

# The Effect of Adult Attachment Types, Gender Role Attitude on the Heterosexual Relationship Satisfaction in University Students

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** The purpose of this study was to examine adult attachment types, gender role attitudes and heterosexual relationship satisfaction of college students and to examine how they affect satisfaction with heterosexual relationships.

**Methods/Statistical analysis:** This study is a descriptive correlation study to investigate the degree of adult attachment type, gender role attitude, and heterosexual relationship satisfaction of college students. The data were collected by 183 college students located in S, G and C province who agreed to participate in this study. The collected data were analyzed by frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation, Pearson correlation and multiple regression.

**Findings:** The results of this study were as followings: Male 29.8% female 70.2%, mean age 24.8 years. There was a statistically significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.622$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in satisfaction with heterosexual relationship and adult attachment, and significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.236$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between heterosexual satisfaction and gender role attitude. The worse the attachment anxiety, the worse the heterosexual relationship satisfaction ( $B = -.528$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the worse the attachment avoidance, the lower the Heterosexual relationship satisfaction ( $B = -.632$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On the other hand, the more classical the gender role attitude, the more likely the Heterosexual relationship satisfaction is fall ( $B = -.412$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

**Improvements/Applications:** Therefore, it is necessary for a university student to develop a program that can identify his or her attachment type and actively cope with this relationship.

**Keywords:** *adult, attachment, college, heterosexual relationship, Gender role.*

## Introduction

Erikson suggested building close relationships with people as a fulfillment task to accomplish in early adulthood. Humans live through many development tasks throughout their lives, and the early adulthood is a time of building a mature interpersonal relationship by building a close relationship through their interpersonal relationships with others [1]. College students at this time experience difficulties or conflicts in forming a broader interpersonal relationship [2], and seem to be fully exercising their functions as adults, but they are not completely separated from their parents, causing anxiety about full independence with the psychological burden on the role demanded by society.

Attachment refers to an intimate, strong emotional bond that one feels about someone close to him that is formed through interaction with a primary parent in the early part of one's life [3]. Adult attachment is the result of the transition to friends and lovers who are not primary carers [4]. Unstable adult attachment is a variable that foretells the personality characteristics of an individual and has a significant effect on the quality of the relationship and the satisfaction of the relationship. Unstable adult attachment is divided into two dimensions: anxiety attachment and avoidance attachment; anxiety attachment means a dimension that is too preoccupied with relationships or afraid of being rejected or abandoned by others; and avoidance attachment means a dimension that makes it uncomfortable to be intimate with others [5]. In addition, the attachment target of university students

in the suddenly expanded relationship is diverse and the attachment pattern is complicated, so the attachment is different from the initial stage of development [6]. Many attachment theorists argue that in order to understand adult interpersonal patterns, it is more appropriate to understand the overall level and pattern of attachment to current opposite sex friends or intimate others than to identify the type of attachment to parents formed in the early stages of development [7]. Adult attachment is also consistently studied in a wide range of fields as well as developmental psychology and is known as a significant variable to heterosexuality satisfaction [8,9]. A university student's experience in heterosexuality is closer than other interpersonal relationships, including family and friends, and the formation of intimate heterosexuality in early adulthood has a positive effect on individuals, such as helping them in mental health and improving the quality of life throughout their lives [10]. In particular, heterosexuality is an important concern for college students and a key interpersonal and developmental task. In fact, among the issues that university students appeal to counseling centers [11], they reported that the most influential person is their opposite sex [12].

Compared to the innate biological concept of sex (sex), the gender role is an expected behavioral characteristic of men or women in the affected society and culture based on biological gender [13]. In general, the masculinity of gender roles represented an independent, competitive and achievement-oriented character, and femininity had been known to represent a warm, sensitive and friendly character, and acting according to gender roles was considered very natural and desirable for men and women [14]. According to the study, such gender roles also affect relationships between men and women, women who value the quality of relationships in resolving conflicts between lovers try to resolve conflicts more actively than men, while men who value the status of relationships tend to avoid conflicts [15]. Cheng (2010)'s study also found that women are socialized and educated to solve problems more relationship-oriented in conflict situations, while men tend to avoid them by being socialized and educated as achievement or task-oriented [16]. However, since the study by Lee and Park [17] did not distinguish between men and women, and Kim and Lee [18] conducted the study only on women, it was not clear how gender roles actually affect heterosexual satisfaction, so it was thought that it would be necessary to repeat the study. Since the previous research was reviewed that there

were many references to adult attachment and gender role as variables that affect the heterosexual relationship satisfaction in college students, this study tries to re-examine the effect of adult attachment type and gender role on the satisfaction of the opposite sex in university students. Therefore, I want to find out the relationship between adult attachment style, sex role attitude and heterosexual relationship of college students, what variables are influencing them, and try to contribute to the mature heterosexual relationship satisfaction of college students.

## Method

This study was conducted for about three months from August to October 2018. The survey was conducted on 183 college students attending N University in C city, C Province. All data used was collected according to the approved guidelines and screening procedures of "N University". A total of 190 questionnaires were collected and 183 of them were used in the study, excluding seven insufficient ones.

### *Adult attachment type*

In this study, we found that students in college had to measure adult adhesion patterns in their bodies. Kim [19] modified and validated the ECR-R (Experience of Close Relation Ship-R) of Frey, Waller and Brennan [20]. The scale of attachment-anxiety is 18 questions and the sub-scale of attachment-avoidance is 18 questions, consisting of 36 questions, five-point Likert scale, and Kim's study [19] showed that Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .89 and .85, respectively. In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of attachment-anxiety was .85, an attachment-avoidance was .92.

### *Gender role attitude*

Developed by Osmond and Martin [21], it was measured by the Sex Role Attitude Measurement Tool (SRA), which was translated into Korean by Moon's study [22]. The gender-role attitude consisted of performance-force perception (12 items) and gender-role recognition (5 items), and a total of 17 items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=very much). The total score is 17 to 85 points, meaning the higher the score, the more modern gender roles they have. In a study by Moon's [22] Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .82. In this study, the total questionnaires Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .83.

**Heterosexual relationship satisfaction**

The Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) developed by Snyder [23] was revised by Kwon and Chae [24] to a phrase that You [25] considers suitable for dating in Korea, and used the sentence analyzed by Lee [26]. Overall dissatisfaction, emotional communication problems, problem-solving communication, and shared time conflict are composed of 41 questions and are a true measure of response with ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. The higher the score on the scale, the more satisfied the relationship is. In a study by Lee [26], the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was overall dissatisfaction .90; emotional communication problems .85, problem-solving communication .74, and shared time .74, with a total of .91. In this study, the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was found to be overall dissatisfaction .83, unsatisfactory emotional.85, unsatisfactory problem-

solving communication .83, shared time .84, and overall as .88

**Result and Discussion**

The general characteristics of the subjects in this study are as shown in Table 1. The average age of the subjects was 20.80±1.80. There were 53 (29.0%) men and 130 (70.1%) women, while 124 (67.8%) were currently dating. When asked about the number of heterosexual relationship, 97 respondents (53.3 %) answered “two times,” When asked, “How long was the dating period?” 54 respondents (29.0 %), 32 respondents (17.5 %) answered “between six months and one month,” 49 respondents (26.8 %) said they had dating for more than three years, and 10 respondents (5.5 %) answered that they had been dating for more than three years.

**Table 1. General characteristics (N=183)**

Characteristics	Categories	n(%) or M±SD
Age		20.80±1.80
Gender	Male Female	53(29.0) 130(70.1)
Now, Heterosexual relationship	Yes	124(67.8)
Number of heterosexual relationship	1-2 times	97(53.0)
	3-5 times	57(31.1)
	More than 5 times	29(15.8)
The period of heterosexual relationship	Less than 3 month	38(20.8)
	3-5months	54(29.5)
	6months-1year	32(17.5)
	1year-3yesar More than 3 years	49(26.8) 10(5.5)

Table 2 shows the correlation between each variable.

**Table 2. Correlations among adult attachment type, gender role attitude and heterosexual relationship satisfaction.**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	1	.328***	-.183***	-.567***	-.534***	-.598***	-.687***
2.		1	-.249 ***	-.485***	-.510**	-.568**	-.524**
3.			1	-.426***	-.436**	-.489**	-.501**

**Cont... Table 2. Correlations among adult attachment type, gender role attitude and heterosexual relationship satisfaction.**

4.				1	.355**	.345***	.378***
5.					1	-.477***	.367***
6.						1	.421***
7							1

1. attachment- anxiety, 2.attachment-avoidance, 3. Gender-role attitude, 4. Dissatisfaction overall, 5. Emotional communication problems, 6. Problem-solving communication, 7.Shared time conflict. \* p<.05, \*\* p< .01, \*\*\* p< .001

The results of multi-regression analysis on how each variable affects the Heterosexual relationship satisfaction are as shown in Table 3. The worse the attachment anxiety, the worse the heterosexual relationship satisfaction (B= -.528, p<.001), the worse the attachment avoidance, the lower the Heterosexual relationship satisfaction (B= -.632, p<.001). On the other hand, the more classical the gender role attitude, the more likely the heterosexual relationship satisfaction is fall (B= -.412, p=.001).

**Discussion**

This study is a descriptive relationship study to identify factors that affect the satisfaction of the heterosexual partner in college students. Based on the results of the previous research, I would like to discuss some. In the correlation between the variables in this study, the two sub parameters of attachment types, attachment

**Table 3. Multiple regression of adult attachment type, gender role attitude and heterosexual relationship satisfaction**

Predictors	Heterosexual relationship satisfaction						
	B	SE	β	t	p	tolerance	VIF
Constant	5.598	6.908		13.598	<.001		
Attachment anxiety	-.528	.089	-.416	9.244	<.001	.980	1.017
Attachment avoidance	-.632	.078	-.378	-8.437	<.001	.989	1.014
Gender role attitude	-.412	.165	-.378	4.132	.001	.991	1.015

Anxiety and attachment avoidance, both showed a statistically significant negative correlation with the heterosexual relationship satisfaction. In the Attachment Anxiety case, the results were the same as in the preceding study, in which people with attached anxiety tend to be immersed in interpersonal relationships and reduce their satisfaction with the opposite sex if they feel

afraid of being abandoned and rejected in a relationship they feel close to [8,27].

In a study by Lee and Yang [27], people who tend to attachment avoidance themselves to high self-esteem but avoid close relationships, excessively belittling reliance on others, and believing in themselves, they are more likely to be isolated alone. That result was similar to this

report because it could be thought that the heterosexual relationship satisfaction would be reduced. In addition, according to Erickson's theory of psychological and social development [1], the primary developmental task in early adulthood is to gain intimacy through relationships between peers and lovers. This suggests that active intervention is necessary in satisfying the opposite sex of university students, which is early in adulthood. The results of this study showed that gender role attitudes had a statistically significant negative correlation with heterosexual relationship satisfaction, and that the higher the posture of traditional, or classical gender roles, the lower the rational relationship satisfaction level. In the study by Choi and Yang, who studied the relationship between adult women's love-relationship satisfaction and the gender stereotype, there was no significant statistical difference between gender stereotypes and heterosexual relationships [29], and there was a significant relationship in the study by Sanchez et al [30]. It is believed that the reason for this is that Choi and Yang conducted research with a gender stereotype tool with strong sociocultural concepts [29], rather than a tool for gender roles with strong biological gender concepts.

### Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of adult attachment type and gender role attitude on heterosexual relationship satisfaction, and the result was to induce interpersonal satisfaction through healthy heterosexual relationship of university students and to form more mature interpersonal relationship after employment. It is meaningful that the basic data is presented. As a result, it is expected that this basic data will give students the opportunity to re-experience the attachment and gender roles of college students, thereby forming a positive heterosexual relationship, and also to be the basis for positive interpersonal relationships. However, it is difficult to expand the results of this study because the study was conducted only by a small number of early adult students. In addition, it is necessary to be careful because it cannot convey the characteristics of the socio-cultural perspective in the gender role attitude because it can convey the biased knowledge. In addition, since the results of research on various sub concepts were not reported in the satisfaction of heterosexual relations, it is suggested to conduct research on these sub concepts later.

**Ethical Clearance:** Not required

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**Conflict of Interest:** Nil

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