

# Shadows of Self: Attachment Insecurity As A Predictor of Identity Disturbances In Young Adults

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**Abstract-** *This study investigates how attachment insecurity predicts identity problems in young people. Identity building is an important developmental job in emerging adulthood, yet many people experience instability in their self-concept and emotional functioning. Attachment instability, which originates in early caregiving experiences, has a substantial impact on interpersonal relationships and self-perception. The study included 300 young individuals aged 18-25 who took standardized measurements. The findings revealed a substantial positive link between attachment insecurity and identity disturbance. The findings underline the significance of early relational experiences in identity formation, as well as the necessity for treatments that promote emotional control and secure connections.*

**Keywords:** Attachment insecurity, identity disturbance, young adults, self-concept and psychosocial development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is an important developmental stage marked by identity discovery, emotional growth, and increased independence. During this time, people work to build a secure sense of self while managing personal, social, and professional hurdles. However, not all individuals effectively integrate their identities, resulting in identity disruptions.

Attachment insecurity is a crucial factor in this process. It stems from inconsistent or inattentive caring during early infancy, resulting in maladaptive relationship patterns.

Attachment Insecurity

Attachment insecurity occurs when caregivers are inconsistent, careless or emotionally unavailable. It might show as nervous, avoidant, or disordered attachment patterns. Individuals with insecure attachment frequently report feelings of abandonment, emotional instability, and relational issues.

Identity Disturbance

Identity disruption is characterized by self-concept instability, a lack of direction, and conflicting values or objectives. It is linked to emotional discomfort, poor decision-making, and difficulty in maintaining relationships.

### Theoretical background:

**Attachment theory:** Attachment insecurity is based on the core ideas of attachment theory expressed by John Bowlby (1969) and extended by Mary Ainsworth (1978). According to Bowlby, early interactions with main caregivers serve as the foundation for internal working models, which are cognitive-affective templates that influence how people view themselves and other people in intimate relationships. Standards for care, support, and emotional availability are shaped by these internal working models, which arise from recurrent relationship experiences.

**Erikson's theory:** Erikson's (1959) theory represents one of the first and most significant frameworks for comprehending identity formation and disturbance. The primary developmental challenge of adolescence, according to Erikson, is resolving the Identity vs. Role Confusion crisis, in which people attempt to combine their beliefs, roles, objectives, and personal traits into a stable and cohesive sense of self. Identity synthesis, self-direction, commitment, and a sense of continuity are all results of successful resolution.

### NEED FOR THE STUDY

Identity problems are becoming more widespread among young adults, although the underlying causes are unknown, particularly in non-clinical groups. Attachment insecurity is a crucial influence on identity formation, however there is little research in the Indian setting. Understanding this address can help to develop early detection, preventive, and intervention techniques for promoting psychological well-being and identity stability.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ríos-Mazurek, 2021:

This study investigated emerging adults' identity formation in connection to attachment, parentification, and relational trauma. Quantitative analyses found that insecure attachment, relational trauma, and excessive parentification all predicted less cohesive identity states. Stable connection facilitated the formation of a stronger identity. The findings highlighted the influence of early caregiving quality and relational stress on identity development. Limitations included self-report measures, which could introduce bias and reduce measurement depth.

Jager, et al. (2023):

Using a family-systems perspective, this study investigated attachment insecurity and parental stress in young adult households. Actor, partner, and relationship effects revealed that parental stress in late adolescence alters attachment patterns, which reflect both individual dispositions and dyadic interactions. The results underscore the importance of family dynamics in attachment formation. The study's focus on European-American middle- to upper-class intact households limited its cultural and socioeconomic generalizability.

Lapsley, et al. (1990):

This study examined first-year college students and found a connection between teenage attachment identity formation and college adjustment. Secure attachment predicted improved identity development, emotional stability, and college adaption, whereas insecure attachment was linked to identity confusion and maladjustment. The findings lend credence to continuity theory, demonstrating that early relationship stability has an influence on later psychological functioning. Limitations included self-reporting and other sample-specific restrictions.

Fraley, et al. (1997):

This study examined attachment formation in friendships and romantic relationships among young adults. Romantic partners are increasingly serving as key attachment figures, with friends fulfilling attachment requirements to varying degrees. The findings indicate that attachment in early adulthood changes from parents to peers and partners. Limitations included a predominantly college-aged population, which limited generalizability.

Lopez et al., (2002):

Longitudinal studies on first-year college students investigated attachment stability, coping, and distress. Secure

or rising attachment security enhanced confidence, adaptive coping, and decreased discomfort, but chronic insecurity exacerbated emotional difficulties. The findings underscored that attachment may alter in early adulthood, with secure attachment maintaining psychological well-being. Limitations included a dependence on self-report measurements.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Problem Statement:

Identity formation is critical in young people, yet many struggle with emotional and relational issues. Attachment insecurity may predict these difficulties, although its relevance in non-clinical groups remains unknown.

#### Aim:

To investigate how attachment insecurity predicts identity disruptions in emerging adults, as well as its impact on self-concept and identity construction, in order to get a better understanding of developmental processes.

#### Objectives:

Use standardized measures to evaluate attachment insecurity and identity disturbance, and look into the predicted relationship between attachment patterns and identity concerns in young adults.

#### Sample & Sampling Techniques:

300 young people aged 18 to 25 from colleges, institutions, and communities were recruited via convenience sampling, with voluntary participation following informed consent.

#### Tools Used:

**Attachment Insecurity:** The Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990) has 18 items with a Likert scale of 1 to 5, measuring anxiety, closeness, and dependence. **Identity Disturbance: SCIM** (Kaufman et al., 2015), 27 items, Likert 1-7, measures Disturbed, Lack, and Consolidated Identity.

#### Research Design:

A quantitative, cross-sectional study used psychometric methods to investigate the correlations and predicted associations between attachment insecurity and

identity disruption in non-clinical young adults.

#### Statistical analysis:

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and linear regression were used in SPSS to investigate the relationships and predictive effects of attachment insecurity on identity disturbance.

#### Hypothesis:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between attachment insecurity and identity disturbances in young adults.

#### Inclusion criteria:

Participants aged 18-25, male or female, gave informed permission.

#### Exclusion criteria:

Individuals in significant psychological therapy, teenagers, or those with incomplete questionnaires.

#### Procedure:

Building rapport with participants, obtaining consent, completing a personal profile form, and then administering AAS and SCIM. Data were assessed and examined for correlations and regression results.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptive Statistics:

Among 300 young people, attachment insecurity had a mean of 33.79 (SD = 8.745), whereas identity disturbances had a mean of 18.43 (SD = 5.199). These ratings reflect varied levels of attachment insecurity and identity disturbance, offering insight into the sample's relationship worries and self-concept issues.

### Correlation Analysis:

Attachment insecurity and identity disruptions had a significant positive connection ( $r = .766$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Higher attachment insecurity was connected with greater identity disruption, suggesting that insecure attachment strongly predicts difficulties in building a stable and coherent sense of self in young people.

### Discussion:

The study found that attachment insecurity substantially predicts identity problems. Participants with insecure attachments reported self-doubt, internal struggle, and identity instability. The findings emphasize the developmental value of stable connection experiences. Demographics show that urban, middle-class young adults were predominantly represented, underscoring the importance of supportive surroundings and attachment-focused treatments in educational and therapeutic contexts.

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Summary:

The study investigated the link between attachment insecurity and identity disruption in 300 young adults. Attachment insecurity has a substantial correlation with identity disturbance ( $r = .766$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that relational worries affect self-concept, internal conflict, and identity instability. The findings emphasize the necessity of safe connection experiences for healthy identity formation.

### Conclusion:

Attachment insecurity predicts identity problems in young people, impairing self-esteem, emotional regulation, and relationship development. Early and current attachment patterns have a substantial impact on identity formation. Interventions that encourage safe attachments, self-reflection, and supportive relationships can help young adults develop stable, coherent identities and increase their psychological well-being.

### Limitations:

The study used self-report assessments, which might lead to bias. The cross-sectional design restricts causal conclusions. The sample demographics, which are predominantly urban, middle-class students with a little male bias, limit generalizability. These limitations limit the capacity to detect directionality and generalize findings to larger groups.

### Implications:

The findings complement developmental and attachment theories, since they reveal that insecure attachment has a major impact on identity formation. Practical treatments such as counselling, psychoeducation, and peer-support programs that promote stable connections and emotional support can assist young adults in developing coherent self-

concepts and reducing identity-related difficulties.

### Future Scope:

Future research should employ longitudinal designs and encompass different cultural, socioeconomic, and rural-urban groups. Multimethod techniques, such as interviews and observations, as well as investigations into mediators such as self-esteem, coping, and social support, might help to understand the mechanisms that link attachment insecurity and identity disruption and lead focused therapies.

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