

Relationship between Attachment and Personality Styles in College Going Students

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Abstract

Attachment is an affectionate tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one – a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time. Nofle and Shaver (2006) found that on average, secure attachment was consistently positively related to extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability and conscientiousness. A high score on negative model of self, which is characteristic of fearful and preoccupied attachment, was on average strongly negatively related to emotional stability. Finally, dismissing attachment was consistently negatively related to extraversion and agreeableness. In line with their findings, we **aimed** to explore in this study the association between the attachment styles and the personality styles of college going students. For this purpose 100 male and 100 female (total 200) college going (undergraduate) students have been taken, and they were assessed using the Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney et al., 1994) and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1991). In **result** it was found that there is a significant positive correlation between **Neuroticism** and the **Preoccupied-Anxious Style of Attachment** and there is a significant negative correlation between **Extraversion** and **Avoidant Style of Attachment**. And in females, **Psychoticism** and **Neuroticism** were significantly negatively correlated to **Confidence** (a measure of Secure Attachment Style).

Keywords: Attachment styles, Personality styles, College students.

Introduction

We the mortal beings from the very moment when we evolve from a foetus to an adult human until the last day on the face of the earth, we are surrounded by attachments and the effects it has on our lives. This attachment to people helps us to be strong; reflecting our inner strength and frailties then the attachment is worth being attached to. But the same word 'attachment', when makes an individual crippled, addicted and deaf to his inner conscience then it forms malfunctions.

Attachment is an affectionate tie that one person forms between himself and another – a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time (Ainsworth, 1985). Research in adult attachment has involved classifying individual differences in attachment style. Adult attachment styles have generally referred to one's behavioural responses to perceived and actual distress, and to the separation and reunion to attachment figures (Sperling & Berman, 1994). These styles have been described to be of two types- the secure attachment style, there are three insecure styles of attachment – anxious-preoccupied attachment, dismissive-avoidant attachment and fearful-avoidant attachment.

Secure Attachment: It is relatively easy for securely attached people to become emotionally close to others.

They are comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them. Often they report greater satisfaction and adjustment in their relationships. They feel comfortable both with intimacy and with independence. Many seek to balance intimacy and independence in their relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Anxious – Preoccupied Attachment: People having an anxious-preoccupied attachment style agree that they want to be completely emotionally intimate with others. They are uncomfortable being without close relationships. People with this style of attachment seek high levels of intimacy, approval, and responsiveness (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment: People with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, tend to be comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important for them to feel independent. Investigators commonly note the defensive character of this attachment style. They tend to suppress and hide their feelings, and tend to deal with rejection by distancing themselves from the sources of rejection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment: They want emotionally close relationships, but find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. They sometimes

worry that they will be hurt if they allow themselves to become too close to others. People with this attachment style have mixed feelings about close relationships. They are much less comfortable initially expressing affection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Hans J. Eysenck's most known contribution to the personality theories is the three dimensions of personality that he described – Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism.

Psychoticism describes an individual being insensitivity, disregard for danger and convention, aggressive, cold, egocentric, unsympathetic, manipulative and occasionally originality and/or creativity.

Neuroticism describes an individual as having guilt feelings, low self-esteem, lack of autonomy, below average emotional control, below average will power, lack of persistence, tendency to repress unpleasant feelings and suggestible.

Extraversion described an individual as being out-going, sociable, lively, active, assertive, irresponsible, dominant, lacking reflection, sensation seeking, impulsive, risk-taking, expressive, desiring novelty, having excitement, contact with people, and tolerance for pain.

The group of undergraduate students, ages ranging from 18 to 21 years is a group that faces many challenges of life in a very short span of time. During this period they need to make a choice for their career, they come out of the guarded and secured environment of school and enter college where they face a lot more independence and they are responsible for the decisions they take for themselves. Sperling and Berman (1994) defined adult attachment as the tendency of one to seek and maintain proximity to those who provide physical and/or psychological safety and security. Hence, this is the period when they start forming relations and seeking and maintaining these attachments. This group also forms a huge part of our population.

Nofle and Shaver (2006) said that there were consistent and theoretically meaningful associations between the attachment-style and personality trait measures. Ora Nakash-Eisikovitset *al.* (2002) in their research found that secure attachment was negatively correlated with personality pathology and positively correlated with healthy functioning, whereas disorganized/unresolved attachment was strongly associated with multiple forms of personality pathology. Anxious/ambivalent attachment tended to be associated with measures of withdrawal, internalization, and introversion. Avoidant attachment style was not associated with any single form of personality pathology.

Aim

The aim of the present study is to explore the association between the attachment styles and the personality styles of college going students.

Objectives

It is our objective to find the relationships between

- **Confidence** and the different areas of personality viz. **Psychoticism, Extraversion** and **Neuroticism**.
- **Discomfort With Closeness** and the different areas of personality viz. **Psychoticism, Extraversion** and **Neuroticism**
- **Relationships As Secondary** and the different areas of personality viz. **Psychoticism, Extraversion** and **Neuroticism**.
- **Need For Approval** and the different areas of personality viz. **Psychoticism, Extraversion** and **Neuroticism**.
- **Preoccupation** and the different areas of personality viz. **Psychoticism, Extraversion** and **Neuroticism**.

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant relationship between attachment styles and personality styles.
- There will be a significant relationship between the attachment styles and personality styles of both males and females.

Methods

Sample: The sample consisted of 200 undergraduate (100 male and 100 female) students selected from colleges in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. A total of 6 colleges were approached among which only 3 colleges gave permission for collecting data from their students.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

- Undergraduate students
- Age range from 18 to 21 years
- Regular students
- Unmarried students
- Students who would give their consent

Exclusion criteria

- Students who currently have any psychiatric illness
- Students who currently have any physical illness

Tools used

1. **Socio-demographic data sheet** was developed to collect socio-demographic details of the participants. It included details of name, age, sex, address, religion, marital status, family type and monthly family income. The items were all multiple choice questions. The items were coded for analysis.

- Eysenck Personality Questionnaire – Revised (EPQ-R):** (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1991): The EPQ-R is a self administered tool consisting of 90 items, designed to give rough and ready measures of three important personality dimensions: Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism. This scale measures **Psychoticism** as an independent dimension which describes the personality as solitary, troublesome, cruel, lacking in feeling and empathy, hostile to others, sensation seeking, and liking odd and unusual things. **Neuroticism** refers to the general emotional liability of a person, his emotional over-responsiveness and his liability to neurotic breakdown under stress. **Extraversion** as opposed to introversion refers to the out-going, uninhibited, sociable proclivities of a person. **Lie Scale** refers to the social desirability of the person. The items have to be answered in either “yes” or “no” and they are scored accordingly. The EPQ-R is a well-known test of which the reliability and validity are established.
- Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ):** (Feeney, Noller and Hanrahan, 1994): The ASQ is also a self administered tool consisting of 40 items. It measures the attachment style of an individual under 7 headings which are, Confidence, Discomfort with closeness, Relationships as secondary, Need for approval, Preoccupation, Avoidant Attachment and Attachment Anxiety. **Confidence** signifies feeling of worthiness, confidence, easier to get to know and easy to get close to the person, liked and respected by others. **Discomfort with closeness** signifies feeling of self-dependence, worry about people getting too close, difficult to trust others and difficult to depend on others, feeling of uneasiness when getting close to others, greater discomfort with closeness. **Relationships as secondary** signifies tendency to appraise relationships as secondary and building relationships are less important than achieving things. **Need for approval** signifies greater need for approval, general feeling of being ashamed and foolish when talking over problems with others. **Preoccupation** signifies greater preoccupation with relationships, worry over relationships and feeling of disappointment. The attachment styles of Secure, Avoidant and Anxious are very well defined by the items of this questionnaire. The items in this have to be judged on a 6 point rating scale, where 1 signifies “totally disagree”, 2 signifies “strongly disagree”, 3 signifies “slightly disagree”, 4 signifies “slightly agree”, 5 signifies “strongly agree” and 6 signifies “totally agree”.

Procedure

The sample consisted of 200 undergraduate students (100male and 100 female) from three colleges in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Permission from the principals of the three

colleges was obtained. The students were informed about the research work being conducted and consent was taken from them. The tools were administered in groups. Time taken for each group was approximately 45 minutes. Instructions were read out and explained and queries about how to answer the test items were addressed and demonstrated.

Statistical Analyses

The SPSS (version -16) was used to analyze the data. Mean, SD, frequency and percentages were used for calculating the required analysis for the sample. Pearson’s correlation coefficient and ‘t’ test were applied to see the significance of the data.

Results

Table 1 Mean, SD and t-values of Age and Sex

Sex	N	Mean and SD of age	t-test
Male	100	19.17(1.129)	2.226
Female	100	18.84(0.961)	

Table 2 Distribution of the socio-demographic details in the sample

	Categories	Total		
		Percentage	Male	Female
Religion	Hindu	86%	84	88
	Islam	10%	14	6
	Others	4%	2	6
Family Type	Joint	49.5%	52	47
	Nuclear	50.5%	48	53
Monthly Family Income	Upto 5000	32%	32	32
	5000 to 15000	39%	40	38
	Above 15000	29%	28	30

Table 3 Mean and SD of the Attachment styles in Males and Females

Attachment Style	Male	Female
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Confidence	36.16 (6.477)	35.64 (6.951)
Discomfort With Closeness	40.67 (7.416)	42.75 (7.295)
Relationships As Secondary	24.11 (7.959)	23.36 (6.666)
Need For Approval	24.68 (7.721)	26.32 (5.846)
Preoccupation	30.15 (8.599)	30.89 (7.058)
Avoidant Attachment	59.00 (8.924)	59.74(9.900)
Attachment Anxiety	43.62 (11.122)	45.61(9.191)

Table 4 Mean and SD of the Personality styles in Males and Females

Personality Style	Male	Female
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)
Psychoticism	5.75(2.607)	3.91(2.499)
Extraversion	13.72(2.640)	13.28(3.072)
Neuroticism	7.79(4.407)	11.04(4.070)

Table 5 The correlation between the personality styles and attachment styles of both males and females separately and students in total

Attachment Styles	Gender	Personality Styles		
		Psychoticism	Extraversion	Neuroticism
Confidence	Total	-0.113	0.111	-0.120
	Male	-0.034	0.097	0.030
	Female	-0.232*	0.117	-0.259**
Discomfort With Closeness	Total	-0.075	-0.200**	0.281***
	Male	-0.011	-0.371***	0.343***
	Female	-0.048	-0.036	0.148
Relationships As Secondary	Total	0.088	-0.141*	-0.164*
	Male	0.090	-0.072	-0.189
	Female	0.056	-0.226*	-0.115
Need For Approval	Total	-0.115	-0.192**	0.089
	Male	-0.144	-0.156	0.027
	Female	0.008	-0.226*	0.081
Preoccupation	Total	0.055	-0.086	0.213**
	Male	-0.001	-0.039	0.210*
	Female	0.175	-0.130	0.213*
Avoidant Attachment	Total	0.071	-0.253***	0.061
	Male	0.056	-0.236*	-0.008
	Female	0.124	-0.263**	0.107
Attachment Anxiety	Total	-0.060	-0.162*	0.199**
	Male	-0.036	-0.129	0.172
	Female	-0.018	-0.188	0.182

*- Significant at 0.050 level, **-Significant at 0.010 level, ***-Significant at 0.000 level

Discussion

Table 1 discusses the mean, SD and t-values of age and sex of the sample. It was found that the mean age of males and females had no significant difference.

Table 2 discusses the distribution of socio-demographic details in the sample. Majority of the participants belonged to the Hindu religion, which is similar to the general population in India (Rao and Begum, 1994). The participants were almost equally divided into the joint and nuclear family type and on three different family income groups.

Table 3 discusses the mean and SD of attachment styles in males and females. It was found that **Confidence** was greater in males than in females. **Discomfort with closeness** was greater in females than in males. **Relationships as secondary** was greater in males than in

females. **Need for approval** was greater in females than in males. **Preoccupation** was greater in females than in males. **Avoidance attachment** was greater in females than in males. **Attachment anxiety** was greater in females than in males.

Table 4 discusses the mean and SD of personality styles in males and females. It was found that **Psychoticism** was greater in males than in females. **Extraversion** was greater in males than in females. **Neuroticism** was greater in females than males.

Table 5 discusses the correlation between the personality styles and attachment styles of both males and females separately and students in total as per the results obtained. **Discomfort with closeness** is significantly negatively correlated to **Extraversion** in Total and Males. Extraverted people are out-going in nature and mix with people a lot. They do not face problem in

becoming close to people. A person who has discomfort in getting close to people will have difficulty in developing relationships with others, will stay aloof from others and be solitary which characterize neuroticism, hence, the positive correlation.

Relationships As Secondary is significantly negatively correlated to **Extraversion** in Total and Female. Extraverted people are social by nature and mix with people. It is also significantly negatively correlated to **Neuroticism** in total. People high on Neuroticism are usually dependent in nature and hence for them relationships are very important and they tend to depend on their partners and hence they do not consider their relations as secondary.

Need For Approval is significantly negatively correlated to **Extraversion** in Total and Female. Extraversion is characterized by assertiveness, dominance, lack of reflection, impulsivity, risk-taking behavior and the like. Whereas Need for approval is described by a greater need for approval, general feeling of being ashamed and foolish when talking over problems with others.

Preoccupation is significantly positively correlated to **Neuroticism** in Total, Male and Female. Preoccupation signifies greater preoccupation with relationships, worry over relationships and feeling of disappointment. And neuroticism signifies a low self-esteem, lack of autonomy, below average emotional control, below average will power, lack of persistence, tendency to repress unpleasant feelings, being anxious, depressed, tensed, and suggestible. These qualities of neuroticism create preoccupation in them. Nofle and Shaver (2006) also found the same in their study.

Avoidant Attachment is significantly negatively correlated to **Extraversion** in Total, Male and Female. Individuals with an avoidant style of attachment, tend to be comfortable without close emotional relationships and often deny needing close relationships. They seek less intimacy and tend to suppress and hide their feelings (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). These qualities are on the opposite pole of the qualities of the individuals high on extraversion that is uninhibited, sociable, lively, active and assertive.

Attachment Anxiety is significantly negatively correlated to **Extraversion** in total (Ora Nakash-Eisikovitset *al.*, 2002) and significantly positively correlated to **Neuroticism** in total. People belonging to the anxious attachment style agree that they want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but often find that others are reluctant to get as close as they would like. They are uncomfortable being without close relationships. People with this style of attachment seek high levels of intimacy, approval, and responsiveness from their partners. They tend to concentrate on only one relation being extremely clingy in that and do not mix with other people. Hence, the negative correlation with extraversion was found. They sometimes value intimacy to such an extent that they become overly dependent on their partners

(Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals high on neuroticism who are characterized by low self-esteem, lack of autonomy, below average emotional control, below average will power also tend to cling to their relationships and are preoccupied about them. Hence, positive correlation with neuroticism was found.

It is also found that there is a significant negative correlation between **Extraversion** and **Avoidant Style Of Attachment** in both males and females.

A significant positive correlation was also found between the **Preoccupied-Anxious Style Of Attachment** and **Neuroticism** in both males and females.

Where there was a significant negative correlation found between **Extraversion** and **Relationships As Secondary** in females, there was no significant correlation found between these variables in males.

There was also a significant negative correlation found between **Extraversion** and **Need For Approval** in females but there was no significant correlation was found between these variables in the males.

There was a significant negative correlation found between **Extraversion** and **Discomfort With Closeness** and a significant positive correlation between **Neuroticism** and **Discomfort With Closeness** in males but there was no significant correlation found between these variables in females.

In females **Psychoticism** and **Neuroticism** were significantly negatively correlated to **Confidence**. Ora Nakash-Eisikovitset *al.* (2002) in their research found that secure attachment was negatively correlated with personality pathology. Confidence is a characteristic of secure attachment style which signifies feeling of worthiness, confidence and easy to get close to the person (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and hence is negatively correlated to Psychoticism and Neuroticism, which are signs of chances of formation of pathology. But there was no significant correlation found between these variables in the males.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there is a significant positive correlation between **Neuroticism** and the **Preoccupied-Anxious Style of Attachment** and there is a significant negative correlation between **Extraversion** and **Avoidant Style of Attachment**. And in females, **Psychoticism** and **Neuroticism** were significantly negatively correlated to **Confidence** (a measure of Secure Attachment Style).

Limitations

- In this study we have used EPQ-R which measures only three traits of personality. And on the basis of only these three traits it is not possible to judge the entire personality of an individual.
- There are studies showing more correlation between the temperament of an individual with his/her attachment styles. We have not considered the

temperament as the EPQ-R only measures the three personality traits of Psychoticism, Neuroticism and Extraversion.

Future Directions

- Other questionnaires like NEO-PI-R and/or 16PF can be used to judge the personality of the individuals and correlated with attachment styles.
- Including both married and unmarried individuals and seeing if there is any significant correlation between the attachment styles and personality styles among them.

Implications

Faulty attachment styles can be modified with psychotherapy and accordingly the Psychoticism and/or Neuroticism in the individual's personality can be managed or modified.

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