

# Intimacy via Attachment: Exploring the Relationship Between Adult Attachment Styles and Sexual Attitudes

Deepali Panda<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Lokesh L<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore, India.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore, India.

Corresponding Author: Deepali Panda

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/gijhsr.20260205>

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between adult attachment styles and sexual attitudes within the Indian sociocultural context. Based on attachment theory, it examines the relationship between secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganised attachment styles and various aspects of sexual attitudes, such as permissiveness, birth control, communion, and instrumentality. The design was quantitative cross-sectional, and the sample was 256 adults aged 18-40 years. Measures of adult attachment and sexual attitudes were used as standardised measures of data collection. Statistical analyses comprised descriptive statistics, Welch ANOVA and post-hoc comparison, and MANOVA via Jamovi. Results indicated that attachment styles were significantly related to variations in sexual attitudes. Secure attachment was associated with higher communion, anxious attachment with greater permissiveness and communion, while avoidant and disorganised attachment were associated with higher permissiveness and instrumentality. These findings highlight the role of attachment orientations in shaping sexual beliefs and relational patterns.

**Keywords:** Adult Attachment Styles, Sexual Attitudes, Permissiveness, Communion, Instrumentality, Birth Control

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sex is a core element of human behaviour that goes beyond the biological role to shape feelings, relationships, and personal well-being. Sexual attitudes, beliefs and judgments of sexual behaviours and relationships are a significant factor that determines how people perceive and relate towards sexuality (Manjula & Dutt, 2017). These are attitudes on a continuum between conservative and permissive, shaped by sociocultural norms and gender roles, as well as personal experiences (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2017).

A complicated blend of traditional values and new modernisation creates sexual attitudes in India. Sexual expression is still controlled by cultural norms that prioritise modesty, family honour, and the institution of marriage, and tend to strengthen conservative views (Majumdar, 2017). Meanwhile, increasing urbanisation and exposure to global ideologies have led to a greater variety of, and even conflicting, ideas about sexuality (Kohli et al., 2022). This two-sidedness generates a wide range of differences in the way people perceive and manifest their sexual attitudes.

Attachment theory is a psychological framework that helps explain these individual differences. Childhood experiences with caregivers help form internal working models that influence

expectations about self and other relationships (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023). These patterns persist into adulthood, affecting emotional regulation, intimacy, and interpersonal functioning (Doinita & Maria, 2015). Adult attachment styles secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganised are distinct ways of perceiving and dealing with relational proximity. (Vertel, 2023).

These attachment orientations are highly connected with sexual attitudes. Individuals securely attached are generally comfortable with intimacy and open communication, and these are linked to more balanced and healthy sexual attitudes (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Conversely, anxious attachment is usually associated with a greater need for reassurance through intimacy, whereas avoidant attachment is related to being emotionally distant and reduced involvement in relational proximity in sexual situations (French et al., 2020; Cadely et al., 2020). Inconsistent or conflicted sexual attitudes may also be a result of disorganised attachment (Rodrigues et al., 2024).

Despite these theoretical links, very few studies have been carried out to determine the relationship between attachment styles and sexual attitudes among the Indian population, where sociocultural processes are uniquely influencing both constructs. To formulate a culturally based concept of sexuality and of relational functioning, it is important to address this gap. The current research will focus on the connection between sexual attitudes and adult attachment styles in young adults in India. It also tries to investigate the relationship between the various attachment styles and certain aspects of sexual attitudes such as permissiveness, communion, birth control and instrumentality.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the relationship between different adult attachment styles and sexual attitudes.
2. To determine the association between secure attachment styles and the

measures of communion and birth control.

3. To determine the association between anxious attachment styles and the measures of communion and permissiveness.
4. To determine the association between avoidant attachment styles and the measures of permissiveness and instrumentality.
5. To determine the association between disorganised attachment styles and the distinct dimensions of sexual attitudes.

### 1.2 Hypotheses

H1: Individuals with a Secure attachment style will score significantly higher on measures of Communion and Birth Control.

H2: Individuals with an Anxious (Preoccupied) attachment style will score significantly higher on measures of Communion and Permissiveness.

H3: Individuals with an Avoidant (Dismissing) attachment style will score significantly higher on measures of Permissiveness and Instrumentality.

H4: Individuals with a Disorganised (Fearful) attachment style will score significantly higher on measures of Permissiveness and Instrumentality, and significantly lower on Communion and Birth Control.

H0: There is no significant relationship between adult attachment styles and sexual attitudes.

## 2. MATERIALS & METHODS

### Research Design

This study used a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and correlational research design to investigate the relationship between adult attachment style and sexual attitudes.

### Participants

The sample included 256 participants who were 18 to 40 years old from the Indian population. Convenience sampling was employed, where the participants were recruited online. Participation criteria included that the participants needed to be

Indian nationals or long-time residents, with different relationship statuses and sexual orientations. Incomplete and inconsistent responses were not included in the final analysis.

### **Instruments**

#### **Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins, 1996):**

The RAAS, an 18-item self-report measure, is used to measure adult attachment and measure three dimensions: Closeness, Dependence, and Anxiety. Closeness is a measure of the comfort with emotional intimacy, Dependence is a measure of the trust in the availability of others, and the measure of Anxiety is a measure of fear of being left behind. The responses are placed on a 5-point Likert scale, and the subscale scores are calculated by averaging the items. The RAAS scores are then used to categorise the participants into four attachment styles depending on their relative patterns along the dimension of closeness, dependence and anxiety. The scale has a good level of reliability, as Cronbach's alpha varies between 0.77 and 0.85, and the scale has demonstrated construct validity.

#### **Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS; Hendrick et al., 2006):**

The BSAS, a 23-item self-report, is used to measure sexual attitudes by having four dimensions, which include Permissiveness, Birth Control, Communion, and Instrumentality. Permissiveness is a measure of attitudes towards casual sex, Birth Control measures attitude towards contraceptive responsibility, Communion measures emotionality of sexuality, and Instrumentality measures a physical or pleasure-oriented view. The responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with a higher score accompanying a greater support of each dimension. The scale has acceptable reliability with the alpha of Cronbach ranging between 0.70 and 0.90.

### **Procedure**

An online survey was conducted through Google Forms to gather data. Study details were given to participants, and an informed consent form was signed. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information, then RAAS, then BSAS, to reduce order effects. The responses were anonymous and were securely stored to be analysed.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the characteristics of the participants and the variables of the study. The Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that there were violations of normality; thus, powerful statistical methods were used. The ANOVA by Welch was performed to test the differences in dimensions of sexual attitude between the styles of attachment, and then Tukey post-hoc tests were performed to test group differences. Also, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the joint impact of attachment styles on sexual attitudes. All analyses were done in Jamovi with significance of  $p < .05$ .

## **3. RESULT**

### **3.1 Descriptive Statistics**

The adult attachment styles were distributed among the participants ( $N = 256$ ) in such a way that the majority of the participants had a secure attachment style (57.4%). This was succeeded by avoidant attachment (20.7), and disorganised attachment (13.7), and the smallest percentage of respondents gave an anxious attachment style (8.2). The findings indicate that the majority of the sample members are more likely to feel comfortable in intimacy and emotional closeness in relationships, with a smaller percentage showing tendencies of anxiety, avoidance, or both, and insecurity typical of disorganised attachment.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Normality Tests for Study Variables (N = 256)**

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Shapiro-Wilk	P
Permissiveness	29.40	13.10	10	50	0.910	< .001
Birth Control	7.95	3.89	3	15	0.916	< .001
Communion	17.50	5.41	5	25	0.932	< .001
Instrumentality	14.20	5.54	5	25	0.966	< .001

Note. All p-values are based on the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality.  $p < .05$  indicates a significant deviation from normality.

The Permissiveness, Birth Control, Communion, and Instrumentality were calculated in the form of descriptive statistics using the data of 256 participants. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, range and normality statistics.

The findings showed that the average score of Permissiveness was  $M = 29.40$  ( $SD = 13.10$ ), which implied that the participants were moderately tolerant of casual sexual attitudes. The Birth Control mean score was  $M = 7.95$  ( $SD = 3.89$ ), showing moderate attitudes towards contraceptive responsibility. The average score of Communion was  $M = 17.50$  ( $SD = 5.41$ ), indicating that a good number of the participants perceived sexual relationships as the manifestation of emotional intimacy and

attachment. Lastly, the mean score of Instrumentality was  $M = 14.20$  ( $SD = 5.54$ ), which indicated a moderate inclination towards considering sexual activity as a physical or pleasure-based experience.

In order to test the assumption of normality, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The findings indicated that there was a lot of non-compliance of all variables with normality ( $p < .001$ ). The data did not uphold the assumption of normality since p-values were less than .05 in all variables. Thus, the ANOVA of Welch was applied to analyse the effects of attachment styles on sexual attitudes.

### 3.2 Inferential Statistics

**Table 2: Welch's ANOVA Results for the Influence of Attachment Styles on Sexual Attitudes**

Sexual Attitude Variable	F	df	P
Permissiveness	12.8	(3, 72.2)	< .001
Birth Control	19.4	(3, 70.7)	< .001
Communion	34.7	(3, 65.7)	< .001
Instrumentality	42.2	(3, 67.4)	< .001

Note. Welch's ANOVA showed that sexual attitude scores (permissiveness, birth control, communion, and instrumentality) differed significantly across adult attachment styles (all  $p < .001$ ).

Welch ANOVA was performed to test the influence of the adult attachment styles on the sexual attitudes (permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality) because of the non-observance of the assumption of normality. The analysis revealed statistically significant differences across attachment styles for all four dimensions: permissiveness,  $F(3, 72.2) = 12.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ; birth control,  $F(3, 70.7) = 19.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ; communion,  $F(3, 65.7) = 34.7$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and instrumentality,  $F(3, 67.4) = 42.2$ ,  $p < .001$ .

These findings suggest that attachment styles do play a major role in determining sexual

attitudes of people, such as perceptions towards casual sex, contraceptive responsibility, emotional intimacy, and the physical nature of sexual relationships. General group differences are reported in the table, whereas the general differences between particular pairs were tested with post-hoc analyses.

### 3.3 Tukey post-hoc tests

Tukey post-hoc tests were done to identify specific group differences on four dimensions of sexuality-permissiveness, birth control, communion and

instrumentality across the secure, anxious, avoidant and disorganised attachment styles. In the case of permissiveness, securely-attached persons varied significantly from all insecure groups, whereas there were no differences among anxious, avoidant and disorganised attachment styles, suggesting that variation is primarily between secure and insecure attachment. The same situation was noticed with birth control, where secure people were quite different to all the insecure groups, who expressed similar attitudes towards sexual responsibility and contraception.

With communion, outcomes were more subtle. Secure individuals were not the same as avoidant and disorganised groups, but were the same as anxious individuals. Also, insecure attachment styles were very different to each other, meaning that attachment has a role in emotional intimacy within and among attachment types.

Avoidant attachment was distinguished in terms of instrumentality. There was also a significant difference between avoidant individuals and the other groups of anxious and disorganised, and no difference between the anxious and disorganised. There were not many differences in secure individuals, which means that avoidant people have a higher tendency to perceive sexuality physically, not as emotionally related.

Overall, the results point to the fact that attachment security is critical to sexual attitudes and that it is more tangible in the distinction between secure and insecure individuals in terms of permissiveness and birth control and that differences among insecure styles are more pronounced in terms of communion and instrumentality styles, with avoidant attachment being the most pronounced.

**Table 3: Multivariate Analysis of variance (MANOVA)**

Multivariate Tests						
		value	F	df1	df2	p
Attachment styles	Pillai's Trace	0.678	18.3	12	753	<.001
	Wilks' Lambda	0.429	20.7	12	659	<.001
	Hotelling's Trace	1.09	22.5	12	743	<.001
	Roy's Largest Root	0.820	51.4	4	251	<.001

Univariate Tests						
	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Attachment styles	Permissiveness	5001	3	1666.9	10.8	<.001
	Birth Control	2488	3	829.2	41.9	<.001
	Communion	669	3	222.9	17.6	<.001
	Instrumentality	2174	3	724.8	32.4	<.001
Residuals	Permissiveness	38949	252	154.6		
	Birth Control	4986	252	19.8		
	Communion	3186	252	12.6		
	Instrumentality	5639	252	22.4		

A MANOVA was used to test the combined effects of adult attachment styles on sexual attitudes (Permissiveness, Birth Control, Communion, and Instrumentality). Given the large sample size (N = 256), MANOVA was considered robust to violations of normality. The multivariate test was significant, Pillai Trace = .678, F (12, 753) = 18.30, p <.001, which demonstrated that there was a general impact on the set of sexual attitude variables

by the attachment styles. This meaningful multivariate impact was also aligned with other test statistics, such as Wilks Lambda, Hotellings Trace, and Roy's Largest Root (all p < .001), which are good indicators that sexual attitudes varied depending on the attachment style.

The findings justify the following univariate ANOVAs and post-hoc tests, which verify that attachment styles have a significant

effect on each of the dimensions of sexual attitudes. Specifically, the univariate tests revealed significant effects of attachment style on Permissiveness,  $F(3, 252) = 10.80, p < .001$ ; Birth Control,  $F(3, 252) = 41.90, p < .001$ ; Communion,  $F(3, 252) = 17.60, p < .001$ ; and Instrumentality,  $F(3, 252) = 32.40, p < .001$ . These findings combined suggest that adult attachment styles are linked to significant variance in all four dimensions of sexual attitudes.

## DISCUSSION

The current research analysed how adult attachment styles relate to sexual attitudes in four dimensions, namely communion, birth control, permissiveness and instrumentality. Overall, the findings supported all four hypotheses and demonstrated that attachment styles were significantly associated with an individual's sexual attitudes. These findings align with the available literature that indicates that attachment patterns affect interpersonal functioning, emotional control, and intimacy-related behaviours (Doinita & Maria, 2015; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023).

Individuals who were securely attached were rated as having higher levels of communion and birth control, which means that they are more likely to see sexual relationships as emotionally intimate, trusting and responsible. Their attitudes are characterised by the combination of emotional intimacy and sexual activity in equal measure, as well as increased consciousness of contraceptive responsibility and consideration in relationships.

Individuals who were anxiously attached had better scores in both communion and permissiveness. This implies that although they greatly appreciate emotional closeness, they can also be more open to sexual activity, perhaps in a bid to find comfort and relational proximity. Their sexual attitudes are indicative of the need to be intimate, and at the same time, they are concerned about being abandoned.

In contrast, individuals with avoidant attachment scored higher on permissiveness

and instrumentality, indicating a preference for more casual and physically oriented sexual relationships with limited emotional involvement. These results are consistent with the avoidant trait whereby such people hold on to emotional distance and focus on independence in intimate relationships.

The participants who had disorganised attachment had a higher level of permissiveness and instrumentality and a lower level of communion and birth control. This pattern reflects more casual, pleasure-focused sexual attitudes combined with reduced emphasis on emotional intimacy and contraceptive responsibility. These tendencies can be the result of the inner struggles connected with intimacy and emotional control.

Taken together, the findings clearly reject the null hypothesis and highlight that adult attachment styles play a significant role in shaping sexual attitudes, influencing how individuals perceive intimacy, responsibility, and the emotional versus physical aspects of sexual relationships.

## Implications

The results reinforce the use of the attachment theory to sexuality and add to the literature on the Indian setting. In practice, they propose the usefulness of attachment-informed practices in counselling and sexual health education. Interventions may be specific to various attachments, and educational initiatives can encourage healthier attitudes toward sex by emphasising emotional communication, responsibility, and relational security.

## Limitations

The use of convenience sampling limits the study by lowering the generalizability. Self-report measures could have been biased, and the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow causal inferences. Furthermore, the disproportional representation of the groups of attachment styles could have affected the outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

The research proves that sexual attitudes are greatly dependent on adult attachment styles, which emphasises that relational patterns also apply to sexual aspects. The styles of secure attachment were related to emotional intimacy and responsible decision-making, whereas insecure styles were less integrated attitudes, including dependency, avoidance, or conflict in relationships. The null hypothesis was disproved, which proved that the attitudes towards sex are determined by attachment-based expectations of trust and closeness.

### Declaration by Authors

**Acknowledgement:** We extend our sincere appreciation to all those who have supported and encouraged us during our research endeavors. We are grateful for the unwavering support of our well-wishers and supporters, as well as the invaluable contributions of the participants who made this study possible.

**Source of Funding:** None

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

1. Cadely, H. S., Finnegan, V., Spears, E. C., & Kerpelman, J. L. (2020). Adolescents and sexual risk-taking: The interplay of constraining relationship beliefs, healthy sex attitudes, and romantic attachment insecurity. *Journal of Adolescence*, 84(1), 136–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.08.010>
2. Das, K., & Rao, T. S. S. (2019). A chronicle of sexuality in the Indian Subcontinent. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, 1(1), 20–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631831818822017>
3. Doinita, N. E., & Maria, N. D. (2015). Attachment and parenting styles. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 203, 199–204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.08.282>
4. Feeney, J. A., Peterson, C., Gallois, C., & Terry, D. J. (2000). Attachment style as a predictor of sexual attitudes and behaviour in late Adolescence. *Psychology and Health*, 14(6), 1105–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440008407370>
5. French, J. E., Whitley, K. A., Altgelt, E. E., & Meltzer, A. L. (2020). Attachment anxiety in young adulthood is associated with childhood unpredictability and predicts intentions to engage in unprotected sex. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 159, 109858. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.109858>
6. Kohli, B., Malu, B., Janarthanan, J., Nanda, A., Ann, A., & Kothari, A. (2022). Hook-up culture among young Indian adults in Indian metropolitan cities. *Sexuality & Culture*, 26(6), 2107–2121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09987-1>
7. Majumdar, C. (2017). Attitudes towards premarital sex in India: Traditionalism and cultural change. *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(2), 614–631. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-017-9486-y>
8. Manjula, M., & Dutt, S. (2017). Sexual knowledge, attitude, behaviours, and sources of influences in Urban college youth: A study from India. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 33(4), 319. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0971-9962.218602>
9. Mukhopadhyay, C. C., Blumenfield, T., & Gondek, A. (2017). Gender and sexuality. In *Perspectives: An open invitation to cultural anthropology* (1st ed.). American Anthropological Association.
10. O'Shaughnessy, R., Berry, K., Dallos, R., & Bateson, K. (2023). *Attachment theory: The basics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203703878>
11. Rodrigues, J. C., Soares, T. P., & Ribeiro, L. M. (2024). Do attachment styles influence the sexual function of an individual? *European Psychiatry*, 67(S1), S767–S768. <https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2024.1597>
12. Vertel, A. (2023). *Mary Ainsworth's attachment theory and its significance for understanding a child's early social-emotional development*. *Humanities Science Current Issues*, 1(70), 304–310. <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/70-1-46>

How to cite this article: Deepali Panda, Lokesh L. Intimacy via attachment: exploring the relationship between adult attachment styles and sexual attitudes. *Gal Int J Health Sci Res*. 2026; 11(2): 43-49. DOI: 10.52403/gijhsr.20260205

\*\*\*\*\*