

Examining Attachment Style in Hookup Culture: The Societal Normalization of Trauma-Based Partner Selection

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Author's Note. Aida Ardelean is an Honours student in the Department of Sociology, at the University of British Columbia. This thesis was written in fulfillment of course requirements for a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Sociology. Dr. Silvia Bartolic, Associate Professor of Teaching, in the Department of Sociology at the University of British Columbia was the Honours advisor on this project.

Abstract. Based on the theory of attachment, individuals are going to love someone the way they themselves have experienced love. As young adults finish their studies and enter their careers, there is a social expectation for many to find a lasting relationship and settle down. If young adults developed an insecure attachment style during childhood, this could lead to the possible recreation of intergenerational trauma when seeking a long-term partner. Much has been written about hookup culture on university campuses and the impacts that it has on mental and emotional health (i.e. Garcia 2012, Machia 2020, etc.), but less has been written on whether the impacts of hookup culture are a product of one's attachment. My project aims to explore how the attachment styles developed in childhood contribute to participation in hookup culture during university. Twenty participants who identified as current or previous students attending a Canadian university and residing in British Columbia were recruited to participate in this study. A series of semi-structured hour-long interviews were conducted following the completion of a preliminary survey. These surveys examined participants' attachment styles and self-esteem levels. Participants were also asked a series of questions about their experiences with hookup culture and casual sex. It was found that participants scoring high on anxiety and avoidance are more likely to experience lower levels of self-esteem than participants scoring low on anxiety. However, participants scoring high on avoidance experienced higher levels of regret than participants scoring low on avoidance. Further, individuals that had a fearful avoidant attachment were more likely to experience feelings for a casual hookup partner. Finally, the study found that participants with fearful avoidant attachment were

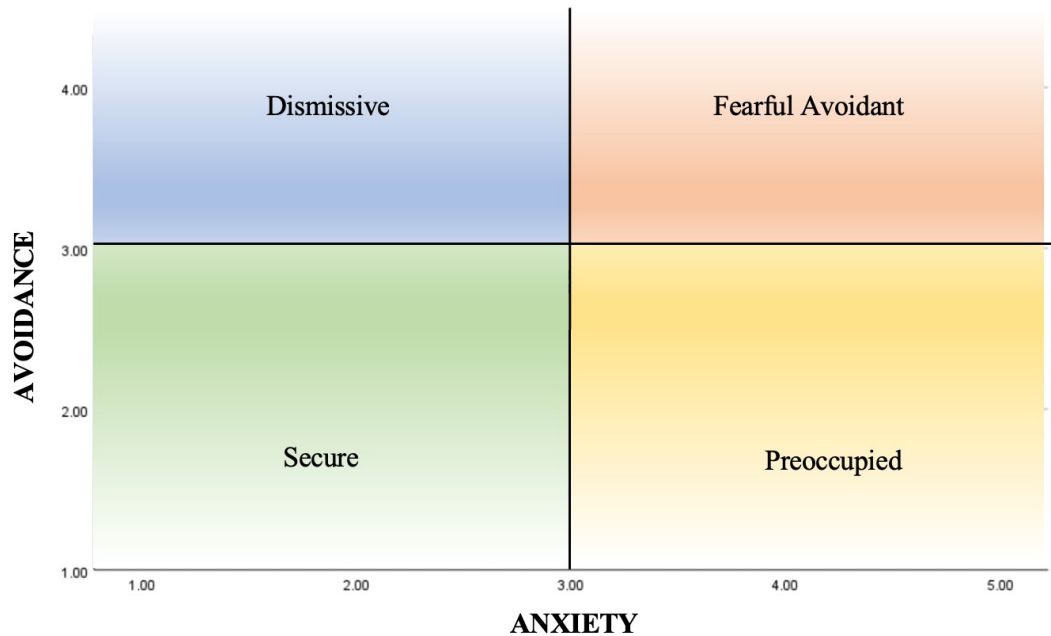
more likely to be single. However, participants with secure attachment were more likely, on average, to have a friend with benefits or one night stand than insecure participants.

Background

Relationships are difficult to navigate and young adults often undertake them with minimal guidance and support. In a study conducted by Levine (2019) of over 300 university students, 73% were willing to sacrifice most of their goals in life for a romantic relationship and yet most individuals know little about the science behind romantic relationships. Individuals are conditioned to believe that the reason they are unable to find happiness in a relationship has little to do with themselves and more to do with external circumstances. Individuals rarely look at themselves as the reason behind their dissatisfaction and even more rarely seek help when their partner suggests they do so (Levine, 2019, p. 127). It has been shown that the best predictor of happiness in a relationship is a secure attachment style and individuals with this attachment style report higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships (Levine, 2019, p. 132) while individuals with insecure attachment styles may look at their relationship history and see a string of unsatisfying relationships and perhaps regrettable decisions (Lawson, 2019, p. 6).

Based on attachment theory, the experience of love starts when individuals are children while they observe and interact with their primary caregivers. However, individuals in society scorn basic needs for intimacy, closeness, and dependency in adulthood while promoting independence and self-sufficiency (Levine, 2019, p. 21). Gillath (2016) found that while attachment theory has been a popular theoretical framework for understanding infant–caregiver relationships for many years, the theory has also become a prominent framework for understanding personality processes and close relationships in adulthood. Attachment theory states that the emotional bonds individuals form in early childhood become unconscious patterns of how we form adult relationships, whether they are romantic or not. There are four primary attachment types. Securely attached individuals have low anxiety over abandonment and low avoidance of intimacy and therefore, they are comfortable with both vulnerability and dependence. Individuals with a dismissive attachment style have low anxiety over abandonment and high avoidance of intimacy while individuals with preoccupied attachment style have high anxiety over abandonment and low avoidance of intimacy. Finally, individuals with a fearful avoidant attachment style are high in both anxiety and avoidance, therefore, they consciously seek vulnerability and dependence but are simultaneously uncomfortable with both. (See Figure 1). Traditionally, attachment styles have been viewed and applied to individuals as static characterizations (Gibson, 2020, p. 24), but researchers now know that they exist on a spectrum and can be transformed or exacerbated over time, depending on one’s life circumstances or external norms, namely, those of hookup culture.

Figure 1. Attachment Typologies



Dilemma

Since attachment style forms in childhood, individuals may be unaware of their attachment style, its implications, and how it could affect the trajectory of their relationships. Further, with the increase in casual sex and the social discourse that comes along with it, the modern dating scene has been primed for the maintenance and benefit of insecure attachment styles (Levine, 2019, p. 98). This makes it more difficult for young adults to form close and committed bonds. Young (2021) found that individuals are most likely to return to their baseline attachment style, with circumstances like stress, relationship problems, history of abuse, psychological problems, life-altering events, and other relational experiences. Securely attached individuals tend to maintain high levels of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and trust while insecurely attached individuals report decreasing levels of all three (Levine, 2019, p. 132).

Most insecurely attached individuals (preoccupied, dismissive, fearful avoidant) tend to believe that it is more socially acceptable to maintain a detached persona and mask discontent in relationships (Levine, 2019, p. 101). Young adults tend to experience a lot of hardship when trying to find a partner to settle down with, and yet have had little

focus placed on them by researchers. Attachment theory is important for young adults, as they have not yet had the opportunity to build a healthy and serious partnership, thus, there may be more cause for concern if most of the modern-day dating pool proves to be insecurely attached (Levine, 2019, p. 94). As young adults finish their studies and begin their careers, institutions in society that promote monogamous marriage still expect many to find a lasting relationship. One strategy that individuals in society have adopted to deal with anxiety of abandonment and avoidance of intimacy is hooking up.

This research will examine university students' attachment styles and their participation and satisfaction with hooking up. I hypothesize that:

1. Participants with secure attachment styles will have lower rates of hooking up compared to insecurely attached (preoccupied, dismissive, fearful avoidant) participants.
2. Participants with preoccupied attachment will experience more feelings of guilt than participants with secure attachment. Participants that have dismissive attachment will experience less feelings of guilt than participants with secure attachment.

Literature Review

When it comes to casual sex, even scientists agree that it is rarely casual. From a biological standpoint, kissing alone raises levels of oxytocin, the chemical associated with trust and attachment (Fisher, 2010, p. 218). Sex stimulates the production of dopamine, the brain chemical associated with feeling intense romantic love. Therefore, when individuals have sex with someone they hardly know, it can push individuals toward feelings of passionate romantic love. In Fisher's (2010) study, 50% of women and 52% of men who initiated a one-night stand were eager to begin a longer connection, with one-third of the reported hook-ups evolving into a romantic relationship. However, when hook-ups failed to evolve into a relationship, one of the partners regularly became depressed, suggesting that this individual had hoped for a longer, more meaningful connection (Fisher, 2010, p. 220). Another factor that may influence whether individuals commit to one another is the attachment styles that they develop. Adolescents with poor parental support were found to partake in more risk-taking behaviors, such as the regular use of illicit drugs and alcohol, as well as promiscuity (Kliewer, 2015, p. 551). Such promiscuity is also encouraged by societal narratives in media during the courtship phase, which is the slow, systematic process of pursuing another person (Negroni, 2013, para. 8). Rather than reflecting independence, this illustrates a fear of dependency.

Secure

Securely attached individuals enjoy stronger experiences of love than insecurely attached individuals (Miller, 2015, p. 50). Individuals with secure attachment styles are

generally supportive, available, and open with their friends and partners. They can feel safe while being vulnerable and can also help shift individuals with insecure attachments into a more secure space. A secure relationship is characterized by security, playfulness, collaboration, flexibility, and sensitivity (Tatkin, 2012, p. 49). Nancy Collins (1990) found that people with a secure attachment system seem to function as effective communication coaches and are good at getting others to open up and talk about personal things. Securely attached individuals also engage in more self disclosure, keep fewer secrets, and express their emotions more honestly than dismissive individuals do.

Individuals with a secure attachment style usually don't go through many partners before they find someone that they are happy to settle down with and they take a long time to reappear in the dating pool, if at all (Levine, 2019, p. 94). Subjects with a secure attachment style are also less likely to deceive someone (Levine, 2019, p. 143) due to their natural gravitation towards individuals with similar qualities and their power to enhance the attachment of their partners that may be more insecure.

Dismissive

Dismissive attachment styles generally appear withdrawn, are highly independent, emotionally distant in their relationships, and less likely to connect on an intimate level. They find it difficult to be highly involved with their partners and become overwhelmed when they are relied on heavily and retreat physically and emotionally as a result. They typically had parents who were absent from their childhood so they believe they can only safely rely on themselves (Gibson, 2020, p. 6), however, their view of their childhood tends to be overly positive and they may not even recognize the negative aspects of their upbringing. Therefore, they can confuse neglect with independence and are not in touch with their feelings of abandonment. It may be difficult to help a dismissive individual recognize and accept their avoidant behavior as they often hate being asked to look inward and examine their own actions, both past and present.

During their childhood they were severely criticized or punished as a way for their parents to express their anger and as a result they believe that vulnerability will always lead to disappointment and that they can only truly rely on themselves (Young, 2021, p. 54). When dating, dismissive individuals will often adopt this attitude with new partners and act dismissive of their feelings or uncomfortable conversations. They may see conflict as the end of a relationship and detach themselves easily from their partner as they hold an ideal in their mind of a previous relationship which they believe no one else can ever measure up to (Lawson, 2019, p. 40). Internal narratives like this may lead to dating multiple people simultaneously to avoid forming an attachment to any one person. This has been made easy by online dating sites as they provide a plethora of options for individuals to bounce between and avoid connection by focusing only on the sexual aspects of their relationships.

By perceiving hooking up and their casual partners in a more negative light, they distance themselves to protect themselves from pain. Many insecurely attached individuals choose to forgo relationships all together because they find committed relationships too stressful. This can be extremely easy when hookup culture is normalized, and they are offered multiple casual partners to choose from through online dating websites. If a partner succeeds in breaking through a dismissive individual's defensive shield to catch a glimpse of their insecurities or emotions beneath, they often panic and run to seek either solitude or someone who does not realize they are not exactly what they seem. Therefore, these individuals find it difficult to commit. They are also more likely to be unfaithful to their partner and are prone to addiction with drugs, gambling, alcohol, sex, or work.

Individuals with a dismissive attachment style tend to end their relationships more frequently and since they also suppress loving emotions, they get over partners quickly and can start dating again almost immediately. Therefore, dismissive individuals find themselves single more frequently and for longer periods of time. When individuals meet a new casual hookup partner, the probability that they have a dismissive style of attachment is high, around 25% (Levine, 2019, p. 95). Not only are dismissive individuals cycled back into the dating pool more quickly, but they are also not dating other dismissive individuals, or at least not for long since individuals with a dismissive attachment style tend to end their relationships more frequently and are more likely to divorce (Levine, 2019, p. 94). The chances that they are dating securely attached individuals is also slim, as securely attached individuals tend to be less available. Thus, they will most often seek to fulfill their biological needs for emotional and physical connection from less demanding partners or a variety of partners. Hookup culture further encourages dismissive individuals to spread themselves among many different people so that no one person knows everything about them.

Preoccupied

Preoccupied individuals fear rejection and abandonment just as much as dismissive individuals but instead of withdrawing to protect themselves, they self-sacrifice to please people. This anxiety breeds cycles of giving, resentment, complaint, demanding, temporary satisfaction, and giving again (Lawson, 2019, p. 7). It primarily stems from left over feelings of inadequacy in childhood and being taught to expect rejection (Gibson, 2020, p. 8). While they were provided with the same distance that dismissive individuals were in childhood, they did not have enough space to learn how to self soothe and the withdrawal of their caregiver created a deeper dependency on the parent to be soothed (Gibson, 2020, p. 8). Research shows that this attachment style perceives affection as conditional to appeasing their parents and so these individuals subconsciously believe that others will only abandon them if they prove to be unworthy of their love (Young, 2021, p. 60). As adults they may be people pleasers because they crave validation from others (Young, 2021, p. 25) and they fear that if they do not please others, they will not receive the love

and affection they seek.

For individuals with a preoccupied attachment style, certain individuals, namely dismissive attachment styles, intensify their worries and feelings of inadequacy, while others, such as securely attached individuals, pacify them (Levine, 2019, p. 90). Paradoxically preoccupied individuals often date people with a dismissive attachment style, even though findings highlight adverse consequences (Levine, 2019, p. 91). If preoccupied individuals have been casually dating for a while, they become predisposed to attract the individuals who are least likely to make them happy. Based off this anxious predisposition, when a preoccupied individual meets someone secure and their attachment style remains relatively calm, they conclude that they may not be a suitable partner because they are used to associating an activated attachment style with love and a calm attachment system with boredom and indifference (Levine, 2019, p. 96). Once single, preoccupied individuals fear loneliness so they are quick to jump from one relationship to another and they may even use sexuality to intensify their relationship with others, even if there's no sexual desire (Young, 2021, p. 62). Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style approach their sex lives with a drive to gain reassurance and avoid rejection. Slowly but surely, "bad experiences and relationships can lead you to view relationships in a different light and eventually a once secure attachment will shift into a dismissive attachment" (Young, 2021, p. 31). Similarly, preoccupied individuals can build high levels of avoidance on top of their high levels of anxiety and develop a fearful avoidant attachment style.

Fearful Avoidant

Individuals with a fearful avoidant attachment style tend to be preoccupied and dismissive, constantly shifting between being vulnerable with their partner and being distant. They do not trust easily as they believe betrayal is likely and thus overanalyze micro-expressions and body language. This occurs because they had an untrusting relationship with their caregivers in childhood where some form of abuse was paired with emotional support at infrequent times. Therefore, they feel a sense of connection while subconsciously believing it to be a threat.

Having a fearful avoidant attachment has also been shown to have a direct link to sexuality and women with fearful avoidant attachment, particularly, were found to have a higher number of partners over a lifetime whereas men with fearful avoidant attachment had a more positive response to sexual solicitation (Young, 2021, p. 56). Fearful avoidant habits, such as craving closeness but distancing themselves when things become more intimate, can also lead to a series of short relationships in which these individuals seek closeness only to flee when they actually receive it. These fearful avoidant behaviors result in compulsive sexual behaviors and lower sexual satisfaction. They might do this with one-night stands or short-term relationships and when they start feeling vulnerable, they are likely to avoid sexual intimacy and its accompanying vulnerability altogether.

As fearful avoidant individuals' primary fear is being abandoned, punished, or rejected, this is what they often end up doing to others. This can make a potential partner feel abandoned, intimidated and never good enough. However, the fearful avoidant partner truly wants their partner to move toward them. The partners of fearful avoidant individuals will often complain that they are being pushed away when in fact, the preoccupied individual uses their partner's pursuit of them as proof for themselves that they are loved and that their efforts will be reciprocated (Tatkin, 2016, p. 136). This is rarely the case and they find themselves in one failed relationship after another, repeating the same cycles again and again.

Methods

Data Collection

To be eligible for this study, participants had to be adult university students currently or previously attending a Canadian university, and currently residing in British Columbia. Participants were recruited by posting the research project advertisement on social media websites (Facebook and Instagram) for a period of 3-4 weeks in January 2022. Participants were asked to share their story and help progress the future of relationship research by volunteering to participate in the study. Once individuals indicated their interest, they were contacted via email. Prospective interviewees received a formal email along with the "Pre-Screening Questions" within an email text. Participants were selected based on their responses to the screening questions and were contacted again to request that they participate in a private, hour-long, semi-structured interview. Once the participant agreed to take part in an interview, an individual interview time was scheduled. The consent process and all interviews with participants occurred via UBC hosted Zoom during mid-to-late January 2022. Since the interviews were conducted virtually, participants were asked ahead of time to arrange to be in a private and quiet room without distractions for the duration of the interview. There were no problems with this setting besides poor wifi connection from the participants' end on a few occasions. The interviewer was also at home in a quiet and private space without distractions.

Before beginning the interview with the participant, the interviewer read the consent form aloud to confirm consent. Participants were then asked to complete a self-conducted survey the UBC-hosted version of Qualtrics. The survey consisted of 28 multiple choice questions that were ranked on a 5-point scale from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Ten of these questions were to determine the individual's self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) and the other eighteen questions were designed to determine the individual's attachment style using Nancy Collins' Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) (1996). Once the participant signaled to the interviewer that they had completed

the survey, they then moved to the interview. With participant consent, interviews were recorded via local audio recording. All participants consented to recording.

The semi-structured interview consisted of seventeen questions with open ended prompts depending on the participants answers to the questions. Interview questions focused on individuals' personal experiences, including previous romantic relationships, personal opinions on hookup culture, and the challenges encountered. Individuals were interviewed about their experiences with hooking up, including their romantic experiences and their participation in hookup culture. Most interviews took approximately 30 minutes or less, with a few extending to the full 60 minutes. After the interview, participants were provided with a gift card via email to *Somedays*, a Vancouver based and independently owned queer and black business, as a token of appreciation.

After the interview ended, participants were reminded of the researcher's contact information in case they had any questions or concerns. Once interviews were transcribed, each interviewee received a copy of their transcript to review. Research subjects were assigned a code number and pseudonym that were used to identify them on data collection forms and transcripts. The researcher removed or altered elements of the transcripts if they could personally identify participants to maintain confidentiality. A master list was created linking code numbers and pseudonyms to names. This list was kept in a password protected virtual folder that was only shared with the interviewer and project supervisor. Location was not reported by name in the final research report and was replaced by "a Canadian university."

Measures

Twenty-four variables were assessed in the survey. The variables are operationalized as follows:

Attachment style. Using Nancy Collins' Adult Attachment Scale (1996), the following eighteen items were combined to form attachment typologies (Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissing, Fearful) and attachment dimensions (Anxiety and Avoidance). Participants were asked to identify how strongly they related to the following statements: (1) "I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others," (2) "People are never there when you need them," (3) "I am comfortable depending on others," (4) "I know that others will be there when I need them," (5) "I find it difficult to trust others completely," (6) "I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them," (7) "I do not often worry about being abandoned," (8) "I often worry that my partner does not really love me," (9) "I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like," (10) "I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me," (11) "I want to merge completely with another person," (12) "My desire to merge sometimes scares people away," (13) "I find it relatively easy to get close to others," (14) "I do not often worry about someone getting close to me," (15)

“I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others,” (16) “I am nervous when anyone gets too close,” (17) “I am comfortable having others depend on me,” (18) “Often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.” Response categories included: (1) “Strongly disagree,” (2) “Disagree,” (3) “Neither agree nor disagree,” (4) “Agree,” (5) “Strongly agree.” Using these items, two attachment dimensions were created. In the Anxiety subscale, the following question was reverse scored: (7) “I do not worry about being abandoned.” For the Avoidance subscale, the following question was reverse scored: (13) “I find it relatively easy to get close to others,” (3) “I am comfortable depending on others,” (14) “I do not worry about someone getting too close to me,” (17) “I am comfortable having others depend on me,” and (4) “I know that people will be there when I need them.” The Anxiety subscale measures the extent to which a person is worried about being abandoned or unloved (Collins, 1996) while the Avoidance subscale measures the extent to which an individual is worried about proximity to someone. Collins (1996) suggests using items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 to create the Anxiety subscale. In order to improve reliability only items 7, 8, and 10 were used in this study. The Cronbach’s Alpha for the Anxiety subscale was reported as .85. For the Avoidance subscale, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 were used based on Collins (1996) recommendation. The Cronbach’s Alpha for the Avoidance subscale was .81. In order to develop the Attachment Typologies, high/low categories for both the Anxiety and Avoidance subscales were created using the midpoint as the cut point (low: < 3 ; high: $>$ or $= 3$). Using these high/low categories, participants were coded into attachment typologies. Secure individuals scored low on Anxiety and Avoidance. Preoccupied individuals scored high on Anxiety and low on Avoidance. Dismissive individuals scored low on Anxiety and high on Avoidance. Finally, Fearful Avoidant individuals scored high on both Anxiety and Avoidance (see Figure 1). In addition to creating the Attachment Typologies, a dichotomous Secure/Insecure Attachment variable was created by grouping Preoccupied, Dismissing, and Fearful Avoidant individuals into the Insecure category.

Self-esteem. The following ten items were combined to form the self-esteem scale. Participants were asked how strongly they relate to the following statements: (1) “Overall, I am satisfied with myself,” (2) “At times I think I am no good at all,” (3) “I feel that I have a number of good qualities,” (4) “I am able to do things as well as most other people,” (5) “I feel I do not have much to be proud of,” (6) “I certainly feel useless at times,” (7) “I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others,” (8) “I wish I could have more respect for myself,” (9) “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure,” (10) “I take a positive attitude toward myself.” Response categories included: (1) “Strongly disagree,” (2) “Disagree,” (3) “Neither agree nor disagree,” (4) “Agree,” and (5) “Strongly agree.” Questions 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 were reverse coded. The scores for all ten items were summed. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. The Cronbach’s Alpha for this scale was reported as .88.

Satisfaction. Participants were asked: (1) “Were you generally satisfied with your previous casual hookup experiences?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2)

“No.” Participants were offered the opportunity to elaborate after each question on why they provided their answer.

Regret. Participants were asked: (1) “Have you ever experienced feelings of regret after a casual hookup?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.” Participants were offered the opportunity to elaborate after each question on why they provided their answer.

Friends with Benefits. Participants were asked: (1) “How many friends with benefits have you had?” Participants had the opportunity to give an open-ended quantitative answer. *One Night Stands.* Participants were asked: (1) “How many one-night stands have you had?” Participants had the opportunity to give an open-ended quantitative answer. *Dating multiple people.* Participants were asked: (1) “Have you ever dated multiple people simultaneously?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.”

Views. Participants were asked: (1) “What are your views on casual sex?” Response categories were open-ended.

Hooking up. Participants were asked: (1) “Do you participate in hook ups (i.e., physical or sexual relations with another individual, regardless of if you are dating or not)?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.”

Hooking up frequency. Participants were asked: (1) “How often do you participate in hooking up per month?” Response categories were open-ended.

Hooking up length. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “For how many years have you been participating in hookups?” Response categories were open-ended.

Pressure. Participants were asked: (1) “Have you ever experienced feelings of pressure or anxiety prior to a casual hookup?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.” Participants were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they provided their answer.

Repeat. Participants were asked: (1) “Would you participate in hooking up again?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.” Participants were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they provided their answer.

Developing feelings. Participants were asked: (1) “Have you ever developed feelings for a casual hookup partner?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.” *Religion.* Participants were asked if they practiced any religions. Participants were asked: (1) “Do you practice any religions? If yes, which ones?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.” If participants answered yes, they were asked to provide an open-ended answer. *Ethnicity.* Participants were asked to specify their ethnicity. Participants

were asked: (1) “What ethnicity would you identify with?” Response categories were open-ended. *Relationship status.* Participants were asked if they are in a relationship currently. Participants were asked: (1) “Are you in a current romantic relationship (i.e., an open or monogamous relationship with another individual)?” Response categories included: (1) “Yes” and (2) “No.”

Looking. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “What are you looking for right now?” Response categories were open-ended.

Number of previous romantic relationships. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “How many previous romantic relationships have you had?” Response categories were open-ended.

Longest romantic relationship. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “How long was your longest relationship?” Response categories were open-ended. *Satisfaction type.* Participants were asked the following question: (1) “During your hookups, were you physically or emotionally satisfied?” Response categories were open-ended.

Expectations for a partner. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “Have you ever had any expectations of your partner after your casual hookup and were they met?” Response categories were open-ended.

Expectations for self. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “Do you think your partner had any expectations of you and do you think you met them?” Response categories were open-ended.

Other emotions during a hookup. Participants were asked the following question: (1) “Were there any other emotions that came up for you after one or multiple casual hookups?” Response categories were open-ended.

Analysis Plan

IBM SPSS version 28 was used to conduct the quantitative analyses. Qualitative data (i.e., interview transcripts and open-ended questions) were thematically coded using open coding. Descriptive analyses were conducted on the Attachment Typologies, dichotomous Attachment variable, and other remaining variables in addition to correlation analysis among the variables. ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences between the Attachment Typologies and t-tests were conducted on the dichotomous Attachment variable to determine differences between Secure and Insecure attachment types.

Qualitative data was examined to further discern differences in the attachment typologies. Qualitative data examined type of satisfaction, expectations, and other emotions during a hookup through thematic analysis. These questions were inductively coded into

groups based on attachment style and individual answers for each question were compared within the attachment style groups, as well as between the groups. Thematic analysis was then used to find recurring patterns and themes amongst participant answers and the themes were placed into a flat coding frame.

Results

The final sample consisted of 20 individuals. Fifty percent of the participants identified as White (N=10), 30% identified as East Asian (N=6), and 5% identified as Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, and Mixed respectively (N=1). In terms of religion, 60% identified as an Atheist (N=12), 20% identified as Jewish and Christian respectively (N=2), and 5% identified as Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, and Spiritual respectively (N=1). When asked about their birth country, 75% were born in Canada (N=15) and 25% were born elsewhere (N=5). As seen in Table 1, the Anxiety subscale had indicated moderate levels of anxiety toward abandonment on average. The Avoidance subscale showed moderate to low levels of avoidance of intimacy on average. The mean score for self-esteem illustrated moderate to high levels of self-esteem in the sample on average. Through the mean score for relationship status, it was found that most of the sample was single. Looking's mean score demonstrated that most of the participants were looking for something casual. The mean score for dating multiple people proved that most of the sample had dated multiple people simultaneously. The mean score for hooking up showcased that most of the sample did participate in hooking up. The hooking up frequency showed that most of the sample participated in hooking up 3 times per month. Further, the mean score for hooking up length proved that most of the sample participated in hooking up for 1 to 2 years. The mean score for friends with benefits indicated that most of the sample had 1 friend with benefits. The mean score for one-night stands indicated that most of the sample had 5 one night stands previously. Satisfaction's mean score illustrated that most of the sample did not walk away from their hookup experiences with a sense of satisfaction. Regret demonstrated that most of the sample had experienced feelings of regret after hooking up. The mean score for pressure showed that most of the sample had experienced feelings of pressure prior to a casual hookup. Finally, repeat's mean score indicated that most of the sample would participate in hooking up again.

Correlations

A correlation analysis was run to investigate how different levels of anxiety over abandonment, avoidance of intimacy, and self-esteem related to participation in hooking up. As shown in Table 3, the correlation between anxiety and self-esteem is $r = -.51$, $p = .02$, indicating that participants scoring high on anxiety are more likely to experience

lower levels of self-esteem than participants scoring low on anxiety. The correlation between avoidance and regret is $r = .55, p = .00$ indicating that individuals scoring high on avoidance experience higher levels of regret than individuals scoring low on avoidance. The correlation between avoidance and self-esteem is $r = -.50, p = .02$ which indicates that individuals scoring high on avoidance also experience lower levels of self-esteem compared to individuals scoring low on avoidance. The correlation between avoidance and relationship status is $r = -.49, p = .03$ which indicates that individuals scoring high on avoidance are also more likely to be single. Having a one-night stand is positively related to the frequency of hooking up ($r = .84, p = .00$) which indicates that if a participant has previously had a one-night stand, they are more likely to participate in hooking up frequently than participants who have not had a one night stand before. Having a one-night stand is also positively related to having a friend with benefits ($r = .50, p = .02$), illustrating that a participant who has previously had a one-night stand is more likely to also participate in a friends with benefits arrangement. Finally, dating multiple people simultaneously and participating in hooking up is positively related ($r = .66, p = .00$), showcasing that if participants had dated multiple people simultaneously, they were also more likely to participate in hooking up than participants who had not dated multiple people simultaneously.

Attachment Styles

Of the 20 participants in the study, 40% were Secure (N=8), 40% were Preoccupied (N=8), 0% were Dismissive (N=0), and 20% were Fearful Avoidant (N=4). Figure 2 plots each participant on the Anxiety and Avoidance dimensions. Hypothesis tests were conducted using the attachment typologies (Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, Fearful) as well as a comparison of Secure versus Insecure where insecure included the Preoccupied and Fearful Avoidant attachment types. In this dichotomous comparison, 40% were Secure (N=8) and 60% were Insecure (N=12). Participants with Anxiety equal or greater to the midpoint of 3 on the 5-point scale, were deemed to have High Anxiety over abandonment while participants with Anxiety under the midpoint were deemed to have Low Anxiety over abandonment. Similarly, participants with Avoidance equal or greater to the midpoint of 3 on the 5-point scale, were deemed to have High Avoidance of intimacy while participants with Avoidance under the midpoint were deemed to have Low Avoidance of intimacy. Out of the 20 participants in the study, 60% had High Anxiety (N=12) and 40% had Low Anxiety (N=8). Furthermore, 20% had High Avoidance (N=4) and 80% had Low Avoidance (N=16).

Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis #1. No significant results were found between the Secure, Preoccupied, and Fearful Avoidant groupings or the Secure versus Insecure comparisons for rates of

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Relationship Status	20	1.45	0.510	1	2	0.218	-2.183
Looking	12	1.42	0.900	0	3	0.745	0.053
Number of previous romantic relationships	19	3.26	1.759	1	7	0.510	-0.567
Longest Romantic Relationship	20	29.95	20.004	3	72	0.546	-0.761
Views	20	1.70	0.470	1	2	-0.945	-1.242
Dating Multiple People	20	1.70	0.470	1	2	-0.945	-1.242
Hooking up	20	1.65	0.489	1	2	-0.681	-1.719
Hooking up Frequency	13	3.31	2.562	1	10	1.633	2.997
Hooking up Length	13	1.54	0.877	1	3	1.176	-0.551
Friends with Benefits	20	1.80	1.609	0	4	0.108	-1.640
One Night Stands	20	5.55	11.014	0	50	3.792	15.664
Satisfaction	15	1.40	0.507	1	2	0.455	-2.094
Regret	16	1.81	0.403	1	2	-1.772	1.285
Pressure	17	1.65	0.493	1	2	4.041	16.528
Repeat	20	1.85	0.366	1	2	-2.123	2.776
Self-Esteem	20	35.7500	5.99890	27	50	0.744	0.641
Anxiety	20	2.9833	1.05118	1.33	4.67	0.073	-0.908
Avoidance	20	2.6375	0.59498	1.17	3.67	-0.568	1.277

hooking up. However, when analyzing the qualitative data, we see that secure participants have more friends with benefits and one-night stands than insecure participants, which is reflected in the mean differences amongst secure and insecure participants. Secure participants had an average of 2.25 friends with benefits while insecure participants only had an average of 1.50. This indicates that secure participants have more friends with benefits than insecure participants. The average of one night stands for secure participants was 9.25 while insecure participants had an average of 3.08 which shows that secure participants have more one-night stands than insecure participants.

Table 2. Correlations

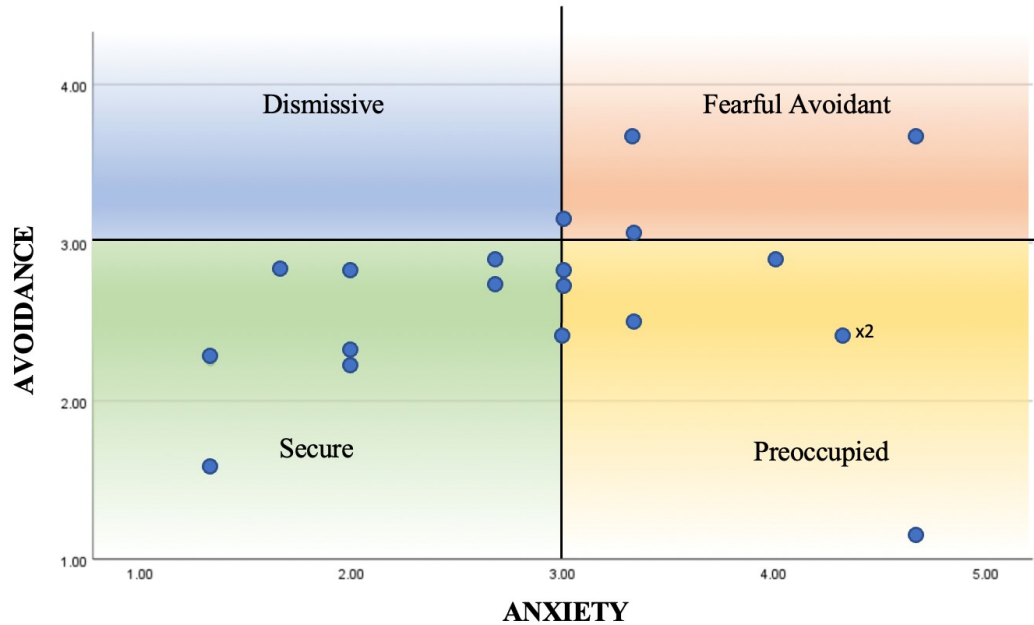
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Anxiety	1	$r = .160$ $n = 20$	$r = -.513^*$ $n = 20$	$r = -.214$ $n = 20$	$r = .025$ $n = 20$	$r = -.230$ $n = 19$	$r = -.210$ $n = 12$	$r = -.182$ $n = 20$	$r = .043$ $n = 13$	$r = .314$ $n = 16$	$r = -.261$ $n = 20$	$r = -.219$ $n = 20$	$r = .193$ $n = 20$	$r = -.330$ $n = 20$	$r = .402$ $n = 17$	$r = .175$ $n = 20$
Avoidance			$r = -.504^*$ $n = 20$	$r = -.489^*$ $n = 20$	$r = .093$ $n = 20$	$r = .003$ $n = 19$	$r = -.470$ $n = 12$	$r = .340$ $n = 20$	$r = -.032$ $n = 13$	$r = .551^*$ $n = 16$	$r = .241$ $n = 20$	$r = -.072$ $n = 20$	$r = .236$ $n = 20$	$r = .155$ $n = 20$	$r = -.144$ $n = 17$	$r = .160$ $n = 20$
Self-Esteem				$r = .125$ $n = 20$	$r = -.103$ $n = 20$	$r = .174$ $n = 19$	$r = .201$ $n = 12$	$r = .130$ $n = 20$	$r = .107$ $n = 13$	$r = -.265$ $n = 16$	$r = .273$ $n = 20$	$r = .248$ $n = 20$	$r = -.279$ $n = 20$	$r = -.028$ $n = 20$	$r = -.330$ $n = 17$	$r = -.233$ $n = 20$
Relationship Status					$r = -.066$ $n = 20$	$r = .118$ $n = 19$	$r = .554$ $n = 12$	$r = -.390$ $n = 20$	$r = .526$ $n = 13$	$r = -.289$ $n = 16$	$r = -.141$ $n = 20$	$r = .235$ $n = 20$	$r = -.127$ $n = 20$	$r = -.066$ $n = 20$	$r = -.176$ $n = 20$	$r = -.183$ $n = 20$
Views						$r = -.187$ $n = 19$	$r = -.614$ $n = 12$	$r = .435$ $n = 20$	$r = .313$ $n = 13$	$r = .462$ $n = 16$	$r = .403$ $n = 20$	$r = .288$ $n = 20$	$r = .289$ $n = 20$	$r = .286$ $n = 20$	$r = .090$ $n = 17$	$r = .642^{**}$ $n = 20$
Number of previous romantic relationships							$r = .345$ $n = 12$	$r = .303$ $n = 19$	$r = -.009$ $n = 13$	$r = .087$ $n = 16$	$r = .407$ $n = 19$	$r = .311$ $n = 19$	$r = .196$ $n = 19$	$r = .511^*$ $n = 19$	$r = .350$ $n = 17$	$r = .151$ $n = 19$
Looking								$r = -.043$ $n = 12$	$r = -.026$ $n = 10$	$r = -.553$ $n = 11$	$r = .138$ $n = 12$	$r = .245$ $n = 12$	$r = -.646^*$ $n = 12$	$r = .056$ $n = 12$	$r = -.140$ $n = 12$	$r = -.204$ $n = 12$
Hooking up									$r = c$ $n = 13$	$r = .179$ $n = 16$	$r = .775^{**}$ $n = 20$	$r = .350$ $n = 20$	$r = .036$ $n = 20$	$r = .663^{**}$ $n = 20$	$r = -.452$ $n = 17$	$r = .572^{**}$ $n = 20$
Hooking up Frequency										$r = .053$ $n = 13$	$r = .396$ $n = 13$	$r = .843^{**}$ $n = 13$	$r = .470$ $n = 13$	$r = .153$ $n = 13$	$r = .420$ $n = 13$	$r = c$ $n = 13$
Regret											$r = .195$ $n = 16$	$r = .122$ $n = 16$	$r = .224$ $n = 16$	$r = -.182$ $n = 16$	$r = -.041$ $n = 16$	$r = .303$ $n = 16$
Friends With Benefits												$r = .502^*$ $n = 20$	$r = .086$ $n = 20$	$r = .543^*$ $n = 20$	$r = -.349$ $n = 17$	$r = .393$ $n = 20$
One Night Stands													$r = .275$ $n = 20$	$r = .288$ $n = 20$	$r = -.131$ $n = 17$	$r = .217$ $n = 20$
Longest Romantic Relationship														$r = -.164$ $n = 20$	$r = .418$ $n = 17$	$r = .351$ $n = 20$
Dating Multiple People															$r = -.528^*$ $n = 17$	$r = .336$ $n = 20$
Pressure																$r = .059$ $n = 17$
Repeat																1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

c. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables in constant.

Figure 2. Participant Attachment Typologies



Hypothesis #2. When analyzing the variables between Secure and Insecure participants, a significant difference was found between groups for self-esteem ($t = 1.96$, $df = 18$, $p = .07$). The mean level of self-esteem for the secure group ($N=8$) was 38.75 with a standard deviation of 6.92, while the mean level of self-esteem for the insecure group ($N=12$) was 33.75 with a standard deviation of 4.55. By examining the mean levels of self-esteem for the secure versus insecure groups, we can determine that secure individuals have higher self-esteem than insecure individuals. Young (2021) found that a positive view of the self means lower anxiety whereas a positive view of others means lower avoidance (p. 49) and individuals with secure attachment had a higher self-esteem, higher social competence, and exceptional communication satisfaction and adaptability. Therefore, those participants with secure attachment who have higher self-esteem may also experience higher levels of satisfaction.

Additional Insights

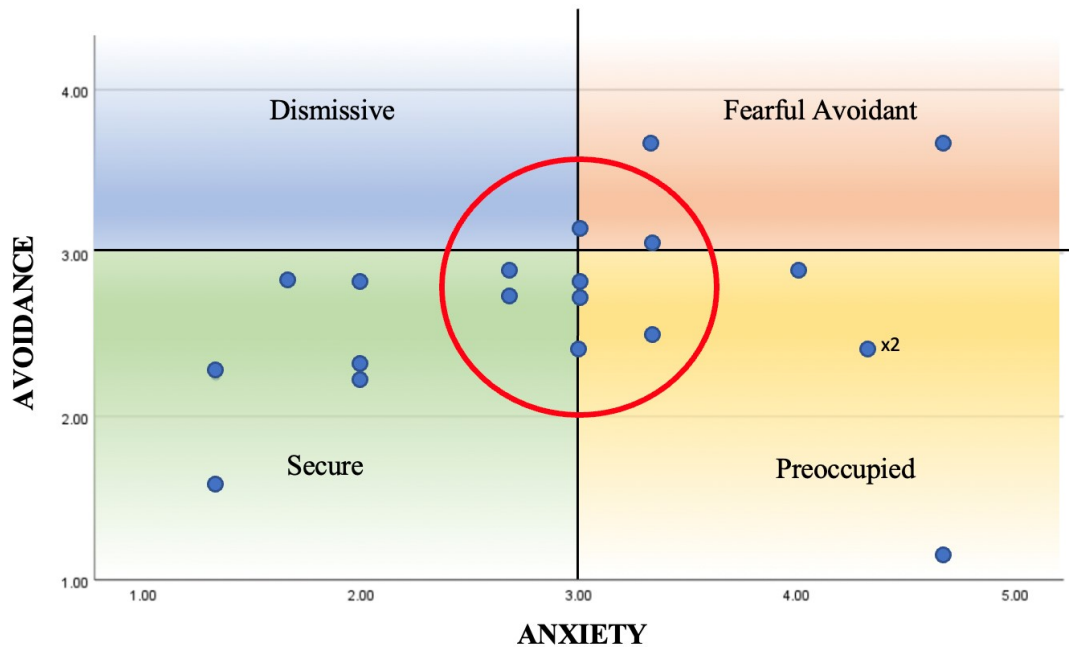
Participants scoring high on avoidance were found to experience higher levels of regret than participants scoring low on avoidance. Between the Secure, Preoccupied, and Fearful Avoidant groupings, a positive significant difference was also found between groups when asked whether participants had ever developed feelings for a casual hookup partner. The analysis of the variance model is significant ($F = 3.78$, $df (2, 13)$, $p = 0.051$). Post hoc analysis shows that between the groupings, it was the individuals that had a

fearful avoidant attachment that experienced feelings for a casual hookup partner. The mean difference between secure and fearful avoidant attachments was $.54$ ($p = .04$) and the standard error was $.23$. The mean difference between preoccupied and fearful avoidant attachments was $.67$ ($p = .02$) and the standard error is $.25$. No significant difference was found when analyzing the variables between Secure and Insecure participants.

Discussion

While individuals who are dismissive or fearful avoidant claim to not be ready for a relationship, preoccupied individuals can seem immature to someone who is securely attached. These same insecure behaviors can be seen in individuals who fall close towards the center of the anxiety and avoidance dimensions. In the study sample, within each of the four attachment styles (Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, Fearful Avoidant) there is significant variation in terms of levels of anxiety and avoidance. Several of the participants in this study fell toward the center of the two dimensions, making their patterns similar to one another despite being in different categories. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Participant Attachment Typologies Midpoint Data



“What are you looking for right now?”

It was hypothesized that participants with secure attachment styles will have lower rates of hooking up compared to participants with insecure attachment styles. In this study, participants who had previously participated in hooking up also had one-night stands, participated in friends with benefits arrangements, and were more likely to claim they would participate in hooking up again. Participants with fearful avoidant attachment were more likely to be single, however, this does not mean they were more likely to participate in hooking up. In contrast, the average of one night stands and friends with benefits for securely attached participants was higher than that of insecurely attached participants. While securely attached individuals may be more open to sexual exploration, dismissive individuals may feel more uncomfortable with their sexuality and avoid hooking up altogether. However, as noted in Figure 3, securely attached individuals can have higher levels of avoidance or avoidant tendencies as a behavioral response to the extremes of hookup culture. In comparison, participants with fearful avoidant attachment, that are close to the midpoint between fearful avoidant and dismissive, may also hold many avoidant tendencies. Individuals with avoidant tendencies are more likely to claim they have never been in love and when dismissive individuals engage in sexual activities, they tend to disconnect their emotions to avoid closeness (Young, 2021, p. 52). One fearful avoidant participant stated:

“For me, it’s just more fun. You get to know the person and I don’t really take hooking up that seriously. I definitely don’t get attached to people through that.”
(Participant #13, Fearful Avoidant)

This distant and self-protective behavior is similar to how dismissive individuals approach their sexuality. They might also abstain from sex, sometimes choosing to rely on masturbation (Becker Phelps, 2014, p. 20). While there were no participants with dismissive attachment in the study, those individuals with higher levels of avoidance mimic this behavior as well. One participant that had high levels of avoidance stated:

“I love the idea of casual sex. Though, I usually just choose to stay home instead, watch a movie at home, and maybe masturbate instead of seeking out another person.” (Participant #7, Secure)

These behaviors are a part of their approach to sexuality and may have served as another explanation for the low average of hooking up amongst insecure participants.

“Situationships”

A “situationship” is defined as the space before a committed relationship but after a relationship is no longer platonic (Hsieh, 2021, para. 1). Unlike “friends with benefits” or relationships, there is no consensus or conversation regarding the expectations or “label”

of the relationship. Within these arrangements, it is common to see individuals dating multiple people simultaneously as a way to avoid commitment but still reap the benefits of the emotional intimacy a relationship could provide (Levine, 2019, p. 268). This study demonstrated that if participants had participated in hooking up, they were more likely to participate in a friend with benefits arrangement. Further, if participants had dated multiple people simultaneously, they were also more likely to participate in a friends with benefits arrangement. It was also found that participants of this study with fearful avoidant attachment were more likely to experience feelings for a casual hookup partner. Participants that have fearful avoidant or preoccupied attachment may find expressing their emotions more difficult due to a fear of abandonment and rejection.

Participants were also asked if there were any other emotions they felt after a casual hookup. Some participants expressed they felt confusion, a common internal conflict many individuals have when they find themselves in a situationship and it is clear that even securely attached individuals can fall victim to the stressful back and forth of these relationships. A preoccupied participant stated:

“I think the main thing that I have experienced after casual hookups has been questioning where we go from here and what does this mean for us? I tend to future trip whereas it seems like people around me can just have sex with someone and then just move on.” (Participant #15, Preoccupied)

The drive to find a sense of security is especially heightened when an individual is scared of losing a partner and they instinctively return to familiar childhood attachment behaviors. Fearful avoidant individuals often experience a hyper-fixation on relationships and limit their self development in desperate search for a partner (Lawson, 2020, p. 35). Since they hate being alone even for a short period of time, they may turn to hooking up or serial monogamy (Lawson, 2019, p. 36). Within the study, participants who claimed they did not date multiple people simultaneously tended to have a preoccupied or fearful avoidant attachment style. This may be a result of preoccupied and fearful avoidant individuals' tendency to hyper-fixate on one person who they have formed an attachment to (Young, 2021, p. 66). If they choose to participate in casual hookups, it is likely that individuals with fearful avoidant attachment will develop feelings for a casual hookup partner due to the close link between sexual intimacy and emotion. This can also be seen in the lower average of hookups amongst insecure participants in this study, as they give their full attention to their partners and find themselves unable to hook up with anyone else.

Anxiety and Regret

Unsurprisingly, if participants had experienced feelings of pressure or anxiety before or during hooking up, they were less likely to date multiple people simultaneously.

This may be related to negative experiences they had while hooking up that heighten avoidant or anxious tendencies and encourage individuals to choose a serious romantic partner over a casual hookup. When it comes to regret, participants with fearful avoidant attachment were more likely to regret their experiences compared to participants with secure attachment. This means that having a secure attachment style is protective from psychological distress following a hook up. Meanwhile, a secure participant with high levels of avoidance seemed unaffected emotionally after hooking up. They claimed that:

“Not much shifted after a hookup. I used to think I would go and tell my friends about this person I met, but with my hookups it wasn’t like that. It wasn’t worth telling any of my friends about it. I felt a bit lonely after those hookups, but I would move on pretty quick so it wasn’t a deep feeling of loneliness.” (Participant #7, Secure)

This is similar to the impartial way dismissive attachment styles approach negative feelings around hooking up.

Limitations and Future Directions

A limitation of this study relates to the study population. A sample size of twenty participants served as a limitation since this may not have been representative of all university students in BC, certainly not nationally or globally. However, for means of preliminary examination, this sample size was sufficient for building a foundation for further hookup research. The study was a mixed methods study which allowed for more depth in participant responses through interviews. A survey would be more beneficial to gather a wider range of responses in the future. Second, there were no participants with a dismissive attachment style which prevented the collection of data for this attachment style grouping, as well as its comparison to other attachment styles. This may be due to the fact that dismissive individuals are not normally interested in relationships (Lawson, 2019, p. 41) and may not have volunteered to participate in the study.

Third, as attachment style is a spectrum based on anxiety and avoidance dimensions, there are limitations to using groupings or classification schemes. Many participants were similar to one another, located near the centre of the graph and close to artificial cut points that create categories. A larger sample would provide the ability to look at only the extremes in each category which would allow for further clarification on attachment types and behaviours. Finally, another possible limitation was reporting bias. The attachment style and self-esteem survey that participants completed prior to their interview requires self-disclosure. While the interviews were confidential, they were not anonymous and there may have been hesitation in sharing personal stories with a researcher.

When considering future directions, research needs to focus on how negative dating and hookup experiences can lead to or heighten a dysfunctional attachment style, as attachment style can also be influenced by trauma obtained in adulthood (Young, 2021, p. 83). Furthermore, it's important to also analyze the intersectional perspectives of race, religion, culture, ethnicity, and class in regard to attachment styles, as well as potential mental health disorders or conditions that may hinder social skills. All of these could potentially make the road to a secure attachment style more difficult and may instead promote hookup culture as an easier coping mechanism.

Conclusion

This project aims to fill gaps in the current research on attachment styles by exploring how the attachment styles individuals develop in childhood contribute to participation in hookup culture as young adults. It was hypothesized that participants with secure attachment styles will have lower rates of hooking up compared to insecurely attached (Preoccupied, Dismissive, Fearful Avoidant) participants. The study found that participants with fearful avoidant attachment were more likely to be single. However, participants with secure attachment were more likely, on average, to have a friend with benefits or one night stand than insecure participants. Furthermore, it was also hypothesized that participants with preoccupied attachment will experience more feelings of guilt than participants with secure attachment, and participants that have dismissive attachment will experience less feelings of guilt than participants with secure attachment. It was found that participants scoring high on anxiety or avoidance are more likely to experience lower levels of self-esteem than participants scoring low on anxiety. Further, participants scoring high on avoidance experience higher levels of regret than participants scoring low on avoidance. Finally, the analysis showed that individuals that had a fearful avoidant attachment were more likely to experience feelings for a casual hookup partner. However, all attachment styles said they would consider hooking up with someone again. This may be a result of the societal or peer pressure many individuals expressed they felt to participate in hookup culture. Attachment theory is a tool that may help individuals understand why they think the way they do and choose the people they choose. It equips individuals with the necessary habits to make better and more informed decisions. The more aware individuals are about their attachment style, the easier it will be to navigate life and relationships with others.

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