

SHORT THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)

**The role of attachment and early maladaptive schemas in
relationship satisfaction, dyadic processes, and gender differences**

by Lili Kövér

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The Examination takes place in the Library of the Department of Anesthesiology and Intensive Care, Faculty of Medicine, University of Debrecen, in Augusztai Building II, at 11:00 on 27 August 2026.

Head of the Defense Committee:	László Csiba, PhD, DSc, Full Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
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The PhD Defense takes place at the Lecture Hall of Bldg. A, Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Debrecen, at 13:00 on 27 August 2026.

1 Introduction

Relationship satisfaction is fundamental to individuals' psychological well-being, emotional stability and quality of life. Empirical findings consistently demonstrate that higher relationship satisfaction is associated with more favourable mental and physical health indicators, greater stress tolerance and more effective conflict management. Conversely, lower levels of satisfaction tend to be linked with increased anxiety and relationship difficulties. This highlights the importance of examining the internal psychological processes that shape the subjective experience of romantic relationships.

Among the factors that determine relationship satisfaction, the internal representations that shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their partners play a particularly significant role. Two theoretical perspectives provide valuable insights into these internal dynamics. Attachment theory emphasises the impact of early caregiving experiences on the development of expectations and behavioural patterns in adult romantic relationships, particularly regarding closeness, trust, and emotional regulation. Secure attachment is generally associated with greater relationship satisfaction, whereas insecure attachment is linked to conflict, fear of abandonment and avoidance of intimacy.

Meanwhile, schema theory focuses on enduring cognitive and emotional patterns that emerge from early interpersonal experiences, known as early maladaptive schemas. These deeply rooted beliefs influence how a partner's behaviour is interpreted, can distort perception of interpersonal situations and result in increased vulnerability to negative relational interactions and reduced relationship satisfaction.

While attachment theory and schema theory have different areas of focus, both examine the impact of enduring internal patterns on relationship functioning. However, previous studies have typically investigated these constructs separately, so limited knowledge is available regarding their contribution to relationship satisfaction at the dyadic level and any gender differences in these processes. The present doctoral dissertation aims to improve understanding of the internal mechanisms underlying relationship satisfaction by conducting two empirical studies. The first study examines the role of attachment anxiety and avoidance in mixed-sex couples, considering gender differences, differences between clinical and non-clinical samples, and actor-partner effects. The second study analyses the impact of early maladaptive schemas on relationship satisfaction using a similar dyadic approach.

Together, the two studies demonstrate that emotion regulation patterns related to attachment processes and maladaptive schemas both play a significant role in the functioning and well-being of romantic relationships, particularly regarding partners' mutual influence.

2 Literature review

Relationship satisfaction is a key indicator of both individual psychological well-being and the stability of long-term relationships, both of which are associated with better mental health. Previous research into the quality of romantic relationships has primarily focused on interactional and sociocultural factors, such as communication patterns and gender roles. However, there is an increasing body of evidence that suggests the evaluation of relationship functioning is also determined by deeper cognitive and emotional representations that are rooted in early experiences. Therefore, relationship satisfaction depends not only on the objective quality of relational interactions, but also on how individuals subjectively interpret intimacy, closeness and the fulfilment of their needs. Attachment theory and schema theory offer relevant theoretical frameworks for examining these internal representations. According to Bartholomew's theory, an individual's early attachment history is manifested in their romantic relationships. Based on this two-dimensional attachment model, there is a relationship between attachment and individuals' views of themselves and their relationships. Accordingly, adult attachment can be interpreted along two dimensions: fear of abandonment and avoidance of closeness. Fear of abandonment is characterised by concern that a significant other may reject or not love the individual. In contrast, avoidance of closeness is characterised by a tendency to maintain emotional distance and general discomfort with intimacy. These two dimensions can be low or high, resulting in four attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful.

Empirical studies have shown that secure attachment is associated with greater relationship satisfaction, whereas anxious and avoidant attachment patterns negatively affect relationship functioning. However, most research has examined these associations at the individual level. Due to the reciprocal nature of romantic relationships, though, one partner's attachment patterns may also influence their partner's satisfaction.

Early maladaptive schemas are stable cognitive and emotional structures that develop through the interaction of temperament and early environmental experiences. They determine an individual's interpretation of themselves and others. According to schema theory, five basic emotional needs must be fulfilled during development: (1) secure attachment to others; (2)

autonomy, competence, a sense of identity; (3) realistic limits and self-control; (4) freedom to express emotions and needs; and (5) spontaneity and play. If these needs are not met, maladaptive schemas can develop within the personality, which can be categorized into five main domains: (1) Disconnection and Rejection, (2) Impaired Autonomy and/or Performance, (3) Impaired Limits, (4) Other-Directedness and (5) Overvigilance/Inhibition. These schemas therefore affect romantic relationships, distorting the perception of a partner's behavior and influencing relational interactions and satisfaction. Previous studies have found a negative association between certain early maladaptive schemas, such as emotional deprivation, subjugation or self-sacrifice, and relationship satisfaction. However, most of these studies have not examined the effects of schemas on partners, nor the role of gender differences in relationship functioning. Research has shown that males are more likely to exhibit avoidant attachment patterns, whereas females are more likely to exhibit anxious attachment patterns. In contrast, there has been less research into gender differences in maladaptive schemas, although some findings suggest that schemas such as self-sacrifice and subjugation may be more common among females. Together, these findings raise the possibility that internal psychological structures may contribute to relationship satisfaction at both the individual and dyadic levels, with different patterns emerging between males and females.

The present study aimed to examine how adult attachment styles and early maladaptive schemas contribute to relationship satisfaction at the dyadic level. Accordingly, the study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examining gender differences in romantic attachment, paying particular attention to avoidant patterns in males and anxious patterns in females.
2. Exploring differences in attachment styles among individuals with anxiety and/or depressive disorders, healthy individuals and their partners.
3. Analysis of the actor–partner effects of secure attachment on relationship satisfaction.
4. Examining gender differences in the relationship between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction while controlling for relationship duration.
5. Investigation of the association between early maladaptive schemas and relationship satisfaction.
6. Analysis of the effects of early maladaptive schemas on one's own and one's partner's relationship satisfaction.

7. Exploring gender differences in the relationship between schemas and satisfaction in relationships.

3 Study 1: Associations Between Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Participants

The study sample consisted of couples without a clinical diagnosis, as well as couples in which one partner exhibited symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. Healthy participants were recruited from the staff of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Debrecen's Faculty of Medicine and their acquaintances, while members of the clinical group were recruited from outpatient care at the clinic. Inclusion criteria were an age of over 18 years and having been in a relationship for at least six months.

Psychiatric diagnoses were established using a structured clinical interview based on DSM-5 criteria. Only individuals exhibiting symptoms of anxiety and/or depression were included in the clinical group. The Spielberger Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-T), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) were used to confirm the diagnosis. Participants showing symptoms above the clinical threshold were excluded from the healthy control group using the same questionnaires. Only cisgender individuals were included to enable the investigation of gender differences. Participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. The study was approved by the Regional and Institutional Research Ethics Committee (RKEB/IKEB) of the University of Debrecen's Clinical Centre.

The final sample consisted of 170 individuals (85 couples), and no differences were found between the clinical ($n = 38$ couples) and healthy ($n = 47$ couples) groups in terms of age or relationship duration.

3.2 Questionnaires

3.2.1 Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationship (PAIR)

The *Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships* (PAIR) self-report questionnaire was used to assess the four dimensions of intimacy experienced in romantic relationships:

emotional, sexual, intellectual and recreational. PAIR allows couples to evaluate their relationship in these areas using a five-point Likert scale. In the present study, the Hungarian adaptation of the questionnaire (PAIR-H) was used to assess relationship satisfaction in terms of understanding/support and shared experiences.

3.2.2 Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR)

The Hungarian version of the *Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire* (ECR) was used to measure romantic attachment styles. The questionnaire assesses attachment along the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. Participants were classified into secure, dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment categories according to the model of Bartholomew and Horowitz, based on their scores on these two dimensions.

3.3 Statistical analysis

The data were analysed using the RStudio statistical software (version 1.3.1093) and the Jamovi statistical software (version 2.3.28). The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to examine the distributions of age and relationship duration, indicating that neither variable followed a normal distribution. Accordingly, the Mann–Whitney U test was applied to assess differences between groups.

The chi-square test was used to examine the distribution of attachment categories by gender and group membership. The strength of the associations was estimated using Pearson's contingency C and Cramer's V coefficients. Fisher's exact test was applied to assess attachment concordance between partners due to low cell frequencies.

Separate multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) were conducted to examine relationship satisfaction in males and females. The dependent variables were the dimensions of relationship satisfaction (understanding/support and shared experiences), and the independent variables were the attachment styles of the partners and their interaction. Relationship duration was included as a covariate in the analyses. Effect sizes were characterized using Wilks' lambda values and significant differences were explored using pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni correction.

3.4 Results

There was no significant difference in the gender distribution of attachment styles in the separate participant groups (Fisher's exact test, $p > .05$) or in the combined sample ($\chi^2(3) = 2.64$, $p = .45$). However, attachment style distribution showed a significant association with group membership (healthy individuals, individuals with psychological disorders and their partners; $\chi^2(6) = 26.02$, $p < .001$). This proved to be a weak, yet significant, relationship ($C = .36$, $V = .28$). The groups differed significantly exclusively in terms of secure attachment ($\chi^2(2) = 56.86$, $p < .001$), which was more prevalent among healthy participants.

There were significant differences in the distribution of partners' attachment styles (Fisher's test, $p < .001$); however, matching attachment styles were rare (Cohen's $\kappa = .24$). At the same time, most individuals with a secure attachment style had a partner with a secure attachment style (females: 71%; males: 70%). No significant gender differences were found in the dimensions of relationship satisfaction (understanding/support and shared experiences) (paired t-test, $t = 1.26$, $df = 46$, $p > 0.05$). The effect of partners' attachment styles on relationship satisfaction was examined by conducting separate MANCOVA analyses by gender, controlling for relationship length. The two dimensions of relationship satisfaction were included as dependent variables, while both partners' attachment styles were included as independent variables. Based on Wilks' lambda values ($> .70$), attachment styles explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in the dependent variables (23–30%).

ANCOVA analyses showed that, for female participants, satisfaction with the understanding/support dimension was significantly associated with their own and their partner's attachment style ($p < .05$). Based on Bonferroni pairwise comparisons, secure attachment ($M = 33.07$; $SD = 5.2$) was associated with higher satisfaction among both females and their male partners ($ps < .05$). However, among females, only relationship length showed a significant association with satisfaction in the shared experiences dimension ($p < .05$).

Among male participants, satisfaction with the understanding/support dimension was significantly associated with their female partner's attachment style ($p < .05$), with higher satisfaction associated with secure attachment ($M = 33.6$; $SD = 3.8$). In the shared experiences dimension, the interaction effect of both partners' attachment styles was also found to be significant ($p < .05$), in addition to the female partner's attachment style. Interpreting the interaction effect revealed that a female partner with a secure attachment style was associated

with higher satisfaction ($M=24.31$, $SD=3$), particularly when her male partner exhibited a fearful attachment style ($M=28.00$, $SD=1.41$).

4 Study 2: Early Maladaptive Schemas and Relationship Satisfaction

4.1 Methods

4.1.1 Participants

Healthy volunteers were recruited from employees of the Department of Psychiatry at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Debrecen, and their acquaintances, between 2022 and 2023. The inclusion criteria were an age of over 18 years and being in a romantic relationship with someone of the opposite sex for at least six months. Only cisgender individuals were included to enable the investigation of gender differences. Participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. The study was approved by the Regional and Institutional Research Ethics Committee (RKEB/IKEB) of the University of Debrecen's Clinical Centre.

A total of 256 individuals completed the questionnaires, but because of incomplete or unmatched data, 162 individuals had to be excluded. The final sample consisted of 47 couples (94 individuals: 47 females and 47 males). The mean age of the total sample was 50.94 years ($SD=6.4$): 51.3 years for female ($SD=6.2$) and 49.7 years for male ($SD=6.1$). The average duration of the relationships was 24.1 months ($SD=6.9$).

4.2 Questionnaires

4.2.1 Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ)

The Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ) was used to assess early maladaptive schemas. This measures 18 such schemas via 244 items that are rated on a six-point Likert scale.

4.2.2 Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the PAIR questionnaire, which measures four dimensions of intimacy: emotional, sexual, intellectual and recreational.

4.3 Statistical analysis

Continuous variables were summarised using mean and standard deviation. Based on the results of normality tests (Shapiro–Wilk test), it was found that most variables did not follow a normal distribution. Therefore, non-parametric procedures were applied to the analyses. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare paired samples and Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine associations. Internal consistency of schema variables was analysed separately for males, females and the total sample. To explore the mutual effects between partners, mixed models were applied in the form of the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). Results were considered statistically significant at $p < .05$. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27).

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Results regarding early maladaptive schemas in males and females

Early maladaptive schemas demonstrated adequate internal consistency in both males (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.890$) and females (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.912$). Examining gender differences revealed that males achieved significantly higher scores on the emotional deprivation schema ($M = 16.6$ vs. 14.07 ; $p = 0.010$), the social isolation schema ($M = 15.48$ vs. 14.63 ; $p = 0.039$) and the defectiveness/shame schema ($M = 21.89$ vs. 19.65 ; $p = 0.032$). Conversely, females scored higher on the self-sacrifice ($M = 57.17$ vs. 50.49 ; $p = 0.001$) and negativity/pessimism ($M = 24.21$ vs. 23.33 ; $p = 0.019$) schemas. No significant differences were observed between males and females in the remaining schemas.

4.4.2 Correlations between male and female early maladaptive schemas

Numerous significant correlations were observed between male and female early maladaptive schemas. The following schemas showed moderate to strong correlations in both genders: abandonment ($\rho = 0.45$; $p < 0.001$), mistrust/abuse ($\rho = 0.58$; $p < 0.001$), dependence/incompetence ($\rho = 0.55$; $p < 0.001$), enmeshment/undeveloped self ($\rho = 0.47$; $p < 0.001$), subjugation ($\rho = 0.49$; $p < 0.001$), self-sacrifice ($\rho = 0.43$; $p < 0.001$), insufficient self-control/self-discipline ($\rho = 0.54$; $p < 0.001$), approval-seeking ($\rho = 0.61$; $p < 0.001$) and negativity/pessimism ($\rho = 0.61$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, male emotional deprivation schemas were associated with female vulnerability to harm or illness schemas ($\rho = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, male social isolation and defectiveness/shame schemas were linked to female negativity/pessimism ($\rho = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$) and dependence/incompetence ($\rho = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$).

schemas. Furthermore, male emotional inhibition and unrelenting standards correlated with female defectiveness/shame ($\rho=0.52$, $p<0.001$) and negativity/pessimism ($\rho=0.46$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, females' emotional deprivation, social isolation and failure schemas showed significant associations with males' approval-seeking ($\rho=0.47$, $p<0.001$) and emotional inhibition ($\rho=0.39-0.46$, $p<0.001$) schemas. The strongest correlations emerged between the dependence/incompetence, defectiveness/shame and emotional inhibition schemas ($\rho=0.51$; $p<0.001$). These results suggest that partners' early maladaptive schemas are not independent of one another but demonstrate mutual associations within couples. Accordingly, actor-partner interdependence modelling (APIM) was applied in subsequent analyses to examine how individual schemas influence one's own relationship satisfaction and that of one's partner.

4.4.3 Results of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM)

The APIM analyses revealed that the emotional deprivation schema, which belongs to the disconnection and rejection domain, significantly decreased both one's own and their partner's relationship satisfaction in both genders. This indicates a mutual negative effect of this early maladaptive schema on relationship satisfaction for both the actor and their partner. The abandonment schema did not influence one's own level of satisfaction; however, it significantly reduced the satisfaction of one's partner in both genders. The mistrust/abuse and social isolation schemas were associated with a decrease in the partner's satisfaction. Early maladaptive schemas of defectiveness/shame, vulnerability to harm or illness, emotional inhibition, unrelenting standards, punitiveness and insufficient self-control/self-discipline were primarily associated with a decrease in one's own relationship satisfaction. Within the impaired other-directedness domain, the subjugation schema decreased the partner's satisfaction, while the approval-seeking schema showed a negative association with one's own satisfaction in both genders. In contrast, the failure, dependence/incompetence, enmeshment/immaturity, self-sacrifice, negativity/pessimism, punitiveness and entitlement/grandiosity schemas showed no consistent significant association with relationship satisfaction.

5 Discussion

This doctoral research aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the internal psychological factors that influence relationship satisfaction. Emphasis was placed on romantic attachment styles, early maladaptive schemas and their gender-specific characteristics, as well as dyadic

patterns. A heterogeneous sample of mixed-sex couples was examined, including both healthy individuals and those with psychiatric disorders. In both studies, each partner evaluated their own internal patterns and relationship satisfaction. This made it possible to explore individual (actor) and partner effects, as well as mutual associations.

5.1 Gender differences and similarities

We did not find any significant gender differences regarding attachment styles, which is consistent with several previous findings. However, more pronounced gender differences emerged in the domain of early maladaptive schemas. Males scored higher on the emotional deprivation, social isolation and defectiveness/shame schemas, while females showed higher levels of the self-sacrifice and negativity/pessimism schemas. These results imply that, although core attachment patterns exhibit fewer stable gender differences, gender-related patterns associated with societal roles and expectations may become more pronounced at the level of maladaptive schemas.

5.2 Differences between clinical and non-clinical groups

Secure attachment was less prevalent among individuals with anxiety and/or depression. No clear group differences emerged for the other attachment styles. At the same time, secure attachment was associated with higher relationship satisfaction in the overall sample. These results support the idea that attachment security is a key factor in psychological well-being and relationship functioning.

5.3 Dyadic patterns: similarity and complementarity

One of the central messages of our findings is that relationship satisfaction is a dyadic phenomenon, whereby partners' internal patterns are interrelated and may shape each other's perception of the relationship's quality. Regarding attachment styles, secure attachment was frequently observed alongside a partner's secure attachment, whereas complementary pairings were more common among those with insecure patterns. In terms of shared experiences, the highest levels of satisfaction were observed in couples where the female partner exhibited a secure attachment pattern and the male partner a fearful attachment pattern. This suggests that the emotional stability of the securely attached partner can offset the insecurities arising from fearful attachment when engaging in shared activities.

At the level of schemas, strong associations emerged between male and female schemas, which may indicate mutually reinforcing relational cycles. For example, a particularly important association was found between male emotional deprivation schemas and female vulnerability to harm/illness schemas. Interpreted within the framework of attachment theory, these findings suggest that anxious and avoidant tendencies, as well as schema activation, may maintain emotional distance and strain in relationships.

5.4 Key factors of relationship satisfaction

Based on the attachment study, secure attachment was associated with higher satisfaction in the understanding/support dimension. This finding is consistent with previous empirical research. Further analyses, which controlled for relationship duration, showed that satisfaction in this area was related to both partners' attachment styles. In contrast, satisfaction with the shared activities dimension was not associated with either partner's attachment characteristics, but rather with the length of the relationship.

The APIM results of the schema study indicated that several schemas were associated with one's own and/or one's partner's satisfaction. However, the emotional deprivation schema played a particularly central role, emerging as an important source of dissatisfaction for both male and female participants. Furthermore, the abandonment, mistrust/abuse, social isolation, subjugation, approval-seeking, unrelenting standards and negativity/pessimism schemas showed negative associations with relationship satisfaction in multiple cases. Overall, secure attachment and fewer activated maladaptive schemas were associated with higher relationship satisfaction.

5.5 Clinical and practical implications

The results suggest that it is worthwhile examining attachment and schema patterns in an integrated manner in both couple therapy and individual interventions. Strengthening secure attachment (e.g. through mentalisation, emotion-focused interventions and enhancing empathic responsiveness) may improve understanding and support and act as a protective factor, even in the presence of clinical vulnerability. A schema therapy approach may be particularly relevant for couples in which predominant schemas include emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust/abuse, social isolation or shame. Therapeutic work could involve identifying and communicating needs, restructuring automatic reactions and strengthening assertiveness and boundary-setting skills.

5.6 Implications of the Findings for Couple and Family Therapy

The findings of the present dissertation have several relevant implications for couple and family therapy practice. The results suggest that relationship satisfaction cannot be understood solely as a function of individual characteristics, but rather as a reciprocal, dyadic process in which both individual vulnerabilities and interactional patterns play a significant role.

At the individual level, the importance of attachment dimensions and early maladaptive schemas can be highlighted. Schemas such as emotional deprivation, abandonment, or defectiveness/shame may distort the interpretation of the partner's behavior and contribute to the maintenance of negative emotional reactions. Schema therapy techniques, including imagery rescripting, cognitive restructuring, and limited reparenting, may facilitate the modification of these maladaptive meanings, while increasing awareness of attachment patterns may support a better understanding of emotional reactions and relational behaviors.

The findings at the dyadic level indicate that one partner's internal patterns may also influence the other partner's relationship satisfaction, supporting the interaction-focused perspective of couple therapy approaches. Identifying and reframing dysfunctional interactional cycles, such as anxious-avoidant dynamics, may therefore be of particular importance in the therapeutic process. In addition, interactions between schema modes may contribute to the maintenance of maladaptive relational cycles, the interruption of which may be facilitated by the methods of emotionally focused couple therapy, including the exploration and validation of primary emotions and the externalization of negative interactional cycles. From a psychodynamic perspective, dyadic processes may also be paralleled with phenomena such as collusion or unconscious collusion.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and adaptively communicating emotional needs. Schemas and attachment patterns may distort the interpretation of the partner's behavior; therefore, increasing awareness of emotional needs and their explicit communication represents an important therapeutic goal. Techniques such as the use of I-statements, reflective listening, and the accurate expression of emotions may promote mutual understanding and improve relationship satisfaction.

Overall, the findings support the application of an integrative therapeutic approach that emphasizes both the exploration of individual vulnerabilities and the modification of couple interaction patterns.

5.7 Strengths, limitations and future directions

One of the study's main strengths is its heterogeneous sample, the inclusion of both partners and the application of the APIM, which enabled the examination of mutual effects. However, the following limitations should be noted: the study only included mixed-sex couples; the sample size was relatively small for comparing clinical and non-clinical subgroups; the relationships were relatively short; and the study had a cross-sectional design with potential biases inherent in self-report methods.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to better capture mutually influencing processes over time. In addition, daily diary and experience sampling method (ESM) approaches may provide opportunities to examine everyday interactions and emotional states in real time, while observational study designs may contribute to a deeper understanding of partner interactions and dyadic processes. Examining the role of relationship history would also be worthwhile, particularly establishing whether the given relationship is the individual's first long-term partnership or has developed following previous relationship experiences. Furthermore, future studies could explore cross-cultural differences and the specific effects of various psychiatric disorders, as well as the impact of online communication and digital interaction on attachment and early maladaptive schemas.

6 Novel findings

1. No significant gender differences were found in terms of romantic attachment styles. However, significant gender-specific patterns emerged in terms of early maladaptive schemas. This suggests that the internal representations that shape relationship functioning may manifest differently in men and females at different levels of psychological organisation.
2. A lower proportion of secure attachment was observed among individuals with anxiety and/or depressive disorders. This indicates an association between psychological disorders and relationship quality.
3. Not only was secure attachment associated with an individual's own relationship satisfaction, but it was also associated with their partner's satisfaction. This finding suggests that the effects of attachment patterns can be observed not only at an individual level, but also in a partner's relational experience.
4. Among early maladaptive schemas, the emotional deprivation schema was found to be a key factor underlying both individual and relational dissatisfaction. This schema may be associated with a persistent sense of emotional unavailability within the relationship.
5. Certain maladaptive schemas were related to both individuals' own relationship satisfaction and their partners' satisfaction. This further emphasises the reciprocal nature of relationship processes.
6. Complementary schema patterns could be identified within couples (e.g. emotional deprivation leading to vulnerability to harm or illness). These patterns may create mutually reinforcing, self-perpetuating cycles of interaction within the relationship.
7. The associations between schemas and relationship satisfaction varied between male and female participants. This suggests that individual schema patterns may influence partner relationship satisfaction in gender-specific ways.
8. The findings support the view that relationship satisfaction can only be fully understood within an integrated framework combining attachment- and schema-level perspectives. Internal relational representations shape the emotional quality and stability of the relationship in a mutually reinforcing way.

7 Summary

The aim of this research was to provide a comprehensive overview of the internal psychological factors that influence relationship satisfaction, paying particular attention to romantic attachment styles and early maladaptive schemas. Instead of examining relationship functioning within a single theoretical framework, we analyzed the integrated associations between attachment patterns and schemas using a dyadic approach. This represents a novel contribution compared to previous research designs. Including both partners in the study allowed us to explore how individual internal representations relate to not only one's own relationship satisfaction, but also that of one's partner.

The results indicated no significant gender differences in romantic attachment styles, but substantial gender-specific patterns emerged in early maladaptive schemas. Secure attachment was associated with higher relationship satisfaction for both partners, whereas certain early maladaptive schemas, particularly emotional deprivation, proved to be key determinants of lower relationship satisfaction. Psychological disorders were also associated with a lower prevalence of secure attachment, which was reflected in lower relationship satisfaction.

Dyadic analyses revealed that relationship satisfaction cannot be interpreted at an individual level alone. One partner's attachment patterns and early maladaptive schemas were also found to be associated with the satisfaction of the other partner, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of relationship processes. Similar schema patterns were identifiable within couples, which may give rise to mutually reinforcing, self-maintaining cycles of interaction. Furthermore, the associations between schemas and satisfaction manifested differently in men and women, particularly in terms of how individual patterns relate to the partner's relationship experience.

Different dimensions of relationship satisfaction were associated with distinct factors: the understanding/support dimension was primarily related to partners' attachment styles, whereas the experience of shared activities was more closely associated with relationship duration. Overall, the findings suggest that relationship satisfaction can only be understood through an integrated approach that considers attachment- and schema-level processes. Internal relational representations do not operate in isolation, but rather interact dynamically to shape emotional quality, conflict management and satisfaction within the relationship.

From both theoretical and practical perspectives, the findings emphasize that secure attachment and maladaptive schemas, particularly those related to emotional deprivation, may significantly impact emotional availability, mutual support, and relationship stability.



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Subject: PhD Publication List

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List of publications related to the dissertation

1. **Kövé, L.**, Balázs, K., Berecz, R., Égerházi, A.: Gender differences in the association between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction.
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IF: 1.4 (2024)
2. **Kövé, L.**, Szöllősi, G. J., Frecska, E., Bugán, A., Berecz, R., Égerházi, A.: The association between early maladaptive schemas and romantic relationship satisfaction.
Front. Psychol. 15, 1-10, 2024.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1460723>
IF: 2.9

List of other publications

3. **Kövé, L.**, Balázs, K., Frecska, E., Égerházi, A.: A PAIR-H párkapcsolati kérdőív magyar nyelvű adaptációja.
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