

## **How Attachment Patterns Explain Women's Emotional Dependence in Affective Relationships**

*Como os padrões de apego explicam a dependência emocional das mulheres nos relacionamentos afetivos*

*Cómo los Patrones de Apego Explican la Dependencia Emocional de las Mujeres en las Relaciones Afectivas*

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### **Abstract:**

Loving with dependency generates suffering and loss of autonomy. Internal voids demand constant fulfillment, and when one attempts to fill an emotional void with another person's love, one's own physical and mental health may be put at risk. In this context, the present study seeks to analyze how attachment patterns, a theory proposed by John Bowlby, influence the development of relationships and emotional dependence in women, aiming to promote reflection on feelings and behaviors in contemporary affective relationships. The study was characterized as exploratory research involving female participants aged between 20 and 50 years, residing in the state of São Paulo and engaged in an affective relationship for at least five months. The Emotional Dependency Questionnaire (CDE), developed by Fonseca et al. (2020), was used to assess participants' levels of emotional dependence. The instrument was administered through a Google Forms survey distributed online via the researchers' social media platforms. The results showed that emotional dependence has negative psychosocial impacts on dependent individuals, affecting different areas of their lives, particularly fear of rejection and abandonment, separation anxiety, need for validation and affection, fear of loneliness, dysfunctional behaviors aimed at maintaining the bond, and the influence of modernity on relationship maintenance. Attachment Theory was used as the theoretical framework to understand the development of emotional dependence in women and their permanence in harmful relationships, considering its effects on psychological and emotional well-being.

### **Keywords:**

Emotional dependence; Attachment theory; Affective relationships; Psychology.

### **Resumo:**

Amar com dependência gera sofrimento e perda de autonomia. Vazios internos demandam preenchimentos constantes e, quando se tenta preencher um vazio com o amor de outro, põe-se em risco a própria saúde física e mental. Nesse sentido, o presente estudo busca analisar como os padrões de apego, teoria proposta por John Bowlby, influenciam no desenvolvimento dos relacionamentos e da dependência emocional nas mulheres, a fim de fazer uma reflexão sobre sentimentos e comportamentos nas relações afetivas atuais. O trabalho realizado foi caracterizado como uma pesquisa exploratória, com pessoas do gênero feminino, que possuem idade entre 20 e 50 anos, residem no estado de São Paulo e estão em um relacionamento afetivo por no mínimo 5 meses. Utilizou-se o instrumento Cuestionario de Dependência Emocional (CDE), feito por Fonseca et al. (2020), que visa medir o nível de dependência emocional das participantes. Sua aplicação ocorreu por meio de um Google Forms divulgado online através das redes sociais das pesquisadoras. Os resultados obtidos permitiram verificar que tal problemática traz impactos negativos, ao nível psicossocial, na pessoa dependente, o que se reflete nas diferentes esferas de sua vida, tendo como foco: Medo da rejeição e abandono;

Ansiedade de separação; Necessidade de validação e afeto; Medo da solidão; Comportamentos disfuncionais para manter o vínculo; e as influências da modernidade na manutenção dos relacionamentos. Foi utilizada a Teoria do Apego como base teórica para entender o desenvolvimento da dependência emocional em mulheres e a permanência em relações prejudiciais, tendo em vista os impactos no bem-estar psicológico e emocional.

**Palavras-chave:**

Dependência emocional; Teoria do apego; Relacionamentos afetivos; Psicologia.

**Resumen:**

Amar con dependencia genera sufrimiento y pérdida de autonomía. Los vacíos internos demandan una satisfacción constante y, cuando se intenta llenar un vacío con el amor de otra persona, se pone en riesgo la propia salud física y mental. En este sentido, el presente estudio busca analizar cómo los patrones de apego, teoría propuesta por John Bowlby, influyen en el desarrollo de las relaciones y de la dependencia emocional en las mujeres, con el fin de promover una reflexión sobre los sentimientos y comportamientos en las relaciones afectivas actuales. El trabajo se caracterizó como una investigación exploratoria con personas del género femenino, de entre 20 y 50 años de edad, residentes en el estado de São Paulo y que mantienen una relación afectiva de al menos cinco meses. Se utilizó el Cuestionario de Dependencia Emocional (CDE), elaborado por Fonseca et al. (2020), con el propósito de medir el nivel de dependencia emocional de las participantes. Su aplicación se realizó mediante un formulario de Google Forms difundido en línea a través de las redes sociales de las investigadoras. Los resultados permitieron comprobar que esta problemática genera impactos negativos a nivel psicosocial en la persona dependiente, reflejándose en diferentes esferas de su vida, especialmente en el miedo al rechazo y al abandono, la ansiedad por separación, la necesidad de validación y afecto, el miedo a la soledad, los comportamientos disfuncionales para mantener el vínculo y las influencias de la modernidad en el mantenimiento de las relaciones. La Teoría del Apego fue utilizada como base teórica para comprender el desarrollo de la dependencia emocional en las mujeres y su permanencia en relaciones perjudiciales, considerando los impactos sobre el bienestar psicológico y emocional.

**Palabras clave:**

Dependencia emocional; Teoría del apego; Relaciones afectivas; Psicología.

## INTRODUCTION

This study aims to understand how attachment patterns contribute to understanding women's emotional dependence in affective relationships, potentially impacting well-being, mental health, development, and personal fulfillment (BLASCO, 2012; MOTA, 2018; NEVES, 2021 apud SCHLOSSER, 2014). It is known that human nature is sociable and in constant contact with the environment, establishing affective relationships and constructing the subjectivity of each individual, whether through dating, marriage, or virtually. That said, these relationships can be classified as healthy when they are associated with well-being, trust, security, intimacy, respectful communication, shared projects, receptiveness to differences and similarities, conflict resolution skills, and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven

(AMARAL et al., 2022). On the other hand, an unhealthy relationship occurs when there is a great deal of idealization with false expectations, in which one or all of those involved experience negative situations, such as dependence or emotional pressure, fear of the partner, guilt, moments of violence, among others (FERRANTE; SOUZA, 2021). According to the same authors, cases of pathological love, low self-esteem, and emotional sequelae are observed as a consequence of these experiences.

In romantic relationships, an individual acting with the goal of always wanting the other's attention may be related to impulsive and dysfunctional behaviors (SOPHIA, 2008). When an affective relationship begins, feelings of attachment are present, with a need to feel loved, comforted, and protected; that is, one will seek in their partner the affection and attachment that is lacking (SILVA; ANDRADE, 2017).

John Bowlby (2002) developed attachment theory by highlighting the importance of human affections and emotions in healthy and pathological development, emphasizing that early childhood affectionate relationships play a fundamental role in understanding attachment and love throughout an individual's life. Given this context, it is crucial to address this issue in social discussions, seeking reflection on emotional dependence, as well as the importance of caring for the mental health of those involved. Therefore, the following question arises for this research: How do attachment patterns explain the development of emotional dependence in women in affective relationships?

Emotional dependency is understood as a difficulty in being alone and a need for the presence, approval, and affection of another person, which can result in a maladaptive relationship. This loving bond is characterized by the recurring search for an attachment figure, in which the dependent person tends to "unload" all their emotional baggage, intending, as a result, to fill some missing space (SILVA; ANDRADE, 2017). Furthermore, the authors emphasize that dependent women act and react with such solidarity and understanding towards the suffering of others that they remain blind to their own suffering, having a need to be validated in addition to the fear of rejection and abandonment. Therefore, dependent relationships can be connected to low self-esteem, anxiety, fear, and anger—feelings that harm the daily well-being of these individuals, who abuse the care of others, neglecting their own care and pleasurable activities (BUTION, 2016).

Furthermore, women have historically been described and narrated based on the representation of men's desires (STREY, 2004; apud PALMA et al., 2024). The female body is produced within this masculine imaginary, adhering to practices confined to defined spaces, ways of dressing, gestures, permitted and forbidden gazes, resulting in a product of social



context that creates, defines, and excludes (PALMA et al., 2024). Therefore, this factor directly influences the construction of women's affective relationships, facing various stigmas and challenges in relationships, influenced by gender norms, cultural expectations, and power inequalities.

This study aims to analyze how attachment patterns influence the development of relationships and emotional dependence in women, encouraging them to reflect on their feelings and behaviors, potentially fostering a sense of acceptance and appreciation of their experiences. Therefore, we seek to: Present the theoretical foundations of attachment patterns and their main classifications; Analyze how attachment patterns contribute to the formation of these relationships; Reflect on the role of psychology in supporting women experiencing emotional dependence.

Based on the definitions previously listed, it is noticeable that addiction causes damage to mental health and to family and social relationships (LEMOS; VÁSQUEZ; ROMÁN-CALDERÓN, 2019). (according to SANTOS, 2024), in addition to being frequently made invisible and culturally stereotyped, making its identification difficult, even though it generates intense psychological suffering. However, according to Riso (2012), this topic is frequently raised in psychological consultations, as are the perceptible harms in daily life. As a result, further exploration and analysis of this field of study is fundamental. Despite a growing number of publications, there are still few scientific studies dedicated to studying this topic in depth.

The work, developed by psychology students, involves an analysis free from judgment, seeking to contribute to a reflection on affective relationships. Furthermore, after analyzing and identifying a scarcity of information related to emotional dependency, it is believed that the results obtained could be more productive if there were more scientific research and comparative analyses related to the topic.

Finally, this research contributes to psychology by broadening the clinical understanding of the topic, strengthening the use of attachment theory in the analysis of adult relationships, and supporting therapeutic interventions aimed at autonomy and the redefinition of marital bonds. In this way, the work not only enriches clinical practice but also promotes sociocultural reflections necessary to deconstruct beliefs that keep women in harmful relationships.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Emotional dependency

An emotionally dependent person tends to assume a submissive position, disregarding their own needs in order to satisfy their partner, even enduring contempt and humiliation, because there is a belief that one cannot live without a relationship, even if it generates sadness and suffering (HIDALGO, 2017). According to him, this dependence is an extreme affective need that causes the person to change their life project and make their tastes unfeasible, resulting in situations of daily stress, which can lead to the development of other psychopathologies, such as depression, eating disorders and anxiety disorders, highlighting the need for psychological support (ARNTZ, 2005; BORNSTEIN, 2012; apud BUTION; WECHSLE, 2016).

Arntz (2005) separated the ideas of emotional dependence and functional dependence, the former being characterized by an emotional need for excessive attachment and care from another person. On the other hand, functional dependence points to a feeling of ineffectiveness in self-care, always needing the help of another figure, seen as stronger. However, both concepts describe a pathological and dependent affective connection.

Bornstein and Cecero (2000) suggest that emotional dependency can be explained by four elements: motivational, affective, behavioral, and cognitive. According to the same authors, the motivational component refers to a need for support, guidance, and approval from others. The affective component describes the anxiety felt by the individual in situations where they must act individually. The behavioral element would be the tendency to seek help from others, in addition to characteristics of submissiveness in interpersonal interactions. And, lastly, the cognitive component refers to the subject's perception of themselves as inefficient and inadequate.

According to Sophia (2008), there are elements that help in identifying the pathological state of love, highlighting the fear of abandonment, referring to anxiety and apprehension when the partner is distant (physically or emotionally), and the dependent person sees themselves facing a possible breakup of the relationship, which can lead to insomnia, tachycardia, muscle tension, alternating periods of lethargy and intense activity. Furthermore, Rayane and Souza (2018) state that the difficulty in establishing bonds since childhood is caused by the fear of abandonment and rejection, developed in the face of numerous negative

experiences in their affective life. In this context, feelings of distrust predominate, thus hindering new relationships.

Sussman (2010) states that there is no scientific research describing forms of intervention or prevention directed at emotional dependency, even though it is an important topic of discussion in the field of psychopathology, and is frequently found in books, films, and television programs. However, it is necessary to treat the phenomenon of emotional dependency as a clinical problem, since a person remains in a relationship that causes them great suffering, generating physical and emotional dangers and risks (BUTION, 2016).

Furthermore, there is a scarcity of criteria provided by the fourth edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR). Bornstein and Cecero (2000) question the development of diagnostic parameters due to undefined information from DSM consultants regarding the literature used to support the changes made, as well as a lack of empirical support for the proposals and a prioritization of personality disorders over others (ALVARENGA; FLORES-MENDOZA; GONTIJO, 2009). That said, it is presumed that emotional dependency will receive a more precise categorization in the future, since some additional behaviors are already being recognized and included in the DSM as part of other disorders, such as GAD (generalized anxiety disorder), some types of depressive disorders, and personality disorders. However, there is still a need for a greater understanding of the specificities and characteristics of this phenomenon (BUTION; WECHSLER, 2016).

### **Attachment theory**

John Bowlby (2002) developed his theory based on the analysis of the behavior of children separated from their parental figures during the Second World War. From these results, it was possible to explore the birth of the children's emotional attachment model and their first figures of affection, highlighting the importance of this affective bond for the emotional development of children (ADORIAN et al., 2024). According to the same author, it is important to understand the contact between parental figures and the baby in order to understand how affective and social relationships will be formed throughout life. Emphasizing how the way the attachment figure connects with the baby during the early stages of life will significantly impact the child, establishing social and emotional bonds in the future.

According to Adorian et al. (2024), in secure attachment, the individual has clarity about their interests and goals and pursues them, demonstrating self-confidence, as well as

feeling comfortable expressing their true emotions, developing healthy intimate relationships, addressing conflicts constructively, with open conversations that seek solutions, and strengthening commitments. On the other hand, the author discusses insecure attachment, which can be divided into three types that will be explained below.

Insecure avoidant attachment is defined by the characteristic of avoiding emotional intimacy, presenting an intense fear of rejection, discomfort in having to depend on other people, maintaining emotional isolation, avoiding the expression of their needs and emotions, blindly believing that autonomy is fundamental to avoid emotional distress (ADORIAN et al., 2024).

There is also insecure, anxious, or ambivalent attachment, where there is a tendency for constant seeking and approval, continuously seeking validation and confirmation of one's value and importance within the relationship. In this case, dependent individuals may exhibit large mood swings, alternating between happiness (when there are feelings of security) and anxiety (when they feel threatened), displaying possessive behaviors in a constant search for affection and attention as a way to compensate for their insecurities (ADORIAN et al., 2024).

Disorganized insecure attachment can be defined as the manifestation of contradictory behaviors, that is, extremely aggressive emotional reactions or complete paralysis in the face of conflict and stress. Occasionally, there may be moments of dissociation, in which the individual feels disconnected from themselves or from reality, exhibiting high levels of anxiety and emotional blocks in relationships, impairing their ability to trust themselves and their partners (ADORIAN et al., 2024).

These attachment patterns represent the results of interactions carried out in early childhood up to the age of five, projected into adult life, shaping the behaviors of individuals. Therefore, a poorly established bond with the main attachment figure in childhood would bring about problems in relationships in adult life, where the individual with insecure attachment would likely seek in their respective partner the supply of a missing love and affection (RODRIGUES; CHALHUB, 2009).

According to Bowlby (2002), we perceive the loved one as "stronger and wiser," consequently, as the one who can guarantee our survival, protecting and comforting us. According to him, the love that remains linked to adults is considered an attachment process, thus linking the child and their mother; that is, a process that is based on both the need for protection and the tendency to care for the other. That said, it is clear that the attachment styles established in early childhood are found in marital romantic relationships, showing the



establishment of beliefs and schemas that have been developed and maintained throughout life (MOMEÑE et al., 2021).

Finally, the work of psychology in supporting women experiencing emotional dependency consists of providing support to regain their emotional autonomy, as well as promoting critical reflection on depreciative thoughts and feelings in order to restore their self-esteem and maximize the possibility of the woman building more balanced and healthy emotional bonds.

As Bution and Wechsler (2016) state, psychotherapy seeks to offer support to the patient, as well as help in changing dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors. They also state that the topic is still a field little explored scientifically, and there is a need for more research in the area of emotional dependency. Therefore, psychology is essential in intervening in the damage caused by dependency, since it studies human behavior, helping in the identification of psychological symptoms (FERNANDA et al., 2024).

## **SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY**

The research was submitted to Plataforma Brasil and approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under CAAE No. 94166425.6.0000.5510, according to opinion No. 5.794.872, on 12/14/2025, in accordance with CNS Resolution No. 466/2012. The research was characterized as exploratory, seeking to broaden the understanding of the topic, given a shared interest in the subject. Regarding the approach, Attachment Theory was used, with the aim of understanding the emergence of emotional dependence in women and their permanence in harmful relationships, helping to identify attachment patterns through their behaviors.

### **Participants**

For participant selection, female individuals were included, women who have been in a romantic relationship for at least 5 months, aged between 20 and 50 years, and who reside in the state of São Paulo. Participants aged 19 or younger, or over 51, who are not in a marital relationship, and who do not reside in the state of São Paulo, as well as male participants, were excluded.

### **Materials**



Data collection was carried out via an online questionnaire on the Google Forms platform, disseminated through social media. The questionnaire contained 22 closed-ended, objective questions related to the topic of emotional dependency, aiming to measure the level of emotional *dependency in women*. *The instrument used was the Emotional Dependency Questionnaire (CDE)* (Appendix A), developed by Fonseca. et al. (2020), which was applied after acceptance of the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE), guaranteeing confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation.

The instrument was chosen because of its ability to map cognitive aspects of emotional dependence evidenced in the judgment of one's own behaviors, and it has a theoretical basis in Aaron Beck's Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (FONSECA et al., 2020).

### **Data collection**

Initially, a questionnaire was posted on the students' Instagram account with the goal of reaching an average of 10 participants for the research. Following this, the results were explored and the most frequently repeated patterns were evaluated in order to analyze how these standardized behaviors influenced the participants' marital relationships.

After the responses were collected, the students conducted a qualitative data analysis, seeking to identify the most frequent patterns and possible meanings. Based on this, the interpretation of the responses was related to Attachment Theory, proposed by John Bowlby (2002), in order to identify the main aspects and meanings related to the topic.

Through this research, we understand the different psychological aspects of women who experience a harmful relationship marked by emotional dependence, especially in relation to attachment patterns. The results helped to provide data and information on the subject, contributing to greater visibility and recognition of this phenomenon, as well as expanding clinical understanding of emotional dependence and supporting psychology professionals in the intervention and support process to promote well-being in the interpersonal relationships of these women.

### **Risks and benefits**

The research involved a minimal risk of potential discomfort when answering any questions on the proposed questionnaire, even though Informed Consent was obtained before



the questions, ensuring the safety, well-being, and dignity of the participants, as well as the preservation of data (in accordance with the General Data Protection Law), anonymity, and confidentiality of those involved in the research. Should this occur, the participant will have the freedom not to answer, interrupt the research, take breaks, or cancel their participation at any time. We took care to choose a validated questionnaire that would not expose participants to embarrassment. In all these cases, the participant will not be harmed, penalized, or held liable in any way if they withdraw from participation. As a protective measure, in case of any embarrassment or discomfort, the responsible researcher will negotiate psychological support for participants at the USCS Psychology Clinic.

Immediate benefits for the women involved in the research include self-reflection on affective relationships, as reflecting on their feelings and behaviors can bring a sense of acceptance and appreciation of their experiences, even anonymously, as well as greater attention to functional relationships. Secondary benefits include increased knowledge about emotional dependency, provision of relevant information on the subject, and reduction of stigma due to increased social awareness.

### **Data analysis procedure**

The data were obtained through the application of a self-report instrument composed of 22 closed-ended questions, designed to assess indicators of emotional dependence. The instrument, "Cuestionario de Dependência Emocional" (CDE) (Appendix A), developed by Fonseca et al. (2020), was made available online via Google Forms and answered individually and voluntarily by the participants.

After data collection ended, 16 people responded to the questionnaire: eight people aged 20 to 25, two aged 31 to 35, three aged 36 to 40, and three aged 41 to 45. One participant was excluded because she did not answer a question on the form. However, for a more comparative analysis between age groups, a draw was held, resulting in a total of 8 participants for analysis: two participants aged 20 to 25, two participants aged 31 to 35, two participants aged 36 to 40, and two participants aged 41 to 45.

We consider high scores to be those answered with "Mostly true about me" and "Describes me perfectly," average scores to be those answered with "More true than false about me" and "Moderately true about me," and low scores to be those who answered "Mostly false about me" and "Completely false about me." High-scoring responses, in a quantity exceeding half of the questions, may indicate the possibility of emotional dependence.

The data analysis was conducted using five categories, with the aim of characterizing the participants' profile in relation to levels of emotional dependence. These categories were defined based on the questionnaire literature, which understands emotional dependence as a multidimensional phenomenon, involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects (FONSECA et al., 2020).

The defined categories were: fear of rejection and abandonment (anxiety about the possibility of losing a partner); separation anxiety (intense insecurity in the face of real or imagined separations); need for validation and affection; fear of loneliness (helplessness, fear of being alone or becoming alone); and dysfunctional behaviors to maintain the bond (self-sacrifice and extreme attitudes to avoid abandonment). That said, we grouped similar questions from the questionnaire and named them to identify what was being evaluated in each group of questions. The following are the categories with their respective questions from the instrument:

1. FEAR OF REJECTION AND ABANDONMENT: “I am worried about the idea of being abandoned by my partner” (2); “When I argue with my partner, I am worried about the idea that he/she will not want me anymore” (8 ); “ I am afraid that my partner will abandon me” (15).
2. SEPARATION ANXIETY: “If my partner doesn’t call or doesn’t show up at the agreed time, I get anxious thinking that he/she might be upset with me” (6); “When my partner needs to be away for a few days, I feel anxious” (7); “If I don’t know where my partner is, I feel insecure” (17).
3. NEED FOR VALIDATION AND AFFECTION: “I do everything I can to be the center of attention in my partner’s life” (4); “I constantly need demonstrations of affection from my partner” (5); “I really need my partner to be attentive to me” (11); “I need to have someone to whom I am more special than others” (12); “I feel very bad if my partner doesn’t constantly express affection for me” (14); “I only have fun when I’m with my partner” (22).
4. FEAR OF LONELINESS: “I feel helpless when I’m alone” (1); “I’m a needy and fragile person” (10); “When I have an argument with my partner, I feel empty” (13); “I can’t stand loneliness” (18).
5. Dysfunctional behaviors to maintain the bond: “I threaten to hurt myself so that my partner doesn’t leave me” (9); “If my partner suggests a plan, I drop everything

I’m doing to be with him/her” (16); “I’m capable of doing reckless things, even risking my life, to preserve

“the love of the other” (19); “If I have plans and my partner shows up with others, I change my plans just to be with him/her” (20); “I distance myself a lot from my friends when I’m in a romantic relationship” (21); “To attract my partner, I try to impress or entertain him/her” (3).

After collecting the responses, a table was created with all 8 participants randomly selected for analysis represented in the columns. Furthermore, the categories were divided by color: Fear of abandonment and rejection, represented by pink; Separation anxiety, represented by purple; Need for validation and affection, represented by green; Fear of loneliness, represented by blue; Dysfunctional behaviors to maintain attachment, represented by orange.

In order to facilitate the visualization of the responses, where each number represents an answered questionnaire question, and to identify frequent patterns among age groups and hypothesize about their possible meanings, as shown below:

IDADE	20 - 25	20 - 25	31 - 35	31 - 35	36 - 40	36 - 40	41 - 45	41 - 45
COMPLETAMENTE FALSO SOBRE MIM	9, 12, 18, 19 e 21	3, 4, 6, 9, 17, 19, 21 e 22	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21 e 22	4, 6, 9, 19, 21 e 22	6, 9, 13, 19, 21 e 22	9 e 19	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 e 22	9
MAIOR PARTE FALSO EM MIM	1, 3, 10 e 22	5, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18 e 20	7 e 20	1, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18 e 20	1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 e 20	16, 18 e 20	-	10, 12, 16, 19, 20, 21 e 22
MAIS VERDADEIRO QUE FALSO EM MIM	2, 4, 7, 16, 17 e 20	1, 2, 7, 11 e 12	8	5, 8 e 12	8 e 12	3, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17 e 21	16	4, 11 e 14
MODERADAMENTE VERDADEIRO EM MIM	6, 8, 13, 14 e 15	8 e 13	-	2, 3, 7, 13 e 15	2, 5 e 11	1, 4, 6, 8 e 22	5 e 13	2, 3, 13, 17 e 18
MAIOR PARTE VERDADEIRO EM MIM	5 e 11	-	-	11	-	2, 5, 11 e 12	-	1, 5 e 15
ME DESCREVE PERFEITAMENTE	-	-	-	-	-	7	3	6, 7 e 8

MEDO DA REJEIÇÃO E ABANDONO; ANSIEDADE DE SEPARAÇÃO; NECESSIDADE DE VALIDAÇÃO E AFETO; MEDO DA SOLIDÃO; COMPORTAMENTOS DISFUNCIONAIS

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research aimed to analyze how attachment patterns influence the development of relationships and emotional dependence in women, and to bring reflections about their feelings

and behaviors, potentially providing a sense of acceptance, as well as greater attention to dysfunctional and functional relationships.

Based on the data obtained, it was observed that among participants aged 20 to 25, the highest scores are concentrated in category 1, referring to fear of abandonment, according to Bowlby (2002). This may indicate emotional insecurity related to an anxious attachment pattern, and variations may occur. humor, alternating between happiness when they feel safe and anxious when They perceive signs of abandonment, as well as a need for constant displays of affection.

Among participants aged 31 to 35, there was a predominance in category 1, linked to the fear of abandonment, as previously mentioned by Bowlby (2002), and also in category 3, referring to the need for validation and affection, as well as an anxious attachment pattern, which aims at a constant need for affective approval.

Among the participants aged 36 to 40, categories 1 and 3 stood out with a high degree of severity compared to the previous ones, representing, respectively, the fear of abandonment and the need for validation, as mentioned by Adorian et al. (2024). In addition, there was a moderate classification in category 2, related to separation anxiety, which may present intense insecurity in the face of real or imagined separations, also indicating a relationship to the anxious attachment pattern, with attempts to maintain proximity and validation from the attachment figure.

Finally, those aged 41 to 45 also showed a higher prevalence in categories 1 and 2 (fear of abandonment and separation anxiety), which suggests a possibility of emotional dependence being present among these women, through insecurity about the absence of their partner and in the search for validation, as cited by Adorian et al. (2024).

According to Bowlby (2002), in the early stages of life, children establish affective bonds with early figures, which impacts the future development of relationships. Therefore, the students expected variations in the manifestations of emotional dependence according to the participants' age groups, precisely because their childhoods occurred in different periods and contexts.

However, the data analysis revealed a result distinct from this initial hypothesis, since the fear of abandonment, for example, was similarly present at all ages analyzed, as was the need for validation, possibly strongly related to an anxious attachment pattern, where a poorly formed bond with the main attachment figure in childhood would cause relationship problems in adulthood (RODRIGUES; CHALHUB, 2009). However, it is also important to consider that this anxious pattern may be related not only to attachment history, but also to sociocultural

factors involved, in addition to the participants' current experiences. Furthermore, these hypotheses could only be confirmed by further analysis of past relationship histories and an investigation into their family relationships and childhood development.

That said, one of the hypotheses raised regarding the pattern of dependency at different ages is the current great romantic idealization present in social networks, films and books, generating an expectation of perfect love, intense fear of loss and emotional dependency disguised as "intense love" (BAUMAN, 2004).

According to Bauman 's considerations on modernity, Miranda and Marback (2019) argue that the influence of virtual networks causes relationships to be constantly constructed and deconstructed, a succession of restarts, transforming relationships into a capitalist logic of consumption, where something new or better is quickly discarded. Furthermore, according to Lins (2020, p. 305), "few people have the courage to try new paths; despite the frustrations, almost everyone resorts to what is already known, because the unknown is frightening, scary, and generates insecurity." Thus, they understand that it is easier to remain in a dysfunctional relationship model that they grew up with in digital culture than to recognize this excessive and illusory idealization.

Another hypothesis developed from this research involves the small sample size from the same region, suggesting that results may differ in a sample encompassing a larger number of participants across a wider geographic scale, as this could reveal more diverse sociocultural and economic contexts. Furthermore, it was possible to analyze that patterns of emotional dependency remained similar across different age groups, suggesting that age may not be a determining factor in the manifestation of emotional dependency in isolation. On the other hand, it cannot be stated that regional aspects have a greater influence than age because this article does not encompass geographic diversity; future investigations with greater territorial scope are recommended to confirm the data presented.

One final hypothesis that the students could raise concerns the influence of sociocultural factors on emotional dependence in affective relationships, since women are historically taught to prioritize the other, to care for or maintain relationships at any cost (PALMA et al., 2024). This favors behaviors such as submission, fear of abandonment, and the need for validation, as discussed throughout the article. Furthermore, the family and historical model would be another factor that reinforces and maintains dependence, because in collectivist contexts, individuals tend to prioritize interpersonal relationships and the maintenance of bonds, while in individualistic contexts there is a greater emphasis on autonomy and independence (TRIANDIS, 2018).



Finally, it is understood that anxious attachment can be stable throughout life, since, according to Bowlby (2002), these patterns begin to operate relatively automatically in interpersonal relationships, influencing how the individual perceives love, abandonment, and emotional security. Although attachment theory explains these results, it is possible that other factors, such as recent experiences or social context, may also influence emotional dependence. In this sense, "such individuals not only internalize these experiences, but also tend to recreate similar relational contexts, reinforcing their emotional schemas throughout life" (BOWLBY, 2002), thus creating an affective history that is a major influence on emotional dependence.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the aim of understanding how attachment patterns contribute to the development of emotional dependence in women within romantic relationships, this research sought to understand the influence of childhood affection on the construction of these relationships, as well as to promote reflection on functional and dysfunctional relationships in women. Thus, emotional dependence is understood as a dysfunctional affective bond that fosters a belief that one cannot live without a relationship, even if it generates sadness and suffering, negatively impacting the well-being and quality of life of the dependent person, since they exaggerate their care for the other and neglect their own care and activities.

The findings reinforce the importance of clinical interventions focused on emotional regulation and restructuring of dysfunctional patterns, especially in women with anxious attachment patterns. As practical implications, psychotherapy can help the patient change their behavior, thoughts, and self-esteem, understanding and helping them better cope with emotional dependence, understanding their context, building more open communication, and working on their emotional regulation, anxiety, fear of loneliness, and frustration, without depending on their partner to calm them or fill their void. In other words, the psychologist will act by promoting a process of self-knowledge and change, offering a safe and welcoming space so that the woman can recognize her behavioral patterns and reframe her emotional experiences. Through clinical interventions, the professional can work on identifying and modifying dysfunctional thoughts related to love, abandonment, and validation, developed



through digital culture, for example, as mentioned in the text, promoting greater emotional independence, quality of life, and social coping skills for the situations they experience.

Finally, based on the sample analyzed in this study, a predominance of evidence of insecure attachment was observed among the participants, highlighting the importance of expanding the discussion on this subject in everyday life, including in media such as television and social networks, in order to increase awareness and understanding of its effects on affective relationships. However, this conclusion should be viewed with caution due to the small number of participants. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies include a more comprehensive and varied sample, allowing for generalization, with a larger number of participants from different regions and ages, even research with the male population, allowing comparative analyses that help to better understand the phenomenon of emotional dependence.

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## **APPENDIX A - *EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (EDC)***

### **Questionnaire of Dependence Emotional**