



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**EXPLORING FRIENDSHIP ATTACHMENT STYLE, CONFLICT  
RESOLUTION STYLE AND ITS IMPACT**

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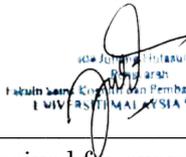
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# **Exploring Friendship Attachment, Conflict Resolution Style and Its Impact**

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to look into Malaysian undergraduate students' friendship attachment styles, conflict resolution styles, and their effects. It focuses on how their friendship attachment style influences how they handle disagreements and how it affects their lives. The interview guide was employed as the major instrument to gather data in this study, which followed the qualitative research technique. Actual data was gathered from seven (7) Malaysian undergraduate students who had close friends and have had disagreements with at least one of them. Thematic analysis was utilised to examine the data, which was used to discover distinct themes from the interviews. For the purposes of data analysis, the interviews were transcribed. The three specific objectives of this study are: (1) to examine friendship attachment style among undergraduate students in Malaysia (2) to explore how friendship attachment style guide individuals in dealing with conflicts in their friendship and (3) to investigate the impact of attachment style. Some of the findings corroborate previous research that secure attachment styles deal positively with conflicts, while others, such as secure attachment styles can deal negatively with conflict and insecure attachment styles can deal positively with conflicts, are rather uncommon. As a result, to explain the latter findings, some recommendations for future research were included. The study's implications and limitations are also examined.

*Keywords:* friendship attachment style, conflict resolution style, attachment style impacts, Malaysian undergraduate students

## ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk melihat gaya keterikatan persahabatan pelajar sarjana muda Malaysia, gaya penyelesaian konflik, dan kesannya. Ia memfokuskan pada cara gaya ikatan persahabatan mereka mempengaruhi cara mereka menangani perselisihan faham dan cara ia mempengaruhi kehidupan mereka. Panduan temu bual digunakan sebagai instrumen utama untuk mengumpul data dalam kajian ini, yang mengikut teknik kajian kualitatif. Data sebenar dikumpul daripada tujuh (7) pelajar sarjana muda Malaysia yang mempunyai kawan rapat dan pernah berselisih faham dengan sekurang-kurangnya seorang daripada mereka. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengkaji data, yang digunakan untuk menemui tema yang berbeza daripada temu bual. Untuk tujuan analisis data, temu bual telah ditranskripsikan. Tiga objektif khusus kajian ini ialah: (1) untuk mengkaji gaya keterikatan persahabatan dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah di Malaysia (2) untuk meneroka bagaimana gaya keterikatan persahabatan membimbing individu dalam menangani konflik dalam persahabatan mereka dan (3) untuk menyiasat kesan keterikatan gaya. Beberapa penemuan menyokong penyelidikan terdahulu bahawa gaya lampiran selamat menangani konflik secara positif, manakala yang lain, seperti gaya lampiran selamat boleh menangani konflik secara negatif dan gaya lampiran tidak selamat boleh menangani konflik secara positif, agak jarang berlaku. Hasilnya, untuk menjelaskan penemuan terakhir, beberapa cadangan untuk penyelidikan masa depan telah disertakan. Implikasi dan batasan kajian juga diteliti.

*Kata kunci:* gaya keterikatan persahabatan, gaya penyelesaian konflik, impak gaya keterikatan, pelajar sarjana Malaysia

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Current chapter describes the background of the study, the problem statement, objectives and research questions, the significance and limitation of the study, the definition of terms used in the study as well as the chapter's summary.

#### **1.1 Background of Study**

As a person, I've watched and experienced many different types of relationships involving two or more people, including familial relationships, friendships, acquaintanceships, and romantic partnerships. Work ties, teacher/student partnerships, and community or group relationships are examples of more complicated types of relationships. As I grew older, I established a variety of friendships and lost a lot of them. After having a number of damaged friendships during my adolescent years, I began to explore the explanation behind it.

People create friendships with others for a variety of reasons, including social support and the ability to lean on and be leaned on. To have this form of friendship, everyone involved in the relationship must find it significant. A meaningful friendship is one in which there is a high level of trust and intimacy. Intimacy in a friendship refers to everyone in the partnership disclosing information about themselves and knowing that the information is acknowledged by the others, allowing them to feel understood and validated by each other (Reis & Shaver, 1988). People will be able to develop close, meaningful, and long-term friendship as a result of this. However, every relationship, including friendships, is guaranteed to experience difficulties at

some point during the relationship's lifespan. It will also have an impact on friendship satisfaction.

The way people navigate through a relationship, including solving conflicts, is influenced by a number of factors. Human nature dictates that previous contacts with other individuals, whether with family or friends, will influence their attitude toward future relationships. As a result, it's fair to say that our initial and earliest interactions as infants influenced the way we interact today. Then, during the early years of our childhood, our interactions with friends reinforce this mentality. If we see the interaction as positive, we are more likely to have pleasant interactions in the future. We are more likely to have bad encounters with others if this is not the case. Bowlby coined the term "attachment theory" to describe this concept.

Attachment patterns acquired in early childhood as a strategy of controlling physical and emotional proximity to caregivers are thought to endure into adult relationships, according to researchers (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Feeny & Noller, 1991). There has been a lot of research done on attachment style and conflict resolution type in friendships. The findings revealed that there is a link between the two factors, however the results were mixed (Bonache, Gonzalez-Mendez, & Krahé, 2016; Hamlet, 2019; Paquette, Rapaport, St. Louis, Vallerand, 2020; Page, 2021). The impact of attachment style on relationship satisfaction, specifically friendship, have also been explored by using a quantitative approach (Braithwaite, Selby, & Fincham, 2011; Rodriguez, Ratanasiripong, Hayashino, & Locks, 2014; Lim, Khoo, & Khoo, 2021).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Numerous studies on attachment style, conflict resolution, and satisfaction have been conducted. To name a few, Hamlet (2019) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between attachment and friendship conflict resolution among college students, Bippus and Rollin (2003) on attachment style differences in relational maintenance and conflict behaviours as perceived by friends and Lim et al. (2021) investigated the role of communication skills in mediating the relationship between attachment style and friendship quality in young adult friendships. The majority of previous studies have been quantitative in nature, focusing solely either on attachment style and conflict resolution or attachment style and relationship satisfaction only. However, none of these studies has conducted a qualitative study that aims to investigate attachment style, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction all at the same time.

Furthermore, most qualitative studies on attachment styles concentrate solely on romantic and marital relationships. According to Gonsalves (2021), while we all have a primary attachment style, it can change depending on how secure we feel with the person. For instance, while some people feel more secure in their marital relationship, it might not be the case for the other. Some individual might feel more secure in a relationship with their friends than they do with their romantic partner. As a result, one's attachment style in a romantic relationship may differ from one's attachment style in other relationships, such as familial relationships, working relationships, and friendships.

Using a qualitative approach, this study attempted to investigate how one's conflict resolution style and perceived friendship satisfaction are shaped by one's friendship attachment type.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

#### **1.3.1 General Objective**

To explore the role of adult friendship attachment style on conflict resolution style and friendship satisfaction among undergraduate students in Malaysia.

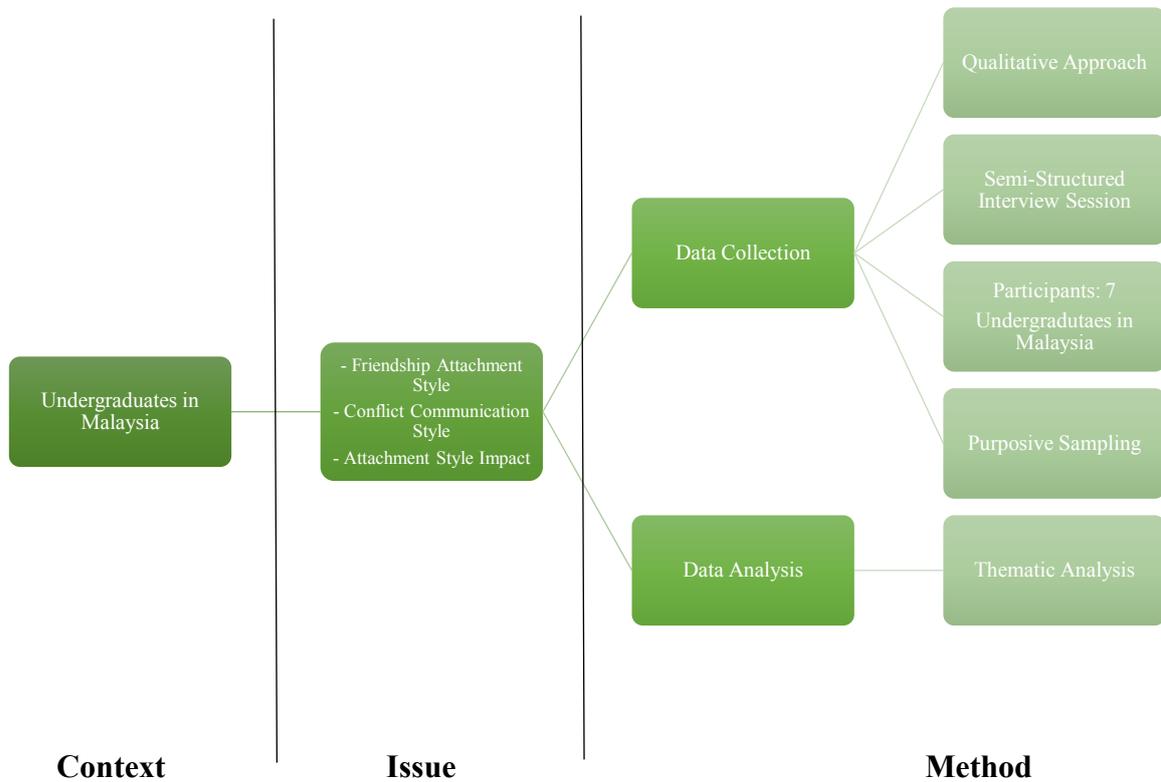
#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To examine friendship attachment style among undergraduate students in Malaysia.
- ii. To explore how friendship attachment style guide individuals in dealing with conflicts in their friendship.
- iii. To investigate the impact of attachment style.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

- i. What are the friendship attachment style among undergraduate students in Malaysia?
- ii. How does friendship attachment style guide individuals in dealing with conflicts in their friendship?
- iii. What are the impact of attachment style?

## 1.5 Research Framework



**Figure 1.5:** Research framework of the study

## 1.6 Significance of Study

### i. Knowledge

This study can serve as a basis and may be important as a guide to generate new ideas for researchers for new research. It can also serve as a reference for future academics interested in learning more about friendship attachment forms and its meditative effects, for example.

### ii. Friendship Maintenance

This research can assist undergraduate students in Malaysia in maintaining their friendships by providing a more detailed picture of their interactions. It's important to note that not all people are aware of the importance of attachment type in determining how they manoeuvre relationships. Adults will be able to use attachment style to understand why their friends are in a relationship the way they are. Friendships will be less likely to be harmed. It can assure friends that conflicts are not necessarily bad, and it will help improve their friendship. In addition, Majd Ara et al. (2017) discovered that issues in interpersonal interactions are one of the causes of depression. Because this study has great potential to help lower the chance of friendship damage, it can also help some people avoid depression.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **1.7.1 Friendship Attachment**

**Conceptual Definition:** Friendship is defined as a relationship between two people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Attachment, according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2021), is "a strong feeling of being emotionally connected to someone or something," or "a feeling of affection or strong connection to someone or something." As a result, friendship attachment is defined as an individual's emotional link with another person in a friendship context.

**Operational Definition:** Friendship attachment is described in this study as Malaysian undergraduate students' level of emotional connection in a friendship based on Bowlby's Attachment Theory.

### **1.7.2 Conflict Resolution**

**Conceptual Definition:** Conflict resolution, according to Shonk (2021), is the informal or formal process by which two or more parties reach a peaceful conclusion to their disagreement.

**Operational Definition:** The way Malaysian undergraduate students deal with issues in their friendship according to Schulze's four conflict communication styles is characterised as conflict resolution in this study.

### **1.8 Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher explains the research's goal, as well as the research's background, based on the problem statement. For a better understanding of this paper in upcoming chapters, definitions of terminologies are also supplied.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter consists of two sections where the first one focus on discussion regarding the theories that will be used in this paper: attachment style and conflict resolution style, and the second focusing on the discussion of past literature of both attachment style and conflict resolution style, as well as attachment style and relationship satisfaction. These will provide a general understanding and solid framework for this research paper's exploration.

#### **2.1 Related Theory**

##### **2.1.1 Attachment Style**

Bowlby (1969, 1973) coined the term "attachment style," which describes how secure a person feels in interpersonal interactions. He proposed that during their first contacts with an adult, newborns develop two basic attitudes: (1) self-esteem and (2) interpersonal trust. The caregiver's behaviour and emotional reactions contributed to the infant's self-esteem. It informs the newborn that he or she is a valued, important, and loved individual, or, on the other hand, that he or she is unimportant and unwanted. Interpersonal trust is concerned with other people and entails general expectations and ideas about others, which is mostly determined by whether the caregiver is regarded as trustworthy by the infants (Branscombe & Baron, 2017).

Four patterns of different attachment styles arose from the two basic attitudes. Attachment styles are divided into two dimensions; secure and insecure attachment styles, in which the latter is further divided into three insecure attachment styles known as the dismissive-avoidant, anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment style. A person

with a secure attachment style has a prominent level of self-esteem and interpersonal trust, as well as the ability to build long-term, stable, and meaningful relationships (Shaver & Brennan, 1992). An anxious-preoccupied attachment style is characterised by poor self-esteem and excessive interpersonal trust. Individuals that have this attachment type crave excessive intimacy and are quick to create bonds. They cling to others, yet they anticipate being rejected at some point because they believe they are unworthy (Whiffen, Aube, Thompson, & Campbell, 2000). Next, poor self-esteem paired with a lack of interpersonal trust results in a fearful-avoidant attachment style, which leads to a lack of close relationships or unhappy ones (Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). They want to be in close connections, but their low self-esteem and lack of confidence in others prevents them from being vulnerable in their communication and relationships (Bartholomew, 1990). Finally, those with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style have an elevated level of self-esteem but a low level of interpersonal trust. This combination drives people to believe they are deserving of great relationships, yet they are afraid of actual closeness because they do not trust easily. They frequently state that they do not desire or require deep relationships with others (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006).

### **2.1.2 Conflict Resolution Style**

Conflict can be addressed in a variety of ways, each of which can be effective or ineffective. To be able to resolve conflicts, one must have specific skills in terms of communication and actions. The majority of people would address their problems through discussion. Communication frequently consists of both verbal and non-verbal communications, with verbal messages encompassing one's choice of words, as well as tone, speech rate, and volume. Nonverbal messages, on the other hand, are frequently cues such as a person's body language, gestures, and eye contact (Lwehabura & Matovelo, 2000). The purpose of

communication in interpersonal interactions is to get literal meaning across, allowing one to express what they are going through and what they need to someone else (Diggory, 2022).

According to Schulze (2019), there are four basic styles of interpersonal conflict communication; assertive, aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive. She further explained that these approaches differ based on two factors: whether direct or indirect communication of thoughts and feelings is used, and how much of the communication is presented in a way that preserves the relationship. Assertive communicators convey their opinions and feelings clearly and frankly in a kind, polite, and relationship-preserving manner. They think that through balancing one's rights with the rights of others, both sides should prevail in the end. In terms of conflict resolution, this communication style is believed to be the most effective. Direct communication is used by aggressive communicators as well. However, one's demands and desires take precedence over maintaining the relationship, and communication is harsh, cruel, and disrespectful as a result. They have a loud, demanding voice and use blame, intimidation, or attack to gain control over others. Passive and passive-aggressive communicators, on the other hand, speak in an oblique and ambiguous manner. The difference is that passive communication seeks to maintain the relationship, but passive-aggressive communication does not. The goal of passive communicators is to avoid overt dispute in order to keep the connection intact. Passive communication can be ascribed to a variety of factors, including a lack of self-esteem, a desire to avoid hurting someone's feelings, and a desire to postpone ending a relationship. Their nonverbal communication frequently demonstrates a lack of eye contact and poor body posture. Passive-aggressive communicators, on the other hand, believe that speaking up is worthless since they lack influence and believe that those in control would not listen. They are most likely to communicate through their body language or a lack of open communication, such as the silent treatment. Because of their dissatisfaction with their

communication being disregarded or misconstrued, they would often come across as vengeful and uncooperative.

Other than that, according to Rahim (1983), resolving conflicts has two dimensions, which are further separated into five distinct techniques to resolving them. The aspects include concern for oneself and concern for others. The five diverse tactics include obliging, controlling, avoiding, compromising, and integrating, with compromising and integrating categorised as good conflict strategies, while the other three are unhealthy. The middle of the five styles is thought to symbolise compromise. Individuals with this style are equally concerned about themselves and others, with the goal of being understanding. They will make every effort to find results that help both sides. Integrating resolution style prioritises self- and other-interests, with the goal of maximising benefits and finding a solution that benefits both sides. Obliging people, who are concerned about others but not so much about themselves, want to be liked by others, therefore they will prioritise others' needs over their own. This resolution style is characterised by anxiety as a result of disagreement and a desire to maintain interpersonal harmony. A person who is more concerned with himself than with others is dominant. It is the polar opposite of obliging, in which the individual prioritises their own wants and refuses to compromise. Last but not least, avoiding is unconcerned for one's own well-being and that of others since they see no benefit in finding a solution and instead choose to retreat.

Exit, loyalty, voice, and neglect are four ways people deal with problems in romantic relationships, according to Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982). Exit refers to when a person quits a relationship, such as when a romantic relationship is reduced to a friendship. When a person detects a dispute, rather than confronting it, they let it linger until it fades away, thinking that the relationship would improve without having to deal with the conflict. This response is known as loyalty. When people actively discuss an issue and try to discover solutions, this is