

Alone or Abused? Fear of Being Single, Attachment Insecurity, and IPV Risk in Young Adults

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Introduction

- Domestic violence affects 1 in 3 women and 1 in 10 men in the United States, with roughly 1500 fatalities annually.¹
- Fear of being single (FBS) can be defined as distress, concern, or anxiety regarding the current or future experience of lacking a romantic partner.²
- Individuals with FBS require a stable relationship for psychological security, and if without, are prone to distress and anxiety.²
- Individuals that score higher in anxious attachment are less selective in romantic relationships and are more likely to remain in relationships that do not meet their needs.^{3,4}
- Insecure attachment styles are linked to both FBS and an increased risk of intimate partner violence (IPV); the direct relationship between FBS and tolerance for IPV remains unexplored.²



Aims and Objectives

- The objective is to investigate the association between FBS and tolerance of domestic violence.
- Considerations for other possible associations with FBS, including attachment style, relationship-contingent self-esteem, preferences for a dominant partner, and perpetration of violence, were also included.
- Ultimately, the goal is to identify those who might be more at risk of domestic violence as this may lead to possible avenues for treatment and prevention of IPV.

Methods

Participants

Participants (N=719, 495 women) took part through either Prolific, an online survey distribution platform, or the Oakland University Psychology Subject Pool.

- Mean [SD] age = 24.73 [10.57] years
- 18+, cisgender, currently/previously have been in a relationship 3 months or longer.

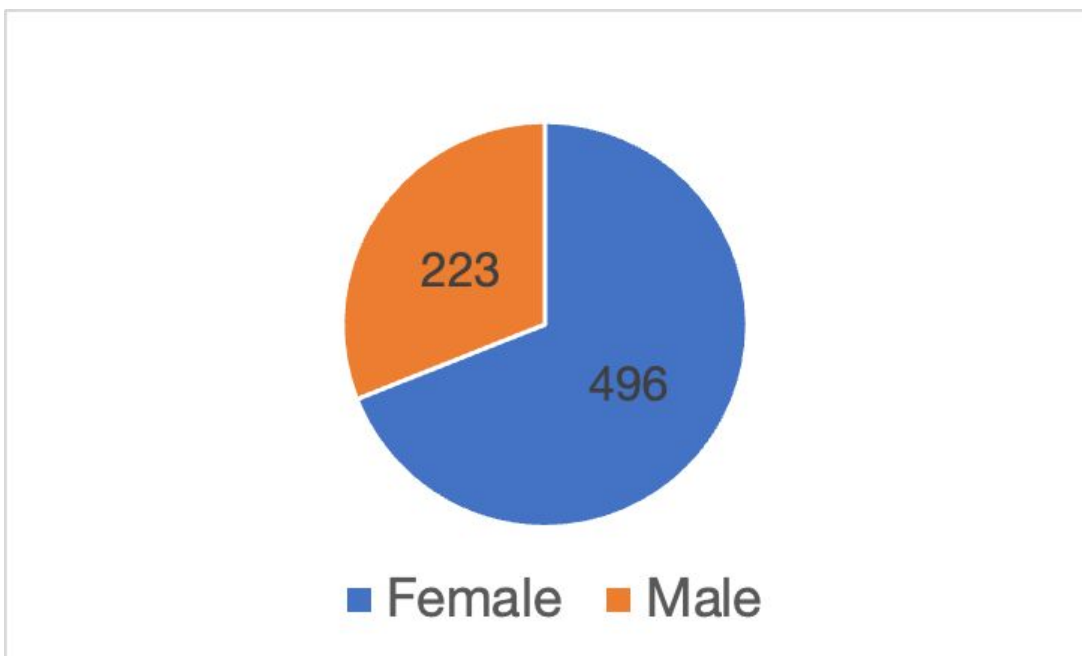


Figure 1 Gender distribution in the final study population.

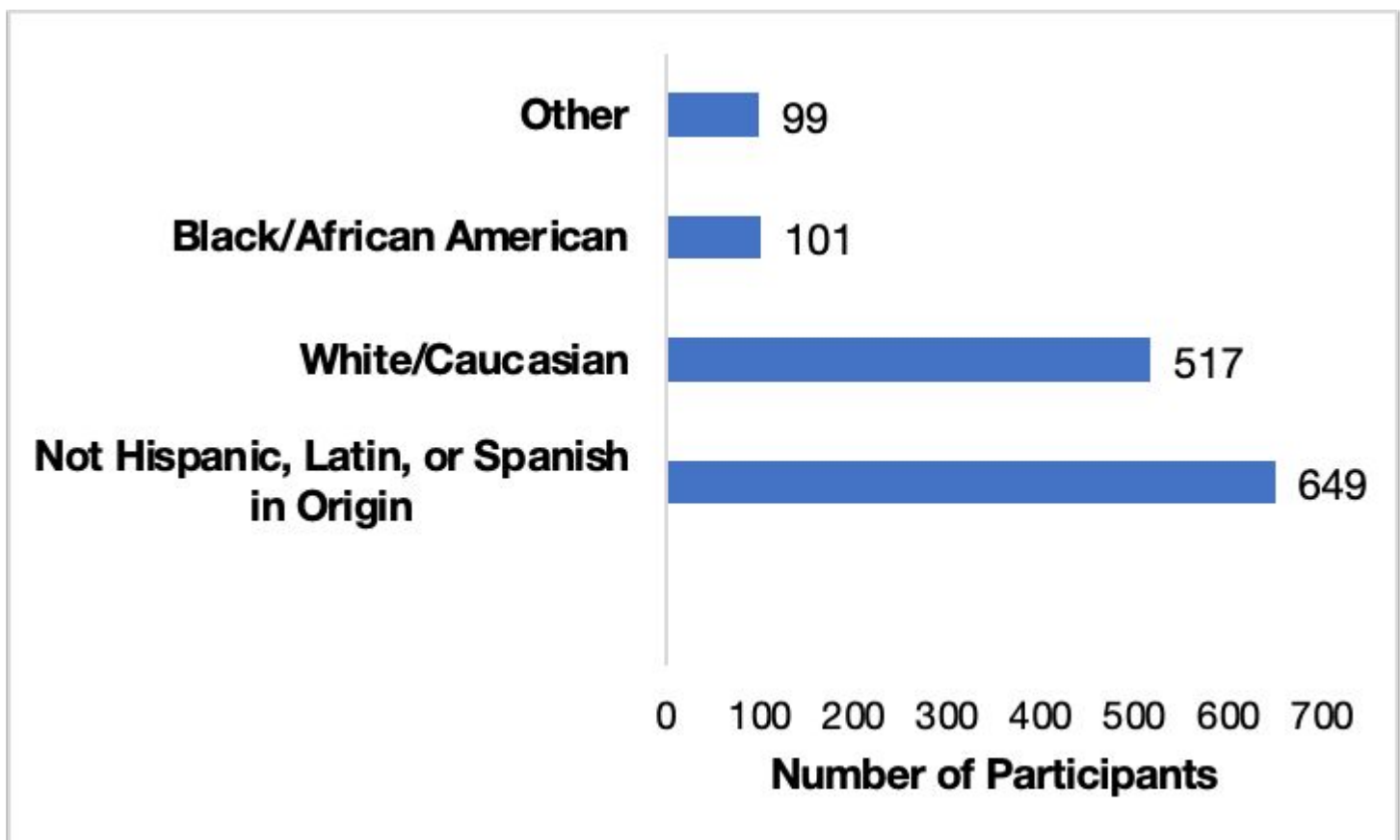


Figure 2 Racial/ethnic identity in the final study population.

Surveys

All participants completed the surveys through Qualtrics, which distributed the following questionnaires:

- The Fear of Being Single Scale²
- Preference for a Dominant Partner⁵
- The Relationship-Contingent Self-Esteem Scale⁶
- The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire⁷
- Aggression in Intimate Relationships Scale⁸

Data entries were excluded if participants had spent less than 20 minutes, or if they had completed less than 80% of the study.

Statistical Analysis

Pearson’s correlation coefficients, univariate regression models, and hierarchical regression were used.

Results

Table 1 Hierarchical regression model statistics.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Step 1					
Attachment Anxiety	2.57	0.14	0.58	18.5	<.001
Attachment Avoidance	0.34	0.19	0.09	1.77	0.078
R²=.36, ΔR²=.36, F(2, 684)=193.93, p<.001					
Step 2					
Attachment Anxiety	2.32	0.15	0.53	15.7	<.001
Attachment Avoidance	0.53	0.28	0.08	2.13	0.033
Relationship-Contingent Self-Esteem	0.47	0.22	0.08	1.51	0.133
Preference for a Dominant Partner	0.17	0.09	0.02	2.66	0.008
R²=.37, ΔR²=.009, F change (2, 682)=4.84, p=.008					
Step 3					
Attachment Anxiety	2.29	0.15	0.53	15.5	<.001
Attachment Avoidance	0.46	0.27	0.07	1.99	0.048
Relationship-Contingent Self-Esteem	0.38	0.23	0.06	1.48	0.142
Preference for a Dominant Partner	0.17	0.09	0.02	2.76	0.006
Frequency of Abuse Experienced	0.29	0.17	0.08	1.92	0.055
Participant Aggression	−0.51	0.19	−0.13	−2.63	0.009
R²=.38, ΔR²=.006, F change (2, 680)=3.49, p=.031					

Step 1: Only attachment anxiety associated with FBS.

Step 2: Attachment anxiety remained significant, attachment avoidance, and a preference for a dominant partner was also a significant positive predictor.

Step 3: Attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and a preference for a dominant partner remained significant. Participant aggression was negatively associated with FBS, and the frequency of abuse experienced approached significance.

Conclusions

- FBS was consistently linked to attachment-related anxiety and, to a lesser extent, to preferences for dominant partners, the frequency of abuse experienced, and participant-perpetrated aggression.
- This finding reinforces the consideration of FBS as a psychological factor in romantic relationship decisions and highlights the value of attachment-based interventions to reduce fear-driven relational dependence.
- Incorporating FBS screening into IPV risk assessments and relationship counseling could help identify individuals at greater risk of remaining in unhealthy or unsafe relationships.
- Cognitive-behavioral and attachment-focused interventions aimed at reducing attachment insecurity, fostering relational self-efficacy, and addressing problematic partner preferences may enhance young adults’ ability to make healthier relationship decisions.

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