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in Romantic Relationships

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Theoretical Background	2
2.1	Infidelity	2
2.1.1	Gender Differences in Infidelity	3
2.1.2	Correlates of Infidelity	4
2.2	Attachment Styles.....	7
2.2.1	Adult Attachment.....	8
2.2.2	Research on Attachment Styles	9
2.3	Attachment Styles and Infidelity	10
2.4	Self-esteem	11
2.5	Self-esteem and Infidelity	12
2.6	Romantic Relationships	12
3.	Research Questions and Hypotheses	14
4.	Methods.....	16
4.1	Design	16
4.2	Sample	16
4.3	Measures	18
4.3.1	Infidelity	18
4.3.2	Self-esteem	19
4.3.3	Attachment Styles	20
4.4	Procedure	21
4.5	Preliminary Data Analyses and Assumption Checks.....	22
5.	Results.....	24
5.1	Descriptive Statistics.....	24
5.2	Relation between Self-esteem and Infidelity	25
5.3	Relation between Attachment Styles and Infidelity	25
5.4	Gender Differences among the Variables	28
5.5	Exploratory Analyses	29
6.	Discussion.....	31
6.1	Discussion of Results.....	31

6.2 Limitations	34
6.3 Directions for Future Research	36
7. Conclusion	38
8. Literature	39
9. List of Figures.....	45
10. List of Tables.....	45
11. Appendices.....	46
Appendix A Scales	46
Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (+ German version)	46
Revised German version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	48
German version of the Revised Adult Attachment Scale.....	49
Appendix B Assumption Checks	50
Linearity Assumption Check.....	50
Testing for Normality	50
Homoscedasticity Assumption Check	53
Appendix C	54
Abstract (English)	54
Abstract (German).....	55

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships are specifically characterized by commitment (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). The violation of this commitment through engaging in certain activities with other people outside the relationship (Blow & Hartnett, 2005) is referred to as *infidelity* (Lişman & Holman, 2021). Such involvement beyond the main relationship is described by the term *extradyadic behaviors* (Martins et al., 2016). Infidelity can occur in romantic relationships and marriages (Pazhoohi, 2022) and has detrimental effects on partners (Haseli et al., 2019).

One of the variables that have been examined in relation to infidelity are self-esteem and attachment styles, for which existing research (Sheppard et al., 1995; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Whisman et al., 2007; Fathi et al., 2011; Ghiasi et al., 2024) has found varying results. This master thesis aims to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles, and the tendency toward infidelity in romantic relationship, using cross-sectional data from an online survey. The following chapters provide a theoretical overview of infidelity, self-esteem, and attachment styles, followed by a description of the measurements, presentation of the results, and their discussion.

2. Theoretical Background

The following chapter begins with an overview of infidelity and its relevance in research, followed by elaborations on the theory of attachment styles and self-esteem, and their relations to infidelity. Finally, the concept of romantic relationships is defined.

2.1 Infidelity

The understanding of infidelity has changed over time from a focus on the relationship as a reproductive purpose to a profound commitment that includes emotional values. In 1992 (Buss et al.), extradyadic behavior was connected to an individual's risk of reproduction. By contrast, in more recent research (Lişman & Holman, 2021), infidelity is ascribed to the breach of commitment between two partners. More specifically, infidelity describes the link to the following activities: "Having an affair", "extramarital relationship", "cheating", "sexual intercourse", "oral sex", "kissing", "fondling", "emotional connections that are beyond friendships", "friendships", "internet relationships" and "pornography use" (Blow & Hartnett, 2005, p. 186). Through these activities, a distinction between sexual and emotional infidelity becomes apparent. In studies in the 1990s (Buss et al., 1992; Shackelford & Buss, 1997), this differentiation was already considered when defining infidelity. "Sexual infidelity refers to sexual activity with someone other than one's long-term partner. Emotional infidelity occurs when one's partner channels emotional resources such as love, time and attention to someone else" (Shackelford & Buss, 1997, pp.1034-1035). In research, the focus is often either on sexual or emotional infidelity as a single element (Lişman & Holman, 2021), with emotional infidelity largely disregarded (Warach et al., 2024). A possible explanation for this emphasis on sexual infidelity is demonstrated by previous results, which stated that individuals' high sexual interest levels lead to a higher probability of extramarital sex (Treas & Giesen, 2000). To avoid this issue and to consider infidelity as a whole, this master thesis focuses on both sexual and emotional infidelity.

Infidelity has been researched in various forms and from various angles. In research preceding 2021, it was prevalent to examine infidelity retrospectively based on engagement in active extradyadic behaviors (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Barta & Kiene, 2005; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007; Omarzu et al., 2012). Others examined cues and influences on infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 1997; Atkins et al., 2001), predictors (Whisman et al., 2007),

impacts (Beach et al., 1985; Buss et al., 1992; Gordon et al., 2004), and the degree of justification for it (Glass & Wright, 1992).

In infidelity research, operationalization was and still is a big issue (Warach et al., 2024). Determining an operational definition of infidelity is challenging due to its ambiguity for each research participant (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). This master thesis, therefore, focuses on the tendency toward infidelity, resulting in participants' understanding of what classifies as unfaithful behavior as less relevant when examining behavior patterns of infidelity. Therefore, the Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (Lişman and Holman, 2021) is utilized for this master thesis. Additionally, examining the tendency toward infidelity rather than the intention is suggested to lead to more honest responses from participants (Lişman & Holman, 2021). Nevertheless, it needs to be taken into account that the responses to hypothetical scenarios of infidelity may not accurately reflect actual behavior in real-life situations (Pazhoohi, 2022); therefore, clear intentions on infidelity can and will not be implied when analyzing behavior patterns in this master thesis.

2.1.1 Gender Differences in Infidelity

Numerous studies (e.g., Buss et al., 1992; Glass & Wright, 1992; Shackelford & Buss, 1997; Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007; Lişman & Holman, 2021) have revealed differences between men and women when examining infidelity. Men were found to have a higher probability to report extramarital sex (Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004), as well as emotional and sexual unfaithful behavior (Lişman & Holman, 2021), than women. However, this difference was not found for younger men and women (Atkins et al., 2001). Women were also found to state fewer sexual extradyadic partners than men (Allen & Baucom, 2004). It needs to be considered that females might be prone to underreporting extradyadic behavior due to counter-reactions they might face from society compared to men (Atkins et al., 2001; Haseli et al., 2019). This conforms with the higher probability of males over females viewing their infidelity as justified and referring to less guilt (Glass & Wright, 1992). Moreover, 49 percent of men perceived sexual extradyadic behavior as more negative compared to emotional infidelity (Buss et al., 1992). For women, it was only 19 percent. This corroborates the results in 1997 (Shackelford & Buss, 1997) and highlights the previously mentioned emphasis on sexual over emotional infidelity in research.

While some studies (Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Lişman & Holman, 2021) have found a higher tendency toward infidelity in men, another study reported only a minor difference, with 32 percent of men and 29 percent of women committing acts of unfaithful behavior (Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007). Other studies found no differences between males and females in the US (Adamopoulou, 2013) or when controlled for other factors (Treas & Giesen, 2000). In sum, while the majority of studies has found males to be more prone to infidelity-related behaviors, not all studies were able to corroborate these results and there is evidence to suggest a decreasing difference of gender for younger individuals (Atkins et al., 2001). The interest and importance of examining gender differences in this master thesis becomes further apparent when discussing the correlates of infidelity, self-esteem, attachment styles, and their relation to infidelity in the subsequent subchapters.

2.1.2 Correlates of Infidelity

This subchapter discusses the following correlates of infidelity: age, relationship satisfaction, education, income, socioeconomic status, attitudes toward infidelity, and length of relationship (Atkins et al., 2001; Haseli et al., 2019; Træen et al., 2022).

Results differ depending on participant's age. Sexual extradyadic incidents were least reported by men older than 65 and younger men (Atkins et al., 2001). Males between 55 and 65 exhibited the most incidents. It was the same pattern for women, with the highest rate between 40 and 45. These results were consistent in another study (Mbago & Sichona, 2010), mentioning a higher probability of 39-year-olds to engage in extradyadic behavior outside of marriage compared to participants younger than 30. A similar pattern was found for men over 25 and below 24 (Bhatta, 2014). Other studies (Whisman et al., 2007) found no relations to age or contradictory ones: "The odds of infidelity were twice as high for ages 18-30 as for those over 50" (Treas & Giesen, 2000, p. 58).

Research on the association of relationship or marital satisfaction is more consistent (Atkins et al., 2001; Whisman et al., 2007; McDaniel et al., 2017; Luo & Yu, 2022). One of the features of a satisfied relationship is the fulfillment of basic needs, such as security and sexual fulfillment, and the trust in the realization of these needs (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). As hypothesized, participants who claimed to be satisfied in their relationship reported four times less sexual extramarital involvement than dissatisfied ones (Atkins et al., 2001). In

accordance with that, higher marital dissatisfaction was a predictor of infidelity (Whisman et al., 2007; Luo & Yu, 2022). A study (McDaniel et al., 2017) that implemented married and unmarried individuals, as well as emotional and sexual infidelity (online), corroborated similar results: less satisfaction predicted higher infidelity-related behaviors.

Education constitutes another correlate of infidelity. Men with a primary level or lack of education were more likely to engage in extramarital intercourse than “those male[s] who had studied secondary or higher level of education” (Bhatta, 2014, p. 1). The opposite impact was also found (Atkins et al., 2001): The higher the education status, the higher the probability of extramarital sex. This interrelation was explained by a higher appeal of extradyadic involvement for wealthy individuals (Atkins et al., 2001) due to exercising power (Haseli et al., 2019). Additionally, another study (Brooks & Monaco, 2013) investigated the influence of education from a different angle. They considered the education of both partners, finding couples “both having high levels of education” to have a lower probability (6-9 percent) of involvement in extramarital sex (Brooks & Monaco, 2013, p. 275).

In several studies, the association of income has been highlighted (Atkins et al., 2001; Bhatta, 2014; Munsch, 2015). There was a positive linear correlation found between income and extramarital sex for incomes higher than 30.000 dollars (Atkins et al., 2001). In accordance with that, men assigned to higher levels of income (and higher age) “was significantly associated with extramarital sex” (Bhatta, 2014, p. 6). This interrelation can be once more embedded into the context of exerting of power. A further explanation was put forward: “Individuals with higher incomes might be considered to have higher status, to travel more, or to interact professionally with more appealing individuals” (Atkins et al., 2001, p. 744). Contradictory results (Adamopoulou, 2013) showed a significant negative correlation between income and infidelity for individuals who were not married. Associations of infidelity were also found, when men or women were economically dependent on their partner (Munsch, 2015). More specifically, women who were the breadwinners of the relationship, exhibited a lower likelihood of unfaithful behavior, and when this also applied to men, it led to an increase in infidelity.

Socioeconomic status mostly comprises education, income, and occupation (Baker, 2014). In infidelity research (Green & Sabini, 2006; Adamopoulou, 2013), education and income have been considered as indicators for socioeconomic status. While education and

income (separately) seemed to have associations on infidelity, socioeconomic status did not conform to that (Adamopoulou, 2013), showing no statistical significance to infidelity in the context of the US. Regarding these results, it is argued that “[t]he relationship between socioeconomic status and infidelity may differ across contexts” (Adamopoulou, 2013, p. 461). Another study (Green & Sabini, 2006) investigated, *inter alia*, the hurt and anger of an individual after the experience of infidelity. They found that low socioeconomic individuals expressed more feelings of hurt and anger over sexual infidelity than over emotional infidelity, and the opposite for high socioeconomic individuals. It appears to be more efficient to examine income and education separately, than combined into socioeconomic status (Atkins et al., 2001; Adamopoulou, 2013; Bhatta, 2014). What can be highlighted from the results, though, is the importance of considering the cultural context when examining variables related to infidelity-related behaviors.

When infidelity is discussed in research, especially when aiming to derive implications for therapeutic treatment, the norms and values of the respective culture should be reflected (Penn et al., 1997; Pazhoohi, 2022). While no connection between socioeconomic status and infidelity was found in the US context (Adamopoulou, 2013), men with a higher socioeconomic status in developing countries (Africa) were related to infidelity (Fortson, 2008). This corroborates the results of a study (Oyediran et al., 2010) with Nigerian men, whose education and profession were significantly associated with extramarital sex. The diverging results of infidelity in different cultures might underlie the varying attitudes toward extradyadic behavior in each cultural context (Pazhoohi, 2022). For instance, attitudes toward infidelity-related behavior of males and females in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, and Portugal were examined (Træen et al., 2022). Most individuals disapproved extradyadic behavior; nevertheless, “the acceptance for extradyadic activity was higher in Belgium and Portugal than in the Nordic countries for both genders” (Træen et al., 2022, p. 6). When comparing these results to a developing country, a similar interpretation was provided, confirming “the view that sexual behavior in Nigeria is a reflection of cultural values and norms” (Oyediran et al., 2010, p. 132).

As Træen et al. (2022) demonstrated, attitudes toward extradyadic behavior in a relationship is a relevant correlate of infidelity. Operationalizing attitudes toward infidelity is as challenging as infidelity itself (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Some partners do not explicitly

communicate their attitudes toward exclusivity in their relationship and, therefore, struggle to define them (Boekhout et al., 2003). Hence why, a study (Boekhout et al., 2003) investigated specific activities that participants should classify as accepted or unaccepted behavior in a relationship. They found a higher probability among men preferring the relationship to be nonexclusive, meaning to engage with people outside of the relationship. Additionally, attitudes toward infidelity were found to positively correlate with it (Haseli et al., 2019). Moreover, females were found to carry significantly more negative attitudes toward infidelity (Silvia et al., 2017).

The last correlate being discussed in this chapter is the length of the relationship, revealing an association to infidelity (Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Vowels et al., 2022). Participants who married in their teens were found to have a higher probability of extramarital sex than participants who were 23 or older (Atkins et al., 2001). A higher probability could not be connected to the length of the relationship itself but to the circumstances of marrying as a teen, since participants who married at 23 or older showed no higher likelihood. More specifically, length of marriage (longer) was found to predict extramarital sex (Spanier & Margolis, 1983) or sexual extradyadic behavior including online interaction (Vowels et al., 2022). This was also corroborated by the following results (Forste & Tanfer, 1996): With every month being in a relationship, the probability increased by around 2% for women to have intercourse outside of the relationship. The mentioned results also emphasize the meaning of the type of relationship that is investigated, especially whether participants are married or unmarried. Unmarried women had a 5 times lower likelihood than married women to engage in extradyadic sex (Forste & Tanfer, 1996). There was no difference found between women cohabitating with or dating their partner. In addition, the highest indicators of infidelity in a relationship were found in the first 5 years and decreased when the relationship lasted longer than 15 years (Scheeren et al., 2018).

2.2 Attachment Styles

In theory, attachment refers to the formation of attachment by an infant to their mother, a mother figure or a main caregiver (Ainsworth, 1979). The attachment bond is constituted by three different functions: *proximity seeking*, which aims to keep the so-called attachment figure close; *safe haven*, meaning the attachment figure is a place of security; and *secure base*, which functions as a base to which grounding can always be restored and where

own capabilities can be developed from (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Bowlby's theory of attachment functioned as the starting point of attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Fraley, 2018). Ainsworth et al. (1978) differentiate between secure, anxious-resistant and avoidant style of attachment of infants. According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2003), the understanding of *secure attachment* is characterized by low anxiety and low avoidance levels, as well as high levels of closeness and interdependence; *anxious attachment* is described with strong feelings of anxiousness, less avoidant behavior, and by insecurity and patterns of worrying; and *avoidant attachment* is connected to the need to distant oneself. In literature, attachment styles are also commonly divided into four styles (Cann et al., 2008), where *secure attachment* is also characterized by low avoidance and low anxiety; *fearful attachment* as high in avoidance and high in anxiety; *dismissive attachment* as high in avoidance and low in anxiety; and *preoccupied attachment* as low in avoidance and high in anxiety, and the last three attachments belong to the umbrella term *insecure attachment*. To align the three- and four-style approaches, the avoidant attachment style can be regarded as similar to the fearful and dismissive attachment, since these two are high in avoidance; and the anxious style as similar to the preoccupied attachment style, as they are both high in anxiety (Shi, 2003).

2.2.1 Adult Attachment

Infant and adult attachment exhibit several parallels. The distribution of the three attachment styles appears to be similar among adults and infants. "56% of [adults] classified themselves as secure, approximately 24% as avoidant, and approximately 20% as anxious [...]" (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 521). In comparison, the distribution among infants was 62 % secure, 23 % avoidant, and 15 % anxious (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

A key similarity between infant and adult attachment constitutes the behavioral system called the *attachment system* (Bowlby, 1982). The system activates behavior patterns to restore attachment and its state of safety, it is activated in children as well as adult romantic partners and aims to keep the attachment figure close (Heffernan et al., 2012; Fraley, 2018). Differences between child and adult romantic relationship attachment should also be acknowledged: "In contrast, adult attachment relationships are typically reciprocal, with each partner being both a provider and a recipient of care" (Hazan & Shaver, 1994, p. 8). This needs to be kept in mind, that it is not unilateral as in the child-mother-dimension. Romantic

relationships can also be regarded as less fixed compared to the commitment of children and their parents (Levinger, 1976).

To substantiate this resemblance, a naturalistic observational study of romantic partners separating at an airport was conducted (Fraley & Shaver, 1998). The researchers stated that adult dynamics could be similar to child-parent dynamics, whose behaviors were found to be influenced by the manner of access to the attachment figure and the duration of the relationship. The participants reacted with attempts to maintain the contact with the attachment figure and even protested when he or she intended to leave, which is corresponding to childhood dynamics. Nevertheless, Fraley and Shaver (1998) also found behavior patterns that are not similar to children: “[M]utual caregiving behaviors were present-behaviors that are typically exhibited by attachment figures who are separating from their children, but not exhibited by children themselves” (p. 1202). This underlines that the adult attachment relation to the attachment figure is reciprocal.

Attachment figures are still present in adulthood (Umemura et al., 2017). They can have the role of friends, parents, institutions, and romantic relationship partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), as this master thesis focuses on. For the purpose of making the three attachment styles more feasible and relevant for adult romantic relationships, they were adapted (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) into the following three descriptions: secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent. These descriptions and their items functioned as the basis for the scale used in this master thesis: Revised Version of the Adult Attachment Scale – German Version (Schmidt et al., 2016). However, this scale does not aim to measure attachment styles categorically but views attachment as continuous dimensions.

2.2.2 Research on Attachment Styles

Research on the different attachment styles in romantic relationships showed the following: Researchers (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Simpson et al., 2007) found securely attached people to be the most sufficient and effective in being successful with features such as forgiveness, trust, shared goals, intimacy, support, and sustaining a solid relationship. The securely attached believe that mistreatments can be reversed, carry beliefs about their romantic partners having positive motives (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005), and use security-based strategies which imply an underlying trust

in their partner fulfilling their needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Due to this trust, their attachment system is quickly deactivated since their needs get fulfilled (Simpson et al., 2007). When exposed to an anxiety-provoking circumstance, securely attached people look for more proximity than avoidant ones (Simpson et al., 1992). Avoidantly attached individuals fail to consider the needs of their partners, have a hard time with forgiveness (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Simpson et al., 2007), and tend to avert from intimate connection (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Simpson, 1990). Anxiously attached individuals struggle with fear of abandonment (Simpson et al., 2007), react with distancing (Pistole & Arricale, 2003), lack to trust their partner (Simpson, 1990), and report their relationship to be of poorer quality (Holland et al., 2012). They rely on hyperactivating strategies, which increase negative feelings, as they focus on the absence of their attachment figure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

2.3 Attachment Styles and Infidelity

Attachment in romantic relationships is considered to be determined by the involvement in infidelity-related behaviors (Haseli et al., 2019). Current research (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Fathi et al., 2011; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024) indicates that secure attachment is the least likely attachment style to be associated with infidelity-related behaviors. However, there is no consensus about avoidant (DeWall et al., 2011; Fathi et al., 2011) or anxious attachment (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007; Russell et al., 2013; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024) to be the most associated with infidelity; however, the majority of studies I have found indicate the latter. Nevertheless, two studies found avoidant attachment to be the most predictive of infidelity (DeWall et al., 2011; Fathi et al., 2011). There seems to be less devotion and commitment in a relationship among avoidantly attached individuals than among securely attached ones (Haseli et al., 2019).

When examining these attachment styles in relation to infidelity, different results for men and women were found (Allen & Baucom, 2004). On the one hand, anxious attachment was discovered to be a significant predictor of online-related infidelity behavior, with a stronger effect observed in men (McDaniel et al., 2017). On the other hand, anxious attachment was found to be associated with infidelity for women, while it was avoidant attachment for men (Allen & Baucom, 2004). Furthermore, married couples who are both low in anxiety, showed a lower likelihood of infidelity (Russell et al., 2013).

2.4 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is “a positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self” (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 30). The understanding of self-esteem was shaped by self-image, before Rosenberg (1965) developed the self-esteem scale to specify it in the context of social attitudes and behaviors. On the level of positivity, it is distinguished between viewing oneself as “very good” or “good enough”. High self-esteem comprises positive feelings of respect, self-worth, and a good sense of opportunities for self-growth; while low self-esteem is indicated by negative feelings of respect, self-contentment, and self-denial. Specifically, low self-esteem is constituted by unsteady pictures of oneself and the urge to present oneself better in front of society, which both lead to feelings of anxiety (Rosenberg, 1965).

Self-esteem can be divided into global and specific self-esteem. The global refers to the entirety of attitudes about oneself, while the specific deals with a particular object such as academic self-esteem (Rosenberg et al., 1995). It needs to be stressed that both concepts cannot be used interchangeably as they focus on different aspects, meaning that behavior should only be measured under the scope of specific self-esteem and global self-esteem is “most relevant to psychological well-being” (Rosenberg et al., 1995, p. 144). This master thesis aims to measure attitudes about oneself as a whole and in relation to psychological well-being, hence why, the concept of global self-esteem is implied, which is corresponding to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965).

Research on self-esteem indicates that higher levels are associated with greater psychological well-being (Nwankwo et al., 2015; Beltrán-Morillas et al., 2022). It is also a relevant marker in attachment styles. For both genders, self-esteem was stated to be most related to parent attachment instead of other attachment figures, though, mother nor father attachment was concluded to be more strongly associated with self-esteem (Pinquart, 2023). Low self-esteem was found in anxiously attached individuals, while individuals with a secure attachment style tend to exhibit high self-esteem (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Ghiasi et al., 2024). While numerous research concluded high self-esteem to allow individuals to, inter alia, navigate life, school, work, and relationships more successfully, research should focus on how self-esteem can be effectively enhanced before deriving and implementing interventions for it in society (Orth & Robins, 2022). Concerning gender differences, self-esteem scores regarding globality, physicality, and intellectuality were significantly higher for men than

women (Shackelford, 2001). This difference is argued to underlie different theoretical approaches by biological, evolutionary, and social psychological theorists. They suggest men and women to be distinctive in their temperament, being exposed to different challenges, and that gender roles shape their social behavior (Casale, 2020).

2.5 Self-esteem and Infidelity

Anxiously attached individuals justified their infidelity due to self-esteem issues (Allen & Baucom, 2004) or claimed to thereby attempt to enhance their low self-esteem (Sheppard et al., 1995). Research on the relation between self-esteem and infidelity has shown diverging results (Sheppard et al., 1995; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007; Whisman et al., 2007). Individuals with lower rather than higher self-esteem were found to engage in extradyadic behavior (Sheppard et al., 1995). This could not be corroborated when infidelity and self-esteem were mediated by marital dissatisfaction (Whisman et al., 2007). Regarding gender, men with lower rather than higher self-esteem were more likely to betray their partners (Eaves and Robertson-Smith, 2007). A similar significant difference could not be found among women.

2.6 Romantic Relationships

“The term ‘romantic relationships’ refers to mutually acknowledged ongoing voluntary interactions” (Collins et al., 2009, p. 632). Higher levels of intensity and affection, as well as sexual activity, distinguishes romantic relationships from other types (Collins et al., 2009). “Romantic relationships entail three component features – passion, intimacy, and commitment – that may be present in varying degrees in different relationships” (Connolly & Mclsaac, 2011, p. 181). This citation emphasizes the differing understandings of the components accounting for a romantic relationship for each individual and was thus included as a guideline in the questionnaire of this master thesis for the term *romantic relationship*.

Furthermore, this master thesis examines participants older than 20 years old, since “relationships become more enduring with age” (Connolly & Mclsaac, 2011, p. 182); and with a minimum of 3 years in a romantic relationship, as the first 5 years of a relationship were found to be the most vulnerable for infidelity (Scheeren et al., 2018). Additionally, in this thesis, the focus is on romantic relationships instead of marriages. Infidelity in married

individuals has been the focus in research (Sheppard et al., 1995; Whisman et al., 2007; Lişman and Holman, 2021), hence why, exploring romantic relationships of unmarried individuals constitutes an important contribution (Martins et al., 2016).

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

There appears to be a lack of research examining infidelity in terms of tendency rather than retrospectively (Lişman & Holman, 2021) and a focus on infidelity of married individuals (Sheppard et al., 1995; Whisman et al., 2007; Lişman & Holman, 2021). Even more, results about likelihood of infidelity were different for married and unmarried women (Forste & Tanfer, 1996). Therefore, this master thesis wishes to provide additional insights into infidelity research, particularly in the context of mainly unmarried individuals and their tendency toward infidelity. In this context, two independent variables are examined: self-esteem and attachment styles. Previous research (Sheppard et al., 1995; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Whisman et al., 2007; Fathi et al., 2011; Ghiasi et al., 2024) has suggested a pattern, yet the findings remain inconclusive, especially regarding gender differences (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007; McDaniel et al., 2017). Hence, this master thesis addresses the following research questions and hypotheses:

Firstly, previous research on the relation between infidelity and self-esteem of married individuals (Sheppard et al., 1995; Whisman et al., 2007) and unmarried ones (Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007) could not find consistent results. Nevertheless, it indicates an association between low self-esteem and high infidelity.

Research question 1: Is there a relation between self-esteem and the tendency toward infidelity in a romantic relationship?

H1: Self-esteem is negatively associated with the tendency toward infidelity.

Secondly, several studies (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Fathi et al., 2011; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024) consistently indicate that secure attachment is the least associated attachment style with infidelity. It remains inconclusive whether anxious or avoidant (DeWall et al., 2011; Fathi et al., 2011) attachment shows the strongest association with infidelity. However, a greater number of studies (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007; Russell et al., 2013; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024) suggest a stronger link to anxious attachment.

Research question 2: How do attachment styles relate to the tendency toward infidelity in romantic relationships?

H2a: There is an association between the three attachment styles and the tendency toward infidelity. It is hypothesized that anxious and avoidant attachment are positively associated with the tendency toward infidelity, and secure attachment is negatively associated with it.

H2b: Among the three attachment styles, anxious attachment shows the strongest association with the tendency toward infidelity.

Thirdly, across all aspects of infidelity, gender emerges as a key factor (e.g., Buss et al., 1992; Glass & Wright, 1992; Shackelford & Buss, 1997; Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Eaves and Robertson-Smith, 2007).

Research question 3: Are there gender differences in the relationships between self-esteem, attachment styles, and the tendency toward infidelity?

Prior research indicates that men score higher in self-esteem (Shackelford, 2001), and this master thesis seeks to explore this further.

H3: Female participants have a lower self-esteem than male ones.

The inconclusiveness regarding the relationship between anxious or avoidant attachment and infidelity is also evident in the context of gender differences. Previous results concluded anxious attachment to be associated with infidelity among women (Allen & Baucom, 2004) as well as among men in another study (McDaniel et al., 2017), while avoidant attachment was linked to infidelity in men (Allen & Baucom, 2004). Nevertheless, the results are insufficient to support definitive conclusions.

H4: There are differences in the relationship between attachment style (anxious, avoidant) and the tendency toward infidelity in males and females.

Previous studies having revealed males to have a higher likelihood of engaging in infidelity-related behavior (Atkins et al., 2001; Lişman & Holman, 2021) and to state more sexual extradyadic partners (Allen & Baucom, 2004), suggests men to have a higher tendency toward infidelity than women. However, diverging results, showing only a minor difference (Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007) or no difference (Treas & Giesen, 2000; Adamopoulou, 2013) between men and women, were also obtained.

H5: Male participants have a higher tendency toward infidelity than female participants.

4. Methods

4.1 Design

The present study used a cross-sectional, quantitative, and anonymous online survey to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles, and the tendency toward infidelity in romantic relationships.

4.2 Sample

For recruitment, participants were reached via social media platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp. Additionally, with the support of a lecturer at the University of Education of Lower Austria (Pädagogische Hochschule Niederösterreich), several students from different seminar groups were recruited. Participation criteria included a minimum age of 20, relationship experience of three years in total (irrespective of being married or unmarried), and sufficient German skills, as the survey was administered in German. For reporting purposes, all variable and category labels (in tables and figures) were translated into English, while response items remained in German. Participants received an informed consent form at the beginning of the survey, stating that participation was voluntary, and responses would remain anonymous. The completion of the survey took an average of 1.05 minutes ($SD = 0.38$).

The original sample size consisted of 233 participants. After excluding cases with missing responses, missing data on the dependent variable, and three cases without informed consent, a total of 192 cases were considered for the analyses. Among these valid datasets, one participant omitted all five demographic questions, and one to two others left individual demographic items unanswered. These missing values were considered in the demographic reporting (Table 1) and affected only those item analyses in which gender was a relevant variable, such as the t-tests comparing male and female participants.

The mean age of the valid sample ($n = 189$) was 33.14 years ($SD = 11.64$), with ages ranging from 21 to 81 years. For a more detailed overview and distribution of additional demographic variables, including gender, marital status, sexual orientation, and relationship duration, see Table 1. No participants identified as diverse in terms of gender. The item on

relationship duration was designed to capture the total duration of all romantic relationships, providing an overall indication of participants' relationship experience.

TABLE 1

Sociodemographic Data of the Samples

Total Sample	Variable	<i>n</i>	%
190	Gender		
	Female	119	63
	Male	71	37
191	Marital status		
	Single	52	27
	In a relationship	110	58
	Married	29	15
	Sexual Orientation		
	Heterosexual	175	92
	Homosexual	2	1
	Bisexual	10	5
	None of the above	4	2
	Relationship duration		
189	3-5	54	29
	6-8	38	20
	9-11	38	20
	12 or more	59	31

Note. *n* = number of participants.

The present study aims to perform correlation and multiple regression analyses. Consequently, prior to data collection, two power analyses were conducted using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). Firstly, for the correlation analyses, a conventional medium effect size of $r = .30$ (Döring, 2023) was assumed in order to achieve power of .80, with an alpha level of .05. The analysis stated a minimum sample size of 64 for directional hypotheses and 82 for non-directional, therefore, a size of 192 participants ensures statistical power for the analyses. Secondly, for the multiple regression analyses, a conventional medium effect size of $f^2 = 0.15$ (Faul et al., 2009) was assumed in order to achieve power of .80, with an alpha level of .05, and four variables (self-esteem and three attachment dimensions). The analysis stated a minimum sample size of 85, therefore, a size of 192 participants ensures statistical power for the analyses. Given the larger sample sizes in previous studies (e.g., Whisman et al., 2007;

Fathi et al., 2011; Ghiasi et al., 2024), a comparison of effect sizes was not conducted, as the smaller sample size of the present study may not provide comparable statistical power (Hayes, 2022). Additionally, t-tests and an ANOVA were performed for comparisons between subgroups (gender differences). Given that the total sample size exceeds the required minimums for medium effect sizes, no separate power analysis was conducted for these comparisons.

4.3 Measures

For the present study, three established scales were employed for the survey. The Likert scales of two of the instruments were modified to a 5-point structure. This adjustment was made to maintain comparability between the different scales and to ensure consistency across all measures. All modifications were carefully documented and will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

4.3.1 Infidelity

For screening the dependent variable infidelity, the Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (PTIS; Lişman & Holman, 2021) was used. The PTIS consists of 10 items and is relevant for this master thesis as it measures participants' tendency toward infidelity by assessing their acceptance of hypothetical scenarios related to both emotional and sexual infidelity. Originally designed in English and for married couples, the scale was modified for the purpose of this master thesis. The items of the scale were translated into German using the back-translation method with the assistance of a native English speaker to ensure content consistency with the original version (see Appendix A). Since this master thesis includes unmarried individuals to examine romantic relationships, rather than focusing on marital infidelity, the items had to be modified accordingly. The terms "spouse", "extramarital", and "married" were omitted or altered to "partner" and "relationship". An example of an omitted item includes: "Colleagues of the opposite sex represent a potential opportunity for an extramarital affair", which was modified to "Arbeitskolleg/innen stellen eine potenzielle Möglichkeit für eine Affäre dar". Additionally, to ensure the items were applicable to same-sex relationships, they were also modified accordingly, as shown in the mentioned item. The original order of the items was largely maintained. However, items 7 to 9 were slightly

rearranged to improve flow and clarity of the questionnaire but did not affect the content of the items.

The original scale (PTIS; Lişman & Holman, 2021) is in the form of a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). While the phrasing was adopted, the 6-point scale was modified to a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The sum score, calculated by summing all 10 items, demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), although slightly lower than the original scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$). A higher sum score indicates a greater tendency toward infidelity (Lişman & Holman, 2021). Considering the modifications, it is necessary to examine the construct validity, therefore, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed. The analysis revealed that the communalities of the items varied, with most values exceeding the threshold of .40 (Costello & Osborne, 2005). However, items 2 and 6 did not reach the threshold: "Mit einer anderen Person zu flirten, würde mir das Gefühl geben begehrt zu werden" and "Arbeitskolleg/innen stellen eine potenzielle Möglichkeit für eine Affäre dar". These two items were excluded from the analyses, as they are also the least relevant to the construct in terms of content meaning. After excluding the two items, a Cronbach's alpha of .87 was obtained.

4.3.2 Self-esteem

The independent variable self-esteem was evaluated with the revised German version (RSES; Von Collani & Herzberg, 2003) of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE, Rosenberg, 1965). The RSE is widely regarded as the standard instrument for measuring global self-esteem (Donnellan et al., 2015). The RSES consists of 10 items relating to positive or negative feelings about oneself. The original scale is in the form of a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*trifft gar nicht zu*) to 4 (*trifft vollkommen zu*). While the language and phrasing were mainly adopted, the 4-point scale was modified to a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*trifft gar nicht zu*) to 5 (*trifft völlig zu*). For scale point 3, the response option *trifft teils-teils zu* was added. The scale yields a sum score with a possible range from 10 to 50, with 50 representing the highest level of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). Example items are: "Alles in allem bin ich mit mir selbst zufrieden" and "Hin und wieder denke ich, dass ich gar nichts taue". The scale showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), which is comparable to the value reported for the original RSES (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

4.3.3 Attachment Styles

For measuring the independent variable attachment styles, the German version (AAS-revised edition; Schmidt et al., 2016) of the Revised Version (AAS-revised; Collins, 1996) of the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990) was used. The scale is designed to assess attachment dimensions that represent an individual's internal working model (Schmidt et al., 2016). It consists of 18 items grouped into three dimensions of 6 items each: close, depend, and anxiety (Collins & Read, 1990). For each dimension, the items are calculated into a sum score, ranging from 6 to 30, resulting in three separate sum scores (Schmidt et al., 2016). Items of the scale *close* refer to the extent of closeness a person allows and needs from others without experiencing levels of fear, for example "Es ist mir unangenehm, wenn mir jemand sehr nahe ist". The items of the scale *depend* assess the extent to which a person trusts others to be present, reliable, and meet their needs, for example "Menschen sind nie da, wenn man sie braucht". For the items of the scale *anxiety*, feelings of fear of abandonment are assessed in connection with high needs for closeness and fear of rejection of such needs. For example, "Ich mache mir oft Sorgen, dass mein/e Partner/in eines Tages nicht mehr mit mir zusammen sein möchte".

The AAS-revised edition (Schmidt et al., 2016) only allows to measure the three attachment dimensions (close, depend, anxiety) as continuously scaled and they cannot be directly interpreted as categorical attachment styles. Since the theoretical background and hypotheses of this master thesis aim to examine attachment styles as categorical constructs, the approach proposed by Schmidt et al. (2016) will be adopted. Schmidt et al. (2016) suggest conducting regression analyses using the continuous dimensions and then plotting the values according to the attachment styles. To cluster the dimensions into attachment styles, the procedure outlined by Collins and Read (1990) will be adopted, as their results demonstrated that the dimensions "corresponded well to the three attachment styles" (p. 652).

The original scale uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*stimmt gar nicht*) to 5 (*stimmt genau*). In this thesis, the 5-point scale is maintained, but the wording is adjusted to range from 1 (*trifft gar nicht zu*) to 5 (*trifft vollkommen zu*), ensuring consistency with the preceding scale in the questionnaire and thereby avoiding unnecessary variations in wording. Other adjustments include modifications to the wording of the items to improve readability and the removal of unnecessary terms, such as "Liebesbeziehungen", for which a definition is

explicitly provided in the questionnaire. Hence why, two items were modified: “In Liebesbeziehungen wünschen sich meine Partner/innen häufig mehr Nähe von mir, als mir angenehm ist” to “Mein/e Partner/in wünscht sich häufig mehr Nähe von mir, als mir angenehm ist”, and “Es ist mir unangenehm, wenn jemand mir sehr nahe ist” to “Es ist mir unangenehm, wenn mir jemand sehr nahe ist”. Additionally, while the items in the original scale are not organized according to their respective dimensions, the scale used in this thesis arranges them according to the three attachment dimensions (close, depend, anxiety) to improve clarity for the participants. This modification could potentially increase participants’ awareness of the scale’s focus.

In terms of internal consistency of the adapted scale, it showed good internal consistency for the depend (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$) and anxiety (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$) scale, and acceptable internal consistency for close (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$). This is comparable to the AAS-revised edition (Schmidt et al., 2016), showing good internal consistency for depend (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$) and anxiety (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$). For close, a Cronbach’s alpha of only .67 was achieved.

Measuring construct validity, an EFA revealed that the communalities of the items were above .40, with most exceeding .60 (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Only item 12 (anxiety) did not reach the threshold, with a value of .36. Item 12 (“Ich merke, dass andere mich nicht so nah an sich herankommen lassen, wie ich es gerne hätte”) was noted as confusing in several comments during the pretesting phase and will, hence why, be excluded from the analyses. After excluding the item, a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 was obtained for the anxiety dimension.

4.4 Procedure

The survey was conducted over the period between October 2024 and January 2025. With the assistance of my supervisor and colleagues from a seminar group at the University of Vienna, the online questionnaire was developed. A pretest was carried out to assess the clarity of the items, leading to minor adjustments based on feedback. When participants were recruited, they were informed that the questionnaire would focus on fidelity, without disclosing all the variables of the study to avoid influencing their responses. The questionnaire was created and administered using SoSci Survey (Leiner, 2024). At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were informed about the consent and anonymity of their data,

followed by instructions on how to complete the items. After the items, participants were asked to provide demographic information. The demographic questions were placed after the main items of the questionnaire to increase the likelihood of them being completed.

4.5 Preliminary Data Analyses and Assumption Checks

After data collection, the datasets were examined using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30). For data preparation, sum scores were calculated for the RSES, the PTIS, and each dimension of the AAS-revised edition. These sum scores served as the key variables in the subsequent analyses. After excluding incomplete cases, the final sample consisted of 192 participants. The remaining cases were subsequently examined for implausible item responses and outliers (Bortz & Schuster, 2010; Döring, 2023). In five cases, a standard deviation of 0.00 was observed on more than one of the scales, indicating no variation in item responses within these scales. However, a closer inspection of these cases revealed no signs of contradictory or implausible answering behavior; especially since these participants also completed the demographic questions seemingly conscientiously. Therefore, these cases were retained for further analyses.

Outliers were identified using boxplots, which revealed several outliers on the self-esteem items; however, no indications of contradictory or implausible answering behavior were found. Further analysis of outliers using Cook's Distance revealed no values exceeding the critical threshold of 1, suggesting that outliers did not have a significant impact on the subsequent analyses. An analysis of Mahalanobis distances showed values ranging from 0.31 to 21.21, with a mean of 3.98. One participant showed a notably high Mahalanobis distance of 21.21. Upon closer inspection, the responses across the scales appeared plausible, with no indications of random responding, except for only choosing the lowest value on the infidelity scale. The demographic questions were completed in full. Nevertheless, since it could not be determined with certainty whether the extreme responses (consistently choosing the lowest value on the infidelity scale) reflected a strong personal belief in fidelity or random responding, the case was excluded from the analyses, resulting in a final sample of $N = 191$.

To perform correlation and multiple regression analyses, assumption checks were conducted beforehand (Field, 2017; Hayes, 2022). The linearity of the relationships between variables was assessed through visual inspection of a scatterplot (see Figure D1 in Appendix B

for a more detailed view). The standardized residuals appeared to be randomly scattered above and below the zero line, suggesting that the assumption of linearity was sufficiently met. Minor deviations were observed but are unlikely to affect the accuracy of the results.

The standardized residuals were examined using a histogram and Q-Q plot to assess the normality assumption. Both plots revealed some noticeable deviations from a normal distribution, suggesting that the assumption is not fully met (see Figures D2 & D3 in Appendix B). The analyses were repeated after removing potential outliers, but this did not lead to any notable improvement in the distribution of residuals. However, deviations from normality are unlikely to compromise the validity of the results, given the sufficiently large sample size (Field, 2017). Nonetheless, the results should be interpreted with caution, as the sample size ($N = 191$) is adequate but not exceptionally large.

Visual inspection of the Q-Q plots and histograms for the variables anxiety dimension and infidelity revealed a distribution that was approximately normal (see Figures D4–D7 in Appendix B). However, some deviations from normality were observed at the upper end of the distribution. Results should also be interpreted with caution. For the correlation analyses, Spearman's ρ was used due to the partial violation of the normality assumption (Field, 2017).

In terms of homoscedasticity, the residuals in the scatterplot appeared predominantly randomly distributed (see Figure D8 in Appendix B), suggesting that the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. Multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. All independent variables had VIF values below 2, indicating no concerns regarding multicollinearity (Field, 2017). Additionally, t-tests and an ANOVA (Field, 2017) were conducted for subgroup comparisons; assumption checks for these tests are reported in the corresponding results sections.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, namely sum scores and mean-scores, were computed for the variables infidelity, close, depend, anxiety, and self-esteem in the total sample ($N = 191$) to provide an overview of scale distributions. Table 2 presents the results.

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	TR	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Infidelity				
Sum Score	191	8-40	13.53	5.61
Mean-Score	191	1-5	1.69	0.70
Close				
Sum Score	191	6-30	22.23	4.36
Mean-Score	191	1-5	3.70	0.73
Depend				
Sum Score	191	6-30	22.24	5.15
Mean-Score	191	1-5	3.71	0.86
Anxiety				
Sum Score	191	5-25	11.08	4.61
Mean-Score	191	1-5	2.22	0.92
Self-Esteem				
Sum Score	191	10-50	40.01	6.85
Mean-Score	191	1-5	4.00	0.68

Note. *N* = total sample; TR = theoretical range; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 3 presents the intercorrelations among the variables. A significantly weak positive correlation between anxiety and infidelity was observed ($\rho = .15$, $p = .04$). Other correlations, while significant, are not related to the hypotheses and will not be further discussed.

TABLE 3

Intercorrelations (Spearman) of the Measured Variables

	Infidelity	Close	Depend	Anxiety	Self-Esteem
Infidelity	-	-	-	-	-
Close	.03	-	-	-	-
Depend	-.13	.51**	-	-	-
Anxiety	.15*	-.39**	-.62**	-	-
Self-Esteem	-.09	.38**	.49**	-.46**	-

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

5.2 Relation between Self-esteem and Infidelity

To examine the hypotheses that the predictors self-esteem, secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment are associated with the tendency toward infidelity, a multiple regression analysis was conducted for the total sample ($N = 191$), using the variables' sum scores. The overall regression model was not statistically significant, $F(4, 186) = 1.69$, $p = .15$, $R^2 = .035$, adjusted $R^2 = .014$. For the hypothesis that self-esteem is negatively associated with the tendency toward infidelity, no significant regression was found, $B = -0.02$, $p = .76$, 95% CI $[-0.16, 0.12]$. Self-esteem was examined exploratorily using a linear regression analysis; the results stayed insignificant: $F(1, 189) = 0.37$, $p = .54$, $R^2 = .002$, adjusted $R^2 = -.003$, $B = -0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.15, 0.08]$.

5.3 Relation between Attachment Styles and Infidelity

For the hypothesis that there is an association between the three attachment styles and the tendency toward infidelity, no significant regression was found for the depend and anxiety dimensions: depend, $B = -0.15$, $p = .18$, 95% CI $[-0.38, 0.07]$; anxiety, $B = 0.08$, $p = .48$,

95% CI [-0.15, 0.31]. For the close dimension, a significantly weak positive association with the tendency toward infidelity was found ($\beta = .21$, $p = .02$). The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = 0.27$, 95% [0.04, 0.49]) indicates that, on average, infidelity increased by 0.27 units for every one unit increase in close. For a detailed view, see Table 4.

TABLE 4

Regression Coefficients Predicting Infidelity N = 191

Variable	Unstandardized coefficient	SE	Standardized coefficient	t	p	95% CI	
	B		β			LL	UL
Constant	10.94	4.19		2.61	.01	2.66	19.21
Self-esteem	-0.02	0.07	-.03	-0.30	.76	-0.16	0.12
Close	0.27	0.12	.21	2.32	.02*	0.04	0.49
Depend	-0.15	0.11	-.14	-1.33	.18	-0.38	0.07
Anxiety	0.08	0.12	.07	0.70	.48	-0.15	0.31

Note. SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; * $p < .05$.

Plotting Attachment Dimension Values into Categorical Attachment Styles

The attachment dimensions were assigned to the three attachment styles based on the clustering pattern described by Collins and Read (1990), in which a secure attachment style represents high scores on close and depend, and low scores on anxiety; an anxious attachment style represents moderate scores on close and depend, and high scores on anxiety; and an avoidant attachment style represents low scores on close, depend, and anxiety.

Applying Ward's method for cluster analysis (Collins & Read, 1990; Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 2009), resulted in a pattern of dimension scores within clusters that closely resembles the results of Collins and Read (1990). Moderate scores on close and depend, and high scores on anxiety in Cluster 1 correspond to the anxious attachment style. In Cluster 3, high scores on close and depend, and low scores on anxiety suggest secure attachment. In Cluster 2, low scores on close and depend correspond to the avoidant attachment style, except of high instead of low scores on the anxiety dimension. For a detailed view, see Table

5. Out of the total sample ($N = 191$), Cluster 1 anxious attachment comprises 69, Cluster 2 avoidant attachment 33, and Cluster 3 secure attachment 89 participants.

TABLE 5

Ward Method Cluster Analysis using Standardized Dimension Scores $N = 191$

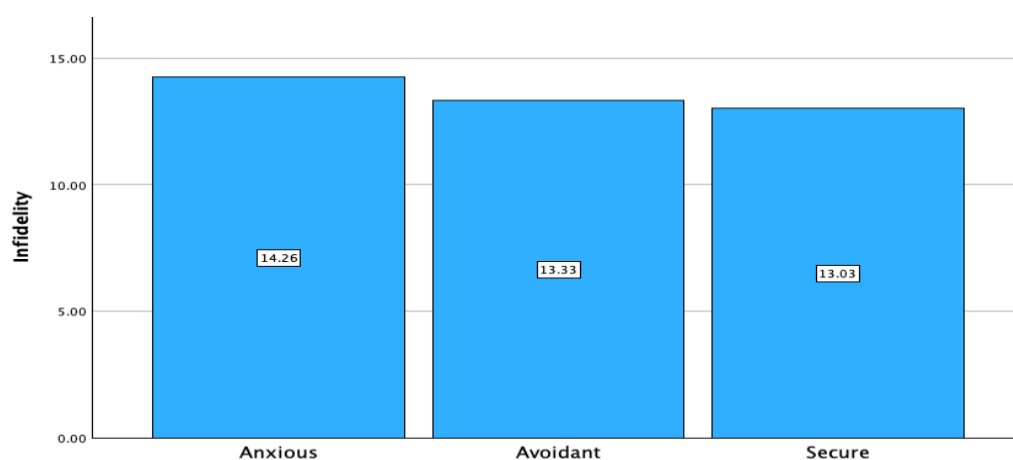
Dimension	Cluster		
	1 Anxious	2 Avoidant	3 Secure
Close			
<i>M</i>	-.18	-1.06	.53
<i>SD</i>	.88	.92	.72
Depend			
<i>M</i>	-.34	-1.27	.78
<i>SD</i>	.70	.75	.48
Anxiety			
<i>M</i>	.19	1.50	-.71
<i>SD</i>	.69	.74	.44

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Descriptively, Figure 1 shows that the anxious attachment cluster displays the highest mean infidelity score ($M = 14.26$), followed by the avoidant cluster ($M = 13.33$) and the secure cluster ($M = 13.03$).

FIGURE 1

Mean Infidelity Scores by Attachment Style Clusters



Note. Theoretical Range 8-40.

5.4 Gender Differences among the Variables

To examine the hypothesis that female participants have a lower self-esteem than male ones, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Levene's test for self-esteem was not significant ($F(1, 187) = 0.04, p = .83$), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met (Field, 2017). There was no statistically significant difference in self-esteem between males and females, $t(187) = -1.35, p = .18$, 95% CI $[-3.43, 0.64]$. Descriptive results showed that the mean self-esteem score of male participants ($n = 70, M = 40.93$) was higher than that of female participants ($n = 119, M = 39.53$).

To test the hypothesis that there are differences in the relationship between attachment style (anxious, avoidant) and the tendency toward infidelity in males and females, a two-way ANOVA was conducted. Levene's test was not significant ($p = .22$), assuming equal variances. There was no statistically significant difference in the relation between attachment styles and infidelity in males and females, $F(2, 183) = 0.50, p = .61, \eta^2 = 0.01$. For female participants, the highest mean infidelity score was found in the anxious attachment cluster ($M = 13.55$) and for male participants, it was highest in the avoidant attachment cluster ($M = 16.80$). For a detailed view, see Table 6.

TABLE 6

Dependent Variable: Infidelity Scores $n = 189$

Cluster	Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Anxious	Female	13.55	4.91	40
	Male	15.11	7.33	27
	Total	14.18	6.00	67
Avoidant	Female	12.71	5.53	28
	Male	16.80	5.26	5
	Total	13.33	5.61	33
Secure	Female	11.74	4.74	51
	Male	14.76	5.68	38
	Total	13.03	5.35	89
Total	Female	12.58	5.01	119
	Male	15.04	6.28	70
	Total	13.49	5.63	189

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; Theoretical Range 8-40.

To examine the hypothesis that male participants have a higher tendency toward infidelity than female participants, an independent samples t-test was carried out. Levene's test for infidelity was not significant ($F(1, 187) = 3.61, p = .06$), assuming variance homogeneity was met. There was a statistically significant difference in the tendency toward infidelity between males and females, $t(187) = -2.96, p < .05$, 95% CI $[-4.10, -0.82]$, with higher infidelity mean scores of males ($M = 15.04$) than females ($M = 12.58$).

5.5 Exploratory Analyses

On the one hand, previous research has found younger participants (Atkins et al., 2001; Bhatta, 2014), younger than 30 (Mbago & Sichona, 2010), and participants older than 65 (Atkins et al., 2001) to be less associated with infidelity-related behaviors than 39- to 65-year-olds (Atkins et al., 2001; Mbago & Sichano, 2010). On the other hand, no relations to age (Whisman et al., 2007) and a higher probability for 18- to 30-year-olds than 50-year-olds was found (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Therefore, the association between age and infidelity was exploratorily examined.

Based on previous research, two age group comparisons were conducted: ages from 20 to 29 compared to 30 to 64, and 20 to 38 compared to 39 to 64. In the valid sample ($n = 188$), only three participants were older than 65, therefore, no separate age group for participants over 65 was included in the analysis ($n = 185$). To test the differences between the age groups and the tendency toward infidelity, two independent samples t-tests were conducted. For the first age group, with ages ranging from 20 to 29 (group 1) and 30 to 64 (group 2), the Levene's test was not significant ($F(1, 183) = 0.12, p = .73$), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. There was no statistically significant difference between the age groups, $t(183) = -0.68, p = .49$, 95% CI $[-2.21, 1.07]$. The mean score of age group 2 ($n = 87, M = 13.80$) was slightly higher than that of age group 1 ($n = 98, M = 13.23$).

For the second age group, with ages ranging from 20 to 38 (group 1) and 39 to 64 (group 2), the Levene's test was not significant ($F(1, 183) = 0.40, p = .53$), assuming equal variances. There was no statistically significant difference between the age groups, $t(183) = -0.50, p = .62$, 95% CI $[-2.66, 1.58]$. The mean score of age group 2 ($n = 34, M = 13.94$) was slightly higher than that of age group 1 ($n = 151, M = 13.40$).

Regarding differences, it was additionally examined if there is a correlation between the duration of the relationship and the tendency toward infidelity. According to previous results, infidelity-related behaviors are most likely to occur within the first 5 years of a relationship (Scheeren et al., 2018). The analysis with the valid sample ($n = 188$), revealed no significant correlation between relationship duration and infidelity ($\rho = .02$, $p = .77$).

6. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles, and the tendency toward infidelity (Research question 1 & 2), focusing on a sample consisting primarily of unmarried individuals (only 15% of participants were married). Additionally, the study aimed to explore potential gender differences in this context (Research question 3). Previous studies found diverging results for the relation of self-esteem and infidelity (Sheppard et al., 1995; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007; Whisman et al., 2007), as well as for the relation of attachment styles and infidelity (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Fathi et al., 2011; Ghiasi et al., 2024). It was assumed that self-esteem is negatively associated with the tendency toward infidelity (H1). Furthermore, it was postulated that anxious and avoidant attachment are positively associated with the tendency toward infidelity, while it is negatively for secure attachment (H2a), and that anxious attachment shows the strongest association with it (H2b). Regarding gender differences, it was assumed that female participants have a lower self-esteem than males (H3). Additionally, it was hypothesized that there are differences in the relationship between attachment styles (anxious, avoidant) and the tendency toward infidelity (H4) and that males have a higher tendency toward infidelity than females (H5).

Multiple regression, correlation, t-test, and ANOVA analyses were conducted on cross-sectional data to examine the hypotheses. A significant correlation between the anxiety dimension and the tendency toward infidelity was found. The data revealed the anxious attachment style to be the most related to the tendency toward infidelity, although not statistically significant. No significant relationship between self-esteem and infidelity was observed. In the following subchapters, results are discussed in more detail before addressing the study's limitations and outlining directions for future research.

6.1 Discussion of Results

For H1, neither the regression analysis nor the Spearman correlation revealed a significant relationship between self-esteem and the tendency toward infidelity, and thus the hypothesis could not be supported. These results do not corroborate the results of previous studies (Sheppard et al., 1995; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007), which suggested a link between low self-esteem and infidelity. The mean infidelity score was 13.53 and the mean

self-esteem score was 40.01 (see Table 2). This indicates that participants had a very low tendency toward infidelity and a relatively high level of self-esteem, which limits the examination of the relationship between self-esteem and infidelity.

For example, Sheppard et al. (1995) compared self-esteem scores between participants exhibiting unfaithful behavior and those who did not, finding lower self-esteem scores of participants with unfaithful behavior. Since the present study examined the tendency toward infidelity rather than actual behavior, a cut-off value could have been established to categorize participants into low and high tendency to infidelity groups for a comparison of their self-esteem scores. However, due to the low infidelity scores of the participants, only 8 individuals could have been assigned to the high infidelity group (with sum scores above 25 within a range of 8 to 40). This underlines the low infidelity scores of the present data and should be taken into account when interpreting the results, as it might explain the non-significance of H1. Although this master thesis aimed to elicit honest responses by examining infidelity in terms of tendency rather than retrospectively (Lişman & Holman, 2021), it remains possible that participants provided socially desirable responses, reporting themselves as more faithful than might be true.

Regarding H2a, the regression analysis showed a weak positive association only between the close dimension and the tendency toward infidelity. When the data were categorized into attachment styles, the highest mean infidelity score was observed for individuals with high scores in the anxious attachment style. H2a cannot be supported, as no significant relationship between the three attachment styles and infidelity was found. Since the analysis was based on attachment dimensions followed by plotting the results into categories, only the mean score differences can be interpreted, which do not allow conclusions about statistical significance. However, the lowest mean infidelity scores were found in the secure attachment style, which supports previous research suggesting that secure attachment is least associated with infidelity (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Fathi et al., 2011; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024). This corresponds to secure attachment being the most successful in sustaining a solid relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

For H2b, a weak positive correlation between the anxiety dimension and infidelity was found ($p = .15$); however, this relationship did not remain significant in the multiple regression analysis, suggesting that the association between the anxiety dimension and infidelity may

not be independent from other variables. Nevertheless, the weak positive association, combined with the highest mean infidelity scores for individuals in the anxious attachment style, suggest partial support for H2b. This supports previous research indicating anxious attachment to be the most associated with infidelity (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007; Russell et al., 2013; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024), in contrast to avoidant attachment (DeWall et al., 2011; Fathi et al., 2011), which showed lower mean infidelity scores than anxious attachment in the present study. Lower relationship engagement among anxiously attached individuals may lead to greater external involvement, thereby increasing the risk of infidelity (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007) and tendency toward infidelity.

In terms of H3, no significant results were found to support the hypothesis. However, the higher mean self-esteem score among male participants indicates lower self-esteem among female participants. This supports earlier research outcomes (Shackelford, 2001) and may reflect the different challenges and social expectations that women are faced with (Castel, 2020). However, although men reported higher overall self-esteem, no differences were found in social self-esteem (Shackelford, 2001), suggesting that other factors may account for the gender difference in global self-esteem.

H4 was not supported, with analyses revealing no statistically significant difference. However, when comparing mean infidelity scores, they were highest among anxiously attached women and avoidantly attached men. This outcome corresponds to the results of the study by Allen and Baucom (2004). Avoidantly attached men may engage in infidelity-related behavior or tend to it as a means of maintaining their sense of independence and autonomy, while anxiously attached women may attempt to thereby reduce feelings of insecurity (Allen & Baucom, 2004). Additionally, they (Allen & Baucom, 2004) found the highest incidents of extradyadic behavior among anxious females and avoidant males, the latter also reported the highest overall incidents, and anxious males reported higher rates than anxious females. The results of the present study align with this pattern, as the mean infidelity scores are highest among avoidant males and higher for anxious males compared to anxious females.

Regarding H5, the results strongly support the hypothesized higher tendency toward infidelity among male participants. The analyses provided significant results ($p < .05$) which underline previous research (Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Lişman & Holman,

2021). Women might tend to underreport infidelity-related behavior due to socially expected norms (Atkins et al., 2001; Haseli et al., 2019), meaning that infidelity is more tolerated for men (Allen & Baucom, 2004). Additionally, men referred to less guilt when committing infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1992), which further supports the results.

Despite evidence to suggest a decreasing difference of gender for younger individuals (Atkins et al., 2001), the results of the present study could not support this assumption. No significant difference between younger and older participants and their tendency toward infidelity was found, only a slightly higher infidelity mean score for the older groups.

Though there is evidence to imply a relationship between the duration of the relationship and infidelity (Scheeren et al., 2018), the results do not conform with that, as no significant correlation was revealed. It should be considered that the present study examined participants' past and present relationship experiences across all relationships combined, whereas prior research (Scheeren et al., 2018) focused on participant's current relationships. Therefore, the results are not directly comparable.

6.2 Limitations

Even though this master thesis aimed to derive meaningful insights and to contribute to infidelity research, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First and foremost, the study's sample size needs to be considered. Although power analyses conducted beforehand suggested a sufficient sample size, the analyses could have yielded more precise results with a larger sample size, especially in the subgroup analyses. A larger sample size would have been more comparable to previous research (e.g., Whisman et al., 2007; Fathi et al., 2011; Ghiasi et al., 2024), allowing for a better comparison of effect sizes. For H2a and H2b, a larger sample size would have been necessary, as the three cluster groups were limited; especially the avoidant male cluster, which included only five 5 participants when testing H4. While the study revealed noteworthy results, a larger sample size would have allowed for better comparability with previous research.

Furthermore, as this master thesis assessed hypothetical scenarios in the context of infidelity by measuring the tendency toward infidelity, real-life applicability or generalizability cannot be assumed (Pazhoohi, 2022). This limitation is further reinforced by the used convenience sample of this master thesis, which consisted largely of university students

(Pazhoohi, 2022). Additionally, the limited inferential analyses due to the small sample size, prevented the inclusion of interaction effects, further restricting the generalizability of the results.

As already mentioned in the results section, the low mean infidelity scores combined with the high self-esteem scores of the data limited the examinations and thereby the results of the relationship between self-esteem and the tendency toward infidelity. While it is possible that participants' tendency toward infidelity is genuinely low, it could also reflect socially desirable responses. However, the PTIS items provide limited opportunity for participants to be influenced by their attitudes toward infidelity-related behavior. The significant result of a higher tendency among male participants further challenges the assumption of socially desirable responding. Even more, the low infidelity scores might be explained by the possibility that the sample composition was influenced by the way the questionnaire was advertised, specifically through the emphasis on "fidelity". This wording may have particularly appealed to individuals who strongly value fidelity, while deterring those who have engaged in infidelity.

The operationalizing issue of infidelity (Warach et al., 2024) also poses limitations for this master thesis. The challenge of determining behavior as infidelity-related remains challenging (Blow & Hartnett, 2005), even though the examination of the tendency toward infidelity aimed to minimize this issue (PTIS; Lişman & Holman, 2021). The items were primarily designed to assess behavioral patterns without being influenced by participants' definitions of what constitutes infidelity. Nevertheless, responses on this scale may still be affected by individual interpretations of infidelity due to certain terms. For example, in item 9, "Es gibt gewisse Umstände, in denen es plausible wäre, eine Affäre anzufangen", the term "affair" remains open to interpretation and could lead to low responses, even though other infidelity-related behaviors might have elicited higher responses. The same applies to item 8, "Wenn ich wüsste, dass mein/e Partner/in es niemals herausfinden würde, könnte ich eine Affäre anfangen". Revising the term "affair" or adding more infidelity-related behaviors in these two items could improve the measurement of infidelity by reducing ambiguity caused by specific wording, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the assessment.

Concerning the attachment style scale (AAS-revised edition; Schmidt et al., 2016), this master thesis arranged the attachment dimensions accordingly rather than randomly

distributed. While there are no indications to suggest that it increased participants' awareness of the scale's focus and thus influenced their responses, this possibility still needs to be considered when interpreting the results. More importantly, due to violations of construct validity, one item had to be removed from the anxiety dimensions, resulting in an unequal number of items across the three attachment dimensions and thereby impairing their comparability or potentially affecting the outcome of the multiple regression analysis for H2a and H2b. Most importantly, the procedure of categorizing the attachment dimensions limited the examination of H2a and H2b and would require a larger sample size for more detailed analyses.

Finally, interpretations of the relationships between the variables and infidelity must be considered within the framework of their respective social and cultural contexts (Penn et al., 1997; Pazhoohi, 2022). Since diverging results on infidelity have been reported across different social and cultural contexts (Fortson, 2008; Oyediran et al., 2010; Adamopoulou, 2013; Træen et al., 2022), the results of this master thesis should be interpreted within the cultural framework of the Austrian sample, as infidelity-related behaviors might be more or less accepted than in other countries and might, therefore, lead to different responses about one's infidelity behavior (Træen et al., 2022).

6.3 Directions for Future Research

The current results contribute to infidelity research by reinforcing previous research and providing insights for future research directions. In line with prior research (Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Lişman & Holman, 2021), men were found to have a higher tendency toward infidelity than women. To assess the generalizability of these results, future research should examine more diverse samples beyond university students (Atkins et al., 2001; Allen & Baucom, 2004), as in the present study, or those with primarily higher education (McDaniel et al., 2017). Additionally, the results of this master thesis were able to provide a small contribution to the question of which attachment styles are associated with which gender (Allen & Baucom, 2004; McDaniel et al., 2017), but a much larger sample size is needed to explore this relationship further.

Furthermore, regarding the need for a larger sample size, it is crucial for several possible further investigations. Firstly, it would help to address issues related to the low scores

on the infidelity scale and the high scores on the self-esteem scale, thereby increasing the robustness of the analyses. This would be particularly important considering previous results (Sheppard et al., 1995; Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007; Whisman et al., 2007), which could not be adequately examined in the present study. Another possibility to avoid low scores on the infidelity scale in future research, could be an adaption of the Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (PTIS; Lişman & Holman, 2021). Clarifying or replacing the term “affair” could help to ensure that other forms of infidelity-related behavior are also captured. Secondly, since it could only be partially supported that anxious attachment is most associated with infidelity, a larger sample size would allow for a more robust investigation of attachment style associations and help confirm previous results (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007; Russell et al., 2013; McDaniel et al., 2017; Ghiasi et al., 2024).

Future studies could also further investigate the association between age and infidelity, as 39- to 65-year-olds (Atkins et al., 2001; Mbago & Sichano, 2010) were found to be higher associated with infidelity than younger participants (Atkins et al., 2001; Mbago & Sichona, 2010; Bhatta, 2014) and those older than 65 (Atkins et al., 2001). Even though the present study did not find any significant associations with age, it remains an interesting factor for which longitudinal research could provide more profound insights.

7. Conclusion

In sum, this master thesis contributes to the field of infidelity research by supporting previous results and expanding them in the context of investigating the tendency toward infidelity through the inclusion of unmarried individuals. No relationship between self-esteem and the tendency toward infidelity was found, though, it must be interpreted in view of the sample, which showed generally low self-esteem and high infidelity scores. The conclusions of this master thesis rely largely on mean-scores, as only one hypothesis, namely a higher tendency toward infidelity among male participants, was statistically confirmed. Based on the mean-scores for the attachment styles, securely attached individuals showed the lowest association with the tendency toward infidelity, whereas anxiously attached individuals demonstrated the highest, along with a statistically significant correlation for the anxiety dimension. Furthermore, anxious attachment appeared more frequently among women, while avoidant attachment was more common among men, with avoidantly attached men reporting the highest overall levels of infidelity tendency. Additionally, male participants had higher mean self-esteem scores than female participants, indicating comparatively lower self-esteem among women. These results emphasize the need for a larger sample size to examine these patterns more robustly and confirm the results with greater statistical power.

8. Literature

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9. List of Figures

Figure 1	27
Figure D1	50
Figure D2	50
Figure D3	51
Figure D4	51
Figure D5	52
Figure D6	52
Figure D7	53
Figure D8	53

10. List of Tables

Table 1	17
Table 2	24
Table 3	25
Table 4	26
Table 5	27
Table 6	28

11.Appendices

Appendix A Scales

Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (+ German version)

- If my spouse would be unfaithful, it would seem natural to me to have an extramarital relationship.
- Wenn mein/e Partner/in untreu wäre, würde es für mich selbstverständlich sein, auch untreu zu sein.
- Flirting with another person would make me feel wanted.
- Mit einer anderen Person zu flirten, würde mir das Gefühl geben begehrt zu werden.
- The lack of sexual relations with my spouse would be a reason for me to have an extramarital relationship.
- Das Fehlen von sexueller Intimität mit meinem/r Partner/in, wäre ein Grund für mich fremdzugehen.
- It is plausible for me to have a relationship with someone else than my spouse if I feel emotionally bonded to him/her.
- Es ist plausibel für mich, eine Beziehung mit jemand anderem als meinem/r Partner/in zu haben oder anzufangen, wenn ich mich emotional verbunden zu der anderen Person fühlen würde.
- My spouse's long-term absence would make me engage in relationships with other people.
- Eine lange Abwesenheit meines/r Partner/in würde dazu führen, mich auf Beziehungen mit anderen Personen einzulassen.

- Colleagues of the opposite sex represent a potential opportunity for an extramarital affair.
- Arbeitskolleg/innen stellen eine potenzielle Möglichkeit für eine Affäre dar.
- If I knew that my spouse would never find out, I could have an extramarital affair.
- Wenn ich wüsste, dass mein/e Partner/in es niemals herausfinden würde, könnte ich eine Affäre anfangen.
- There are certain contexts in which it would be plausible to have an extramarital affair.
- Es gibt gewisse Umstände, in denen es plausibel wäre, eine Affäre anzufangen.
- My spouse's close relationship with a colleague of the opposite sex would make it likely for me to engage in a relationship with someone else.
- Wenn mein/e Partner/in ein enges Verhältnis mit einem/r Arbeitskollegen/in hätte, wäre es wahrscheinlich, dass ich mich auch auf eine Beziehung mit jemand anderem einlasse.
- The fact that other married friends have had extramarital relationships makes me think that it can happen to me.
- Der Fakt, dass Freunde untreu waren, lässt mich denken, dass ich auch fremdgehen könnte.

Revised German version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

- Alles in allem bin ich mit mir selbst zufrieden.
- Hin und wieder denke ich, dass ich gar nichts taue.
- Ich besitze eine Reihe guter Eigenschaften.
- Ich kann vieles genauso gut wie die meisten anderen Menschen auch.
- Ich fürchte, es gibt nicht viel, worauf ich stolz sein kann.
- Ich fühle mich von Zeit zu Zeit richtig nutzlos.
- Ich halte mich für einen wertvollen Menschen, jedenfalls bin ich nicht weniger wertvoll als andere auch.
- Ich wünschte, ich könnte vor mir selbst mehr Achtung haben.
- Alles in allem neige ich dazu, mich für einen Versager zu halten.
- Ich habe eine positive Einstellung zu mir selbst gefunden.

German version of the Revised Adult Attachment Scale

- Für mich ist es leicht, andere an mich heranzulassen.
- Ich kann es mir nur schwer zugestehen, mich auf andere zu verlassen.
- Ich mache mir oft Sorgen, dass mein Partner/meine Partnerin mich nicht wirklich liebt.
- Ich merke, dass andere mich nicht so nah an sich herankommen lassen, wie ich es gerne hätte.
- Ich kann mich gut auf andere verlassen.
- Mich beunruhigt es nicht, wenn andere mir zu nahe kommen.
- Menschen sind nie da, wenn man sie braucht.
- Es ist mir irgendwie unangenehm, mit anderen sehr vertraut zu werden.
- Ich mache mir oft Sorgen, dass mein Partner/meine Partnerin eines Tages nicht mehr mit mir zusammen sein möchte.
- Wenn ich anderen meine Gefühle zeige, habe ich Angst, dass diese nicht in gleicher Weise für mich empfinden.
- Ich frage mich oft, ob mein Partner wirklich etwas für mich empfindet.
- Ich fühle mich wohl, wenn sich enge Beziehungen mit anderen entwickeln.
- Es ist mir unangenehm, wenn jemand mir sehr nahe ist.
- Ich weiß: wenn ich jemanden brauche, wird auch jemand da sein.
- Ich möchte anderen gerne nahe sein, aber habe Angst verletzt zu werden.
- Es fällt mir schwer, anderen voll und ganz zu vertrauen.
- In Liebesbeziehungen wünschen sich meine Partner/innen häufig mehr Nähe von mir, als mir angenehm ist.
- Ich bin nicht sicher, ob ich mich darauf verlassen kann, dass andere da sind, wenn ich sie brauche.

Appendix B Assumption Checks

Linearity Assumption Check

FIGURE D1

Scatterplot Linearity (N = 192)



Testing for Normality

FIGURE D2

Histogram of Standardized Residuals (N = 192)

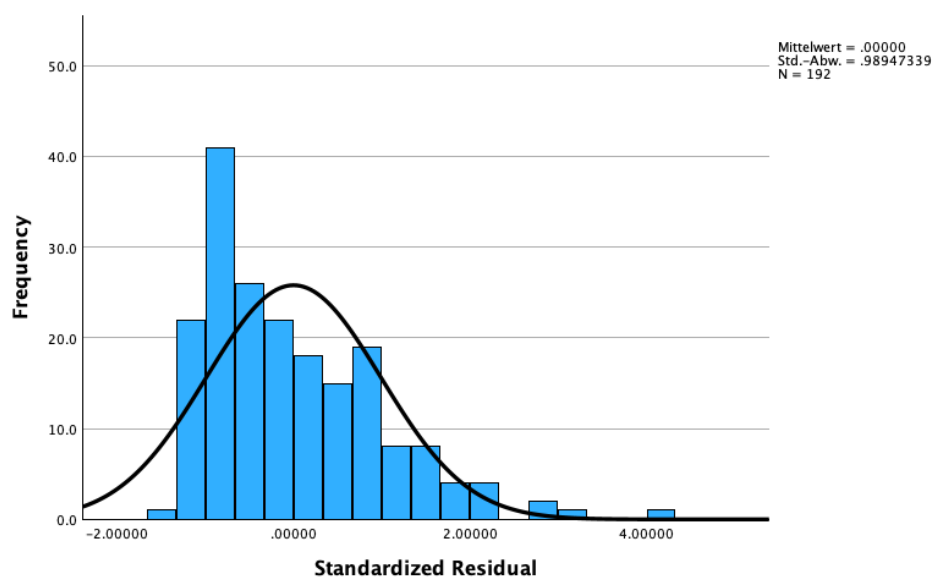


FIGURE D3

Q-Q Diagram of Standardized Residuals (N = 192)

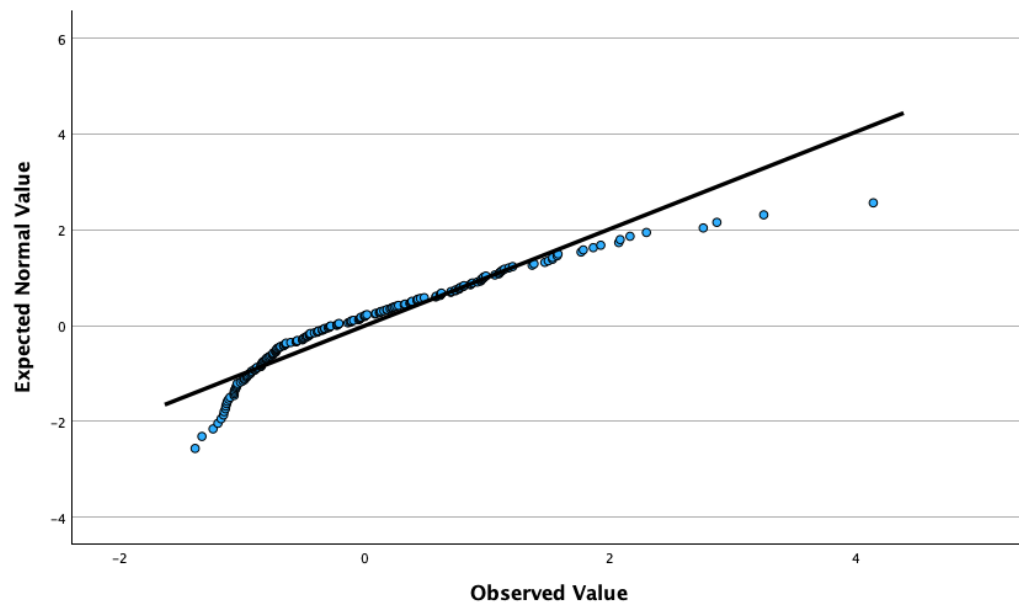


FIGURE D4

Histogram of Anxiety Variable (N = 192)

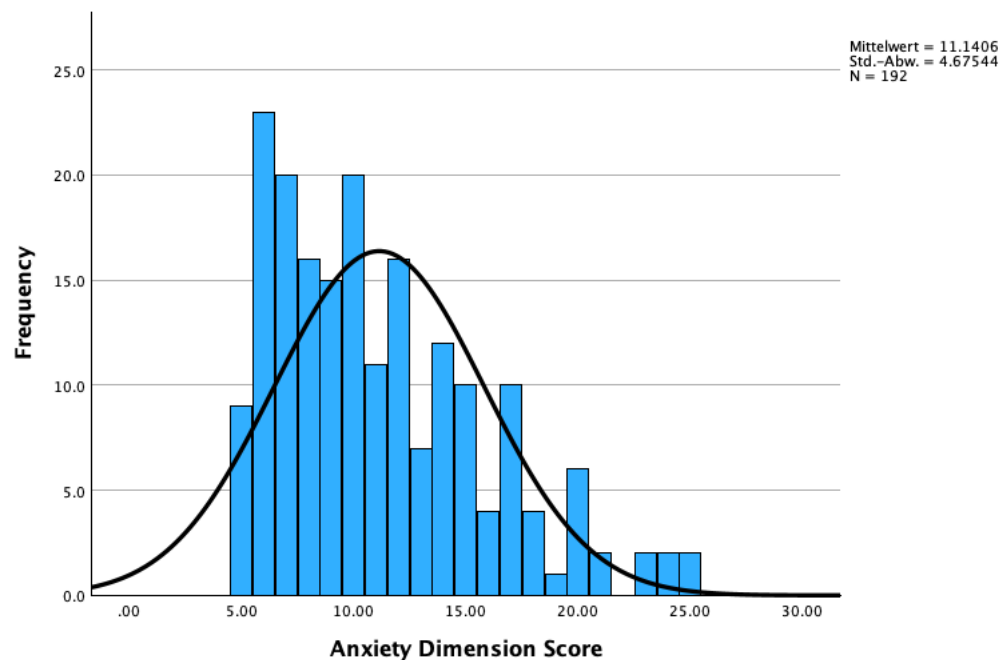


FIGURE D5

Q-Q Diagram of Anxiety Variable (N = 192)

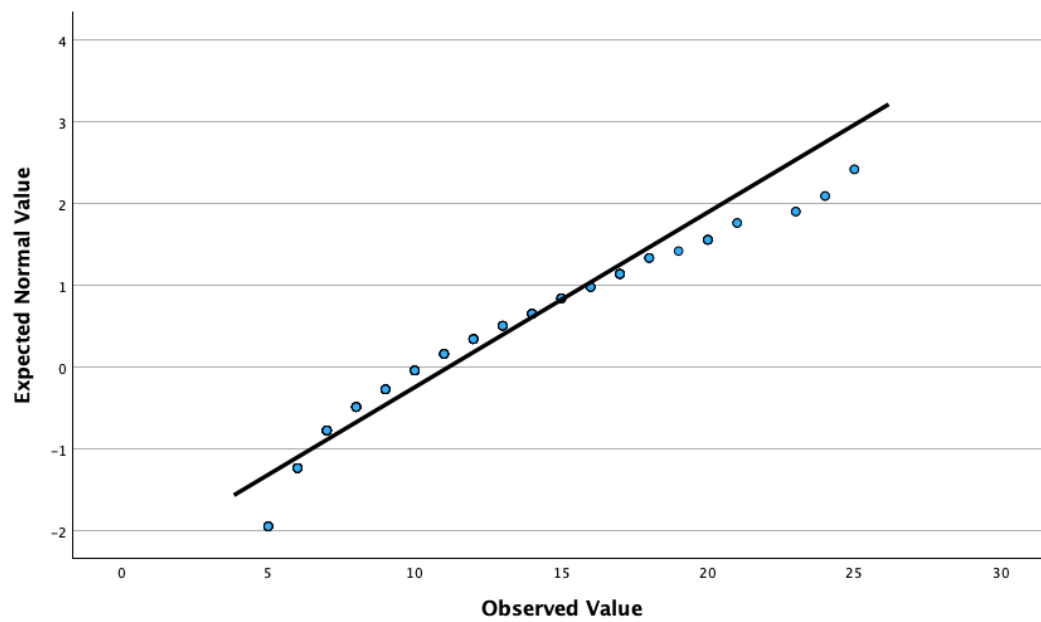


FIGURE D6

Histogram of Infidelity Variable (N = 192)

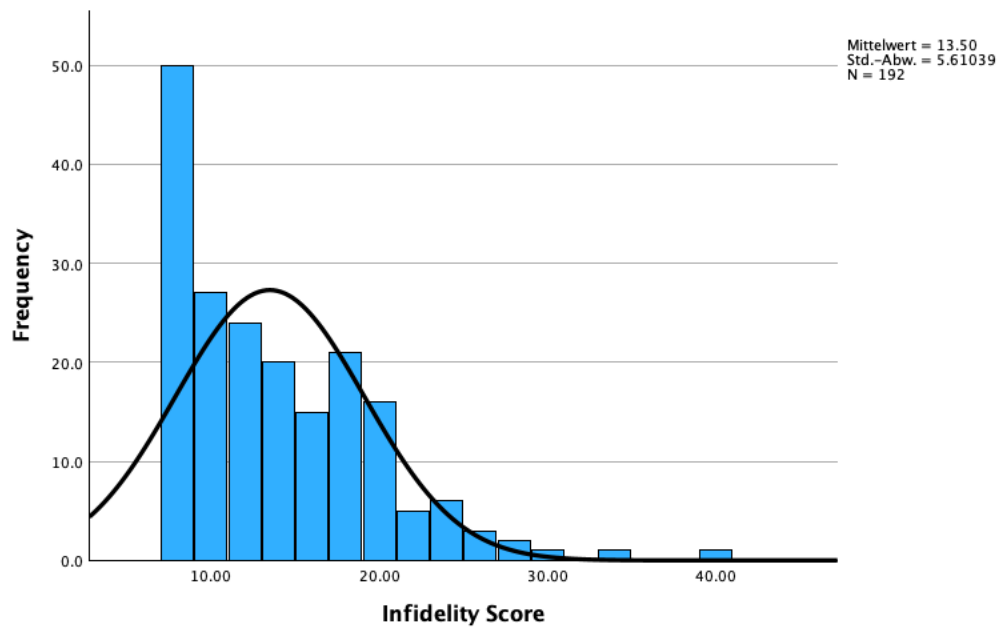
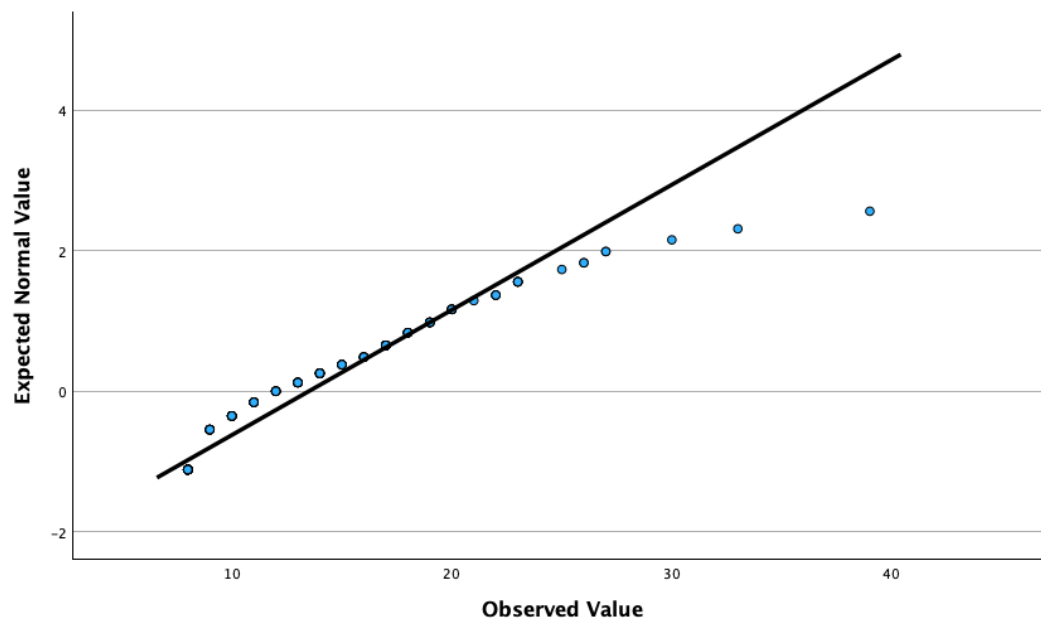


FIGURE D7

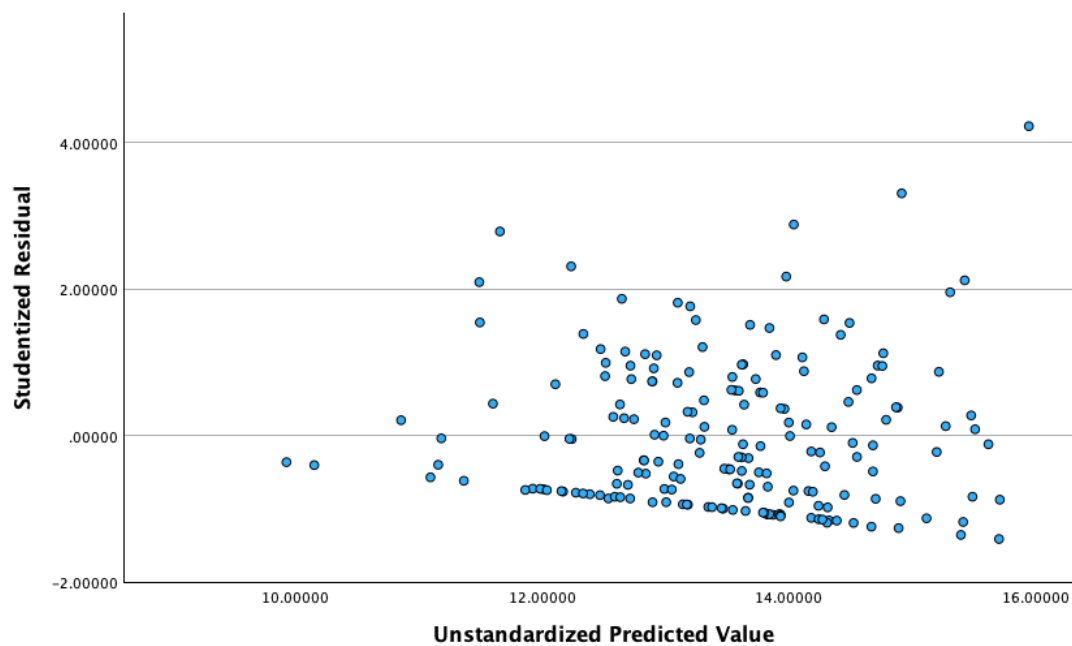
Q-Q Diagram of Infidelity Variable (N = 192)



Homoscedasticity Assumption Check

FIGURE D8

Scatterplot Homoscedasticity (N = 192)



Appendix C

Abstract (English)

Infidelity describes the breach of commitment between romantic partners. This master thesis investigated self-esteem and attachment styles in relation to the tendency toward emotional and sexual infidelity in romantic relationships, focusing primarily on unmarried individuals. Gender-related associations were also examined. Previous research suggests that low self-esteem and anxious attachment are associated with higher infidelity. Cross-sectional data were collected from a final sample of 191 German speaking participants, who completed the Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (PTIS), the revised German version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and the German version of the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (AAS-revised edition) in an online survey. Results revealed a significantly higher tendency toward infidelity among male participants compared to females. No relationship between self-esteem and infidelity tendency was found. However, a reported positive significant correlation between the anxiety dimension and the tendency toward infidelity, with anxiously attached individuals showing the highest mean infidelity scores, suggested an association between anxious attachment and the tendency toward infidelity. Mean-score results indicated gender-related associations between the tendency toward infidelity and anxiously attached women/avoidantly attached men. Male participants had higher mean self-esteem scores than female participants, indicating comparatively lower self-esteem among women. The results support previous research on the associations between self-esteem, attachment styles, and infidelity, also when examining the tendency toward infidelity and including unmarried individuals.

Keywords: romantic relationships, tendency toward infidelity, emotional and sexual infidelity, self-esteem, attachment styles, gender difference, correlation, associations, mean-scores, unmarried individuals

Abstract (German)

Untreue beschreibt den Bruch der partnerschaftlichen Verpflichtung zwischen Liebesbeziehungspartner/innen. Diese Masterarbeit untersuchte den Zusammenhang von Selbstwert und Bindungsstilen mit der Tendenz zur emotionalen und sexuellen Untreue in Liebesbeziehungen, wobei der Fokus insbesondere auf unverheirateten Personen lag. Geschlechterspezifische Zusammenhänge wurden ebenfalls überprüft. Frühere Forschung weist daraufhin, dass niedriger Selbstwert und ängstlicher Bindungsstil mit einer höheren Untreuewahrscheinlichkeit einhergehen. Querschnittsdaten wurden anhand einer finalen Stichprobe von 191 deutschsprachigen Teilnehmer/innen erhoben, welche die Propensity towards Infidelity Scale (PTIS), die revidierte deutsche Fassung der Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) und die revidierte deutsche Version der Adult Attachment Scale (AAS-revised edition) in einer Onlinebefragung ausfüllten. Die Ergebnisse zeigten eine signifikant höhere Tendenz zur Untreue für männliche im Vergleich zu weiblichen Teilnehmer/innen. Zwischen Selbstwert und Tendenz zur Untreue konnte kein Zusammenhang festgestellt werden. Allerdings wurde eine positive signifikante Korrelation zwischen der Angstdimension und der Tendenz zur Untreue berichtet, mit den höchsten Mittelwerten der Untreue bei ängstlich gebundenen Personen, was auf einen Zusammenhang zwischen ängstlichem Bindungsstil und Tendenz zur Untreue hinweist. Die Mittelwertanalysen deuteten zudem auf geschlechtsspezifische Zusammenhänge zwischen der Tendenz zur Untreue und ängstlich gebundenen Frauen bzw. vermeidend gebundenen Männern hin. Männliche Teilnehmer wiesen höhere Selbstwert-Mittelwerte auf als weibliche, was auf einen vergleichsweise geringeren Selbstwert bei Frauen schließen lässt. Insgesamt bestätigen die Ergebnisse frühere Befunde zu den Zusammenhängen von Selbstwert, Bindungsstilen und Untreue, auch bei der Untersuchung der Tendenz zur Untreue sowie unverheirateter Personen.

Schlagworte: Liebesbeziehungen, Tendenz zur Untreue, emotionale und sexuelle Untreue, Selbstwert, Bindungsstile, Geschlechterspezifische Zusammenhänge, Korrelation, Zusammenhänge, Mittelwerte, unverheiratete Personen