



THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN REJECTION SENSITIVITY AND RELATIONSHIP  
COMMITMENT: ATTACHMENT STYLES AS MEDIATORS

DAPHNE VOON KAI YEN

NG YI XUAN

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The Association between Rejection Sensitivity and  
Relationship Commitment: Attachment Styles as Mediators

Daphne Voon Kai Yen and Ng Yi Xuan

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

This research project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Submitted on September 2025.

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DAPHNE VOON KAI YEN

NG YI XUAN

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**APPROVAL FORM**

This research paper attached hereto, entitled “The Association between Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Commitment: Attachment Styles as Mediators” prepared and submitted by Daphne Voon Kai Yen and Ng Yi Xuan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Psychology is hereby accepted.



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Supervisor  
Dr Tan Soon Aun

Date: 30/8/2025

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

**Abstract**

This study examined the correlation between rejection sensitivity (RS) and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship, with attachment styles tested as mediators. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data were collected from 234 participants (79.9% female, 20.1% male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 23.97$ ,  $SD = 4.07$ ) who fulfilled the inclusion criteria of being aged 18 years and above, currently in a romantic relationship but not legally married, and Malaysian. Participants were recruited through self-selected, purposive, and snowball sampling and completed online self-report questionnaires comprising the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ), the State Adult Attachment Measure (SAAM), and the Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory (MDRCI). Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 and Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4). Results demonstrated a significant negative correlation between RS and relationship commitment. Mediation analyses further indicated that secure and avoidant attachment significantly mediated this association, whereas anxious attachment did not. These findings suggest that RS predicts commitment through attachment-related mechanisms, operating differently across attachment styles. The study enhances understanding of how rejection sensitivity and attachment interact to shape commitment within the Malaysian cultural context, while also underscoring the broader role of cultural and social-contextual factors. Practically, the findings highlight the value of attachment-based counselling interventions to promote healthier relationships and strengthen commitment among unmarried young adults.

**Keywords:** rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, relationship commitment, unmarried individuals, Malaysia

**Subject Area:** HQ801-801.83 Man-woman relationships. Courtship. Dating


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**DECLARATION**

We declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of our own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

Name : DAPHNE VOON KAI YEN

Student ID : 22AAB06962

Signed : 

Date : 30<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Name : NG YI XUAN

Student ID : 21AAB04682

Signed : 

Date : 30<sup>th</sup> August 2025

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**List of Abbreviations**

## Abbreviations

1. ARSQ - Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire
2. CI - Confidence Interval
3. DMS - Defensive motivational system
4. DOSM - Department of Statistics Malaysia
5. K-S test - Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test
6. MDRCI - Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory
7. PPMC - Pearson product-moment correlation
8. SAAM - State Adult Attachment Measure
9. SD - Standard Deviation
10. SERC - The Scientific and Ethical Review Committee
11. SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Sciences
12. UTAR - Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
13. VIF - Variance Inflation Factor

## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### Background of Study

Romantic relationships are interpersonal interactions that encompass intimacy, mutual dependency, and the pursuit of shared goals (Liu et al., 2019). Among the different components contributing to the success of relationships, commitment stands out as a crucial component, providing the basis for trust, stability, and emotional connection between partners (Ilene, 2024). Commitment indicates a long-term perspective toward the relationship, involving not just feelings of attachment to a partner but also a purposeful determination to preserve and develop the relationship over time (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). This aligns with Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, which views commitment as a vital component of consummate love—an ideal form of love that combines intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). In this context, commitment is not only a passive feeling but an intentional decision to remain engaged with a partner and invest in the relationship, especially when confronted with obstacles. Thus, it is evident that commitment is essential for promoting relationship stability and boosting relational quality.

An increasing amount of evidence indicates that inadequate commitment in romantic relationships may have greater consequences, including reluctance to engage in long-term relationships or marriage. Data from the Central Statistics Office showed an 8.7% decline in marriage rates in 2023 compared to 2022, demonstrating an ongoing trend of individuals being unmarried or single (Central Statistics Office, 2024). This reduction implies a shift in societal attitudes toward traditional milestones like marriage, with more individuals postponing or avoiding commitment entirely. Many cultures consider marriage as a cornerstone of social and

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family life, reflecting stability, family formation, and intergenerational continuity (Kumar, 2022). However, as more individuals delay or completely refrain from marriage, it raises concerns regarding the increasing significance of relationships in creating societal dynamics and the psychological underpinnings motivating this hesitation.

Such inability to commit may emerge from several sources, including personal fears and relationship dynamics (Mishra & Allen, 2023). For instance, rejection sensitivity—a personality trait defined by heightened sensitivity to social rejection—can hinder an individual’s ability to emotionally interact with their partner and sustain commitment (Gao et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2024). Rejection sensitivity encourages hypervigilance to potential rejection, leading to difficulty in developing trust and emotional security in romantic relationships. These challenges, in turn, negatively disrupt long-term commitment.

Similarly, attachment patterns significantly impact how individuals’ approach and sustain commitment in romantic relationships (Mishra & Allen, 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). These styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganised—emerge early in infancy through interactions with caregivers and impact individuals’ capacity to manage intimacy, bond emotionally, and navigate relational challenges (Bowlby, 1982). Secure attachment, characterised by comfort with intimacy and confidence in one’s partner, supports enhanced levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction (Sagone et al., 2023). Conversely, those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles may struggle with commitment due to their heightened fears of rejection or unease with emotional intimacy (Mishra et al., 2024).

Building on this foundation, this study intends to analyse the associations between rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, and relationship commitment in the context of unmarried Malaysian young couples. While past research has studied these constructs independently,

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insufficient emphasis has been placed on their combined influence within distinct cultural contexts. This study intends to address this gap by studying how attachment styles influence the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment, giving a deeper comprehension of the psychological and cultural elements determining commitment in modern relationships.

### **Problem Statement**

According to a nationwide survey conducted by Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), among 485 respondents aged 18 to 35, less than half (41.8%) expressed plans to get married (Menon, 2021). Additionally, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) reported a 12.5% decline in marriage rates in 2023 (Xinhua, 2023). The recent decline in marriage rates in Malaysia implies that many individuals remain reluctant about or apprehensive about committing to long-term relationships, as indicated by research correlating fear of relationship commitment to greater rates of singlehood. This fear is generally driven by concerns about relational stability, emotional risks, and the ability to maintain satisfying relationships (Apostolou & Tekeş, 2024).

This trend may be partly explained by psychological factors, such as fear of rejection or a heightened sensitivity to relationship challenges, which affect individuals' capacity for commitment. Individuals with high rejection sensitivity often avoid deep relationships as a protective mechanism against potential emotional harm, thereby delaying or avoiding long-term commitments such as marriage. Existing studies have studied rejection sensitivity (i.e., Richter & Schoebi, 2021), factors that impact relationship commitment (i.e., Machia et al., 2024) and insecure attachment styles as a mediator (i.e., Mishra et al., 2024). However, there are few to no studies exploring secure attachment style as a mediator between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment. Recognizing this, this study seeks to examine the impact of rejection



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sensitivity on relationship commitment, contributing to a broader understanding of how psychological factors influence relationship dynamics.

The first notable gap is that the specific impact of rejection sensitivity on relationship commitment has not been well studied. While existing research has looked into its implication on other dynamics, such as relationship addiction (Lim & Kwon, 2024), social media addiction (Jang et al., 2024) and body dysmorphic symptoms (Balaya & Sündermann, 2024), there is a lack of focus on how rejection sensitivity undermines trust, emotional security, and long-term relational goals. The current research overlooks how rejection sensitivity might erode commitment by fostering insecurity and diminishing individuals' ability to maintain stable and supportive romantic relationships.

The subsequent issue is that there is a lack of research on the impact of rejection sensitivity on attachment styles, highlighting a significant gap in existing literature. The majority of studies have primarily focused on how attachment styles predict levels of rejection sensitivity, rather than investigating the reverse relationship (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022; Namitha Kothuru & Arjun Sekhar, 2023). Notably, in recent studies, only Mishra et al. (2024) have explored this reverse correlation, focusing on how rejection sensitivity may predict particular attachment styles. This oversight in the broader literature signifies a critical gap, as rejection sensitivity may have an impact on attachment styles in intimate relationships.

Moreover, there is a limited scope of previous studies, which mostly focus on insecure attachment styles, including anxious and avoidant attachments (Disha & Ipshita, 2023; Mishra et al., 2024), with limited attention given to secure attachment style. John Bowlby's attachment theory outlined four basic styles: secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganised, which are important for understanding relationship dynamics (Bowlby, 1982). Secure attachment remains

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insufficiently examined, despite its importance in promoting healthy relationship dynamics. One relevant study by Karagüven and Aslan (2022) identified secure attachment as a partial mediator between rejection sensitivity and marriage expectations—an association that shares similarities with relationship commitment but differs in specific relational dynamics. This omission highlights the necessity to further investigate secure attachment to enhance a more comprehensive understanding of how different attachment styles are associated with rejection sensitivity and commitment.

Additionally, studies examining the association between rejection sensitivity, relationship commitment, and attachment styles in the Malaysian context are absent. Most existing studies have focused on populations in other regions, such as Asia and the Middle East (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022; Mishra et al., 2024; Kothuru & Sekhar, 2023). This leaves a substantial gap in understanding how these dynamics function within Malaysia's unique cultural context.

Lastly, the participant samples in prior studies frequently contain a variety of relationship dynamics, such as married, engaged, or even pregnant individuals (Richter & Schoebi, 2021; Mishra et al., 2024). However, research focusing solely on unmarried individuals is scarce, creating a gap in understanding how attachment styles and rejection sensitivity affect commitment among individuals not engaged in formal or legal relationship statuses. This demographic gap is crucial, since unmarried individuals may encounter relationship dynamics differently compared to those in legally or socially recognised relationships.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) Is there a correlation between rejection sensitivity and attachment styles among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?

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- a) Is there a correlation between rejection sensitivity and secure attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
  - b) Is there a correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
  - c) Is there a correlation between rejection sensitivity and avoidant attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
- 2) Is there a correlation between attachment styles and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
- a) Is there a correlation between secure attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
  - b) Is there a correlation between anxious attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
  - c) Is there a correlation between avoidant attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
- 3) Is there a correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
- 4) Do attachment styles mediate the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?

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- a) Does secure attachment style mediate the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
- b) Does anxious attachment style mediate the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?
- c) Does avoidant attachment style mediate the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship?

### **Research Objectives**

#### ***Main Objectives***

This study seeks to investigate the mediating role of attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant) in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

#### ***Specific Objectives***

- 1) To examine the correlation between rejection sensitivity and attachment styles among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
  - a) To examine the correlation between rejection sensitivity and secure attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
  - b) To examine the correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

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- c) To examine the correlation between rejection sensitivity and avoidant attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
- 2) To examine the correlation between attachment styles and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
  - a) To examine the correlation between secure attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
  - b) To examine the correlation between anxious attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
  - c) To examine the correlation between avoidant attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
- 3) To examine the correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
- 4) To identify the mediating role of attachment styles in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
  - a) To identify the mediating role of secure attachment style in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

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- b) To identify the mediating role of anxious attachment style in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.
- c) To identify the mediating role of avoidant attachment style in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

### **Research Hypotheses**

H<sub>1a</sub>: There is a negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and secure attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>1b</sub>: There is a positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>1c</sub>: There is a positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and avoidant attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>2a</sub>: There is a positive correlation between secure attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>2b</sub>: There is a negative correlation between anxious attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>2c</sub>: There is a negative correlation between avoidant attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

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H<sub>4a</sub>: Secure attachment style significantly mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>4b</sub>: Anxious attachment style significantly mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

H<sub>4c</sub>: Avoidant attachment style significantly mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.

### **Significance of Study**

This study will generate literature contribution by specifically focusing on the impact of rejection sensitivity on relationship commitment as previous studies have largely investigated rejection sensitivity in the context of other relational dynamics (Balaya & Sündermann, 2024; Jang et al., 2024; Lim & Kwon, 2024). By focusing on the association between rejection sensitivity and commitment, this research can provide a deeper understanding of how rejection sensitivity undermines trust, emotional security, and long-term relational goals. This specificity enables a more focused investigation, enriching the literature with a nuanced viewpoint on rejection sensitivity to commitment.

Moreover, this study would adopt a fresh approach by examining the potential impact of rejection sensitivity on attachment styles, thereby reversing the prior research direction. While much of the earlier literature focuses on how attachment styles predict rejection sensitivity (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022; Namitha Kothuru & Arjun Sekhar, 2023), this study offers new insights into the bidirectional correlation between rejection sensitivity and attachment styles.

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Furthermore, by examining secure attachment as a mediator, this study fills a significant gap in the existing literature, which has mainly focused on insecure attachment styles—anxious and avoidant attachments (Disha & Ipshita, 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). Additionally, this research provides a more balanced perspective on attachment theory by incorporating its three principal components—secure, anxious, and avoidant. This widened scope contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how different attachment styles, associated with rejection sensitivity, affect relationship commitment.

In addition, this study will enrich the academic literature by examining the association of rejection sensitivity, relationship commitment, and attachment styles in the Malaysian context. Focusing on a Malaysian sample addresses the scarcity of region-specific research and offers insights that reflect the country's cultural and societal dynamics. These findings provide valuable contributions to cross-cultural context, expanding the comprehension of how this framework functions across different cultural contexts.

By narrowing the target sample to unmarried individuals, this study provides an opportunity to investigate relationship dynamics among those who are not engaged in formal or legal marriage. This demographic focus addresses a critical gap in literature, as unmarried individuals may experience different relational dynamics compared to those in socially or legally recognised relationships.

Lastly, the findings of this study can hold practical implications, such as guiding the design of counselling strategies for individuals with higher rejection sensitivity. Counsellors and related professionals can benefit from a comprehensive understanding of how rejection sensitivity influences relationship commitment between couples. This insight facilitates the development of targeted solutions to assist clients and couples in navigating relationship issues



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more efficiently. Also, by raising awareness among couples about the role of rejection sensitivity, this study can promote healthier communication patterns and emotional security, which will ultimately lead to improved relationship satisfaction and stability.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### ***Rejection Sensitivity***

##### **Conceptual Definition**

Rejection sensitivity is a personality trait marked by heightened sensitivity to social rejection; individuals exhibiting this sensitivity often anxiously or angrily anticipate, easily recognize, and emotionally respond to perceived rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Gao et al., 2019). Additionally, rejection sensitivity is defined as a cognitive-affective disposition characterised by the tendency to anxiously expect, rapidly recognise, and overreact to impending rejection in interpersonal interactions. This sensitivity is found in early experiences of rejection, such as family violence, emotional abuse, or conditional love, which create anticipatory anxiety and concerns about acceptance (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1997).

##### **Operational Definition**

The Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ) developed by Berenson et al. (2009) was used to assess rejection sensitivity. Scores are determined by multiplying rejection worry by the reverse of rejection expectation for each scenario. Higher mean scores indicate increased rejection sensitivity.

#### ***Relationship Commitment***

##### **Conceptual Definition**

Commitment indicates a long-term orientation towards a relationship, including feelings of attachment to a partner and the intention to sustain the relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001;

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 Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). On the other hand, relationship commitment is the psychological attachment and intent to maintain a relationship, shaped by satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size. According to Rusbult's Investment Model (1980), commitment increases when relationship advantages surpass costs (satisfaction), alternatives are less attractive, and investments — both tangible (e.g., shared assets) and intangible (e.g., time, emotions) — are important. Commitment can stay strong even in less satisfying relationships if investments are considerable and alternatives are inadequate.

### **Operational Definition**

Relationship commitment was investigated using Kurdek's (1995) Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory (MDRCI). This scale is designed to assess commitment in relationships based on various determinants, including rewards, costs, match to ideal comparison level, alternatives, investments, and barriers. Higher composite scores imply stronger commitment.

### ***Attachment Styles***

#### **Conceptual Definition**

Attachment style is a concept derived from Bowlby's attachment theory that refers to a person's typical methods of engaging in deep caregiving and receiving relationships with "attachment figures", which are often one's parents, children, or romantic partners. The concept involves one's trust in the attachment figure's availability as a stable base from which to freely explore the world when not in difficulty, as well as a safe haven from which to seek support, protection, and comfort in times of distress (Bowlby, 1988; Levy et al., 2011).

***Secure Attachment.*** Secure attachment is defined as trust in the accessibility and responsiveness of attachment figures, especially in times of stress. Individuals with secure

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attachment are comfortable requesting support, demonstrating emotional resilience, and maintain a good balance between intimacy and independence in relationships. This attachment style fosters trust and emotional stability in interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1988).

***Anxious Attachment.*** Anxious attachment develops from inconsistent or unreliable caregiving, resulting in increased sensitivity to indications of rejection or abandonment. Individuals with this style generally demonstrate dependence, emotional overactivation, and a heightened need for reassurance. This type of attachment relates to the fear of abandonment and trouble trusting the lasting nature of partnerships (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988).

***Avoidant Attachment.*** Avoidant attachment develops as a response to caregiving that discourages emotional connection or reliance. Individuals with avoidant attachment prioritize self-reliance and emotional detachment, typically suppressing their emotional needs. This attachment type is characterised by uneasiness with intimacy and reluctance to depend on others (Bowlby, 1988).

### **Operational Definition**

Attachment styles were measured using the State Adult Attachment Measure (SAAM) by Gillath et al. (2009). The SAAM evaluates three subscales: attachment secure, anxiety, and avoidance. Participants react to items expressing their current attachment-related feelings.

***Secure Attachment.*** Secure attachment was measured using the “attachment secure” subscale of the SAAM. Participants assess their agreement with items conveying a sense of security and trust in relationships. Higher scores suggest a greater sense of attachment security.

***Anxious Attachment.*** Anxious attachment was measured using the “anxiety” subscale of the SAAM. This subscale examines participants’ feelings of dread and dependency in relationships. Higher scores suggest greater attachment anxiety.

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***Avoidant Attachment.*** Avoidant attachment was measured using the “avoidance” subscale of the SAAM. Participants answer items reflecting discomfort with intimacy and reliance on others. Higher scores suggest a greater tendency toward attachment avoidance.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### Relationship Commitment

Commitment reflects a long-term orientation to a relationship, encompassing feelings of attachment to a partner and an intention to sustain it (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). A study mentioned that relationship commitment involves partners strategically influencing each other's commitment levels through factors like satisfaction, investment, and future plans, aiming to achieve specific commitment goals (Machia et al., 2024). Machia et al. (2024) mentioned that people monitor not only their own commitment but also their partner's perceived commitment. This is crucial as the end of a relationship, particularly if unexpected, can be emotionally harmful, as commitment is a key element that contributes to well-being and emotional security (Teoh et al., 2023). Precisely assessing a partner's commitment enables individuals to prevent emotional surprises and interpret their partner's behaviours favourably, even when undesirable. When a partner is perceived as committed, tiny imperfections are viewed as less consequential. Nonetheless, if commitment is perceived as inadequate, these behaviours may indicate possible future issues, prompting fear or uncertainty regarding the relationship's future (Machia et al., 2024).

Relationship commitment is a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors. Apostolou and Tekeş (2023) found that an increased fear of relationship commitment was associated with a higher probability of remaining single rather than being in an intimate relationship. The research demonstrates that lower levels of agreeableness and self-esteem are associated with a greater fear towards relationship commitment, which frequently results in remaining single. Social network dynamics also shape commitment; disapproval from friends or

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family can threaten relationship stability, prompting individuals to navigate these pressures based on their commitment levels (Sigler & Forest, 2024). Besides, religious orientation promotes commitment differently based on intrinsic and extrinsic orientations (Humala et al., 2023). Intrinsic religious orientation strengthens commitment by reducing dissatisfaction, whereas extrinsic orientation diminishes the impact of alternatives on commitment.

In short, commitment in romantic relationships involves a long-term attachment to a partner, characterised by a profound emotional connection and the intention to sustain the relationship over time. It is one of the most crucial elements in guaranteeing the quality and stability of an intimate relationship, as it determines individuals' investment, satisfaction, and willingness to navigate adversities. Multiple factors might affect one's level of commitment in a relationship. Overall, commitment is a multifaceted construct influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors, all contributing to the dynamics and well-being of romantic relationships.

### **Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Commitment**

Rejection sensitivity has been shown to significantly predict important relationship outcomes, particularly relationship commitment (Mishra & Allen, 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). Mishra et al. (2024) found that rejection sensitivity negatively correlates with relationship commitment in both men and women. Individuals with higher rejection sensitivity tend to report lower levels of commitment. Additionally, when both partners exhibit high rejection sensitivity, relationship outcomes are worse compared to couples with lower rejection sensitivity levels. A study also shows that rejection sensitivity negatively impacts relationship commitment, as individuals with high sensitivity may fear rejection, leading to avoidance behaviours and reduced emotional investment in their romantic relationships (Mishra & Allen, 2023).

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Moreover, research indicates that rejection sensitivity affects perceptions of partner responsiveness (Richter & Schoebi, 2021), which may subsequently impact relationship commitment (Arican-Dinc & Gable, 2023). Individuals who are sensitive to rejection may misunderstand neutral or ambiguous behaviours from their partner as signals of rejection. For example, if a partner is preoccupied or distracted, a rejection-sensitive individual may interpret this as a lack of interest or support, rather than a temporary condition. Consequently, when one partner feels a lack of responsiveness from the other, they are likely to become increasingly demotivated to sustain the relationship (Arican-Dinc & Gable, 2023).

In conclusion, rejection sensitivity plays a critical role in predicting relationship outcomes, especially in terms of relationship commitment. Individuals with higher rejection sensitivity tend to show less commitment, as their intensified fear of rejection prompts emotional withdrawal or avoidance of deeper investment in the relationship. The negative impact of rejection sensitivity extends beyond personal emotional responses; it also influences individuals' perceptions of their partner's behaviours. Individuals with high rejection sensitivity may see neutral or ambiguous behaviours as signs of rejection, regardless of their actual relevance to commitment or emotions. This misunderstanding may induce emotional distress and create a cycle of insecurity, leading the individual to become increasingly defensive and less willing to communicate openly, thereby further diminishing the quality of the relationship.

### **Attachment Styles and Relationship Commitment**

Attachment styles and relationship commitment are highly correlated, with studies showing that attachment styles profoundly affect relationship commitment (Mishra & Allen, 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). Mishra and Allen (2023) found that individuals with anxious or ambivalent attachment styles generally tend to have lower levels of closeness and trust in

REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES & RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT relationships, negatively impacting relationship commitment. Individuals exhibiting anxious or avoidant attachment styles typically possess an inaccurate perception of their relationships, fail to establish secure attachments with their partners, invest minimally in their relationships, and interpret others' behaviours negatively. Specifically, people with anxious attachment styles tend to overly worry about their partner's commitment, overestimate threats, and misinterpret their partner's actions, which, in turn, lowers commitment and satisfaction.

Furthermore, those with anxious attachment styles exhibit diminished commitment and satisfaction caused by their fear of abandonment, resulting in behaviours that can jeopardise their commitment and dedication to the relationship. The study indicated this style is more frequently observed in women (Mishra et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the avoidant attachment style, predominantly observed in men, also correlated with lower commitment, since individuals with this style often have difficulties with emotional proximity and intimacy, restricting their commitment to their partners (Mishra et al., 2024).

In contrast to those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles, individuals with a secure attachment style have higher levels of relationship commitment, leading to enhanced relationship satisfaction (Sagone et al., 2023). Securely attached individuals tend to be more comfortable with intimacy, invest more in their relationships, and experience greater happiness and stability. They are more inclined to establish stable, long-term relationships.

In short, people with varying attachment styles will demonstrate different degrees of commitment in their relationships. Individuals exhibiting insecure attachment styles (anxious or avoidant) may encounter difficulties with trust, emotional closeness, and accurate interpretations of their partner's behaviours, which impairs their ability to maintain commitment. Conversely, a secure attachment style shows higher levels of trust, emotional investment, and stability, leading



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to greater commitment and overall relationship satisfaction. These findings emphasise the importance of attachment styles in understanding relationship dynamics and show the potential benefits of fostering secure attachments for healthier, more committed relationships.

### **Rejection Sensitivity and Attachment Styles**

Attachment styles were previously studied as predictors of rejection sensitivity, with insecure attachment patterns, especially anxious and avoidant, significantly correlated with increased rejection sensitivity. Rejection sensitivity, defined as an intense fear of rejection, is believed to stem from early attachment experiences and distorted relational schemas (Disha & Ipshita, 2023; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Kumar & Mahapatra, 2024). Insecure attachment styles increase relational anxiety and foster negative behaviours in romantic relationships, such as emotional outbursts and relational aggression, undermining trust and intimacy (Choi & Lim, 2023). Individuals with anxious attachments frequently display heightened rejection sensitivity due to their fear of abandonment, resulting in behaviours that negatively impact intimacy and relationship stability (Mishra & Allen, 2023). A positive association has also been shown between avoidant attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. Individuals with avoidant attachment styles demonstrate high sensitivity to rejection, as they fear being rejected due to caregivers who failed to meet their emotional needs and provided enough support during childhood. The fear prompts individuals to avoid intimacy as a protective measure (Set, 2019).

Despite extensive research concentrating on attachment styles as predictors of rejection sensitivity, current studies reveal a reciprocal link where rejection sensitivity also determines attachment styles. High rejection sensitivity establishes anxious and avoidant tendencies by influencing how individuals understand relational threats thereby influencing relational outcomes including commitment and satisfaction (Mishra et al., 2024). Rejection-sensitive individuals may

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misunderstand benign cues such as rejection, leading to emotional overinvestment or detachment, both of which contribute to insecure attachment styles. Moreover, secure attachment styles display a protective effect against rejection sensitivity, facilitating balanced emotional regulation and maintaining relational stability (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022).

However, there is a study that discovered that rejection sensitivity associates significantly with anxious attachment but exhibits no significant association with secure or avoidant styles (Mahapatra, 2024). According to Set 2019, there is a positive association that has been shown between avoidant attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. This suggests a need for more investigation into rejection sensitivity's role as a predictor of attachment schemas.

While attachment styles are well-established predictors of rejection sensitivity, the reverse causal pathway where rejection sensitivity influences attachment orientations remains underexplored. This difference is particularly crucial in understanding how rejection sensitivity develops into distinctive attachment patterns, particularly within cultural contexts like Malaysia. Additionally, the minimal attention paid to secure attachment as a predictor of rejection sensitivity and relational outcomes further underscores the need for investigation. Addressing these gaps, this study will examine rejection sensitivity as a predictor of attachment styles and its implications for relationship commitment, introducing unique insights into the interplay of these mechanisms.

### **Attachment Styles as Mediator**

Attachment styles considerably impact the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment by altering how individuals perceive and respond to rejection (Mishra et al., 2024). A mediator illustrates the process by which one variable impact another, illustrating the mechanisms underlying these correlations (Breitborde et al., 2010).

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Secure attachment has been demonstrated to partially mediate the association between rejection sensitivity and relational outcomes, such as marriage expectations (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022). While this study focused on marriage expectations, the findings show wider relevance to general relationship dynamics, particularly regarding commitment and long-term goals. Secure attachment enables individuals to manage rejection fear effectively, building emotional resilience and balanced viewpoints on relational challenges. This resilience fosters relational stability and happiness, enabling commitment even in stressful times.

However, the mediating effects of insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) were less substantial. Avoidant attachment, for instance, shields rejection sensitivity by encouraging emotional separation, yet this detachment often leads to dissatisfaction and reduced relational intimacy (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022). Similarly, individuals with avoidant attachment generally fail to create meaningful commitments due to their excessive relational expectations and reluctance to embrace closeness fully. This shows that avoidant attachment may operate as a barrier rather than a mediator in mediating relationship outcomes.

Conversely, anxious attachment exacerbates rejection sensitivity, leading to emotional instability and relational conflict (Demircioğlu & Köse, 2021; Jung & Han, 2021). Anxiously attached individuals sometimes misunderstand neutral or ambiguous cues such as rejection, generating overreactions that disrupt trust and stability in relationships. This loop diminishes the likelihood of lasting commitment, showing the negative association between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment (Namitha Kothuru & Arjun Sekhar, 2023).

Although the importance of attachment types in mediating rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction is well-documented, their specific mediating role in relationship commitment remains underexplored. Most of the research focuses on satisfaction as an outcome,

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implicitly associating it with commitment without specifically studying this pathway

(Nascimento, 2022). Given that relationship satisfaction strongly predicts commitment, greater

research is needed to untangle the mediating effects of attachment types in this correlation.

Additionally, existing research frequently focuses on restricted population groups, such as

married couples or university students (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022), which limits the

generalizability of findings to various relational contexts.

The literature underlines the importance of attachment styles as mediators between rejection sensitivity and relational outcomes, notably secure attachment's function in developing resilience and commitment. However, the minimal attention on commitment as a result, compared to satisfaction, implies a significant gap. Furthermore, contradictory findings about insecure attachment types, notably avoidant attachment, demand further exploration to clarify their mediating impacts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The rejection sensitivity model introduced by Downey and Feldman (1996) explains how individuals with heightened sensitivity to rejection interpret and react to social interactions, as well as how rejection from significant others affect their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in future intimate relationships. This model describes rejection sensitivity as a cognitive-affective processing tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to rejection. Early experiences of rejection often cultivate expectations of similar future experiences, leading individuals to focus on avoiding rejection. This heightened alertness can act as a defensive mechanism for identifying social threats, however it can simultaneously erode emotional stability and trust in relationships (Downey et al., 2004; Romero-Canyas et al., 2010).

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Individuals with high rejection sensitivity frequently misinterpret neutral or benign behaviours from their partners as signs of rejection. In response, they may reduce emotional and physical investment in their relationships to safeguard their self-worth. This defensive tendency can present as recurring thoughts of ending the relationship and increased emotional and physical withdrawal from the relationship (Machia & Ogolsky, 2021). Such behaviours would reduce the chances of both rejecting and accepting experiences, thus weakening relationship commitment (Besikci et al., 2016; Norona & Welsh, 2016).

Rejection-sensitive people are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious and avoidant) in romantic relationships (DeWall et al., 2012; Set, 2019). To avoid emotional harm, they often adopt avoidant behaviours by creating emotional and physical distance from significant others to prevent the possibility of rejection (Set, 2019). Conversely, certain rejection-sensitive individuals exhibit patterns linked to anxious attachment. These individuals would engage in relationships with fear and hypervigilance, perpetually scanning for signs of rejection or abandonment. This high sensitivity may result in overdependence on their partner's behaviours and a desperate need for reassurance, which would strain the relationship (DeWall et al., 2012; Set, 2019).

In parallel, attachment theory, first developed by John Bowlby (1969), emphasises the relevance of early emotional relationships between individuals and their caretakers. These interactions shape internal working models of self and others, depending on an individual's experiences with their primary caregiver, which then shape how they act in future situations. Mary Ainsworth (1978) developed Bowlby's work, finding three basic attachment styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Each style reflects a particular method for analysing relational dynamics, overcoming emotional obstacles, and approaching intimacy. Attachment theory offers a

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framework for understanding how individuals' attachment styles predict their responses in future intimate relationships, hence influencing their ability to form and maintain long-term commitments.

Secure attachment develops from consistent, responsive caring, building positive internal working models where individuals perceive themselves as deserving of affection and others as reliable and supportive. These positive perceptions promote emotional regulation, trust, and increased ability for intimacy (Bowlby, 1988). Ainsworth underlined that securely attached individuals are better suited to manage relational obstacles, understanding relational difficulties effectively and retaining stability throughout disagreements. This emotional resilience leads to stronger relationship commitment, as securely attached individuals are more likely to sustain rewarding, long-term relationships (Karagüven & Aslan, 2022; Set, 2019; Urganci, 2023). Their capacity to balance independence with interdependence further deepens their relational bonds, allowing them to remain emotionally involved despite external demands.

Anxious attachment, on the other hand, develops when caregivers are inconsistent, sometimes providing and other times neglecting emotional needs. This unpredictability produces a sense of insecurity, driving individuals to seek excessive reassurance and validation from their partners. Anxiously attached individuals often fear abandonment and interpret ambiguous acts as rejection, resulting in hypervigilance and heightened emotional reactivity. Individuals with anxious attachment typically regard themselves as undeserving of love and others as unreliable, resulting in hyper-vigilance to rejection signs and exaggerated emotional responses (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 2013; Mishra et al., 2024). Individuals with anxious attachment styles have weakened initial commitment and a comparatively weaker rate of development in commitment over time compared to those with less anxious attachment styles. Excessive reliance, jealousy,

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and emotional overreactions can undermine trust and intimacy, complicating the maintenance of long-term commitment (Freeman et al., 2023).

Avoidant attachment develops when caregivers are emotionally distant or unresponsive, leading individuals to conceal their emotional needs and avoid proximity. Avoidantly attached individuals value independence and generally keep emotional distance to shield themselves from potential rejection (Goldberg et al., 2016). While this approach decreases vulnerability, it also limits relational intimacy and emotional connection. They tend to distance themselves emotionally and suppress their need for intimacy. Individuals with avoidant attachment frequently encounter difficulties in committing to relationships due to their unease with emotional intimacy. Their inclination to emphasise self-reliance and avoid dependency on partners may result in decreased relational satisfaction and challenges in sustaining significant, committed relationships (Namitha Kothuru & Arjun Sekhar, 2023; Urganci, 2023).

The integration of attachment theory and the rejection sensitivity model provide a robust framework for understanding the impact of rejection sensitivity on relationship commitment, with attachment styles serving as a mediating role. The rejection sensitivity model highlights the cognitive-affective processes that intensify fears of rejection in interpersonal contexts, while the attachment theory explains how early caregiving experiences influence internal working models that guide relational behaviours throughout life. Together, these theories explain how heightened rejection sensitivity may lead to insecure attachment styles—either anxious or avoidant—by reinforcing patterns of emotional hypervigilance or withdrawal. Insecure attachment styles thus hinder the development of trust, intimacy, and emotional investment, which are critical for maintaining long-term commitment. Low rejection-sensitive individuals are more inclined to develop secure attachment styles, as their positive internal working models and emotional

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resilience enable them to engage in relationships with trust, intimacy, and enhanced long-term commitment.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study examines the association between rejection sensitivity (independent variable) and relationship commitment (dependent variable), as depicted in Figure 1, where a single-headed arrow starts from rejection sensitivity and points to relationship commitment.

Furthermore, attachment styles are added as the mediator in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment. There are three dimensions under attachment styles: secure, anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Each dimension of attachment styles (i.e., secure, anxious and avoidant) mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment. The study measures the link between rejection sensitivity and attachment styles, along with the link between attachment styles and relationship commitment.

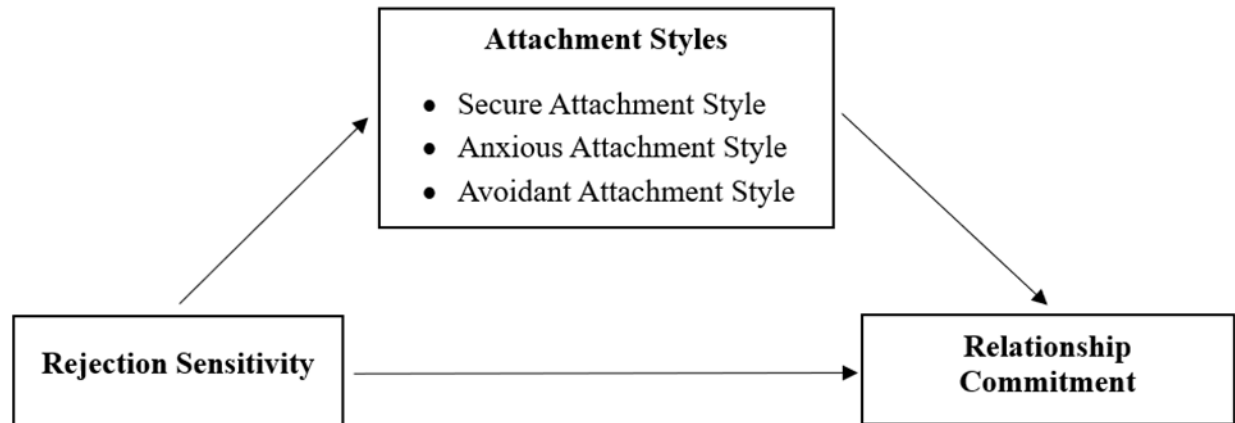
This study hypothesised that higher rejection sensitivity leads to insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious and avoidant), which in turn leads to lower relationship commitment. In contrast, lower rejection sensitivity fosters secure attachment, thereby enhancing higher relationship commitment. The adoption of attachment style theory explains the mediating role of attachment styles in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.



**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework of The Mediating Role of Attachment Styles between Rejection*

*Sensitivity and Relationship Commitment*



## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The present study is a quantitative study that used an online survey research method to collect data from unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. The survey consisted of structured and self-administered questionnaires to collect information on demographic background, rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, and relationship commitment, were collected through structured and self-administered questionnaires. A quantitative research method was chosen as it enables statistical analysis between variables (Ghanad, 2023). The study utilised a cross-sectional research design, whereby all variables were collected at a single point in time. This design was chosen for its efficiency and cost-effectiveness, allowing researchers to collect the necessary data within one data collection period (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

#### **Research Procedures**

##### ***Research Method***

Firstly, the researchers employed an online sampling method to collect data. Specifically, they utilised an unrestricted self-selected survey method, which allowed open public access to the survey. In an unrestricted self-selected survey method, the survey link or website is made publicly available for voluntary participation and can be accessed through means such as online advertisements, website banners, or traditional media channels like print and broadcast (Fielding et al., 2017). In this study, the researchers adopted this method by promoting the survey through multiple social media platforms.

In addition, the target sample was recruited using purposive sampling. This form of non-probability sampling involves selecting individuals who possess specific characteristics relevant

REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES & RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT to the study (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). It allows researchers to obtain a sample that is both relevant and reliable while reducing potential bias, which in turn strengthens the reliability and credibility of the findings (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Additionally, snowball sampling was applied, whereby participants who had completed the survey were encouraged to share it with others who also fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

### ***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria***

Prior to participating in the survey, participants were screened to ensure they fulfilled the necessary inclusion criteria to maintain the validity of the results. Respondents of the study must fulfil the following requirements: a) 18 years old and above, b) currently involved in a romantic relationship but not legally married, c) Malaysian. These criteria are essential to align with the study's aim of examining unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. To ensure participants met the required criteria, a few screening questions were presented before the main section of the survey. The survey was divided into two phases: the screening phase, which included demographic questions such as age, gender, and ethnicity along with questions about participants' relationship status, and the main phase, in which the researchers confirmed that all the respondents met all of the inclusion criteria.

### ***Location of the Study***

Participants were recruited from both West and East Malaysia. The data collection was conducted online using Qualtrics, a web-based online survey platform.

### ***Ethical Clearance***

The research procedure and complete questionnaire were submitted and approved by the UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (SERC) prior to data collection (U/SERC/78-415/2024). This procedure ensured the study was compliant with known ethical practices and

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upheld the rights and well-being of respondents. Prior to taking part, all the respondents were presented with an informed consent document explaining the objective, procedures, and approximate duration of the study. The document explicitly informed them that their participation was purely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point without any penalty.

To maintain participant privacy and confidentiality, all responses were de-identified, stored securely, and only accessible to authorised research team members. No identifying information was gathered, and outcomes were reported in aggregate to maintain participants' anonymity. The informed consent form also explained the minimal risks and possible benefits of participation. Although no significant risks were expected, participants were told that introspection regarding intimate relationship experiences might lead to slight emotional distress. Their involvement provided important data that possibly could contribute to future psychological research and interventions with relationship commitment and attachment styles.

The participants were also alerted to their rights, such as the right to refrain from answering any question, withdraw at any stage, and request clarification regarding the study. Contact details for the research team and SERC were given in case the participants wanted to ask any questions or request information regarding the study or their participation.

### **Population, Sample Size, Power, and Precision**

#### ***Population***

The study population consisted of unmarried individuals living in Malaysia. This group was selected to align with the study's objective of investigating romantic relationship dynamics among individuals who are in a relationship but not legally married within the Malaysian context.

### *Sample Size Calculation*

To determine whether participants qualified for the study, a screening section was administered before the main section of the survey. The first section included several demographic questions (e.g., gender, age, religion) and items to verify participants' current relationship status. Only the participants who met all of the inclusion criteria advanced to the second section, which included the main portion of the study.

The Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects (Schoemann et al., 2017) was employed to calculate the required sample size for the mediation model. The correlation coefficients of all the variables were input into the Monte Carlo simulator, and other parameters were employed according to guidelines formulated by Schoemann et al. (2017). This procedure was followed with the objective of reaching an accurate estimation of the minimum sample size required to identify mediation effects with sufficient statistical power.

The analysis was carried out with the statistical power of .80 (Kemal, 2020) and was seeking to detect a mediation model where rejection sensitivity was the independent variable, attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) were the mediators, and relationship commitment was the dependent variable. The analyses suggested the following necessary sample sizes for effect detection for indirect effects: secure attachment ( $N = 327$ ), anxious attachment ( $N = 91$ ), and avoidant attachment ( $N = 91$ ). Among these, model testing for secure attachment required the largest sample size. A minimum of 337 participants was thus targeted to provide adequate power for that model.

With the typical attrition and missing data rates of psychological studies, which range from 15% to 20% (Dong & Peng, 2013), the final target sample size was lowered to 377

participants. This was to ensure statistical power and enhance the reliability and validity of the study's results.

### ***Sampling Method***

Researchers employed online data collection techniques to collect responses for the study. To be more precise, an unrestricted self-selected survey technique was used, where the questionnaire was placed in the public domain for voluntary submission. The sampling technique allowed respondents to enroll themselves in the study by taking the survey through online media. The survey was published and spread on various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and XiaoHongShu, to reach the maximum number of individuals from the target population. This method was adopted because of its efficacy and could be spread on a large scale to cover young technology-savvy users who are eligible for this study.

Aside from online advertising, purposive sampling was used to find participants who satisfied certain inclusion criteria. In purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique, participants are intentionally selected as they meet specific criteria aligned with the study's aim (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Makwana et al. (2023) state that purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgmental or deliberate sampling, is especially beneficial when researchers aim to select participants who are most relevant to the research subject. This study included only unmarried Malaysian residents aged 18 and older who are currently in a romantic relationship. This focused methodology was crucial in acquiring substantial and relevant data consistent with the study's objectives.

To continue diversifying the participant sample, snowball sampling was also utilised. This method, also referred to as chain or referral sampling, is particularly effective for reaching hidden or hard-to-access groups by relying on participants' social networks. This technique

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allowed for an organic expansion of the sample and supported efficient data collection from individuals who otherwise might not have encountered the survey (Makwana et al., 2023).

Survey participants were asked to circulate the link throughout their social networks to open up access to a more diverse pool of eligible individuals. This recruitment approach ensured the highest level of sample representativeness overall and allowed for effective data collection within the time frame of the study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The survey link was distributed across several social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and XiaoHongShu. A digital promotional poster was created, containing key information about the study along with a QR code that linked directly to the Qualtrics survey. This poster was shared across the mentioned platforms to increase accessibility and encourage greater participation from a diverse audience.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were presented with an information sheet, which they had to read before proceeding. This section provided details on the purpose of research, the criteria of the study, participants' rights, confidentiality, and the researchers' contact information. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without facing any negative consequences.

Informed consent was then obtained, confirming that participants understood their responses would be used solely for research purposes. Including a confidentiality clause likely fostered trust and encouraged individuals to participate, as it assured them that their identities would remain anonymous.

Lastly, to show appreciation and encourage participation, a lucky draw was introduced before the demographic section of the questionnaire. Participants who were interested in joining

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the lucky draw could voluntarily provide their name and phone number. Only those who completed the entire survey were eligible to receive a token of appreciation, which consisted of a RM10 credit via Touch 'n Go eWallet. At the end of data collection, 50 participants were randomly selected as winners of the lucky draw.

### **Instruments**

#### ***Demographic Information***

Participants were required to fill out a short demographic questionnaire aimed at capturing variables that align with the study's aims. Data on age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, and how long they had been in their current romantic relationship were captured. These demographic factors were included to allow for descriptive analyses and potential covariate control because previous research had found that processes of relationship: attachment and rejection sensitivity vary enormously by age cohorts, gender, and length of relationship (Mishra & Allen, 2023; Mishra et al., 2024).

#### ***The Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ)***

The Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ) created by Berenson et al. (2009) was used to assess rejection sensitivity. The ARSQ has 18 items, each with two subscales: (1) rejection concern (anxiety) and (2) rejection expectancy (probability), measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unconcerned/very improbable) to 6 (very concerned/very probable). Each of the simulated interpersonal scenarios in the ARSQ evaluates an ambiguous social encounter, such as probable rejection by a friend or a romantic partner, thus facilitating the assessment of increased awareness of perceived interpersonal threats.

To calculate a comprehensive rejection sensitivity score, the concern score of each item was multiplied by the reverse-coded expectation score. The average of all product scores for



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items was calculated, with higher scores signifying more rejection sensitivity. This scoring method evaluates the dynamic interplay between emotional sensitivity and expected interpersonal outcomes that underpin the theoretical framework of rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

Empirical validation of the ARSQ has proven high psychometric attributes. For example, Berenson et al. (2011) showed a high internal consistency with Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ , whereas Berenson et al. (2016) verified this with an even higher reliability value of  $\alpha = .91$  in a larger and more diversified sample. These findings underline the measure's robustness in capturing individual differences in rejection sensitivity across multiple groups and circumstances.

However, despite the ARSQ's wide usage and good psychometric base in Western contexts, validation research in non-Western or Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, remains limited.

### ***Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory (MDRCI)***

The study assessed relationship commitment through the Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory (MDRCI), developed by Kurdek (1995). The MDRCI consisted of 24 items, which were rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 9 (extremely true). The six theoretical determinants of commitment were assessed using the scale in the following manner: (1) rewards, (2) costs, (3) match-to-ideal comparison level, (4) alternatives, (5) investments, and (6) barriers. Even though the inventory was designed with a multidimensional approach, it was mostly used to be a unidimensional measure, and overall commitment scores were calculated by summing up all the item responses. The greater the score, the greater the relational commitment.

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The MDRCI had positive- and negative-worded items that assessed the facilitators and inhibitors of commitment. Examples of positively framed items included: “I’ve put a lot of energy and effort into my relationship” and “I have to sacrifice a lot to be in my relationship.” Conversely, negatively framed items such as “Overall, there are a lot of personal costs involved in being in my relationship” and “Overall, alternatives to being in my relationship are appealing” were included to capture constraints and external pressures.

Empirical verification of the MDRCI was found to have high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from .94 to .95 in Kurdek’s (1995) early research. The scale further showed predictive validity, with sum commitment scores significantly correlating with relationship stability and satisfaction across different samples. The MDRCI has been widely applied across Western populations, e.g., across the United States (e.g., Kurdek, 1995; Starks et al., 2019), testifying to its cross-cultural applicability in individualist and Western relational contexts. No validation study has yet been published within the Malaysian context. Despite this, the MDRCI’s robust psychometric properties and successful use in various cultural settings suggest it is suitable for cross-cultural adaptation in non-Western contexts.

### ***State Adult Attachment Measure (SAAM)***

Gillath et al.’s (2009) State Adult Attachment Measure (SAAM) was used to assess participants’ attachment styles. The SAAM consisted of 21 items across three subscales: (1) secure attachment, (2) anxious attachment, and (3) avoidant attachment. The items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (extremely true). This yielded a multidimensional evaluation of participants’ state-level attachment patterns.

Each subscale was scored independently by averaging the responses to the items that corresponded to the subscale. Higher mean scores indicated stronger adherence to the respective

REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES & RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT attachment style. The SAAM was designed to assess immediate or context-sensitive attachment tendencies. For instance, secure attachment was assessed by items such as “If something went wrong right now, I feel like I could depend on someone.” Anxious attachment was reflected in items such as “I really need to feel loved right now.” Avoidant attachment, however, was assessed by negatively phrased items such as “If someone tried to get close to me, I would try to keep my distance” and “I would be uncomfortable having a good friend or a relationship partner close to me,” which assessed discomfort with closeness or emotional intimacy.

Empirical support for the SAAM has demonstrated strong psychometric properties. In the first study, Gillath et al. (2009) reported Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .83$  to  $.87$  internal consistency coefficients for the three subscales, demonstrating their reliability. Later research with Western samples has supported the utility of the measure for examining momentary attachment states in different contexts (Altmann et al., 2021; Strachan et al., 2023; Tammilehto et al., 2024).

However, despite all the SAAM’s extensive application with Western groups, validation data utilizing Southeast Asian or Malaysian samples remain limited. Its demonstrated psychometric soundness elsewhere suggests some cross-cultural potential, but additional research is necessary to determine its validity in the Malaysian context.

### **Pilot Test**

A pilot test was carried out as an initial assessment to determine the feasibility of the research methods and to check the reliability and legibility of the survey instruments before full-scale data collection. Pilot testing aimed at verifying that participants understood items as intended and to identify any problems concerning questionnaire structure, instructions, or item phrasing (In, 2017; Ruel et al., 2016). The pilot test provided the observation of reaction latency, helping in the evaluation of the survey’s length and structure (Ruel et al., 2016).

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The pilot test consisted of administering the English-language questionnaire to 30 participants who satisfied the inclusion criteria for the main study (i.e., Malaysian, aged 18 or above, currently in a romantic relationship but not legally married). The sample size was determined to be suitable according to Hertzog's (2008) criteria, which indicates that 30 participants are sufficient for pilot studies with the objective of measuring instrument reliability and enhancing procedural feasibility. Bujang et al. (2024) also stated the suitability of this sample size for initial scale validation. Recruitment was carried out using online sampling techniques, encompassing unrestricted self-selected survey distribution through social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, XiaoHongShu), with purposive sampling to guarantee consistency with the target population. Snowball sampling was employed to broaden outreach by prompting participants to recommend qualified peers.

A reliability analysis was conducted to investigate the internal consistency of the psychological instruments used. The Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ) demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .839. The State Adult Attachment Measure (SAAM) also showed acceptable to excellent reliability across its subscales: secure attachment ( $\alpha = .766$ ), anxious attachment ( $\alpha = .792$ ), and avoidant attachment ( $\alpha = .879$ ). Finally, the Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory (MDRCI) yielded an alpha coefficient of .723, signifying acceptable internal consistency. Every instrument showed acceptable to excellent reliability, as outlined by Taber (2017), indicating their suitability for use throughout the actual study. No major adjustments were necessary based on the findings of the pilot test

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### **Actual Study**

The process of data collection for the actual study was carried out from 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2025 to 15<sup>th</sup> July 2025. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment were .740 and .839, respectively. The reliability coefficients for the secure, anxious and avoidant attachment styles were .809, .804 and .826, respectively, reflecting high internal consistency across the scales.

### **Analysis Procedure**

All analysis were performed by using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23.0). Prior to hypothesis testing, the reliability of all psychometric instruments was examined through Cronbach's alpha coefficients to assess internal consistency. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations (SDs), and minimum and maximum values, were computed for all study variables. Frequency distributions were also examined to summarise participant characteristics.

To verify that assumptions for parametric testing were met, the data were assessed for normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. Skewness and kurtosis, histograms, Q-Q plots, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were used to evaluate normality. Scatterplots were inspected to assess linearity and homoscedasticity, while the Durbin-Watson statistic was used to evaluate the independence of residuals. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) and tolerance values were calculated to detect multicollinearity.

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the strength and direction of associations among the key variables. Two-way ANOVA was performed to examine the effects of two independent variables, while Levene's test was applied to assess the assumption of homogeneity of variances. To test mediation effects, Hayes' PROCESS Macro for SPSS (Model

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

4) was employed (Hayes, 2018). Analyses included estimation of direct, indirect, and total effects, using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples to derive robust confidence intervals.

## Chapter IV

### Results

#### Missing Data and Data Cleaning

A total of 508 responses were initially collected through the online survey. Out of these responses, 188 responses were incomplete, likely due to participants discontinuing the survey prior to completion—a common limitation associated with online data collection platforms. Furthermore, 86 respondents did not meet the study's inclusion criteria, as they were either single or legally married. All other respondents met the remaining eligibility requirements. Following the exclusion of incomplete responses and those not meeting the eligibility requirements, the final valid sample consisted of 234 participants.

#### Normality Assumptions

##### *Skewness and Kurtosis*

Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to assess the normality of all variables (see Table 1). According to George & Mallery (2010), values between  $-2$  and  $+2$  are generally considered acceptable indicators of a normal distribution. The results suggested that all skewness values were within this range. For kurtosis, all variables were within the  $\pm 2$  range except for rejection sensitivity (RS\_Total), which had a kurtosis of 2.773. Although this value is slightly above the recommended cut-off, it is still within the broader  $\pm 3$  threshold considered acceptable for behavioural and social science data (Lord et al., 2021). Thus, no severe violations of normality were detected.

**Table 1***Skewness and Kurtosis*

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Relationship Commitment	-.168	.501
Rejection Sensitivity	.991	2.773
Secure Attachment	-.595	.448
Anxious Attachment	-.435	-.378
Avoidant Attachment	.291	-.218

*Histograms and Q-Q Plots*

Normality was further assessed visually via histograms (refer to Appendix D1). The histogram for relationship commitment showed an approximately bell-shaped distribution, whereas anxious attachment (AnxScr) and secure attachment (SecScr) displayed slight negative skewness. Rejection Sensitivity and avoidant attachment (AvdScr) exhibited a slight positive skew, characterised by a limited number of higher extreme values. The Q–Q plots (refer to Appendix D2) demonstrate that the observed values for all variables closely adhered to the diagonal reference line, signifying small deviations from normality.

*Normality Tests*

Table 2 displays the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests for every study variable. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated that only relationship commitment ( $D(234) = .046, p = .200$ ) had a normal distribution. The Shapiro–Wilk test, which exhibits heightened sensitivity for smaller datasets, revealed significant deviations from normality for all variables except relationship commitment ( $p = .026$ ). Nonetheless, considering the large sample size ( $n = 234$ ), both tests are expected to identify negligible deviations that do not significantly impact parametric analysis (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012).

**Table 2**



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*Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test*

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnova <sup>a</sup>		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Relationship Commitment	.046	234	.200*
Rejection Sensitivity	.067	234	.012
Secure Attachment	.085	234	.001
Anxious Attachment	.082	234	.001
Avoidant Attachment	.060	234	.042

*Note.*

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

***Conclusion for Normality Assumptions***

Based on the four indicators of normality—skewness, kurtosis, histograms, and Q–Q plots—all variables in the present study fell within the acceptable range of –2 to +2 for skewness and kurtosis (George & Mallery, 2010), except for rejection sensitivity (RS\_Total), which showed a slightly higher kurtosis of 2.773. This value is within the broader  $\pm 3$  threshold considered acceptable for behavioural science data (Lord et al., 2021). Visual assessment of histograms and Q–Q graphs indicated only slight deviations from normality. Although the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests detected some variables as significantly non-normal, likely due to the large sample size, these deviations were small and not severe enough to violate the assumption of normality. Therefore, the normality assumption is considered sufficiently met, and the dataset is eligible for parametric statistical analyses.

**Assumptions of Mediation Analysis*****Test on Independence of Errors***

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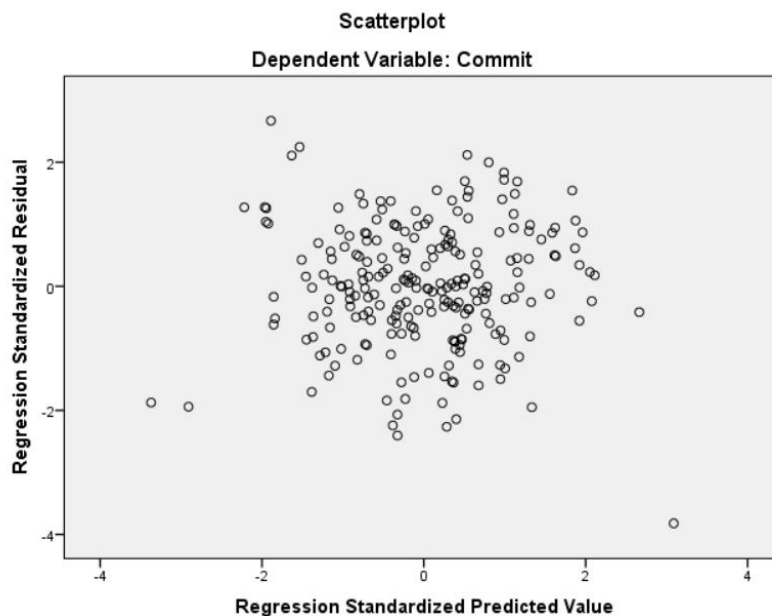
The Durbin-Watson test was conducted to evaluate the independence of residuals. As stated by Field (2017), Durbin-Watson values below one or above three indicate a violation of this assumption. In this study, the obtained value was 1.881, which falls within the acceptable range, suggesting that the residuals were independent of each other.

### *Test on Normality of Residual, Linearity of Residual, Homoscedasticity*

A scatterplot was generated to evaluate the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals. It plotted the standardised predicted values of relationship commitment against standardised residuals. The pattern revealed that residuals were randomly and equally distributed along the horizontal zero line, indicating that these assumptions were not violated.

**Figure 2**

*The Scatterplot to Test the Assumptions for Residual Linearity, Residual Normality and Homoscedasticity*



***Tests on Multicollinearity***

Collinearity statistics, including Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), are reported in Table 3. Based on Myres (1990), VIF values over 10 suggest a collinearity issue. In the present analysis, all VIF values were below 10, indicating no concern. Similarly, Menard (2002) proposed that a tolerance value below .10 indicates multicollinearity. As all tolerance values in this study exceeded .10, the assumption of no multicollinearity was satisfied.

**Table 3**

*Coefficients among Variables*

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Rejection sensitivity	.845	1.184
	Secure attachment style	.657	1.523
	Anxious attachment style	.714	1.400
	Avoidant attachment style	.813	1.229

*Note.* VIF=Variance Inflation Factor

***Test on Multivariate Outliers and Influential Cases***

A case-wise analysis was performed on the dataset of 234 participants to identify multivariate outliers. 10 cases were flagged as multivariate outliers (Cases 26, 27, 81, 99, 106, 110, 166, 201, 213, and 234; see Table 4). To determine whether these cases were influential, Mahalanobis distance, Cook's distance, and Centered Leverage distance were examined (refer to Appendix D3). According to Cook and Weisberg (1984), a Cook's distance value exceeding 1 may indicate an influential case. As none of the identified cases exceeded this threshold, no violations were observed. In terms of Mahalanobis distance, all values were 15 or below, suggesting no significant influence on the sample data. The Centered Leverage distance was

REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES & RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT computed using the formula  $(p+1)/n$ , where  $p$  represents the number of predictors and  $n$  the sample size, yielding a value of .0214. Based on Ellis and Morgenthaler's (1992) guideline, values exceeding three times this value (i.e.,  $> .0642$ ) may suggest an influential case. As all 10 cases had Leverage values below this cutoff, no violations were detected. Therefore, the identified cases were retained for further analysis.

**Table 4**

*Casewise Diagnostic for Relationship Commitment*

Case Number	Std. Residual	Relationship Commitment	Predicted Value	Residual
26	-2.142	3.00	3.7949	-0.79494
27	-2.068	2.79	3.5590	-0.76737
81	2.247	4.00	3.1664	0.83363
99	2.669	4.04	3.0514	0.99031
106	-2.405	2.67	3.5592	-0.89251
110	-2.264	2.92	3.7567	-0.84001
166	2.107	3.92	3.1347	0.78196
201	-2.242	2.71	3.5404	-0.83203
213	2.118	4.63	3.8392	0.78582
234	-3.821	3.25	4.6679	-1.41788

## Demographic Statistics

### *Demographic Information*

The demographic distribution of participants can be obtained in Table 5. The sample includes 234 Malaysians aged 18 to 53 years ( $M = 23.97$ ,  $SD = 4.07$ ). Most participants identified as female (79.9%), while 20.1% identified as male. In terms of ethnicity, the sample was predominantly Chinese (84.6%), followed by Malay (9.8%), Indian (2.1%), and Bumiputra Sabah and Bumiputra Sarawak (1.7%). Regarding religious affiliation, most participants

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identified with Buddhism (65.8%), followed by Christianity (19.2%), Islam (9.4%), and Hinduism (1.7%). An additional 3.8% selected ‘Other’, which included free-thinker, agnostic, atheist, Taoism, and Iban. In terms of employment status, most participants were students (67.1%), followed by those employed full-time (23.1%), part-time (4.3%), self-employed (1.7%), and unemployed (3.4%). One participant (0.4%) reported an internship under the “Other” category. As a criterion for inclusion, all participants were required to be in a romantic relationship. Among them, 96.6% reported being currently in a relationship, 2.1% were cohabiting, and 1.3% were engaged. When asked whether they were currently engaged in a long-distance relationship, 44.0% responded “Yes,” while 56.0% responded “No”.

**Table 5**

*Demographic Information of Participants (n=234)*

Characteristics	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	187	79.9
Male	47	20.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	23	9.8
Chinese	198	84.6
Indian	5	2.1
Bumiputra Sabah	4	1.7
Bumiputra Sarawak	4	1.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
In a relationship	226	96.6
Cohabited	5	2.1
Engaged	3	1.3
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Full-time	54	23.1
Part-time	10	4.3
Self-employed	4	1.7

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Unemployed	8	3.4
Student	157	67.1
Others	1	.4
<b>Engaged in a Long-Distance Relationship</b>		
Yes	103	44.0
No	131	56.0

*Notes:*  $n$  = number of cases; % = percentage;  $M$  = mean;  $SD$  = standard deviation

***Frequency Distribution of the Variables***

Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics for the factors analysed in this study. The mean score for relationship commitment was 3.66 ( $SD = 0.49$ ), whereas the mean for rejection sensitivity was 9.79 ( $SD = 3.42$ ). The attachment dimensions revealed mean scores of 38.67 ( $SD = 6.10$ ) for secure attachment, 36.37 ( $SD = 6.84$ ) for anxious attachment, and 24.65 ( $SD = 8.54$ ) for avoidant attachment. These values present a comprehensive summary of participants' levels in key psychological constructs evaluated.

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics of Variables (n=234)*

Variables	Min	Max	$M$	$SD$
Rejection sensitivity	1.11	24.67	9.79	3.42
Secure attachment style	16.00	49.00	38.67	6.10
Anxious attachment style	16.00	49.00	36.37	6.84
Avoidant attachment style	7.00	49.00	24.65	8.54
Relationship commitment	1.88	4.83	3.66	.49

*Note.*  $M$ =Mean;  $SD$ =Standard Deviation; Min=Minimum; Max=Maximum

**Inferential Statistics*****Pearson's Correlation Analysis***

Pearson product-moment correlation (PPMC) analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between rejection sensitivity, secure attachment style, anxious attachment style, avoidant attachment style, and relationship commitment (see Table 7). The results will be presented alongside the hypotheses outlined in Chapter I.

**H<sub>1a</sub>: There is a negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and secure attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The result shows that rejection sensitivity significantly and negatively correlates with secure attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship,  $r(232) = -.37, p < .001$ . The result supported H<sub>1a</sub>.

**H<sub>1b</sub>: There is a positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The result shows that there is a significant but negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship,  $r(232) = -.15, p = .021$ . Thus, H<sub>1b</sub> is not accepted.

**H<sub>1c</sub>: There is a positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and avoidant attachment style among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** Pearson's correlation showed that rejection sensitivity significantly and positively correlates with avoidant attachment style,  $r(232) = .21, p < .001$ . The result supported H<sub>1c</sub>.

**H<sub>2a</sub>: There is a positive correlation between secure attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** According to the result, there is a significant and positive correlation between

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secure attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship,  $r(232) = .42, p < .001$ . The hypothesis is accepted.

**H<sub>2b</sub>: There is a negative correlation between anxious attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The results revealed that anxious attachment style positively correlates with relationship commitment,  $r(232) = .55, p < .001$ . Thus, the hypothesis is not accepted.

**H<sub>2c</sub>: There is a negative correlation between avoidant attachment style and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The results depicted that avoidant attachment style positively correlates with relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship,  $r(232) = .32, p < .001$ . Hence, H<sub>2c</sub> is not accepted.

**H<sub>3</sub>: There is a negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** As shown in the result, rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment are significantly and negatively correlated,  $r(232) = -.19, p = .004$ . Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 7**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Rejection Sensitivity	-			
2. Secure Attachment Style	-.37***	-		
3. Anxious Attachment Style	-.15*	.43***	-	
4. Avoidant Attachment Style	.21**	-.23**	.22**	-
5. Relationship Commitment	-.19**	.42***	.55***	.32***

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



***Mediation Analysis***

The mediation model was analysed using the Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4), which estimates direct, indirect, and total effects. Statistical significance was determined based on three criteria: (a) a  $p$ -value below .05, (b) a  $t$ -value surpassing 1.645 for a one-tailed test at the 95% confidence level (Hair et al., 2016), and (c) a 95% bootstrap confidence interval (CI) that does not include zero. All CIs were derived from 10,000 bootstrap samples to ensure robust estimation.

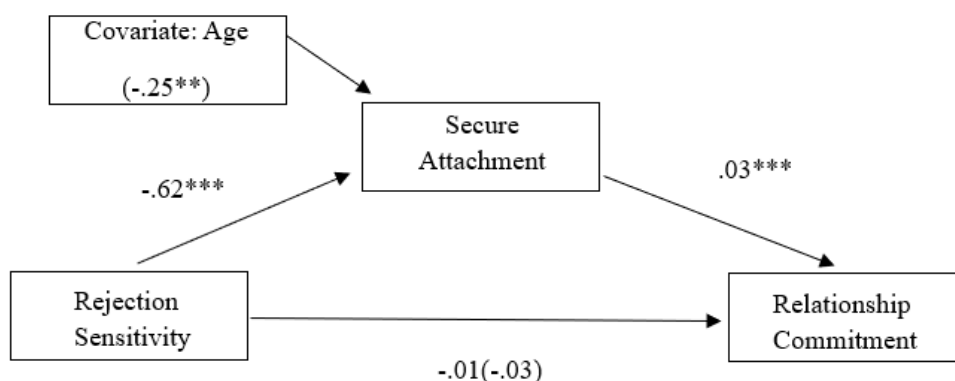
**H<sub>4a</sub>: Secure attachment style significantly mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The model predicting secure attachment from rejection sensitivity, age, and gender was significant,  $R^2 = .168$ ,  $F(3, 230) = 15.526$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that 16.8% of the variance in secure attachment was explained by the predictors. Rejection sensitivity significantly predicted secure attachment ( $B = -.621$ ,  $SE = .108$ ,  $\beta = -.347$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-.834, -.407]$ ), with higher rejection sensitivity correlated with lower secure attachment. Age was also a significant negative predictor ( $B = -.252$ ,  $SE = .095$ ,  $\beta = -.168$ ,  $p = .008$ ), whereas gender was not significant ( $p > .05$ ). In the outcome model for relationship commitment, which accounted for 45.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .455$ ,  $F(6, 227) = 31.604$ ,  $p < .001$ ), secure attachment significantly predicted commitment ( $B = .025$ ,  $SE = .005$ ,  $\beta = .314$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[.016, .035]$ ). The total effect of rejection sensitivity on commitment was significant ( $B = -.026$ ,  $SE = .009$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI  $[-.044, -.007]$ ), but the direct effect was not significant when secure attachment was included in the model ( $B = -.013$ ,  $SE = .008$ ,  $p = .102$ , 95% CI  $[-.028, .003]$ ). The indirect effect through secure attachment was significant ( $B = -.016$ ,  $BootSE = .005$ , 95% CI  $[-.026, -.007]$ ).

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According to Zhao et al. (2010), this pattern is categorised as indirect-only mediation (referred to as “full mediation”): the effect of rejection sensitivity on relationship commitment was transmitted through secure attachment, with no independent direct effect remaining after this pathway was considered. A Monte Carlo power analysis conducted with the final sample size ( $n = 234$ ) further confirmed the robustness of this mediation, indicating that the indirect effect via secure attachment was well powered (power = 1.00), and thus reliably detectable in the present study. Theoretically, this suggests that rejection sensitivity undermined secure internal working models (trust, comfort with intimacy), and it was this decrease in attachment security that contributed to less commitment in the sample. This finding supports  $H_{4a}$ , demonstrating that secure attachment significantly mediates the correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment. The correlation between the variables is presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*A Mediation Model Showing the Effect of Rejection Sensitivity and Secure Attachment on Relationship Commitment. The Values shown are Unstandardised Coefficients. The Total Effect was Shown in Parenthesis.  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$*



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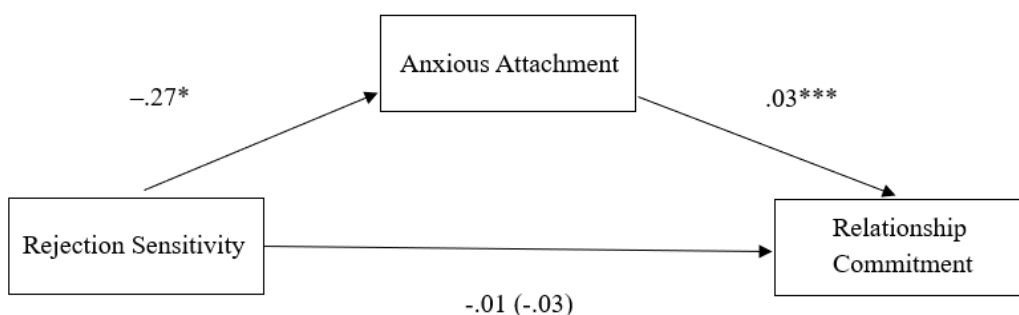
**H<sub>4b</sub>: Anxious attachment style significantly mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The model predicting anxious attachment was significant ( $R^2 = .040$ ,  $F(3, 230) = 3.221$ ,  $p = .023$ ), with rejection sensitivity negatively predicting anxious attachment ( $B = -.270$ ,  $SE = .131$ ,  $\beta = -.135$ ,  $p = .039$ , 95% CI  $[-.528, -.013]$ ). Neither age ( $p = .275$ ) nor gender ( $p = .179$ ) was significant. In the commitment outcome model ( $R^2 = .455$ ,  $F(6, 227) = 31.604$ ,  $p < .001$ ), anxious attachment significantly predicted commitment ( $B = .025$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $\beta = .343$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[.016, .033]$ ). The total effect of rejection sensitivity on commitment was significant ( $B = -.026$ ,  $SE = .009$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI  $[-.044, -.007]$ ); however, the direct effect was nonsignificant after anxious attachment had been included ( $B = -.013$ ,  $SE = .008$ ,  $p = .102$ , 95% CI  $[-.028, .003]$ ). The indirect effect via anxious attachment was equally nonsignificant ( $B = -.007$ ,  $BootSE = .004$ , 95% CI  $[-.015, .001]$ ), as the CI included zero.

A Monte Carlo power analysis indicated that the indirect effect via anxious attachment style had relatively low power (power = 0.63), suggesting limited ability to detect this pathway; thus, nonsignificant findings for this mediator should be interpreted with caution. Zhao et al. (2010) states that a nonsignificant  $a \times b$  indicates insufficient evidence to support mediation, regardless of the significance of the component routes. The contradicting signs of  $a$  and  $b$  indicate an inconsistent or suppression pattern in the component coefficients; nonetheless, due to the non-significant indirect product, the appropriate conclusion is the absence of mediation in this sample. This indicates that anxious attachment did not statistically explain the relationship between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment in this context, either the anxious pathway is weak, competing processes counterbalance each other, or sample/contextual factors

REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES & RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT (e.g., cultural norms) altered the occurrence of anxiety-related mechanisms. Therefore, H<sub>4b</sub> was not supported. The correlation between the variables is displayed in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*A Mediation Model Showing the Effect of Rejection Sensitivity and Anxious Attachment on Relationship Commitment. The Values shown are Unstandardised Coefficients. The Total Effect was Shown in Parenthesis. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$*



**H<sub>4c</sub>: Avoidant attachment style significantly mediates the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship.** The model predicting avoidant attachment was significant ( $R^2 = .052$ ,  $F(3, 230) = 4.188$ ,  $p = .007$ ), with rejection sensitivity positively predicting avoidant attachment ( $B = .504$ ,  $SE = .162$ ,  $\beta = .202$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [.185, .823]). Age ( $p = .994$ ) and gender ( $p = .173$ ) were not significant. In the relationship commitment outcome model ( $R^2 = .455$ ,  $F(6, 227) = 31.604$ ,  $p < .001$ ), avoidant attachment significantly predicted commitment ( $B = .018$ ,  $SE = .003$ ,  $\beta = .320$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.012, .025]). The total effect of rejection sensitivity on commitment was significant ( $B = -.026$ ,  $SE = .009$ ,  $p = .006$ ,

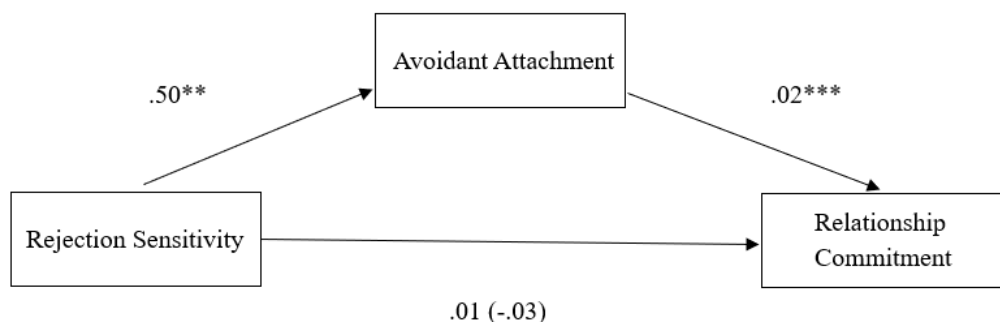
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95% CI  $[-.044, -.007]$ ); however, the direct effect was nonsignificant when avoidant attachment was included ( $B = -.013$ ,  $SE = .008$ ,  $p = .102$ , 95% CI  $[-.028, .003]$ ). The indirect effect of rejection sensitivity on commitment through avoidant attachment was significant ( $B = .009$ ,  $BootSE = .003$ , 95% CI  $[.004, .017]$ ), suggesting that higher rejection sensitivity was correlated with higher commitment via higher avoidant attachment.

A Monte Carlo power analysis confirmed that this indirect pathway was well powered (power = 0.91), indicating that the avoidant mediation effect can be reliably detected in the present sample. Zhao et al. (2010) state that a significant indirect effect opposing the overall effect indicates competitive (inconsistent) mediation, whereby at least two mechanisms operate in contradictory directions. In this instance, an avoidant pathway connected rejection sensitivity to increased relationship commitment, whereas other processes contribute to the overall negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment. The presence of a positive avoidant indirect effect, therefore, signals a substantive, but countervailing, mechanism that requires further investigation, for example, other mediators (e.g., relationship satisfaction, perceived alternatives, or investment) may carry the stronger negative pathway from rejection sensitivity to relationship commitment. This finding supports  $H_{4c}$ . The correlation between the variables is displayed in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*A Mediation Model Showing the Effect of Rejection Sensitivity and Avoidant Attachment on Relationship Commitment. The Values shown are Unstandardised Coefficients. The Total Effect was Shown in Parenthesis. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$*

**Table 8**

Direct, indirect, and total effects of rejection sensitivity on relationship commitment via secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment

Effect	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>BootSE</i>	95% CI (LL)	95% CI (UL)
Total effect	-.026**	-.178**	.009	-.044	-.007
Direct effect	-.013	-.088	.008	-.028	.003
Indirect effect					
Rejection sensitivity → Secure → Relationship commitment	-.016**	-.109**	.005	-.026	-.007
Rejection sensitivity → Anxious → Relationship commitment	-.007	-.046	.004	-.015	.001
Rejection sensitivity → Avoidant → Relationship commitment	.009**	.064**	.003	.004	.017

Note.  $n = 234$ . *B* = unstandardised regression coefficient.  $\beta$  = standardised regression coefficient.

*BootSE* = bootstrapped standard error (10,000 resamples). CI = confidence interval. \*\* $p < .01$

## Chapter V

### Discussion

#### Discussion

##### *Rejection Sensitivity and Attachment Styles*

Consistent with  $H_{1a}$ , the present study demonstrated that rejection sensitivity was significantly and negatively correlated with secure attachment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. This shows that those who are more sensitive to rejection may find it more difficult to sustain secure attachment patterns, which are often characterised by trust, intimacy, and relational stability. This finding is consistent with the theoretical foundations of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and the rejection sensitivity model (Downey & Feldman, 1996), both of which propose that negative interpersonal experiences, such as heightened fears of rejection, disrupt positive internal working models of the self and others. Rejection sensitivity may undermine the establishment of secure attachment by weakening the foundations of trust and emotional stability in relationships. The finding also corresponds indirectly with prior research demonstrating that securely attached individuals are less reactive to rejection cues (Jha et al., 2024) and report greater relational satisfaction and stability (Ouyang, 2025). While Jha et al. (2024) explored attachment as a predictor of rejection responses, the present study reveals the contrary pattern, in which heightened rejection sensitivity correlates with lower levels of secure attachment. Although explored from different perspectives, these studies agree on the notion that attachment security and rejection sensitivity are closely linked in establishing relationship dynamics.

Contrary to  $H_{1b}$ , the present study demonstrated that rejection sensitivity was negatively correlated with anxious attachment in this sample. This finding deviates from most of the recent research, which consistently indicates a positive correlation between the two variables. For

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example, Shan et al. (2021) and Set (2019) revealed that anxious attachment is associated with hypervigilance to abandonment and heightened rejection sensitivity. Likewise, Finzi-Dottan and Abadi (2024) and Mishra et al. (2024) revealed correlations, including rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment in mediation models associated with fear of intimacy and poorer relationship functioning, respectively. Although these prior studies demonstrate an established connection between anxious attachment and rejection sensitivity, many of them examine the association from the perspective of attachment predicting rejection sensitivity or use different outcome variables; the present study instead investigates the correlation in the reverse direction, which is that rejection sensitivity predicts attachment, which may help explain the inconsistent pattern observed here.

Cultural factors may also help explain this discrepancy. Set (2019) proposed that socio-ecological variables such as relational mobility influence how rejection sensitivity is demonstrated. In collectivist countries like Malaysia, characterised by low relational mobility and cultural norms that value stability and family interdependence (Kito et al., 2017), individuals may repress overt anxiety about abandonment to preserve relational harmony (Kamaluddin et al., 2024). Set (2019) further noted that in more individualistic contexts with greater relational mobility, anxious attachment and rejection sensitivity tend to co-occur more strongly; although that work framed attachment as the predictor, it highlights cultural conditions under which the two constructs become tightly connected. Because the present study assesses the correlation in the opposite direction from rejection sensitivity to attachment style, these cultural variations may partly account for the deviation from the direction of rejection sensitivity to anxious attachment pattern observed in the Malaysian sample. Overall, the findings indicate that the correlation



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between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment may be culturally contingent, underlining the relevance of understanding attachment dynamics within distinct cultural contexts.

Consistent with H<sub>1c</sub>, the present study suggested that rejection sensitivity had a positive correlation with avoidant attachment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. This shows that those who are more sensitive to rejection are also more likely to develop avoidant attachment patterns, characterised by emotional distancing and limited closeness (Downey & Feldman, 1996). A potential explanation is that avoidance acts as a defense mechanism: when fear of rejection is heightened, individuals might isolate themselves emotionally to lessen vulnerability. This perspective is reinforced by previous studies indicating that avoidance can evolve as a response to rejection concerns (Shan et al., 2021) and that rejection-sensitive individuals, although appearing detached, remain highly responsive to rejection cues (Set, 2019; Jha et al., 2024).

However, not all research has found this link. For instance, Kumar and Mahapatra (2024) discovered no significant correlation between rejection sensitivity and avoidance, suggesting that the relationship may be context dependent. Cultural and relational factors may impact how avoidance is expressed: in certain circumstances, it may mask heightened concerns of rejection through withdrawal, whilst in others it can operate as a deactivating strategy that shields individuals from relational threats.

Most previous research has studied attachment styles as predictors of rejection sensitivity or related outcomes, but the present study takes the contrary approach by establishing rejection sensitivity as the predictor of attachment styles. This directional difference may contribute to the variation in findings. For instance, Jha et al. (2024) found that insecure attachment heightened individuals' vulnerability to rejection cues, while the current investigation revealed that

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increased rejection sensitivity correlated with lower secure attachment. Although investigated from opposite viewpoints, both findings underline the reciprocal nature of the correlation between attachment security and rejection sensitivity. Similarly, research relating anxious attachment to heightened rejection sensitivity (Finzi-Dottan & Abadi, 2024; Mishra et al., 2024; Shan et al., 2021; Set, 2019) mostly conceptualised attachment as the predictor, whereas the present study highlighted rejection sensitivity as the predictor. This inverted direction of study may help explain the inconsistent pattern reported in the Malaysian context, where cultural variables may reduce the expected positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment.

### ***Attachment Styles and Relationship Commitment***

This study sought to examine the correlation between attachment styles and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. The initial hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between secure attachment and commitment, and negative correlations for anxious and avoidant attachment. Contrary to expectations, the findings revealed that all three attachment styles, including secure, anxious, and avoidant, showed positive correlations with relationship commitment.

The result indicating that secure attachment was linked to higher commitment supports H<sub>2a</sub> and aligns with prior research (e.g., Sagone et al., 2023; Simpson, 1990), which has shown that securely attached individuals tend to report greater trust, satisfaction, and commitment within their relationships. Securely attached individuals tend to feel comfortable with intimacy, able to experience closeness without fear of abandonment, and more willing to both seek and provide support (Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019; Feeney & Collins, 2019). They also tend to report greater overall happiness compared to those with insecure attachment (Sagone et al., 2023).

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These qualities foster positive emotional climates in relationships, as securely attached partners tend to experience more frequent positive emotions and fewer intense negative emotions (Simpson, 1990; Ouyang, 2025). Trust further emerges as a crucial factor that explains the link between secure attachment and commitment. Trust reflects confidence in a partner's reliability and responsiveness and is consistently linked with positive relationship outcomes (Campbell et al., 2025). Simpson's (1990) work demonstrates that secure attachment predicts greater trust, while studies on long-distance relationships show that higher trust enhances satisfaction and, in turn, strengthens commitment (Hammonds et al., 2020). Thus, securely attached individuals not only hold positive beliefs about love and self-worth but also develop trusting, emotionally fulfilling relationships, which in turn promote enduring commitment. Taking them together, these characteristics explain why securely attached individuals are more likely to sustain enduring and committed relationships.

However, the unexpected result that insecure attachment styles were positively associated with commitment can be meaningfully understood by cultural factors specific to the Malaysian collectivist context. Collectivist societies, including Malaysia, generally show lower social approval of divorce or separation (Pelham et al., 2022), which may create external pressures for individuals to remain committed, regardless of personal dissatisfaction. This cultural backdrop is further reinforced by the role of shame. Prior research has highlighted that people in collectivist cultures are more shame-prone and tend to follow social norms even at the expense of personal choice (Bejanyan et al., 2014; Sznycer et al., 2012), which means relationship dissolution may lead to "losing face" or being judged by others. Therefore, building on this perspective, avoiding shame and maintaining social approval may reinforce commitment among insecurely attached individuals.

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Beyond these broad cultural expectations, social influence also plays a central role in shaping relationship behaviours. Peer groups may act as models, sources of support, and even sources of pressure, compelling individuals to sustain their relationships in order to conform to peer expectations (Kanth et al., 2024). Furthermore, evidence from neighbouring collectivist contexts also support this interpretation. A study conducted in Singapore found that parenting styles influence romantic relationship quality in emerging adulthood, with individuals reporting greater commitment when raised by authoritarian mothers (Cho et al., 2020). Taken together, these factors suggest that collectivist cultural norms, coupled with social and familial pressures, may reinforce commitment among insecurely attached individuals regardless of their attachment-related insecurities.

The discrepancy between the hypothesis and the result can also be understood through underlying psychological mechanisms. Prior study has shown that attachment-related anxiety is closely tied to a desire to maintain relationships (Bergeron et al., 2019). Anxiously attached individuals often report being “over-committed,” prioritising their relationship above other aspects of life and making significant sacrifices to avoid abandonment (Bergeron et al., 2019). Their heightened fear of abandonment (Blake, 2025) leads to hyperactivation, expressed through behaviours such as reassurance-seeking, clinging, or controlling attempts to maintain closeness (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Consequently, we predict that even when relationships are unsatisfying, anxious individuals may still display strong commitment as a means of ensuring proximity and reducing insecurity.

Rusbult’s Investment Model (1980) further explains why insecurely attached individuals appear to have high commitment. Commitment is shaped not only by satisfaction but also by the level of investment in the relationship (e.g., time, shared memories, mutual friends, financial

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Another principle of Rusbult's Investment Model (1980) is that perceptions of a lack of alternatives increase commitment. Anxiously attached individuals, who often report lower self-esteem and self-worth compared to secure individuals (Jamil et al., 2020), may undervalue their ability to find another partner, leading them to remain committed. For avoidantly attached individuals, while they tend to devalue intimacy, alternatives may still appear unappealing because starting a new relationship requires emotional vulnerability and trust-building, which they are reluctant to engage in due to tendencies toward mistrust and social discomfort when facing uncertainty (Lauriola et al., 2024). As a result, avoidant individuals may show higher commitment, not because of closeness, but because maintaining the current relationship is perceived as less threatening than re-entering the dating market.

### ***Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Commitment***

This study hypothesised that rejection sensitivity would be negatively associated with relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. The results supported this hypothesis, revealing a significant negative correlation between the two variables. In other words, individuals with higher levels of rejection sensitivity reported lower levels of relationship commitment. This result is consistent with previous studies. For instance, Mishra et al. (2024) identified rejection sensitivity as a predictor of key relationship outcomes, including lower levels of commitment, while Mishra and Allen (2023) found that rejection-sensitive individuals often fear rejection, leading to avoidance

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behaviours and reduced emotional investment in romantic relationships. Similarly, Downey and Feldman (1996) reported that individuals high in rejection sensitivity tend to hold negatively distorted views about the future of their relationships, making them more threat-sensitive and less inclined to sustain romantic partnerships.

The rejection sensitivity model offers further insight into this association. High rejection sensitivity often fosters anxious attachment tendencies, characterised by excessive worry about a partner's commitment, negative interpretations of partners' actions, and an overestimation of potential threats (Pietrzak et al., 2005). These tendencies undermine relationship satisfaction, closeness, and ultimately commitment. In line with Rusbult's Investment Model (1980), which highlights satisfaction as a key predictor of commitment, Mishra et al. (2024) found that individuals with higher rejection sensitivity reported lower satisfaction, which in turn reduced their commitment to romantic relationships.

Another mechanism lies in how rejection sensitivity shapes perceptions of partner responsiveness. Individuals high in rejection sensitivity are more likely to misinterpret neutral or ambiguous partner behaviours as signs of rejection (Richter & Schoebi, 2021). For instance, a partner's momentary distraction might be perceived not as a temporary lapse, but as disinterest or emotional withdrawal. Such misperceptions can diminish the perceived supportiveness of the partner, which in turn may reduce motivation to maintain the relationship (Arıcan-Dinc & Gable, 2023).

Defensive motivational system (DMS) provides an explanation for how rejection sensitivity undermines commitment. As a self-protective mechanism, the DMS will be hyperactive in individuals high in rejection sensitivity, leading to heightened vigilance for rejection cues and maladaptive defensive behaviours such as withdrawal, reduced self-disclosure,

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and reluctance to fully invest in the relationship (Downey et al., 2004; Romero-Canyas et al., 2010). These defensive behaviours prioritise self-preservation over relational investment, thereby limiting commitment. Rather than seeking closeness, rejection-sensitive individuals may focus on minimising vulnerability, which hinders both the depth and stability of their relationships.

### *The Mediating Role of Attachment Styles*

The present study examined whether secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles mediated the link between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. The results showed partial support for the hypotheses, with secure and avoidant attachment emerging as significant mediators, but anxious attachment did not significantly mediate the correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment.

The results of this study supported hypothesis H<sub>4a</sub>, where secure attachment significantly mediated the relationship between rejection sensitivity and commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. According to the findings, those who are more sensitive to rejection are less likely to maintain secure attachment patterns, which weaken their commitment to a relationship. These results are in accordance with earlier research by Ünal-Karagüven and Aslan (2022), who found that there is a partial mediation effect by secure attachment. This interpretation aligns with theoretical frameworks suggesting that attachment security supports effective emotional regulation, enabling individuals to navigate anxiety caused by rejection sensitivity without engaging in defensive or maladaptive behaviours (Domic-Siede et al., 2024; Downey & Feldman, 1996). Empirical research further supports this, as secure attachment has been linked to higher relationship satisfaction and stability (Bowlby, 1969; Ouyang, 2025). From a methodological standpoint, Zhao et al. (2010) classify this pattern

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as indirect-only mediation, meaning that the effect of rejection sensitivity on commitment was explained through secure attachment, with no remaining direct pathway. This confirms the interpretation that attachment security functions as the primary mechanism linking rejection concerns to relationship commitment in this sample.

Contrary to  $H_{1b}$ , the present study demonstrated that rejection sensitivity was negatively correlated with anxious attachment in this sample. Although rejection sensitivity negatively predicted anxious attachment and anxious attachment positively predicted commitment, the overall indirect pathway was nonsignificant, suggesting a suppression effect (MacKinnon et al., 2000). In other words, rejection sensitivity lowered anxious attachment tendencies in this sample, counteracting the positive influence that anxiety produced on commitment, therefore cancelling out the mediational pathway. According to Zhao et al. (2010), a nonsignificant indirect effect ( $a \times b$ ) suggests insufficient evidence for mediation, regardless of whether the individual pathways are significant. Thus, while component paths were statistically meaningful, the absence of a consistent indirect impact indicates attachment cannot be regarded as a mediator in this context.

This finding diverges from earlier research that found anxious attachment as a significant mediator between rejection sensitivity and relationship outcomes, including relationship commitment. For instance, Mishra et al. (2024) observed that anxious attachment mediated the pathway associated with rejection sensitivity with lower commitment levels, whereas the present study found no significant effect. Moreover, Shan (2021) and Set (2019) further demonstrated that anxious attachment is characterised by hypervigilance to abandonment and heightened response to rejection cues, which would theoretically foster a stronger mediation effect.



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However, most of these studies framed attachment as a predictor of rejection sensitivity or studied outcomes other than commitment, which may explain the differences.

Cultural evidence may also explain the difference. In collectivist countries like Malaysia, where relational harmony and stability are highly valued (Kito et al., 2017; Kamaluddin et al., 2024), rejection-sensitive individuals may repress overt anxiety tendencies (e.g., clinging, needs for reassurance) to avoid jeopardizing relationship harmony. As a result, the anxious attachment pattern may be less apparent, reducing its role as a mediator. Furthermore, in such settings, anxiety about abandonment may conversely reinforce commitment through fear-driven motives or social pressures to sustain the relationship rather than diminish it. These dynamics may explain why the expected pathway from rejection sensitivity through anxious attachment to commitment was not observed in the present study.

Besides that, the results showed that avoidant attachment significantly mediates the correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment, thereby supporting H<sub>4c</sub>. Specifically, rejection sensitivity positively predicted avoidant attachment, which in turn positively predicted commitment. Although avoidant attachment is often associated with emotional distance, poorer intimacy, and lower relationship satisfaction (Guzmán-González et al., 2020), its positive association with commitment may reflect a defensive strategy. For rejection-sensitive individuals, avoidance may serve to decrease emotional exposure to potential rejection, thereby preserving the relationship without complete vulnerability (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

This finding expands earlier studies. Mishra and Allen (2024) showed that avoidant attachment mediated the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship outcomes, while Finzi-Dottan and Abadi (2024) demonstrated that avoidant attachment played a significant

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mediating role, operating as a defensive mechanism in shaping marital expectations. While this research did not focus particularly on rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment, they corresponded to the present result by highlighting avoidance as a mediator via which relational threats are translated into adult commitment dynamics. From Zhao et al.'s (2010) framework, this case demonstrates competitive mediation, where the indirect impact operates in the opposite direction as the total effect. Here, rejection sensitivity correlated with higher relationship commitment via avoidant attachment, even though the overall association between rejection sensitivity and commitment was negative. This shows numerous mechanisms are at work, some reducing commitment and others reinforcing it.

In the Malaysian cultural context, where dependability and relational stability are highly valued (Dalin et al., 2024; Susilaningtyas & Nurwianti, 2022), avoidance may act less as withdrawal and more as defensive maintenance, where societal norms greatly value stability and relationship breakup can have substantial consequences.

### **Implications**

#### ***Theoretical Implications***

Two theories were applied to explain the correlations between rejection sensitivity, attachment styles and relationship commitment among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship. First, the rejection sensitivity model by Downey and Feldman (1996) describes how people with heightened sensitivity to rejection interpret and respond to social interactions, especially in romantic contexts. This model posits that individuals with high rejection sensitivity anxiously anticipate, perceive, and overreact to potential rejection. This heightened vigilance often leads to maladaptive behaviours, such as withdrawal or excessive reassurance-seeking, which may undermine relationship stability. Second, Bowlby's

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(1969) attachment theory posits that insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) typically undermine intimacy and long-term relationship commitment, while secure attachment fosters trust, closeness and stability. However, the findings of the present study are only partially supported by these theoretical assumptions. Specifically, the negative correlation found between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment contradicts the predictions of the rejection sensitivity model, while the positive correlations between insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) and relationship commitment diverge from the conventional predictions of attachment theory. These findings imply that although the two theories provide useful frameworks, they may not fully capture the relational dynamics observed in this particular cultural context.

Prior to this study, little research had directly studied the correlation between rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, and relationship commitment in the Malaysian setting, particularly among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship in committed relationships. Existing Malaysian studies have generally focused on attachment in relation to stress, social support, or marital satisfaction (Khodarahimi et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2013; Yahya et al., 2018), leaving unmarried individuals underexplored. Cross-cultural findings further indicate that the link between rejection sensitivity and attachment may vary by cultural setting. For example, Set (2019) discovered that anxious attachment and rejection sensitivity are more strongly associated in individualistic societies with considerable relational mobility, whereas the weaker association identified in Malaysia may reflect collectivist beliefs that prioritize harmony and stability. Similarly, Muiyang et al. (2023) explored attachment and resilience among Malaysian young adults, but not within romantic couple dynamics, highlighting the need to extend such research into committed relationships.

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The application of the rejection sensitivity model and attachment theory in this study yielded findings that diverge from the conventional predictions. For instance, while the rejection sensitivity model proposes that rejection-sensitive people are more likely to develop anxious attachment and show lower commitment, the present study found a negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment. This suggests that in certain collectivist cultural contexts, such as Malaysia, rejection-sensitive individuals may cope with their fears in ways that do not align with theoretical assumptions.

Similarly, attachment theory generally posits that insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) undermine long-term commitment. Yet, in this study, both anxious and avoidant attachment styles were positively associated with relationship commitment. This contradiction may reflect the influence of collectivist cultural norms, where maintaining a relationship is often shaped by cultural norms, social pressure, and relational obligations. In such contexts, even individuals with insecure attachment may remain committed, not because of emotional security, but due to external pressures and cultural values that prioritize relationship endurance.

In summary, this study makes a theoretical contribution by showing that the predictions of the rejection sensitivity model and attachment theory are only partially supported in the Malaysian collectivist context. The findings suggest that these theories, which were originally developed in Western individualist contexts, may need to be culturally adjusted in order to take into consideration different relational dynamics (Friedman et al., 2010; Schmitt et al., 2004). Future research should further explore the associations between rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, and relationship commitment by considering cultural and social-contextual aspects.

*Practical Implications*

The findings of this study offer significant practical implications for counselling and intervention initiatives targeted at unmarried individuals. Anxious attachment and rejection sensitivity were found to be negatively correlated in this study, which suggests that people may deal with rejection fears differently in a collectivist context, perhaps by suppressing overt insecurity. In order to prevent long-term stress, it is crucial to assist clients in identifying, processing, and expressing rejection-related issues in healthful ways rather than suppressing them.

Additionally, the findings of the present study indicated a positive correlation between anxious and avoidant attachment styles and relationship commitment, which contradicts conventional assumptions. In the collectivist society of Malaysia, where the breakup of relationships may be viewed as shameful or socially undesirable, people with insecure attachment may still exhibit significant commitment to their partners. This emphasises the need for counsellors to be sensitive to the cultural and social norms influencing relationship decisions. Therefore, interventions should not only target the reduction of attachment-related insecurities but also address the external pressures that may perpetuate commitment despite relational dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, the study provides practical insights into the development of culturally designed premarital counselling and relationship education programs for unmarried individuals. By raising awareness of how rejection sensitivity and various attachment styles influence relationship commitment, counsellors can assist couples in developing better coping strategies and more effective communication patterns. These attempts may help people in reducing

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### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Firstly, the study did not attain the proposed sample size of 337 participants, partly due to methodological limitations in data collection. Particularly, an unrestricted self-selected survey method was employed, whereby the survey link was publicly accessible. While this approach facilitated wider reach, it also allowed individuals who did not fulfill the inclusion criteria (e.g., not in a romantic relationship, not Malaysian, or outside the specified age range) to participate, resulting in invalid responses. Furthermore, the use of a lucky draw as a token of appreciation appeared to motivate some participants to submit multiple entries in an attempt to increase their chances of winning, which resulted in duplicate submissions and lowered the data quality. To address these problems, future research could use stricter eligibility screening procedures at the beginning of the survey to guarantee that only eligible participants can proceed with the main questionnaire. Duplication can be reduced as well by implementing technical safeguards, such as limiting submissions to one per participant. For recruitment, instead of using QR codes or fully open-access links, researchers may consider using more controlled methods like invitation-based sampling or targeted groups to ensure that the sample better aligns with the intended criteria.

The sample composition in this study did not reflect the demographic distribution of the Malaysian population, as most participants were Chinese and female. The difference in race and gender limits the generalisability of the findings to the larger population of unmarried individuals currently in romantic relationships. Future research should prioritise recruiting more demographically diverse samples to better represent Malaysia's multi-ethnic and gender-balanced population.

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Additionally, the study included non-probability sampling approaches, notably purposive, snowball, and self-selected online recruitment. While these approaches were practicable within the restrictions of time and resources, they present the possibility of sampling bias, as self-selected participants may differ systematically from non-participants. To increase external validity, future research could benefit from institutional or organisational collaboration that provides access to larger and more diverse participant pools, making probability-based sampling procedures feasible.

Lastly, the cross-sectional correlational design limits the ability to deduce causality or temporal direction between rejection sensitivity, attachment styles, and relationship commitment. Longitudinal study is recommended to capture changes in these aspects over time, providing stronger evidence for the mechanisms by which rejection sensitivity and attachment processes influence commitment. Consequently, the study contributes to an area where findings have been inconsistent across contexts. Previous research has shown both positive and negative correlations between attachment styles and relationship commitment, suggesting that these dynamics may be influenced by cultural, relational, or methodological factors. The present findings, particularly the different roles of anxious and avoidant attachment, highlight the need for further exploration. Future studies should explore potential moderators (e.g., cultural values, relationship duration, or socio-economic status) to better understand under what conditions attachment styles strengthen or reduce relationship commitment.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the influence of rejection sensitivity on relationship commitment and the mediating role of attachment styles among unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship in Malaysia. The findings offered partial support for the

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presented hypotheses, highlighting secure attachment as a protective factor, avoidant attachment as a competitive mediator, and anxious attachment as nonsignificant in this cultural setting. The results altogether illustrate the various pathways through which rejection sensitivity operates, indicating that it can both undermine and enhance commitment depending on attachment dynamics. The study additionally highlights the need of attachment-oriented and culturally tailored counselling approaches. By helping clients address rejection concerns and insecure attachment tendencies, while also recognising social norms that constitute commitment, practitioners can better support unmarried individuals who are currently committed in a romantic relationship in creating healthier and more satisfying relationships. Considering its limitations, the study met its objectives and offers a distinctive contribution to the Malaysian setting by applying different findings to a collectivist culture. It highlights how cultural expectations surrounding harmony, stability, and relational obligations influence the manifestation of attachment and commitment. This addition not only improves the local literature but also gives insights for culturally tailored relationship education and counselling programs.



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## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

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## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

## Appendices

## Appendix A: Sample Size Calculation using Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects

### Model 1 (Rejection Sensitivity → Secure Attachment Style → Relationship Commitment)

Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects  
Written by Alexander M. Schoemann (Contact), Aaron J. Boulton, & Stephen D. Short

Model: One Mediator  
Objective: Set Power, Vary N

Target Power: 0.8  
Minimum N: 50  
Maximum N: 500  
Sample Size Steps: 1

# of Replications: 10000  
Monte Carlo Draws per Rep: 20000  
Random Seed: 1234  
Confidence Level (%): 95

Input Method: Correlations

	X	M	Y
X	1.00		
M	0.369	1.00	
Y	0.31	0.25	1.00
Std. Deviation	1.1	0.83	0.44

Instructions

To use this app, follow these steps:

- Select Model.** The user should first select the mediation model containing the indirect effect(s) of interest. Models may be selected in the drop-down menu in the left-most column of the app. Note that when a different mediation model is selected, the model graphic and input-value sections in the middle column will be altered.
- Select Objective.** Once the desired model is chosen, the user should select the objective of the power analysis. Two

Calculate Power

	ab	325.00	0.78	0.79	0.80
ab	326.00	0.78	0.79	0.80	
ab	327.00	0.79	0.80	0.81	
ab	328.00	0.79	0.80	0.81	
ab	329.00	0.79	0.80	0.81	

N = 327 at 0.80 power

### Model 2 (Rejection Sensitivity → Anxious Attachment Style → Relationship Commitment)

Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects  
Written by Alexander M. Schoemann (Contact), Aaron J. Boulton, & Stephen D. Short

Model: One Mediator  
Objective: Set Power, Vary N

Target Power: 0.8  
Minimum N: 50  
Maximum N: 500  
Sample Size Steps: 1

# of Replications: 10000  
Monte Carlo Draws per Rep: 20000  
Random Seed: 1234  
Confidence Level (%): 95

Input Method: Correlations

	X	M	Y
X	1.00		
M	0.30	1.00	
Y	0.31	0.46	1.00
Std. Deviation	1.1	0.97	0.44

Instructions

To use this app, follow these steps:

- Select Model.** The user should first select the mediation model containing the indirect effect(s) of interest. Models may be selected in the drop-down menu in the left-most column of the app. Note that when a different mediation model is selected, the model graphic and input-value sections in the middle column will be altered.
- Select Objective.** Once the desired model is chosen, the user should select the objective of the power analysis. Two

Calculate Power

	ab	88.00	0.76	0.78	0.80
ab	89.00	0.77	0.79	0.81	
ab	90.00	0.78	0.79	0.81	
ab	91.00	0.78	0.80	0.82	
ab	92.00	0.79	0.80	0.82	

N = 91 at 0.80 power

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

***Model 3 (Rejection Sensitivity → Avoidant Attachment Style → Relationship Commitment)***

Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects  
Written by Alexander M. Schoemann (Contact), Aaron J. Boulton, & Stephen D. Short

Model: One Mediator

Objective: Set Power, Vary N

Target Power: 0.8

Minimum N: 50

Maximum N: 500

Sample Size Steps: 1

# of Replications: 10000

Monte Carlo Draws per Rep: 20000

Random Seed: 1234

Confidence Level (%): 95

Input Method: Correlations

	X	M	Y
X	1.00		
M	0.38	1.00	
Y	0.31	0.39	1.00
Std. Deviation	1.1	0.63	0.44

Instructions

To use this app, follow these steps:

- Select Model.** The user should first select the mediation model containing the indirect effect(s) of interest. Models may be selected in the drop-down menu in the left-most column of the app. Note that when a different mediation model is selected, the model graphic and input-value sections in the middle column will be altered.
- Select Objective.** Once the desired model is chosen, the user should select the objective of the power analysis. Two

Calculate Power

ab	88.00	0.76	0.78	0.80
ab	89.00	0.77	0.79	0.81
ab	90.00	0.78	0.79	0.81
ab	91.00	0.78	0.80	0.82
ab	92.00	0.79	0.81	0.82

N = 91 at 0.80 power

**Appendix B: Information Sheet, Informed Consent and Formatted Questionnaire****Information Sheet****Title of the project**

The Association between Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Commitment among Unmarried Couples in Malaysia: Attachment Styles as Mediators

**Purpose of the study**

There is a rising in reluctance toward long-term commitments and declining marriage rate in Malaysia. With psychological factors such as rejection sensitivity and attachment styles potentially influencing relationship commitment, the researchers aim to examine how these factors contribute to this trend. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the mediating role of attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant) in the association between rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment among unmarried couples in Malaysia.

**Criteria of study**

- 1) Aged 18 and above
- 2) Currently involved in a romantic relationship but not legally married
- 3) Malaysian

**Participant's rights**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study or stop it at any time without any penalty. The research team may stop it if you don't fulfil the study eligibility criteria. A research team member will communicate with you if the matter arises.

**Confidentiality**

The researchers will keep your information confidential and will not be made publicly available. Data obtained from this study that does not identify you. The researcher and regulatory authorities may review your original records to verify the study procedures and/or data. Your information may be held and processed on a computer. Only research team members are authorized to access your information.

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES & RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

### **Duration of the study**

This survey takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

### **Compensation**

Participants who complete the survey will have the opportunity to enter a lucky draw, where 50 winners will each receive RM10 through the TnG e-wallet.

### **Contacts**

If you have any inquiries, please feel free to contact the researchers:

Ng Yi Xuan (ngyixuan421@lutar.my)

Daphne Voon Kai Yen (dvoon0228@lutar.my)

### **Informed consent**

I confirm that I am at least 18 years old, have read and understood the information provided above, and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

**Section A: Demographic**

1. Age (Please put your age in numbers, e.g. 25) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender

Male

Female

Others (*please specify*):

3. Ethnicity

Malay

Chinese

Indian

Bumiputra Sabah

Bumiputra Sarawak

Others (*please specify*):

4. Marital status

Single

In relationship

Engaged

Married

Others (*please specify*):

5. Length of current relationship (e.g. 1 year 3 months) \_\_\_\_\_

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

**Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ)**

**Instructions:** The items below describe situations in which people sometimes ask things of others. For each item, imagine that you are in the situation, and then answer the questions that follow it.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Very unconcerned/ Very unlikely	.....	.....	.....	.....	Very concerned/ Very likely

1. **You ask your parents or another family member for a loan to help you through a difficult financial time.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your family would want to help you?
  - b. I would expect that they would agree to help as much as they can.
2. **You approach a close friend to talk after doing or saying something that seriously upset him/her.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to talk with you?
  - b. I would expect that he/she would want to talk with me to try to work things out.
3. **You bring up the issue of sexual protection with your significant other and tell him/her how important you think it is.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over his/her reaction?
  - b. I would expect that he/she would be willing to discuss our possible options without getting defensive.
4. **You ask your supervisor for help with a problem you have been having at work.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to help you?
  - b. I would expect that he/she would want to try to help me out.
5. **After a bitter argument, you call or approach your significant other because you want to make up.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your significant other would want to make up with you?
  - b. I would expect that he/she would be at least as eager to make up as I would be.
6. **You ask your parents or other family members to come to an occasion important to you.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not they would want to come?
  - b. I would expect that they would want to come.



7. **At a party, you notice someone on the other side of the room that you'd like to get to know, and you approach him or her to try to start a conversation.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to talk with you?
  - b. I would expect that he/she would want to talk with me.
8. **Lately you've been noticing some distance between yourself and your significant other, and you ask him/her if there is something wrong.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not he/she still loves you and wants to be with you?
  - b. I would expect that he/she will show sincere love and commitment to our relationship no matter what else may be going on.
9. **You call a friend when there is something on your mind that you feel you really need to talk about.**
  - a. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to listen?
  - b. I would expect that he/she would listen and support me.

## Appendix C: Ethical Clearance

**UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN**

DU012(A)

Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation

Co. No. 578227-M

Re: U/SERC/78-415/2024

17 December 2024

Mr Tay Kok Wai  
 Head, Department of Psychology and Counselling  
 Faculty of Arts and Social Science  
 Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman  
 Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat  
 31900 Kampar, Perak.

Dear Mr Tay,

**Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol**

We refer to the application for ethical approval for your students' research project from Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) Psychology programme enrolled in course UAPZ3013/UAPZ3023. We are pleased to inform you that the application has been approved under Expedited Review.

The details of the research projects are as follows:

No	Research Title	Student's Name	Supervisor's Name	Approval Validity
1.	The Influence of Valence, Behavioural, and Cognitive-Emotional Maturity to Parenthood on Fertility Intention: Examining the Moderating Role of Gender	1. Chew En Jee 2. Yong Wen Hui	Dr Tan Soon Aun	17 December 2024 – 16 December 2025
2.	The Fragile Bonds of Love: Examining How Partner Affirmation and Commitment Uncertainty Predict Sexual and Emotional Infidelity Among Married Couple in Malaysia	1. Chang Shan Mei 2. Tay Shi Swen 3. Wong Ming Jie		
3.	Sensitivity and Relationship Commitment Among Unmarried Couples in Malaysia: Attachment Styles as Mediator	1. Daphne Voon Kai Yen 2. Ng Yi Xuan		
4.	Pornography Consumption and Relationship Satisfaction Among Married Couples: A Moderated Mediation Model of Sexual Satisfaction and Gender	1. Tay Xue Jie 2. Wong Wei Zhong		

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

- (1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research;
- (2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and
- (3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.
- (4) Written consent be obtained from the institution(s)/company(ies) in which the physical or/and online survey will be carried out, prior to the commencement of the research.

Kampar Campus : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia

Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 466 1313

Sungai Long Campus : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8868

Website: www.utar.edu.my



## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

Should the students collect personal data of participants in their studies, please have the participants sign the attached Personal Data Protection Statement for records.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Ts Dr Faidz bin Abd Rahman**

Chairman

UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee

c.c     Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science  
         Director, Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research

**Kampar Campus** : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia

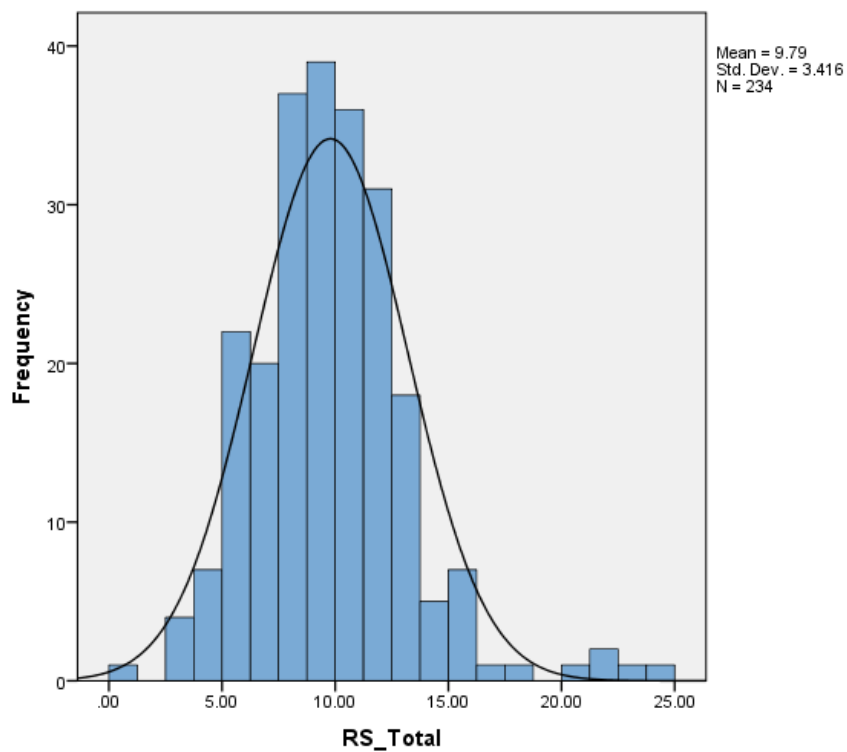
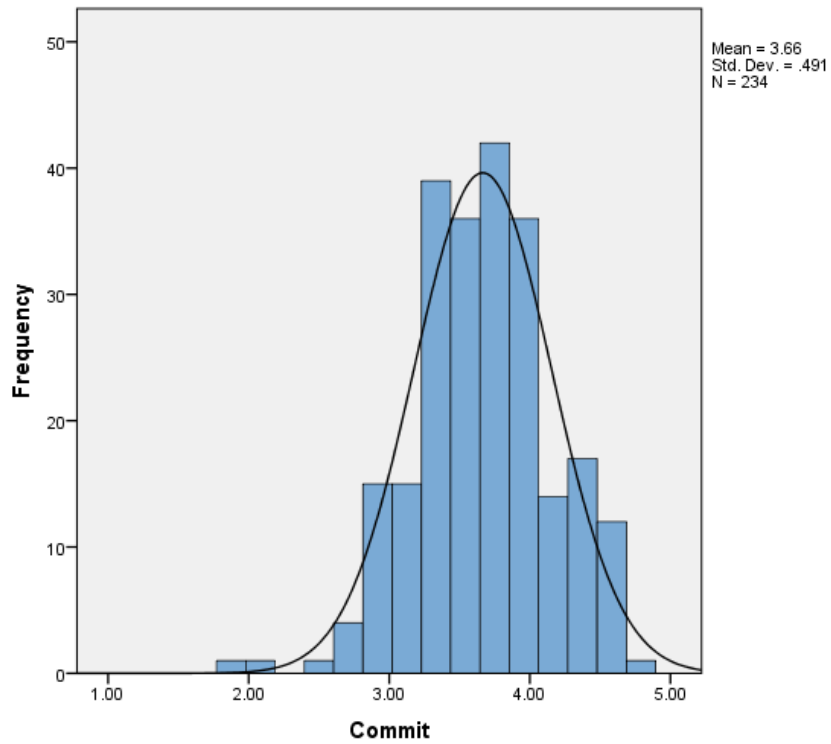
Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 468 1313

**Sungai Long Campus** : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

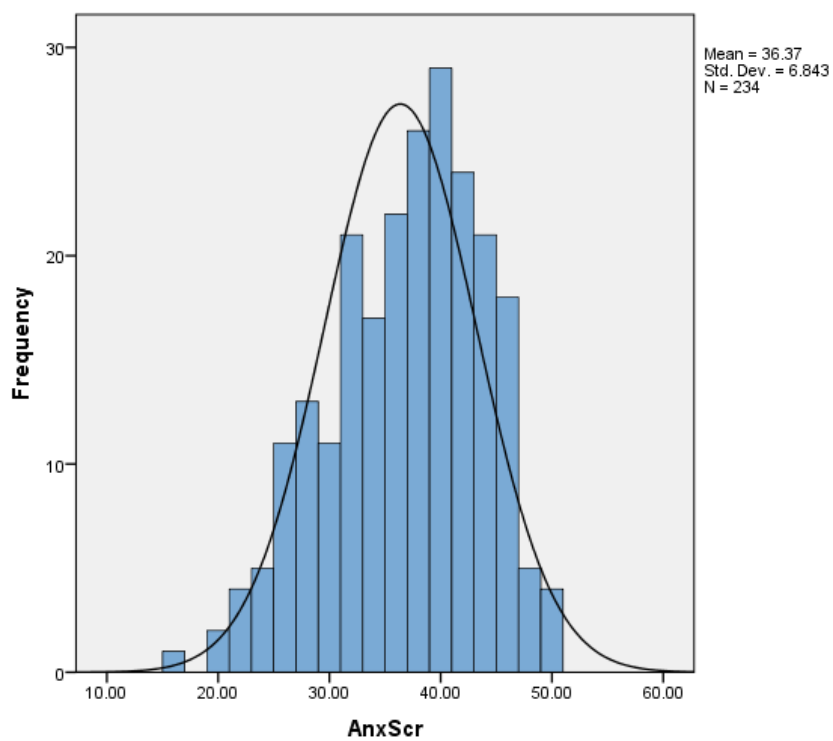
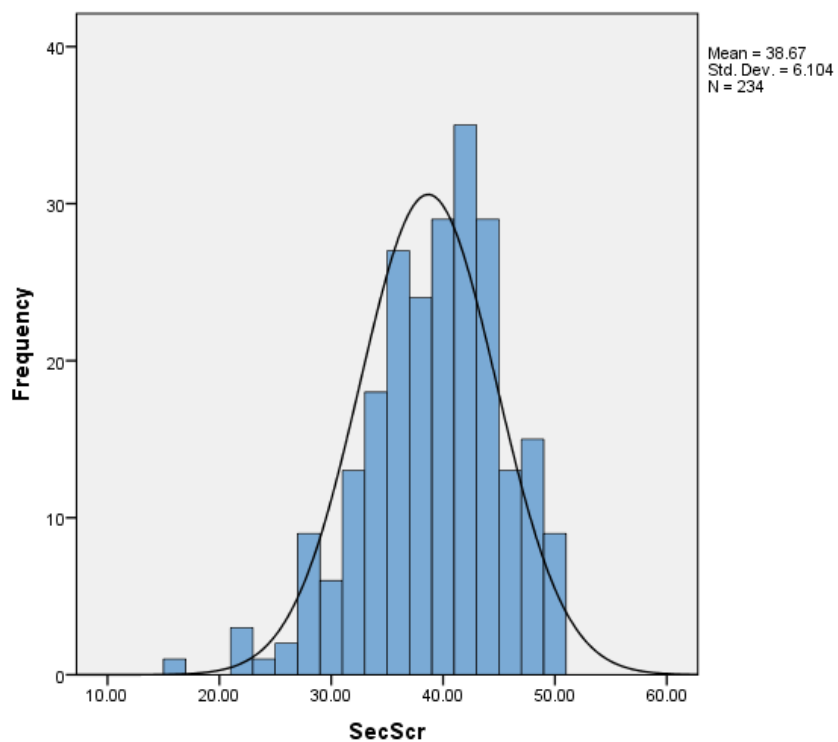
Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8888

**Website:** [www.utar.edu.my](http://www.utar.edu.my)

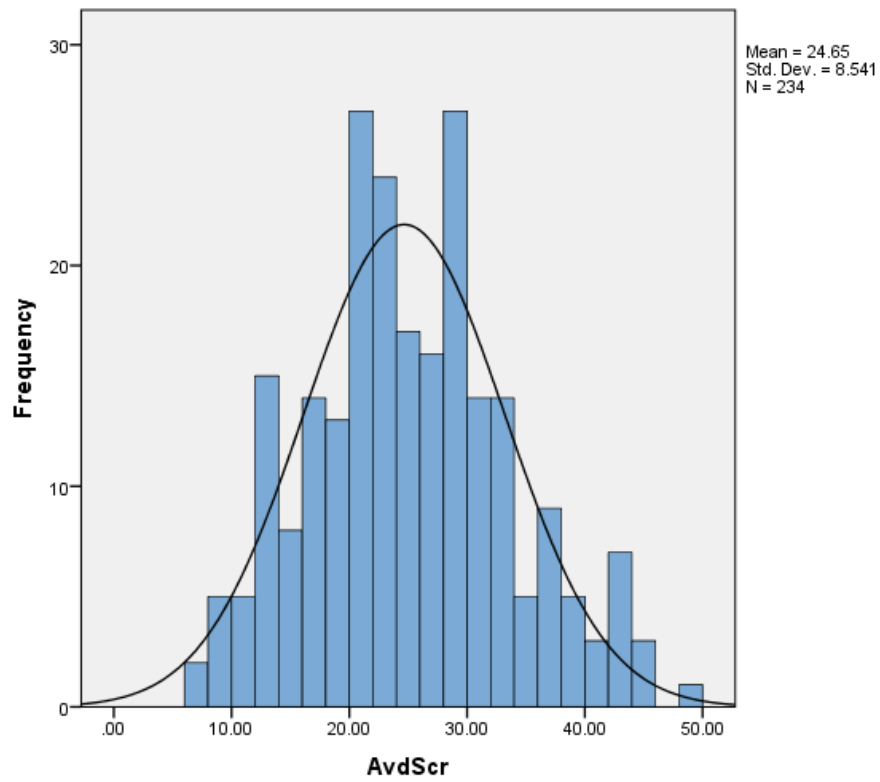


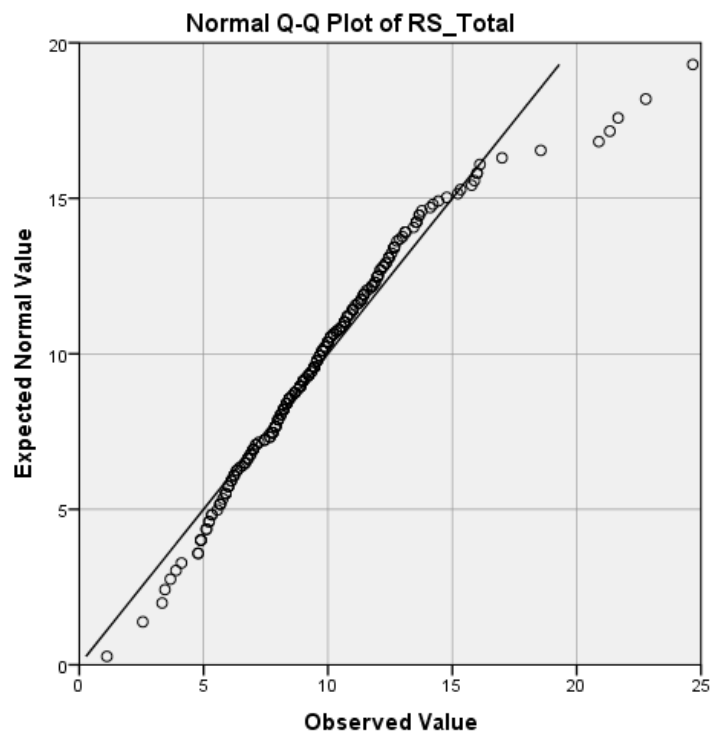
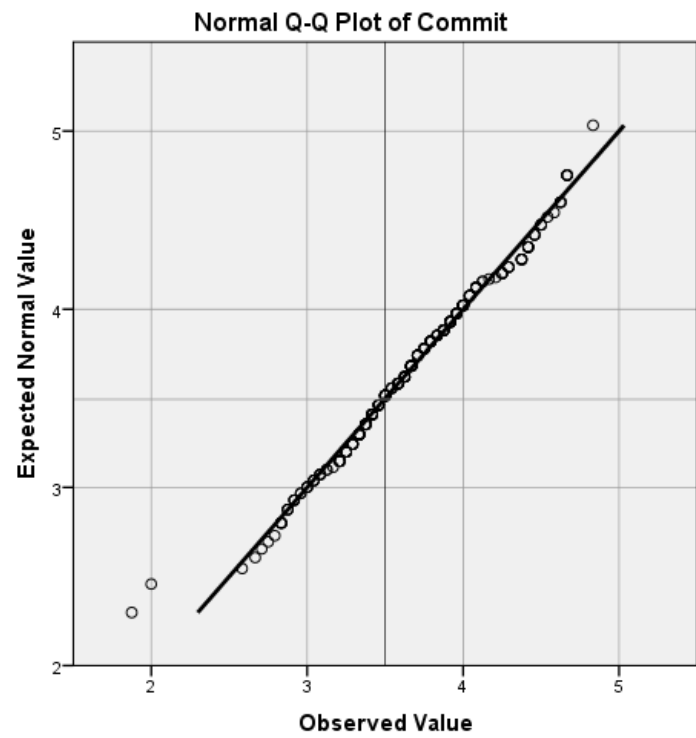
**Appendix D: SPSS Results***Appendix D1 Histograms*

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

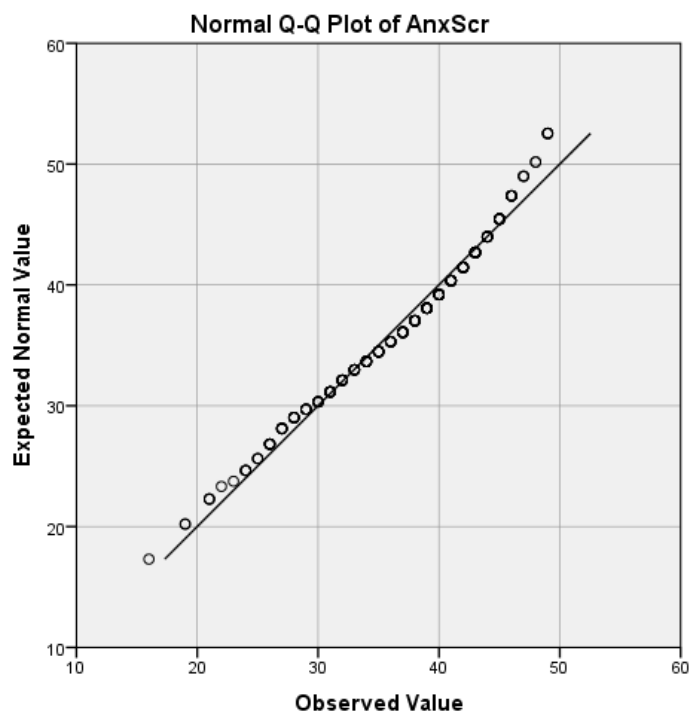
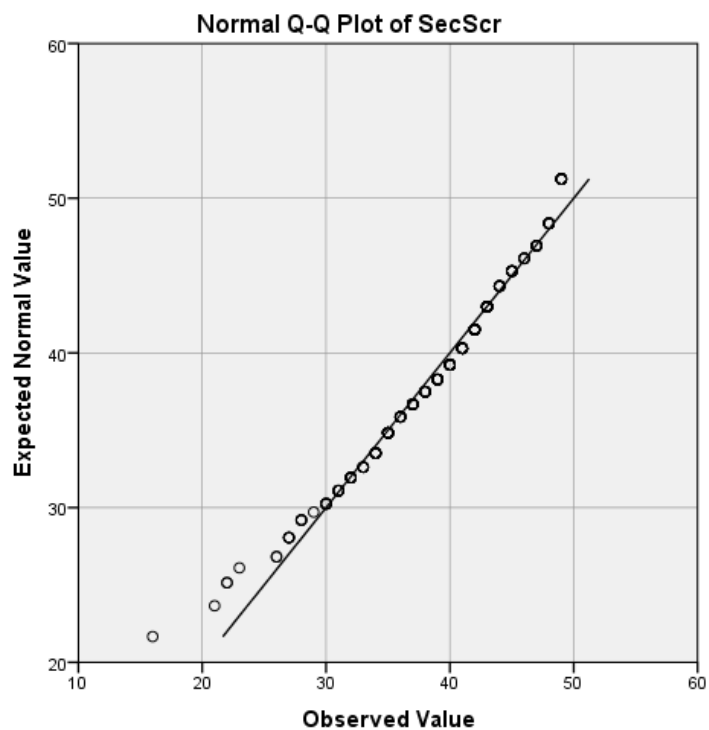


## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

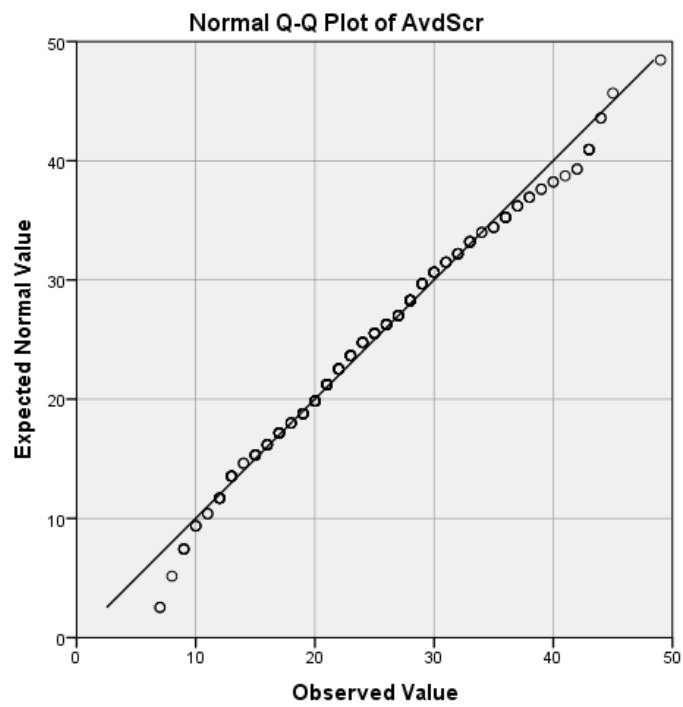


*Appendix D2 Q-Q Plots*

## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT







## REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT STYLES &amp; RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

*Appendix D3 Case Summaries***Case Summaries<sup>a</sup>**

Case Number		Mahalanobis Distance	Cook's Distance	Centered Leverage Value
1	26	2.01995	0.0122	0.00867
2	27	3.22906	0.01609	0.01386
3	81	3.75523	0.02145	0.01612
4	99	7.01454	0.05253	0.03011
5	106	2.04409	0.0155	0.00877
6	110	1.37566	0.01065	0.0059
7	166	3.95826	0.01972	0.01699
8	201	3.80438	0.0216	0.01639
9	213	2.21283	0.0127	0.0095
10	234	15.00665	0.23126	0.06441