

# Personality Traits, Attachment Styles, and Romantic Relationships

Hayley Steinmetz, Morgan Dartnell, Kaitlyn Herron, and Thomas A. Martin

## Abstract

Interactions between personality traits, attachment styles, and romantic relationship status were investigated in this study. Research was conducted via an online survey administered by Qualtrics and data were collected through self-report methods. Results showed that individuals who never had been in a relationship were less extraverted and more likely to exhibit anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Individuals who were either in a relationship or had been in a relationship in the past exhibited more extraverted characteristics and were less likely to report anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

## Introduction

- Personality is a central psychological characteristic of human beings that can be profiled on five domains: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 2010).
- Early interaction between children's behavior and their primary caregivers' reactions to their behavior have significant impacts on children's development of personality and future behavior and attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). These same attachment styles initially used to describe infant-mother relationships can be applied to relationships in later life, including romantic relationships.
- Secure subjects have love relationships that last the longest and anxious-ambivalent subjects have less enduring love relationships. Avoidant subjects were more likely to report they had never been in love, or that they were not in love at the time of the study. These subjects also indicated that their love experiences were less intense (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

## Method

- A Qualtrics survey sent via email to students enrolled in a psychology course collected data from 198 individuals, who received extra credit for that class in return for participating.
- Participants completed the Big Five Personality Trait Short Questionnaire, Psychosis Attachment Measure, and the Experience of Close Relations-Revised: Danish Version Measure.
- A correlational design was used to find relationships of personality traits, attachment styles, and experiences in romantic relationships.

## Results

- Extraversion correlated negatively with the avoidant and anxious attachment style subscales of the Psychosis Attachment Measure. Agreeableness correlated negatively with the avoidant subscale. Conscientiousness and emotional stability correlated negatively with the anxious subscale.
- Extraversion correlated negatively with all five subscales of the Experience of Close Relations measure (see Table 1). Emotional stability correlated negatively with four out of the five subscales (see Table 1).
- Individuals who had never been in a relationship were more anxious, anxious with low self-regard, independent-avoidant, counter-dependent avoidant, and angry-preoccupied compared to individuals who were either in a relationship or had been in one in the past (see Table 2).

Table 1

Reliability Coefficients and Correlation Matrix

	$\alpha$	O	E	A	C	ES	IA	AN	CA	AP	LS
Big Five Variables											
Openness (O)	.76										
Extraversion (E)	.87	.12									
Agreeableness (A)	.78	.15*	.10								
Conscientiousness (C)	.83	.07	.09	.26**							
Emotional Stability (ES)	.87	-.03	.38**	.17*	.28**						
Experience of Close Relations											
Independent Avoidance (IA)	.92	-.16*	-.24**	-.32**	-.18*	-.13					
Anxious (AN)	.78	-.08	-.19**	-.12	-.25**	-.50**	.49**				
Counter-dependent Avoidance (CA)	.88	-.07	-.19**	-.36**	-.20**	-.25**	.76**	.57**			
Angry Preoccupied (AP)	.86	-.05	-.15*	-.12	-.26**	-.38**	.34**	.67**	.55**		
Anxious Low Self-regard (LS)	.91	-.06	-.21**	-.09	-.27**	-.48**	.30**	.83**	.51**	.84**	

Note:  $N = 198$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2

Relationship History and Attachment Style Differences

	Never		Current/Past		$t(196)$	$p$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$		
Anxious	25.27	7.01	29.74	8.86	2.87	.005
Anxious Low Self-regard	18.22	7.01	23.41	10.43	2.88	.004
Independent Avoidance	50.51	10.34	56.45	11.54	2.87	.005
Counter-dependent Avoidance	29.11	9.33	35.11	9.72	3.41	.001
Angry-preoccupied	24.68	6.46	28.40	8.99	2.38	.018

Note:  $N = 198$ ; results significant if  $p \leq .05$

## Discussion

- Those who are actively pursuing romantic relationships may find it useful to adopt the attitudes or traits of extraverted people.
- Those who are in romantic relationships but are not satisfied or happy with it can work on learning more extraverted and agreeable styles to improve their relationship.
- Individuals who are aware that they have an avoidant or anxious attachment style can choose to seek assistance to become more secure in themselves and in romantic relationships.