

Attachment and Relationship Quality Research: A Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer (2015–2025)

Quang Thi Mong Chi^{1*}

¹University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City

¹ University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi

*Corresponding Author: quangmongchi@hcmussh.edu.vn

Citation: Chi, Q. T. M. (2025). Attachment and Relationship Quality Research: A Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer (2015–2025), *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 11(1), 699-711. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v11i1.3929>

Published: January 03, 2026

ABSTRACT

This study provides a bibliometric synthesis of global research on attachment and relationship quality in romantic relationships published between 2015 and 2025, situating this growing body of literature within broader social and cultural transformations of intimate life. Drawing on 890 English-language peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and analyzed using VOSviewer, the study maps publication trends, geographic patterns of knowledge production and collaboration, thematic structures, and emerging research gaps. The findings indicate a marked expansion of publications after 2020, accompanied by a strong concentration of scholarly output in North America and Western Europe, while Asia, Latin America, and Africa remain marginal in global research networks. Thematic clustering reveals five dominant research domains focusing on attachment constructs, relationship quality indicators, developmental contexts, psychological processes, and methodological approaches, with attachment avoidance, relationship satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, and intimacy occupying central positions, whereas commitment and attachment anxiety receive comparatively limited attention. Despite its restriction to English-language Scopus-indexed publications, the study offers an original contribution by elucidating how geographic, cultural, and methodological asymmetries shape contemporary research agendas on intimate relationships, and by identifying critical directions for future research, particularly in relation to cultural diversity, commitment, and longitudinal and dyadic perspectives.

Keywords: Attachment and Relationship Quality Research, Bibliometric, Analysis, VOSviewer

INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships are fundamental to human wellbeing and social functioning across the lifespan, with research demonstrating that relationship quality significantly influences mental health, life satisfaction, and overall psychological adjustment (Reis & Gable, 2003). Among the various theoretical frameworks that have shaped our understanding of romantic relationships, attachment theory originally developed by Bowlby (1969, 1988) and extensively researched through adult attachment perspectives—has emerged as one of the most influential and widely applied approaches in relationship science (Sprecher et al., 1993; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Adult attachment theory posits that early relational experiences with caregivers create internal working models of self and others, which subsequently shape attachment patterns in adult romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). These attachment patterns characterized primarily along dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance influence how individuals seek closeness, respond to intimacy, manage conflict, and experience relationship satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Over the past two decades, attachment theory has been extensively applied to understand diverse aspects of romantic relationships,

including relationship satisfaction (Sprecher et al., 2006), intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991), sexual satisfaction (Brassard et al., 2015), communication patterns (Noller & Feeney, 1994), and conflict resolution processes (Campbell et al., 2001).

Relationship quality operationalized through constructs such as satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, and dyadic adjustment serves as a critical indicator of relationship functioning and individual wellbeing (Fincham & Linfield, 1997; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997). The link between attachment patterns and relationship quality has been extensively documented, with secure attachment generally predicting higher relationship satisfaction and dyadic adjustment, while insecure attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance) are associated with lower relationship quality and increased relationship distress (Sprecher et al., 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). However, the precise mechanisms through which attachment influences relationship quality such as through emotion regulation, communication effectiveness, or dyadic coping remain an active area of investigation.

Emerging adulthood (ages 18–29) is a distinct developmental period characterized by prolonged exploration, identity formation, and relative independence from parental influence (Arnett, 2000, 2015). Young adults in this period navigate critical relationship milestones including dating, forming committed partnerships, and in some cases, marriage. Despite the significance of this developmental stage for relationship formation, research specifically examining attachment and relationship quality in emerging adulthood remains dispersed across multiple disciplines and journals.

As the field of attachment and relationship science has expanded substantially over the past decade, it has become increasingly important to take stock of the research landscape—to identify key trends, influential scholars and institutions, dominant theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and critical research gaps. Bibliometric analysis provides a systematic, quantitative approach to mapping scientific knowledge structures, revealing patterns of collaboration, citation patterns, and the intellectual scaffolding of a research field (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Such analyses have proven valuable in various research domains by revealing research trajectories, identifying influential works and scholars, and highlighting understudied areas.

Despite the extensive application of attachment theory to romantic relationships, no prior study has provided a comprehensive bibliometric synthesis of attachment and relationship quality research that situates the field within broader patterns of social and cultural change over the most recent decade. Existing reviews have predominantly focused on psychological mechanisms or specific relationship outcomes, leaving unanswered questions about how knowledge production in this domain is temporally distributed, thematically structured, and geographically concentrated within the global research system.

Addressing this gap is particularly important in light of ongoing transformations in intimate life associated with globalization, shifting gender norms, technological mediation of relationships, and changing cultural expectations regarding intimacy and commitment. A field-level bibliometric perspective can therefore offer not only a systematic overview of research trends, but also critical insight into how scholarly attention to attachment and relationship quality reflects wider social dynamics and cultural priorities.

Accordingly, the present study employs a bibliometric approach using VOSviewer to analyze **890 peer-reviewed, English-language articles indexed in Scopus and published between 2015 and 2025**. The study aims to:

- a. examine **temporal trends** in research output;
- b. describe **geographic distribution and country-level collaboration patterns**;
- c. identify the field's **thematic structure** through keyword co-occurrence analysis;
- d. characterize the **intellectual foundations** of the literature using citation and journal co-citation analyses; and
- e. integrate these findings to identify **conceptual, geographic, and methodological gaps** to inform future research.

By systematically examining the bibliometric landscape of attachment and relationship quality research, this paper provides a structured overview of the field's current intellectual organization, highlights dominant and underrepresented themes, and delineates key conceptual, geographic, and methodological gaps to guide future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attachment Theory and Adult Romantic Relationships

Attachment theory posits that early interactions between infants and caregivers establish internal working models—cognitive schemas and expectations about the self, others, and relationships—that persist into adulthood and shape relationship functioning (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). While Bowlby's original work focused on infant-caregiver bonds, subsequent research extended attachment theory to adult romantic relationships, demonstrating

that the attachment patterns developed in childhood significantly influence how individuals form, maintain, and navigate romantic partnerships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

In adult romantic relationships, attachment is typically conceptualized along two primary dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998). Individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to be insecure about their relationships, experience heightened fear of abandonment, and chronically seek reassurance and validation from partners. In contrast, individuals high in attachment avoidance prioritize independence and self-reliance, view emotional intimacy as threatening, and maintain emotional distance from partners to preserve autonomy. Securely attached individuals, characterized by low scores on both dimensions, are comfortable with intimacy and interdependence, trust in their partners and themselves, and exhibit greater flexibility in emotional expression and support seeking (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008).

Relationship Quality: Conceptualization and Key Dimensions

Relationship quality encompasses multiple dimensions of relationship health and satisfaction and serves as a primary outcome variable in attachment and relationship research (Sprecher & Feinlee, 1997). Several core dimensions have emerged consistently:

- **Relationship Satisfaction:** individuals' subjective evaluation of their relationship, encompassing emotional contentment, fulfillment, and overall approval of the partnership (Fincham & Linfield, 1997).
- **Dyadic Adjustment:** a multidimensional construct capturing consensus, satisfaction, affectional expression, and cohesion within the couple (Spanier, 1976; Busby et al., 1995).
- **Intimacy:** emotional closeness, self-disclosure, vulnerability, and mutual understanding between partners (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Reis & Shaver, 1988).
- **Commitment:** the intention to maintain a relationship and willingness to invest in its continuation; a crucial but often underexamined dimension (Rusbult, 1980; Adams & Jones, 1997).
- **Sexual Satisfaction:** contentment with the sexual aspects of the relationship, increasingly recognized as an integral component of relationship quality (Brassard et al., 2015).

The Attachment–Relationship Quality Link: Theoretical Mechanisms

Several theoretical pathways explain how attachment shapes relationship quality:

- **Diathesis–Stress Pathway:** insecure attachment creates vulnerability that is activated when couples face stress, leading to maladaptive responses (hyperactivation for anxiety, deactivation for avoidance) (Creasey, 2002).
- **Emotion Regulation Pathway:** secure attachment facilitates adaptive regulation of negative emotions during conflict; insecurity is associated with emotional escalation or suppression that undermines relationship quality (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).
- **Communication and Conflict-Resolution Pathway:** secure attachment promotes open, empathetic communication and collaborative conflict resolution; insecurity predicts negative patterns such as demand–withdraw and defensiveness (Creasey & Hepting, 2001; Noller & Feeney, 1994; Christensen & Heavey, 1990).
- **Dyadic Coping Pathway:** partners' coordinated efforts to manage stress together mediate the association between attachment security and relationship outcomes (Bodenmann et al., 2006).

Attachment and Relationship Quality in Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood (18–29 years) is marked by exploration, instability, and relative independence from parental figures (Arnett, 2000, 2015). Young adults in this period form and maintain romantic partnerships while negotiating identity, education, and career demands. Existing research suggests that secure attachment in emerging adulthood predicts greater relationship satisfaction, commitment, and stability, whereas insecure attachment predicts instability and distress (Feeney, 1999). However, studies specifically targeting emerging adulthood remain relatively limited compared to research on married or non-age-specific adult samples.

Key Research Trends and Contemporary Directions

Recent developments in attachment and relationship quality research include: (1) increased use of dyadic analytical approaches such as the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (Kenny et al., 2006); (2) growing attention to psychological mechanisms (e.g., emotion regulation, communication, dyadic coping) linking attachment to outcomes; (3) extension of attachment frameworks to specific relational challenges (e.g., intimate partner violence, infidelity, technology use); and (4) emerging but still limited cross-cultural research. Despite these advances, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding commitment, cultural diversity, longitudinal designs, and emerging adulthood–specific investigations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Overview

This study employs a systematic bibliometric analysis using a five-step literature review process (Seuring & Müller, 2005; Dohale et al., 2020) to examine 890 peer-reviewed articles on attachment and relationship quality published between 2015 and 2025. Bibliometric analysis enables quantitative mapping of scientific knowledge structures, identification of research trends, and visualization of intellectual connections within a research domain (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). VOSviewer (version 1.6.18) was used to construct distance-based network maps in which nodes represent items (e.g., keywords, authors, journals, countries), node size reflects frequency or impact, and distances indicate the strength of relationships between items (Van Eck & Waltman, 2022).

Research Questions

The analysis is guided by five research questions:

- RQ1. What are the temporal publication trends in attachment and relationship quality research from 2015 to 2025?
- RQ2. What is the geographic distribution of the literature, and how are countries connected through collaboration networks?
- RQ3. What thematic clusters and focal constructs characterize the field, as revealed by keyword co-occurrence patterns?
- RQ4. What are the intellectual foundations of the literature, as reflected in citation profiles and journal co-citation structures?
- RQ5. What conceptual, geographic, and methodological gaps emerge from the integrated bibliometric evidence, and what directions do they suggest for future research?

Step 1: Rationale for Selection of Time Period

The time period 2015–2025 was selected because it: (1) captures a decade of accelerated growth in attachment and relationship research; (2) follows major theoretical and methodological developments; (3) includes the most recent research published up to the time of data collection; and (4) is sufficiently long to identify temporal trends while remaining thematically coherent.

Step 2: Rationale for Selection of Database

The Scopus database was chosen as the sole source of bibliographic data due to its: (1) extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in psychology and related fields; (2) advanced citation-tracking capabilities; (3) integration with reference management tools; and (4) established use in prior bibliometric studies (Pham-Duc et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). The exclusive use of Scopus is acknowledged as a limitation because it excludes non-indexed journals and non-English publications.

Step 3: Article Selection and Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of Scopus was conducted using a Boolean query combining attachment-related and relationship quality-related terms. Articles were filtered by publication year (2015–2025), language (English), and document type (articles and reviews). Inclusion criteria required that studies explicitly examined attachment constructs (e.g., attachment style, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, adult attachment) in relation to romantic relationship outcomes or processes (e.g., satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, intimacy, commitment). Conference papers, dissertations, non-peer-reviewed sources, and non-romantic attachment studies were excluded.

Step 4: Data Extraction and Bibliometric Analysis

For each article, the following data were extracted: year of publication, title, authors, journal, author keywords, index keywords, affiliations, country of affiliation, citation count, and document type. The final dataset comprised 890 articles (862 research articles and 28 reviews), with a total of 12,323 citations. On average, each article received 13.85 citations (median = 7; SD ≈ 22).

Table 1. Summary of Data Collection Process

Stage	Criterion	Count
Initial search	Scopus database, 2015-2025	890 articles
Document type	Articles + Reviews (English language)	890 articles (862 Articles, 28 Reviews)
Citation analysis	Total citations received	12,323 citations

Average citations	Citations per article	13.8 citations
Keyword coverage	Author keywords available	818 articles (91.9%)
Index keywords	Scopus keywords available	475 articles (53.4%)
Final sample	Analyzed in study	890 articles

Descriptive statistics were computed in Excel and Python to examine publication trends, journal distributions, authorship patterns, institutional affiliations, country contributions, and citation distributions. For network analyses, data were imported into VOSviewer to construct keyword co-occurrence maps, co-authorship networks, and country collaboration maps. A minimum occurrence threshold of 10 was applied for keyword co-occurrence analysis to balance comprehensiveness with readability.

Step 5: Identification of Research Gaps

Research gaps were identified by integrating quantitative findings (e.g., absent or underrepresented keywords, countries, or methods) with qualitative interpretation of network structures. Gaps were categorized into conceptual, population, methodological, geographic, and theoretical domains and used to formulate a future research agenda.

Data Quality and Limitations

Strengths of this methodology include use of a comprehensive database, transparent selection criteria, and integration of descriptive statistics with visual network analysis. Limitations include reliance on a single database, the inherent constraints of citation metrics, potential sensitivity to keyword thresholds, and the inability of bibliometric approaches to directly assess theoretical or methodological quality.

RESULTS AND BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Year-wise Publication Trends

The analysis reveals a substantial and sustained increase in research output on attachment and relationship quality over the 2015–2025 period. The number of articles increased from 58 in 2015 to 134 in 2025, representing a 131% increase over the period. The average number of publications per year was 80.9 articles. Notably, 564 articles (63.4% of the total) were published between 2020 and 2025, indicating accelerated research activity in the most recent half decade.

Table 2. Year-wise Publication Trends (2015-2025)

Year	Number of Articles	Percentage	Cumulative %
2015	58	6.5%	6.5%
2016	58	6.5%	13.0%
2017	74	8.3%	21.3%
2018	62	7.0%	28.3%
2019	74	8.3%	36.6%
2020	91	10.2%	46.8%
2021	80	9.0%	55.8%
2022	94	10.6%	66.4%
2023	74	8.3%	74.7%
2024	91	10.2%	84.9%
2025	134	15.1%	100.0%
Total	890	100.0%	

Document Types

Of the 890 articles, 862 (96.9%) were empirical or theoretical research articles and 28 (3.1%) were review papers. This distribution indicates that the field is driven primarily by original empirical work, with a modest but important contribution from integrative reviews and meta-analyses.

Top Journals

The articles were published across 327 journals, but publication was concentrated in a relatively small number of core outlets. The top 15 journals accounted for 317 articles (35.6% of the total).

Table 3. Top 15 Journals by Number of Publications

Rank	Journal Name	Articles	%	Total Citations	Avg Citations
1	Journal of Social and Personal Relationships	55	6.2%	780	14.2
2	Frontiers in Psychology	40	4.5%	672	16.8
3	Journal of Marital and Family Therapy	30	3.4%	518	17.3
4	Current Psychology	24	2.7%	385	16.0
5	Emerging Adulthood	22	2.5%	294	13.4
6	Family Process	20	2.2%	456	22.8
7	Journal of Family Psychology	18	2.0%	282	15.7
8	Personality and Individual Differences	16	1.8%	372	23.2
9	Journal of Adult Development	15	1.7%	223	14.9
10	Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy	14	1.6%	187	13.4
11	Family Relations	14	1.6%	198	14.1
12	Family Journal	14	1.6%	156	11.1
13	Personal Relationships	13	1.5%	303	23.3
14	Journal of Interpersonal Violence	11	1.2%	142	12.9
15	American Journal of Family Therapy	11	1.2%	156	14.2

Geographic Distribution

Sixty-three countries were represented in the dataset. However, research output was highly concentrated in a small number of nations.

Table 4. Top 20 Countries by Research Affiliations

Rank	Country	Affiliations	%
1	United States	789	35.1%
2	Canada	318	14.2%
3	Italy	192	8.5%
4	China	81	3.6%
5	Spain	80	3.6%
6	Portugal	75	3.3%
7	United Kingdom	57	2.5%
8	Turkey	47	2.1%
9	Israel	46	2.0%
10	Iran	45	2.0%
11	Germany	39	1.7%
12	Switzerland	38	1.7%
13	Australia	37	1.6%
14	France	34	1.5%
15	Chile	33	1.5%
16	Netherlands	33	1.5%
17	Poland	28	1.2%
18	Brazil	26	1.2%
19	Norway	23	1.0%
20	India	15	0.7%

The United States and Canada combined accounted for 49.3% of all affiliations. European countries collectively contributed approximately 25.0% of affiliations. Asian, South American, and African countries were comparatively underrepresented.

The geographic collaboration pattern is further illustrated in Figure 3, which depicts a country co-authorship network based on countries contributing at least five documents. The United States forms the largest node with extensive links to Canada, Italy, the United Kingdom, China, and several European countries, underscoring its role as the primary hub in the global collaboration network. Canada and Italy appear as secondary hubs with strong ties to both North American and European partners, whereas emerging contributors such as China, Spain, and Portugal are positioned on the periphery but show increasing linkage densities. Notably, collaborative ties between North America and Western Europe are dense and reciprocal, reflecting well-established research partnerships facilitated by shared theoretical frameworks, research traditions, and funding opportunities.

In contrast, countries in Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, and Africa occupy peripheral positions with fewer and weaker collaborative links. This pattern may reflect differences in research capacity, funding availability, language barriers, or divergent priorities within psychological and family science research. The relative underrepresentation of non-Western countries in the co-authorship network highlights the need for greater international collaboration and cross-cultural research to enhance the generalizability of attachment and relationship

attachment constructs, relationship quality indicators, developmental contexts, psychological processes, and methodological approaches). The network map visually highlights the central role of attachment, relationship satisfaction, and dyadic adjustment as hubs that connect to more specialized topics such as sexual satisfaction, intimate partner violence, self-esteem, and communication.

In this visualization, five distinct research clusters emerge. The largest cluster (red) encompasses core attachment constructs—attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, insecure attachment, romantic attachment, and secure attachment—closely linked to intimacy, trust, love, and sexual satisfaction. A second cluster (green) centers on relationship quality indicators including relationship satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, marital satisfaction, and commitment, integrated with dyadic processes such as communication, dyadic coping, and the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM). The third cluster (blue) highlights developmental contexts and risk factors such as emerging adulthood, adolescence, college students, and intimate partner violence. A fourth cluster (yellow) focuses on psychological resources and adjustment mechanisms including social support, emotion regulation, self-esteem, and coping strategies. Finally, a small cluster (purple) emphasizes security and safety dimensions within relationships. The proximity and density of connections among these clusters underscore the interdisciplinary and integrative nature of contemporary attachment and relationship research, illustrating how foundational attachment processes are linked to diverse relational outcomes, developmental stages, and psychological mechanisms.

Citation Analysis

The 890 articles accumulated 12,323 citations (mean = 13.85; median = 7). Citation distribution was highly skewed: 42.5% of articles received five or fewer citations, whereas 1.1% (10 articles) were cited more than 100 times.

Table 5. Most Influential Articles (Top 10 by Citation Count)

Rank	Citations	Authors & Year	Title	Journal
1	308	Estevez et al. (2017)	Attachment and emotion regulation in substance addictions and behavioral addictions	Journal of Behavioral Addictions
2	158	Günther-Bel et al. (2020)	A mixed-method study of individual, couple, and parental functioning during COVID-19	Family Process
3	145	Candel et al. (2019)	Insecure attachment and relationship satisfaction: A meta-analysis	Personality and Individual Differences
4	129	Fairbairn et al. (2018)	A meta-analysis of longitudinal associations between substance use and attachment security	Psychological Bulletin
5	128	Sockol (2018)	A systematic review of interpersonal psychotherapy for perinatal women	Journal of Affective Disorders
6	120	Rostad et al. (2016)	The association between reflective functioning and parent-child relationship quality	Journal of Child and Family Studies
7	113	McDaniel et al. (2019)	Daily technology interruptions and emotional and relational well-being	Computers in Human Behavior
8	109	Burgess-Moser et al. (2016)	Changes in relationship-specific attachment in Emotionally Focused Therapy	Journal of Marital and Family Therapy
9	103	Jorgensen et al. (2017)	The financial behavior of emerging adults	Journal of Family and Economic Issues
10	100	McDaniel et al. (2017)	Infidelity-related behaviors on social media and marital satisfaction	Computers in Human Behavior

In addition to numerical indicators, the intellectual structure of the field is illustrated in Figure 2, which presents a journal co-citation network based on sources cited at least 20 times. Journals such as *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Attachment and Human Development*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, and *Family Process* occupy central positions with large nodes and dense connections, indicating that they function as core outlets that anchor the theoretical and empirical development of attachment and relationship quality research. Peripheral but strongly linked sources such as *Computers in Human Behavior* reflect newer streams connecting attachment and relationship processes with technology use, while outlets like *Journal of Sex Research* and *Archives of Sexual Behavior* highlight the integration of sexual satisfaction and intimacy into the broader attachment framework.

The co-citation structure reveals several disciplinary clusters. One cluster groups journals in social and personality psychology (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*), reflecting the theoretical roots of attachment theory in personality research. A second

cluster encompasses family and relationship science outlets (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Process*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Personal Relationships*), which focus on couple dynamics, family functioning, and developmental contexts. A third cluster includes clinical and therapeutic journals (*Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*), illustrating the translation of attachment theory into clinical practice. Finally, specialty journals addressing specific relational phenomena—such as sexual behavior, intimate partner violence, and emerging adulthood—occupy bridging positions, connecting foundational theory with applied and context-specific research. This multi-cluster structure underscores the field's theoretical breadth and its ability to integrate insights across psychological, developmental, clinical, and applied domains.

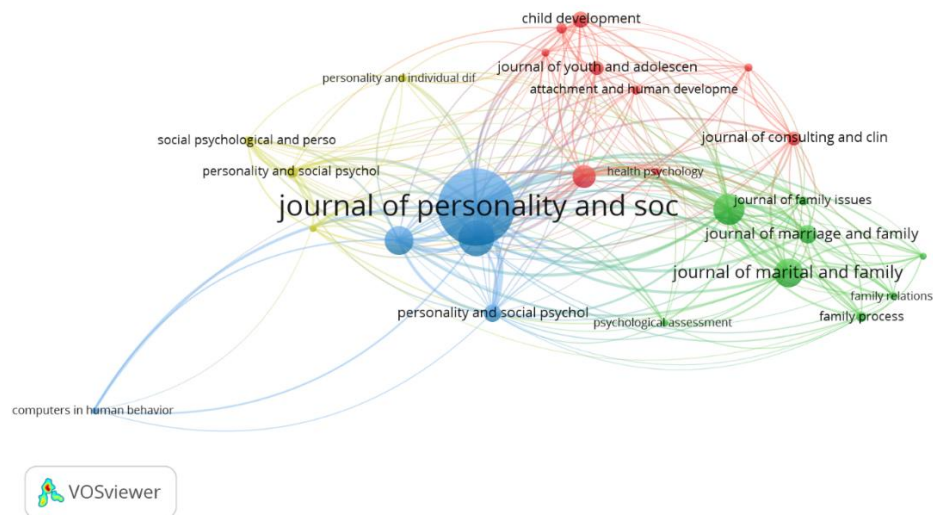


Figure 3. Journal co-citation network (minimum 20 citations per source) showing clusters of core outlets in social, developmental, and family psychology. Node size represents number of citations; proximity and link strength indicate co-citation frequency. Journals positioned centrally serve as foundational sources cited together across multiple studies, whereas peripheral journals reflect emerging or specialized research streams. The network illustrates how attachment and relationship quality research draws on a diverse intellectual base spanning personality, social, developmental, clinical, and applied psychology.

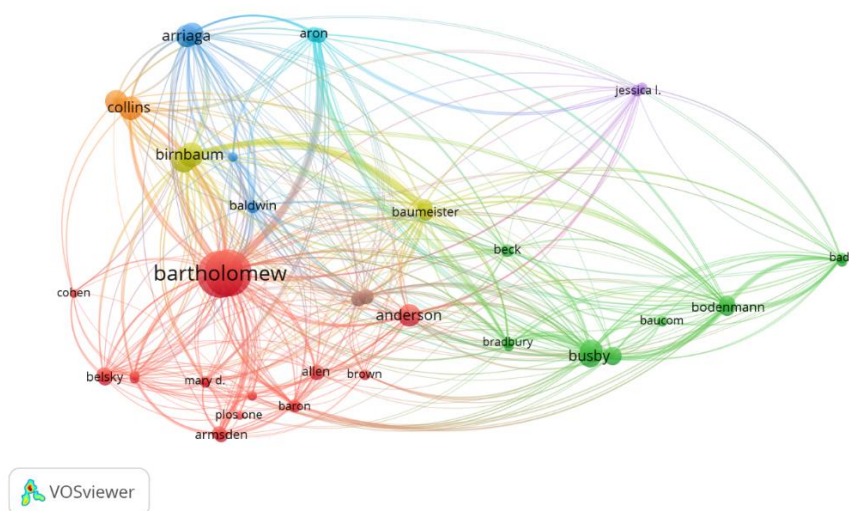


Figure 4. Co-citation network of most influential cited authors (minimum 50 citations per author). Node size reflects total citation frequency; link thickness indicates co-citation strength; and colors denote clusters of authors frequently cited together. Bartholomew (largest red node) represents foundational work on adult attachment measurement, co-cited with Belsky, Cohen, Plosone, Baron, Armsden, and others in the developmental/clinical cluster. A second cluster (green) centers on Busby, Bodenmann, Beck, Baucom, and Bradbury, reflecting couple therapy and relationship intervention research. A third cluster (blue) includes Aron, Arriaga, Baldwin, and Birnbaum, representing social-psychological perspectives on romantic relationships. A fourth cluster (orange) features Collins, Birnbaum, and Anderson, focusing on attachment processes in

emerging adulthood and sexuality. Finally, a small purple cluster (Jessica L. and others) highlights emerging contributors bridging multiple research traditions.

This author co-citation map complements the journal co-citation analysis (Figure 2) by identifying the most influential individual scholars whose work has shaped the intellectual foundation of attachment and relationship quality research. The prominence of Bartholomew underscores the lasting impact of her four-category model of adult attachment (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, fearful-avoidant), which extended Bowlby's and Ainsworth's early frameworks to adult romantic relationships. The clustering pattern reveals distinct but interconnected research traditions: developmental and clinical psychology (red), couple therapy and intervention science (green), social and personality psychology (blue), and emerging adulthood and sexuality (orange). Cross-cluster links illustrate the integrative nature of the field, with scholars such as Bartholomew, Collins, and Busby serving as intellectual bridges connecting theory, measurement, mechanism, and intervention.

DISCUSSION

Overview of the Bibliometric Landscape

This bibliometric analysis provides a decade-long synthesis (2015–2025) of research examining attachment and relationship quality in romantic relationships. The findings depict a rapidly expanding and increasingly consolidated field, anchored in attachment theory and oriented toward relational processes and dyadic outcomes. The pronounced growth in publication volume—particularly after 2020—suggests heightened scholarly attention to intimate relationships amid broader societal changes affecting family life, emotional wellbeing, and interpersonal connection.

From a social–cultural perspective, this expansion reflects growing academic concern with how individuals form, maintain, and evaluate intimate relationships in contexts characterized by social acceleration, uncertainty, and changing norms surrounding intimacy, commitment, and partnership formation. The consolidation of attachment theory as a dominant framework indicates not only its psychological utility, but also its resonance with contemporary cultural narratives emphasizing emotional security, self-regulation, and relational competence.

Across analyses, three defining structural features emerge: (1) sustained temporal growth, (2) geographic concentration of knowledge production, and (3) thematic convergence around a limited set of core constructs. Together, these features suggest a mature research field whose intellectual boundaries are well established, yet unevenly shaped by global patterns of academic participation.

Conceptual Emphases and Theoretical Imbalances

The keyword co-occurrence analysis indicates that attachment avoidance occupies a more central position in the literature than attachment anxiety, despite the theoretical centrality of both dimensions within contemporary attachment models. This imbalance may reflect a broader cultural preoccupation with autonomy, emotional self-sufficiency, and relational distance—values that are especially salient in Western, individualist societies where much of the research is produced.

From a psychological standpoint, both avoidance and anxiety are associated with impaired relationship functioning through distinct regulatory strategies. However, the relative marginalization of attachment anxiety in the keyword landscape suggests that hyperactivating strategies—such as reassurance-seeking, emotional volatility, and fear of abandonment—may receive less sustained scholarly attention than deactivating strategies characterized by emotional withdrawal and intimacy avoidance.

This pattern has important social implications. By privileging avoidance over anxiety, the literature may implicitly normalize emotional distancing as a culturally intelligible relational difficulty, while rendering emotional dependency or vulnerability less visible as a legitimate object of scientific inquiry. Such selectivity risks narrowing theoretical understanding of relational insecurity and may obscure culturally diverse expressions of attachment-related distress.

Relationship Quality and the Marginalization of Commitment

Relationship satisfaction and dyadic adjustment emerge as dominant indicators of relationship quality across the bibliometric landscape, whereas commitment appears comparatively peripheral despite its central role in classical relationship theories. Psychologically, satisfaction reflects subjective evaluations of relational wellbeing, while commitment captures motivational and structural investments that sustain relationships over time.

From a social–cultural perspective, this imbalance may reflect broader transformations in intimate life associated with individualization and relational fluidity. In many contemporary societies, romantic relationships are increasingly evaluated through the lens of personal fulfillment rather than long-term obligation, durability, or collective

expectations. As a result, research emphasis on satisfaction may mirror cultural shifts toward expressive individualism, in which relationships are maintained primarily insofar as they meet emotional and personal needs.

The relative neglect of commitment therefore represents not only a theoretical gap but also a missed opportunity to examine how social norms, economic conditions, and cultural expectations shape decisions to remain in or exit relationships. Greater attention to commitment processes—particularly in emerging adulthood—could illuminate how attachment orientations interact with social constraints, moral obligations, and life-course transitions.

Mechanisms Linking Attachment and Relationship Quality

The bibliometric findings reveal growing attention to psychological and interpersonal mechanisms linking attachment patterns to relationship outcomes, including emotion regulation, communication, and dyadic coping. These constructs function as conceptual bridges connecting individual attachment orientations with dyadic relationship quality.

Importantly, the prominence of dyadic and interactional keywords signals a methodological and epistemological shift toward viewing romantic relationships as interdependent systems rather than aggregates of individual traits. This shift aligns with broader social-scientific perspectives emphasizing relationality, mutual influence, and co-construction of meaning within intimate partnerships.

Nevertheless, while such mechanisms are increasingly acknowledged, the literature remains limited in its explicit testing of how these processes unfold across time and social contexts. From a social-cultural standpoint, mechanisms such as communication or emotion regulation are not value-neutral skills but are shaped by culturally specific norms regarding emotional expression, gender roles, and interpersonal boundaries. Failure to situate these mechanisms within cultural contexts may constrain their explanatory power and limit cross-cultural generalizability.

Geographic Concentration and Cultural Inequalities in Knowledge Production

The geographic distribution of research output reveals a pronounced concentration in North America and Western Europe, which together dominate both publication volume and international collaboration networks. Although contributions from Asia and Latin America are increasing, these regions remain peripheral within the global structure of attachment and relationship quality research.

This concentration raises important questions about whose relational experiences are represented—and whose are marginalized—in the scientific literature. Attachment theory, as operationalized in much of the existing research, is deeply rooted in Western cultural assumptions emphasizing autonomy, emotional disclosure, and individual choice. Relationship quality indicators such as satisfaction and intimacy may hold different meanings in collectivist or relationally interdependent societies, where family embeddedness, obligation, and social harmony are prioritized.

From a cultural analysis perspective, the current bibliometric structure reflects broader inequalities in global knowledge production, including disparities in research funding, publication access, and linguistic dominance. Addressing these imbalances requires not only expanding geographic representation, but also critically examining the cultural assumptions embedded within dominant theoretical models.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J. M., & Jones, W. H. (1997). The conceptualization of marital commitment: An integrative analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(5), 1177–1196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1177>
- Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. *Journal of Informetrics*, 11(4), 959–975. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007>
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>
- Arnett, J. J. (2015). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Bodenmann, G., Pihet, S., & Kayser, K. (2006). The relationship between dyadic coping and marital quality: A 2-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(3), 485–493. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.20.3.485>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. Basic Books.
- Brassard, A., Dupuy, E., Bergeron, S., & Shaver, P. R. (2015). Attachment insecurities and women's sexual function and satisfaction: The mediating roles of sexual self-esteem, sexual anxiety, and sexual assertiveness. *Journal of Sex Research*, 52(1), 110–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2013.838744>
- Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 46–76). Guilford Press.

- Bretherton, I., & Munholland, K. A. (2008). Internal working models in attachment relationships: Elaborating a central construct in attachment theory. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed., pp. 102–127). Guilford Press.
- Burgess-Moser, M. B., Johnson, S. M., Dalgleish, T. L., Lafontaine, M. F., Wiebe, S. A., & Tasca, G. A. (2016). Changes in relationship-specific attachment in emotionally focused couple therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 42(2), 231–245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12139>
- Busby, D. M., Christensen, C., Crane, D. R., & Larson, J. H. (1995). A revision of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale for use with distressed and nondistressed couples: Construct hierarchy and multidimensional scales. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 21(3), 289–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.1995.tb00163.x>
- Campbell, L., Simpson, J. A., Kashy, D. A., & Fletcher, G. J. (2001). Ideal standards, the self, and flexibility of ideals in close relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(4), 447–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167201274006>
- Candel, O.-S., & Turliuc, M. N. (2019). Insecure attachment and relationship satisfaction: A meta-analysis of actor and partner associations. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 147, 190–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.04.037>
- Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. R. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Christensen, A., & Heavey, C. L. (1990). Gender and social structure in the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(1), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.1.73>
- Creasey, G. (2002). Associations between working models of attachment and conflict management behavior in romantic couples. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 49(3), 365–375. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.49.3.365>
- Creasey, G., & Hepting, P. (2001). The relation between individual differences in attachment and conflict management. *Attachment & Human Development*, 3(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730010024006>
- Descutner, C. J., & Thelen, M. H. (1991). Development and validation of a Fear-of-Intimacy Scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 3(2), 218–225. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.3.2.218>
- Dohale, V., Verma, P., Gunasekaran, A., & Akarte, M. (2020). Exploring the relationship between TQM and Industry 4.0: A systematic literature review and future research agenda. *The TQM Journal*, 32(6), 1542–1562. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TQM-02-2020-0033>
- Estevez, A., Jauregui, P., Sanchez-Marcos, I., Lopez-Gonzalez, H., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Attachment and emotion regulation in substance addictions and behavioral addictions. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 6(4), 534–544. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.6.2017.086>
- Fairbairn, C. E., Briley, D. A., Kang, D., Fraley, R. C., Hankin, B. L., & Ariss, T. (2018). A meta-analysis of longitudinal associations between substance use and interpersonal attachment security. *Psychological Bulletin*, 144(5), 532–555. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000141>
- Feeney, J. A. (1999). Adult romantic attachment and couple relationships. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 355–377). Guilford Press.
- Fincham, F. D., & Linfield, K. J. (1997). A new look at marital quality: Can spouses feel positive and negative about their marriage? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 11(4), 489–502. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.11.4.489>
- Günther-Bel, C., Vilaregut, A., Carratala, E., Torras-Garat, S., & Pérez-Testor, C. (2020). A mixed-method study of individual, couple, and parental functioning during the state-regulated COVID-19 lockdown in Spain. *Family Process*, 59(3), 1060–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12585>
- Jorgensen, B. L., Foster, D., Jensen, J. F., & Vieira, E. (2017). The financial behavior of emerging adults: A family financial socialization approach. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 38(1), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-015-9481-0>
- Kenny, D. A., Kashy, D. A., & Cook, W. L. (2006). *Dyadic data analysis*. Guilford Press.
- Kumar, R., Saxena, S., Kumar, V., Prabha, V., Kumar, R., & Kukreti, A. (2023). Service innovation research: A bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer. *Competitiveness Review: An International Business Journal*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CR-01-2023-0010>
- McDaniel, B. T., Drouin, M., & Cravens, J. D. (2017). Do you have anything to hide? Infidelity-related behaviors on social media sites and marital satisfaction. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 88–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.031>
- McDaniel, B. T., Galovan, A. M., Cravens, J. D., & Drouin, M. (2019). “Technoference” and implications for mothers’ and fathers’ couple and coparenting relationship quality. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 80, 303–313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.11.019>
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. Guilford Press.
- Noller, P., & Feeney, J. A. (1994). Relationship satisfaction, attachment, and nonverbal accuracy in early marriage. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 18(3), 199–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02170026>

- Pham-Duc, B., Nguyen, P. T., Tran, T. H. M., Pham, H. H., & Nguyen, H. T. (2022). Bibliometric review on sustainable supply chain management: Overview from 2006 to 2020. *Sustainability*, *14*(1), 472. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14010472>
- Reis, H. T., & Gable, S. L. (2003). Toward a positive psychology of relationships. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 129–159). American Psychological Association.
- Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 367–389). Wiley.
- Rostad, W. L., Silverman, P., & McDonald, M. K. (2016). The association between reflective functioning and parent-child relationship quality. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *25*(7), 2164–2177. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-016-0388-7>
- Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *16*(2), 172–186. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(80\)90007-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(80)90007-4)
- Seuring, S., & Müller, M. (2005). From a literature review to a conceptual framework for sustainable supply chain management. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *16*(15), 1699–1710. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2008.04.020>
- Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., & Nelligan, J. S. (1992). Support seeking and support giving within couples in an anxiety-provoking situation: The role of attachment styles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *62*(3), 434–446. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.62.3.434>
- Sockol, L. E. (2018). A systematic review and meta-analysis of interpersonal psychotherapy for perinatal women. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *232*, 316–328. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.01.018>
- Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *38*(1), 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/350547>
- Sprecher, S., & Felmlee, D. (1997). The balance of power in romantic heterosexual couples over time from “his” and “her” perspectives. *Sex Roles*, *37*(5–6), 361–379. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025601423031>
- Sprecher, S., Felmlee, D., Metts, S., & Cupach, W. (1993). Perceived understanding in relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *10*(3), 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407593103005>
- Sprecher, S., Felmlee, D., Schmeekle, M., & Shu, X. (2006). No breakup occurs on an island: Social networks and relationship dissolution. In M. A. Fine & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of divorce and relationship dissolution* (pp. 457–478). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, *84*(2), 523–538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3>