

Research Article

Examining university students' attitudes towards attachment styles¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to evaluate university students' attitudes towards attachment styles according to demographic characteristics. The universe of the study is 800 students studying at the Department of Psychology at Istanbul Aydın University. The sample of the study was 279 university students determined by convenience sampling method and a questionnaire was applied to this sample. Socio-demographic information form and the Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory, adapted to Turkish by Sümer and Güngör (1999) developed by Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998), were applied to the participants. The Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory has 2 sub-dimensions as Anxious and Avoidant and 36 items. In the analysis of the data; Kruskal Wallis H, Mann Whitney-U analyzes were used. High scores indicate the presence of a high level of attachment style. According to the findings of the study, among the gender variable of university students; There is a significant difference between the age variable and the level of avoidance and anxiety; It was determined that there was no significant difference between parents living together and class variables and anxiety and avoidance levels.

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Introduction

Attachment is defined as the strong emotional bonds people develop against people they consider important to them (Güngör, 2001; Morsünbül & Tümen 2008; Kullik, 2013). Bowlby, based on object relations and psychodynamic approach, has formed his theory by examining the reaction of children to separation from their parents for two years (Bayhan & Işıtan, 2010; Çalşır, 2009; Görgün et al., 2010; Tüzün & Sayar, 2006; Friedman et al. 2010; Wilhelm & Tietze, 2016). Attachment behavior; It tends to show up clearly when the attached person is scared, tired, or sick. Attachment behavior decreases when the attachment figure shows a protective and calming attitude and provides help. The presence of an attachment figure and its sensitivity to the individual provides a strong sense of security in the attached person (Brumaria, 2015). Although attachment behavior is clearly seen in early childhood, it can be observed throughout life, especially in stressful times (Bozkurt, 2006; Deniz, 2006; Haliloğlu, 2008). Bowlby explained this as "when people of any age face difficulties, when they are sure that there is one or more people to help them, they feel happy at the highest level and put their talents in the best way" (Bayhan & Işıtan, 2010; Çalşır, 2009).

In addition to the desire to be close to their parents, the relationship between the caregiver and the caregiver is of central importance for children to feel safe (Tüzün & Sayar, 2006; George, Cummins & Davies, 2010). In addition, Bartholomew and Horowitz, based on the early definitions of attachment, brought together two types of internal working models regarding the self and the other proposed in Bowlby's original theory and defined an adult attachment style model, which they called four category models. According to this 'Quadruple Attachment Model', it is accepted that there are safe, obsessive, fearful, and indifferent attachment patterns (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Attachment theory is a model that is used to understand the emotional, cognitive and behavioral characteristics that adults experience in their social and romantic relationships, while focusing on the periods of infancy and childhood and the relationship between the primary caregiver and the child in this period (Çalşır, 2009). Although

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the first social behavior seen at the beginning of life is the attachment between the baby and the mother, attachment styles have a pioneering quality in determining future affectionate relationships and adaptation of the individual to the social environment. Deprivation and insufficiencies in the attachment relationship are accepted as a sign that various problems may arise in adult personality structure and interpersonal relationships (Soysal et al. 2005; Jiang, Huebner & Hills, 2013).

Attachment styles change during adolescence as they direct adolescents' attachment behaviors and interests towards their peers rather than their parents. During these changes in adolescence, the attachment relationship that the adolescent has developed against individuals who took care of them as a child plays an important role. However, although the adolescent shifts from parent figures to peer groups, the early attachment relationship has a permanent and strong effect on the adolescent (Çalışır, 2009; Brenning et al. 2011). In a study conducted by Shaver and Brennan (1992) on 242 university students, important results were obtained regarding the effects of attachment style on the individual's personality. Individuals with secure attachment style are less anxious and more extroverted; Students with avoidant attachment style were more maladaptive and depressive; It has been determined that fearful attachments are adults who avoid social relationships and cannot establish emotional relationships (as cited in: Deniz, 2006).

A university student is neither an adult nor a child. A university student is usually an adult who suffers from the difficulties of transition from childhood to youth and adulthood. Those who reach adulthood are beginning to enter different worlds as a social structure. Many problems arise in this period of human life. The problems faced by university students vary (Rençber, 2012: 483). Students who start university enter into a new, different and foreign environment for themselves. In an environment of freedom and autonomy different from high school, vocational lessons, different styles of friendships and teacher relations are among the new experiences of university student life. A university student is an adult who, as an individual, has developmental problems. University students have to find their own identity, adapt to social values instead of childhood values, adopt wider social and universal values, and reach social maturity (Koç, Avşaroğlu & Sezer, 2004: 484).

In the university life of adults, which are accepted as a step to adulthood, there are some problems that cannot be defined with the end of adolescence. For example, traditional social values, friends of the opposite sex, addictions that come with lifestyle, psychological problems, etc. it can continue. Since it is thought that the attachment styles of university students will affect their self-recognition, attachment, and taking responsibility behaviors, it was aimed to determine the attachment styles of university students with this descriptive study.

Problem of Study

Do university students' attachment styles show significance according to their demographic characteristics?

Research Sub-Problems

- Do university students' attachment styles show significance according to the gender variable?
- Do university students' attachment styles show significance according to the age variable?
- Do university students' attachment styles show significance according to their parents' living together?
- Do university students' attachment styles show significance according to the class variable?

Method

Research Model

This study is a quantitative study aimed at determining the attitudes of university students towards attachment styles, and was carried out with a general survey model.

Survey models are a research approach that aims to describe a past or present situation as it exists. The event, individual, or object subject to research is tried to be defined in its own conditions and as it is. No effort is made to change or influence them in any way. There is what is wanted to be known and it is there (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Participants

The universe of the research consists of 800 students studying at the Department of Psychology at Istanbul Aydın University. Istanbul Aydın University has 12 faculties including Medicine, Dentistry, Education, Science and Literature, Fine Arts, Law, Economics and Administrative Sciences, Communication, Architecture and Design, Engineering, Health Sciences, Sports Sciences; Schools of Applied Sciences, Foreign Languages; It is a 39,000-capacity foundation university with Justice, Anadolu Bil and Sağlık Hizmetleri Vocational Schools (IAU, 2020). It accepts approximately 8,000 students annually. The purpose of the research application in this university; It is because it will be easy to reach the university and apply the questionnaire. The convenience sampling method was used in the study.

The sample of the study, on the other hand, consists of 279 students from this population who were determined by the convenience sampling method (Büyüköztürk et al. 2019).

Participants

The distribution of university students participating in the study according to gender, age, parents living together and class variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participant Group

Control Variables	N=280		
	f	%	
Gender	Female	143	51.3
	Male	136	48.7
Age	18-20 ages	127	45.5
	21-23 ages	113	40.5
	24 ages +	39	14.0
Parent Live Together	yes	234	83.9
	No	45	16.1
Grade	1 st grade	76	27.2
	2 nd grade	60	21.5
	3 rd grade	75	26.9
	4 rd grade	68	24.4
Total	279	100	

When the distribution of university students participating in the study by gender variable is examined, it is seen that female students constitute 51.3% of the group, while male students constitute 48.7%. When the distribution of the participants by age variable is examined; It is observed that students aged 18-20 constitute 45.5% of the group, students aged 21-23 constitute 40.5% of the group and students aged 24 and over 14.0% of the group. Considering the distribution of the students participating in the study by their parents living together; Students whose parents lived together constituted 83.9% of the group, while students whose parents did not live together constituted 16.1% of the group. Considering the distribution of the university students participating in the research by grade level; University students in the first year constitute 27.2% of the group, the students in the second year 21.5%, the students in the third year 26.9% and the students in the fourth grade 24.4%.

Data Collection Tools

The Personal Information Form and the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory were used to collect data in the study.

Personal Information Form

The personal information form is a questionnaire consisting of 4 questions (gender, parental cohabitation, age, class) in which the personal characteristics and life of the participant group formed by the researcher are evaluated.

Inventory of Experiences in Close Relationships (IECR)

The Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory was developed to determine attachment styles. IECR was developed by Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) and adapted to our language by Sümer and Güngör (1999). ERI has two sub-dimensions: anxiety and avoidance. The answers given in the ERI, which has a Likert-type assessment, are "I strongly agree with no disagree (1-7)". IECR has 36 items, 18 of which are for determining the level of anxious attachment and 18 of them are for determining the level of avoidant attachment. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .86 for the anxious attachment sub-dimension and .90 for the avoidant attachment sub-dimension. Items 4, 8, 16, 17, 18, 20, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 30, 32, 34, 36 of the scale are calculated reversely.

With the application of the scale, 2 different score types are obtained, namely anxiety score and avoidance score. While the value of odd numbered items is used to calculate anxiety score; The value of even-numbered items is used in calculating the avoidance score.

Results

Findings and Comments on Participants' Opinions on Attachment Styles by Gender Variable

The distribution of opinions of university students participating in the study on attachment styles according to the gender variable is shown in Table 2 below, according to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 2.

Analysis Results of Opinions on Attachment Styles by Gender Variable

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{x}	U	p
Anxiety	Male	136	135.82	9049	0.316
	Female	143	144.96		
	Total	279			
Avoidance	Male	136	151.25	8115	0.017*
	Female	143	128.17		
	Total	279			

There is no significant difference between the test score average of male students (\bar{X} = 135.82) and the test score average of female students (\bar{X} = 144.96) in the "Anxiety in Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension [p = 9049, $p > 0.05$]. This finding shows that there is no significant difference between the level of anxiety in the close relationships of university students and their gender.

There is a significant difference between male students' test score average (\bar{X} = 151.25) and female students' test score average (\bar{X} = 128.17) in the dimension of "Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory" [p = 8115, $p < 0.05$]. This finding shows that there is a significant difference between the level of avoidance and gender in the close relationships of university students. It is understood that the avoidance levels of male students in close relationships are higher than female students.

Findings and Comments on Participants' Opinions on Attachment Styles According to Parent Coexistence

The distribution of the opinions of the university students participating in the study on the attachment styles according to the parents living together is shown in Table 3 below, according to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 3.

Analysis Results of Parents' Opinions Regarding Attachment Styles according to Coexistence

Dimensions	Gruplar	N	\bar{x}	U	P
Anxiety	Yes	234	143.21	4549.5	0.130
	No	45	123.32		
	Total	279			
Avoidance	Yes	234	140.05	5253.5	0.981
	No	45	139.74		
	Total	279			

In the "Anxiety in the Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension, there is no significant difference between the test score average of the students whose parents live together (\bar{X} = 143.21) and the test score average of the students whose parents do not live together (\bar{X} = 123.32) [p = 4549.5, $p > 0.05$]. This finding shows that there is no significant difference between the level of anxiety in the close relationships of university students and their parents' living together.

In the "Avoidance of Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension, there is no significant difference between the test score average (\bar{X} = 140.05) of the students whose parents live together and the test score average of the students whose parents do not live together (\bar{X} = 139.74) [p = 5243.5, $p > 0.05$]. This finding shows that there is no significant difference between the avoidance level of university students in their close relationships and their parents living together.

Findings and Comments on Participants' Opinions on Attachment Styles by Age Variable

The distribution of opinions of university students participating in the study on attachment styles according to age variable is shown in Table 4 below, according to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test.

Table 4.*Analysis Results of Opinions Regarding Attachment Styles by Age Variable*

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{X}	X_2	P	M.D.
Anxiety	18-20 ages A	127	149.22	7.909	0.019*	A-C
	21-23 ages B	113	140.78			
	24 ages + c	39	107.73			
	Total	279				
Avoidance	18-20 ages A	127	153.11	7.017	0.030*	A-C
	21-23 ages B	113	125.48			
	24 ages + c	39	139.40			
	Total	279				

In the "Anxiety in the Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension, a statistically significant difference was found between the attitudes of the participants in terms of age ($X_2 = 7.909$, $p < 0.05$). According to the analysis results to understand which groups this difference exists, it was determined that the significant difference was between students aged 18-20 ($\bar{X} = 149.22$) and students aged 24 and over ($\bar{X} = 107.73$). Accordingly, it is understood that students between the ages of 18-20 experience more anxiety levels in close relationships than students aged 24 and over.

In the "Avoidance of Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension, a statistically significant difference was found between the attitudes of the participants in terms of age ($X_2 = 7.017$, $p < 0.05$). According to the results of the analysis made to understand between which groups this difference is; It was determined that there were students aged between 18-20 ($\bar{X} = 153.11$) and those aged 24 and over ($\bar{X} = 139.40$). Accordingly, it is understood that students between the ages of 18-20 have higher avoidance levels in close relationships than students aged 24 and over.

Findings and Comments on Participants' Opinions on Attachment Styles According to the Class Variable

The distribution of opinions of university students participating in the study on attachment styles according to the class variable is shown in Table 5 below, according to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test.

Table 5.*Analysis Results of Opinions Regarding Attachment Styles according to the Class Variable*

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{X}	X_2	P	M.D.
Anxiety	1st grade A	76	147.50	3.983	0.263	
	2nd grade B	60	139.62			
	3rd grade C	75	147.31			
	4th grade D	68	123.90			
	Total	279				
Avoidance	1st grade A	76	146.34	4.814	0.186	
	2nd grade B	60	152.04			
	3rd grade C	75	139.31			
	4rd grade D	68	123.05			
	Total	279				

In the "Anxiety in the Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of the participants in terms of class ($X_2 = 3.983$, $p > 0.05$).

In the "Avoidance of Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory" dimension, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of the participants in terms of class ($X_2 = 4.814$, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the distribution of university students' attitudes towards attachment styles by gender; significant difference in avoidance level; It was determined that there was no significant difference in anxiety level. According to the study, it is understood that male students experience more avoidance levels in close relationships than female students. In Erözkan's (2011) study, it was stated that male students have more avoidance attachment style than female students.

Considering the distribution of university students' attitudes towards attachment styles by age; It was determined that there is a significant difference in avoidance and anxiety levels. Kılıç (2010) and Dede (2015) determined that there is a difference in attachment styles according to age in their research. These results are similar to those obtained

in our study. Doyle, Lawford & Markiewicz (2009) reported that secure attachment increases as age increases. Individuals at university are trying to adapt to social and academic life. Romantic relationships during the university period contribute to social development and increasing participation in activities (Çavdar, 2013). Our research includes students from various age groups. It is assumed that the adaptation level of these students to social and academic life varies according to their age, that they do not go through similar adaptation processes, and that causes differences in attachment styles according to age.

It was determined that the anxious and avoidant attachment levels of the participants did not differ depending on their parents' living together. There are studies that the anxious and avoidant attachment levels do not differ according to the parental cohabitation status (Kılıç, 2010; Topkara, 2014). According to the attachment theory, the period up to the age of three is very important. Attachment styles that occur at these ages have the ability to directly affect future lives. Attachment is a need and this need forms the basis of relationships (Bowlby, 2012). During the university period, young people try to adapt to their academic and social lives. Romantic relationships in this period help individuals increase their social development and participation in social activities (Hamamcı & Esen-Çoban, 2010). It is thought that university students with different lives have a similar level of adaptation to their academic and social lives and go through certain adaptation processes, preventing the formation of differences in attachment styles according to the parents living together variable.

It was determined that the anxious and avoidant attachment levels of the participants did not differ depending on the class variable. In the study conducted by Kılıç (2010) and Dede (2015), it was found that there was no difference in anxious and avoidant attachment according to the class variable. The results obtained in this study are similar to the results of our study. There are great similarities between the attachment style of children and the romantic attachment style of adults (Morsünbül & Çok, 2011). While it is determined that safe parents and their children are also securely attached; It is reported that children of obsessive parents are inconsistent, and children of parents who adopt the avoidant approach are likewise avoidant (Altundağ, 2011).

Recommendations

Recommendations for future studies

- The sample of the study consists of 279 Psychology department students studying at Istanbul Aydın University. The sample is limited and university students from all regions can be reached to generalize the results.
- Attachment styles were wanted to be determined by the scale used. Individual and social problems of university students were ignored and one-on-one interviews were not conducted. In order to obtain more reliable results, different information retrieval methods can be applied in future research.
- There are students of the psychology department in the study. In order to examine the result variables with more reliable results according to the department, students studying in different departments can be reached in equal numbers.

Recommendations for practitioners

- Necessary training programs can be organized to explain the effects of attachment styles on the individual's living spaces and to avoid negative effects.
- Studies can be planned on the importance of romantic relationships and achieving quality relationships.

Limitations of the Study

- Research conducted, students studying at Istanbul Aydın University
- The Sociodemographic Data Form applied to the research participants is limited to the qualities measured by the perceived IEER.

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