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The influence of attachment style on friendships and intimate relationships

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"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between parental attachment style, friendship quality, and intimate relationship quality. The hypothesis was that participants with secure attachment to their parents would have higher levels of both friendship and intimate relationship quality, while those with insecure attachment to their parents would have lower levels of both friendship and intimate relationship quality. The results partially supported this hypothesis, elucidating a connection between friendship quality and intimate relationship quality. Due to the limitations of this study, mostly regarding small sample size, further research should be conducted on the effect of both secure and insecure attachment on other relationships in adulthood.

Introduction

Predictors of success in adult relationships begin in early adolescence often due to their attachment styles with caregivers. Attachment has been identified as a predictor of success and satisfaction in adult friendships and intimate relationships. **We hypothesized that individuals who have secure attachment will have both more secure friendships and more secure intimate relationships than those who are not securely attached. We also expected to find an association between individuals who experience anxious attachment and prioritization of intimate relationships over friendships, while individuals who experience avoidant attachment will prioritize friendships over intimate relationships.**

Method

Participants

Eighty-seven participants recruited from Boston University undergraduate psychology courses.

Materials

Participants answered the following scales: Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI-32), McGill Friendship Questionnaire (MFQ-RA), and Inventory of Parents and Peer Attachment (IPPA).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via email and social media. Upon choosing to take the study, participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time and were required to review an informed consent form. All participants took the following three questionnaires in the following order: the McGill Friendship Questionnaire, the Couples Satisfaction Index, and the Inventory of Parents and Peer Attachment. All three questionnaires were self-report measures on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study.

Results

Significant positive correlations were found between attachment with mothers and fathers, $r(49)=0.42, p=.002$; peers and friends, $r(54)=.64, p<0.001$; and intimate relationships and friendships, $r(64)=.32, p=.014$.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variable	Mother	Father	Peers	Partner	Friend
Mother Attach.	--	.42**	.22	-.17	.14
Father Attach.		--	-.05	.05	-.11
Peer Attach.			--	.13	.64***
Intimate Partner Satisfaction				--	.30*
Friend Satisfaction					--

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Participants with four or more close friends reported higher attachment to their mother, $t(57)=2.29, p=.026, d=.61$, peers, $t(55)=2.09, p=.026, d=.56$, and friends $t(58)=3.74, p<.001, d=1.00$. No significant differences were found for satisfaction with father or intimate partner based on the number of close friends.

Table 2

Mean Attachment and Satisfaction Scores by Number of Current Close Friends

# Close Friends	Mother	Father	Peers	Partner	Friend
1-3	81.35b	81.00	97.65b	98.60	127.14b
4+	95.58a	85.03	105.29a	93.27	138.24a

Note. Higher numbers indicate higher attachment and satisfaction.

Discussion

Findings support early attachment experiences being a prototype for subsequent relationships, with a positive correlation between friendship and relationship satisfaction. The majority exhibited secure attachment with mothers and peers, highlighting the role of early relationships in fostering positive expectations. However, lower secure attachment with fathers suggests familial variations which warrant further study.

Limitations

Limitations in our study included a small sample size and a lack of demographic variety. Many students also did not complete all survey questions, and many students were unable to be categorized into attachment groups for the final peer assessment. These factors may have influenced our results by shrinking the data collection.

Applications

These findings have various theoretical and practical implications despite these limitations. The study shows how it is important to assess a person's attachment style and address it if they are struggling in relationships romantically or with their peers. While these studies partly support the hypothesis, their primary significance lies in posing intriguing questions for future research.