

# A Study Exploring the Link between Attachment Styles and Social Networking Habits of Adolescents in Urban Bangalore

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**Abstract-** While attachment has been a topic of extensive research in developmental psychology, its impact in the context of the technological changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the changing dynamics of familial structures and relationships have not been so extensively explored. The present research examined the attachment styles of 95 adolescents varying from 14 to 17 years of age, from reputed English medium schools all over Bangalore. They were given the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment and then categorized into those who use Facebook for more than 7-8 hours a day and those who don't. Five securely attached adolescents and five insecurely attached adolescents with heavy Facebook use were selected randomly and were interviewed to investigate the reasons for Facebook use. Results indicated that there existed substantial differences in the reasons for Facebook use by those securely and insecurely attached adolescents. The insecurely attached adolescents showed patterns of low confidence and negative view of others and situations. They enjoyed the privacy and independence that came hand in hand with Facebook use and believed Facebook was not meant for the older generation. They also believed that their need for affection and their need to belong, was met by the use of Facebook, which otherwise would not have been possible. Popularity rated high as a consequence of using Facebook and the effects of peer pressure were not undermined. Securely attached adolescents on the other hand, did not view privacy and independence as big issues revolving solely around Facebook use. They also enjoyed the presence of their family members on Facebook along with them. Popularity still scored high as a result of Facebook use, as so did the need to fit in and belong. On the whole there came to light differences that existed between the securely and insecurely attached adolescents on the reasons for Facebook use.

**Index terms-** attachment, attachment styles, facebook, social networking, adolescents.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is considered the most difficult phase in the lifespan of man. It is also the most volatile and unstructured and the most moldable. Adolescents can be shaped by innumerable things at this point in their lives and in today's world; technology has no less influence on adolescents than their friends. Another great influencer of an adolescent's relationships would be his attachment styles that are determined by his early childhood caregiver experiences.

### Attachment

Attachment is an affective bond or tie that develops between an infant and its caregiver. Such bonds are usually reciprocal between two adults, but between a child and its caregiver, this bond is usually based on security, safety and protection. The child's tie to its caregiver is called the "attachment" and the caregiver's reciprocal tie is called the "care-giving bond". The two way process requires on the part of the mother to engage in lively social interaction and respond to signals and approaches from the infant. Some infants direct attachment behaviour towards more than one attachment figure almost as soon as they start to show discrimination between caregivers; most come to do so during their second year. These figures are arranged hierarchically, with the principal attachment figure at the top. Bowlby also conceived attachment as an evolutionary mechanism, necessary for the survival of the species by helping offspring maintain close proximity to a caregiver. Attachment serves the biological aim of survival through genetic replication and the psychological aim of security.

Attachments lie at the heart of family life. They create bonds that can provide care and protection across the life cycle (Ainsworth, 1991). Attachments can also evoke the most intense emotions and create problems if the individual becomes insecure (Byng 1995). The central theme of attachment theory is that, mothers who are available and responsive to their infant's needs establish a sense of security. The infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world. He also shares the psychoanalytic view, that early childhood experiences heavily influences development and behaviour later on in life.

The quality of attachment evolves over time as the infant interacts with his/her caregivers. The type of attachment, or attachment status of the infant toward the caregiver is partly determined by the interaction between the two and partly by the state-of-mind of attachment (that is of their own attachment figure) of the caregiver. As the caregiver affects the infant, the child also affects the caregiver. Attachment is also viewed as central to the capacity of emotion regulation.

There are four major attachment styles observed: secure, anxious resistant, anxious avoidant and disorganized attachment styles.

1. Secure Attachment styles: Child protests caregiver's departure and seeks proximity and is comforted on return. The child then returns to exploration. The child may also be comforted by the stranger but shows clear preference for the caregiver. This is significantly related to maternal sensitivity.
2. Anxious Resistant Attachment styles: The child is unable to use caregiver as a secure base, seeking proximity before

separation occurs. He is also distressed on separation with ambivalence, anger, reluctance to warm to caregiver and return to play on return.

3. **Anxious Avoidant Attachment styles:** Little affective sharing in play. Child shows little or no distress on departure, little or no visible response to return, ignoring or turning away with no effort to maintain contact if picked up and treats the stranger similarly.
4. **Disorganized Attachment Style:** Lack of coherent attachment strategy shown by contradictory, disoriented behaviors such as approaching but with the back turned to the caregiver. Stereotypes on return such as freezing or rocking.

Children with insecure attachment styles are seen to have elevated levels of anxiety symptoms and increased levels of worry (Muris et al 2000). Robert Weiss was one of the first researchers to suggest a link between loneliness and attachment styles.

The existence of attachment is usually manifested in three ways: Proximity seeking, Secure base phenomena and Separation protest.

1. **Proximity Seeking** refers to the desire to be near the people the infant is attached to.
2. **Secure Base Phenomena** is when the attachment figure acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.
3. **Separation Protest** is the anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure.

The Attachment Theory is in essence a spatial theory revolving around the availability of the primary caregiver. The infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world. Attachment theory is a psychological, evolutionary, and ethological theory concerning relationships between humans. The most important tenet of attachment theory is that a young child needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally.

There are several important similarities and differences between the attachments that occur in childhood and adulthood. Shaver and Hazan (1989) point out six similarities between childhood and adult (and adolescent) attachments. First, is that the quality of the attachment is dependent upon the reciprocation, sensitivity and responsiveness of the attachment figure/ caregiver. Second, securely attached individuals (infants/adults) are generally happier and more adaptive than insecurely attached individuals. Third, the attachment mechanism of maintaining proximity to the attachment figure is displayed in both adult and infant attachments. Fourth, separation from an attachment figure causes extreme distress (separation distress), and the initiation of attachment behaviors in an attempt to regain contact with the attachment figure. Fifth, in both adults and infants, there is an "intense sensitivity" when displaying discoveries and achievements to the attachment figure for approval. And lastly, both attachments entail a certain degree of baby talk or motherese type communication.

Feeney et al. (1999) note that there are two important differences between childhood attachment and adult attachment. The first is that childhood attachments are asymmetrical, meaning that the relationship is usually

complimentary than reciprocal. Second, there is almost always a sexual component involved in adult attachments.

Relationships with peers have an influence on the individual that is distinct from that of parent-child relationships, though the latter can influence the peer relationships they form. Although peers become important in middle childhood and, the evidence suggests peers do not become attachment figures, though children may direct attachment behaviors at peers if parental figures are unavailable. Attachments to peers tend to emerge in adolescence, although parents continue to be attachment figures. With adolescents, the role of the parental figures is to be available when needed while the adolescent makes excursions into the outside world. Children usually begin to develop a single general model of attachment relationships during adolescence, although this may occur in middle childhood

### **Attachment and Adolescents**

In adolescence, unlike childhood and adulthood, the meaning and the importance of the construct of attachment for social functioning is derived primarily from theoretical inference and from a few studies examining its correlates within unusual samples. Yet, attachment organization appears likely to be integrally related to a range of domains of psychosocial functioning in adolescence both because it reflects core aspects of the ways adolescents process affect in social relationships and because it is also likely to be associated with qualities of ongoing relationships with parents (Allen & Hauser, 1996; Allen & Land, in press). The formation of meaningful peer relationships is one of the developmental tasks of adolescents, which could possibly be the strongest theoretical links to attachment behaviour. Peer relationships increase markedly in intensity during adolescence and in some cases may in themselves become attachment relationships.

Weiss (1973,1989) believed that secure adolescents attached high importance to both attachment and affiliation goals in friendship, anxious-ambivalent adolescents overemphasized attachment goals, and avoidant adolescents gave low importance to the two types of goals. In addition, whereas secure adolescents were responsive to affiliation and attachment contexts, insecure adolescents showed less responsiveness to these contexts and their habitual working models guided their responses (Mario et al, 2001)

### **Social Networking**

One can define a social network site as a web-based service that allow individuals to

- (1) Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
- (2) Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and
- (3) View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Facebook is the most visited social networking site in India, according to (ComScore, 2011). According to a study by web analytics, Facebook.com grabbed the number one ranking among social networking sites in India for the first time in July 2010 with 20.9 million visitors, up 179 per cent, as compared to 7.47 million in 2009. These sites have been integrated into daily practice because of their affordability and reach.

Social networking sites have attracted millions of users, with a majority of them being youngsters most of whom have integrated these sites as their daily practices. It's popularity could be due to the concept of "real-time web", a process where individual can contribute content and it's being broadcasted as it's being uploaded, which is analogous to television and radio broadcasts, increases popularity of Facebook. And the popularity of a social networking site is not just based on how many people it has, but how frequently they engage with others on it. Boyd and Ellison 2007 believe that social networking sites designs are egocentric, meaning that the individual user is the centre of their network. Facebook also helps to organize events and send invites to friends.

Self representation is of immense importance. Social networking revolves around false identities and virtual relationships, creating a safe haven for youngsters to explore their potentials. Its relationship to attachment styles is varied and diverse. Adolescents especially have a huge advantage.

Jeff Hancock (2009), of the Cornell University says that "Most people believe that given the opportunity, everything else equal, people will lie more online than they would face-to-face," Hancock called this the "cues heuristic," which means the fewer deception-detecting signals at our disposal, the less we'll trust someone. At the same time, research indicated that technology, which allows us craft picture-perfect social networking profiles or e-mail, in sick, when we're lounging on the beach, isn't tempting us to lie any more than we normally do. So thus it becomes a matter of whether we lie because we want to, or whether we lie because we are able to.

The Internet is more exciting and challenging as a research environment than earlier media because it is a complex, virtual, social, and physical world that children and adolescents participate in and co-construct, rather than something that is merely watched or used such as television or personal computers. It becomes a complex virtual universe behind a small screen on which developmental issues play out, offering new views into the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of children and adolescents. (Greenfield & Van, 2006, p. 393). Valkenburg and Schouten 2006 studied the negative effects of online social networking sites on self worth and happiness among 10 to 19 year olds and found that positive responses to user profiles improved these measures and negative responses decrease them. With social networking sites becoming more of a substitute for families, it is the women who are most affected by it, as they derive their self worth from relationships with others and Facebook compels them to acquire hundreds of friends.

The framework in the present study is based on the assumptions drawn from John Bowlby's attachment theory. According attachment theorists, the child who receives responsive and sensitive parenting from the primary caregiver forms an internal working model of that caregiver as trustworthy and dependable when needed and develops a model of the self as someone who is worthy of such care (Bowlby, 1973, 1982).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 1) Social networking and its usage

Today, online social networking in the present 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be undermined as 55% percent of teenagers' online, use and create online social networking profiles (Lehnhart & Madden, 2007). Also studies by Sheri and Tanisha (2009)

show that traffic on social networking sites have increased in recent years. Despite the debate on the efficacy of online networking, there has been a tenfold increase.

One of the main reasons for it's popularity would be because of the many benefits such as the provision for self expression, connectivity and creation and also how individuals have the freedom to create and recreate themselves, as found by a study conducted by Takahashi in 2010, by reviewing nearly 5000 profiles on popular social networking sites. Themes much spoken about were explored by Williams and Merten in 2008, who found that adolescents post information regarding family and social issues, risk behaviors, disclosure of personally identifiable information, and frequent peer interaction.

Of late, the implications of heavy use of networking sites have been the focus of some researches. Studies have been conducted to see the various detrimental effects of these sites. Buffardi and social psychologist W. Keith Campbell (2009), ran 130 Facebook users through the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). People, who score high on the NPI are more likely to cheat and game-play in relationships, monopolize resources and are excessively materialistic. What emerged is that online narcissists behave much like offline ones, amassing numerous but shallow relationships and engaging in ceaseless self-promotion. Concern has been expressed over the years, regarding the ability of youngsters learning relationship skill that could be hampered by excessive use of online social networking and Stefanone (2011) found that a majority of the women using online social networking sites, base their self worth on the appearance of their profile pictures and their self esteem is directly proportional to the attention they receive for it.

On the other hand, Valkenburg et al (2009), believes that social networking sites have created a more intimate atmosphere where teens and young adults are more likely to connect with peers and discuss personal issues in a positive way. And Julia Porter et al (1996) found that the use of Facebook to share scientific information and knowledge is used to "increase both their learning and their flexibility in ways that would not be possible within a self-contained hierarchical organization."

Many authors agree that four major factors distinguish computer mediated Communication (CMC) from Face to Face (FtF) communication; greater anonymity, the reduction of the importance of physical cues, greater control over the time and place of the interaction and the ease of finding similar others (Amichai-Hamburger 2007; McKenna, Green & Gleason). Together these factors "create a unique psychological environment for the user" (Amichai-Hamburger 2007) and attract researchers to computer mediated communication. But in contrast along-term study conducted by psychologists at the University of Virginia, found that the interactions young adults are having on their Facebook and MySpace pages are more similar to than different from the interactions they have in their face-to-face relationships,"

### 2) Adolescents and social networking

Adolescence is a time of heightened stress, with as many as one in four young people experiencing a mental health problem; appropriate care is required to reduce the impact of mental illness on their transition into adulthood and subsequent adult life. In a study conducted by Ullas (2011), 28% of those

who fall in the 15-19 age group considered online social networking as their top priority and 28% of them indulged in it to escape boredom.

Gentzler et al (2011) found that students who report more frequent phone conversations with parents also report more satisfying, intimate, and supportive parental relationships, but those students who use a social-networking site to communicate with parents report higher levels of loneliness, anxious attachment, as well as conflict within the parental relationship. Ong et al (2011) found that individuals who had participated in online chatting exhibited greater familial loneliness than those who had not because the time spent in online chatting reduced the time spent in familial relationships. Social loneliness was related to the quality of Internet relationships rather than to the time spent online. Individuals who participated in online chatting had less romantic loneliness because of a greater ease of maintaining romantic relationships online.

Online social networking seeks to not only increase an individuals contacts and maintain them, but also plays a crucial role in grieving for lost friends. As Williams and Merton(2009) found that when dealing with grief, not only does social networking sites prolong an attachment with the deceased, but it “also facilitates a teenagers” coping in a way that grants unlimited freedom and opportunity to reflect back over their relationship with the deceased.”

Reich in 2010 found that typical adolescent uses of Social Networking Sites represent networked individualism, rather than online communities.

A study done by Woodhouse, Warner et al in 2010 show that adolescent attachment moderated the connection between parent and adolescent symptoms; in most cases attachment security was more protective if both parents were high on anxiety symptoms or if one parent was high on anxiety but the other parent was low on depressive symptoms. Meditational analyses indicated that representations of their mothers as a secure base.

In response to the available literature, this study has focused on the variables of secure attachment and insecure attachment styles and their reasons for the use of online social networking sites.

The present study is an investigation into the relationship between attachment styles and use of social networking sites and also elaborates on the reasons that may underlie it.

### III. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

The present research attempts to examine and explore the link between Attachment Styles and Online Social Networking Habits of adolescents in Bangalore. An attempt was also made to obtain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between different styles of attachment and Facebook use.

#### A. Objectives

1. To study Attachment styles of adolescents.
2. To explore social networking habits of adolescents in Urban Bangalore
3. To find linkages, if any, between attachment styles and social networking habits

#### B. Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses were stated:

1. A secure style of attachment in adolescents leads to a greater emotional bond with parents and peers and a lesser use of social networking sites.
2. An insecure style of attachment in adolescents, leads to a less emotional bond with parents and peers, and greater use of social networking sites.

#### C. Research Design

This study used the empirical research design. It made use of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The participants were first administered questionnaires. The results were obtained, scored and interpreted. This was followed by an in-depth interview with some of the participants, for further information. These interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, to obtain a comprehensive view.

#### D. Sample

In this research study, quantitative data was collected through the convenient sampling procedure, while the sample for the interview, selected from the larger sample was used to collect qualitative data.

A total of 93 adolescents, between the ages of 13-16 years from Bangalore participated. The sample consisted of 41 female and 54 male participants. They were administered the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg,1987) with their voluntary consent. A group of 10 participants were then selected for an in-depth interview.

#### E. Assessment Tools

To measure attitude styles of adolescents, the **Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)** was used.

This inventory was developed by Mark T. Greenberg and Gay Armsden in 1987, to assess adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimension of relationships with parents and close friends, particularly how well these figures serve as sources of psychological security. The theoretical framework is attachment theory. Three broad dimensions assessed are: degree of mutual trust, quality of communication, and extent of anger and alienation.

Scores on the IPPA have been found to be associated with a number of personality variables. Among late adolescents, parent and peer attachment are correlated with positiveness and stability of self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and affective status (depression, anxiety, resentment/alienation, covert anger, and loneliness) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Armsden, 1986). The relationship of attachment and affective status holds even when degree of negative life-change is controlled (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Quality of attachment to parents and to a lesser extent, peers, is associated with self-reported tendencies toward the use of more problem-solving coping strategies relative to emotion-managing efforts in stressful situations (Armsden, 1986). Among early to middle adolescents, parent attachment, and to a lesser extent, peer attachment, were found to be associated with lesser hopelessness and less externally oriented locus of control and with greater self-management (coping) skills (Armsden et al., 1987; Lewis et al., 1987).

#### F. Administration



The subjects were given the instructions as well as the questionnaires, in the school campus. There was no time limit to fill out the questionnaire. Once the respondents finished answering, the questionnaires they were collected and the results were tabulated for interpretation. The subjects were seated comfortably and rapport was established. The subjects were then given the instructions as well as the questionnaires, in the school campus. There was no time limit to fill out the questionnaire. Once the respondents finished answering, the questionnaires they were collected and the results were tabulated for interpretation. Once tabulated, 10 participants were selected randomly from the two categories obtained from the questionnaires.

The interview followed a semi structured format and was conducted a week after the initial assessment. Thematic analysis was used to decode the interview obtained from the data. The transcripts were also given to co-researchers, for validation.

### G. Statistical Tools

The statistical tools of Mean, Median, and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) were used for statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

## IV. RESULTS

An analysis of the results, gives us an understanding of the prevalence of attachment styles among teenagers in the city, their social networking habits and also the 'whys' of Facebook use. This research also seeks to expand on the differences in reasons, given by the securely and insecurely attached adolescents, on their use of Facebook.

Table I: Distribution of sample based on age and gender.

No. of Participant	Gender		Age Range 14 – 17 years
95	Female	41	Mean = 15.76 SD =7.72
	Male	54	

From the table we see that the total number of participants for the present study was 95 adolescents, 41 girls and 54 boys all ranging from 14 years to 17 years and the mean age of the participants was 15.76 years. The participants were from various school and colleges from Bangalore and were all from upper and upper middle socio-economic backgrounds.

After permission was obtained from the respective schools, the Facebook Use Questionnaire and the Attachment Styles Questionnaire were administered to measure the extent of use of online social networking and their attachment styles. The questionnaires were scored and interpreted. Out of these participants, five adolescents who measured 'high' (7-8 hrs or more daily) on the use of social networking and five who measured 'low' (less than 7-8 hrs daily) on the use of social networking were selected and were then shortlisted for an in-depth interview.

On analysis, it was found that a total of 58 participants were 'high' users of Facebook and 37 of the participants scored 'low' on the amount of Facebook usage.

Table II: The distribution Facebook use among adolescents, according to gender.

Gender	High Facebook Use	Low Facebook Use
Boys	31	23
Girls	27	14

From the above table we see that a total of 31 boys and 27 girls were high users of Facebook. The low Facebook users consisted of 23 boys and 14 girls. This present study did not take into account gender differences in the use and the reasons for use of Facebook.

Table III: The distribution of high Facebook use among Insecurely and Securely Attached Adolescents

HIGH Facebook Use			
Insecurely attached Adolescents		Securely Attached Adolescents	
Girls	73.3%	Girls	45.45%
Boys	71.4%	Boys	42.30%

Table IV: The distribution of high Facebook use among Insecurely and Securely Attached Adolescents.

LOW Facebook Use			
Insecurely attached Adolescents		Securely Attached Adolescents	
Girls	26.66%	Girls	54.54%
Boys	28.57%	Boys	53.57%

From the above tables, we find that among the 'High' users of Facebook, 42 of the adolescents were scored as insecure (22 girls and 20 boys) and 16 were identified as secure adolescents (5 girls and 11 boys). Among the Low users of Facebook, 21 of them were secure adolescents (6girls and 15 boys) and 16 adolescents (8 girls and 8 boys) were scored as insecure.

From the present study, an analysis of the numerical data, gives us an insight into prevalent attachment styles and use of social networking sites. It was found that a majority of the insecure adolescents spent more time on Facebook. The findings are similar to those found by Eloise Zoppos (2009), who said that individuals with attachment styles related issues, take to Facebook more, than those without attachment style related issues. This could be mainly attributed to the fact that those with attachment issues spend less time and effort in forming and maintaining relationships in real life. They instead spend progressively large amounts of time on online social networking sites, in order to compensate for the lack of real face to face relationships. These methods of forming relationships provides them with the convenience of staying in a less threatening environment and still form relationships with people outside their immediate environment. Thus we see that Facebook or any online social networking site for that matter, are the most popular with those who have attachment related issues and who are insecure. Zoppos (2009) also found that 43.5% of secure individuals were high users of Facebook and 66.5% of those with attachment related issues were high users of Facebook.

The results of the present study also indicate that around 39% of the adolescents were insecure. This could be due to changes in parenting, the unavailability of a secure supporting family system, in cases where both parents are working, and

infants are usually thrust to a non family member to be baby sat. This is of immense importance as it is believed, an infant's early childhood experiences with their caregivers, serves as an important predictor for future styles of attachment (Bowlby, 1969). In previous literature, it has been found that approximately 35% of individuals are insecure. Children are also missing out on a major chunk of their childhood that they spend with their parents or grandparents, as they are sent to day care centers or crèches because the parents are too busy generating income for the family. Most adolescents participating in the study came from affluent backgrounds, with educated parents and occupational history of repute. Thus different styles of parenting and the possibility of lack of quality time spent with the infants could be the reason for the huge numbers of individuals with attachment style related issues later on in life.

In this present study, it was found that a majority of them (61%) however do not have any attachment related issues, meaning that they do not have problems forming relationships with people in the real world. Their attachment bonds are intact and they relate and adjust well with people around them. They are able to initiate and maintain close and intimate relationships with people around them. These results are similar to those from previous research, where it is estimated that approximately 65% of the population is securely attached.

The prevalence of those who used online social networking sites in the current study, was a whopping 100%. In 2009, Lehnhart found that 59% of the teenagers who use the net have accounts on social networking sites. There is a marked difference in the results found here. This could mainly be attributed to the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, where the majority of the respondents belonged to the upper socio-economic status or the upper middle socio-economic status and are all currently studying in reputed International and English medium schools.

It was expected that the adolescents who are securely attached, would have a negative relationship with Facebook and this was supported; with only 27.5% of them being high users of Facebook and a stunning 72.35% of the adolescents who were insecurely attached, emerged as high users of Facebook. This can mean that securely attached individuals have a lesser degree of need to turn to social networking sites to form close meaningful relationships because as found in previous studies, securely attached individuals have reported holding positive views of both themselves and of others (Pietromonaco & Barret 1997). They have less interpersonal problems, than insecurely attached individuals (Horowitz et al, 1993), and are also less likely to develop problematic internet use (Fleming & Harrison 2007). Secure individuals have less self doubt than those who are insecurely attached.

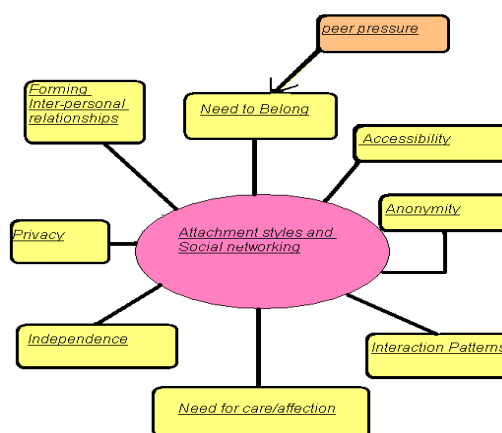
An in-depth interview was conducted on 10 adolescents, five who were securely attached (two girls and three boys) and five who were insecurely attached (one girl and four boys).

From the analysis of the interviews various themes were identified. Many that related directly to the objectives of the study and some that provided insight into nuances that may require further research.

The main themes that ran in the interviews of those insecurely attached, ranged from insecurities to low self esteem to differences in types of leisure activities engaged in, to changes in patterns of interaction and levels of privacy and independence needed.

The following Thematic Network was developed using the themes that were found underlying the interviews.

Fig. 3: A diagrammatic representation, of the underlying themes in the in-depth interviews.



### Anonymity

Adolescents like to spend a lot of their online time chatting with friends and unknown people: A feature of a majority of the insecurely attached adolescents. One adolescent claimed that “While we chat with strangers, we can share stuff that is dear to us without feeling embarrassed that our friends will come to know.” As one insecure adolescent said, “There’s a greater level of comfort when talking to strangers and I feel less inhibited to share information about myself.” As strangers are also better able to look at the problem objectively insecure adolescents feel more secure. Added to that is the fact that these are people the adolescents have never seen and will never meet in their whole life. This gives them added benefits of not being judged and getting sympathy. They are allowed to put up a fake front in order to be ‘liked’ by others and “the sympathy that we get is whole.” “Strangers are capable of giving unbiased advice and are very sympathetic.” As one adolescent puts it, “Half the time my problems revolve around my friends or family, and telling my friends about these problems will make them think I’m a sissy, so I don’t talk to my friends about matters like these.” Insecurely attached individuals also feel safe talking to strangers because “There’s no fear of them blurting out the wrong information to the wrong people.” And another opines that “my family and friends don’t care enough, to be bothered about my problems.”

Securely attached people on the other hand, shared their issues, more with family and friends than with strangers. “I feel better talking to my friends if I have any problems. They care for me and will help me out whenever I need help.” Another securely attached adolescent opines that I don’t bug my online pals with my troubles, I just maintain a cordial relationship with them.” Another adolescent believes that he doesn’t need stranger friends to unburden himself to. As they believe “friends and family are there to share your problems with. Another securely attached individual opines “how can I go and just tell some stranger about my problems?” While the securely attached adolescents spend time chatting with mostly friends and family members, they do sometimes talk to strangers but only to make now acquaintances and not to share their distressing issues.

Thus substantial differences were found in the way in which securely attached and insecurely attached adolescents weaved their interaction with their online peers. Clear differences emerged in the way in which the securely and insecurely attached adolescents interacted with strangers online and the way in which they shared their problems and issues. While the insecurely attached were more willing to share their problems with strangers, the securely attached would rather befriend strangers to turn them into friends rather than confide in them. The insecurely attached individuals were more bothered about being judged than the securely attached individuals.

### **Interaction Patterns**

An underlying theme of interaction in terms of conversing with family members and friends was evident and differences were seen in the way in which the securely attached adolescents interacted and the way the insecurely attached adolescents interacted. These differences covered a wide ground of interaction with friends, with family members and online. The interaction patterns varied across a wide spectrum of situations and individuals. The pattern of interaction with their friends was found to be different from that of the interaction with parents and family members. One adolescent believed that she could 'talk to her friends about anything, but there are certain things she cannot talk to her parents about.' Another adolescent was of the opinion that "It's easier to talk to friends, because you can use short forms and they will understand and you can also use bad words." "But with parents you have to be very careful because I'm not allowed to use bad words." "With friends, they know what you are talking about and they understand without you having to tell them ever thing directly." Another adolescent was of the opinion that "Friends know what would have happened the previous day so, they understand faster." One insecurely attached adolescent was of the opinion that she cannot express herself in front of her parents. Words come to me better in front of my friends." Another reason for differences in patterns of interaction was that a majority of the insecurely attached adolescents feel that parents are very strict, friends on the other hand are not." And also "friends are going through similar things like us, so they can understand better than adults who belong to a different generation." These patterns show that insecurely attached adolescents feel the lack of communication between parents and themselves and it also emphasizes their lack of willingness to bridge that gap.

Securely attached individuals on the other hand, agreed that there are certain things one cannot talk to your parents about, for example the topic of boyfriends and girlfriends are a big no. But most of them spoke to their parents about literally anything and if they couldn't approach their parents or family members their friends were always there. Basically there is no dearth of people that the secure individuals have to talk to. They also do not feel hesitant talking to family members about most issues.

This difference could mainly be because adolescents themselves do not view parents as friends. Securely attached adolescents see their parents as more approachable and view them as someone they can share things with.

### **Need to Belong**

There was also a need to belong that came out strongly in the interaction with family and friends whether online or face to face. This is especially high among insecure adolescents which guides their behavior and interaction online and in face to face interaction. One young adolescent says, "What will my friends think of me, if I don't use Facebook?" Another opines that only "Nerds" don't use Facebook. It's all about trying to fit in. To not be left behind in one's circle of friends. As one adolescent puts it "I am part of my group because I use Facebook and we don't accept people who don't have an account there." Having a Facebook account is also mandatory when you want to share pictures with friends. So technically to be someone who gets noticed and wants to be popular has to use Facebook. And not just use Facebook, but be a regular user of it. Another adolescent is of the opinion that it's "cool" to use Facebook and "If you haven't logged in the previous evening you had better have a good excuse for it." One adolescent claims "It's embarrassing to tell your crush or anyone that you don't have a Facebook account." "It's like not knowing what the in thing is." Another crucial aspect of using Facebook is the public display of connections. Thus one's friends' list is visible to all and has to be impressive to attract attention.

### **Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure is an important factor that influences the need to belong. As the need to belong is an internal motivation to comply with a particular group, peer pressure on the other hand, is an external factor that pushes an individual to conform to a particular group. Another adolescent believes that "You won't have too many friends if you are not on Facebook." An insecurely attached adolescent thinks that Facebook is the "Perfect thing to keep in touch with friends and should be made compulsory." Friends need each other online to share in the joys and sorrows of life. One of the securely attached adolescents believes that the longer your list of virtual friends, the more popular you are. Facebook is literally seen as a measure of popularity among today's generation.

Among the securely attached adolescents, the importance of having a Facebook account doesn't decrease, and the reasons for having one, does not differ considerably. It is still considered "cool" to use Facebook. It acts as a platform on which they can share pictures and information with everyone, only because it is very convenient." It also is used as a tool to keep in touch with friends and family members.

One of the main reasons for this could be that adolescence is in itself a stage of 'trying to fit in' and 'be like the rest'. Thus irrespective of their individual attachment styles, adolescents universally do what is required of them to belong and be part of their peer group. Hence Facebook serving as a medium of 'fitting in' is has adolescents of all styles taking to it.

Many of the insecure adolescents, when asked to describe their profile pictures, stated they uploaded pictures of themselves alone. The securely attached adolescents on the other hand, uploaded a mix of single profile pictures and also pictures that had images of themselves along with other friends. This has a lot to do with their levels of confidence, probably fearing that their friend in the profile picture might get more attention than them.



### **Privacy and Independence**

There is an interesting pattern of privacy that most adolescents voiced when talking about “Facebooking” and unanimously agreed that adults, at least parents should not be allowed on Facebook.” One adolescent opined that “Facebook is the only place where I can be myself”. My parents aren’t constantly looking at me and criticizing me. I’d die if my parents joined Facebook.” Another believed that “My parents are very nosy and they have problems with everything I do. So I normally don’t introduce my friends or show them pictures of us when we go out and all, but if they joined Facebook, they will see all my pictures and comments and will definitely have something bad to say about my friends and our things.” Another adolescent opined that parents have their own friends, so why should they come trying to make friends with my friends?” Generally among the insecurely attached adolescents, a parent being on Facebook is a big no. They “feel on edge” if one of their parents is on Facebook, and are constantly wondering if they are checking their (adolescents) profiles and pictures and comments. Despite detesting the parent’s presence on Facebook, having a sibling or more on their friend’s list is absolutely fine. “My siblings usually know what’s going on in my life and I know what’s happening in their life. We just don’t tell our parents, it’s a mutual agreement” Most adolescents enjoy the feelings of privacy Facebook has to offer and a majority of the adolescents’ share the view that Facebook is meant only for the “Younger Generation” and that “Parents have no right impinging on their personal space.” They enjoy the fact that they can be whom ever they want and talk to whomever they want from the comfort of their own homes without parents knowing. The secrecy with which they change character and identity is appealing to them and creates a sense of power, generally found missing in their real life relations. The insecure adolescents, especially resent it if the “Grown ups want to know why they spend so much time on Facebook.” “Why should they come poking their nose there?” they ask. It’s a widely held belief that the older generation is not welcome on Facebook and even if they do venture, they are “Too dumb to understand”. “The intricacies of Facebook would be much too difficult for them” said a 15 year old adolescent.

What comes out rather strongly here is there innate fear of being judged by anyone- from their parents to friends to complete strangers. Adolescents hide behind a mask of what they want to be, conveniently made available by Facebook. A lack of confidence is also seen on a very subtle note, where they lack confidence in who they are, resulting in them wanting to be someone they are not.

With the growing need for independence, adolescents are increasingly trying to explore and experiment with new avenues and forums for self discovery, self expression and independence. Both the secure and insecure adolescents use Facebook for just such purposes with hardly any difference between them. They also exercise independence over what they share on Facebook especially regarding personal information. Independence is a long sought after state for all adolescents, secure or insecure, and Facebook brings this out beautifully. Many adolescents exercise independence in the number of hours they will spend online, the pictures they upload, the statuses they update and the comments they post. The fact that most parents are not on Facebook, allow the

adolescent to be ‘free’. One adolescent believed that “it’s more fun interacting this way because parents are not breathing down your back about how you are dressed, what language you are using, how your hair looks and how you present yourself.” Another opines that “parents have an old retarded way of looking at how we behave and are, and it just doesn’t belong in the present century, so Facebook offers you freedom from stuff like that.” It’s a lot of fun this way and I like it more.” There isn’t much difference in the way insecure and secure adolescents react to the independence they get from using Facebook.

### **Accessibility**

Accessibility is another main criterion for its popularity with adolescents. In today’s world, most homes belonging to the middle to upper middle socio-economic status have at least one computer at home with access to the internet. Even if an individual doesn’t have access to Facebook from home, there are innumerable internet cafes across the country.

With Facebook being free, it is accessible to all age groups irrespective of their socio-economic background. It requires little or almost no money to create and maintain an account and is accessible from anywhere that has a computer and internet access. The fact that today’s children do not grow up without a computer at home or even access to a computer, using Facebook is very easy. Most of the youth today know how to use a computer and using Facebook offers no resistance on the part of the adolescents. Many adolescents claim Facebook to be a source of recreation, when they are ‘jobless’. One adolescent says “I log onto Facebook every time I take a break because it’s very refreshing.” Another opines that using Facebook doesn’t require anything elaborate and is relatively easy to use.” Another individual opines that “Using Facebook doesn’t leave behind a trail of mess that needs to be cleaned up later and is therefore very convenient.” Another individual opines that she has nothing else to do at night, so Facebook it is.” “Chatting is another feature that most enjoy on Facebook.” As one puts it, “Facebook is a single forum that brings all my friends together, unlike GTalk and MSN, so it’s very convenient and I can choose whom I want to chat with.”

Currently Facebook Mobile is in vogue, allowing individuals to access Facebook from their mobile phones from where ever they are, whether in school or at home, without even a computer with internet access. Thus one’s access to their Facebook account is extremely easy and requires hardly any other equipment other than a Mobile Phone.

Most of the girls enjoying playing free games on Facebook, and the boys look down on Facebook games and would rather use their Xbox.

There doesn’t seem to be any striking difference between the insecure and secure adolescents, in the use of Facebook because of its accessibility.

### **Need for Affection**

Need for affection has emerged as a strongly prevalent underlying pattern in the interviews of all the insecurely attached adolescents. A majority of the insecurely attached adolescents said that they took to Facebook because they had been rebuked by their parents or family members.” Sometimes I try talking to my mother, but she always says she’s too busy, so I end up logging onto Facebook and I talk to my friends instead.” Another opined that my friends are always



willing to listen to me, so I end up sharing things with them.” One adolescent says my friends “always love me.” Implying that his parents don’t. They seek to get the attention of parents and feel pushed away when ignored. As one adolescent said, “Sometimes I know my family doesn’t want me around, that’s when I take to Facebook.” Another adolescent said, “My parents are usually too busy for me, and instead of getting under their feet, I use Facebook.”

Some adolescents also don’t like spending time with their family members as they consider it “a waste of time” and would rather use that time to spend with their friends. There is total disregard for their family members and prefer spending time with their friends. They did not consider spending time with their family members a proper utilization of their spare time.

Many of them spoke about their relationship with their family members and how they consider online social networking an escape from family members and duties as one participant said, “I don’t like my parents joining Facebook. That is the only place I get freedom from my parents.” They don’t mind. But with parents you have to be very careful because I’m not allowed to use bad words.” “With friends, they know what you are talking about and they understand without you having to tell them ever thing directly.” Another adolescent was of the opinion that “Friends know what would have happened the previous day so, they understand faster.” One insecurely attached adolescent was of the opinion that she cannot express herself in front of her parents. Words come to me better in front of my friends.” Another reason for differences in patterns of interaction was that a majority of the insecurely attached adolescents feel that parents are very strict friends on the other hand are not.” And also “friends are going through similar things like us, so they can understand better than adults who belong to a different generation.”

The insecurely attached adolescents believed “it’s easier forming relationships with people online than in real life.” “I don’t fight with these people.” “I can be whoever I want to be and no one can make out if I lie.” I put up whichever pictures I want and people don’t even know it’s me, so it’s great.” “They needn’t know everything about me” they claim. “It’s easier online because they don’t ask too many questions.” The level of judging a person and forming an impression on first interaction on social networking sites differs from that in face to face interactions. It is purely left to the physical appearance of usually the profile pictures and the other information one uploads. The process of getting to know the person is done later on only if you want to and is left to your discretion. The insecure adolescents feel more comfortable forming relationships online especially with strangers than in face to face relationships. They believed an element of ‘rawness’ leaves him exposed in face to face relationships that makes him feel awkward.

On analysis, many themes appeared that throw light on the links between attachment styles and levels of social networking, as assumed earlier. The reasons for the higher use of Facebook by insecurely attached individuals have been highlighted in various themes that ran through the interviews.

One of the major reasons for the popularity of Facebook would definitely be its availability and the ease with which it can be used. For the easier it is to use, the more it will be used. Creating and maintaining an account on Facebook requires just a computer with internet access and in today’s

world a computer is a necessity in most homes. The ability to access Facebook through mobile phones has just made access easier for those on the move. Thus one requires not just being at home with a computer but having a mobile phone with GPRS facility, allows one to access their Facebook accounts from just about anywhere. The fact that being at home and not having anything to do, most adolescents turn to Facebook. It can be accessed during exam times, at any time of the night or day, and even when they have relatives at home.

The privacy that Facebook provides its users is a refreshing change from badly kept secrets and back stabbing friends. Facebook assures utmost secrecy and for adolescents hiding things from their parents finds it the safest refuge. With the right mix of hiding and showing information, adolescents are immersed in creating different identities of themselves and managing who sees what information about themselves. Facebook allows certain individuals access to certain information, while certain people can be hidden from accessing all the information. With today’s craze for partying and enjoying with friends, and with parents not approving of their lifestyle, evidence of the night before, cannot be shown to the parents. So adolescents like to put it up on Facebook, where their friends have access to them, but not the parents. Thus privacy settings on Facebook are of convenience to the adolescents.

Adolescence is a crucial stage of development and comes with its own set of problems and issues. There are various changes that take place during this time and it’s also the time for experimentation. Friends are the most crucial to an adolescent’s life. The need to belong is one of the most pressing needs during adolescence and this is influenced by peer pressure. At this age most adolescents are willing to go that extra mile to fit in and belong to their peer group. Thus Facebook is another means through which peers exercise their control over the other members of their peer groups. Adolescents create and maintain accounts in order to ‘belong’ to their groups and to share the same experiences. In early adolescence they are still exploring the ways of the world and are easily influenced especially by their friends. Hence the need to belong comes across very strongly in the interviews that were conducted. This need is mainly a ‘within force’ and peer pressure is more an ‘outside force’. Thus peer pressure would influence an individual’s need to belong.

Another need that Facebook caters to is the need for care and affection. Most adolescents believe that Facebook is an adequate compensation for family affection. They escape to Facebook probably because they believe log onto Facebook as soon as they come home. Their friends care for them more than their family. This would not be hard to believe as the family members rarely have time to spend with them at home and the children usually feel more comfortable with their friends.

Adolescents also state they feel more comfortable with their friends and can ‘talk to them about most things.’ This may be due to the fact that family members are still a little old fashioned and topics like sex, boyfriends and girlfriends are still taboo and should not be spoken about. Hence adolescents feel more comfortable talking to friends who don’t share the same views as their parents. In addition to that friends also have similar problems, so talking to an experienced friend is of immense help because they feel they can be given practical advice.

Not only do adolescents prefer talking to their friends about various issues, their style of interaction varies from parents to friends. Adolescents prefer using slang with their friends because they consider it cool to talk like that and parents would not appreciate it. Though parents try their best to lead them away from talking slang, teenagers retain it and take pride in their increase in vocabulary. It's also easy to fit in if one uses slang and offers a higher level of popularity. Members of the older generation do not understand certain terms and figures of speech, and it's more convenient using it with their friends group.

Individuals also experience a greater level of independence while using Facebook. As this is the age for self-expression and discovery, adolescents are experimenting with their identity. Facebook provides independence in terms of changing their identity uploading and changing personal information viewable by others. This freedom to control their information, allows adolescents with a sense of independence not possible in real life.

Forming inter-personal relations online is easier for those with attachment related issues. Adolescents can physically stay in a comforting, secure environment and reach out to others beyond their immediate environment. Research shows that individuals with attachment related issues, lack social skills that are necessary to form relationships in the real world. Hence the ease with which an individual can form relationships online is a much more attractive option, than facing the anxiety, ridicule and embarrassment that goes into forming real relationships.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Adolescence is considered the most difficult phase in the lifespan of man. It is also the most volatile and unstructured and the most moldable. Adolescents can be shaped by innumerable things at this point in their lives and in today's world; technology has no less influence on adolescents than their friends. Another great influence on an adolescent's relationships would be his attachment styles that are determined by his early childhood caregiver experiences.

This study primarily focused on the interaction of an adolescent's attachment styles with their use of Social Networking Sites, especially Facebook, in order to give us an understanding of the prevalence of attachment styles among teenagers in the city, their social networking habits and also the differences in their reasons given for Facebook use.

This study was conducted on a sample of 95 adolescents all ranging between the ages of 14 to 17 years, from the city of Urban Bangalore. The results of this study indicate that 44% of the sample was identified as insecurely attached and 66% of the sample was securely attached. Out of this a total of 72% of the insecurely attached adolescents were found to be high users of Facebook and only 44% of the securely attached adolescents were heavy users of Facebook.

In-depth interviews were conducted to get into the 'whys' of Facebook use. From the interviews many themes such as accessibility, anonymity, interaction patterns, independence, privacy, need to belong and the need for care and differences in interaction patterns were discovered. Many of these themes throw light directly on the research objectives and some that provide insight into the developmental issues of the adolescent period. These themes question our

understanding of their levels of self confidence or the lack of it, their supposed understandings of parental rejection and peers as lifelong companions.

Thus in conclusion we can say that adolescents take to online social networking not only to pass their time, but it serves as a basic tool to fill in a void that they find in their real lives. The more active one is on Facebook, the more isolated from real life they become. As 'Facebooking' requires no social skills to build relationships, one needs just a computer and internet access to build bonds and maintain relationships. It bridges the gap between who they are and who they want to be and it offers the insecurely attached a chance to be just as popular and have the same number of friends as a securely attached individual.

One can argue if virtual friends can really take the place of real friends? Can they provide the same warmth that you would feel, when being hugged by a friend, or the same satisfaction coming from a friend physically whipping away a tear? Do virtual friends like you, for who you actually are or do they like you for who you are pretending to be? Can the world survive on virtual friends? Further research could seek to answer some of these questions and find solutions to improve the quality of our relationships.

It is hoped that his study has brought to light recently developing issues in the field of Psychology in the broader framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that these new concepts will continue to be studied in relation to bettering human relationships.

The sample for this study, mainly hails from an upper socio-economic or upper middle socio-economic background and this reduces the generalizability of the study. The major limitation to this study was that the study was conducted on only adolescents, and a wider variety of age groups could not be incorporated. The fact that the current study focused only on a sample purely Bangalore reduces its generalizability.

## APPENDIX

### Interview guideline

1. Can you describe why you like using Facebook?
2. How do you feel when you are not able to log in as often as you like?
3. How do you feel when you are logged in?
4. Do you feel "special/happy/unique" when you are online? In what way?
5. In what way do you feel special when you are online?
6. While chatting, what do you generally chat about?
7. With whom and why?
8. Why do you enjoy chatting?
9. Do you find something missing in you that you find in Facebook?
10. Does Facebooking make your day better? In what way?
11. Describe how you feel when someone 'likes' or comments' on your uploaded pictures and your statuses or 'writes on your wall'.
12. How much it's connected to real life?
13. How they view themselves and how they want others to view them
14. If they had the power to change any feature, what would it be?
15. What role does Facebook play in their social and academic lives?

16. Without Facebook how would things have been?
17. Is Facebook interaction as good as face to face interaction?
18. Social issues
19. How much of the information they share is inappropriate (according to them)

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