The Relationship between Adult Attachment Style and Perceived Knowledge of Partner Sex History among University Students

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Abstract: Research has extensively studied adult attachment theory, a fundamental psychological framework, particularly regarding its implications for adult attachment and sexual dynamics. The previous literature has established relationships between adult attachment and various sexual behaviours as well as communication patterns. Specifically, individuals with secure attachment styles typically engage in open communication and cautious sexual behaviours, whereas individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles exhibit less sexual communication and engage in riskier sexual activities. That said, limited research has explored the relationship between adult attachment style and perceived knowledge regarding partner sex history. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating how adult attachment style relates to perceived knowledge about partner sexual experiences. A sample of 237 undergraduate students completed surveys assessing attachment style and their perceived awareness of their partner’s sexual past. Attachment style was evaluated using the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) and perceived knowledge was measured using the Partner Sexual History Scale (PSHS). The results indicated a significant correlation between adult attachment style and perceived knowledge of a partner’s sexual history. Specifically, individuals with secure and avoidant attachment styles demonstrated greater perceived awareness of their partner’s sexual experiences compared to those with an anxious attachment style. This research contributes to our comprehension of the complex interplay among adult attachment, sexual knowledge, sexual communication, and relationship dynamics in young adult populations.

Keywords: attachment style; adult attachment theory; sex communication; sexual knowledge; sex behaviour; partner sex history; intimate relationships

1. Introduction

Adult attachment theory was introduced by Hazan and Shaver [1] as they examined attachment within adult romantic relationships. Following the three-type model of attachment, Hazan and Shaver noted three distinct attachment categories: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-anxious [1]. In adulthood, secure attachment characterizes individuals who value and crave relationships. Securely attached adults are supportive, trusting, and reflective in relationships, which fosters a warm and long-lasting relationship [2]. Conversely, insecure-avoidant or avoidant attachment in adulthood entails a fear of intimacy, which manifests into suspicion, dismissiveness, and emotional unavailability in romantic relationships [2]. Individuals with avoidant attachment styles may experience more confusion, hopelessness, and pessimism in their relationships [1]. Lastly, insecure-anxious or anxious attachment in adulthood highlights a fear of partner availability and responsiveness [2]. Anxiously attached adults experience stress, heightened emotions, and overdependence in their relationships [2].

Past research has highlighted a relationship between adult attachment and sexual behaviour, as well as adult attachment and sexual communication. Individuals with secure
attachment styles tend to engage in more sexual communication, including discussing sexual boundaries, needs, and emotional connections related to sex as well as safer sex practices [3–5]. In contrast, adults with anxious and avoidant attachment styles exhibit less sexual communication and are more likely to engage in riskier sexual behaviours [3–5]. Specifically, adults with insecure attachment styles demonstrated more unsafe sex behaviours when compared to secure attachment styles as they exhibited higher levels of negative attitudes toward condom use, fewer serious relationships, more unfamiliar sexual partners, and lower condom use [4–6]. Recent research also indicates that young adults aged 18 or older with an anxious or avoidant attachment style engage in riskier sexual behaviours than those with secure attachment styles [5].

Sexual well-being, as emphasized by the World Health Organization [7], encompasses satisfying, healthy, and informed sexual interactions, including an understanding of a partner’s sexual history. Drumright et al. [8] conducted a study on the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among partners, aiming to investigate the association between STI transmission and partner sexual concurrency (having multiple sex partners at the same time) as well as an individual’s awareness of their partner’s concurrent sexual activity. The study involved 196 participants and revealed that only 26% of respondents were aware of their partner’s ongoing sexual experiences, indicating limited knowledge of their partner’s sexual experiences [8]. Furthermore, the study found a negative correlation between STI transmission and knowledge of a partner’s sexual history [8]. This underscores the importance of understanding a partner’s sexual history for sexual well-being, highlighting a need for increased awareness and research on this topic.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [9] have issued a guide for professionals, such as doctors, to facilitate discussions on sexual health and sexual history with patients. This framework highlights several key factors for assessing an individual’s sexual health, including inquiries about the individual’s knowledge of their partner’s sex history. These questions may pertain to any concurrent partners their partner may have, the identities of their partner’s previous sex partners, and whether their partner engages in drug use [9]. Moreover, an individual’s level of perceived knowledge of their partner’s sexual history contributes to riskier sex, such as a decrease in condom usage [10]. Despite previous literature highlighting a relationship between adult attachment and sexual dynamics such as behaviour and communication, the relationship between attachment and perceived knowledge about a partner’s sexual history remains unexplored. There is still a gap in understanding how adult attachment influences perceived knowledge about a partner’s sexual history. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationship between adult attachment and perceived knowledge of partner sexual history among young adults to bridge this gap in the research and promote better sexual health and well-being among this population.

Given that the current study addresses the research gap concerning the relationship between adult attachment style and perceived knowledge of partner sex history, the research team hypothesized the following: Adult attachment style is related to the level of perceived knowledge an individual has about their partner’s sexual history. Specifically, individuals with secure attachment styles are expected to have greater levels of perceived knowledge about their partner’s sexual history compared to individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

2. Materials and Methods
2.1. Sampling Process

Adult attachment style is rooted in attachment dynamics within adulthood [1]. Given the premise that adult attachment styles are grounded in experiences and relationships related to adulthood, our study investigated these phenomena within a sample of undergraduate students aged 18 years or older. By focusing on this group, we were able to explore adult attachment styles within the correct context of adulthood. Therefore, a total of 237 undergraduate students from the University of Guelph aged 18 years or
older participated in this research (refer to demographics Section 3.1). The sample size of 237 participants was decided based on several factors, such as statistical power, attachment style representation, and comparability with other studies. While an a priori power analysis was not conducted, the chosen sample size still yielded adequate power for detecting effect sizes in statistical analyses with a proper representation of the three different attachment styles. Participant recruitment was conducted following approval from the University of Guelph research and ethics board, utilizing on-campus advertising methods. On-campus advertising was conducted by sharing the study recruitment poster with several online psychology, sociology, and family relations human development courses at the University of Guelph. Furthermore, the study recruitment poster was advertised on multiple bulletin boards in various buildings on the university campus. To be eligible, participants needed to have non-platonic relational experiences to reflect on, indicating involvement in, or prior experience with a non-platonic relationship characterized by sexual and/or romantic feelings towards another individual [11]. While adult attachment theory was initially developed for romantic relationships, the research team chose to broaden the inclusion criteria to represent all relational dynamics observed in our contemporary context. Given the variability in individuals’ perceptions of romantic relationships, defining them solely based on traditional notions may not capture the diverse experiences present in modern relationships. Thus, adopting a perspective of non-platonic relational experiences offered a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to studying adult attachment, acknowledging the fluidity and diversity evident in contemporary relationship dynamics.

After obtaining consent, participants completed a brief pre-screening questionnaire to confirm their eligibility. Using yes-or-no options, participants confirmed the following sample items: I am an undergraduate student at the University of Guelph; I have been in or am currently in a non-platonic relationship; and I can read English. Pre-screening aimed to ensure that participants met the criteria for relational experience and competency required for study inclusion. Ineligible participants were redirected to an end page, where they were thanked for their support and consideration of the study. Eligible participants proceeded to a demographic questionnaire that gathered information on age, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Sample items included “Please indicate your age” and “What is your sexual orientation,” with the option to choose not to respond for the gender and sexuality items. Pre-screening ensured that all respondents were undergraduate students, while the demographic survey confirmed that students were at least 18 years old.

2.2. Scales

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins) was used to assess adult attachment style in this study [12]. A shortened revised version of the scale, which consisted of 18 survey questions, was used to accommodate the time constraints of the busy undergraduate student sample. Participants were instructed to reflect on all non-platonic relationships, both past and present, and to rate statements on a 5-point Likert scale based on how closely each item described their feelings within these relationships. Example items included “I find it difficult to trust others completely”, with 1 indicating minimal relatability and 5 indicating maximal relatability. The internal consistency of the RAAS was assessed to ensure the reliability of the measurement instrument. In a sample of undergraduate students, Cronbach’s alphas for the close, depend, and anxiety subscales of the RAAS were reported as 0.77, 0.78, and 0.85 [12]. These coefficients indicated satisfactory internal consistency reliability for each subscale, which demonstrated the reliability of the RAAS in assessing adult attachment styles in individuals. To assess participants’ perceived knowledge of their partner’s sex history, the research team developed a self-report scale called the Partner Sexual History Scale (PSHS). Comprising eight items, the PSHS gauged participants’ perceived knowledge of their partner’s sexual past, depicting their perceived knowledge about their partner’s sexual history. Participants were asked to consider their relationships, both past and present, and indicate their level of familiarity with their partner’s sexual experiences. Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants rated the extent of their
understanding of their partner’s sexual experience, with 1 indicating minimal perceived knowledge and 5 indicating maximum perceived knowledge. Example items included “I know if my partner has ever been STI tested”, and “I know the number of sexual partners my partner has had in their lifetime”. As there was no existing scale to measure perceived knowledge about partner sex history, the research team devised the PSHS by drawing on items derived from pre-existing scales examining aspects of partner sex history. For example, the Sexual Communication Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSES) was referenced when developing the PSHS [13]. The SCSES assesses sex communication self-efficacy with a focus on five underlying factors, one of which pertains to the partner’s sexual history [13]. The SCSES includes items that ask participants to reflect on whether they have asked their partner questions on their number of past partners, history of needle sharing, concurrent sexual activity with other people, and STI history [13]. Four items from the SCSES were adapted to the PSHS, specifically items 2 and 4.

The PSHS also included items from a recent study conducted by Cornelius and Kershaw [14]. Participants were asked to estimate or disclose the number of sex partners their partner has had in their lifetime and assess their perception of their partner’s sexual risk history using a six-item index previously validated as a measure of sexual risk [14]. Sample items on the PSHS asked whether the participant’s partner has tested negative for HIV, has a history of drug injection, has an STI history, has a history of incarceration, has engaged in sexual activity with a same-sex partner, or has engaged in transactional sex. These questions were directly based on the CDC guidelines for sexually transmitted disease treatment and adapted to the PSHS due to their significance in addressing crucial sexual topics that partners should be aware of. Specifically, items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 on the PSHS were linked to the study performed by Cornelius and Kershaw [14] as well as the CDC guideline for safer sex [9].

Participants accessed the study online via Qualtrics, where they were prompted with pre-screening questions. After completing the pre-screening, participants were required to read an information letter and sign a consent form before starting the survey. Upon providing consent, participants were directed to a short demographic questionnaire consisting of four questions aimed at enhancing the research team’s understanding of the sample. Participants proceeded to complete the Revised Adult Attachment Scale comprising 18 items and the Partner Sex History Scale containing eight items. Upon completion of the survey, participants were directed to an end page where they were thanked for their contributions, reminded of their rights as participants, and provided with counselling resources available through the University of Guelph. Additionally, participants had the option to follow a separate link to another survey page to provide contact information for incentive purposes. This method of data collection was approved by ethics and ensured the anonymity of the dataset, as no participant information was linked to the data. Participants who opted to provide their name and email address through the separate link were entered into a randomized draw to win one of three 25-dollar Starbucks gift cards.

2.3. Statistical Analyses

To analyze the data, the research team individually coded the results from the Revised Adult Attachment Scale and the Partner Sexual Health Scale in Excel. Total scores were computed for each scale and the research team then utilized the data to run ANOVA and post hoc testing through R-Studio to compare the perceived knowledge scores across the different attachment styles. This study consisted of one categorical independent variable (adult attachment style) and one continuous dependent variable (the level of perceived knowledge about the partner’s sexual history). Employing a between-subjects design, this study evaluated adult attachment style across three levels (secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment), which were measured among all participants. To determine participant attachment style, the research team coded the RAAS according to the original scale’s scoring instructions [12]. Each participant was assigned one of the three attachment styles on their scores within the three-factor scores that measured close, depend, and anxiety.
Furthermore, participants’ scores on the PSHS were also evaluated. These scores were averaged to determine each participant’s mean level of perceived knowledge about their partner’s sex history.

The statistical analyses were conducted with several tests to ensure the validity and reliability of this study’s findings. Firstly, the normality of the data was assessed through graphical methods and the Shapiro–Wilk test. This step was crucial to determine if the data followed a normal distribution, which is a fundamental assumption for many statistical tests. Additionally, the equality of variances across attachment styles was evaluated using Levene’s test. This test examines whether the variances of different groups are approximately equal, which is necessary for the accurate interpretation of ANOVA results. However, the results from this study indicated a significant violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption. Consequently, a Kruskal–Wallis ANOVA was performed instead of a traditional ANOVA as the Kruskal–Wallis test is a non-parametric alternative used when the assumptions of ANOVA, such as normality and homogeneity of variances, are violated. Following the ANOVA, post hoc analysis was conducted using the Bonferroni correction. This adjustment method is used to account for the increased risk of Type I errors when performing multiple comparisons. Additionally, one-tailed t-tests were employed to further investigate the differences between specific attachment style pairs. These tests examine whether there are statistically significant differences between the means of two groups, based on the direction of the expected difference. Overall, these statistical analyses were chosen and implemented to ensure a rigorous examination of the relationship between attachment styles and perceived knowledge of partner sex history, while addressing potential violations of statistical assumptions.

3. Results

3.1. Demographics

This study included a total of 237 participants, with the majority falling within the age range of 18–19 years old (49%) and 20–22 years old (48%). The remaining 3% of respondents were aged between 23 and 32 years old. Participants were divided into three age subgroups for demographic purposes to understand the sample of the study better. Regarding gender identity, 225 participants (95%) identified as cisgender, while 3 identified as transgender, 6 as agender, and 1 chose not to respond. Furthermore, 84% of participants identified as female, with 11% identifying as male and 5% identifying as nonbinary, gender neutral, or genderqueer. Most participants identified as heterosexual (67%) or bisexual (18%), while the remainder identified as queer (5%), lesbian (2.9%), pansexual (2.9%), gay (1.2%), or other (1.2%). These demographic findings suggest that the sample in this study primarily comprised young, cisgender females, with the majority falling within the age range of 18–19 and 20–22 years old.

3.2. Attachment Style Analysis

As shown in Table 1, the sample size for each attachment style consisted of 85 securely attached adults, 49 avoidantly attached adults, and 103 anxiously attached adults. Individually (without inter-group comparisons), all adult attachment styles exhibited high levels of perceived knowledge of partner sex history, as evidenced by mean scores exceeding 2.9 out of 5 on the PSHS. Specifically, participants with secure attachment styles had the highest perceived knowledge scores on the PSHS, averaging 4.39. This was followed by participants with avoidant attachment styles, averaging 4.12, and participants with anxious attachment styles, averaging 3.68.

Additionally, Table 1 highlights the standard deviation of each attachment style. The data reveal that the secure attachment style exhibited a standard deviation (SD) of 0.83, indicating a consistent trend among securely attached respondents with similar scores on the PSHS. In contrast, the avoidant attachment style demonstrated an SD of 0.96, suggesting a moderate degree of variation in their scores on the PSHS. On the other hand, anxious
attachment styles exhibited a larger SD of 1.15, indicating a stronger variation in scores on the PSHS among respondents with anxious attachment styles.

Table 1. Attachment Style and Partner Sex History Perceived Knowledge Summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Style</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure-Avoidant</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure-Anxious</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The mean value represents average scores of perceived knowledge regarding partner sex history.

3.3. ANOVA Results

Based on the results from Table 1, the research team conducted a Levene test to assess the homogeneity of variances. The test yielded a Levene’s F-value of 5.1106 and a corresponding p-value of 0.006724, which displayed significant results and a violation of homogeneity of variance. Consequently, a Kruskal–Wallis ANOVA was conducted, which reported H(2) = 26.5 and df = 2, p < 0.001. The ANOVA revealed a test statistic of 26.5, indicating a difference in perceived knowledge across the attachment styles. Moreover, the reported p-value was 1.76 × 10−6, p < 0.001, providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis and signifying a statistically significant difference in perceived knowledge of partner sex history among the three attachment styles.

3.4. Post Hoc Results

Because the ANOVA results revealed a significant difference in at least one of the perceived knowledge levels of the attachment styles, a Bonferroni correction test was conducted to perform pairwise comparisons of the mean perceived knowledge scores across the three attachment styles. Table 2 presents the reported p-value between the means of each attachment style and their corresponding significance levels.

Table 2. Pairwise comparison examining attachment style to perceived knowledge of partner sex history.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>p-Value</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure-Avoidant</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>Nonsignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure-Anxious</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant-Anxious</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bonferroni test revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived knowledge between the avoidant and anxious attachment styles (p < 0.05). Specifically, the avoidant group exhibited greater perceived knowledge about partner sex history. Additionally, the test identified a statistically significant difference in perceived knowledge of partner sexual history between the secure and anxious attachment styles (p < 0.001), indicating that the secure group had more perceived knowledge about partner sex history compared to the anxious group. In contrast, the Bonferroni post hoc test did not find a statistically significant difference in perceived knowledge between participants with secure and avoidant attachment styles. The reported p-value indicated that the perceived knowledge scores of the secure attachment group were not significantly different from the perceived knowledge scores of the avoidant attachment group.

A one-tailed t-test was conducted to further investigate whether individuals with secure attachment had more perceived knowledge of partner sex history than individuals with avoidant and anxious attachment. For the secure–avoidant comparison, the reported results were t(1.66) = 89 and p > 0.05, indicating no significant statistical difference in perceived knowledge scores between adults with secure and avoidant attachment styles. However, the results for the secure–anxious attachment style one-tailed t-test were t(4.89) = 183.06 and p < 0.001. These results confirm that adults with secure attachment
styles had significantly more perceived knowledge about partner sex history than adults with anxious attachment styles.

After calculating Cohen’s $d$ for this study, the effect size was 0.43 for the anxious–avoidant group, 0.69 for the anxious–secure group, and 0.26 for the avoidant–secure group. Subsequently, the overall effect size for the ANOVA was 0.46, which indicated a moderate effect according to Cohen’s guidelines. The data demonstrated a moderate effect size between the avoidant and anxious attachment styles, with a value of 0.43. This suggested that there was some similarity in the perceived knowledge levels regarding partner sex history between the avoidant and anxious attachment styles. Despite each attachment style maintaining distinct levels of perceived knowledge, it is noteworthy to mention that there was some overlap between them, which merits reporting. Moreover, there was a moderately large effect size between the secure–anxious attachment styles, with an effect size of 0.68. This indicated a significant difference in perceived knowledge levels about partner sexual history between individuals with secure and anxious attachment styles. Lastly, there was a small effect between the secure–avoidant attachment styles, with a reported effect size was 0.26. This suggests that there was no significant difference in perceived knowledge of partner sex history between the secure and avoidant attachment styles.

4. Discussion

Previous research has consistently suggested that adult attachment style plays a significant role in shaping an individual’s sex life. The results of this study align with the past literature, as they reveal a notable difference in perceived partner sex history awareness between individuals with secure and avoidant attachment styles, as opposed to those with anxious attachment styles. This observation supports our initial hypothesis and emphasizes the impact of attachment style on sexual dynamics, specifically an individual’s perceived knowledge of their partner’s sexual history.

Our findings regarding the difference in perceived knowledge between individuals with avoidant and anxious attachment styles align with past research and our hypothesis. Anxiously attached adults tend to be less open and willing to self-disclose than avoidantly attached adults [15]. Avoidant attachment is characterized by traits of self-autonomy, suspiciousness, and hyper-independence, whereas anxious attachment is characterized by feelings of stress and anxiety [1]. Thus, individuals with avoidant attachment styles might be more inclined than individuals with anxious attachment styles to actively seek, learn, and facilitate communication regarding their partner’s sexual experiences due to their prioritization of self-autonomy and independence.

Contrary to our prediction, the results did not support the hypothesis that individuals with secure attachment styles have higher levels of perceived knowledge about their partner’s sexual history than individuals with avoidant attachment styles. This lack of distinction in perceived knowledge can be understood by examining the common characteristics shared by individuals with secure and avoidant attachment styles, particularly their shared values of autonomy and independence [2]. Adults with both secure and avoidant attachment styles may demonstrate similar perceived knowledge levels regarding their partner’s sexual history, as both attachment styles prioritize their sense of self and personal autonomy. Consequently, it is plausible that individuals with avoidant attachment styles might exhibit a similar willingness to learn about their partner’s sexual past to securely attached adults due to their values of independence and self-reliance.

While we did not anticipate the sample sizes for each attachment style, it was noteworthy to observe the large proportion of anxious adults. This could be attributed to various factors, including the limited socialization opportunities young adults have had within the past 2 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the dynamics of dating culture. Italian researchers have delved into the impacts of the pandemic on emotional experience and attachment within adult romantic relationships. Their findings indicated a significant increase in anxious attachment styles among adults, likely stemming from prolonged periods of separation from their partner and a greater need for closeness and
reassurance [16]. Additionally, the prevalence of anxiously attached participants may also reflect the new technological era of dating. Studies have suggested that the rise of individualism and reliance on technology in our society can create and foster anxious attachment in adulthood [17]. Considering the interplay of variables such as COVID-19 and the challenges of navigating relationships in the 21st century, the observed levels of relational anxiety among participants are both significant and intriguing for the field of adult attachment research.

Another significant result is the large standard deviation observed within the anxious attachment group. This wide variability in the anxious attachment style can be interpreted through what it means to be an anxiously attached partner. Previous research has identified traits associated with anxious attachment styles such as feeling more insecure, fearful, and overwhelmed in adult relationships [2]. Anxiously attached participants who exhibited high perceived knowledge about their partner’s sex history may have sought out this information to alleviate their insecurities and fears within the relationships. On the other hand, anxiously attached participants with low perceived knowledge levels may have opted to avoid learning about their partner’s sex history to sidestep those feelings of anxiety, rejection, and hurt. This variance also highlights the diverse coping mechanisms employed by individuals with anxious attachment styles.

Limitations

This research study examined the relationship between adult attachment and perceived knowledge of partner sex history. That said, it is important to acknowledge limitations in this study’s methodology and sample demographics. Firstly, this study predominantly included cisgender and heterosexual individuals, with a notable overrepresentation of female respondents. These demographics provide a limitation when interpreting the results of this study, as they may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Additionally, the sensitive nature of the topics assessed in the study, coupled with the use of self-report measures, introduces potential biases in participant responses. Specifically, respondents may have exhibited social desirability bias when answering questions related to attachment style and perceived knowledge of partner sexual experience. This bias could affect the authenticity of the data collected, potentially skewing the presentation of participants’ attachment styles and their actual understanding of their partner’s sexual history. Moreover, response bias extends to the participant’s partner that they are reflecting on. Even if respondents know their partner’s sexual history, their partner may exhibit their own social desirability bias or may be unsure about their sexual history, leading to inaccuracies in the information provided.

The sample size of 237 participants, while sufficient for many analyses, is another limitation of this study. An a priori power analysis was not conducted, and thus potentially affected the precision of effect size. Moreover, while the development of the Partner Sexual History Survey (PSHS) involved defining items from other instruments validated through an inductive method, a formal psychometric validation process, including exploratory factor analysis (EFA) or confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), was not conducted. This represents a notable limitation as it precludes an assessment of the PSHS’s reliability, validity, and dimensionality. Additionally, the internal consistency of the instrument and its dimensions could not be reported due to the lack of available data. As such, the absence of a psychometric validation and internal consistency assessment for the PSHS limits the interpretation and generalizability of the findings related to perceived partner sexual history knowledge. Future research should prioritize conducting rigorous psychometric validation procedures to ensure the reliability and validity of the PSHS as a measurement tool. Overall, these limitations underscore the need for a cautious interpretation of this study’s findings and highlight areas for future research to address.

What our study has demonstrated is a high prevalence of anxious attachment among undergraduate students, along with a noteworthy lack of perceived knowledge regarding their partner’s sexual history among adults with anxious attachment styles when compared
to other attachment styles. That said, individuals with an anxious attachment style may view themselves as having less knowledge, even though their level of perceived knowledge may not significantly differ from that of others. These findings open avenues for future academic research into how individuals with anxious attachment styles perceive their level of sexual knowledge.

Professionals such as psychologists can utilize the insights from this study to design programs and interventions aimed at enhancing sexual knowledge among adults with anxious attachments, given that anxiously attached adults exhibited low levels of awareness regarding their partner’s sexual past. By fostering sexual knowledge in adults with anxious attachment styles, we contribute to the cultivation of better sexual and romantic relationships. Moreover, encouraging individuals with anxious attachment styles to have more sexual knowledge about their partner’s sexual history can bolster self-confidence and promote overall sexual health, thus mitigating potential sexual risk.

Our current research underscores the persistent limitation in knowledge about sexual history within partnerships. Drawing on prior research conducted by Drumright et al. [9], which revealed that 26% of respondents were aware of their partner’s sexual history, our study builds upon this by providing more recent data. Specifically, we found that 25% of respondents exhibited low levels of perceived knowledge about their partner’s sexual past. This continuity in findings across studies suggests an ongoing need for enhanced education regarding partner sex history in adulthood to promote safer sex practices and overall sexual well-being.

Future research can explore similar research topics on attachment and sex knowledge but with a more specific demographic. Given that our study did not control for factors such as age, gender, or sexual orientation, future research could examine partner knowledge about the sexual experience within distinct populations, such as an adult population who may possess greater maturity and experience in obtaining sexual knowledge compared to young adults. Additionally, research could focus specifically on monogamous or polyamorous relationships to discern whether there are differences in the openness of sexual knowledge between these relationships. Lastly, exploring knowledge about partner sexual histories within the fourth attachment style, insecure-disorganized, could provide valuable insights as our study solely focused on the three attachment styles proposed by Hazan and Shaver [1]. This avenue of research could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between attachment styles and sexual knowledge within relationships.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the results of this study supported the hypothesis with some exceptions. Overall, participants across all attachment styles demonstrated high levels of perceived knowledge about their partner’s sexual history. However, certain attachment styles demonstrated more perceived knowledge about the partner’s sex history than other attachment styles. Specifically, individuals with secure and avoidant attachment styles exhibited greater perceived knowledge about their partner’s sex history compared to those with anxious attachment styles. Conversely, there was no significant difference in knowledge scores between individuals with secure and avoidant attachment styles, suggesting similar levels of perceived knowledge about their partner’s sex history.


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

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy and security regulations with the affiliated university.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**References**


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