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Attachment Styles, Forgiveness and Satisfaction in Relationship among Committed and Non-Committed Females

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Abstract

This study attempts to find out differences in Attachment Styles, forgiveness, and satisfaction in relationship between committed and non-committed females. The participants were 70 females. The Adult Attachment Scale Revised by Collins, N.L., the Bolston Forgiveness Scale by Amanze R.U. & Carson, J., and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale given by Hendrick were the tools employed to measure attachment styles, Forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction, respectively. Committed females ($M=25.143$, $SD=2.225$) were found to be significantly higher ($u=994.500$, $p<.001$) on Relationship Satisfaction as compared to non-committed females ($M=20.861$, $SD=5.953$). The limitation of this study is participants consisted of only females; therefore, gender differences were not taken into consideration. The sample size was also small, so the results cannot be generalized. The findings of this study can be applicable in counseling settings to understand the determinants of Attachment style, Forgiveness, and Satisfaction in relationships.

Keywords: Committed relationship, non-committed relationship, attachment style, forgiveness, relationship satisfaction.

Introduction

Attachment theory describes the patterns that people form when developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1982) [1]. Attachment styles reflect how you behave in a romantic relationship and are based on the emotional connection you formed as an infant with your primary caregiver- often your mother. Attachment style provides the foundation for how and why people grow to love other people (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) [2].

If one develops a maladaptive attachment style as a child, then she or he will likely continue these maladaptive patterns when attempting to form attachments to other people in their adult love relationships. This raises the concern that individuals with poor attachment histories in childhood may not have sufficient skills to form healthy relationships as adults. Attachment styles are characterized by your behavior within a relationship, especially when that relationship is threatened. Understanding how your attachment style shapes and influences your intimate relationships can help you make sense of your behavior, how you perceive your partner, and how you respond to intimacy.

Attachment can be defined as the emotional tone between children and their caregivers and is evidenced by an infant's seeking and clinging to the caregiving person, usually the mother. By their first month, infants usually have begun to show such behaviour, which is designed to promote proximity

to the desired person. Attachment theory originated in the work of John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst (1907–1990) [1].

In his studies of infant attachment and separation, Bowlby pointed out that attachment constituted a central motivational force and that mother-child attachment was an essential medium of human interaction that had important consequences for later development and personality functioning. Being monotropic, infants tend to attach to one person, but they can form attachments to several persons, such as the father or a surrogate. Attachment develops gradually; it results in an infant's wanting to be with a preferred person who is perceived as stronger, wiser, and able to reduce anxiety or distress. Attachment thus gives infants feelings of security. The process is facilitated by interaction between mother and infant; the amount of time together is less important than the amount of activity between the two.

Phases of Attachment

- In the first attachment phase, sometimes called the pre-attachment stage (birth to 8 or 12 weeks), babies orient to their mothers, follow them with their eyes over a 180-degree range, and turn toward and move rhythmically with their mother's voice.

- In the second phase, sometimes called attachment in the making (8 to 12 weeks to 6 months), infants become attached to one or more persons in the environment.
- In the third phase, sometimes called clear-cut attachment (6 through 24 months), infants cry and show other signs of distress when separated from the caretaker or mother; this phase can occur as early as 3 months in some infants. On being returned to the mother, the infant stops crying and clings as if to gain further assurance of the mother's return. Sometimes, seeing the mother after a separation is sufficient for crying to stop.
- In the fourth phase (25 months and beyond), the mother figure is seen as independent, and a more complex relationship between the mother and the child develops.

Mary Ainsworth's Types of Attachment (1913–1999)

Mary Ainsworth was a Canadian developmental psychologist from the University of Toronto. She described three main types of insecure attachment: insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent, and insecure-disorganized.

The insecure-avoidant child, having experienced brusque or aggressive parenting, tends to avoid close contact with people and lingers near caregivers rather than approaching them directly when faced with a threat. The insecure-ambivalent child finds exploratory play difficult, even in the absence of danger, and clings to his or her inconsistent parents. Insecure-disorganized children have parents who are emotionally absent with a parental history of abuse in their childhood. These children tend to behave in bizarre ways when threatened. According to Ainsworth, disorganization is a severe form of insecure attachment and a possible precursor of severe personality disorder and dissociative phenomena in adolescence and early adulthood. Mary Ainsworth expanded on Bowlby's observations and found that the interaction between the mother and her baby during the attachment period significantly influences the baby's current and future behavior.

There is a long list of scientific literature that categorizes how we form emotional attachments to our primary caregivers to ensure our safety and survival.

The most famous study comes from a 1969 experiment called The Strange Situation, which gave rise to the four styles of attachment we know today. In the study, babies and their birthing parents played in a room together. The parent left and then returned a few minutes later. The baby's reaction was then monitored.

From that study, the four attachment styles were identified:

- **Secure Attachment:** Babies became upset when their parents left and were comforted by their return.
- **Anxious Attachment:** Babies would become very upset when their parents left and would be difficult to comfort upon their return.
- **Avoidant Attachment:** Babies would barely react - or not react at all - when their parents left or returned.
- **Disorganized Attachment:** Babies had more erratic or incoherent reactions to their parents leaving or returning, such as hitting their heads on the ground or "freezing up."

The baby's reaction to their parent's departure and return says a lot about how the baby is used to their caregiver attending to their needs, Dr. Derrig notes. And those experiences as youngsters are likely to affect the way they relate to others in their adult lives.

Babies who are securely attached understand their parent is someone they rely on, so they become concerned when they

go and are comforted by them coming back. On the other hand, babies who learn that their parents aren't going to be attentive to their needs are less worried about their absence and less comforted by their return. They've learned they can't rely on their caregivers to provide them with what they need, so the parent's presence (or absence) isn't as meaningful to them.

In addition to attachment, forgiveness is a variable that may be important in forming and sustaining relational bonds (Worthington, 2006) [4]. Just as attachment styles form in early childhood, patterns of forgiveness are learned as children develop and increase their social interactions with others (Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, & Boyatzis, 2005) [5].

Forgiveness involves willfully putting aside feelings of resentment toward someone who has committed a wrong, been unfair or hurtful, or otherwise harmed you in some way. Forgiveness is not merely accepting what happened or ceasing to be angry. Rather, it involves a voluntary transformation of your feelings, attitudes, and behavior so that you are no longer dominated by resentment and can express compassion, generosity, or the like toward the person who wronged you.

Forgiveness is sometimes considered an important process in psychotherapy or counseling.

Forgiveness may be both an emotional and decisional process that involves a shift from negative to positive emotions through a willful choice (Strelan & Covic, 2006) [6]. As such, caregivers and other models may teach children how to develop skills of emotional healing when relational injuries occur.

Forgiveness looks different when we forgive a stranger versus a loved one, and it depends on the relationship. Many researchers and clinicians claim that forgiveness is a cornerstone of a successful marriage (e.g., Worthington, 1994) [7].

This belief underpins the development of several marital interventions that emphasize forgiveness, particularly in the context of marital infidelity (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2005) [8]. Research evidence supports this view, as forgiveness has been linked to several key constructs in the marital domain, including conflict resolution, relationship-enhancing attributions, and greater commitment.

Forgiveness is one of the most important factors that affects relationship longevity. Studies also indicate that relationship satisfaction, as well as parties' personality traits, plays a role in the process of forgiveness. High levels of relationship satisfaction were positively related to forgiveness, and a low level of relationship satisfaction was negatively related (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich & Fincham (2007) [9].

The phenomenon of "situationships" -loosely defined romantic relationships characterized by ambiguity, lack of communication, and inability to progress -has become increasingly common among young adults. Recent surveys indicate that nearly 50% of 18–29-year-olds have been involved in a situationship, with the vast majority reporting negative emotional impacts when these connections inevitably dissolve. The landscape of modern romantic relationships has undeniably shifted, especially among millennials and members of Gen Z. Traditional courtship leading towards committed partnerships has given way to more casual, undefined connections. This new grey area of romance without responsibility has been termed "situationships"—relaxed yet intimate associations that occupy an ambiguous middle ground between friends and partners. As many young adults shy away from formally defining relationships or

explicitly voicing expectations, these situations have become increasingly commonplace. Though some level of uncertainty is expected in early-stage dating, a prolonged lack of clarity can cultivate disappointment and even emotional anguish. Understanding the drivers, outcomes, and pathways forward requires clearly defining what constitutes a modern situation. (A.S. George, 2024) [10].

Table 2: Test of normality

Variables	Groups	Shapiro wilk	p
Secure	Committed	0.969	0.408
	Non-committed	0.953	0.131
Dependent	Committed	0.941	0.061
	Non-committed	0.976	0.619
Anxious	Committed	0.956	0.170
	Non-committed	0.959	0.197
Forgiveness	Committed	0.944	0.072
	Non-committed	0.962	0.253
Satisfaction	Committed	0.922	0.016
	Non-committed	0.855	< .001

Note. Significant results suggest a deviation from normality.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Group	Mean	SD	U	p
Secure	Committed	18.886	3.802	720.500	0.298
	Non-committed	18.111	2.974		
Dependent	Committed	16.486	4.604	685.500	0.526
	Non-committed	16.139	3.833		
Anxiety	Committed	18.571	5.321	743.500	0.192
	Non-committed	16.361	4.829		
Forgiveness	Committed	58.629	7.837	478.000	0.081
	Non-committed	63.611	11.193		
Satisfaction	Committed	25.143	2.225	994.500	< .001
	Non-committed	20.861	5.953		

Result & Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to find the difference in Attachment style, Forgiveness, and Satisfaction in relationships among committed and non-committed females, utilizing a sample of 70 females.

As can be seen from the result table, among all the hypotheses, only the hypothesis stating that “There is a significant difference in satisfaction among committed and non-committed females” was accepted as the result showed a significant difference. ($u=994.500$, $p<.001$).

The analysis of data clearly showed a significant difference in the mean value of committed ($M=25.143$, $SD=2.225$) and non-committed ($M=20.861$, $SD=5.953$) females on Satisfaction in relationships. These findings are consistent with earlier research.

In a longitudinal analysis, Kamp Dush and Amato (2005) [11] found evidence that entering into a more committed form of relationship resulted in the enhancement of subjective well-being. Which is consistent with current research. This shows that committed individuals experience more relationship satisfaction than non-committed individuals.

The hypothesis “There is a significant difference in Secure attachment style of committed females ($M=18.886$, $SD=3.802$) and non-committed females” ($M=18.111$,

$SD=2.974$) was not accepted as results were found not significant ($u=720.500$, $p=0.298$).

The second hypothesis, “There is a significant difference in Dependent attachment style of committed females ($M=16.486$, $SD=4.604$) and non-committed females ($M=16.139$, $SD=3.833$),” was also not accepted as the results were not significant. ($u=685.500$, $p=0.526$).

The third hypothesis, “There is a significant difference in Anxious attachment style of committed females ($M=18.571$, $SD=5.321$) and non-committed females” ($M=16.361$, $SD=4.829$), was not accepted as the results were not significant. ($u=743.500$, $p=0.192$).

The reason behind this could be the age of participants, so maybe they didn’t think about marriage or long-term relationships and ongoing trends in relationships where most of the young population is in situations and casual relationships despite their attachment style.

The hypothesis “There is a significant difference in forgiveness among committed ($M=58.629$, $SD=7.837$) and non-committed females” ($M=63.611$, $SD=11.193$) was not accepted as the results were not significant ($u=478.000$, $p=0.081$).

On similar lines, the study by Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002) [12] showed that the commitment-forgiveness association appeared to rest on intent to persist rather than long-term orientation or psychological attachment.

The reason behind this can be that non-committed individuals don’t have any commitment, and so they don’t have responsibility or obligations towards each other. Therefore, they do not feel hurt or betrayed by another person as much as committed individuals.

To conclude, it can be said that the committed and non-committed females were found to be significantly different in Satisfaction in relationships and they were not found to be significantly different in Attachment Styles and Forgiveness.

Conclusion

The study found that there is a significant difference between relationship satisfaction among committed and non-committed females.

Limitations

- The sample size was small ($n=70$), so the data was not normally distributed.
- The study was done only on females, which does not take into account gender differences.
- The population mainly consisted of the young population, which excludes the effect of age.
- The tests used were not adapted for the Indian population.
- Other variables in a relationship were not considered.

Suggestions

- We can consider a large sample size to make the results more generalizable.
- The study can be done on both males and females to take into consideration gender differences.
- A study can be done on a population of a vast age range, which will take into account different age groups.
- Other variables in relationship dynamics can be studied.

Implications

- These findings can be applicable in couple and family counseling settings.

- ii). Findings can be useful for therapists in dealing with the new generation's changing relationship patterns and issues.
 - iii). The results can be beneficial for couples to improve their relationship satisfaction and quality of relationship.
 - iv). The young population can benefit from these findings as they have difficulties in navigating through relationship and commitment issues.
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