

## The relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles, and romantic relationships satisfaction

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### Abstract

This study explores the relationships among self-esteem, attachment styles, and romantic relationship satisfaction in adulthood. Although prior research has examined these constructs independently, limited attention has been given to their combined influence on relationship satisfaction while accounting for attachment insecurity, indicating a notable research gap. The objective of the study is to examine how self-esteem and attachment styles jointly contribute to adults' evaluations of their romantic relationships. A quantitative research design was employed, using standardized self-report instruments to collect data from 180 participants aged over 18. The measures assessed self-esteem, attachment orientations, and perceived relationship satisfaction. The findings indicate that higher self-esteem is associated with greater relationship satisfaction, whereas insecure attachment orientations are linked to lower self-esteem and diminished satisfaction. In contrast, secure attachment does not demonstrate a strong independent contribution when other variables are considered. Differences in relationship satisfaction were observed across gender, although self-esteem and attachment patterns remained comparable. The study highlights the stronger negative influence of attachment insecurity relative to the positive role of secure attachment. These findings have important implications for counseling practice by emphasizing the need to address attachment-related vulnerabilities and self-evaluative processes to enhance relationship quality.

**Keywords:** Adult relationships; attachment styles; relationship satisfaction; self-esteem; psychological wellbeing.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships are a cornerstone of adult life, significantly impacting individual well-being. Romantic relationships are typically defined as ongoing, voluntary bonds between two individuals characterized by emotional intimacy, affection, and a degree of commitment, and, for many couples, sexual involvement (Berscheid & Regan, 2016). Understanding the factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction is therefore crucial. Previous studies suggest that several elements play an important role in shaping how satisfied people feel in their relationships (Jackson et al., 2025). For instance, attachment styles have long been linked to patterns of closeness and security with partners (Hazan & Shaver, 2017). Self-esteem is another well-established factor, as people with higher self-regard tend to communicate more openly and maintain healthier dynamics, which in turn promotes satisfaction (Murray et al., 2000; Orth et al., 2012). In addition, everyday processes such as communication quality and conflict resolution have been shown to strongly influence whether couples remain happy together (Gottman, 2023). Stable personality traits, particularly those described in the Big Five model, also provide meaningful insight into differences in relationship outcomes (Malouff et al., 2010).

The affective bond that gives two people a solid emotional base from which to engage with the outside world was the definition of attachment (Pintado & Mendoza, 2016). Attachment theory posits that early childhood experiences shape individuals' expectations and behaviors in close relationships (Bowlby, 1969). These attachment styles influence how individuals perceive themselves and their partners. In the context of non-familial relationships, a person may have feelings of insecurity while having a stable foundation with their parents. Even when a person was and still is confident in their parental ties, this can make them uneasy in other situations, such as romantic relationships (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Therefore, taking more recent relationship experiences into account is important alongside examining the primary caregiver relationship, as suggested by the attachment theory. Beyond attachment, self-esteem has also been recognized as an important antecedent of romantic relationship satisfaction (Orth et al., 2012). Self-esteem is commonly defined as the overall positive or negative evaluation individuals hold about themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). People with higher self-esteem tend to engage in relationships with greater confidence, communicate their needs more effectively, and establish healthier boundaries, which in turn fosters higher satisfaction in their romantic lives. In contrast, individuals with lower self-esteem are often more prone to insecurity and dependency, which may contribute to dissatisfaction and conflict in close relationships (Murray et al., 2000).

Self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall sense of self-worth, is believed to play a pivotal role in relationship dynamics. People with high self-esteem tend to approach relationships with confidence and security, while those with low self-esteem may experience greater anxiety and insecurity (Leary & MacDonald, 2003). Also, self-esteem, or a person's sense of value, should affect how they see themselves, how they believe their romantic partners see them, and the quality of their relationship as a whole (Sciangula & Morry, 2009). Another study by Murray et al. (2000) asked married and dating couples how they thought their partner actually perceived them on a number of general traits, as well as how they wanted their partner to view them. They found that low self-esteem individuals underestimated how optimistically their partner viewed them, and that this underestimation was linked to lower relationship satisfaction. Conversely, people with high self-esteem underestimated how positive their spouse thought of them, and this overestimation was linked to greater relationship satisfaction.

### 1.1. Literature review

#### 1.1.1. Romantic relationships

Romantic relationship satisfaction refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of the quality, fulfillment, and happiness experienced within a romantic partnership (Fletcher et al., 2000; Hendrick, 1988). It encompasses emotional closeness, communication, intimacy, and perceived support between partners. Romantic relationship

satisfaction has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that reflects several core elements of close partnerships. Emotional closeness refers to the sense of warmth, trust, and mutual understanding that partners develop, and it often involves feeling comfortable being vulnerable in front of one another (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Communication captures the extent to which partners can openly share thoughts, feelings, and concerns; effective communication is strongly linked to conflict resolution and higher levels of satisfaction (Gottman, 2023). Intimacy has been defined as the experience of mutual self-disclosure and responsiveness, where each partner feels understood, validated, and cared for (Shaver & Reis, 1988). Finally, perceived support represents the belief that one's partner is available and responsive in times of need, which fosters security and confidence within the relationship (Collins & Feeney, 2000). These dimensions collectively illustrate how satisfaction in romantic relationships extends beyond surface happiness to deeper emotional and relational processes. Although romantic relationships share certain features with other close bonds, such as friendships or family ties, the literature highlights several elements that distinguish them.

Romantic relationships typically combine emotional intimacy with sexual and physical intimacy, creating a unique bond that is not usually present in non-romantic relationships (Regan, 2011; Ribeiro et al., 2022). They are also characterized by exclusive commitment and long-term orientation, in which partners often plan their futures together and view the relationship as central to their identity (Aron & Aron, 1997). Moreover, research suggests that romantic partners often become integrated into each other's self-concept, a process described by the *self-expansion model*, whereby individuals see their partner as part of their own identity (Aron et al., 1991). These distinctive features, sexual intimacy, exclusivity, and self-expansion, differentiate romantic relationships from other close interpersonal bonds and explain why satisfaction in this domain plays such a crucial role in overall well-being. Romantic relationships often follow a developmental course that can be described through a series of stages. Levinger (1980) outlined the "ABCDE" model, which captures five phases: *acquaintance/attraction*, *build-up*, *continuation*, *deterioration*, and *ending*. Early stages involve initial attraction and self-disclosure, where individuals explore compatibility and shared values. As relationships progress into the build-up and continuation phases, intimacy, trust, and commitment deepen, often supported by emotional closeness and shared goals. If conflicts remain unresolved or partners' needs are not met, relationships may move into deterioration and, in some cases, dissolution.

Although not all relationships follow these stages rigidly, the models highlight common trajectories in romantic development. Relationship satisfaction can also be understood through the lens of Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) *Social Exchange Theory*, later refined as the *Interdependence Theory*. According to this perspective, satisfaction depends on the perceived balance between rewards and costs within the relationship. Importantly, individuals do not evaluate their relationships in isolation; they compare them against their *comparison level* (expectations based on past experiences and societal standards) and *comparison level for alternatives* (perceived quality of other potential partners or being single). Thus, even if a relationship provides emotional support and intimacy, satisfaction may decrease if individuals perceive that other relationships either observed in their social environment or imagined alternatives could offer greater rewards. This comparative process helps explain why relationship satisfaction is dynamic and sensitive to external social influences.

High levels of relationship satisfaction are often linked to positive interpersonal dynamics such as trust, emotional responsiveness, and mutual respect (Hazan & Shaver, 2017; Feeney & Noller, 1996). Beyond attachment styles and self-esteem, research has highlighted several additional psychological factors influencing romantic relationship satisfaction. Empathy plays a central role, as partners who are able to take each other's perspective and respond with emotional understanding report higher levels of satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Cramer & Jowett, 2010). Similarly, indicators of subjective well-being and happiness have been consistently linked to relationship quality; individuals who report greater overall life satisfaction also tend to perceive their romantic partnerships more positively (Demir, 2008; Proulx et al., 2007). Problem-solving and conflict resolution skills are equally important, with studies showing that constructive communication and collaborative problem

solving are strong predictors of long-term stability (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). More recently, research grounded in cognitive-behavioral approaches has demonstrated that dysfunctional beliefs and cognitive distortions, such as unrealistic relationship expectations or catastrophizing, are associated with lower satisfaction and greater relational distress (Baucom et al., 2008). Taken together, these findings indicate that relationship satisfaction is a multidimensional outcome shaped not only by attachment and self-concept but also by emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processes.

### **1.1.2. Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall sense of self-worth or personal value (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem is not a unitary construct but can be differentiated into dimensions such as global self-esteem and domain-specific self-esteem. Global self-esteem refers to a person's overall evaluation of their worth as a human being, whereas domain-specific self-esteem captures evaluations in particular areas such as academic competence, physical appearance, or social acceptance (Mruk, 2006; Rosenberg, 1979). This distinction is important because global self-esteem often acts as a more stable predictor of general well-being and relationship outcomes, while domain-specific self-esteem may vary depending on context. It plays a crucial role in shaping how people view themselves and interpret their partners' behaviors in romantic contexts. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in secure, trusting, and satisfying relationships, whereas those with low self-esteem often experience greater anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of rejection (Leary & MacDonald, 2003; Sciangula & Morry, 2009; Mishra et al., 2024). In line with Rosenberg's (1965) definition, self-esteem can be understood as an overall sense of self-worth, highlighting that perceptions of personal value are at the core of how individuals experience themselves in relationships.

Self-esteem is an important factor in romantic relationships. Individuals with higher self-esteem tend to express themselves more openly, communicate their needs more clearly, and show greater sensitivity to their partner's needs. They are also more likely to engage in constructive problem solving and effective communication, both of which contribute to overall relationship satisfaction (Ünüvar et al., 2018). Similar findings appear in international research. For example, Robinson & Cameron (2012) showed that high self-esteem not only enhances one's own satisfaction but also improves the partner's satisfaction. Likewise, Rusbult et al., (2009) demonstrated that individuals with higher self-esteem are more likely to support their partner's personal growth, helping them feel closer to their "ideal self." Taken together, these findings indicate that high self-esteem fosters mutual support, empathy, and healthy interaction, which ultimately strengthens relationship satisfaction. Self-esteem may fluctuate in time; it can shift during major life transitions. One such period is pregnancy and early parenthood. Caiozzo et al. (2018) found that while women's self-esteem generally increases during pregnancy, their relationship satisfaction often declines in the months following childbirth. This decrease could be due to new responsibilities, physical and emotional changes, or shifting dynamics between partners during the postpartum phase. These changes show how even temporary fluctuations in self-esteem can affect how individuals relate to and feel about their romantic partners.

### **1.1.3. Attachment styles**

Attachment styles describe characteristic ways individuals form and maintain emotional bonds with others, particularly in close relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 2015). Based on Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and later extended to adult romantic relationships, attachment styles are commonly categorized as secure, anxious, avoidant, and sometimes ambivalent (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Secure attachment is characterized by comfort with closeness, trust in the partner, and a positive view of both self and others. Individuals with secure attachment are generally more capable of effective communication and conflict resolution, which in turn promotes higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Hazan & Shaver, 2017; Feeney & Noller, 1996). In contrast, anxious attachment is marked by fear of abandonment, heightened dependency, and sensitivity to rejection. Anxiously attached individuals often report lower satisfaction due to insecurity and excessive

reassurance-seeking behaviors (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Avoidant attachment involves discomfort with intimacy, a preference for independence, and emotional distance from partners. Avoidant individuals typically resist closeness, which undermines relationship satisfaction and leads to difficulties in maintaining supportive bonds (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Finally, ambivalent attachment reflects a contradictory pattern of simultaneously seeking closeness and resisting it, often producing instability and ambivalence within relationships. This attachment style is also associated with lower relationship satisfaction and heightened conflict (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Securely attached individuals tend to experience greater relationship satisfaction due to their comfort with intimacy and effective communication. In contrast, anxious individuals often fear abandonment, and avoidant individuals may resist emotional closeness; both patterns are associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Recent studies focusing on university students reinforce the impact of attachment styles on well-being and relationship satisfaction. In Turkey, Yıldız et al. (2017) found that avoidant and anxious attachment styles significantly predicted lower romantic relationship satisfaction among female undergraduates. Another study with a larger Turkish student sample showed that nearly half of the participants reported avoidant or anxious attachment, both of which were negatively associated with overall life satisfaction and psychological resilience (Buluş & Atan, 2018). Similarly, a study conducted in Cyprus during the post-COVID-19 period revealed that insecure attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance) adversely influenced life satisfaction through diminished psychological resilience (Ziyaeemehr et al., 2023). International findings also support these results; for instance, research with Italian university students indicated that those in stable romantic relationships reported higher psychological well-being compared to single peers, and secure attachment was strongly linked with greater relationship satisfaction and overall stability (Donati et al., 2023).

#### **1.1.4. The relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem, and romantic relationship satisfaction**

Romantic relationships are among the most influential aspects of human life, deeply affecting our emotional well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 2017; Dush & Amato, 2005), sense of identity (Erikson, 1968; Aron & Aron, 1997), and overall life satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Proulx et al., 2007). Understanding the psychological factors that contribute to the quality of these relationships, particularly attachment styles, can offer valuable insights into why some relationships thrive while others struggle. Romantic relationship satisfaction refers to the degree to which individuals feel content, fulfilled, and happy in their romantic relationships (Glenn & Weaver, 1988; Myers & Diener, 1995). One of the strongest psychological frameworks for understanding variability in romantic satisfaction is attachment theory, originally proposed by Bowlby (1988) and extended to adult relationships by researchers Hazan and Shaver (1987). They argued that the attachment styles individuals develop in childhood, secure, anxious, or avoidant shape how they perceive intimacy, trust, and emotional closeness in adulthood. In their view, securely attached individuals are more likely to build stable and satisfying romantic relationships, whereas those with insecure attachment styles often experience greater conflict, lower satisfaction, and difficulties in maintaining closeness.

Attachment styles are typically categorized as secure, anxious, or avoidant (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to feel comfortable with intimacy and trust, and are more likely to maintain stable, satisfying relationships (Collins & Feeney, 2000). In contrast, those with an anxious attachment style often fear rejection and seek constant reassurance, which may lead to dissatisfaction and emotional instability within relationships (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Meanwhile avoidant individuals tend to suppress emotional needs and distance themselves from intimacy which is also negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Attachment styles and relationship satisfaction are related to each other. Meta-analytic findings (Li & Chan, 2012; Hadden et al., 2014) suggest that attachment anxiety and avoidance are strong negative predictors of relationship satisfaction across different populations and cultural contexts. These associations may be mediated

by several interpersonal processes such as communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, and perceptions of partner responsiveness (Pepping et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2015).

Additionally, dyadic approaches, such as the Actor and Partner Interdependence Model (i.e., a framework that examines how both an individual's own characteristics [actor effects] and their partner's characteristics [partner effects] jointly shape relationship outcomes), have shown that both partners' attachment styles contribute to relationship dynamics. For instance, a securely attached partner may buffer the negative effects of the other partner's insecure attachment, improving overall satisfaction (Campbell et al., 2005). In contrast, insecure partners can make each other feel worse and less satisfied in the relationship.

Although many studies have shown these patterns, recent research highlights that things like age, culture, and how people manage their emotions also matter when looking at the link between attachment and relationship satisfaction. Even though the topic has been studied a lot, we still don't fully understand how short-term emotions and personal traits work together with attachment styles to affect relationship satisfaction over time. Also, much of the current literature is based on Western, individualistic cultures. There is a lack of research examining how attachment styles and romantic satisfaction interact in collectivist or non-Western societies, where cultural norms about relationships and emotional expression may differ significantly.

One other determinant of relationship satisfaction is how much individuals perceive themselves as worthy or valuable. Self-esteem is an essential part of how individuals form and maintain their sense of identity. It plays a key role in the process of self-verification, where individuals seek confirmation of who they believe they are. When people receive validation of their self-image especially within close relationships they are more likely to feel capable, competent, and valuable (Swann, 1983; Swann, 2012). Cast and Burke (2002) emphasize that this process of identity confirmation, when achieved through interactions with others such as romantic partners or social groups, directly contributes to strengthening a person's worth-based self-esteem. In romantic relationships, this mutual self-verification reinforces emotional security and deepens connection, a process that can be explained by sociometer theory, which views self-esteem as an internal gauge of relational value shaped by acceptance or rejection from significant others (Leary, 2005; Murray et al., 2000).

Furthermore, self-esteem strongly influences how individuals perceive and experience satisfaction in romantic relationships. According to Sciangula and Morry (2009), individuals with higher self-esteem tend to experience *self-enhancement* that is, they are more likely to feel idealized by their partners and view the relationship positively. In contrast, those with low self-esteem often experience *self-deprecation*, feeling less worthy or fearing rejection, which negatively affects how they interpret their partner's behavior and the relationship as a whole.

The connection between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction is generally positive, and this trend appears regardless of gender. Research by Voss et al. (1999) showed that individuals with higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to enjoy healthier, more fulfilling romantic relationships, including better communication, trust, and commitment. These individuals are also more resilient in the face of conflict and are better able to express their needs and emotions.

However, relationship satisfaction is not determined solely by one partner's self-esteem. As shown by Erol and Orth (2013), both partners' self-perceptions matter. A person with low self-esteem may internalize negative thoughts, which can spill over and reduce their partner's relationship satisfaction as well. For instance, someone who constantly doubts their worth may unintentionally create distance or tension, making it difficult for the relationship to grow positively.

Another important factor is how much approval and acceptance a person feels from their partner. "People who strongly desire acceptance are especially sensitive to their partner's evaluations and reactions" (Murray et al., 2000). If they feel empathy and unconditional regard from their partner, their relationship satisfaction increases even when there are conflicts or disagreements. On the other hand, if they do not feel this emotional

support, their satisfaction can decline significantly (Cramer, 2003). This suggests that perceived emotional safety and acceptance are just as important as communication and compatibility when it comes to maintaining a healthy romantic bond.

In summary, self-esteem plays a crucial role not only in how people view themselves but also in how they build and sustain romantic relationships. Higher self-esteem is generally linked to more satisfying and secure relationships, while lower self-esteem can lead to misunderstandings, emotional distance, and dissatisfaction. Because self-esteem also influences how partners respond to each other's needs, it becomes a shared experience that shapes the overall quality and stability of the relationship.

By considering the literature findings mentioned above, the hypotheses of this study are:

H1: Self-esteem levels of individuals have a significant contribution to their romantic relationship satisfaction.

H2: Attachment styles have a significant contribution to romantic relationship satisfaction.

H2a: Secure attachment makes a positive contribution to romantic relationship satisfaction.

H2b: Anxious and avoidant attachment makes a negative contribution to romantic relationship satisfaction.

## **1.2. Purpose of study**

This research aimed to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles, and romantic relationship satisfaction. Ultimately, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological factors underpinning successful romantic relationships. Although these variables are discussed individually in the literature, studies evaluating these three concepts together are limited. By examining the roles of self-esteem and attachment styles, we hope to provide valuable insights for relationship counseling and interventions aimed at enhancing relationship quality. The findings will inform strategies for fostering healthier relationship patterns and promoting individual well-being within the context of romantic partnerships.

One of the primary limitations of our study is the exclusive use of a correlational model, in which self-esteem and attachment style were treated as independent variables predicting romantic relationship satisfaction. However, future research could explore more complex models by examining the potential mediating or moderating roles of these variables. For instance, attachment style might mediate the relationship between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, or self-esteem might moderate the impact of attachment style on relationship satisfaction. In addition, our sample included individuals who were either currently in a romantic relationship or had been in one within the past two years, without applying an age restriction. While this allowed for a diverse range of participants, it may have introduced variability in life stages and relationship status that could affect the results. Future studies could benefit from more targeted sampling (e.g., by age group, relationship duration, or type). Another important limitation is that we collected data from only one member of each romantic relationship, which may have limited the depth and accuracy of the relational dynamics captured. Relationship satisfaction is inherently dyadic, and including partner perspectives or dyadic data could further enrich the understanding of mutual influence in romantic dynamics. This approach would provide a more holistic view of the interaction patterns, shared experiences, and relational perceptions within romantic relationships.

## **2. METHOD AND MATERIALS**

### **2.1. Participants**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Yeditepe University Ethics Committee. Informed consent was collected from all participants prior to data collection. The study was conducted through an online survey administered via Google Forms and therefore posed no risk of harm to participants. All data were stored securely on laboratory computers at the university. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not collecting any identifying information and by restricting data access solely to the research team. Our research was conducted

with 180 participants and includes individuals from diverse genders, sexual orientations, relationship statuses, age groups, and cities. A brief introduction explaining the purpose of the study was given to the participants. Also, the assurance of the study confidentiality was provided by mentioning the academic purposes of the study. Participants are %67 women and %33 men, who are mainly between 18-26 years old. Their relationship status is mostly unmarried (% 90%) (Table 1):

**Table 1**

*Binomial test*

	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion (p)
Age	18-26	156	180	0.867, < .001
	27-35	10	180	0.056, < .001
	35 or older	14	180	0.078, < .001
Gender	Man	59	180	0.328, < .001
	Woman	121	180	0.672, < .001
	I am currently in a romantic relationship.	111	180	0.617, 0.002
Relationship Status	I have been in a romantic relationship for the past two years.	69	180	0.383, 0.002
	Dating	2	180	0.011, < .001
	Engaged	3	180	0.017, < .001
Relationship Stage	In a relationship	145	180	0.806, < .001
	Married	18	180	0.100, < .001
	Single	12	180	0.067, < .001

*Note:* Proportions tested against value: 0.05

## 2.2. Data collection instruments

### 2.2.1. Rosenberg self-esteem scale

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a widely used instrument designed to assess individuals' global evaluations of their self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale consists of 10 items; each rated on a four-point Likert-type format ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Total scores reflect overall self-esteem, with higher scores indicating a more positive self-evaluation. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Çuhadaroglu (1986), who reported an internal consistency coefficient of  $\alpha = .75$ , supporting the measure's reliability in Turkish samples. Although cut-off values may vary across studies, lower scores generally reflect reduced self-esteem, whereas higher scores correspond to adequate or elevated self-esteem levels.

### 2.2.2. Adult attachment styles scale

The Adult Attachment Style Scale (AAS) was originally developed based on the attachment theory extended to adult romantic relationships by Hazan and Shaver (2017). They were the first to consider how early attachment styles might affect romantic relationships in later life. The scale assesses an individual's attachment styles in three different categories: anxiety, dependence, and closeness. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Kesebir et al. (2012), and their findings verified its validity and reliability. The results showed that the scale is a psychometrically sound tool for use in the Turkish cultural context (Kesebir et al., 2012).

This 18-item test measures three sub-dimensions: secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles, with each

sub-dimension assessed by six items. Sample item for secure attachment is “I am comfortable depending on others”; for avoidant attachment is “I find it difficult to depend on others”; for anxious attachment is “I worry that others won’t care about me as much as I care about them.” Since the scoring in our version of the scale is based on a true/false format, and in line with recommendations to increase reliability, we combined the avoidant and anxious dimensions under the broader category of non-secure attachment. Consequently, participants are classified as either securely or non-securely attached. In their validation study, the internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) coefficients were reported as 0.81 for the secure subscale, 0.78 for the anxious/ambivalent subscale, and 0.73 for the avoidant subscale. These values indicate acceptable reliability across the subscales. Factor analyses supported the three-dimensional structure of the scale, confirming its construct validity. The Turkish version of the AAS is thus considered a psychometrically sound instrument for assessing adult attachment in Turkish populations (Kesebir et al., 2012).

### 2.2.3. Relationship assessment scale

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was originally developed by Hendrick (1988) to measure general relationship satisfaction across a wide range of romantic relationships. The scale comprises 7 items and utilizes a 5-point Likert-type response format, where higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. Hendrick (1988) reported a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .86, indicating high internal consistency. The scale has been shown to possess good convergent validity with other measures of relationship quality and commitment.

The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Curun (2001). In Curun’s (2001) study, the adapted version also demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with a reported Cronbach’s alpha of .80 for the Turkish sample, supporting its reliability in a different cultural context. The scoring of the scale is based on summing the responses, yielding a total score ranging from 7 to 35. Relationship satisfaction is interpreted as follows: scores between 0 and 14 reflect low satisfaction, 15 to 21 indicate moderate satisfaction, and scores between 22 and 35 represent high relationship satisfaction. Due to its brevity, reliability, and ease of administration, the RAS remains one of the most frequently employed tools for assessing relationship satisfaction in both clinical and research settings (Curun, 2001).

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Reliability of the Scales

**Table 2**

*Reliability of the Scales*

Coefficient $\alpha$	Coefficient Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Self-Esteem	0.908	0.010	0.888	0.928
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	0.901	0.011	0.879	0.923
Adult Attachment	0.648	0.040	0.571	0.726

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was utilized, and while Rosenberg Self Self-Esteem and Relationship Assessment Scale shows high reliability (>0.90), the Adult Attachment Style scale’s Cronbach alpha is 0.648, which is not high but acceptable (University of Virginia Library, n.d.) (Table 2).

### 3.2. Descriptive statistics of variables

**Table 3**

*Descriptive statistics of the variables*

	Adult Attachment Scores	Secure Attachment Scores	Adult Nonsecure Attachment Scores	Self-Esteem Scores	Relationship Satisfaction Scores
Valid	180		180	180	180
Missing	0		0	0	0
Mean	0.535		0.465	20.056	26.033
Std. Deviation	0.245		0.211	7.214	6.551
Skewness	0.118		-0.012	-0.595	-0.471
Std. Error of Skewness	0.181		0.181	0.181	0.181
Kurtosis	-0.636		-0.614	-0.529	-0.769
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.360		0.360	0.360	0.360
Shapiro-Wilk	0.947		0.974	0.941	0.946
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	< .001		0.002	< .001	< .001
Minimum	0.000		0.000	0.000	10.333
Maximum	1.000		0.917	30.000	35.000

All variables had skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range of  $\pm 1$ ; however, none of them showed a normal distribution according to the Shapiro-Wilk test. For the Adult Attachment Style (AAS) dimensions, which range from 0 to 1, the mean score for secure attachment among participants was 0.535, while the mean for non-secure attachment was 0.465. The participants' average score on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was 20.056, and their mean score on the Relationship Assessment Scale was 26.033 (Table 3).

### 3.3 . Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables. As presented in Table 6, Self-Esteem scores were positively and significantly correlated with Relationship Assessment Scale scores ( $r = .342, p < .001$ ), indicating that higher self-esteem is associated with greater relationship satisfaction.

In contrast, Self-Esteem scores were negatively and significantly correlated with non-secure attachment ( $r = -.442, p < .001$ ), suggesting that individuals with lower self-esteem tend to exhibit more insecure attachment patterns. A small but significant positive correlation was also observed between self-esteem and secure attachment ( $r = .169, p = .024$ ).

Regarding the relationship between relationship satisfaction and attachment styles, Relationship satisfaction scores showed a significant negative correlation with non-secure attachment ( $r = -.438, p < .001$ ), while the correlation with secure attachment was negligible and non-significant ( $r = .009, p = .903$ ).

Moreover, secure and non-secure attachment dimensions were moderately and negatively correlated ( $r = -.254, p < .001$ ), as expected given their conceptual opposition.

**Table 4**  
*Correlation analysis of variables*

Variable	Self-Esteem Score	Relationship Satisfaction Score	Adult Nonsecure Attachment	Adult Secure Attachment
1. Self-Esteem Score	—			
2. Relationship Satisfaction Score	Spearman's rho = 0.342 $p < .001$	—		
3. Adult Nonsecure Attachment	Spearman's rho = 0.442 $p < .001$	Spearman's rho = 0.438 $p < .001$	—	
4. Adult Secure Attachment Mean	Spearman's rho = 0.169 $p = 0.024$	Spearman's rho = 0.009 $p = 0.903$	Spearman's rho = 0.254 $p < .001$	—

### 3.3.2. Kruskal-Wallis test

A Kruskal–Wallis H test was conducted to examine whether relationship satisfaction levels differed based on attachment style. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between secure and nonsecure attachment groups,  $H(1) = 4.477, p = .034$ .

**Table 5**  
*Dunn*

Comparison	<i>z</i>	<i>Wi</i>	<i>Wj</i>	<i>rrb</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pbonf</i>	<i>pholm</i>
Nonsecure - Secure	-2.116	83.994	97.006	0.145	0.034	0.034	0.034

*Note.* Rank-biserial correlation based on individual Mann-Whitney tests

Subsequent Dunn's post hoc analysis indicated that participants with secure attachment reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction than those with non-secure attachment ( $z = -2.116, p = .034, r(b) = .145$ ). This suggests that attachment style plays a meaningful role in perceived relationship satisfaction when ordinal properties of the Relationship satisfaction scores are taken into account.

### 3.3.3. Regression analysis of attachment styles, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction

Table 6 presents the contributions of attachment styles (*Secure Attachment, Nonsecure Attachment*) and self-esteem on relationship satisfaction. As can be seen from Table 8, these three predictors together explain 17.4 percent of the variance in relationship satisfaction ( $Adj. R^2 = .174, F(3,176) = 13.573, p < .001$ ).

A multiple linear regression was conducted to predict Relationship Satisfaction Score from Adult Secure Attachment Mean, Adult Nonsecure Attachment, and Self-Esteem Score. The overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 176) = 13.57, p < .001$ , with an  $R^2 = .188$  and an adjusted  $R^2 = .174$ , indicating that approximately 17.4% of the variance in relationship satisfaction was explained by the predictors.

**Table 6**

*Regression analysis of variables*

**Regression Coefficients**

Predictor	<i>B</i> (Unstandardized)	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$ (Standardized)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	40.77	3.70	–	11.03	< .001
Adult Secure Attachment	-3.97	2.85	-0.099	-1.39	.165
Adult Nonsecure Attachment	-16.42	3.63	-0.353	-4.53	< .001
Self-Esteem Score	0.23	0.10	0.166	2.19	.030

*Note.* Adult Nonsecure Attachment was a significant negative predictor ( $\beta = -0.353$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Self-Esteem Score was a significant positive predictor ( $\beta = 0.166$ ,  $p = .030$ ). Adult Secure Attachment Mean was not a significant predictor ( $p = .165$ ).

The beta coefficients indicate that the variance in relationship satisfaction is significantly predicted only by **Adult Nonsecure Attachment** ( $\beta = -.363$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and **Self-Esteem Score** ( $\beta = .163$ ,  $p = .030$ ). Although **Adult Secure Attachment** was included in the model, it did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction ( $\beta = -.099$ ,  $p = .165$ ).

Therefore, it can be concluded that insecure attachment and self-esteem are significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, whereas secure attachment does not make a significant contribution when all predictors are considered together.

### 3.4. Gender differences of variables

Difference tests have been applied in order to understand whether self-esteem, attachment styles and relationship satisfaction levels differ regarding to respondents' demographic characteristics.

#### 3.4.1. Gender differences of relationship assessment

**Table 7**

*Gender differences in relationship assessment*

Gender	Low	Average	High	Total
Man	3	6	50	59
Woman	6	37	78	121
Total	9	43	128	180

*Note.* Values represent observed counts. A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant association between gender and relationship satisfaction levels,  $\chi^2(2, N = 180) = 9.21$ ,  $p = .01$ .

In addition to gender, difference tests were also considered for relationship status and age. However, the number of participants who were married or engaged was very limited, resulting in highly uneven group distributions. Because of this imbalance, conducting these tests would not provide meaningful or reliable results. Therefore, no difference tests were reported for relationship status or age in the current sample

## 4. DISCUSSION

This study looked into how two basic psychological elements interact to influence how happy people are in romantic relationships. The results show that these two factors are important in predicting personal contentment in romantic relationships, which is in line with earlier research.

Throughout the study, the importance of self-esteem in romantic relationship satisfaction surfaced as a significant factor using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Higher self-esteem makes people more likely to view relationships positively and feel more competent and important, which promotes emotional stability and closeness in romantic relationships (Leary & MacDonald, 2003; Sciangula & Morry, 2009). Conversely, people with poor self-esteem often undervalue their partner's affection, which can harm the relationship's perceived quality (Murray et al., 2000). Distancing behaviors or increasing dependency are two outcomes of this emotional uncertainty that might have a detrimental impact on satisfaction levels (Sciangula & Morry, 2009).

According to the literature, people's self-esteem affects not just how they perceive their own worth in relationships but also how well they handle conflict and control their emotions. People who have poor self-esteem may interpret small arguments in relationships as a reflection of their value, which might cause them to react emotionally out of proportion. On the other hand, people who have a positive sense of self-worth are more likely to voice their demands and resolve conflicts in a way that promotes the health of their relationships over the long run (Cast & Burke, 2002).

The results also demonstrated that attachment styles had a substantial impact on relationship outcomes using the Adult Attachment Style Scale. Stable and emotionally satisfying romantic relationships are more likely to be formed by those with secure attachment patterns (Hazan & Shaver, 2017; Bowlby, 1969). Mutual trust and happiness are facilitated by securely linked people's ease with intimacy and propensity for more honest and efficient communication (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Secure attachment by itself, however, does not ensure relationship happiness because interpersonal and contextual factors are also very significant.

The correlation study indicates that romantic dissatisfaction is frequently linked to insecure attachment patterns, especially anxious and avoidant ones. While avoidantly attached people may avoid intimacy, avoid vulnerability, and repress their emotional needs, anxiously attached people often show signs of abandonment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Relationship pleasure is decreased by these behavioral patterns because they obstruct candid communication and cause emotional distance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Feeney, 2000).

Crucially, the internal working models linked to every attachment style offer a prism through which people perceive events in their relationships. An avoidantly attached person would see emotional intimacy as a danger to their independence, whereas an anxiously attached person might see a delayed text message as an indication of imminent rejection. Over time, these cognitive biases affect relational behaviors, trust, and emotional reactivity (Pepping et al., 2015).

Additional data from the study suggests that there was a clear correlation between self-esteem and attachment types. Self-esteem is frequently lower in those with insecure attachment patterns (Erol & Orth, 2013). This supports the idea that a person's internal working model, which is influenced by early attachment experiences, affects their conduct toward others as well as their self-concept.

Relationship strain can result when people who believe they are not deserving of love put these insecurities into their romantic relationships (Cast & Burke, 2002). Our results suggest that the lack of insecurity may be a more significant predictor of contentment, even if stable attachment is often regarded as advantageous. Reducing insecure behaviors may be more beneficial to romantic relationships than simply having secure one's present (Pepping et al., 2015). This implies that therapy approaches that target anxiety and avoidance reduction might have a greater effect than those that only concentrate on developing secure characteristics.

The findings showed that the distributions of self-esteem and attachment style did not differ significantly by gender. However, there were differences in relationship satisfaction between the sexes. This could be a result of cultural expectations, gender-specific socialization processes, or standards for emotional expression (Voss et al., 1999). The assumption that emotional frameworks are molded by personal experience rather than biological sex

is supported by the lack of notable gender variations in attachment distribution.

The application of therapeutic therapies aimed at increasing self-esteem and encouraging secure attachment patterns is supported by these findings from a practical standpoint. According to Campbell et al. (2005), psychological counseling, whether individual or dyadic, should focus on how early relationship experiences and internalized self-worth impact romantic functioning in adulthood.

Relationships that are more fulfilling and emotionally secure can be created by helping people identify and change their maladaptive behaviors. Additionally, psychoeducation can help foster relational resilience. People can develop more realistic expectations in relationships, lessen over-dependence, and improve their emotional intelligence by learning about attachment dynamics and self-perception. These results can lower the prevalence of anxious or avoidant relationship cycles and greatly increase relationship satisfaction (Overall et al., 2015).

Using the Relationship Assessment Scale, we measured overall romantic satisfaction and identified key associations. According to the results of correlation analysis, significant associations were found between key variables. As seen in our correlation matrix, self-esteem was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, supporting our first hypothesis that higher self-esteem is associated with higher romantic satisfaction. Furthermore, insecure attachment showed a strong negative correlation with both self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, confirming our second hypothesis and reinforcing theoretical models that link insecure attachment to lower self-esteem and decreased relationship satisfaction. Although secure attachment was expected to be positively related to satisfaction, the correlation between secure attachment and relationship satisfaction was negligible and not statistically significant, pointing to the more dominant influence of insecure attachment in relational outcomes.

Findings from the Kruskal-Wallis test further emphasized the impact of attachment style. A meaningful distinction in relationship satisfaction scores was found between securely and non-securely attached individuals. Relationship satisfaction was higher among participants with secure attachment patterns. This outcome supports the hypothesis that secure attachment functions as a protective factor in romantic contexts, enabling individuals to navigate difficulties with confidence and resilience.

In the regression analysis, insecure attachment and self-esteem were both significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, while secure attachment did not independently predict satisfaction when modeled with other variables. This suggests that the presence of insecure attachment characteristics plays a more critical role in diminishing satisfaction than secure traits do in enhancing it. It emphasizes that addressing insecure tendencies in therapy may yield greater results than focusing only on increasing secure behaviors.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study confirms that attachment styles and self-esteem are essential to romantic relationship satisfaction. These intrapersonal traits influence how individuals relate to themselves and others, ultimately shaping the degree of emotional connection, trust, and intimacy experienced within romantic partnerships. The integration of attachment theory and self-perception models continues to offer powerful insights for relationship research, intervention, and development.

Future research may also benefit from more diverse and targeted sampling, considering specific age ranges, relationship durations, or cultural backgrounds. Since relationship norms, emotional expression, and attachment behaviors vary across cultures, cross-cultural comparative studies would offer valuable insights into how these factors interact in different contexts.

Cetin, I., Kocabeyoglu, M., & Unal, Z.M. (2025). The relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles, and romantic relationships satisfaction. *Global Journal of Psychology Research: New Trends New Trends and Issues*, 15(1), 8-30. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjpr.v15i1.9887>

Finally, reliance on self-report measures should be minimized in future work. Combining self-report data with behavioral observations, partner-reported measures, or physiological indicators could reduce bias and provide a richer, multidimensional understanding of romantic relationship processes.

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## Appendix A

### Full Item List of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

#### EK-2: RBSÖ

Rosenberg Benlik Saygısı Ölçeği

Tarih:

Sizin İçin Uygun Olanı Seçiniz

- 1) Kendimi en az diğer insanlar kadar değerli buluyorum.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 2) Bazı olumlu özelliklerim olduğunu düşünüyorum.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 3) Genelde kendimi başarısız bir kişi olarak görme eğilimindeyim.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 4) Ben de diğer insanların birçoğunun yapabildiği kadar bir şeyler yapabilirim.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 5) Kendimde gurur duyacak fazla bir şey bulamıyorum.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 6) Kendime karşı olumlu bir tutum içindeyim.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 7) Genel olarak kendimden memnunum.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 8) Kendime karşı daha fazla saygı duyabilmeyi isterdim.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 9) Bazen kesinlikle kendimin bir işe yaramadığımı düşünüyorum.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
  - 10) Bazen kendimin hiç de yeterli bir insan olmadığımı düşünüyorum.  
a) Çok doğru b) Doğru c) Yanlış d) Çok yanlış
-

## Appendix B

### Full Item List of the Adult Attachment Style Scale

#### Ek-2. Erişkin Bağlanma Biçimi Ölçeği

Aşağıdaki ifadelerden size en yakın geleni Doğru (D) veya Yanlış (Y) olarak işaretleyiniz	Doğru	Yanlış
1. Kendimi rahat bırakıp başka insanlara bağlanmak zor gelir.		
2. İhtiyacın olduğunda başkaları asla orada olmaz.		
3. Başka birine rahatça bağlanırım.		
4. İhtiyacım olduğunda başkalarının yanımda olacağını bilirim.		
5. İhtiyacım olduğunda başkalarının yanımda olacağına her zaman güvenebileceğimden emin değilim		
6. Başka bir insana tümüyle güvenmek zor gelir		
7. Sıklıkla, terk edilme kaygıları yaşamam		
8. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin beni gerçekten sevmediği endişesine kapılırım.		
9. Başkalarının benimle benim istediğim kadar yakınlık kurmadıklarını düşünürüm.		
10. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin benimle kalmak istemeyeceği endişesi yaşarım.		
11. Başka bir insanla tümüyle bütünleşmek isterim.		
12. Başka bir insanla tümüyle bir olma arzumu insanları benden uzaklaştırır.		
13. Başkalarıyla yakın ilişkiler kurmayı kolay bulurum.		
14. Başka birinin benimle çok yakın olma isteğinden rahatsız olmam.		
15. Başka birinin benimle çok yakınlaşması beni endişelendirir.		
16. Başka birini kendime yakınlaştırmak konusunda rahatımdır.		
17. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişi, benimle, benim kendimi rahat hissedebileceğimden daha çok yakınlaşmak ister.		
18. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişi ile onun kendini rahat hissettiğinden daha yakın olmak isterim.		

## Appendix C

### Full Item List of the Relationship Assesment Scale

Lütfen her bir ifadenin size uygunluğunu 7 dereceli ölçek üzerinde değerlendirip ifadenin yanındaki boşluğa uygun sayıyı yazınız.

1)- Sevgiliniz ihtiyaçlarınızı ne kadar iyi karşılıyor?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hiç Çok iyi  
karşılamıyor karşılıyor

2)- Genel olarak ilişkinizden ne kadar memnunsunuz?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hiç Çok  
memnun değilim memnunum

3)- Diğerleri ile karşılaştırıldığında ilişkiniz ne kadar iyi?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Çok daha Çok daha  
kötü iyi

4)- Ne sıklıkla ilişkinize hiç başlamamış olmayı istiyorsunuz?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hiçbir zaman Her zaman

5)- İlişkiniz ne dereceye kadar sizin başlangıçtaki beklentilerinizi karşılıyor?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hiç Tamamen  
karşılamıyor karşılıyor

6)- Sevgilinizi ne kadar seviyorsunuz?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hiç Çok  
sevmiyorum seviyorum

7)- İlişkinizde ne kadar problem var?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hiç Çok fazla  
yok problem var

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