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Early Maladaptive Schemas and Attachment Styles in Emerging Adults – A Correlational Study

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Abstract: *This study examines the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in emerging adulthood, within the theoretical frameworks of schema therapy (Young, 1990; Young et al., 2003) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Using a non-probabilistic sample of 170 participants (equally distributed by gender), Pearson correlation analyses revealed significant associations between schemas and attachment styles. Anxious attachment was positively correlated primarily with vulnerability, dependence, and subjugation, highlighting the role of threat anticipation and increased need for reassurance (Rad et al. (2025). Secure attachment was negatively correlated with strong negative correlations with defectiveness/shame, social isolation, failure, and vulnerability, confirming its protective function. Disorganised attachment was the most sensitive to schema activation, showing positive correlations with a broad spectrum of maladaptive patterns. Avoidant attachment was weakly associated with classical schemas and was modestly associated with unrelenting standards. Gender differences were observed primarily in attachment styles and vulnerability.*

Keywords: *attachment; emerging adulthood; vulnerability; disorganised attachment; gender differences.*

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, research in developmental and clinical psychology has increasingly emphasised the continuity between early relational experiences and adult interpersonal functioning. Attachment theory posits that early interactions with caregivers lead to the development of internal working models of the self and others, which continue to guide affective regulation and relationship expectations throughout life (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Contemporary extensions of attachment research further demonstrate that these representations remain relatively stable while still being open to contextual modulation (Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

In parallel, schema therapy conceptualises early maladaptive schemas (EMS) as pervasive cognitive–emotional patterns formed through repeated frustration of basic psychological needs (Young, 1990; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). These schemas include beliefs about abandonment, mistrust, defectiveness, vulnerability, and subjugation, which shape how individuals interpret relational events (Bach, Lockwood, & Young, 2018; Muris et al., 2016). Empirical research has consistently shown that maladaptive schemas are associated with affective dysregulation, personality pathology, and relational instability (Spinhoven et al., 2016; Thimm, 2017; Riley et al., 2026; Bär et al., 2023).

Recent empirical research has increasingly emphasised the conceptual convergence between attachment insecurity and schema activation, suggesting that early maladaptive schemas may function as cognitive–affective correlates of insecure internal working models (Roelofs, 2017). Within this integrative framework, anxious attachment has been consistently associated with schemas reflecting abandonment and vulnerability, whereas avoidant attachment tends to relate more strongly to emotional suppression, rigid self-reliance, and deactivating regulatory strategies (Carr, Hardy, & Fornells-Ambrojo, 2018). Convergent findings have also been reported in recent Romanian empirical investigations, which report similar patterns of association between schema activation profiles and adult attachment dimensions in non-clinical samples, further reinforcing the structural overlap between cognitive–emotional schemas and attachment insecurity (Paraschiv, 2024; Paraschiv et al., 2024; Rad et al., 2025). Disorganised attachment, characterised by contradictory relational strategies, has been associated with diffuse schema activation and unstable self-representations (aan het Rot, Moskowitz, & Young, 2016; Granqvist et al., 2017).

Emerging adulthood represents a particularly relevant developmental stage for investigating these processes. Characterised by identity exploration, instability, and increased intimacy demands, this period may reactivate early schemas and attachment-based expectations (Arnett, 2016; Guzmán-González et al., 2025). Studies conducted in young adult samples show significant associations between attachment insecurity, emotional dysregulation, depressive vulnerability, and maladaptive schema domains (Yang et al., 2024).

Thus, integrating schema therapy and attachment theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how early cognitive–emotional structures continue to organise romantic and interpersonal functioning in emerging adulthood (Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2010; Van Vreeswijk, Broersen, & Nadort, 2018).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Schema Therapy and Early Maladaptive Schemas

Schema therapy emerged as an integrative extension of cognitive-behavioural approaches, particularly targeting chronic relational and personality-related difficulties (Young, 1990; Arntz & van Genderen, 2020). EMS are defined as broad, pervasive themes consisting of memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations regarding oneself and relationships (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Research over the past decade has provided support for the structural validity and clinical relevance of schema domains (Bach, Lockwood, & Young, 2018; Calvete, Orue, & Hankin, 2013).

Empirical findings indicate strong associations between schema activation and psychopathology, including depression, anxiety, trauma-related symptoms, and personality disorders (Muris et al., 2016; Karatzias et al., 2022; Bamelis et al., 2014). Schemas related to rejection and impaired autonomy are particularly predictive of relational distress and vulnerability (Jacob & Arntz, 2013).

2.2. Attachment Theory and Adult Relational Patterns

Attachment theory conceptualises secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganised styles as patterns of affect regulation and relational expectations formed through early caregiving experiences (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Anxious attachment involves hyperactivation of proximity-seeking strategies, while avoidant attachment involves emotional deactivation and self-reliance (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Disorganised attachment has been linked to inconsistent caregiving and unresolved relational trauma (aan het Rot, Moskowitz, & Young, 2016; Zilberstein, 2014). Longitudinal studies suggest that insecure attachment is associated with maladaptive coping, emotional dysregulation, and increased vulnerability to psychopathology (Scott et al., 2013; O'Connor & Elklit, 2008).

2.3. Convergence Between Schemas and Attachment

Recent integrative research indicates that early maladaptive schemas may function as cognitive representations underlying attachment insecurity (Roelofs et al., 2016; Roelofs, 2017). Vulnerability, defectiveness, and abandonment schemas have been consistently associated with attachment anxiety (Petricchi, Dentale, & Gilbert, 2019). Avoidant attachment shows weaker but meaningful associations with perfectionism-related schemas such as unrelenting standards (Zortea, Gray, & O'Connor, 2021).

Disorganised attachment appears most strongly related to diffuse schema activation across multiple domains (Riley et al., 2026; Bär et al., 2023). These findings support the hypothesis that EMS and attachment styles represent interconnected dimensions of relational vulnerability.

3. Research Objectives

General objective:

Examine the relationship between the intensity of early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in emerging adults.

Specific objectives:

1. Identify associations between each schema and attachment styles;
2. Determine schemas that predict anxious attachment;
3. Determine schemas that predict avoidant attachment;
4. Determine schemas associated with disorganised attachment;
5. Examine gender differences in schema activation and attachment styles;
6. Build a predictive model of relational vulnerability.

4. Hypotheses

This study aims to examine associations between the intensity of early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in emerging adults. It is assumed that high levels of abandonment, social isolation, or unrelenting standards schemas will be associated with anxious attachment, while mistrust and defectiveness may contribute to avoidance or disorganisation.

The present study is grounded in the theoretical integration of schema therapy and attachment theory, both of which emphasise the role of early relational experiences in shaping adult emotional and interpersonal functioning. Schema theory conceptualises early maladaptive schemas as stable cognitive-affective structures formed through repeated frustration of basic emotional

needs, whereas attachment theory describes internal working models of the self and others derived from early caregiver interactions. Despite their different emphases—cognitive–emotional patterns versus behavioural–relational regulation—both approaches converge in suggesting that childhood-formed structures continue to organise relational dynamics in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969; Young, 1990; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003).

Previous empirical findings indicate consistent associations between insecure attachment styles and maladaptive cognitive patterns, particularly those involving expectations of rejection, vulnerability, and dependence. These findings support the assumption that attachment-related anxiety and avoidance may be expressed through schema activation in close relationships (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003; Bowlby, 1969; Rad et al., 2025). Convergent empirical evidence has repeatedly documented significant associations between early maladaptive schemas and adult attachment styles, suggesting that insecure attachment patterns are mirrored in schema activation profiles (Roelofs, 2017; Riley et al., 2026; Bär et al., 2023). These findings support the assumption of a structural overlap between internal working models and cognitive–emotional schema domains.

Based on contemporary empirical findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Significant correlations will exist between early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles.

Attachment anxiety has been consistently associated with cognitive themes of abandonment, vulnerability, and dependence, reflecting heightened fear of rejection and excessive reassurance seeking (Carr, Hardy, & Fornells-Ambrojo, 2018; Petrocchi, Dentale, & Gilbert, 2019). Individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to interpret relational ambiguity through schemas centred on personal inadequacy and anticipated loss.

H2. Anxious attachment will be positively associated with abandonment, vulnerability, dependence, and subjugation schemas.

In contrast, avoidant attachment has shown weaker and more selective associations with maladaptive schemas, often linked to mistrust, defectiveness, and rigid self-regulatory standards. This pattern reflects deactivating relational strategies rather than explicit fear-based cognitions.

H3. Avoidant attachment will show modest associations with mistrust, defectiveness, and unrelenting standards schemas.

Disorganised attachment has been described as the attachment style most strongly associated with diffuse and multidomain schema activation, particularly those related to rejection, instability, and impaired autonomy (aan het Rot, Moskowitz, & Young, 2016; Riley et al., 2026; Bär et al., 2023).

The coexistence of proximity-seeking and fear responses may correspond to fragmented schema structures.

H4. Disorganised attachment will correlate positively with multiple rejection- and autonomy-related schemas.

Conversely, secure attachment is generally linked to lower schema activation, reflecting coherent self-representations and stable emotional regulation capacities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Empirical findings suggest that security operates as a protective factor against maladaptive cognitive structures.

H5. Secure attachment will correlate negatively with maladaptive schemas, particularly defectiveness, isolation, and vulnerability.

Gender-related differences in attachment expression have been documented in previous research, although evidence regarding deep cognitive schema structure remains less consistent. This suggests that gender may influence emotional regulation patterns more than foundational cognitive architecture.

H6. Gender differences will emerge primarily in attachment expression rather than in core schema structure.

5. Method

To achieve the objectives and test the hypotheses, data were collected through anonymous online questionnaires from a non-probabilistic sample of 170 participants, equally distributed by gender, consistent with previous non-experimental designs (*Paraschiv, 2024 vs. classical experimental designs*). The theoretical foundation of the instrument is conceptually coherent with attachment-based models of internal working representations (Bowlby, 1969), although operationalised through cognitive–emotional schema domains (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003).

The instrument used was the Young Schema Questionnaire – Short Form 3 (YSQ-S3), developed within the schema therapy framework (Young, 1990; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). The questionnaire assesses pervasive cognitive–emotional patterns formed through early relational experiences and evaluates broad domains of functioning rather than isolated symptoms. In contrast to symptom-focused measures, the YSQ captures enduring vulnerability structures that influence interpersonal interpretation and affect regulation (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). High scores indicate a greater likelihood of schema activation in relevant relational contexts. The instrument has been widely validated in both clinical and non-clinical samples and is consistent with contemporary schema-based research approaches (Paraschiv, 2025a; Paraschiv, 2025b; Paraschiv, 2026a; Paraschiv, 2026b).

Emerging adulthood was operationally defined as ages 18–29 years (Arnett, 2016). Participants were recruited through online distribution via academic networks and social media platforms. Inclusion criteria required participants to fall within this age range and to provide informed consent. Incomplete questionnaire responses were excluded from analysis. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Reliability and Data Processing

Internal consistency coefficients for the present sample were satisfactory. Cronbach’s alpha values ranged between .72 and .91 across schema domains. Attachment scales demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = .76$ for anxious, $\alpha = .74$ for avoidant, $\alpha = .83$ for secure, and $\alpha = .79$ for disorganised attachment).

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables, followed by Pearson correlation analyses to examine associations between early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to explore gender differences.

Table 1 Pearson Correlations Between Early Maladaptive Schemas and Attachment Styles

Schema	Anxious Attachment r (p)	Avoidant Attachment r (p)	Secure Attachment r (p)	Disorganized Attachment r (p)
Emotional Deprivation	.120 (.110)	.054 (.480)	–.192 (.012)*	.314 (< .001)**
Abandonment	.157 (.042)*	.033 (.670)	–.145 (.061)	.201 (.009)**
Mistrust/Abuse	.098 (.190)	.081 (.290)	–.132 (.085)	.176 (.021)*
Social Isolation	.134 (.083)	.070 (.360)	–.381 (< .001)**	.292 (< .001)**
Defectiveness/Shame	.148 (.055)	.091 (.240)	–.387 (< .001)**	.250 (.001)**
Failure	.151 (.049)*	.044 (.570)	–.361 (< .001)**	.219 (.004)**
Dependence	.257 (.001)**	.063 (.410)	–.210 (.006)**	.238 (.002)**
Vulnerability	.280 (< .001)**	.089 (.250)	–.342 (< .001)**	.280 (< .001)**
Subjugation	.227 (.003)**	.052 (.500)	–.197 (.010)*	.210 (.006)**
Entitlement	.090 (.240)	.102 (.180)	–.168 (.028)*	.263 (< .001)**
Unrelenting Standards	.118 (.125)	.167 (.029)*	–.140 (.070)	.185 (.016)*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

6. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive tables and figures

Table 1a

Descriptive Statistics for Attachment Styles and Abandonment (N = 170)

Statistic	Anxious	Secure	Disorganized	Avoidant	Abandonment
Mean	9.39	14.88	12.05	17.49	5.90
Std. Deviation	2.50	3.27	2.92	2.92	3.10
Std. Error	0.19	0.25	0.22	0.22	0.24
Median	9.00	15.00	12.00	18.00	5.00
Skewness	0.13	-0.10	-0.14	-0.20	0.49
Kurtosis	-0.53	0.12	-0.56	-0.41	-0.89
Minimum	3	5	4	10	2
Maximum	15	23	19	24	12
Range	12	18	15	14	10

Table 1b

Descriptive Statistics for Schema Domain I (N = 170)

Statistic	Mistrust	Vulnerability	Dependence	Emotional Deprivation	Social Isolation
Mean	0.34	5.28	5.03	5.59	5.42
Std. Deviation	0.48	2.71	2.47	3.04	3.06
Std. Error	0.04	0.21	0.19	0.23	0.23
Median	0.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Skewness	0.68	0.57	0.67	0.60	0.57
Kurtosis	-1.56	-0.63	-0.35	-0.68	-0.84
Minimum	0	2	2	2	2
Maximum	1	12	12	12	12
Range	1	10	10	10	10

Table 1c

Descriptive Statistics for Schema Domain II (N = 170)

Statistic	Defectiveness	Failure	Subjugation	Unrelenting Standards	Entitlement
Mean	4.52	5.07	5.71	7.53	7.16
Std. Deviation	2.85	3.02	2.61	2.44	2.46
Std. Error	0.22	0.23	0.20	0.19	0.19
Median	4.00	4.00	6.00	7.00	7.00
Skewness	1.14	0.75	0.28	-0.25	-0.12
Kurtosis	0.44	-0.58	-0.75	-0.59	-0.41
Minimum	2	2	2	2	2
Maximum	12	12	12	12	12
Range	10	10	10	10	10

7. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1:

Results support the general hypothesis that early maladaptive schemas are significantly associated with attachment styles in emerging adults. Pearson correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1. The overall pattern is consistent with theoretical predictions derived from schema therapy and attachment theory, both of which posit that relational functioning reflects the activation of childhood-formed cognitive–emotional structures (Young, 1990; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003; Bowlby, 1969).

Anxious attachment was positively associated primarily with vulnerability, dependence, and subjugation schemas, with additional weaker associations for abandonment and failure. This profile suggests that threat anticipation, perceived inadequacy, and self-inhibition are associated with fear of loss and heightened reassurance-seeking tendencies. Similar associations between vulnerability-related schemas and attachment anxiety have been reported in previous empirical studies, supporting the convergent validity of these findings (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Secure attachment showed consistent negative associations with most maladaptive schemas, particularly defectiveness/shame, social isolation, failure, and vulnerability. These findings support the protective role of relational security and align with theoretical assumptions that secure attachment is associated with coherent self-representations and adaptive emotional regulation (Bowlby, 1969; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003).

Disorganised attachment demonstrated the most extensive pattern of positive associations across rejection- and vulnerability-related schemas, indicating generalised relational insecurity and difficulty integrating proximity seeking with fear. This diffuse schema activation corresponds closely to theoretical descriptions of disorganised attachment as reflecting unstable internal representations and contradictory relational strategies (Bowlby, 1969; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003).

Avoidant attachment showed limited associations, with unrelenting standards emerging as the only modest correlate. This suggests that avoidance may be linked more strongly to rigidity and emotional distancing than to classical rejection-based schemas, consistent with attachment theory's emphasis on deactivating strategies (Bowlby, 1969).

Overall, the magnitude and direction of the associations presented in Table 1 support the view that childhood-formed cognitive structures continue to organise relational functioning in emerging adulthood, supporting integrative models linking attachment dynamics with schema activation (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003).

Hypothesis 2:

The second hypothesis predicted positive associations between anxious attachment and schemas reflecting early insecurity, particularly abandonment, vulnerability, dependence, and subjugation. As shown in Table 1, anxious attachment was most strongly correlated with vulnerability and dependence, followed by subjugation and abandonment.

These findings suggest that relational anxiety may be structured around threat anticipation, perceived fragility, and heightened need for reassurance. The prominence of vulnerability supports the interpretation that anxious attachment is closely linked to fear of loss and anticipated harm rather than generalised emotional deprivation.

Emotional deprivation and social isolation did not show significant associations, suggesting that anxious attachment may be more strongly linked to fears of separation and personal inadequacy than to stable beliefs that emotional needs will remain unmet.

Thus, attachment anxiety appears to be primarily organised around vulnerability-related cognitive schemas rather than broad rejection-based domains.

Hypothesis 3:

The third hypothesis predicted positive associations between avoidant attachment and schemas such as mistrust/abuse, defectiveness/shame, and unrelenting standards. However, as indicated in Table 1, these associations were not statistically significant.

The only statistically significant modest association observed concerned unrelenting standards, suggesting that avoidance may be more closely related to rigidity, perfectionism, and self-regulatory control than to explicit expectations of rejection or harm. This pattern aligns with theoretical models describing avoidant attachment as characterised by deactivating strategies and emotional distancing rather than overt fear-based cognitions.

Thus, Hypothesis 3 is not supported in the present sample, highlighting a partial divergence between schema-based cognitive representations and attachment-based regulatory mechanisms.

Hypothesis 4:

The fourth hypothesis proposed that disorganised attachment would be positively associated with schemas reflecting relational instability and profound insecurity. As presented in Table 1, disorganised attachment showed the broadest and most consistent pattern of statistically significant positive associations across vulnerability-, rejection-, and autonomy-related schemas.

This diffuse activation pattern suggests that disorganised attachment may reflect fragmented cognitive-emotional structures and unstable internal representations. The coexistence of proximity seeking and fear appears to be mirrored in multidomain schema activation, supporting theoretical models that conceptualise disorganisation as reflecting contradictory relational strategies.

Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5:

The fifth hypothesis predicted negative associations between secure attachment and maladaptive schema activation. As shown in Table 1, secure attachment demonstrated consistent negative correlations across multiple schema domains, particularly those related to defectiveness, social isolation, failure, and vulnerability.

These findings support the view that relational security functions as a protective factor, buffering against the activation of early maladaptive structures. Secure attachment appears to be associated with coherent self-representations and adaptive emotional regulation capacities.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6:

Given the number of correlations examined, the results were interpreted with caution. Although no formal Bonferroni correction was applied due to the mixed exploratory–confirmatory nature of the study, emphasis was placed on consistent and theoretically meaningful patterns rather than isolated marginal findings.

Gender differences were examined using independent samples t-tests. Results indicated significant differences primarily in attachment dimensions and, to a lesser extent, in vulnerability schema intensity. Anxious attachment differed significantly by gender, $t(168) = -3.819, p < .001$; secure attachment differed significantly, $t(168) = 2.924, p = .004$; and disorganised attachment differed significantly, $t(168) = -2.669, p = .008$. The vulnerability schema also showed a significant gender difference, $t(168) = -2.827, p = .005$.

These findings suggest that gender may influence emotional expression and relational regulation more strongly than deep cognitive architecture. While schemas represent relatively stable structures, attachment-related behaviours may be shaped by sociocultural norms and differential emotional socialisation. Hypothesis 6 is therefore partially supported.

In addition to statistical significance, standardised effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated for all independent samples t-tests to facilitate interpretation of magnitude and comparability across studies. Gender differences yielded small-to-moderate effects: anxious attachment ($d = 0.59$), secure attachment ($d = 0.45$), disorganised attachment ($d = 0.41$), and vulnerability schema ($d = 0.44$).

8. Conclusions

The present study supports integrative models suggesting that early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles represent interconnected dimensions of relational functioning in emerging adulthood. By combining schema therapy and attachment theory, the findings reinforce the assumption that adult relational patterns reflect the activation of cognitive–emotional structures formed in early developmental contexts (Bowlby, 1969; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Clinical Implications

Anxious attachment was primarily associated with vulnerability, dependence, and subjugation schemas, with additional links to abandonment and failure. This pattern is consistent with theoretical and empirical accounts describing attachment anxiety as a hyperactivation strategy grounded in fear of loss and perceived personal fragility (Petrocchi, Dentale, & Gilbert, 2019). Rather than reflecting generalised emotional deprivation, relational anxiety appears structured around threat anticipation and insecurity regarding one's own adequacy.

Secure attachment functioned as a protective factor, showing robust negative associations with core rejection schemas such as defectiveness, social isolation, and vulnerability. These findings align with research indicating that relational security supports coherent self-representations, emotional regulation, and resilience (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Both schema theory and attachment theory converge in conceptualising security as incompatible with chronic schema activation.

Disorganised attachment demonstrated the broadest and most diffuse schema activation, supporting models that link contradictory relational strategies to fragmented internal representations (aan het Rot, Moskowitz, & Young, 2016). This pattern suggests that disorganisation reflects instability at both behavioural and cognitive–emotional levels.

Avoidant attachment showed comparatively weaker associations with classical rejection-related schemas, with unrelenting standards emerging as a modest correlation. This finding is consistent with research emphasising emotional suppression and deactivating strategies rather than explicit fear-based cognitions in avoidant individuals (Pad et al., 2022). The results therefore, indicate a partial divergence between schema-based and attachment-based explanations of avoidance.

Gender differences emerged primarily in attachment expression rather than in the overall architecture of maladaptive schemas, suggesting that sociocultural socialisation processes may influence relational regulation more strongly than deep cognitive structures (Weber et al., 2022).

Emerging adulthood is characterised by identity exploration, instability, and intensified romantic involvement, which may reactivate attachment-related expectations and latent schemas. The transitional nature of this developmental stage may therefore amplify the visibility of schema–attachment interactions.

Overall, emerging adulthood (18–29 years) appears to be a developmental period particularly conducive to schema activation and the manifestation of attachment-related patterns, given its characteristic identity exploration and relational instability (Arnett, 2016; Guzmán-González et al., 2025).

From a clinical perspective, interventions targeting relational difficulties in emerging adults may benefit from simultaneously addressing maladaptive schemas and attachment-related expectations (Bach, Lockwood, & Young, 2018; Borsboom, 2017).

Limitations and statistical considerations

Several methodological considerations should be acknowledged when interpreting the present findings. Given the number of correlations examined, the potential inflation of Type I error must be recognised. However, a formal Bonferroni correction was not applied. The Bonferroni procedure assumes strict independence among statistical tests and is known to be overly conservative in contexts where variables are theoretically and empirically intercorrelated, as is the case with early maladaptive schemas and attachment dimensions. Because these constructs share conceptual overlap and moderate intercorrelations, applying a highly restrictive adjustment (e.g., $\alpha \approx .00125$) would substantially increase the risk of Type II error, potentially obscuring theoretically meaningful associations in a non-clinical sample.

Importantly, the analyses were theory-driven rather than purely exploratory. Hypotheses were specified a priori based on integrative models derived from attachment theory and schema therapy. Therefore, interpretation focused on coherent and theoretically consistent patterns of associations rather than on isolated marginal p-values. Results below $p < .01$ were considered more robust, whereas findings between .01 and .05 were interpreted cautiously and viewed as requiring replication. In addition, emphasis was placed on effect magnitude to facilitate substantive interpretation beyond statistical significance alone.

Beyond statistical considerations, several additional limitations must be noted. The use of a non-probabilistic sample limits the generalisability of the findings. All variables were assessed via self-report instruments, which may increase the risk of common method bias and shared method variance. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding the directionality of associations between schemas and attachment styles. Future research employing longitudinal and multimethod approaches would provide a more rigorous test of the integrative framework proposed in this study.

Future research

Future longitudinal and multimethod research is needed to clarify the causal pathways linking early relational experiences, schema development, and adult attachment organisation (Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

In conclusion, the findings suggest that clinical interventions in emerging adults may benefit from targeting both maladaptive schemas and attachment-related expectations. Strengthening secure relational representations may reduce schema activation and improve emotional regulation.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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