

The Relationship Between Childhood Emotional Neglect and Intimacy Avoidance in Women: The Mediating Roles of Rejection Sensitivity, Self-Compassion, and Attachment Anxiety


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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the introduction paragraph beginning “One of the most important relational consequences of childhood emotional neglect is intimacy avoidance,” the construct of intimacy avoidance is introduced as resistance to closeness, vulnerability, and disclosure. However, the measure used later is the Fear of Intimacy Scale, which may capture fear, discomfort, and anticipated relational anxiety rather than behavioral avoidance specifically. The authors should align the terminology more precisely by explaining whether “intimacy avoidance” is being used as a behavioral manifestation of fear of intimacy or as a broader relational outcome.

In the methods paragraph stating that participants were recruited through “social media platforms, community organizations, women’s support networks, and university mailing lists across several Canadian provinces,” the recruitment procedure is too general. The authors should specify the exact platforms, provinces, recruitment dates, advertisement wording, eligibility screening procedure, whether incentives were offered, and how duplicate submissions were detected. These details are necessary to evaluate sampling bias and reproducibility.

In the participant screening paragraph, the manuscript states that participants with “incomplete questionnaires exceeding 10% missing responses” were excluded. The authors should explain how missing data below this threshold were handled, such

as listwise deletion, mean substitution, expectation-maximization, or full information maximum likelihood. Since SEM is sensitive to missingness mechanisms, the authors should also report whether data were missing completely at random and provide the number of exclusions for each screening reason.

In the demographic paragraph of the findings, the authors report education, marital status, and employment status, but the methods earlier claim that the sample represented diverse backgrounds. Important characteristics such as ethnicity, province, immigration status, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, relationship duration, parental status, and current relationship status are not sufficiently described. These variables are especially relevant in a Canadian sample and could influence childhood adversity reporting, attachment, self-compassion, and intimacy outcomes.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the attachment theory paragraph, the manuscript states that neglectful caregiving contributes to insecure attachment patterns “characterized by anxiety, avoidance, or both,” but the model includes only attachment anxiety and excludes attachment avoidance. This creates a theoretical gap because intimacy avoidance is conceptually close to attachment avoidance. The authors should justify why attachment avoidance was not included, or alternatively test whether attachment avoidance provides incremental explanatory value beyond attachment anxiety.

In the introduction paragraph discussing attachment anxiety, the manuscript notes that attachment-anxious individuals “often desire closeness and connection” but may undermine relationship quality. This is an important theoretical point, yet the link from attachment anxiety to intimacy avoidance requires deeper explanation because anxiety is usually associated with hyperactivation and pursuit of closeness rather than deactivation. The authors should explain why anxious attachment is expected to produce avoidance in this model, perhaps through fear-driven withdrawal, rejection anticipation, or defensive distancing.

In the paragraph introducing rejection sensitivity, the authors define it as the tendency to “anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to interpersonal rejection.” This construct is highly relevant, but the manuscript should clarify whether rejection sensitivity is treated as a cognitive-affective mediator distinct from attachment anxiety or as an overlapping manifestation of attachment insecurity. Given the strong theoretical and empirical overlap, the introduction should explicitly justify their simultaneous inclusion in the same SEM model.

In the self-compassion section of the introduction, the authors present self-compassion as a protective mechanism but do not sufficiently specify the expected direction of its serial relationship with attachment anxiety. The paragraph stating that diminished self-compassion “may contribute to attachment anxiety and rejection sensitivity” suggests multiple possible pathways, but the tested model appears to position self-compassion as a predictor of attachment anxiety, not rejection sensitivity. The authors should align the conceptual rationale with the final structural model and state all hypothesized serial paths clearly before the methods section.

In the literature gap paragraph beginning “Although previous studies have independently examined childhood maltreatment, attachment insecurity, self-compassion, and relationship outcomes,” the rationale for focusing specifically on adult women is underdeveloped. The statement that intimacy and emotional connectedness are “particularly salient” for women risks appearing essentialist unless supported by a more nuanced gender-sensitive argument. The authors should discuss women’s relational vulnerability in relation to socialization, trauma exposure, help-seeking, or gendered expectations rather than implying that intimacy is inherently more central to women.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

2. Revised



Editor's decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.