

**The Moderating Role of Emotional Regulation on the Relationship between Attachment Style and Rejection Sensitivity**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the award of

Master's Science in Psychology

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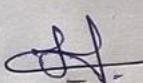
**ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) ERNAKULAM**

**2024**

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, "Moderating Role of Emotional Regulation on the Relationship between Attachment Style and Rejection Sensitivity", is a bonafide record submitted by Ms Arathy V S, Reg.no. SM22PSY004, of St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam under my supervision and guidance and it has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma, fellowship, title or recognition before.

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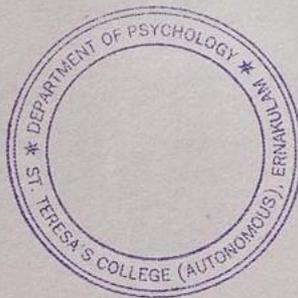
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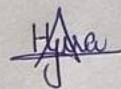
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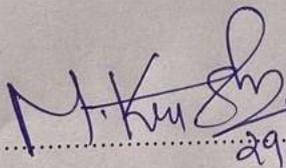
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## **DECLARATION**

I, Arathy V S, do hereby declare that the work represented in the dissertation embodies the results of the original research work done by me in St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Hajira K M, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, it has not been submitted by me to any other university or institution for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, title or recognition before.

Arathy V S

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Department of Psychology at St. Teresa's College in Ernakulam for providing me with the opportunity to conduct this research project. It goes without saying that no project report can be prepared without the assistance and encouragement of others, and this one is no exception. Their support has been invaluable, and I am deeply thankful for it.

I am deeply grateful to my research guide, Ms. Hajira K M, Assistant Professor of Psychology, for her unwavering support and guidance throughout my research journey.

I extend my sincere thanks to my parents, teachers and friends who all have supported me throughout the time. I am grateful to everyone who has given me guidance, encouragement, suggestions and constructive criticisms which have contributed immensely to this project.

Above all, I thank God Almighty for blessing me in all the stages of the project and for helping

I complete the project successfully.

Thanking You

Arathy V S

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## **Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate the moderating influence of emotional regulation on the association between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity among young adults. A sample of 200 individuals participated in the research, responding to standardized questionnaires assessing attachment styles, emotional regulation, and rejection sensitivity. Statistical analyses, including correlation and moderation analysis, were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. Contrary to expectations, the results indicated that emotional regulation did not moderate the relationship between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. Despite extensive research suggesting the importance of emotional regulation in buffering the impact of attachment styles on various psychological outcomes, our findings did not support such a moderating effect in the context of rejection sensitivity among young adults.

*Keywords: Attachment Styles, Emotional Regulation, Rejection Sensitivity, Young Adults*

**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

In the dynamic landscape of young adulthood, encompassing individuals aged 18 to 25, the intricate interplay of attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and emotional regulation shapes the emotional fabric of this transformative stage. Echoing the wisdom of John Bowlby, who emphasized attachment as an ongoing process woven into human nature, the emotional experiences of young adults are profoundly influenced by their attachment styles. Mary Ainsworth's insight into attachment as a transactional process adds depth, illustrating how secure, anxious-preoccupied, or avoidant attachment styles become the blueprint for navigating relationships. These styles, ingrained from early experiences, significantly impact how individuals approach intimacy, seek connections, and establish a sense of self within the social realm.

Geraldine Downey's study on rejection sensitivity has shed light on another layer of complexity in the emotional lives of young adults. Rejection sensitivity acts as an additional antenna that shapes their perceptions of social interactions, influencing their decision-making abilities and overall emotional resilience. This age group is marked by the pursuit of social belonging and identity affirmation, making the fear of rejection a significant force that affects how they navigate friendships, romantic relationships, and broader social contexts. Additionally, emotional regulation, as articulated by Daniel Goleman, emerges as a vital skill that guides young adults through the turbulent seas of their experiences. This cornerstone of emotional intelligence becomes especially crucial as individuals deal with the intensity of emotions inherent in academic pursuits, career aspirations, and the intricacies of forming and maintaining relationships. Together, these psychological constructs weave a complex narrative that offers insights into the emotional terrain traversed by young adults during this critical phase of self-discovery and growth.

## **Attachment Styles**

Adult attachment styles, defined as enduring patterns of relating to others in close relationships, find their roots in early childhood experiences with primary caregivers. These attachment patterns significantly impact how individuals form connections with romantic partners, friends, and family members in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Secure attachment, characterized by comfort with intimacy and trust in relationships, fosters open communication and constructive conflict resolution (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). On the contrary, anxious-preoccupied attachment involves a craving for intimacy coupled with a fear of rejection, often leading to clinginess and misinterpretation of partner actions (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Dismissive-avoidant attachment emphasizes independence, potentially hindering emotional closeness and vulnerability (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Lastly, disorganized attachment results from unpredictable or traumatic childhood experiences, manifesting in conflicting desires for closeness and emotional distancing (Main & Solomon, 1986). It is crucial to recognize that attachment styles are malleable, influenced by self-awareness, therapeutic interventions, and positive relationships, allowing individuals to develop more secure patterns over time (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

### ***Theories associated with adult attachment styles***

The most prominent theory explaining adult attachment styles is Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1973). It proposes that early interactions with primary caregivers shape internal working models, mental blueprints of self and others, guiding how we connect in adult relationships. Secure attachments in childhood, marked by consistent availability and responsiveness from caregivers, lead to secure adult styles characterized by trust, confidence, and comfort with

intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Conversely, inconsistent or insensitive caregiving fosters insecure attachment styles: anxious-preoccupied, marked by neediness and fear of rejection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991); dismissive-avoidant, characterized by emotional distance and self-sufficiency (Fraley & Davis, 1996); and disorganized, exhibiting unpredictable behavior due to conflicting attachment desires (Main & Solomon, 1990).

However, recent theories refine Attachment Theory's focus on childhood experiences. Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of adult experiences in shaping attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It suggests that romantic relationships and social interactions can modify attachment patterns over time. Additionally, Evolutionary Theories propose that attachment styles evolved as adaptive strategies (Buss, 2000). Secure attachment promotes survival and reproduction, while insecure styles might have been advantageous in unpredictable environments. Understanding these diverse theories offers a more comprehensive perspective on understanding and potentially changing adult attachment styles.

### ***Factors Influencing Adult Attachment Styles***

Adult attachment styles, which are the patterns we exhibit in close relationships, are influenced by various factors, as highlighted by research in developmental psychology (Fonagy & Bateman, 2002). The foundation for these styles undoubtedly lies in early childhood experiences, particularly the quality of caregiving received from primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). Consistent, sensitive care from responsive caregivers fosters the development of a secure attachment style. This style is characterized by trust, confidence in relationships, and the ability to seek comfort and support when needed (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). On the other hand, inconsistent or insensitive caregiving experiences, marked by emotional unavailability or unpredictable responses, can contribute to the development of insecure attachment styles (Bartholomew, 1990). These insecure styles can manifest in various ways,

such as anxious attachment (characterized by a fear of abandonment and a constant need for reassurance), dismissive-avoidant attachment (characterized by a preference for independence and a discomfort with intimacy), or disorganized attachment (characterized by a mixture of anxious and avoidant behaviors) (Bartholomew, 1990). However, childhood experiences are not the only factors that shape attachment styles. Genetic predispositions, such as temperament and neurobiology, also play a role in determining attachment styles (Cassidy et al., 1992). For instance, a child with a more biologically sensitive temperament might be more susceptible to developing insecure attachment styles in response to insensitive caregiving compared to a child with a less sensitive temperament. Additionally, life experiences beyond childhood can influence attachment styles throughout life. Romantic relationships, stressful events, cultural norms, and even therapeutic interventions can contribute to the evolution of attachment styles (Fraley & Davis, 1996; Simpson, 1990). It's important to remember that these factors don't operate in isolation. Rather, they interact in unique ways for each individual, making the attachment journey a complex and personalized experience (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). While early experiences hold significant weight, understanding these diverse influences empowers us to gain valuable insight into our attachment styles and, potentially, foster healthier and more secure connections in the future (Wei et al., 2010).

### **Rejection Sensitivity**

Rejection sensitivity refers to a heightened emotional response to perceived or real rejection, going beyond the typical discomfort most people experience (Leibenluft et al., 2018). Individuals with high rejection sensitivity tend to anticipate, misinterpret and intensely react to even minor slights or setbacks, interpreting them as evidence of inadequacy or

unworthiness (Diamond et al., 2016). This can lead to feelings of shame, anxiety, and even anger, impacting self-esteem, relationships, and overall well-being (Chopik et al., 2020).

While not a clinical diagnosis, rejection sensitivity is often seen in individuals with conditions like ADHD, depression, and social anxiety, highlighting its potential influence on mental health (Ziegler et al., 2019).

### *Theories associated with Rejection Sensitivity*

Evolutionary Theory, proposed by Buss (1999), suggests it might be an inherited trait. Our ancestors hypersensitive to social cues like exclusion were more likely to survive and reproduce. However, in modern society, this sensitivity might lead to unnecessary overreactions. Attachment Theory, based on Bowlby's work (1969), links rejection sensitivity to early childhood experiences. Inconsistent or insensitive caregiving can foster insecure attachment styles marked by a fear of rejection, making individuals more sensitive to perceived slights as adults, seeking to avoid the emotional pain of abandonment.

CognitiveAffective Processing Theory, developed by Downey and Feldman (1996), delves into how individuals with high rejection sensitivity process information. They propose that these individuals not only vigilantly search for rejection cues but also interpret them more negatively and react more intensely, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of fear and avoidance. Finally, Social Learning Theory, emphasized by Hazan and Shaver (1987), highlights the role of social experiences. Romantic relationships and social interactions can shape sensitivity over time. Repeated rejections might solidify existing sensitivities, while supportive and accepting relationships can foster more secure responses. Remember, these theories are not mutually exclusive. They likely interact in complex ways to influence individual differences

in rejection sensitivity. Understanding these diverse perspectives offers a valuable framework for exploring this important trait and its potential impact on our lives.

### ***Factors influencing Rejection Sensitivity***

Rejection sensitivity, that heightened emotional response to perceived or real rejection, is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Evolutionary theories suggest a possible genetic predisposition for sensitivity, inherited from ancestors who needed to be alert to social threats (Gilbert et al., 2013). However, this can lead to overreactions in modern contexts. Attachment theory, as proposed by Bowlby (1969), highlights the influence of early experiences.

Inconsistent or insensitive caregiving can lead to insecure attachment styles, characterized by a fear of rejection, making individuals more vulnerable (Bartholomew, 1990). Beyond early experiences, cognitive processing plays a role. Individuals high in sensitivity may hyper vigilantly scan for rejection cues, misinterpreting neutral actions and reacting intensely, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of fear and avoidance (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Finally, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes the impact of ongoing experiences.

Repeated rejections can reinforce sensitivity, while supportive interactions can foster more secure responses. Understanding rejection sensitivity requires considering a combination of these biological, developmental, cognitive, and social factors, all interacting to shape how individuals navigate social connections and respond to perceived rejection.

### **Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage your emotions effectively, influencing how you experience, express, and respond to them (Gross, 2015). It's not about suppressing emotions entirely, but rather about developing healthy strategies to navigate them in a way that promotes well-being and helps you achieve your goals. This can involve calming yourself down when feeling overwhelmed, expressing emotions assertively when needed, or

choosing constructive responses to challenging situations. Effective emotional regulation involves various skills, including identifying emotions, understanding their triggers, and utilizing strategies like mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and cognitive reframing to manage their intensity and duration (Goldin et al., 2008). This ability plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, impacting mental and physical health, relationships, and overall well-being (Gross, 2014).

### ***Theories associated with Emotional Regulation***

Gross's Process Model suggests that we can regulate our emotions at different stages. These stages range from avoiding stressful situations to reframing thoughts and employing relaxation techniques. Cognitive Appraisal Theory highlights how our interpretation of events shapes our emotional response. It emphasizes the power of perspective shifts. Social Learning Theory underlines the impact of observing and interacting with others. It suggests that we can learn healthy regulation skills through positive social experiences. Neurobiological Theories delve into the brain's role, offering insights into the mechanisms behind emotional control. Finally, Attachment Theory reminds us that early childhood experiences can shape our ability to regulate emotions. Secure attachment fosters healthy skills, while insecure styles may lead to challenges. Recognizing these diverse perspectives offers a comprehensive understanding of emotional regulation. It empowers us to develop strategies that promote well-being by effectively managing and expressing our emotions.

### ***Factors influencing Emotional Regulation***

Our ability to navigate the complex world of emotions, influencing how we experience, express, and respond to them, is shaped by a multifaceted interplay of factors. Individual characteristics like temperament, personality traits, and coping styles play a

significant role (Gross & John, 2003). For example, someone naturally optimistic might bounce back from setbacks more easily than someone prone to pessimism. Cognitive processes also matter. Our ability to identify and understand emotions, reframe negative thoughts, and employ mental imagery can significantly impact regulation (Gross, 2015). Early childhood experiences, particularly the quality of attachment relationships with caregivers, lay the foundation for emotional regulation skills. Secure attachment fosters healthy patterns, while insecure attachment can lead to challenges (Bowlby, 1969). Social and cultural influences shape expectations and beliefs around emotional expression, impacting how we regulate emotions in different contexts (Matsumoto, 1996). Furthermore, biological factors like genetic predispositions and brain function can influence emotional reactivity and the effectiveness of specific regulation strategies (Canli et al., 2006). Finally, ongoing life experiences, like stress, trauma, and social support, can dynamically affect our emotional regulation abilities (Charles & Hofmann, 2012). Ultimately, understanding these multifaceted factors empowers us to explore healthy strategies and interventions that best suit our individual needs and circumstances, promoting emotional well-being and building resilience in the face of life's challenges.

### **Rationale of the study**

The study titled 'The Moderating Role of Emotional Regulation on Adult Attachment Styles and Rejection Sensitivity among Young Adults' aims to fill a gap in the existing research by exploring the complex interactions between emotional regulation, adult attachment styles, and rejection sensitivity among young adults. While previous studies have individually examined these constructs, there is limited understanding of how emotional regulation can shape the relationship between adult attachment styles and rejection sensitivity during this crucial developmental period. Given the challenges and changes that young adult

face in their interpersonal relationships, understanding the moderating role of emotional regulation becomes crucial for addressing their social and emotional well-being. This study seeks to provide valuable insights that could help develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms to promote emotional regulation and healthy relationships among young adults.

### **Statement of the problem**

The study titled "The moderating role of emotional regulation on adult attachment styles and rejection sensitivity among young adults" aims to fill a significant gap in current research. It aims to examine the complex relationship between emotional regulation, adult attachment styles, and rejection sensitivity in the specific context of young adulthood. Although extensive research exists on each of these variables independently, the study seeks to explore the nuanced interplay and potential moderating effects of emotional regulation within the unique challenges of young adulthood. Understanding how emotional regulation may influence the connection between adult attachment styles and rejection sensitivity is essential, given the significant developmental changes and challenges in interpersonal relationships during this life stage. The study aims to contribute valuable insights into the psychological well-being of young adults, informing potential interventions and support strategies that promote emotional regulation and foster healthier social connections during this critical period of development.

**CHAPTER II**  
**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A literature review is a process of analysing previously published works on a specific topic to define and clarify a particular problem. It involves summarizing previous investigations, identifying relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature, and suggesting the next steps in solving the problem. The objective of writing a literature review is to facilitate the understanding of information on the current topic under study. The variables under study among young adults are attachment styles, which refers to the enduring patterns of behavior and emotions established in early relationships, influencing how individuals connect with others, and rejection sensitivity which refers to a heightened tendency to expect, perceive, and intensely react to rejection, real or perceived. Emotional regulation refers to the ability to influence the intensity, expression, and duration of emotional states in response to internal and external situations.

Research has consistently shown a significant relationship between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. Kothuru (2023) found that close and dependent attachment styles were associated with higher rejection sensitivity, while the anxious attachment style was linked to a specific dimension of emotion regulation.

A recent study titled "Rejection Sensitivity and Romantic Attachment: A Dyadic Analysis" (2022) by Kim, Y. et al. explored the relationship between rejection sensitivity and romantic attachment in the context of romantic relationships. The study involved 120 couples and used both self-report measures and observed interactions. The findings revealed that there is a reciprocal relationship between rejection sensitivity and insecure attachment. Additionally, the study showed that rejection sensitivity moderates the association between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. In other words, the complex interplay between these two constructs (rejection sensitivity and romantic attachment styles) shapes the dynamics of romantic partnerships.

A preliminary study conducted by De Panfilis et al. in 2020 explored the relationship between rejection sensitivity, emotion regulation strategies, and emotional distress in adolescents. The study revealed that adolescents with high rejection sensitivity tend to use less adaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as rumination and suppression, which ultimately leads to higher levels of emotional distress.

The study "The Dual Role of Emotional Regulation and Rejection Sensitivity in Interpersonal Dynamics" conducted by Johnson et al. in 2018, aimed to investigate the impact of emotional regulation and rejection sensitivity on interpersonal relationships. The study was carried out for six years and involved a sample of 400 participants, where self-report measures and behavioral observations were used. The findings highlighted that individual who effectively regulated their emotions exhibited lower rejection sensitivity, which led to more positive interactions with others. The study also revealed that the relationship between emotional regulation and rejection sensitivity was affected by the quality of social interactions.

The study "Attachment Styles and Rejection Sensitivity: An Integrative Model" (2017) by Martin, S. et al. proposed an integrative model to understand how attachment styles contribute to the development of rejection sensitivity, by combining attachment theory with rejection sensitivity. The research involved 200 participants who completed self-report measures of attachment and rejection sensitivity. The findings showed that individuals with insecure attachment styles, especially those with high levels of attachment anxiety, were more likely to develop rejection sensitivity. The statistical analysis revealed that attachment styles played a significant mediating role in the relationship between early experiences and the development of rejection sensitivity. This study provides a detailed understanding of how attachment and rejection sensitivity are related.

"Attachment Styles and Mental Health: A Meta-Analysis" (2017) by Smith et al. is a research study that analyzed data from 30 independent studies. The goal of this study was to investigate the relationship between attachment styles and mental health outcomes. The study incorporated a diverse population of 10,000 participants and used a random-effects model to analyze the pooled effect sizes. The results showed a strong association between insecure attachment styles and a higher risk for various mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Subgroup analyses further highlighted the differential impact of attachment styles on specific mental health outcomes, emphasizing the importance of understanding attachment dynamics in psychological interventions.

A study conducted by Romero-Canyas et al. in 2010 titled "Rejection sensitivity and the rejection-hostility link in romantic relationships" explored the potential role of rejection sensitivity in the link between perceived rejection and hostility within romantic relationships. According to the study, individuals with anxious attachment styles and high rejection sensitivity tend to perceive rejection from their partners more easily. Consequently, they respond with heightened hostility, which can lead to increased conflicts and dissatisfaction within the relationship.

Berenson et al. (2009) investigated the impact of rejection sensitivity on attentional processes in response to social threat cues in their study titled "Rejection sensitivity and disruption of attention by social threat cues." Their research demonstrated that individuals with high rejection sensitivity, particularly those with anxious attachment styles, exhibit heightened vigilance towards social rejection cues. This heightened sensitivity leads to attentional biases and impaired cognitive functioning in social contexts.

In 2007, Mikulincer and Shaver conducted a study titled "Attachment in Adulthood:

Structure, Dynamics, and Change," which provides a detailed examination of attachment theory in adulthood. The study focuses on how attachment styles impact an individual's perception and response to rejection. The researchers found that those with anxious attachment styles tend to have heightened levels of rejection sensitivity, leading to intensified emotional responses when faced with perceived rejection across various contexts.

London et al. (2007) investigates the social causes and consequences of rejection sensitivity in adolescents in their study titled "Social causes and consequences of rejection sensitivity." They highlight that rejection sensitivity is not only influenced by early experiences of rejection but also impacts various aspects of adolescents' social functioning, including their ability to regulate emotions effectively. This suggests a bidirectional relationship between rejection sensitivity and emotional regulation in adolescence.

Campbell et al. (2005) explored how attachment anxiety influences perceptions of conflict and support in romantic relationships in their study titled "Perceptions of conflict and support in romantic relationships: The role of attachment anxiety." Their findings revealed that individuals with anxious attachment styles, characterized by high rejection sensitivity, are more inclined to perceive conflicts as indicative of rejection. Additionally, they interpret supportive behaviors from their partners with skepticism, contributing to relationship dissatisfaction and instability.

"Rejection Sensitivity and Interpersonal Problems: A Longitudinal Study" is significant research conducted by Downey, G. et al. in 2005. This study investigated how rejection sensitivity can affect interpersonal functioning over time. The research spanned over five years and involved a sample of 400 adolescents. The study used self-report measures and observational data to analyse the findings. The results revealed that individuals with heightened rejection sensitivity showed increased issues in forming and maintaining

relationships over time, which affected their social functioning. Statistical analyses also showed a significant correlation between baseline rejection sensitivity scores and later interpersonal challenges, highlighting the long-lasting effects of rejection sensitivity on social functioning.

Park, Crocker, and Mickelson (2004) explored the relationship between attachment styles and contingencies of self-worth in their study titled "Attachment styles and contingencies of self-worth." They found that individuals with insecure attachment styles, especially those characterized by anxious attachments, tend to derive their self-worth from external validation. Consequently, this makes them highly susceptible to rejection sensitivity and emotional distress in social interactions, thereby perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability.

The study "Attachment Styles and Their Impact on Adult Relationships" conducted in 2001 by Simpson, J. et al. explored the link between attachment styles and adult relationships. The researchers carried out a longitudinal analysis that spanned over a decade, looking at the attachment styles of a diverse sample of 500 participants. The study used a combination of self-report measures and observational methods and found a significant correlation between early attachment patterns and the quality of adult romantic relationships. Statistical analyses revealed a strong association between insecure attachment in childhood and relationship dissatisfaction in adulthood, which highlights the enduring impact of early attachment experiences.

Melnick and Hinshaw (2000) examine the relationship between emotion regulation, rejection sensitivity, and social behaviors in boys with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) compared to typically developing boys in their study titled "Emotion regulation and parenting in AD/HD and comparison boys: Linkages with social behaviors and peer preference." Their study reveals that boys with ADHD, who often struggle with emotion

regulation, exhibit higher levels of rejection sensitivity, leading to difficulties in social interactions and lower peer preference.

In their 1996 study titled "Implications of Rejection Sensitivity for Intimate Relationships," Downey and Feldman discuss the impact of rejection sensitivity on intimate relationships. The study shows that individuals with high rejection sensitivity often face difficulties in building and sustaining intimate relationships. Furthermore, the study highlights the relationship between anxious attachment styles and increased sensitivity to rejection cues, which can lead to interpersonal problems and dissatisfaction in relationships.

Collins and Read (1990) conducted a study titled "Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples," wherein they investigate the correlation between adult attachment styles and relationship quality among dating couples. Their research reveals that individuals with insecure attachment styles, particularly those exhibiting traits of anxiety, tend to display greater rejection sensitivity. This heightened sensitivity predisposes them to perceive rejection even where it may not exist, consequently contributing to relational distress and conflict.

These studies have shown that there is a strong connection between emotional regulation and rejection sensitivity in both adolescents and adults. They suggest that effective emotion regulation skills can mitigate the negative consequences of rejection sensitivity on mental health, while conversely, poor emotion regulation can worsen it.

**CHAPTER III**  
**METHODS**

## **Aim**

This study aims to investigate the influence of Emotional Regulation on the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection Sensitivity.

## **Objectives**

1. To study the relationship between secure attachment styles and Rejection Sensitivity
2. To study the relationship between avoidant attachment styles and Rejection Sensitivity
3. To study the relationship between anxious attachment styles and Rejection Sensitivity
4. To examine whether Emotional regulation will moderate the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection sensitivity

## **Hypotheses**

- (H1): There is a relationship between secure attachment styles and rejection sensitivity.
- (H2): There is a relationship between avoidant attachment styles and rejection sensitivity
- (H3) There is a relationship between anxious attachment styles and rejection sensitivity
- (H4) Emotional Regulation will moderate the relationship between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity

## **Research Design**

To accomplish the objectives, a cross-sectional study was used and to find the relationship between the variables, Spearman's rank correlational research design was employed as the data are not normally distributed. Moderation analysis was used to determine the moderating effect of emotion regulation on attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. These designs are effective methods for identifying relationships between variables, which was essential for meeting the goals of the study.

## **Sample and Sampling**

The population of the present study is young adults between the age range of 18-25. A sample of 200 young adults will be included in the study. To draw a sample from the population convenient sampling method is used.

### *Inclusion Criteria*

1. Young adults between the age of 18-25 are included.
2. Young adults residing in Ernakulam
3. Young adults with the ability to understand and complete the study measures in English are also included.

### *Exclusion Criteria*

1. Young adults from districts other than Ernakulam were excluded.
2. Young adults who don't have at least a Grade 12 education were excluded.

## Tools Used

### 1. Socio-demographic sheet

Socio-demographic sheets were used to collect information regarding age, gender, education, and occupation.

### 2. Adult attachment Style (AAS)

The Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) was officially developed in 1990 but built on the earlier work of Hazen & Shaver (1987) and Levy & Davis (1988). The scale consists of 18 items scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale. It measures adult attachment styles named “Secure”, “Anxious”, and “Avoidant”. Collins & Read (1990) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .69 for Close, .75 for Depend, and .72 for Anxiety. Test-retest correlations for 2 months .68 for Close, .71 for Depend, and .52 for Anxiety.

### 3. Rejection sensitivity (RS)

It is a cognitive–affective processing disposition to anxiously expect rejection, shaped by cognitive-social learning history and triggered in situations when either rejection or acceptance is possible. The RS-Adult questionnaire (A-RSQ) is an adaptation of the RSQ (Downey & Feldman, 1996) for assessing RS in adults. It has good internal consistency and construct validity, making it a reliable tool for assessing rejection sensitivity.

### 4. Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

It is a 10-item scale to measure respondents’ tendency to regulate their emotions developed by Gross et. al(2003) Respondents answer each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It has good internal consistency and construct validity, making it a reliable tool for assessing emotional regulation.

**Operational definition**

## 1. Attachment Style

It is operationally defined as the total scores of the three subscales namely, secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles. The secure scale measures the extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. The depend scale measures the extent to which a person feels he/she can depend on others to be available when needed. The anxiety subscale measures the extent to which a person is worried about being abandoned or unloved.

## 2. Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity is operationally defined as the sum total of the 9 items in the RSAdult questionnaire. It assesses an individual's tendency to expect, perceive, and overreact to rejection in interpersonal situations. High scores on rejection sensitivity indicate a heightened sensitivity to signs of rejection and a tendency to react strongly, even in situations where rejection may not be intended.

## 3. Emotional Regulation

Emotional Regulation is operationally defined as the sum total of 10 items on the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). The ERQ aims to capture how individuals regulate their emotions through cognitive processes, such as reappraisal, and behavioral strategies.

**Procedure**

The data was collected from 200 young adults and analysed individually. Three questionnaires which include all the questions from the Adult Attachment scale, Rejection

ATTACHMENT STYLES, EMOTIONAL REGULATION, REJECTION SENSITIVITY 31  
Sensitivity scale, and Emotional Regulation questionnaire were distributed to the participants.

They were instructed to choose the option honestly which they felt was apt for them. The researcher told them that the information is kept confidential and used only for study purposes.

The collected data was coded for further analysis.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Ethical considerations for the present study involved the assurance of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participant's data. In addition, participants were informed that the data collected would be used strictly for research purposes and would not be shared with other parties or organizations. Informed consent was taken before their participation communicating the information about the purpose of the study and of their right to withdraw from the study at any point of time.

### **Statistical analysis**

The data was collected, coded, and entered into Excel. It was then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 29.0. A test of normality Kolmogorov-Smirnova test was done to check if the data was parametric or not and based on the nature of the data the appropriate statistical tools were selected. Spearman's rank correlation was used to find relationships between variables. Moderation analysis was used to find out the moderating effect of emotional regulation on attachment styles and rejection sensitivity.

**Normality Analysis**

Table 1

*Result of Kolmogorov-Smirnova of normality*

Variables	Sig.
Attachment styles	0.001
Emotional Regulation	0.002
Rejection sensitivity	0.007

Table 1 shows the results of the normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnova test. Attachment styles, Emotional regulation, and Rejection sensitivity scales were found to be not normally distributed ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the sample. Since the data is not distributed normally, a non-parametric test will be used to establish the correlation between the variables.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The study aims to investigate how emotional regulation influences the relationship between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. Specifically, it examines the correlation between Attachment Styles and Rejection Sensitivity and whether Emotional Regulation moderates the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection Sensitivity.

Table 2

*Mean and standard deviation of attachment styles, emotional regulation, and rejection sensitivity*

	Attachment styles	Emotional regulation	Rejection sensitivity
N	200	200	200
Mean	51.17	46.65	18.78
Standard deviation	10.79	10.96	3.64

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of variables among 200 young adults. The present study reports the descriptive statistics of three variables, namely, attachment styles, emotional regulation, and rejection sensitivity. The mean and standard deviation (SD) of Attachment styles were found to be 51.17 and 10.79 respectively. Similarly, the mean and SD of Emotional Regulation were found to be 46.65 and 10.96, respectively. Lastly, the mean and SD of Rejection sensitivity were 18.78 and 3.64, respectively. These descriptive statistics provide critical insights into the distribution and variability of the three variables and can be used to make informed decisions about attachment styles and rejection sensitivity among young adults.

H1: There is a relationship between secure attachment styles and rejection sensitivity

Table 3

*Spearman's rank correlation between secure attachment style and rejection sensitivity among young adults*

	Rejection sensitivity
Secure attachment style	-0.032

Table 3 shows the results of Spearman's rank correlation between secure attachment style and rejection sensitivity among young adults. The result indicates that there is a weak negative correlation between secure attachment style and rejection sensitivity which was found to be not significant. Thus, the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, current literature, as demonstrated in studies by Simpson et al. (1992) and Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), does not support the notion that a positive correlation exists between secure attachment style and rejection sensitivity. Collins and Feeney (2004) propose that individuals with secure attachment styles may experience rejection sensitivity, but their positive internal working models and adaptive support-seeking strategies equip them to cope effectively with such situations.

H2: There is a relationship between avoidant attachment styles and rejection sensitivity

Table 4

*Spearman 's rank correlation between avoidant attachment style and rejection sensitivity among young adults*

	Rejection sensitivity
Avoidant attachment style	0.124

Table 4 shows the results of Spearman's rank correlation between avoidant attachment style and rejection sensitivity among young adults. The result indicates that there is a weak positive correlation between avoidant attachment style and rejection sensitivity which was found to be not significant. Thus, the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

One possible interpretation of these results is that while there might be a tendency for individuals with avoidant attachment styles to exhibit slightly elevated levels of rejection sensitivity, the relationship is not strong enough to be deemed significant. A study by Berant, Mikulincer, and Florian (2001) investigated the link between avoidant attachment and reactions to social exclusion. Their findings indicated that individuals with avoidant attachment tendencies may show heightened sensitivity to rejection, supporting the idea that rejection sensitivity is not limited to anxious attachment styles.

Table 5

*Spearman's rank correlation between anxious attachment style and rejection sensitivity among young adults*

	Rejection sensitivity
Anxious attachment style	0.006

Table 5 shows the results of Spearman's rank correlation between anxious attachment style and rejection sensitivity among young adults. The result indicates that there is a weak positive correlation between anxious attachment style and rejection sensitivity which was found to be not significant. Thus, the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

Although empirical data fails to support a significant positive correlation, literature by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) and Ein-Dor et al. (2011) highlights the complex nature of anxious attachment and its association with rejection sensitivity. This association is influenced by individual differences and contextual factors, resulting in variability in the relationship. Therefore, further research is needed to comprehend how anxious attachment contributes to reactions to rejection fully.

rejection sensitivity

Table 6

*Summary of moderation analysis examining the moderating effect of emotional regulation in the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection sensitivity.*

Model	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	T	Sig.	Coeff
<b>Model Summary</b>						
			.7344		.2857	
Emotional				.0151		
Regulation x	.0177	.0108	2.3303		.1284	
<b>Attachment Style</b>						
Int_1					-1.5265	-.0230

Table 6 shows the moderating effect of Emotional regulation in the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection sensitivity. The result indicates that Emotional regulation does not moderate the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection sensitivity. Thus, the hypothesis stating emotional regulation will moderate the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection sensitivity is rejected.

Research by Niven, Totterdell, and Holman (2009) investigated the role of emotional regulation in interpersonal relationships, particularly in the workplace. Their work emphasized that effective emotional regulation could impact how individuals perceive and respond to social cues, potentially influencing sensitivity to rejection. However, the absence

ATTACHMENT STYLES, EMOTIONAL REGULATION, REJECTION SENSITIVITY 39  
of a moderating effect in the current study suggests that the relationship between attachment  
styles and rejection sensitivity may operate independently of emotional regulation.

**CHAPTER V**  
**CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to investigate the moderating role of emotional regulation on the association between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. However, the findings diverged from the initial expectations. It was found that there exists a weak and statistically insignificant correlation between attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) and rejection sensitivity. Additionally, emotional regulation did not emerge as a significant moderator in the connection between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. These results challenge traditional understandings of how attachment styles relate to rejection sensitivity.

While attachment theory suggests a direct connection between attachment styles developed in early childhood and subsequent interpersonal behaviors and perceptions, our findings suggest that the relationship may be more complex. It seems that factors beyond attachment styles alone may significantly shape how individuals interpret and respond to perceived rejection.

One possible explanation for these unexpected findings could be the presence of individual differences in coping strategies and resilience. As proposed by Belsky and Cassidy (1994), individuals may develop coping mechanisms that mitigate the impact of their attachment styles on rejection sensitivity. For instance, individuals with insecure attachment styles may develop adaptive coping strategies over time, such as seeking social support or reframing negative experiences, which could reduce their sensitivity to rejection.

Additionally, cultural differences in the expression and interpretation of attachment behaviors and rejection sensitivity may contribute to the observed associations. Cultural norms and values influence how individuals perceive and react to social cues, including rejection (Van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Thus, the influence of attachment styles on rejection sensitivity may vary across different cultural contexts, underscoring the importance of considering cultural factors in understanding these dynamics.

Furthermore, the study highlights the limited role of emotional regulation in moderating the association between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. Although emotional regulation is essential for managing emotional responses to social cues, it appears that individuals' regulatory abilities may not significantly change the impact of their attachment styles on rejection sensitivity. This suggests that the mechanisms underlying the relationship between attachment styles and rejection sensitivity may operate independently of emotional regulation or may be influenced by other factors not captured in our study.

### **Findings**

1. There is a weak negative correlation between secure attachment style and rejection sensitivity.
2. There is a weak positive correlation between avoidant attachment style and rejection sensitivity.
3. There is a weak positive correlation between anxious attachment style and rejection sensitivity.
4. Emotional regulation does not moderate the relationship between Attachment styles and Rejection sensitivity.

### **Implications of the study**

1. The study's findings may not apply to broader populations due to its narrow regional focus. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying these findings to other regions or cultural contexts. Replication of the study in diverse geographic locations is necessary to ensure the generalizability of its results.
2. It is crucial to consider cultural and socio-economic factors when understanding attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and emotional regulation. Interventions should

be tailored to account for the specific cultural nuances and contextual factors present in the target population.

3. The study's limited sample size may affect the statistical power and reliability of its findings. Recruiting larger and more diverse samples can enhance the robustness of the results. Rigorous statistical methods should be employed to ensure the validity of the study's findings.
4. Time constraints during data collection may introduce bias or measurement error. Clear instructions and adequate support for participants are essential to minimize response biases and enhance the quality of the data.
5. Understanding how attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and emotional regulation evolve over the lifespan can help inform early intervention strategies and promote healthy socio-emotional development across different life stages. Longitudinal studies can guide the development of targeted interventions tailored to individuals' changing needs.
6. Recognizing the significant role of family dynamics in shaping attachment and social behaviors underscores the importance of family-based interventions. Interventions aimed at enhancing parental caregiving behaviors and promoting secure attachment relationships can have long-lasting effects on individuals' social and emotional wellbeing.
7. Acknowledging the influence of social support networks on attachment styles, rejection sensitivity, and emotional regulation highlights the importance of fostering supportive relationships. Interventions targeting peer relationships, romantic partnerships, and community connections can buffer against the negative effects of rejection sensitivity and promote adaptive emotional regulation strategies.

**Limitations:**

One significant limitation of the study is its narrow regional focus, as it solely concentrates on participants from the Ernakulam district. This restricted geographic scope raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings to broader populations, as cultural and socio-economic factors specific to this region may not accurately represent the experiences and behaviors of individuals from other areas. Additionally, the study's sample size might limit the statistical power and reliability of the results, potentially compromising the ability to detect meaningful associations or draw robust conclusions. Moreover, time constraints during data collection may have constrained participants' responses and engagement with the assessment tasks, potentially introducing bias or measurement error. These limitations underscore the need for caution when interpreting the findings and highlight the importance of replicating the study in diverse settings with larger samples to validate the observed relationships.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Informed Consent**

Greetings,

I am Arathy V S, MSc psychology student of St Teresa's College Ernakulum, Kerala. As part of my final year project, I am doing a study on the topic "The Moderating Role Of Emotional Regulation On Attachment Styles And Rejection Sensitivity Among Young Adults" under the supervision of Asst. Prof. Hajira K M. I humbly request you to read each question and fill up the form which will only take up 10-15 minutes of your time. Always feel free to discontinue at any stage, if you are uncomfortable. I assure you that the information you are given will be confidential and is considered only for research purposes. You can participate in this research study if you belong to the age group of 18-25.

Thank you for your generous time.

#### **Consent form**

I have read and understood all the information thereby giving my consent to participate in this study.

**I'm willing to participate in the study: YES/NO**

**Appendix B: Socio-Demographic sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Education: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C: Adult Attachment Style**

Instructions: Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which it describes your feelings about romantic relationships. Please think about all your relationships (past and present) and respond in terms of how you generally feel in these relationships. If you have never been involved in a romantic relationship, answer in terms of how you think you would feel.

Please use the scale below by placing a number between 1 and 5 in the space provided to the right of each statement.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

**Not at all  
characteristic of me**

**Very characteristic of me**

- (1) I find it relatively easy to get close to others. \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) I do not worry about being abandoned. \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others. \_\_\_\_\_
- (4) In relationships, I often worry that my partner does not really love me. \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. \_\_\_\_\_
- (6) I am comfortable depending on others. \_\_\_\_\_
- (7) I do not worry about someone getting too close to me. \_\_\_\_\_
- (8) I find that people are never there when you need them. \_\_\_\_\_
- (9) I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. \_\_\_\_\_
- (10) In relationships, I often worry that my partner will not want to  
\_\_\_\_\_ stay with me.
- (11) I want to merge completely with another person. \_\_\_\_\_
- (12) My desire to merge sometimes scares people away. \_\_\_\_\_

(13) I am comfortable having others depend on me. \_\_\_\_\_

(14) I know that people will be there when I need them. \_\_\_\_\_

(15) I am nervous when anyone gets too close. \_\_\_\_\_

(16) I find it difficult to trust others completely. \_\_\_\_\_

(17) Often, partners want me to be closer than I feel comfortable being. \_\_\_\_\_

(18) I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when \_\_\_\_\_

I need them.

### Appendix D: Emotional Regulation

**Instructions:** The questions below involve two distinct aspects of your emotional life. One is your emotional experience, or what you feel like inside. The other is your emotional expression, or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture, or behave. Although some of the following questions may seem similar to one another, they differ in important ways. For each item, please answer using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree

1. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel more positive emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about.
2. \_\_\_\_ I keep my emotions to myself.
3. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about.
4. \_\_\_\_ When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them
5. \_\_\_\_ When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.
6. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by not expressing them.
7. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.
8. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in.
9. \_\_\_\_ When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ When I want to feel less negative emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.

### Appendix E: Rejection Sensitivity

**Instructions:** The items below describe situations in which people sometimes ask things of others.

For each item, imagine that you are in the situation, and then answer the questions that follow it.

<b>1. You ask your parents or another family member for a loan to help you through a difficult financial time.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your family would want to help you?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that they would agree to help as much as they can.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>2. You approach a close friend to talk after doing or saying something that seriously upset him/her.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to talk with you?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to talk with me to try to work things out.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>3. You bring up the issue of sexual protection with your significant other and tell him/her how important you think it is.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over his/her reaction?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would be willing to discuss our possible options without getting defensive.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>4. You ask your supervisor for help with a problem you have been having at work.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to help you?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to try to help me out.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>5. After a bitter argument, you call or approach your significant other because you want to make up.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your significant other would want to make up with you?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would be at least as eager to make up as I would be.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>6. You ask your parents or other family members to come to an occasion important to you.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not they would want to come?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that they would want to come.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>7. At a party, you notice someone on the other side of the room that you'd like to get to know, and you approach him or her to try to start a conversation.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to talk with you?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to talk with me.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>8. Lately you've been noticing some distance between yourself and your significant other, and you ask him/her if there is something wrong.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not he/she still loves you and wants to be with you?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she will show sincere love and commitment to our relationship no matter what else may be going on.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
<b>9. You call a friend when there is something on your mind that you feel you really need to talk about.</b>		
How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to listen?	very unconcerned 1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would listen and support me.	very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely

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