

Imagined Intimacy: The Link Between Attachment Styles and Parasocial Relationship of Senior High School Students



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ABSTRACT: This present study was designed to investigate how different attachment styles influence individuals' susceptibility to parasocial experiences, focusing on senior high school students through questionnaires assessing secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing attachment styles. 300 senior high school students, 11 and 12, participated in this study from the University in the Mindanao Region of the Philippines. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the data were normally distributed ($D = .035$, p -value = .200). The levels of both variables were described using means and standard deviations. The study found low levels of Secure Attachment Style among students ($X = 2.23$, $SD = .337$), indicating difficulties in emotional connections. A high level of Fearful Attachment Style was linked to anxiety and avoidance ($X = 3.56$, $SD = .419$), while Preoccupied Attachment Style ($X = 3.86$, $SD = .389$), and a high level of Dismissing Attachment Style ($X = 3.70$, $SD = .409$). High levels of parasocial relationships were noted ($X = 3.54$, $SD = .51$). Parasocial relationships and Secure Attachment Style had a weakly negative link ($r = -.143$, $p = .013$). Conversely, there were extremely minor positive connections between dismissing attachment styles ($r = .095$, $p = .002$) and preoccupied attachment styles ($r = .002$, $p = 0.023$). There was no significant link with Fearful Attachment Style ($r = -0.025$, $p = 0.661$). All things considered, our results point to a somewhat favourable correlation between parasocial relationships and attachment type ($r = 0.494$, $p = 0.05$). According to linear regression, Secure Attachment Styles have a negative correlation ($B = -.189$, $p = .009$) with parasocial connections, while Dismissing Attachment Styles have a positive correlation ($B = .117$, $p = .004$).

KEYWORDS: attachment styles, dismissing attachment style, fearful attachment style, secure attachment style, parasocial relationship, preoccupied attachment style.

I. INTRODUCTION

As people constantly consume media content that saw other's popular personalities, such personalities become attachments for them to the extent that they start believing that they know them personally. This relationship may be related to the attachment theory, which is described as a long-term link or relationship "between people, including those between romantic partners and parents and children" (Cherry, 2023). Parasocial relationships create a sense of attachment and belonging for a person (Bennette, 2024). However, parasocial relationship are one-sided according to Steele (2004).

Worldwide, interactions between fans from countries such as China and the US showcase how fan culture transcends international boundaries, highlighting its importance and global impact (Huang, 2024). Approximately half of participants in a 2023 survey across 26 countries claimed that K-pop was "extremely popular" in their country. During this period, K-pop had gained popularity among the general population, leading to the sale of genre-related merchandise. Based on the survey, K-pop's popularity reaches far beyond the borders of South Korea (Statista, 2024). As an extension of who they are, fans often form intense emotional connections with their idols (Wang, 2024). K-Pop fans often have a parasocial relationship with their idols, formed through a feeling of personal closeness. In a worldwide setting, fans develop parasocial relationships by emulating their idols, enjoying their music and possessions, and engaging in fan communities both online and offline (Purwaningtyas & Oktara, 2023). The concept of parasocial interactions, showing fans forming emotional bonds with their idols as if they were in a real relationship, is now an important aspect of the lives of K-Pop fans.

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In the United States, parasocial relationships are commonly thought of as two-person relationships, but they can also occur between imaginary characters, according to a study done in a public high school by Bennett (2024). Numerous media outlets offer people a wide range of entertainment possibilities. Growing knowledge of this subject may lead to dangerous obsessions. In contrast to traditional media, social media facilitates the mutual understanding between viewers and influencers. This dynamic encourages followers to make more significant emotional investments because they feel appreciated and acknowledged by the influencer (Reynolds, 2022).

People in the Philippines are becoming more aware of the cultural and societal implications of parasocial relationships—those one-sided connections people make with public figures. This has led to increased interest in the study of parasocial connections. Ascue et al. (2023) explored how fans view and perceive their favorite celebrities, offering comprehensive understanding into the complex dynamics involved in these connections. In addition, Abdurajik et al. (2023) examined the parasocial relationship between the media and its viewers, with a particular emphasis on the circumstances of young people whose parents have passed away.

Though many other studies are available, not much is known about the attachment style and parasocial relationship specifically in the local context. Therefore, this study tries to understand how people's attachment patterns influence their vulnerability to parasocial experiences in the connection between different attachment styles and parasocial relationships.

II. METHODS

A. Research Participants

Table 1 shows the students who took part in this study. These students came from the University of the Mindanao Region in the Philippines. They were in 11th and 12th grades studying in senior high school during the 2023-2024 school year. The researchers used convenient sampling. It is a non-random sampling method used often in studies. The researcher chooses participants that are close at hand (easiest to reach) outside this sample strategy. (Fleetwood, 2024). This can be due to their willingness to participate in the study, availability during a certain period of time, or closeness in geography (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Respondents (n=30)

Profile	Number	%
Sex		
Male	140	45.67
Female	160	54.33
Grade Level		
11th Grade	142	47.33
12th Grade	158	52.67

B. Research Instrument

The Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon et al., 2002) and the Attachment Styles Questionnaire (Oudenhoven et al., 2003) were the two surveys that the researchers utilized to get the data. The Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ), created by Van Oudenhoven and his associates in 2003, is currently used by many academics to assess each individual's own attachment style. On a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents disagreement and 5 represents agreement, respondents' rate each of the survey's 24 items. Secure, scared, preoccupied, and dismissive are the four attachment styles that the ASQ seeks to assess. The questionnaire has a subscale with an equal number of items for each style—seven questions for secure attachment, five for afraid, seven for preoccupied, and five for dismissing—to ensure that it covers all facets of attachment styles. The reliability and validity of the ASQ were shown, meaning it gives consistent results when used multiple times. The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, calculated with SPSS, was 0.742, which is good enough for research. McCutcheon and others (2004) created a survey called the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS). It uses a five-point Likert Scale to measure 23 statements, with options from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha, also calculated with SPSS, was 0.926, showing very strong internal consistency. The researchers did a pilot testing to check if both questionnaires were good and consistent for use in the Philippines. For the Attachment Styles questionnaire, almost every question was good except for number 23. The Celebrity Attitude Scale, made by Lynn McCutcheon and having 23 questions, showed that all questions were good by the Pearson-r Correlation Coefficient during the pilot testing.

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Table 2. Mean Interpretation for the level of Attachment Styles (secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing) and Parasocial Relationship.

Mean Interval	Descriptive Rating	Descriptive Interpretation
4.30-5.00	Very High	The level of different attachment styles and parasocial relationships is very high among senior high school students.
3.50-4.29	High	The level of different attachment styles and parasocial relationships is high among senior high school students.
2.70-3.49	Moderate	The level of different attachment styles and parasocial relationships is moderate among senior high school students.
1.90-2.69	Low	The level of different attachment styles and parasocial relationships is low among senior high school students.
1.00-1.89	Very Low	The level of different attachment styles and parasocial relationships is very low among senior high school students.

C. Design and Procedure

This research is quantitative and utilizes a descriptive-correlational research design. Prior to the onset, the researchers gathered relevant literature from this study. The researchers utilized validated Oudenhoven (2022) and McCutcheon (2017) validated questionnaires. The study's method of selecting participants from the senior high school student population was determined to be convenient sampling. The researchers distributed printed questionnaires to the potential participants in a traditional manner. Before distributing the questionnaires, they first sought ethical approval by soliciting letters of authorization from the Dean of the Senior High School department. Besides that, information letters on the ethical aspects of the research were provided to participants to ensure transparency and informed consent. After the data collection process, the researchers processed it systematically, evaluating it by applying appropriate statistical procedures on IBM SPSS version 25. Thereafter, the outcomes were analyzed in relation to the research question.

D. Statistical Treatment

The researchers implemented the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Massey, 1951) to corroborate the normality of the data, which resulted in a normal distribution ($D = .035$, $p\text{-value} = .200$). They were able to implement a diverse array of statistical methodologies during the analysis. The mean and standard deviation ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .180$) were employed to characterize the central tendency and variability of the data, respectively. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was developed by Karl Pearson (1984) to evaluate the intensity and direction of relationships between variables. To predict, using one or more independent variables, the value of a dependent variable. Linear regression analysis was implemented, thereby revealing the extent to which variations in one variable affect other variables (Mahbobi, 2015). The normality test, used together with these statistical methods, allowed the researchers to thoroughly analyze the data and draw meaningful conclusions.

E. Ethical Consideration

The researchers prioritized ethical research practices throughout the study. By fully informing participants of the study's goals, informed consent was guaranteed, possible risks, and methods. Additionally, they were guaranteed the freedom to leave the study at any moment without facing any repercussions. Strict confidentiality measures were taken to prevent participant identities from being connected to specific responses. While the study did not offer direct benefits to participants, it aimed to contribute to a better understanding of how attachment style is linked to parasocial relationships, potentially benefiting future research and initiatives promoting informed civic participation. The research adhered to academic integrity by accurately citing sources, ensuring honest data collection and analysis, and transparently disclosing any potential conflicts of interest. All necessary permissions were obtained from relevant institutional authorities before data collection began.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 3. The level of different Attachment Styles of Senior High School students.

Attachment Styles	X	SD
Secure	2.23	0.337
Fearful	3.56	0.419
Preoccupied	3.86	0.389
Dismissing	3.70	0.40

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The findings on attachment styles among senior high school students illustrate the emotional dynamics of this demographic. Although the Secure Attachment Style mean score ($X=2.23$, $SD=.337$) suggests a low level of secure attachment and possible challenges in creating secure emotional bonds, the scores for other attachment styles paint a more significant picture. Many students may suffer anxiety and avoidance in relationships because they fear rejection or harm, as indicated by the high mean score for Fearful Attachment Style ($X=3.56$, $SD=.419$) (Vinney, 2023). This conclusion supports studies showing how prior trauma or neglect experiences influence the emergence of insecure attachment types. According to Spelman (2023), students with a fearful attachment style may find it difficult to trust people because they are afraid of being vulnerable and being rejected. The relatively high mean score for Preoccupied Attachment Style ($X=3.86$, $SD=.389$) suggests that many students experience anxiety and uncertainty in their relationships, marked by a significant desire for validation and reassurance. This can make it difficult for them to build meaningful and long-lasting relationships because they may constantly seek reassurance and validation while pushing others away (Evraire, 2023). This research raises the possibility that these pupils struggle with powerful emotions and a craving for intimacy. However, a vicious cycle of seeking confirmation and fearing rejection and abandonment might result from their confusion and anxiousness. The high Dismissing Attachment Style mean score ($X=3.70$, $SD=.409$) indicates that people with this style tend to underestimate the significance of emotional ties in their relationships and value independence (Drescher, 2024). According to this research, these students may value independence and independence over emotional closeness and vulnerability in their interactions (Hart, 2024). While independence is frequently regarded as a sign of strength and self-reliance, an excessive desire for it can lead to isolation and detachment (Gardenswartz, 2024).

Table 4. The Level of Parasocial Relationship of Senior High School Students.

Indicator	X	SD
Parasocial Relationship	3.54	0.51

This table shows the survey results that looked at how strong the connections are between Senior High School students and media figures or characters. The level of Parasocial Relationship among participants has a mean score of ($X = 3.54$, $SD=.51$). This means that the connections these students have with media figures are quite strong. It suggests that, on average, these students feel a strong bond with people or characters they see in the media. These results match what other studies have found about parasocial relationships in teenagers (Berajah, 2022). Those studies show that during the teenage years, when young people are more aware of themselves and exploring their identities, these connections with media figures often become stronger and more common. The review highlights that teenagers, particularly those aged 12 to 18, often form deep connections with media figures and celebrities. This is influenced by their age, gender, how much they are exposed to media, and common character types.

Table 5. Summary of Pearson's R Correlation between different Attachment Styles and Parasocial Relationship.

Attachment Styles	Parasocial Relationship
Secure	$r = -0.143$ $p = 0.013$
Fearful	$r = -0.025$ $p = 0.661$
Preoccupied	$r = 0.002$ $p = 0.023$
Dismissing	$r = 0.095$ $p = 0.002$
Overall	$r = 0.494$ $p = 0.05$

Secured attachment style and parasocial relationships exhibited a significant negative correlation, suggesting that individuals with a higher level of secured attachment are less likely to get involved in parasocial relationships. This is in line with the previous research done by Sibia et al. (2023) who theorized that people who are in a secure relationship in real life do not have as much of a need to look for one-sided relationships with celebrities and media. According to the work of Lien et al. (2024), a teenager that is securely attached has a good foundation of trust and emotional stability that may decrease the reason why an individual looks for role models outside the family like celebrities and media figures. Hence, they will be less motivated to form parasocial relationships as a means to fill the void of real human contact.

Nevertheless, the research also provided a relatively more nuanced understanding of people with less secure attachment styles. People who have dismissing attachment style, who emotionally distance themselves in relationships and hardly attend to their needs, had weak but significant opportunities to develop more parasocial relations ($r = .095$, $p = .002$), especially with

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ambivalent celebrities. This observation is in line with the study of Paravati et al., (2022) titled "Social comparison, parasocial relationships, and attachment style: how and when do celebrities improve self-liking?". Such findings indicate that, for example, highly avoidant individuals might be using parasocial bonds to build up their sense of self via social comparison. People with this type of attachment are said to experience enormous challenges related to intimacy and vulnerability which makes their ability to create deep, meaningful relationships in real life very difficult (Robinson et al., 2024).

Likewise, parasocial relationships can create a type of intimacy of sorts without having emotional investment on the part of the individual which is often the aspect that many people avoid to begin with (Mehta, 2023). With the anxious preoccupied attachment style, where there is the tendency to feel insecure coupled with the desire for to be close to someone, there was also a low steaming relationship to parasocial interactions ($= .002, p = 0.023$). This implies that individuals with this style may wish to bond with parasocial relationships, but because of the type of parasocial relationships they are bonded to creates insecurity and instability (Macneil et al., 2021). Individuals with preoccupied attachment styles and high relationships often yearn for closeness and validation but the heartache of feeling stuck by abandonment and rejection (Glass, 2021). Because they are not entirely real, parasocial relationships can provide a certain level of validation, since they are one-sided and idealistic. As a result, parasocial relationships are one-sided and idealized, which creates disappointment or frustration when not reciprocated, deepening the underlying anxiety more than relieving it.

Table 6. Summarizes the attachment styles prediction on the parasocial relationship.

Predictor Variables	B	SE (B)	β	p-value
Secure Attachment Style	-0.189	0.072	-0.151	0.009
Fearful Attachment Style	-0.033	0.058	-0.33	0.566
Preoccupied Attachment Style	0.104	0.066	0.003	0.003
Dismissing Attachment Style	0.117	0.060	0.112	0.004
R²		0.403		
F		2.671		

Linear regression analysis reveals significant positive and negative relationships between parasocial relationships and several independent variables, offering insights into the predictors of parasocial interaction. The positive correlation with dismissing attachment style ($B = .117, p = .004$) suggests that individuals exhibiting dismissive attachment behaviors, characterized by avoidance of intimacy and emotional independence, may compensate by seeking connection and fulfillment through one-sided parasocial relationships. This supports the idea that insecure attachment can lead to parasocial relationships as a way to cope with relationship anxiety. Conversely, the negative correlation with secure attachment style ($B = -.189, p = .009$), representing a healthy and balanced attachment style, indicates that individuals with secure attachments, capable of forming fulfilling reciprocal relationships, exhibit lower levels of parasocial interaction. Their established capacity for intimacy likely reduces their reliance on one-sided connections. According to Wati and Savira (2024), people with secure attachment styles typically have a strong sense of self-worth, which lessens their need for outside validation from public figures. The lack of significant relationship with fearful attachment style ($B = -.033, p = .566$), characterized by anxiety and preoccupation with relationships, while seemingly beneficial, fearful-avoidant attachment did not directly affect parasocial relationships (PSR); however, it may indirectly increase parasocial relationship involvement as a safer alternative to real-life relationships (Steele, 2024). The weak positive relationship with preoccupied attachment style ($B = .104, p = .003$), Attachment styles may have a complex, indirect relationship with parasocial behavior. The model only explains 40% of parasocial relationships ($R^2 = 0.403, F = 2.671$), therefore the overall model's predictive ability is only marginally significant, suggesting that other factors may play a more substantial role in determining the parasocial relationship.

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