



Comparison of primary maladaptive schemas and attachment styles of women involved in emotional relationships with an age gap of 10 years or less and an age gap of 15 years or more (with male age advantage)

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Abstract

Aim: The current study aimed to compare early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in women involved in romantic relationships with an age difference of 10 years or less and an age difference of 15 years or more (with the man being older). **Method:** This study was causal-comparative in nature; the statistical population comprised 91 individuals, with 50 women involved in romantic relationships with an age difference of 10 years or less (Group One) and 41 women in relationships with an age difference of 15 years or more (Group Two). Participants were selected through convenient and snowball sampling methods and responded to the Hazan and Shaver Attachment Styles Questionnaire (1987) and Young's 90-item Schema Questionnaire (1990). Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with SPSS software.

Results: The findings indicated significant differences between the two groups in the anxious/ambivalent attachment style and avoidant attachment style components ($P < 0.01$). There were significant differences between the two groups in the components of emotional deprivation, mistrust, social isolation, defectiveness/shame, failure, dependence, vulnerability, emotional inhibition, entitlement/grandiosity, and self-sacrifice ($P < 0.05$). However, there were no significant differences between the groups in the secure attachment style and components of abandonment, self-sacrifice, compliance, unrelenting standards, attention seeking, pessimism, and punishment ($P > 0.05$).

Conclusion: The results of this study indicated that there are differences between early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in women involved in romantic relationships with a minor and a greater age difference (with the man being older). The findings underscore the importance of schema-focused and emotion-focused approaches in resolving interpersonal conflicts in couples with significant age differences.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Early Maladaptive Schemas, Romantic Relationship, Age Superiority.

Introduction

This study aims to focus on romantic relationships or marriages where men are significantly older than their emotional partners, examining factors that might influence individuals, especially women, to engage in such relationships. Among these factors, the study compares the impact of early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles between two groups of couples with an age gap: those with a 10-year or smaller age difference (where the man is older) and those with a 15-year or greater age gap (also with the man being older). Therefore, the current study raises the question: Is there a difference between the early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles of women involved in romantic relationships with a 10-year or smaller age gap and those with a 15-year or greater age gap (where the man is older)?

Method

This study was causal-comparative in nature; the statistical population comprised 91 individuals, with 50 women involved in romantic relationships with an age difference of 10 years or less (Group One) and 41 women in relationships with an age difference of 15 years or more (Group Two). Participants were selected through convenient and snowball sampling methods and responded to the Hazan and Shaver Attachment Styles Questionnaire (1987) and Young's 90-item Schema Questionnaire (1990). Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with SPSS software.

Results

The findings indicated significant differences between the two groups in the anxious/ambivalent attachment style and avoidant attachment style components ($P < 0.01$). There were significant differences between the two groups in the components of emotional deprivation, mistrust, social isolation, defectiveness/shame, failure, dependence, vulnerability, emotional inhibition, entitlement/grandiosity, and self-sacrifice ($P < 0.05$). However, there were no significant differences between the groups in the secure attachment style and components of abandonment, self-sacrifice, compliance, unrelenting standards, attention seeking, pessimism, and punishment ($P > 0.05$).

Conclusion

In a general summary, the outcome of this study indicated that there is a difference between the early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles of women involved in romantic relationships with a 10-year or smaller age gap and those with a 15-year or greater age gap (where the man is older). This research used a non-probabilistic sampling method, which could affect the generalization of the results. It is recommended to conduct similar studies concerning relationships with a reversed age gap, namely relationships where women are older than men and have a significant age difference. Furthermore, it is suggested that the findings of this study be considered by couple therapists in utilizing schema-focused and emotion-focused approaches in addressing interpersonal conflicts in couples with a significant age gap.

Young believed that schemas and schema processes, due to their impact on our perception of ourselves and others, significantly influence our attitudes and decision-making in life, including one of the most important decisions: the choice of a life partner. According to Young, individuals who have an emotional deprivation schema usually avoid intimate relationships. They don't express their needs, and their emotional inhibition schema is often active; this is observed among women involved

in romantic relationships with an age difference of 15 years or more (with the man being older). Not expressing needs and inhibiting emotional expression leads to their frustration and anger, and may activate an overcompensation schema process involving entitlement and insufficient self-control (domain of impaired limits); these individuals believe that attention and affection from others, especially from a romantic partner, are their rightful due. Furthermore, the activation of schemas such as emotional deprivation, mistrust and abuse, defectiveness and shame, and social isolation – all related to the schema domain of disconnection and rejection – are indicative of a failure to meet fundamental emotional needs and the hardships of childhood and adulthood. This occurs when a child is deprived of their most basic emotional need: love and affection, security, respect, and secure attachment.

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