

WHEN THE RECIPIENT WITHDRAWS: HOW ROMANTIC PARTNER'S AVOIDANCE MODERATES THE LINK BETWEEN ATTACHMENT STYLES AND GIFT-GIVING PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Gift giving in romantic relationships can be experienced as both pleasurable and obligatory. Drawing on attachment theory, this study examines how gift-giver attachment orientations influence gift-giving outcomes through relational and psychological mechanisms, and whether these effects are conditioned by recipient attachment avoidance. Survey data from individuals in committed romantic relationships were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). A survey sample size of 120 was used. Two models were tested. Model A examined the effects of gift-giver avoidance on gift-giving pleasure via relationship satisfaction, while Model B investigated the effects of gift-giver anxiety on gift-giving obligation through relationship satisfaction and self-esteem, including moderation and moderated mediation effects.

Results indicate that gift-giver avoidance does not exert direct effects on gift-giving pleasure; however, relationship satisfaction strongly predicts pleasure, and its mediating role varies across levels of recipient avoidance. In contrast, gift-giver anxiety is associated with greater gift-giving obligation, primarily through reduced self-esteem. Overall, the findings highlight indirect and dyadically contingent pathways through which attachment insecurity shapes gift-giving experiences.

1. Introduction

The exchange of gifts between romantic partners plays an important role in signaling affection, maintaining closeness and expressing relational intentions (Belk & Coon, 1991; Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel, 1999). The gift does not only shape perceptions through its material value; it functions as a means to influence emotional experiences as well as relationship dynamics. This is due to the fact that individuals interpret gifts through the lens of personal needs, expectations from the relationship and relational history (Gino & Flynn, 2011; Baskin, Wakslak, Trope, & Novemsky, 2014). Recent body of research has confirmed that gifts in romantic relationships have a significant symbolic meaning. It influences the gift-giver's feelings of appreciation, satisfaction or stress depending on the type of interaction (Puate-Diaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2024; Chinchanchokchai & Pusaksrikit, 2023).

Attachment theory is a valuable framework to understand the afore-mentioned interpersonal processes. Bowlby (1988) established that individuals display different levels of comfort with closeness depending on their early relational experiences. This forms a pattern of attachment anxiety or avoidance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). Individuals with attachment avoidance display emotional distance, high need for independence and manage intimacy with deactivating strategies (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). The avoidant individuals' tendency to suppress emotional expression and limit closeness is proven to weaken intimacy and undermine relational satisfaction with the passage of time (Simpson & Rholes, 2017). Recent literature has also confirmed that avoidant attachment predicts more suppression of emotional expression and weakened intimacy in a romantic relationship (Mosannenzadeh, Luijten, Maciejewski, Wiewel, & Karremans, 2024). Consequently, we can conclude that attachment avoidance determines how romantic partners respond to relational gestures, including gift exchanges.

It is imperative to highlight here that prior research on gift giving has largely focused on the attachment style of gift-giver. Research has shown that anxious and avoidant gift-givers experience feelings of obligation or reduced pleasure depending on their relational needs (Nguyen & Munch, 2011). However, recipient's attachment orientation and its impact has been given much less attention, even though it plays an important role in shaping the gift-giver's perceptions (Nguyen & Munch, 2014). For example, avoidantly attached individuals have a tendency to downplay affection and show resistance against intimacy enhancing behaviors (Wei, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005), so they may respond to gifts in a way that reduces the pleasure of gift-giver. Therefore, recipient's attachment style becomes an important factor in shaping the gift-giving perception of the romantic partner.

The study at hand builds on this gap by incorporating the impact of recipient's avoidance, and studying how it moderates the link between gift-giver's attachment styles and their gift-giving perceptions. For this purpose, we have proposed two models. The first model examines how gift-giver's avoidance impacts gift-giving pleasure while being mediated by relationship satisfaction, with recipient's avoidance moderating this pathway. The second model contemplates the impact of gift-giver's anxiety on gift-giving obligation, while relationship satisfaction and self-esteem are acting as mediators. Again, recipient's avoidance has been incorporated as a moderator. This study aims to provide a more thorough understanding of the interpersonal mechanisms underlying gift-giving perceptions.

Finally, this study also aims to make contextual contribution by examining these dynamics in a collectivist cultural context. Romantic relationships in collectivist cultures emphasize more on maintaining harmony, upholding interdependence and fulfilling relational obligations (Chinchanchokchai & Pusaksrikit, 2023; Memon, et al., 2021). It can be deduced that gift-giving in such cultures acts as more of a reflection of shared identity and relational duty, rather than as a function of expression (Khan, Jaafar, & Zakaria, 2024). Therefore, this study contributes to a culturally grounded understanding of attachment processes as well as relationship related gift-giving behavior.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gift-Giving as an Emotionally Meaningful Relational Behavior

Gift-giving in romantic relationships serves as more than a symbolic exchange. It is a relational event that provokes emotions, shapes intimacy perceptions and reflects the current dynamics between romantic partners (Belk & Coon, 1991; Puente-Díaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2022). Gifts serve as a cue for relational investment, affection and commitment, therefore both partners can interpret these cues through the lens of their attachment style and emotional schemas (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017; Nickola, Pietromonaco, & Simpson, 2022). Contemporary research proposes that emotional responses to gift exchange (e.g. pleasure or obligation) emerge from deeper interpersonal processes shaped by their interaction patterns and relational histories (Puente-Díaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2024; Algoe, 2019). This dyadic framing serves as a foundation how avoidant attachment and anxious attachment shape the gift-giver's emotional experience. This is particularly significant in contexts where these patterns interact with relationship satisfaction, self-esteem and both partners' attachment orientation (Overall & Simpson, 2015; Fávero, Lemos, Moreira, Ribeiro, & Sousa-Gomes, 2021).

MODEL A: Attachment Avoidance and Gift-Giving Pleasure

2.2. Attachment Avoidance and Reduced Emotional Reward from Gift-Giving

Attachment avoidance is defined as discomfort with intimacy/closeness, preference for independence and inclination towards deactivating strategies that weaken attachment needs (Yang

& Oshio, 2025). Individuals with attachment avoidance have a tendency to downplay emotional intimacy and do not engage emotionally within close relationships. This weakens their response to relational behaviors. Research shows that individuals who habitually avoid emotional engagement report reduced positive affect in response to cues that promote intimacy (Park, et al., 2022; Tammilehto, et al., 2023; Sun & Jakubiak, 2024). Moreover, dyadic research shows that attachment avoidance predicts lower pleasure in relational maintenance behaviors, because avoidant individuals perceive it as a risk to their autonomy or invitation to closeness which they do not prefer (Kouri, Meuwly, Richter, & Schoebi, 2024; Overall, Pietromonaco, & Simpson, 2022). Given this relational pattern, we can conclude that avoidant gift-givers are less likely to derive pleasure from gift-giving. Thus:

H1: Gift giver's avoidance has a negative impact on gift-giving pleasure.

Attachment avoidance also weakens broader relational functioning. These individuals tend to invest less in emotional closeness and show reduced responsiveness. This undermines overall relationship satisfaction (Yu, Wang, & Chen, 2025; Yang, Bai, Zhang, & Zhao). Therefore:

H2: Gift giver's avoidance has a negative impact on relationship satisfaction.

2.3. Relationship Satisfaction and Gift-Giving Pleasure

Relationship satisfaction is defined as the perceived quality and emotional fulfillment in a partnership. A significant body of research has shown that individuals in more satisfying relationships experience higher levels of positive emotions in response to affection displaying behaviors (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Vasquez, Moss, Harris, & Visconti, 2023). Individuals in such relationships have a sense of emotional security, which enhances the positive reward attached with prosocial relational acts e.g. gift-giving. Conversely, low relationship satisfaction weakens emotional responsiveness as well as positive affect.

Thus, satisfaction is expected to shape the gift-giver's pleasure:

H3: Relationship satisfaction has a positive impact on gift-giving pleasure.

2.4. Relationship as a Mediator Between Avoidance and Pleasure

Attachment avoidance is marked by discomfort with intimacy, emotional independence and deactivating strategies, which shapes their socio-emotional behavior in romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017; Overall, Pietromonaco, & Simpson, 2022). These tendencies weaken emotional engagement and response towards cues that promote intimacy. This leads the avoidant individual to limit expression and perceive relational maintenance behaviors (e.g. gifting) as intrusive (Sun & Jakubiak, 2024). Gift-giving is typically perceived as a signal of affection and involvement. However, it is often experienced less positively by individuals with avoidant attachment style, as they report low intrinsic pleasure in gift-giving (Nguyen & Munch, 2011). On the other hand, relationship satisfaction (defined as perceived relational quality and emotional fulfillment) gives rise to affection inducing behaviors, whereas low relationship satisfaction dampens such responses (Sorokowska et al., 2023). We can summarise by stating that attachment avoidance predicts lower relationship satisfaction, and satisfaction shapes perception of emotional reward from partner-directed behaviors. Therefore, relationship satisfaction is a theoretically plausible mediator that can link gift-giver's avoidance to low pleasure in gift-giving. Thus:

H4: Relationship satisfaction mediates the effect of gift giver's avoidance on gift-giving pleasure.

2.5. Recipient's Avoidance as a Moderator in the Avoidance-Pleasure Pathway

Attachment orientations operate within dyads, and partner's orientation plays a significant role in shaping relational experiences. When both partners are avoidantly attached, interactions between them tend to be emotionally distant, low in responsiveness and branded by mutual disengagement (Nguyen & Munch, 2014). Dyadic avoidance intensifies the socio-emotional deactivation of both

partners, leading to weak intimacy and diminished emotional reward. Existing research on avoidant pairs suggests that mutual distancing strategies amplified the negative emotional consequences typically linked with avoidant attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Thus, recipient avoidance is expected to intensify the negative impact of giver avoidance on pleasure:

H5: Recipient avoidance moderates the effect of giver avoidance on gift-giving pleasure.

2.6. Relationship Satisfaction as a Mediating Mechanism in the Giver Avoidance × Recipient Avoidance Interaction

The relational climate becomes even more low in terms of emotional closeness and avoidant tendencies when both partners exhibit avoidant tendencies. This dyadic influence is predicted to reduce relationship satisfaction more profoundly than by one avoidant partner. Lower relationship satisfaction, consequently, diminishes the pleasure attached to gift exchange. With evidence that relationship satisfaction is the mediating pathway through which dyadic attachment patterns are linked to emotional outcomes (Girme, et al., 2018), following can be hypothesized:

H6: The impact of giver's avoidance × recipient's avoidance on gift-giving pleasure is mediated by relationship satisfaction

MODEL B: Attachment Anxiety and Gift-Giving Obligation

2.7. Attachment Anxiety and the Emotional Burden of Gift Giving

Attachment anxiety is characterized by fear of abandonment, sharpened vigilance to relational cues, and heavy reliance on hyperactivating strategies to preserve closeness (Domic-Siede, et al., 2024). Individuals with attachment anxiety have a tendency to interpret relational behaviors, such as gift giving, as signs of partner's approval or disapproval. This sharp sensitivity can shape gift giving behavior into an emotionally loaded behavior performed to maintain closeness, and prevent rejection. Studies have concluded that attachment anxiety leads to higher interpersonal stress and compulsive relational maintenance behaviors (Evraire, Dozois, & Wilde, 2022).

Thus, we can hypothesize that an anxious gift-giver may feel obligated to give gifts to maintain relational security:

H1: Gift giver's anxiety has a positive impact on gift-giving obligation.

Moreover, individuals with high attachment anxiety often have "an excessive need for reassurance and evidence that they are loved"), which compromises their ability to regulate emotions during interactions with romantic partner (Girme, et al., 2021). This tends to undermine relationship satisfaction, as it has been confirmed by several studies later e.g. the study by Reddy & Naila (2024).

Thus:

H2: Gift giver's anxiety has a negative impact on relationship satisfaction.

2.8. Attachment Anxiety and Self-Esteem

Anxiously attached individuals portray heavy reliance on external validation, which leads to an unstable self-esteem likely to be contingent on relational feedback (Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2010). Sociometer theory suggests that self-esteem is a reflection of perceived relational value (Leary, 1999). Therefore, anxious individuals, who frequently anticipate rejection, are highly prone to low self-esteem

This well-established pattern supports:

H3: Gift giver's anxiety has a negative impact on self-esteem.

2.9. Relationship Satisfaction and Perceived Gift-Giving Obligation

Partners who experience low satisfaction in their relationships often feel relational insecurity (Ogolsky, Monk, Rice, Theisen, & Maniotes, 2017), which may intensify the pressure to give gifts

as a compensation (Nguyen & Munch, 2011). Relational stability is threatened due to low satisfaction, therefore it heightens the emotional need to try and maintain the relationship through symbolic acts (Evraire, Dozois, & Wilde, 2022).

Therefore:

H4: Relationship satisfaction has a negative impact on gift-giving obligation.

2.10. Self-Esteem and Perceived Gift-Giving Obligation

Low self-esteem leads to high perceived relational risk, which triggers maintenance efforts that are compensatory in nature (Baker & McNulty, 2013). People with low self-esteem might perceive gift-giving as a necessary act to maintain relational acceptance, rather than enjoyment (Leary & Downs, 1995).

Thus:

H5: Self-esteem has a negative impact on gift-giving obligation.

2.11. Relationship Satisfaction as a Mediator in the Anxiety-Obligation Pathway

Attachment anxiety consistently predicts lower relationship satisfaction due to increased conflict, emotional volatility and reassurance seeking (Girme, et al., 2021; Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2010). Consequently, low relationship satisfaction is linked with profound feelings of relational burden and a heightened sense of obligation to engage in maintenance behaviors such as gift-giving (Nguyen & Munch, 2011; Ogolsky, Monk, Rice, Theisen, & Maniotes, 2017). Therefore, relationship satisfaction is likely to mediate the pathway between attachment anxiety and gift-giving obligation. This proposed mediation is aligned with the idea that relationship satisfaction is the key pathway through which attachment anxiety shapes how people maintain their relationships and behave toward their partner (Don, Girme, & Hammond, 2018).

Thus:

H6: The impact of gift giver's anxiety on gift-giving obligation is mediated by relationship satisfaction.

2.12. Self-Esteem as a Mediator Between Anxiety and Obligation

Attachment anxiety undermines self-esteem due to increased fear of rejection and over-reliance on external validation (Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2010) and low self-esteem heightens compensatory relational behaviors as well as feelings of obligation (Baker & McNulty, 2013). Therefore, self-esteem is a conceivable mediating mechanism between attachment anxiety and obligation perception.

Thus:

H7: The impact of gift giver's anxiety on gift-giving obligation is mediated by self-esteem.

2.13. Moderating Role of Recipient Avoidance in the Anxiety-Obligation Pathway

When an anxious giver and avoidant recipient interact with each other, their conflicting needs of high assurance versus high independence collide. This dyadic misalliance amplifies the giver's insecurity and heightens feelings of obligation (Nguyen & Munch, 2014). Dyadic attachment research has shown that anxious-avoidant pairings produce relational strain as well as compensatory behavior cycles (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Overall & Simpson, 2015; Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

Thus:

H8: Recipient avoidance moderates the effect of gift giver's anxiety on gift-giving obligation.

2.14. Relationship Satisfaction as a Mediating Mechanism in the Giver Anxiety × Recipient Avoidance Interaction

The anxious-avoidant pairing is especially destabilizing, eventually leading to low relationship satisfaction more sharply than either orientation alone (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy,

2005). As deduced by literature review so far, lower satisfaction is likely to further increase perception of obligation.

Thus:

H9: The effect of giver anxiety $\times$ recipient avoidance on obligation is mediated by relationship satisfaction.

2.15. Self-esteem as a Mediating Mechanism in the Giver Anxiety $\times$ Recipient Avoidance Interaction

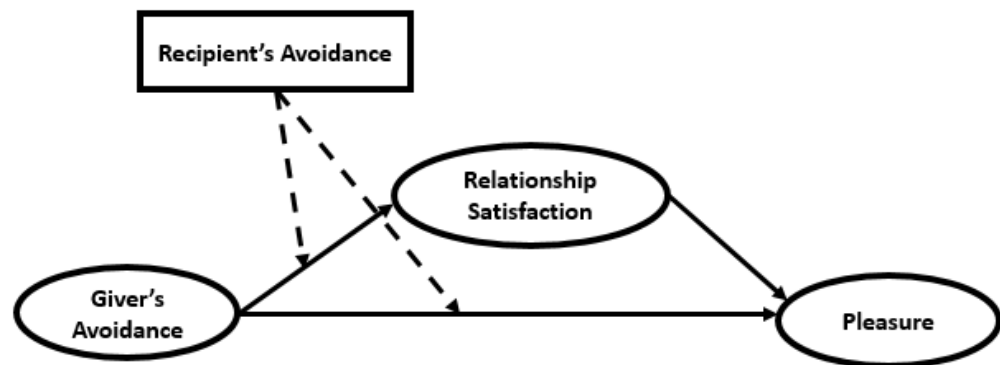
The behaviors of an avoidant partner can give rise to the anxious individual's fear of rejection, confirming their negative self-views and reinforcing low self-esteem (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). Consequently, low self-esteem further increases the compensatory behaviors, including heightened sense of obligation to sustain the relationship (Don, Girme, & Hammond, 2018; Baker & McNulty, 2013).

Therefore:

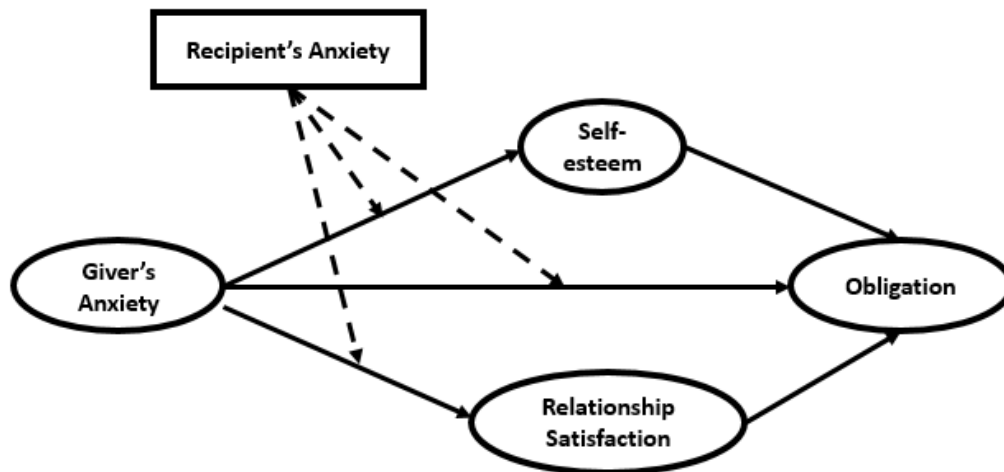
H10: The effect of giver anxiety $\times$ recipient avoidance on obligation is mediated by self-esteem.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Model A



3.2. Model B



4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design and Procedure

This research used a between-subjects survey experiment to study how gift recipient's attachment avoidance impacts relational evaluations and gift-giving perceptions in romantic partners. Scenario based experiments are commonly used in contemporary attachment as well as consumer research because they allow controlled manipulation of partner characteristics while upholding ecological relevance (Hudson, Fraley, Brumbaugh, & Vicary, 2014; Rowe, Gold, & Carnelley, 2020). Data were collected online through Google Forms, by circulating the questionnaire. Participants were informed that the research concerns relationship experiences and they were assured anonymity as well as the right to withdraw at any stage. The researchers remained available to address any questions by the participants, and ensure clarity.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions:

1. High attachment avoidance recipient
2. Low attachment avoidance recipient

Each participant received a variant of the questionnaire describing a hypothetical romantic partner that would receive a gift from them. The high avoidance variant described a partner that possesses characteristics such as relational distancing, emotional self-reliance and discomfort with intimacy, which reflected the core features of an avoidantly attached partner as described by empirical research (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017; Overall, Pietromonaco, & Simpson, 2022). The low avoidance variant described a partner comfortable with relational support and comfort, which indicated a secure attachment orientation. All descriptions were adapted from Nguyen & Munch (2014).

The participants first completed measures of their own attachment orientations. They read the assigned variant and responded to items measuring relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, gift-giving obligation, and gift-giving pleasure. The order of instruments was standardised to minimise sequencing effects. The average completion time of all participants was 10-12 minutes.

4.2.Participants

The sample size for this study was 120 respondents, which comprised of married and engaged individuals residing in Pakistan. Romantic partners in stable relationships were chosen because they have meaningful experience with gift-giving dynamics and relational expectations. Sampling from Pakistan helped in contributing to an existing body of literature which is largely dominated by Western samples, and responds to the need for broader cross-cultural validation in attachment and relationship research (Karandashev, 2021).

A balanced gender representation was ensured, and participants were allocated approximately evenly across the two experimental conditions.

4.3.Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that only respondents in committed relationships were included in the study. This approach ensured that participants who had first-hand knowledge of relational norms and gift-giving expectations were accessed, which strengthens contextual validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling also aided in maintaining gender balance across the two conditions.

4.4.Sample Size Adequacy

The minimum sample size requirement for experimental research is generally a minimum of 50 participants per condition, especially when effect sizes are moderately large and constructs are theoretically robust (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Kline, 2016). The study exceeded this threshold by employing 60 participants per condition.

A post hoc power analysis was also conducted in G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), which confirmed that the sample achieved adequate power of $\alpha = .05$. These results meet the required benchmark recommended for reliable effect estimation in contemporary quantitative research (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022).

4.5.Measures

All constructs for this study were adapted from widely validated scales generally employed in relationship and consumer behavior research. The attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance of participants (i.e. gift-givers' attachment orientation) were assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1988). Three items from the anxiety dimension were removed due to cultural irrelevance in the context of married/engaged individuals from Pakistan. Relationship Satisfaction was measured using the Hendrick (1988) three item scale. Self-esteem was assessed through Ronsenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Gift-giving obligation and gift-giving pleasure were measured using Wolfinbarger and Yale's (1993) validated scales. All items used a seven point Likert Scale to maintain consistency. All of these measures have been repeatedly validated in modern research related to attachment and consumer psychology, therefore they remain the dominant operationalizations of the constructs e.g. (Reshadi, 2023; Gunaydin, Selcuk, Urganci, & Yalcintas, 2021).

5. Results and Data Analysis

5.1.Preliminary Data Analysis

Data were screened for both Model A and Model B, prior to hypotheses testing. All survey items were marked as mandatory in the questionnaire, therefore there was no issue of missing values in the data set.

Post-hoc power analysis were conducted with the help of G*Power 3.1 to check for sample adequacy of both models. Model A achieved power ranging from .87 to .99 at $\alpha = .05$. Model B achieved power ranging from .82 to .99. For both models, power exceeded the recommended

threshold of .80, indicating sufficient power to detect medium to large effects (Cohen J. , 1988; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009)

Normality was measured using skewness and kurtosis statistics for all central variables across both Model A and B. All variables exhibited skewness within ± 2 and kurtosis within ± 7 , which falls within the accepted guidelines for normality (Byrne, 2008; Field , 2009; Mishra, et al., 2019). This assessment was further confirmed with the help of visual histograms.

Influential observations were inspected using Cook's distance. All values were below the critical threshold of 1 for both models, indicating that there were no influential outliers (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2012). Variance inflation factors (VIF) was used to assess multicollinearity. All values were below the suggested cutoffs in both models, which suggested no multicollinearity concerns (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022).

Common Method variance was addressed procedurally as well as statistically. Procedurally, evaluation apprehension and response bias were reduced by ensuring responded anonymity (Chang, Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010). Statistically, Harman's single factor tests were used, and the results indicated that first factor accounted for less than 50% variance in both models. This suggested that common method variance was not suspected as a serious concern (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Podsakoff P. , MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; 2012).

Finally, homoscedasticity was assessed by inspecting the residual scatterplots for both models. This indicated consistent error variance across predictor levels, which satisfied regression assumptions (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022).

Overall, all of the above mentioned diagnostics indicated that the data met all the required assumptions for doing regression, mediation and moderation analyses of model A and B.

5.2. Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis conducted in SPSS for Model A revealed that relationship satisfaction, gift recipient's avoidance and gift giver's pleasure have no significant relationship with gift giver's avoidance. Gift recipient's avoidance has a strong negative correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.669$, $p < 0.01$), whereas gift giver's pleasure has a strong positive correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.656$, $p < 0.01$). Gift giver's pleasure was also found to be strongly and negatively correlated with gift recipient's avoidance ($r = -0.431$, $p < 0.01$).

Bivariate analysis conducted for Model B revealed that self-esteem is significantly and negatively correlated with gift giver's anxiety ($r = -0.603$, $p < 0.01$). However, gift recipient's avoidance and relationship satisfaction were not found to be significantly correlated with gift giver's anxiety. Gift giver's obligation was found to be positively correlated with gift giver's anxiety ($r = 0.614$, $p < 0.01$).

Gift giver's obligation is positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.447$, $p < 0.01$), whereas gift recipient's avoidance has a strong negative correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.668$, $p < 0.01$). However, self-esteem was not found to be significantly related to relationship satisfaction.

Gift recipient's avoidance ($r = -0.202$, $p < 0.05$) and gift giver's obligation ($r = -0.564$, $p < 0.01$) both have a significantly negative relationship with self-esteem. However, gift giver's obligation has no significant relationship with gift recipient's avoidance.

5.3. Hypotheses Testing for Model A

Table 1. Summary of Hypotheses Testing for Model A

Model 2a Hypotheses	Analysis Technique		Result
H ₁ : Gift giver's avoidance has a negative impact on gift giving pleasure	Multiple Regression	OLS	Not Supported

H ₂ : Gift giver's avoidance has a negative impact on relationship satisfaction	Linear Regression	OLS	Not Supported
H ₃ : Relationship satisfaction has a positive impact on gift giving pleasure	Multiple Regression	OLS	Supported
H ₄ : The impact of gift giver's avoidance on gift giving pleasure is mediated by relationship satisfaction	Mediation		Not Supported
H ₅ : The impact of gift giver's avoidance on gift giving pleasure is moderated by gift recipient's avoidance	Moderation		Not Supported
H ₆ : The impact of giver's avoidance*recipient's avoidance on gift giving pleasure is mediated by relationship satisfaction	Moderated Mediation		Supported

5.4.Direct Effects

As shown by the results reported in Table 2, H₁ and H₂ were not supported. Gift giving pleasure did not significantly predict gift-giving pleasure ($\beta = -0.122$, $t = 1.364$, $p = .173$), as well as relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.024$, $t = 0.182$, $p = .856$). However, H₃ was supported, as relationship satisfaction showed a strong positive impact on gift-giving pleasure ($\beta = 0.643$, $t = 9.534$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. Direct Effects for Model A

Path	Original Sample (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	t-statistics	p-values
Gift-giver's avoidance -> Gift-giving pleasure	-0.122	-0.122	0.09	1.364	0.173
Gift-giver's avoidance -> Relationship satisfaction	-0.024	-0.044	0.132	0.182	0.856
Relationship satisfaction -> Gift-giving pleasure	0.643	0.639	0.067	9.534	0

5.5.Mediation Analysis

As shown by the indirect effects in Table 3, the impact of gift-giver's avoidance on gift-giving pleasure via relationship satisfaction was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.015$, $t = 0.180$, $p = .857$). Accordingly, H₄ was not supported, indicating that relationship satisfaction did not mediate the relationship between gift-giver's avoidance and gift-giving pleasure.

Table 3. Indirect Effects for Model A

Indirect Path	Original Sample (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	t-statistic	p-value
Gift-giver's avoidance-> Relationship Satisfaction -> Gift Giving Pleasure	-0.015	-0.027	0.086	0.18	0.857

5.6.Multi-Group Analysis (Moderation by Recipient's Avoidance)

The moderating effect of gift recipient's avoidance on the relationship between gift-giver's avoidance and gift-giving pleasure was not significant. The path difference between low and high recipient avoidance was small and non-significant ($\Delta\beta = 0.046$, $t = 0.246$, $p = .806$). Therefore, H5 was not supported, indicating that recipient avoidance did not moderate this relationship.

Table 4. Multi-Group Analysis for Model A

Path	Path Difference (Low-High Recipient Avoidance)	t-Value	p-Value
Gift-giver's avoidance -> Gift-giving pleasure	0.046	0.246	0.806

5.7.Moderated Mediation

The moderated mediation effect was statistically significant. The indirect path difference for the effect of gift-giver's avoidance on gift-giving pleasure across low versus high levels of recipient avoidance was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.341$, $t = 2.317$, $p = .022$). Accordingly, H6 was supported, indicating that the indirect effect of gift-giver's avoidance on gift-giving pleasure via relationship satisfaction differs as a function of recipient avoidance.

Table 5. Moderated Mediation Effects

Indirect Path Difference	Original Sample (β)	t-statistic	p-value
Gift-giver's avoidance -> Gift-giving pleasure	0.341	2.317	0.022

5.8.Hypotheses Testing for Model B

Table 6. Summary of Hypotheses Testing for Model B.

Model 2b	Analysis Technique	Result
H ₁ : Gift giver's anxiety has a positive impact of gift giving obligation	Linear	Supported
H ₂ : Gift giver's anxiety has a negative impact on relationship satisfaction	Linear	Not Supported
H ₃ : Gift giver's anxiety has a negative impact on self esteem	Linear	Supported
H ₄ : Relationship satisfaction has a negative impact on gift giving obligation	Linear	Supported
H ₅ : Self-esteem has a negative impact on gift giving obligation	Linear	Supported
H ₆ : The impact of gift giver's anxiety on gift giving obligation is mediated by relationship satisfaction	Mediation	Not Supported
H ₇ : The impact of gift giver's anxiety on gift giving obligation is mediated by self esteem	Mediation	Supported

H ₈ : The impact of gift giver's anxiety on gift giving obligation is moderated by gift recipient's avoidance	Moderation	Not Supported
H ₉ : The impact of gift giver's anxiety*recipient's avoidance on gift giving obligation is mediated by relationship satisfaction	Moderated Mediation	Supported
H ₁₀ : The impact of gift giver's anxiety*recipient's avoidance on gift giving obligation is mediated by self esteem	Moderated Mediation	Not Supported

5.9. Direct Effects

In Model B, gift-giver's anxiety had a significant positive effect on gift-giving obligation ($\beta = 0.340$, $t = 2.687$, $p = .007$), supporting H1. However, the effect of gift-giver's anxiety on relationship satisfaction was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.135$, $t = 1.455$, $p = .146$), providing no support for H2. Gift-giver's anxiety was found to have a strong and significant negative effect on self-esteem ($\beta = -0.583$, $t = 6.806$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. Relationship satisfaction showed a significant positive association with gift-giving obligation ($\beta = 0.409$, $t = 4.676$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. Finally, self-esteem had a significant negative effect on gift-giving obligation ($\beta = -0.286$, $t = 2.145$, $p = .032$), providing support for H5.

Table 7. Direct Effects for Model B.

Path	Original Sample (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	t-statistics	p-values
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Gift-giving obligation	0.34	0.342	0.126	2.687	0.007
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Relationship satisfaction	0.135	0.139	0.093	1.455	0.146
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Self-esteem	-0.583	-0.595	0.086	6.806	0
Relationship Satisfaction-> Gift-giving obligation	0.409	0.395	0.088	4.676	0
Self-esteem -> Gift-giving obligation	-0.286	-0.289	0.133	2.145	0.032

5.10. Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis for Model B revealed differential indirect effects. The indirect effect of gift-giver's anxiety on gift-giving obligation via relationship satisfaction was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.055$, $t = 1.465$, $p = .143$), indicating no mediating role of relationship satisfaction and providing no support for H6. In contrast, the indirect effect via self-esteem was marginally significant ($\beta = 0.167$, $t = 1.811$, $p = .070$) and reached significance at the 90% confidence level, supporting H7 and suggesting that self-esteem functions as a mediating mechanism linking gift-giver's anxiety to gift-giving obligation.

Table 8. Indirect Effects for Model B.

Indirect Path	Original Sample (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	t-statistic	p-value
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Relationship satisfaction -> Gift-giving obligation	0.055	0.054	0.038	1.465	0.143

Gift-giver's anxiety-> Self-esteem -> Gift-giving obligation	0.167	0.175	0.092	1.811	0.07
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5.11. Multi-Group Analysis (Moderation by Recipient's Avoidance)

The moderation analysis indicated that recipient avoidance did not significantly moderate the relationship between gift-giver's anxiety and gift-giving obligation. The path difference between low and high levels of recipient avoidance was negligible and non-significant ($\Delta\beta = 0.008$, $t = 0.042$, $p = .966$). Accordingly, H8 was not supported.

Table 9. Multi-Group Analysis for Model B

Path	Path Difference (Low-High Recipient Avoidance)	t-Value	p-Value
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Gift-giving obligation	0.008	0.042	0.966

5.12. Moderated Mediation

The moderated mediation analysis with relationship satisfaction as the mediator indicated a marginally significant conditional indirect effect. The indirect path difference for the effect of gift-giver's anxiety on gift-giving obligation across low versus high levels of recipient avoidance was positive and marginally significant ($\beta = 0.170$, $t = 1.931$, $p = .056$), reaching significance at the 90% confidence level. Thus, H9 was supported, suggesting that the indirect effect via relationship satisfaction varies as a function of recipient avoidance.

Table 10. Moderated Mediation Effects with Relationship Satisfaction as Mediator

Indirect Path Difference	Original Sample (β)	t-statistic	p-value
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Gift-giving obligation	0.17	1.931	0.056

In contrast, the moderated mediation analysis with self-esteem as the mediator was not significant. The indirect path difference was negligible and non-significant ($\beta = 0.005$, $t = 0.039$, $p = .969$), providing no support for H10 and indicating that the conditional indirect effect via self-esteem does not differ across levels of recipient avoidance.

Table 11. Moderated Mediation Effects with Self-Esteem as Mediator

Indirect Path Difference	Original Sample (β)	t-statistic	p-value
Gift-giver's anxiety -> Gift-giving obligation	0.005	0.039	0.969

6. Discussion

The scope of this study was to examine how attachment styles impact gift-giving perceptions i.e. obligation vs pleasure, while incorporating dyadic dynamics. The findings were mostly consistent with contemporary attachment models and indicate that attachment insecurity does not have a uniform direct impact on relational behaviors, rather they operate through indirect as well as conditional processes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017; Overall, Pietromonaco, & Simpson, 2022).

The results of Model A showed that gift giver's avoidance does not directly impact relationship satisfaction or gift-giving pleasure. Rather, relationship satisfaction emerged as a significant predictor of gift-giving pleasure, aligned with prior work which showed that relational satisfaction is the central channel through which attachment styles influence relational maintenance behaviors (Overall & Simpson, 2015; Gunaydin, Selcuk, Urganci, & Yalcintas, 2021).

Prominently, the results of moderated mediation showed that indirect effect of avoidance on pleasure via relationship satisfaction is different across levels of recipient avoidance. This is aligned with dyadic attachment research which showed that avoidant-avoidant pairings or mismatched pairings worsen the relational strain, and shape behavioral outcomes depending on context (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Overall, Pietromonaco, & Simpson, 2022).

A contrasting pattern was revealed by Model B. Gift giver's anxiety was found to be a significant predictor of gift-giving obligation as well as lower self-esteem, which reinforces attachment theory's claim that attachment anxiety heightens concerns about self-worth (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). Attachment anxiety did not predict relationship satisfaction; however, relationship satisfaction and self-esteem were significantly linked with obligation. Mediation analysis showed that self-esteem explained the link between anxiety and obligation, extending previous research associating attachment anxiety to lower self-worth and compensatory behaviors (Park, et al., 2022; Overall & Simpson, 2015). Moreover, the conditional indirect effect via relationship satisfaction supports dyadic perspectives suggesting that partner avoidance shapes how anxious individuals regulate relational insecurity (Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

Consequently, we can conclude that avoidance and anxiety operate through distinct pathways in gift-giving context. Attachment avoidance influences gift-giving pleasure through relationship satisfaction and dyadic interaction, whereas attachment anxiety increases obligation through interpersonal mechanisms related to self-esteem.

By differentiating between pleasure and obligation bases gift-giving, this research extends previous work that has mostly treated gift exchange as a unidimensional, and responds to recent calls integrate psychological and relational processes in consumer behavior models (Puente-Diaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2024; Chinchanchokchai & Pusaksrikit, 2023).

6.1. Implications and Limitations

In theoretical terms, this study has refined attachment-based models of relational consumption by showing that attachment insecurity influences indirectly and conditionally, rather than through stable direct effects. The differentiation between obligation and pleasure highlights how different attachment insecurities appear in relational consumption behaviors. The inclusion of recipient avoidance further advances dyadic approaches to attachment by showing that partner characteristics shape indirect processes.

Practically, the results suggest that gifting in anxious individuals may be driven by feelings of obligation rather than genuine relational intent. Interventions that boost self-esteem and lower reassurance seeking may eliminate obligated gift giving. Practitioners and marketers can benefit

from framing gift giving around autonomy, authenticity, and relational responsiveness rather than obligation.

The limitations of this study are cross-sectional design and reliance on self-report measures. Future research can employ a longitudinal data and dyadic design, and examine these processes across cultural contexts. Moreover, additional mediators such as gratitude or perceived partner responsiveness would benefit by extending understanding of attachment-based gift-giving dynamics.

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