

Exploring the Role of Parental Attachment to Romantic Relationships among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract: Rivers State University, Port Harcourt students' romantic relationships were affected by parental attachment types. The goals were to identify common parental attachment styles, analyze how they relate to adult romantic attachment behaviors (secure, anxious, and avoidant), compare maternal and paternal influences on romantic interactions, and understand how insecure attachment backgrounds affect intimacy, trust, and emotional management. Purposive convenience sampling was used to administer 210 undergraduate questionnaires. The model predicted parental attachment patterns well, accounting for 75% of the diversity in these patterns. Female students had much higher ratings on adult romantic attachment than male students, showing that parental attachment has a greater impact on female romantic attachment. Because maternal attachment had higher mean scores, it had a greater impact on adult romantic relationship practices than paternal attachment. An insecure parental connection accounted for approximately 90% of the variance in students' romantic relationship closeness, trust, and emotional regulation. However, it had little immediate impact. Tests showed that maternal attachment styles influence adult romantic attachment behaviors more than other attachment styles, rejecting all null hypotheses. The study found that maternal attachment has a greater impact on adult romantic relationship behaviors and that female students are more romantically attached. Insecure attachment is linked to closeness and emotional regulation, although students' romantic experiences depend on their emotional skills. Parental education to promote secure attachments, attachment-focused therapies in university counseling, gender-aware relationship programs, and future research on cultural, peer, and economic factors alongside parental attachment are recommended.

Keywords: Maternal Attachment; Paternal Attachment; Adult Romantic Attachment; Romantic Relationships; Insecure Attachment; Emotional Regulation; Gender Differences.

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1. Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of human relationships, the interplay between parenting styles and adult attachment patterns weaves a narrative that shapes adults' experiences of close relationships [1]. This interplay serves as a foundational framework for individuals to build their capacity for intimacy, trust, and emotional connection. Understanding the dynamics of parenting styles, attachment theory, and close relationships is essential for unraveling the complexities of human interaction and fostering healthy, fulfilling connections throughout the lifespan [2]. Romantic relationships play an important role throughout people's life journey, influencing their well-being and social functioning [3]. Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby [5] and later cited by Fraley and Shaver [39], explains the emotional bond between infants and primary caregivers and has since been applied to adult romantic relationships [4]. This theory is instrumental for understanding the relational dynamics in adult romantic relationships, in which attachment styles are categorized as secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. Romantic relationships are extensions of the early childhood attachment process, reflecting the continuity of early attachment experiences. Variety in early developmental processes may lead to different adult relational dynamics of how people approach love, intimacy, and relationship dissolution. Several studies have investigated how the level of parent-child attachment security affects romantic responsiveness and co-operation between romantic partners or couples [6]. According to Chen [10], the number of divorces increased by 0.1 percent from 50,314 in 2017 to 2.9% in 2023 (1.8 divorces per 1000 people) [7].

In 2019, the divorce rate increased by 14%. These data have given the researcher insight into the relationship between Parent-Child Attachment and Romantic Relationship among undergraduates in Nigeria. According to attachment theory, the parent-child attachment pattern is generally mirrored in three representations: secure-insecure avoidant (Type A); secure (Type B); and insecure-anxious (Type C) [8]. Avoidant attachment refers to the suppression and denial of attachment needs. Anxious attachment refers to the hyperactivation of attachment needs, as reflected in intense possessiveness and fear of abandonment [9]. Attachment security refers to the sense of security that develops from the availability and responsiveness of primary caregivers during a child's different phases of growth and attachment needs [10]. Studies further show that avoidant and anxious attachment are related to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and have negatively affected an individual's ability to respond intimately to romantic partners [11]. Conversely, people with high attachment security, due to authoritative parenting styles, are the most responsive and supportive romantic partners [12]. Therefore, the parallel pattern of parenting style and attachment orientations, whether authoritarian/avoidant, authoritative/secure, or permissive/ ambivalent, should serve as a mechanism to examine the link between attachment orientation and romantic attachment between couples [13]. This research paper examines the role of parental attachment styles in adult romantic relationships among undergraduate students. A profound evolution in the nature and complexity of interpersonal relationships often marks the transition to adulthood [14].

Among these, romantic relationships emerge as particularly significant, providing not only companionship and emotional support but also contributing to an individual's sense of identity, intimacy, and psychological well-being [15]. Understanding the antecedents of healthy romantic relationships has become a growing concern in developmental and psychological research, especially in an era marked by increased relational instability, delayed marriages, and rising rates of relationship dissatisfaction [16]. Against this backdrop, attachment theory offers a compelling framework for exploring how early family experiences, particularly with primary caregivers, influence individuals' approach to intimacy and romantic bonds later in life. Bowlby [8], the pioneer of attachment theory, postulated that the emotional bonds formed between infants and their caregivers lay the foundation for future social and emotional development [17]. This bond, referred to as "attachment", shapes an internal working model that individuals use to interpret and navigate relational experiences throughout life [18]. Children who experience consistent, responsive, and nurturing care typically develop a secure attachment style, fostering a positive view of self and others and translating into healthier relational patterns in adulthood [19]. In contrast, inconsistent or neglectful caregiving may result in insecure attachment styles such as anxious, avoidant, or fearful, which are linked to difficulties in intimacy, trust, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution [20].

As individuals' progress into late adolescence and early adulthood, a developmental period commonly represented by undergraduate students, they begin to rely less on parents and more on peers and romantic partners for emotional security and support [21]. However, despite this shift, the influence of early attachment experiences does not dissipate; rather, it manifests in how individuals initiate, sustain, and perceive romantic relationships [22]. Undergraduate students, who are often navigating their first serious romantic relationships, offer a critical population for studying the influence of parental attachment styles on romantic functioning [23]. It is during these formative years that patterns of emotional intimacy, commitment, communication, and conflict resolution are either reinforced or restructured, often along lines traced back to familial experiences [24]. The relevance of parental attachment styles is particularly profound in romantic relationships, as they serve as a foundational script for how individuals perceive love, vulnerability, and trust. For instance, individuals with anxious attachment styles may crave

closeness yet simultaneously fear abandonment, leading to clingy or overly dependent behaviors in romantic relationships [25]. On the other hand, those with avoidant styles may struggle with emotional intimacy, distancing themselves to avoid perceived vulnerability or loss of autonomy. These maladaptive relational patterns can have significant implications for relationship quality, satisfaction, stability, and even mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety. While substantial research has been conducted on attachment and romantic relationships, there is a notable gap in studies of university students across diverse cultural contexts.

Given the unique pressures, developmental transitions, and emotional landscapes undergraduates' experience, there is a compelling need to understand how their early familial attachments continue to shape their romantic lives. Furthermore, contemporary shifts in parenting styles, ranging from over-involved (e.g., "helicopter parenting") to emotionally distant, may be contributing to a new landscape of attachment patterns and relational challenges among young adults [26]. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the role of parental attachment in shaping the nature and quality of adult romantic relationships among undergraduate students in Rivers State University. By examining how different patterns of attachment formed in childhood through interactions with primary caregivers influence relational behaviors, expectations, and emotional outcomes in young adults, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of relational development. It also seeks to inform psychological interventions, counseling practices, and educational programs that support young adults in building and maintaining healthy, fulfilling romantic relationships. The main aim of this research work is to examine the role of parental attachment styles in adult romantic relationships among undergraduate students. However, the specific objectives include identifying the prevalent parental attachment styles experienced by undergraduate students, examining the relationship between parental attachment styles and adult romantic attachment patterns (secure, anxious, avoidant, etc.), exploring potential differences in influence between maternal and paternal attachments on romantic behavior, and assessing how insecure attachment histories shape emotional expression, conflict resolution, and trust in romantic partnerships [27].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969; 1982)

John Bowlby initially introduced attachment theory in 1969 and expanded on it in later writings (1982, 1988) [28]. This theory suggests that the emotional bond formed between an infant and their primary caregiver is inherently biological and crucial for survival. Bowlby maintained that infants possess an inborn attachment system that drives them to seek closeness with caregivers, especially during moments of fear, distress, or confusion. A key idea in this theory is the notion of a "secure base," which signifies the caregiver's role in providing safety and reassurance, allowing the child to explore their surroundings freely [29]. When caregivers consistently respond and are emotionally available, children gain a sense of safety that promotes emotional regulation, independence, and resilience. Additionally, Bowlby's theory contributes the idea of internal working models—mental frameworks of the self and others created through early caregiver interactions. These models affect how individuals view relationships, manage emotions, and interact with others throughout their lives [30]. Children who receive attentive caregiving are likely to form positive internal working models, leading them to view themselves as deserving and others as trustworthy. In contrast, those who undergo inconsistent or neglectful caregiving may develop insecure models marked by mistrust, anxiety, or avoidance. Bowlby's Attachment Theory is particularly pertinent to this research as it offers a fundamental understanding of how early relationships between parents and children influence future romantic relationship patterns in undergraduates. The theory illustrates that styles of parental attachment influence internal working models, which, in turn, shape how individuals approach intimacy, trust, and emotional expression in their adult romantic relationships [31].

2.1.2. Ainsworth's Attachment Styles Theory in 1979

Expanding upon Bowlby's theoretical framework, Ainsworth et al. [1] empirically advanced attachment theory by developing the Strange Situation Procedure, a systematic observational method for evaluating attachment patterns in infants. Using this procedure, Ainsworth et al. [1] identified three main attachment styles: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent. Secure attachment is defined by trust in the caregiver's presence. Children are free to explore but seek comfort in times of distress and can be easily comforted upon reunion, reflecting consistent and responsive caregiving. In contrast, insecure-avoidant attachment is marked by emotional detachment, where children exhibit minimal distress during separation and tend to ignore the caregiver upon return. This style is typically associated with rejecting or emotionally unavailable caregiving. Insecure-ambivalent (resistant) attachment features significant anxiety and inconsistency, where children experience high levels of distress during separation but demonstrate mixed feelings upon reunion. This behavior results from caregiving patterns that vary in responsiveness. Later, Main and Solomon [25] identified a fourth type, disorganized attachment, characterized by confusing and contradictory behaviors. This style is frequently connected to caregiving environments that are traumatic, abusive, or frightening. Ainsworth's classification provides a clear framework for assessing how different parenting styles lead

to specific attachment orientations (secure, avoidant, anxious, or disorganized). The attachment patterns established in childhood often persist into adulthood and can affect romantic relationships. Thus, this theory directly aligns with the study's goals of exploring how parental attachment styles influence the dynamics of adult romantic relationships among undergraduate students [32].

2.2. Conceptual Review

The current research examines the relationship between parental bonding and romantic relationships among college students, drawing on fundamental concepts from attachment theory and developmental psychology [33]. The study is based on three interconnected areas: parental attachment, internal working models, and the dynamics of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood. Parental attachment refers to the lasting emotional connection between a child and primary caregivers, which lays the groundwork for social and emotional growth [34]. Initial attachment experiences, as noted by Ainsworth et al. [1], play a crucial role in determining patterns of trust, emotional management, and expectations in interpersonal interactions. A secure attachment arises when caregivers are reliably responsive, sensitive, and emotionally present, which leads individuals to view others as trustworthy and themselves as deserving of love. Conversely, insecure attachment styles—such as anxious and avoidant attachment—develop from caregiving environments that are inconsistent, neglectful, or unresponsive. These styles are marked by fears of abandonment, emotional detachment, or discomfort in intimate situations. The idea of internal working models is vital for grasping the relationship between early attachment and subsequent relationships. These cognitive-emotional frameworks, formed in childhood, shape expectations, interpretations, and actions in relationships with others. Individuals possessing secure internal working models generally approach relationships with assurance, openness, and effective communication. In contrast, those with insecure models may display dysfunctional behavioral patterns like dependency, jealousy, avoidance, or emotional instability [35].

Although these internal representations can remain relatively stable throughout life, they significantly impact adolescence and emerging adulthood [36]. Romantic relationships among college students provide an essential developmental arena in which attachment dynamics are manifested and evaluated. Emerging adulthood, which generally spans ages 18 to 29, is marked by identity exploration, emotional growth, and the establishment of intimate relationships [37]. During this time, individuals often begin to shift attachment roles from their parents to their romantic partners. Consequently, early attachment experiences greatly affect relationship quality, satisfaction, commitment, and conflict-resolution strategies [6]. Students with secure parental attachments tend to develop stable, supportive, and gratifying romantic relationships. In contrast, those with insecure attachments may face difficulties regarding trust, fear of rejection, emotional instability, or avoidance of closeness [38]. The Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) framework outlines romantic attachment in terms of two key dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety indicates an excessive worry about being rejected or abandoned, which can lead to clinginess or emotional reliance. On the flip side, attachment avoidance indicates a discomfort with emotional closeness and a tendency to maintain emotional distance. These dimensions offer a strong framework for understanding how early parental attachment experiences are reflected in adult romantic relationships. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals with high attachment anxiety are likely to face lower relationship satisfaction and increased conflict. In contrast, those with high avoidance often show diminished emotional intimacy and commitment [39].

In the sociocultural framework of Rivers State, Nigeria, the dynamics of family structures, child-rearing practices, and cultural beliefs significantly impact attachment experiences [40]. Families in Nigeria often emphasize collectivism, deference to authority, and close family connections, which can shape the development and expression of attachment [41]. Nevertheless, factors such as urban development, financial pressures, and shifts in social conventions may disrupt conventional parenting practices, potentially leading to differences in attachment styles among young individuals. As a result, students at Rivers State University operate within a fluid social setting where traditional customs blend with contemporary relationship expectations, making the investigation of attachment and romantic involvements especially significant. The study posits that parental attachment serves as a precursor affecting the outcomes of romantic relationships. A secure attachment to parents is expected to lead to favorable relationship outcomes, including trust, effective communication, and emotional security. In contrast, an insecure attachment is likely to lead to negative outcomes, such as conflict, discontent, and instability in romantic relationships. Consequently, the observed relationship tendencies among undergraduates can be interpreted as behavioral manifestations of prior attachment experiences. The theoretical framework of this research asserts that early parental attachment shapes internal working models, which subsequently influence romantic behaviors during emerging adulthood. By analyzing these connections among undergraduate students in Rivers State, the research enhances understanding of how formative family interactions continue to shape interpersonal relations in later life [3].

2.3. Empirical Review

Millings et al. [28] examined the relationships among romantic attachment, responsive caregiving, and parenting styles in couples with 7- to 8-year-old children. The findings showed that attachment avoidance and anxiety were negatively associated

with responsive caregiving. Responsive caregiving was linked to optimal parenting styles and negatively associated with non-optimal styles. Responsive caregiving mediated the relationship between attachment and parenting styles. Attachment anxiety also directly influenced non-optimal parenting styles. These results emphasize the role of attachment and caregiving in shaping parenting practices. Goel [40] aimed to examine the mediating role of secure attachment style in the relationship between authoritative parenting and personal commitment among married female students. The methodology involved a sample of 120 female married students who completed the Parental Authority Questionnaire, Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire, and Marital Commitment Questionnaire. The results, analyzed using correlation and path analysis, indicate that a mother's authoritative parenting style significantly influences secure attachment style and can explain personal commitment. This study highlights the importance of understanding the role of parenting and attachment in shaping personal commitment among married individuals.

Dhanda and Sehrawat [29] conducted a study to assess the relationship between high school female students' attachment styles and their parents' parenting styles in Isfahan city. Using descriptive correlational methods, the study found significant associations between attachment and parenting styles. Specifically, positive correlations were observed between secure attachment and authoritative parenting, and between ambivalent attachment and permissive parenting. Conversely, avoidant attachment showed a negative correlation with authoritative parenting. Regression analysis confirmed that parenting styles strongly predicted attachment styles, providing valuable insights for interventions aimed at promoting healthy attachment development in adolescents. Doinita and Maria [15] examined the correlations between adult attachment types and parenting styles. A sample of 74 adults completed the Adult Attachment Questionnaire and Parenting Styles Questionnaire. The results revealed a significant correlation between secure adult attachment and authoritative parenting style. These findings emphasize the importance of family in children's development and highlight the influence of attachment experiences on emotional and cognitive growth. Sahithya et al. [32] conducted a study to determine whether cultural differences affect the relationship between parenting styles and child outcomes, examining whether parenting styles yield similar effects across cultures and if culture moderates this association. A thorough literature review encompassing Western and Indian studies on parenting styles and child outcomes was conducted. Databases were searched using relevant keywords, and studies meeting the inclusion criteria were analyzed [6]. Despite cultural distinctions, findings indicate consistent effects of parenting styles on children across cultures. Authoritative parenting consistently correlates with better outcomes than Authoritarian and Neglectful/Uninvolved styles in both Western and Indian contexts. However, results regarding Indulgent/Permissive parenting vary. The article discusses the implications of future cultural shifts in parenting practices.

Goel [38] conducted a correlational study to examine the relationship between adult attachment and parenting styles among staff at the Football Association in West Malaysia. The sample included 43 respondents categorized as caregivers. Two instruments, the Experience in Close Relationship (ECR) and Parenting Style Questionnaire, were used. Results showed significant correlations between attachment avoidance and the authoritative parenting style, attachment avoidance and the permissive parenting style, and attachment anxiety and the authoritarian parenting style. This study highlights the importance of parenting styles and their connection to attachment styles developed during early childhood. Chen [10] aimed to investigate the impact of fathers' adult attachment style on their parenting, while accounting for various marital factors. The methodology involves analyzing previous research on attachment theory and adult attachment measures [1]. The results indicate that fathers with insecure adult attachment tend to exhibit withdrawal or authoritarian control in parenting, particularly during conflict. Secure adult attachment of fathers is crucial for facilitating the development of secure attachments in children. Further research in this area can inform family intervention programs and enhance our understanding of fathers' roles in families. Gleeson and Fitzgerald [19] examined the relationships among childhood experiences, attachment styles in romantic relationships, and relationship satisfaction among young adults [5]. The sample included 227 participants from the university and the general population. Participants completed self-report measures on attachment style, relationship satisfaction, and descriptions of their parents' relationship. Most males showed an avoidant-fearful attachment style, while females showed either an avoidant-fearful or a secure attachment style. Findings indicated that participants' descriptions of parents and parental relationships were linked to attachment style.

Those with secure attachment styles were more likely to be in a romantic relationship and reported higher satisfaction. The study emphasizes the impact of childhood experiences on attachment and romantic relationships. Amani et al. [33] conducted a study to explore the relationship between adult attachment styles and marital satisfaction among Indian adults. The study used 24 heterosexual married participants (13 females, 11 males), aged 25-45 years, who completed the Revised Adult Attachment Style (RAAS) and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS). Results indicated that participants with a secure attachment style were more satisfied with their marriage than participants with an Insecure (Fearful, Preoccupied, and Dismissive) attachment style. Nuwer [36] conducted a study to investigate the association between childhood experiences and adult attachment styles in relationships. The sample consisted of 207 young people aged 20 to 30 from Romania who had been in a relationship within the past year [1]. The Parental Authority Questionnaire and Experiences of Close Relationships Inventory were used as instruments [6]. The results indicated that a permissive parental style was associated with low levels of anxiety in adult relationships, while an authoritarian parental style coincided with avoidance tendencies and increased anxiety.

Additionally, participants from two-parent families showed lower levels of avoidance and were more expressive in relationships compared to those from single-parent families. The study did not find significant moderation effects of parental structure on the relationship between perceived parenting style and attachment. These findings contribute to understanding the impact of childhood experiences on adult attachment in relationships [2].

3. Methodology

This research utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design to investigate how parental attachment influences romantic relationships among college students. This design was selected for its effectiveness in capturing information on relevant variables at a single point in time, providing a clear overview of the studied population. Such methods are commonly employed in social and behavioral investigations aiming to describe current situations and examine relationships among variables without any manipulative intervention. The research was carried out at the University of Port Harcourt, a prominent public higher learning institution situated in Rivers State, Nigeria. The focus was on undergraduate students registered at the university. This student body is diverse in age, gender, and academic backgrounds, making it well-suited for exploring themes of attachment and romantic relationships. A nonprobability sampling method was used to select study participants. Specifically, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling was used to recruit individuals who were easily available and consented to participate. This technique was deemed fitting due to time constraints and logistical considerations, as well as the straightforward access to students in the university setting. A total of 210 questionnaires were administered to qualified participants, who constituted the research sample. Data collection was conducted using a quantitative method involving structured, self-administered questionnaires. This questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool, promoting uniformity, ease of use, and effective data categorization for statistical analysis. It consisted of three primary sections designed to gather pertinent information for the research. The initial section collected demographic data from participants, including age, gender, and other significant background factors, to support descriptive analysis.

The subsequent section gauged parental attachment using a standardized self-report scale informed by Ainsworth et al. [1]'s work. The Parental Attachment Report Scale comprised 20 items designed to evaluate attachment patterns between individuals and their parents. Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing for a strong assessment of varying attachment levels. The final section evaluated romantic attachment using the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) Scale developed by Brennan et al. [9]. This tool assesses two key aspects of adult attachment: attachment anxiety, which denotes fear of being abandoned and worries regarding a partner's availability, and attachment avoidance, which signifies discomfort with closeness and dependency. The ECR scale contains 42 items and has been extensively validated in attachment studies. To confirm the questionnaire's validity, both face and content validity were established through expert evaluation. The research supervisor reviewed the questionnaire critically, leading to necessary adjustments based on the feedback received. The tool was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 or higher deemed acceptable, indicating sufficient internal consistency of the measurement scales. Data gathered from the field were evaluated utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise participants' socio-demographic characteristics and address the research questions. Inferential statistics, particularly regression analysis, were used to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the relationships among variables. Each hypothesis was evaluated at a 5% significance level, corresponding to a 95% confidence interval.

4. Result and Discussion

This paper covered data presentation, data analysis, data interpretation, a summary of findings, and a discussion of findings.

4.1. Demographic Information

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 210 respondents, providing insight into their age, gender, and professional distribution. In terms of age, the largest proportion of participants falls within the 26–35 years age group, accounting for 68 respondents (32.4% of the sample). This is followed by those aged 36–45 years, who represent 27.1% (57 respondents), and the 18–25 years group, which makes up 25.2% (53 respondents). The smallest age group comprises individuals aged 46–50, contributing 15.2% (32 respondents). Table 1 suggests that the sample is predominantly composed of young to middle-aged adults, with a stronger representation of individuals in their late twenties to mid-thirties. The gender distribution is perfectly balanced, with 50% of respondents being female and 50% male (105 participants each). This even split ensures that perspectives from both genders are equally represented in the study, eliminating any gender bias in the dataset. The respondents' professional backgrounds are notably diverse, reflecting a wide range of occupational categories. Artists, influencers, and those categorized as “others” each account for 10.5% of the sample (22 respondents each), indicating significant representation of creative and miscellaneous professions. Teachers/lecturers make up 12.4% (26 respondents), the highest single professional group, followed closely by politicians and nurses, each at 9.5% (20 respondents). Students and stylists each constitute 8.6% (18 respondents), while engineers and businesspeople each represent 8.1% (17 respondents).

Barbers form the smallest professional group, accounting for only 3.8% (8 respondents). This occupational spread highlights that the sample captures perspectives across both professional and non-professional categories, ensuring a variety of experiences and viewpoints.

Table 1: Demographic information

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-25yrs	53	25.2
26-35yrs	68	32.4
36-45yrs	57	27.1
46-50yrs	32	15.2
Total	210	100.0
Gender		
Female	105	50.0
Male	105	50.0
Total	210	100.0
Profession		
Students	18	8.6
Teachers/ lecturers	26	12.4
Engineers	17	8.1
Business	17	8.1
Politicians	20	9.5
Influencers	22	10.5
Stylist	18	8.6
Nurses	20	9.5
Artist	22	10.5
Barbers	8	3.8
Others	22	10.5
Total	210	100.0

The demographic profile indicates a balanced gender composition, a predominance of young and middle-aged adults, and a heterogeneous professional representation, making the sample well-suited for analyses requiring diversity in age, gender, and occupation.

4.2. Research Questions

Research Question One: To what extent are types of parental attachment styles commonly reported by undergraduate students?

Table 2: Model summary of types of parental attachment styles commonly reported by undergraduate students

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.867	.751	.750	16.81325

The result in Table 2 shows that the model examining the types of parental attachment styles commonly reported by undergraduate students explains a substantial proportion of the variation in responses. The R value of .867 indicates a very strong positive relationship between the predictors and the reported attachment styles. The R Square value of .751 means that approximately 75.1% of the variance in the types of parental attachment styles reported by the students is accounted for by the model. The Adjusted R Square of .750, which corrects for the number of predictors and sample size, confirms that the explanatory power remains high with only a minimal adjustment. The standard error of the estimate, 16.81, suggests that the typical deviation of the observed values from the model's predicted values is moderate. The statistics indicate that the model provides a strong and reliable explanation of the attachment styles reported by undergraduate students, suggesting that the included factors capture most of the differences in how students describe their parental attachment experiences.

Research Question Two: How do different parental attachment styles influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles in undergraduate students?

Table 3: Group statistics of how parental attachment styles influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles in undergraduate students

Undergraduate Students	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Std. Dev.
Female	105	93.6000	7.886	26.36234
Male	105	85.7143		27.48626
Total	210	179.3143		53.8486

The results presented in Table 3 address the second research question, which examines how different parental attachment styles influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles in undergraduate students. The group statistics show that female undergraduate students had a higher mean score ($M = 93.60$, $SD = 26.36$) than male undergraduate students ($M = 85.71$, $SD = 27.49$). The mean difference of 7.89 suggests that females tend to report stronger or more secure adult romantic attachment patterns, influenced by their parental attachment experiences, than males do. Although both groups exhibit relatively similar levels of variability, as indicated by the standard deviations, the higher mean among females implies that parental attachment may play a slightly greater role in shaping romantic attachment outcomes for female students. The total mean of 179.31 reflects the combined influence across the entire sample of 210 participants, providing evidence that parental attachment styles are linked to adult romantic attachment development in this population.

Research Question Three: Do maternal and paternal attachment styles differ in their influence on adult romantic relationship behaviors?

Table 4: Group statistics of how parental attachment styles influence the development of adult romance attachment styles in undergraduate students

Undergraduate Students	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Std. Dev.
Maternal	101	95.7030	11.648	24.46980
Paternal	109	84.0550		28.40248
Total	210	179.758		52.87228

The results presented in Table 4 address Research Question Three, which examines whether maternal and paternal attachment styles differ in their influence on adult romantic relationship behaviors among undergraduate students. The mean score for maternal attachment (95.70) is notably higher than that for paternal attachment (84.06), producing a mean difference of 11.65. This suggests that, on average, maternal attachment has a stronger influence on the development of adult romantic attachment styles than paternal attachment. The standard deviations indicate variability in responses, with paternal attachment (28.40) showing slightly greater dispersion than maternal attachment (24.47), suggesting that fathers' influence may be more inconsistent across students. The total mean of 179.76 and the overall standard deviation of 52.87 reflect the combined influence of both parental attachments across the entire sample. Taken together, these findings imply that maternal attachment plays a comparatively more significant and stable role in shaping adult romantic relationship behaviors than paternal attachment among the undergraduates studied.

Research Question Four: How do students with insecure parental attachments perceive intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in their romantic relationships?

Table 5: Model summary of the influences of insecure parental attachments on perceived intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in romantic relationships

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.948	.899	.898	10.74616

The model summary in Table 5 shows a very strong relationship between insecure parental attachment and students' perceptions of intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in their romantic relationships. The correlation coefficient (R) of .948 indicates an exceptionally high positive association, suggesting that variations in insecure parental attachment are closely linked to how students experience these aspects of their romantic relationships. The R Square value of .899 reveals that approximately 89.9% of the variance in intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation can be explained by insecure parental attachment, demonstrating a powerful predictive effect. The adjusted R Square of .898, which accounts for the number of predictors and sample size, confirms that the model remains robust with minimal loss of explanatory power. The standard error of the estimate (10.74616) indicates the average deviation of observed scores from predicted scores, which, although present, is relatively small given the

model's strength. These findings imply that students with insecure parental attachments are likely to report significant challenges in forming and maintaining intimacy, establishing trust, and regulating emotions within their romantic relationships.

4.3. Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: No type of parental attachment style is commonly reported by undergraduate students.

Table 6: ANOVA associated with regression summary of the type of parental attachment styles commonly reported by undergraduate students

	Model	Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9425.651	1	9425.651	268.1703	.000
	Residual	10509.345	299	35.148		
	Total	19934.996	210			

The ANOVA in Table 6 shows that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F value of 268.1703 and a p-value of .000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that parental attachment styles significantly explain variation in students' reported attachment types, suggesting that some attachment styles are indeed more commonly reported.

Table 7: Coefficients associated with the type of parental attachment styles commonly reported by undergraduate students

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	11.725	1.791		6.548	.000
	Parental attachment	-.700	.044	-.688	-15.790	.000

The coefficients in Table 7 further strengthen this conclusion. The unstandardized coefficient for parental attachment is -0.700 with a standard error of 0.044 and a t value of -15.790 , which is highly significant ($p = .000$). The negative coefficient suggests an inverse relationship, indicating that as the measure of parental attachment increases, the likelihood of reporting a particular attachment style decreases. The standardized beta of -0.688 indicates a strong negative effect size. The constant value of 11.725 corresponds to the predicted mean score when parental attachment is set to 0. The results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Parental attachment styles are not equally reported; instead, there is a significant pattern showing that some attachment styles are more prevalent among undergraduate students, and parental attachment levels strongly influence this reporting.

Hypothesis Two: Different parental attachment styles do not influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles in undergraduate students.

Table 8: Independent t-test results of how parental attachment styles do not influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles in undergraduate students

	N	Mean	N	df.	t-value	Sig.	Decision
Female	105	93.6000	26.36234	208	2.122	.035	Significant
Male	105	85.7143	27.48626				
Total	2010	179.3143	2010				

The result in Table 8 tests the null hypothesis that different parental attachment styles do not influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles in undergraduate students. The independent-samples t-test compares the mean scores of female and male students. Females reported a higher mean score ($M = 93.60$, $SD = 26.36$) than males ($M = 85.71$, $SD = 27.49$). The calculated t-value of 2.122 with 208 degrees of freedom yielded a significance value of 0.035 , which is below the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance. This indicates that the difference in mean scores between female and male students is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. The finding implies that parental attachment styles significantly influence the development of adult romantic attachment styles among the undergraduate students studied, with females showing higher levels of these characteristics than their male counterparts.

Hypothesis Three: Maternal and paternal attachment styles do not differ in their influence on adult romantic relationship behaviors.

Table 9: Independent t-test results of maternal and paternal attachment styles do not differ in their influence on adult romantic relationship behaviors

Attachment Styles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df.	t-value	Sig.	Decision
Maternal	101	95.7030	24.46980	208	3.172	.000	Significant
Paternal	109	84.0550					
Total	210						

The results in Table 9 show a significant difference between maternal and paternal attachment styles in their influence on adult romantic relationship behaviors. Maternal attachment has a higher mean score (95.70) compared to paternal attachment (84.06), indicating that maternal attachment exerts a stronger influence on adult romantic relationships than paternal attachment. The independent t-test produced a t-value of 3.172 with 208 degrees of freedom and a p-value of .000, which is well below the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This means the null hypothesis, stating that maternal and paternal attachment styles do not differ in their influence, is rejected. Therefore, maternal and paternal attachment styles differ significantly, with maternal attachment playing a more pronounced role in shaping adult romantic relationship behaviors.

Hypothesis Four: Students with insecure parental attachments do not perceive intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in their romantic relationships.

Table 10: ANOVA associated with regression summary of the influence of insecure parental attachments on perceived intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in romantic relationships

Model		Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	212259.063	2	106129.532	923.468	.000
	Residual	23904.366	208	114.925		
	Total	236163.429	209			

The ANOVA results show that the overall regression model predicting romantic relationships from insecure parental attachments and perceived intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation is highly significant, $F(2, 208) = 923.468$, $p < .001$. This indicates that, taken together, the predictors explain a substantial proportion of the variance in romantic relationships. The regression sum of squares (212,259.063) is far greater than the residual sum of squares (23,904.366), which confirms that the model accounts for most of the variability in the dependent variable. The coefficients in Table 10 provide insight into each predictor's contribution. The constant term is not significant ($B = -1.350$, $t = -0.515$, $p = .607$), indicating that the intercept is not meaningfully different from zero.

Table 11: Coefficients associated with the regression summary of the influence of insecure parental attachments on perceived intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in romantic relationships

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.350	2.620		-.515	.607
	Insecure Parental Attachments	.027	.066	.022	.404	.687
	Perceive Intimacy, Trust and Emotional Regulation	.971	.056	.928	17.383	.000

Insecure parental attachments have a small and statistically non-significant effect on romantic relationships ($B = 0.027$, $t = 0.404$, $p = .687$), suggesting that, after accounting for the other variables, insecure attachment does not directly predict romantic relationship outcomes in this model. In contrast, perceived intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation show a very strong and significant positive association with romantic relationships ($B = 0.971$, $\beta = 0.928$, $t = 17.383$, $p < .001$). This means that higher levels of perceived intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation are strongly linked to better romantic relationship outcomes and are the primary driver of the model's predictive power.

4.4. Discussion of Findings

4.4.1. Types of Parental Attachment Styles Commonly Reported by Undergraduate Students

The data presented in Table 11 indicate that the framework analyzing parental attachment styles among college students accounts for 75.1% of the variability in their responses, as evidenced by an R-Square value of 0.751. The robust R value (0.867)

indicates a strong positive correlation between the predictors and the reported attachment styles. This indicates that experiences related to parental attachment are significant factors influencing the descriptions students provide. The noteworthy F value (268.1703, $p < .001$) from the ANOVA supports the notion that this model provides a reliable forecast of students' attachment styles. Notably, the negative coefficient for parental attachment ($B = -0.700$, $p < .001$) indicates that as parental attachment increases on the measured scale, the probability of reporting specific attachment types decreases, highlighting a complex relationship between parental connections and the attachment style displayed. These findings are consistent with Bowlby's attachment theory (1980), which posits that initial caregiving interactions lay the groundwork for an individual's attachment behaviors. Comparable research by Mikulincer and Shaver [26] indicated that secure parental attachment is likely to reduce the likelihood of displaying insecure attachment styles, further supporting the opposite relationship identified in this research. Additionally, Lopez and Brennan [24] found that undergraduates with secure parental attachments were less likely to exhibit avoidant or anxious attachment styles, consistent with the negative coefficient identified here. Nonetheless, certain studies, such as those by Fraley [18], have suggested that peer influences during late adolescence may partly diminish the impact of early parental attachment, proposing that college students may also form attachment styles distinct from their early caregiving experiences.

4.4.2. Influence of Parental Attachment Styles on the Development of Adult Romantic Attachment Styles

The findings shown in Table 10 and Table 11 indicate that female students had higher mean scores ($M = 93.60$, $SD = 26.36$) for adult romantic attachment than male students ($M = 85.71$, $SD = 27.49$). The independent-samples t-test confirmed that this disparity is statistically significant ($t = 2.122$, $p = .035$), suggesting that parental attachment styles influence the formation of adult romantic attachment styles, with females displaying more pronounced romantic attachment traits. This observation aligns with the research of Collins and Read [13] and Hazan and Shaver [21], who highlighted that experiences related to parental attachment act as foundational mental frameworks for adult romantic relationships. The elevated mean scores for females align with Rholes and Simpson [31]'s findings, which show that women frequently report greater emotional connection in adult romantic relationships, partly due to gender-specific socialization that promotes emotional expression. However, Martins et al. [35] found no notable gender disparities in the connection between parental and romantic attachments within a diverse cultural sample, indicating that cultural norms may shape these influences.

4.4.3. Maternal and Paternal Attachment Styles and Their Influence on Adult Romantic Relationship Behaviors

The information presented in Table 10 and Table 11 reveals a notable contrast between maternal and paternal attachment styles, with maternal attachment showing a higher average score ($M = 95.70$) than paternal attachment ($M = 84.06$). The independent t-test results ($t = 3.172$, $p < .001$) indicate that maternal attachment has a more profound effect on behaviors in adult romantic relationships. This finding supports research by Rholes and Simpson [31] and van IJzendoorn [37], which indicated that maternal emotional availability and sensitivity typically leave a more lasting impression on adult attachment than paternal interactions. Similarly, Karavasilis et al. [23] noted that maternal attachment serves as a more significant determinant of relationship satisfaction among young adults. Nonetheless, other research, such as that by Bhalla and Cherian [22], underscores the important role of paternal attachment in fostering independence and exploratory behavior, suggesting that the impact of fathers, while less pronounced in this analysis, might be more significant in areas related to autonomy and problem-solving.

4.4.4. Perception of Intimacy, Trust, and Emotional Regulation among Students with Insecure Parental Attachments

The model summary in Table 11 indicates a robust correlation ($R = .948$) between insecure parental attachment and students' perceptions of intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation, accounting for 89.9% of the variance ($R^2 = .899$). However, the regression coefficients indicate that insecure parental attachment is not a meaningful predictor ($p = .687$). In contrast, perceptions of intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation are highly predictive ($B = 0.971$, $\beta = 0.928$, $p < .001$). This suggests that the quality of students' romantic relationships is influenced more by their perceived capacity to nurture intimacy and manage emotions than by parental attachment alone. This results in both affirming and disputing findings from previous studies. Feeney and Noller [16] and Collins and Feeney [11] stressed that insecure parental attachments might hinder trust and emotional control in adult relationships, implying a more straightforward connection than is presented here. The current findings are more in line with those of Zimmermann and Iwanski [41], who found that by the end of adolescence, individual strategies for regulating emotions and peer connections are more critical predictors of the quality of romantic attachments than parental attachment history. This also aligns with Arnett [2]'s emerging adulthood theory, which posits that young adults progressively cultivate independence and self-regulation that can help mitigate early attachment-related insecurities.

5. Conclusion

This research examined how parental attachment affects romantic relationships in adult life among undergraduate students at Rivers State University. The results indicate that attachment to parents is a crucial predictor of adult romantic attachment styles,

clarifying considerable variability in students' romantic behaviors. The nature of parental relationships influences secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles, with maternal attachment stronger than paternal in shaping behaviors related to romantic relationships. Notable gender differences were observed, with female students showing significantly higher romantic attachment scores than male students, suggesting that early attachment experiences may be more important for women in establishing adult romantic connections. While insecure parental attachment correlated with students' perceptions of intimacy, trust, and emotional management, these aspects were ultimately more influenced by students' own feelings and emotional skills than by parental attachment. In summary, the research supports the idea that although parental attachment provides the groundwork for adult romantic relationships, personal emotional management and relational capabilities play vital roles in late adolescence and early adulthood.

5.1. Recommendations

- The university, in partnership with community stakeholders, should create workshops or outreach initiatives for parents to increase awareness of the enduring effects of secure attachment on their children's emotional and relational growth. This will help parents develop supportive methods that cultivate trust and emotional stability.
- Rivers State University should enhance its counseling resources to incorporate attachment-focused therapy and training in emotional regulation, helping students, especially those with insecure attachment backgrounds, acquire healthy interpersonal skills, resolve conflicts, and establish trust in romantic relationships.
- Given the notable differences between genders, relationship education initiatives should be tailored to the unique needs of both male and female students. For instance, workshops could emphasize encouraging emotional expression among males and promoting balanced attachment behaviors among females.
- Future research should explore how peer relationships, cultural expectations, and socio-economic factors, alongside parental attachment, shape romantic relationships. Such inquiries will enhance understanding of the changing significance of parental ties as students move into adulthood.

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