



ATTACHMENT STYLES AND PREDISPOSITION TO FORM PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH FICTIONAL BOOK CHARACTERS

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We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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The aim of the present study was to find the relationship between different attachment styles and their predisposition to form Para social relationships with fictional book characters. Para social Relationships (PSR) are the one sided emotional and psychological bonds media users form with media personas such as characters in television, movies, books or even with celebrities. The past findings on Para social relationships and attachment styles have found that there is no significant correlation between Para social relationships and romantic attachment styles. The objective of this study was to find how different attachment styles correlate with Para social relationships and finding gender differences in the attachment styles as well as in the formation of Para social relationships with book characters. Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990) and Multiple Para social Relationship Scale (Tukachinsky, 2010) were used. 100 participants took part in this study from Delhi and NCR region out of which 50 were males and 50 females and the results were analyzed. The findings indicated that there is no significant relationship between the attachment styles and Para social relationships in adults. No gender difference was found in the experience of Para social relationships as well.

INTRODUCTION

Relationships and intimacy are influenced by attachments, a concept introduced by John Bowlby and further developed by Mary Ainsworth 1970s. Bowlby defined attachment as a lasting psychological bond, while Ainsworth saw it as a secure base for exploration. This understanding remains a cornerstone of attachment

theory, which also emphasizes the unique bond between an infant and their primary caregiver as crucial for healthy growth and development. According to Bowlby, attachment theory fulfills important human needs through natural biological responses and behavioral mechanisms.

Attachment is seen as an evolutionary process, showing an emotional bond to another person. Bowlby stressed the importance of a child's early interactions with caregivers. While behavioral theories suggest attachment is learned, Bowlby argued that children have an innate drive to form bonds with caregivers. Attachment also serves to keep infants close to their mothers for survival. Being raised near an attachment figure has historically provided children with comfort, security, and a better chance of reaching adulthood. The development of an attachment system is a result of natural selection.

Throughout history, people have found solace and entertainment in various forms of media, forming connections with characters. This connection can sometimes evolve into a one-sided relationship known as a Para social Relationship, coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956. This term describes the perceived interaction between an audience member and a media personality, where the connection is not mutual.

REVIEW

In a recent study on attachment styles and Para social relationships with fictional book characters, Mula-Márquez et al. (2024) conducted a thorough review of literature to explore how individuals of different age groups establish connections with fictional characters. The research involved various methods and found that both young and older individuals can form strong bonds with fictional characters, leading to positive effects on emotions, behaviors, attitudes, and more. Sibia et al. (2023) focused on the link between romantic attachment styles and parasocial relationships, using a sample of 170 young Indian individuals aged 18-25. The study aimed to address previous limitations by including a broader range of participants and utilizing the Adult Attachment Scale and Multiple Para social Relationship Scale as assessment tools. Lien and Carlson (2023) examined how attachment styles impact the formation of parasocial relationships with celebrities or TV personalities. They analyzed data from 139 college students aged 18 to 21, focusing on experiences and gender. The study found a strong connection between attachment styles and the inclination to engage in one-sided relationships with strangers. Pimienta (2023) conducted a literature review. The results emphasized the similarity between parasocial relationships and traditional attachment processes, highlighting their emotional significance and impact on individuals' socioemotional development and well-being.

MATERIALS & METHODS

To investigate the relationship between secure attachment and the tendency to develop parasocial relationships with fictional book characters in adults. Analyzing the link between anxious attachment and the inclination to form parasocial relationships with fictional book characters among adults. Evaluating the association between avoidant attachment and the predisposition to form parasocial relationships with fictional book characters among adults. Studying the gender gap in the engagement of parasocial relationships.

Sample size

The sample size comprised of 50 males aged between 18-45 years and 50 females aged between 18-45 years, resulting in a total of 100 participants.

Procedure

This research aims to explore the connection between attachment styles and the tendency to form Para social relationships with fictional book characters in adults. The researcher used the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) by Collins & Read (1990) and the Multiple Para social Relationship Scale (MPRS) by Tukachinsky (2010) for this study. The study involved distributing Google Forms for both scales on social media platforms, with questions on attachment style and Para social relationships with media characters. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw, and the confidentiality of their responses. Physical questionnaires were also administered in locations like Daryaganj Book Market and Connaught Place in New Delhi. Demographic information collected included initials, age, gender, relationship status, location, profession, and education. Age categories were 18-24, 25-34, and 35-45, with gender options of female and male. Relationship status options were in a relationship, single, or married, and participants had to select Delhi or Delhi NCR as their current location. Profession was also recorded for a comprehensive participant

profile.

DISCUSSION

The avoidant attachment style is characterized by a reluctance to seek intimacy and depend on others, leading to difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships. This study found that individuals with high avoidant attachment struggle to develop parasocial relationships with fictional characters due to their challenges in forming emotional bonds. This aligns with previous research showing that those with avoidant attachment are less likely to seek social support and face obstacles in intimate relationships, which may extend to their connections with fictional entities.

The findings of this study indicate that attachment styles have an impact on the development of Para social relationships, with individuals who have avoidant attachment styles being less inclined to form connections with fictional book characters. Further investigation is necessary to delve into the mechanisms that govern this association and gain a deeper comprehension of how attachment styles shape Para social relationships. Notably, a positive correlation ($r = 0.0733$) was observed between the two variables, albeit weaker and lower than the correlation for anxious attachment ($r = 0.1554$), suggesting that individuals with avoidant attachment styles are more predisposed to cultivating Para social relationships. Cohen (2004) asserted that those with avoidant attachment styles tend to maintain emotional distance from their favorite TV characters and underestimate the importance of Para social bonds, potentially elucidating the weaker correlation compared to individuals with anxious attachment styles. Moreover, a gender disparity in Para social relationships was identified. Despite the lack of significant difference between males and females in their engagement in Para social relationships, the average scores indicated that women were more inclined to establish such connections than men.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the relationship between adult attachment styles and the tendency to form emotional connections with fictional characters in literature. 100 participants, evenly divided between males and females, completed surveys assessing their attachment styles and their tendencies to bond with characters from various fictional works. The findings revealed that individuals with secure attachment styles were less likely to form strong emotional ties with fictional characters, while those with anxious attachment styles were more inclined to do so. Participants with avoidant attachment styles showed a weak correlation with forming relationships with fictional characters.

Gender differences were also examined, but no significant difference was found, although female adults had a higher mean score for forming Para social bonds compared to male adults.

Future recommendations

Past research has focused on Para social relationships and attachment styles, with limited studies on books. Future research should explore other factors impacting Para social relationships among book readers, including connections with nonfiction authors. Diverse samples from various locations and cultures should be included to draw more generalized conclusions, with studies structured to minimize extraneous variables.

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