The relationship between psychological well-being and attachment in emerging adulthood.

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Abstract
Youths’ transition into adulthood can be challenging, especially when this transition implies a continuation of education, thus a continuation of the financial dependency in early adulthood. There are an array of developmental tasks and challenges young people go through, and some of these tasks can be conflicting: pursuing an academic track versus having financial independence. These new challenges can impact on youths’ well-being. However, having a good parental- and peer attachment have been shown to ease these transitions and have positive effects on well-being. In this current study we aimed to examine if parental and peer attachment could significantly predict outcomes in psychological well-being (i.e., presence of life satisfaction and self-esteem and absence of depression) in university students (Mean age=22.5, SD= 2.0). The results showed that parental- and peer attachment are significantly related to youths’ life satisfaction with one exception. Father attachment was not related to youths’ self-esteem. In summary parental- and peer attachment do contribute to significant increases in psychological well-being.

Keywords: Parental - and Peer Attachment, Emerging Adulthood, Psychological wellbeing, Self-esteem, Life satisfaction, Depression.

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Förhållandet mellan psykologiskt välbefinnande och anknytning vid övergången till vuxenlivet.

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Sammanfattning
Ungdoms övergång till vuxenlivet kan vara utmanande, speciellt när denna övergång innebär en fortsättning av utbildning, vilket leder till en fortsättning av att vara finansiellt beroende i tidigt vuxenliv. Det finns en mängd utvecklingsrelaterade uppgifter och utmaningar som unga personer går igenom och vissa av dessa uppgifter kan vara motstridande: att gå den akademiska vägen eller vara finansiellt oberoende. Dessa nämnda utmaningar kan påverka ungdoms välbefinnande. Dock har det visat sig att ha en god anknytning till föräldrar och vänner kan underlättla dessa övergångar och samtidigt ha positiva effekter på välbefinnande. Målet med studien var att undersöka om föräldra- och vänanknytning kunde signifikant förklara utfall i psykologiskt välbefinnande (närvaro av livstillfredsställelse och självkänsla och frånvaro av depression) i universitetsstudenter (Medelålder= 22,5, SD= 2,0). Resultaten visade att föräldra- och vänanknytning var signifikant relaterat till universitetsstudenters tillfredsställelse med livet. Det fanns dock ett undantag då anknytning till fadern ej var signifikant relaterat till självkänsla. Sammanfattningsvis bidrar föräldra- och vänanknytning till signifikanta ökningar i psykologiskt välbefinnande.

Nyckelord: Föräldra- och vänanknytning, Stundande vuxenliv, Psykologiskt välbefinnande, Självkänsla, Livstillfredsställelse, Depression

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Being young today is not easy. Youths living in western post industrialized countries are faced with more opportunities than ever before. The pathways to becoming an adult has changed and are less clear than they used to be a few years ago (Arnett, 2001). However, there are still people who chose to move on to attend the university relatively soon after graduating from high school (Arnett, 2000). Research has shown that students at higher education are exposed to the risk of developing problems that risk affecting the individual's well-being (Vrangalova, 2015). Two of these problems are decreased levels of self-esteem and experiencing distress due to academic and social pressure amongst other things (Adlaf, Gliksman, Demers, & Newton-Taylor, 2001; Xu, de Bakker, Straijker & Wu, 2015). In addition students in the ages of 19-25 are also going through a period in life which has been identified as a developmental phase called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). In this phase youths are faced with major developmental tasks and changes whilst also engaging in intense identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). Previous research has pointed out the importance of examining well-being amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood (Vrangalova, 2015). There are important questions regarding this topic that still need to be answered, one such question is: what might have positive effects on youths’ well-being and potentially help youths through this difficult phase in life? Thus, in this study we will try to answer these questions.

Well-being is a concept that can be viewed as a multidimensional concept that consists of multiple domains of human functioning such as psychological health or ill-health, affective moods and the individual's cognitive evaluations of his or her own self-worth and life in general
(Dagenais-desmarais, & Savoie, 2012). Whilst subjective well-being is referring to a subjective evaluation of well-being, made mainly in relation to long-term affective moods as well as life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003), psychological well-being is referring to an individual’s development of and ability to cope with difficulties in life (Dagenais-desmarais & Savoie, 2012). Psychological well-being has been shown to be related to adjustment making which is an important factor amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood since this is a period in which many changes occur (Vrangalova, 2015) The multidimensional concept of well-being is a concept that has been conceptualized in multiple ways by different researchers depending on the aim of the research at hand (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). However, an important and central aspect of well-being is life satisfaction (Dagenais-desmarais & Savoie, 2012). Life satisfaction represents the cognitive domain which refers to the level of satisfaction with life experienced by the individual. In other words the level of satisfaction experienced by an individual is based upon a cognitive evaluation of the individual’s life in general (Margitics & Pauwlik, 2009). Prior research examining the concept of life satisfaction has found that although life satisfaction tend to be relatively consistent over a longer period of time, life satisfaction also tend to fluctuate due to an individual being faced with major events or life-changes (Fujita & Diener, 2005). Previous research has also shown that youths life satisfaction and well-being might adapt to changes and challenges that the individual is faced with, meaning that negative aspects of one’s life might lead to a decrease in life satisfaction (Fujita & Diener, 2005). It is very clear that the benefits of being satisfied with life and feeling well would possibly help emerging adults in their transitions, such as attending university.
Other researchers examining psychological well-being has focused on depression alongside with life satisfaction (Vrangalova, 2015). Depression is a complex illness that includes many symptoms such as, exhaustion, and feelings of hopelessness. Depression can be more or less severe depending on how many symptoms and to what degree an individual is experiencing them (Margitics & Pauwlik, 2009). Further, research has shown that depression is common amongst students attending higher education. Most people in this group of people experience symptoms of depression at some point, such as exhaustion (Margitics & Pauwlik, 2009).

Life satisfaction has been shown to be of importance when it comes to dealing with transitions (Fujita & Diener, 2005), which is an important element of the years of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The years of emerging adulthood is also an age period in which individuals is at risk of experiencing depression (Vrangalova, 2015). Thus, one might consider both these concepts (i.e., life satisfaction and depression) as two important concepts to consider when examining individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood. Another aspect that might be important to examine in relation to well-being is self-esteem. Global self-esteem refers to the individual's subjective evaluation of the own personal worth (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 1995). Self-esteem has been shown to be related to the level of satisfaction with life experienced by an individual (Swann, Chang-Schneider & McClarty, 2007), in addition youths’ self-esteem has also been shown to be of great importance in periods of transition (Rieger, Göllner, Trautwein & Roberts, 2015). Previous research on self-esteem has shown that although global self-esteem tend to be fairly consistent across the lifespan, the level of
self-esteem experienced by an individual can be responsive to major changes or challenges, meaning that an individual's global self-esteem can be vulnerable to major life-events (Galambos, Barker & Krahn, 2006). During the years of entering adulthood youths engage in intense identity exploration (Arnett, 2000), something that could lead to increased self-doubt or conflict in the way the individual view him or herself (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003), which in turn might in turn lead to a decrease in self-esteem (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). Furthermore, research has shown that self-esteem amongst students, during the ages of entering adulthood, tend to drop during their first year at university (Chung, et.al., 2014). Whilst higher levels of self-esteem has been shown to be related to life satisfaction, lower levels of self-esteem has been shown to be related to depression (Swann, Chang-Schneider & McClarty, 2007). In conclusion, the results of previous research has shown that self-esteem might decrease in the ages of emerging adulthood due to conflicts in the way individuals view themselves, making self-esteem an important aspect to examine when looking at individuals entering emerging adulthood.

Given the many challenges young people are faced with during the ages of emerging adulthood a question prevails: What might improve chances of individuals successfully dealing with the many challenges and changes during the ages of emerging adulthood by increasing the chances of individuals experiencing higher levels of psychological well-being? The current thesis is aiming to examine this question by looking at the potential relationship between youths' attachment and psychological well-being as well as depression and self-esteem.
Previous research examining attachment and well-being has found that the level of attachment experienced towards other people may be of great importance when it comes to several aspects of well-being, such as social competence and psychological functioning, when transitioning into adulthood (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). In addition previous research has shown that attachment is an important factor to look at in relationship to psychological well-being (Love & Murdock, 2004). Especially amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood attachment has been shown to have a buffering effect on life satisfaction which in turn has been linked to adjustment (Vrangalova, 2015). Given the many positive aspects that having a good attachment could have, youths’ attachment with significant others in their everyday life can be a good protective factor against the threats posed to psychological well-being.

Attachment is defined as a close emotional bond between two people (Bowlby, 1997). This strong emotional bond is first created during infancy between a child and the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1997). Attachment theory states that the child is born with a need to seek proximity and contact with his or her primary caregiver, a need that is created due to the infant being dependent upon the protection and care of others. Thus the main purpose of attachment during the first few years of life is to ensure the infant's security and by doing so increase the chances of survival (Bowlby, 1997). Attachment between child and primary caregiver is suggested by attachment theory to moderate the way in which an individual view the world as well as the social relationships an individual form towards other people. Depending on the nature of the interactions between the child and the caregiver the child creates expectations on what to expect from the world, as well as what types of attachment behaviors to expect from other people.
(Bowlby, 1997; Bowlby, 1998). Research suggests that individuals who as children formed a more secure attachment will find it easier to form strong social bonds with other people as well as develop a greater capacity for intimacy during late adolescence and early adulthood (Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004; Guarnieri, Smorti & Tani, 2014). In addition, individuals who have experienced a secure attachment towards their caregivers during childhood, view their primary caregiver as a safe base from whom they are free to explore their surroundings knowing that they can return if faced with difficulties (Ainsworth, 1989; Cassidy, 1988). This is something that later in life translates into a sense of security making the individual more adaptive to new circumstances (Ainsworth, 1989). A similar finding has been done with people that are reporting higher levels of life satisfaction, which found that people who are high on satisfaction with life will be more encouraged to explore the world, resulting in growth and prosperity for the individual (Park, 2004). Furthermore, individuals who as children developed a secure attachment are less likely to experience loneliness and more likely to experience higher levels of peer acceptance during emerging adulthood, whilst individuals who as children were insecurely attached are more likely to struggle with peer acceptance and more likely to experience alienation (Dykas, Ziv, & Cassidy, 2008). Individuals who as children formed a more secure attachment will also find it easier to form strong social bonds with other people as well as develop a greater capacity for intimacy during late adolescence and early adulthood (Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004; Guarnieri, Smorti & Tani, 2014). Thus, attachment can be an important contributor to youths’ well-being.
With adolescence, peers start occupying a central role in adolescents’ life and well-being. The attachment an individual forms towards peers is thought to be reflecting the attachment an individual experiences towards parents, for example individuals who experienced higher levels of parental attachment during childhood is more likely to be experiencing higher levels of peer attachment during their transition into adulthood (Gallego, Delgado & Sanchez-Queija, 2011). Moreover, individuals who experience a more secure attachment will develop a greater ability to cope with stressful life-events (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), as well as develop better coping strategies in general (Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004). Attachment towards caregivers has been shown to be of great importance when it comes to many aspects of living. However, attachment bonds are not exclusively formed towards caregivers but also towards other important figures, such as peers (Bowlby, 1998; Ainsworth, 1989; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

During youth, specifically in early adolescence, the importance of peers is thought to increase. Peer relationships play an important role when it comes to the process of developing autonomy and independence, in addition peers are also considered to be important when it comes to developing the ability to deal with intimacy (Hwang, Lundberg, Rönnberg, Smedler, 2007). Through the development of strong bonds towards peers, the individual is also able to separate emotionally from the family, and by doing so leaving room for the development of dependence, as well as personal growth (Hwang, Lundberg, Rönnberg & Smedler, 2007). Likewise, attachment theory has suggested that the conditions of primary attachment change in adolescence; during childhood the caregiver is viewed as the primary attachment figure, however in adolescence the attachment towards peers tend to increase whilst the importance of attachment
towards parents decrease (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1998). Additional research has shown results supporting the idea that peer attachment is increasing during adolescence (Gallego, Delgado, & Sanchez-Queija, 2011). Even though attachment towards parents is believed to decrease during adolescence, research has also shown that attachment hierarchy might not be that clear, suggesting that during adolescence and early adulthood several significant others can be viewed as primary caregivers, meaning that the primary attachment includes the relationship with several people such as parents, peers (Ainsworth, 1989) and a romantic partner (Guarnieri Smorti & Tani, 2014). In sum there seems to be many short-term but also long term benefits of having a good attachment to significant others regarding the well-being of individuals.

**Attachment in relation to life satisfaction, depression and self-esteem**

The aim of the current thesis is to explore the potential relationship between attachment and psychological well-being amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood by focusing on life satisfaction as well as depression and self-esteem. Psychological well-being is referring to an individual's development of and ability to cope with difficulties (Dagenais-desmarais, & Savoie, 2012). Life satisfaction, self-esteem and depression are three variables commonly used in research examining psychological well-being (Vrangalova, 2015). Previous research examining well-being (i.e. life satisfaction), depression and self-esteem amongst youths has shown results indicating that attachment is of importance when it comes to these three variables (Love & Murdock, 2004). For instance both parental and peer attachment has been found to be positively related to life-satisfaction, meaning that individuals reporting higher levels of experienced attachment towards both parents and peers also reported higher levels of experienced life
satisfaction (Armsden & Greenberg, 1978). These results are supported by an additional study that found that attachment towards parents as well as attachment towards peers are important when it is in relation to life satisfaction (Ma, & Huebner, 2008). Furthermore, the results also demonstrated that attachment to the mother was the most important predictor of global life satisfaction (Ma & Huebner, 2008). One plausible explanation to the relationship between attachment and life satisfaction is that attachment towards primary caregiver is not only believed to create patterns which affect the way we form future attachment bonds but also to shape the way in which we view the world (Bowlby, 1969). Although some studies found that there was an association between global life satisfaction and peer attachment, the results from another study showed that amongst individuals who were romantically involved attachment to peer could not significantly predict life satisfaction (Guarnieri, Smorti & Tani, 2014). A possible explanation for this is that romantic partners might take the place of peers as one of the more prominent attachment figures (Guarnieri, Smorti & Tani, 2014).

Attachment has also been found to be positively related to self-esteem. Prior research examining the potential relationship between attachment and self-esteem has shown that people who report higher levels of experienced attachment towards foremost parents, but also towards other people tend to view themselves with greater satisfaction (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Wilkinson (2004) found, when studying the potential effects of attachment on youths psychological health, that both parental and peer attachment were positively related to self-esteem. Likewise, the results of a study examining the pathways to self-esteem in late
adolescence showed that both parental attachment and peer attachment were directly related, however these results also indicated that to some females’ attachment towards mother matter more in relationship to self-esteem (Laible, Carlo & Roesch, 2004).

One plausible explanation to the relationship between attachment and self-esteem might be that the primary role of attachment in relationship to an individual's self-esteem is the bolstering of one's own self-worth (Wilkinson, 2004). Furthermore a better quality of attachment leads the individual to evaluate his or her own attributes as more valuable which in turn can increase the level of self-esteem experienced by an individual (Wilkinson, 2004). Both self-worth and the evaluation of attributes has been shown to be associated with global self-esteem (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Wilkinson, 2004).

Parental and peer attachment has both been shown to be related to the level of life-satisfaction experienced by an individual as well as levels of self-esteem. However, in relation to youths’ attachment, depression amongst youths has only been found to be related to parental attachment. The results of a study showed that lower levels of attachment towards parents were significantly associated with the course of depression amongst youths, whereas attachment to peers was not (Agerup, Lydersen, Wallander & Sund, 2014). One potential explanation for this might be that since attachment is an important characteristic of social relationships, individuals who have not formed a good attachment to their parents will have difficulties later in with further attachment types (Agerup, Lydersen, Wallander & Sund, 2014). Moreover, the results showed that individuals who experience lower levels of attachment towards
their parents are more likely to be depressed than individuals who experience higher levels of attachment to the parents (Agerup, Lydersen, Wallander, & Sund, 2014).

Despite previous research having brought up the importance of the relationship between attachment and well-being, especially in periods of transitions from adolescence to adulthood. There has been a limited number of studies done examining the relationship between parental and peer attachment and well-being amongst youths in the ages of 19-25 (Ma & Huebner, 2008). Thus, life satisfaction, self-esteem and depression has all been found to be relevant components to look at when examining how youths are feeling during emerging adulthood, in addition they have all been found to be related to attachment in some way or another. Therefore the purpose of this thesis is to examine the potential relationship between parental and peer attachment and psychological well-being as well as depression and self-esteem, amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood.

Based on all the above this thesis will aim to answer the following research questions: To what extent can attachment towards mother, father, and peers predict psychological well-being conceptualized as life satisfaction, as well as depression and self-esteem amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood.

Previous research examining the relationship between youths’ attachment and life satisfaction, depression and self-esteem has been focusing on a somewhat younger age-group, early to late adolescence (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Wilkinson, 2004). Thus it is clear that there is a need
to broaden the research field to also include a slightly older group of people (i.e. emerging adults).

The choice to specifically focus on individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood, in the ages of 19-25, was based on this being a period in life which is characterised by challenges and developmental tasks that can be problematic (Arnett, 2000). We have also simultaneously investigated youths’ attachment towards several important others for youths: mother, father and peers. We have chosen to explore several types of attachment since attachment towards other people than parents is believed to also play an important role in different aspects concerning youths’ development (Armsden & Greenberg, 1979; Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1998).

In this thesis well-being is assessed by examining individuals experienced life satisfaction. Alongside with life satisfaction, depression and self-esteem is also being examined. We choose to include these concepts in our study since these variables are commonly used in research examining well-being (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Vrangalova, 2015). Since we are looking specifically at students who are going through emerging adulthood we thought that lack of depression would be a good component to examine due to previous research showing that depression is common amongst emerging adults (Margitics & Pauwlik, 2009). In line with attachment theory and the findings of previous research examining youths’ attachment to parents and peers and different dimensions of well-being we hypothesise that both parental: attachment to mother and father and attachment to peers will positively predict life satisfaction as well as global self-esteem. Furthermore we hypothesise that parental: attachment to mother and father will negatively predict depression above and beyond the effect of attachment to peers.
Method

Participants
Participants in the current study were 194 students attending Örebro University, ages ranging from 18-25 (Mean age=22.5, SD=2.0). Two of the total 194 responses were excluded due to the participants failing to state their age. Our sample consisted of 192 students. 155 of the students were females (75%). Almost 75.5 % of the participants moved to Örebro from other cities specifically to attend the university and the remaining 47 participants (24.5 %) were either originally from Örebro or moved here due to other reasons. Most of the participants reported having siblings (97%), and only 6 participants (3%) answered that they did not have any siblings. About 60% of the participants reported being involved in a romantic relationship. Furthermore 70.8% of the participants reported that they grew up in a household with both parents, 25% of the participants reported that they grew up with divorced parents and 4.2% participants reported that they were raised by a single mother. A convenience sample was used in the current study.

Measures
We used four already established scales to measure parental and peer attachment, life satisfaction, global self-esteem and symptoms of depression. We found a swedish adaptation of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment originally created by (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) called Viktiga personer i mitt liv (VIPIL). A Swedish adaptation and translation of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) created by Hwang (2001) was used to measure
attachment. We also found a Swedish translation of Diener’s (1985) *Life satisfaction scale*. Zung’s (1965) *self-rating depression scale* along with the Rosenberg’s *Self-esteem scale* (1965) were translated to Swedish by us since no Swedish translation of these two scales were available to us. To make sure that the translations was capturing the core meaning of all the items the scales were translated to Swedish by both of the authors of the current thesis. The two translations were then compared against each other and translated back by two fellow students at Örebro University who were fluent in both Swedish and English, this was also done to make sure that the core meaning of the items were captured. Once the two scales had been translated, 19 friends of us on Facebook were asked to answer the questions in both of the scales, they were also asked to give feedback as to whether or not they perceived any of the questions as incorrectly formulated. A pilot study was conducted. The pilot study included all of the scales. Zung’s self-rating depression scale consisted of 20 items (α=0.76). The Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale consisted of 10 items (α=0.78).The complete VIPIL scale consisted of 75 items (α= 0.97). The VIPIL scale consisted of three subscales each of them consisting of 25 questions. The mother scale (α= 0.96), the father scale (α= 0.92) and the peers scale (α= 0.95).

**Self-esteem.** We measured youths’ self-esteem using *Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale* which had a Cronbach’s alpha of .87. The Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale is a questionnaire containing 10 items (Rosenberg, 1965). Every item was measured on a four point scale ranging from the scores 1-4, where 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree and 4 = Strongly
disagree. Two examples of items from the SES are “Jag tycker jag har en rad goda egenskaper” and “På det stora hela är jag nöjd med mig själv”. Some of the questions were coded negatively.

Depression. We measured youths’ depression using Zung’s self-rating depression scale which gave a Cronbach’s alpha of .88. Zung’s depression scale is a 20-item scale (Zung, 1965). Every item in the scale is measured on a four point scale ranging from 1-4, where 1 = Sällan eller aldrig, 2 = Ibland, 3 = Ofta and 4 = Mestadels eller alltid. Two examples of the items from Zung’s self-rating depression scale are “Jag känner mig hoppfull inför framtiden” and “Jag har lätt för att göra saker som jag vanligtvis brukar göra”.

Satisfaction with life. We measured life satisfaction using a translated version of the Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS), originally created by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985) which gave a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .84. The Satisfaction with life scale is a scale consisting of 5 items and is designed to measure global cognitive judgements of satisfaction with one’s life. Every item on the scale is measured from 1-7, where 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Slightly disagree, 4= Neither agree or disagree, 5= Slightly agree, 6= Agree and 7= Strongly agree. Two examples of questions from the scale are: “Jag är nöjd med mitt liv” and “Om jag kunde leva om mitt liv, skulle jag inte ändra nästan någonting”.

Attachment to parents and peers. To measure attachment towards parents and peers we used a Swedish translation of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) originally created by Armsden and Greenberg (1987). IPPA was designed on the basis of Bowlby’s theory of attachment described in attachment theory, with special emphasis on Bowlby’s ideas of
internal working models. IPPA is a self-assessment tool used to measure attachment, meaning that it is the respondent’s experience of his or her attachment towards parents and peers being measured (Armsden & Greenberg, 1978). The Swedish translation being used in this survey *Viktiga Personer I mitt Liv* (VIPIL) was created by Philip Hwang (2001). VIPIL in accordance with IPPA consists of 75 items and had a Cronbach alpha of .96. The full scale consists of three subscales. The first subscale is designed to measure attachment towards mother and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .96. The second subscale is designed to measure attachment towards father had a Cronbach’s alpha of .97. The third subscale designed to measure attachment towards peers had a Cronbach’s alpha of .94. The Cronbach’s alpha value of VIPIL was estimated both during the pilot study and on the survey data. The subscales each consists of 25 questions. The inventory of parent and peer attachment is designed to measure individual's behaviour and cognitive as well as emotional dimensions of attachment. The measure is thought to indicate a secure versus insecure attachment, thus it does not say anything about the different attachment styles formulated by Ainsworth (1987).

The questions in the IPPA and also in VIPIL can be divided into three areas; trust, communication and alienation. Higher scores on the questions concerning trust means that the individual perceive their parents, as well as their friends, as accessible and that they feel that they are understood and that their needs and wishes are being respected. Furthermore perceived experience of whether the parents are being attentive towards their emotional state, as well as if they perceive their parents as caring, are measured. IPPA and VIPIL also include items designed to capture anger, feelings of hopelessness and emotional distance towards parents (Armsden &
Greenberg, 1978). Measurement of attachment towards mother, father and friends are measured by similar questions, designed meaning that questions concerning attachment towards peers can be divided into the same categories as mentioned above concerning the questions regarding attachment towards parents. Three examples of items in VIPIL are “Min mamma hjälper mig att prata om mina svårigheter.”, “Jag vill gärna få min pappas synpunkt på saker som bekymrar mig” and “Att prata om mina problem med mina vänner får mig att skämmas eller känna mig dum.”. Responses were answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-Stämmer nästan aldrig eller aldrig to 5-Stämmer nästan alltid eller alltid. The points for each subscale is ranging from 25-125, higher scores indicate a more secure attachment whilst lower scores indicate an insecure attachment (Armsden & Greenberg. 1987). The results of a factor analysis showed that the items were highly correlated with each other in all of the three subscales and three factors was extracted which is consistent with the original scale. However the factor analysis showed that several of our items was loading on low values during the factor extraction.

Procedure
To answer the research question we conducted a cross-sectional survey, online. The survey was created in google forms and consisted of four commonly used scales. We decided to place the scale used to measure attachment first out of all the scales since this scale consisted of 75 questions, thus we wanted to avoid people being too tired to answer the questions accurately. The other scales contained more variation and were shorter. The scale used to measure depression was placed at the end of the survey, to avoid creating negative emotions that might affect the other scales. In the introductory for each measure, we tried to avoid stimulating participants’
orientation towards desirable answers via using labelling or strong words (e.g., “depression”). The survey was then posted on a Facebook group called Dom kallar oss studenter together with an information letter, informing participants about anonymity and confidentiality, as well an informing about the purpose of the study. The survey along with the information letter were posted approximately once a day for seven days. This was done to make sure that as many people as possible had the chance to participate in the online survey. Since the group has over 3000 members many of whom are currently enrolled at the university we concluded that posting in Dom kallar oss studenter would increase our chances of reaching out to as many students as possible within reasonable time.

Analysis

We started with standardizing the scores for attachment and made sure that we did not have any outliers. All of the data was controlled and in Social Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) to make sure that the scores did not violate the assumptions of normality (Field, 2013). None of our scales violated the assumptions of normality, which means that our data could be considered as normally distributed. All scales showed z-value for both skewness and kurtosis that were below ±1.1. The limit of accepted scores is ±3 for skewness and ±5 for kurtosis which puts our values well within the limit of accepted scores (Field, 2013). We then ran two forced entry multiple regressions for attachment to the mother, the father and peers with life satisfaction and self-esteem, respectively, as the outcome variable in the regression analyses. All of the variables in these two regressions models were entered in the first block in this order; 1. attachment to the mother, 2. attachment to the father and 3. attachment to peers. We also ran one multiple stepwise
regression for attachment to the mother, the father and peers with depression as the outcome variable. We entered the predictors (independent variables) in this order; 1. attachment to the mother, 2. attachment to the father and 3. attachment to the peers. All the mentioned analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS 23.

Results

**Parental and peer attachment predicting life satisfaction**

In the forced entry multiple regression in the first block we put attachment to mother in the second block attachment to father and in the third block attachment to peers with life satisfaction as our outcome variable. We put them in separate blocks so that we would be able to see the unique effect of each of the predictors. There were significant differences in each of the steps in the stepwise table: Step 1: $F (1.89)= 73.11, p <0.01$, Step 2: $F (2.188)= 44.96, p <0.01$ and Step 3: $F (3.187)= 41.93, p <0.01$. And the results of a forced entry multiple regression showed that our three predictors, attachment to the mother, attachment to the father and attachment to peers could significantly explain 40.3% of the variance in ratings of life satisfaction $F (3,187) = 41.93, p <0.01$). The most important predictor was attachment to the mother which could significantly predict 27.9% of the variance in life satisfaction, $\beta= 0.35, p <0.01$. The second most important predictor was attachment to the peers, which could significantly explain 7.9 % of the variance in life satisfaction, $\beta= 0.30, p <0.01$. The least important predictor of these three predictors was attachment to the father, which could explain significantly 4.5% of the variance in life satisfaction, $\beta=0.23, p <0.01$. 
Table 1

Forced entry multiple regression predicting life satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE(B)</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>95% CI for B</th>
</tr>
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<td>.71</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment mother</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.27, .59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment father</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.13, .43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment peers</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.23, .52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: p<.001***, β= Beta

Parental and peer attachment predicting self-esteem

In the forced entry regression model we chose to put each of the predictors in separate blocks so we would be able to see the unique effect of each predictor on the outcome variable. In the first block we put “attachment to the mother”, in the second block we put “attachment to the father” and in the third block attachment to the peers” with “self-esteem” as our outcome variable. Every step in the stepwise table showed significant differences; Step 1 \(F(1,189) = 29.25, p < 0.01\), Step 2 \(F(2, 188) = 14.68, p < 0.01\) and Step 3 \(F(3, 187) = 17.77, p < 0.01\). The results of the forced entry multiple regression showed that the predictors attachment; to the mother and peers could significantly explain significantly 22.1% of the variance in self-esteem, \(F(3, 187) = 17.77, p < 0.01\). The most important predictor was attachment to the mother which accounted for 13.4% of the variance in self-esteem, \(\beta = 0.25, p < 0.05\). The second most important predictor was attachment to peers which accounted for 8.7% of the variance in self-esteem, \(\beta = 0.31, p < 0.01\).
However attachment to the father, 0.1% did not significantly predict variance in self-esteem, 
\( \beta = 0.03, p > 0.05. \)

Table 2

**Forced entry multiple regression predicting self-esteem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE(B)</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>95% CI for B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.78, 1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment mother</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.07, 0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment father</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.07, 0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment peers</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.12, 0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: p<.001***, \( \beta = \text{Beta} \)*

**Parental and peer attachment predicting depression**

We chose to perform a stepwise multiple regression. Based on the literature review we thought that attachment to the parents, especially attachment to the mother would be the most important predictor followed by attachment to the father and attachment to peers. Every step in the stepwise table were significant; Step 1 \( F(1,188)=47.50, p <0.01 \), Step 2 \( F(2,187)=38.85, p <0.01 \) and Step 3 \( F(3,186)= 27.90, p <0.01 \). The results of the stepwise multiple regression showed that our three predictors; attachment to mother, attachment to father and attachment to peers could significantly explain 31% of the variance in depression \( F(3,186) = 28.59, p <0.01 \). The most important predictor was attachment to peers which could significantly predict 21% of
the variance in depression, $\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$. The second most important predictor was attachment to the mother which could significantly explain 9% of the variance in depression, $\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.01$. The least important predictor was attachment to the father, which could significantly explain 1% of the variance in depression $\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$.

**Table 3**

*Stepwise multiple regression predicting depressive symptoms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE(B)</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>95% CI for B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.87, 1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment mother</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>-.22, -.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment father</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>-.27***</td>
<td>-.19, -.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment peers</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.13, -.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $p < .05^* . p < .001^{***} . \beta = \text{Beta}$

**Discussion**

The goal of this study was to examine attachment to mother, father and peers as possible predictors of psychological well-being (i.e., life satisfaction) as well as self-esteem and depression amongst individuals during emerging adulthood. Research has shown that attachment and life satisfaction may work as protective factors in emerging adults as well as having other important positive characteristics (Fujita & Diener, 2005, Park, 2004 & Armsden & Greenberg, 1978). The results of the current study demonstrated that all measured forms of attachment (i.e., attachment
to mother, father and peers) was related to life satisfaction as well as symptoms of depression, whilst self-esteem was only related to attachment to mother and peers and not by attachment to father. The overall results of the current study partially supported our hypotheses: Parental and peer attachment can significantly predict outcomes in life satisfaction and self-esteem implying that attachment is of importance when it comes to psychological well-being.

The aim of this thesis was to explore the potential relationship between different types of attachment and psychological well-being as well as self-esteem and depression amongst emerging adults since previous research has shown that psychological well-being as well as depression and self-esteem is of importance when it comes to several aspects during this age period. An age period in which an individual is vulnerable to issues due to being faced with many challenges as well as dealing with major developmental tasks (Arnett, 2000). Results generated by the current study is implying that attachment is of importance when it comes to psychological well-being.

When examining the relationship between attachment and life satisfaction we found that attachment to both parents as well as to peers could significantly predict global life satisfaction. Therefore supporting previous research suggesting that both parental and peer attachment plays an important role when it comes to experiencing global life satisfaction (Armsden & Greenberg, 1978). One plausible explanation to these findings is that the attachment formed between an individual and the primary caregiver is believed to form, not only the way in which we develop social relationships, but also the way in which we view the world (Bowlby, 1997) Furthermore, the results showed that attachment to mother was the most important
predictor and that attachment to peer was the second most important predictor in life satisfaction. These results are to some extent coherent with previous literature suggesting that, although both parental and peer attachment was shown to be important, attachment to the parents is of greater importance in terms of predicting global life satisfaction since attachment to mother was shown to be the most important predictor of life satisfaction (Ma, & Huebner, 2008). In sum, the results demonstrate that attachment to mother, attachment to father as well as attachment to peers can significantly predict global self-esteem.

Furthermore, the results of the current study also demonstrated that attachment to peers and mother could positively predict self-esteem. Attachment to mother being the most important predictor of self-esteem above and beyond attachment to peers. Attachment to father on the other hand could not significantly predict global self-esteem. These findings partially supports previous research that has shown that both parental attachment (i.e., to father and mother) as well as attachment to peers are significant predictors of global self-esteem (Wilkinson, 2004; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The relationship between attachment and self-esteem could possibly be explained by attachment having a bolstering effect on an individual's self-worth, meaning that a secure attachment potentially can increase the level of experienced self-worth (Wilkinson, 2004; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Another plausible explanation to the relationship between attachment and self-esteem is that individuals experiencing a more secure attachment or a more stable attachment towards foremost caregivers may lead to the individual evaluating his or her own attributes as more valuable (Wilkinson, 2004). Both self-worth and the way in which we evaluate our attributes has been found to be directly associated to the level of
global self-esteem experienced by an individual (Wilkinson, 2004). However, in contrary to our hypotheses as well as the reviewed literature we found that attachment to father was not a predictor of self-esteem. This might be due to attachment to mother being of greater importance when it comes to self-esteem amongst females as suggested by one study conducted on adolescents (Laible, Carlo & Roesch, 2004.) However, we did not see any differences in gender which might be due to our sample consisting to a majority of females, making the sample uneven. Thus, the results generated by the current study partially supported our hypothesis that parental attachment (i.e., to mother and father) as well as attachment to peers can positively predict self-esteem since attachment to mother and peers was shown to significantly predict global self-esteem.

In terms of the relationship between attachment and depression the results of the current study demonstrated significant results indicating that attachment to mother, attachment to father and attachment to peers negatively predicts depression. However, the results showed that attachment to peers was the most important predictor of depression, followed by attachment to mother and attachment to father. According to previous research attachment to mother and attachment to father has both been shown to be associated with depression, whereas attachment to peers has not been shown to be associated with depression (Agerup, Lydersen, Wallander, & Sund, 2014). Thus, all three forms of attachment were shown to negatively predict depression, the most important predictor being attachment to peers followed by attachment to mother and last attachment to father. A thought we had as of why attachment to peers was the most important predictor of depression in the university students, was that students’ partial reason to
study could also be to make new peers but also feeling a sense of fellowship with the fellow students. And if these needs are not fulfilled it may result in symptoms of depression.

The current study yielded some unexpected findings. In terms of whether or not parental and peer attachment could significantly predict outcomes in experienced depression we hypothesised that parental attachment (i.e., attachment to mother, and attachment to father) above and beyond attachment to peer could negatively predict depression. Thus, we expected to find results indicating the following hierarchical order; attachment to mother, attachment to father, attachment to peers. However, our results unexpectedly demonstrated that the most important predictor of depression was attachment to peers followed by attachment to mother and attachment to father. Thus, all three forms of attachment (i.e., to peers, mother and father) could negatively predict depression, however the hierarchical order of attachment as predictors of depression was in our sample not consistent with the order that we expected to find. The unexpected order of attachment as predictors is implying that attachment to peers is of greater importance when it comes to depression amongst individuals in the ages of emerging adulthood. Furthermore, the results of the current study also indicated that attachment to father was not a significant predictor of global self-esteem which contradicts previous research showing that both attachment to mother and attachment to father is related to self-esteem (Wilkinson, 2004; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). In conclusion our hypothesis was only partially confirmed, due to the unexpected finding of attachment to peers being the most important predictor of outcomes in depression above and beyond attachment to parents, as well as the results demonstrating that attachment to father was not a predictor of outcomes in global self-esteem. One plausible
explanation for both these findings might be that previous studies examining the relationship between these two variables in relation to attachment focused on a slightly younger age-group (Wilkinson, 2004; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Agerup, Lydersen, Wallander, & Sund, 2014). Whilst the current study focused on students in the ages of emerging adulthood, previous research focused on early to late adolescents. According to attachment theory the hierarchy of attachment might differ depending on which age an individual is in (Ainsworth, 1989). Another plausible explanation as to why the current study found that father attachment did not significantly predict self-esteem is that the majority of our respondents were females. Previous research has shown that to some women’s attachment towards the mother is of greater importance than father attachment in relation to self-esteem (Laible, Carlo & Roesch, 2004). However, we cannot draw any conclusions as to whether or not there were any gender differences in experienced attachment or global self-esteem in our sample since we did not see any gender differences, something that might be explained by the uneven distribution across gender. The results of the current study supports previous research, underscoring the importance of examining attachment as a potential protective factor when it comes to psychological well-being in the ages of 19-25 due to psychological well-being having a positive effect of aspects deemed important when adjusting to major changes (Fujita & Diener, 2005, Park, 2004).

Limitations and strengths

The current study had some limitations which is important to acknowledge. One issue with the current study was the way we conceptualized psychological well-being. The aim of this study was to examine the relation between attachment and psychological well-being, however when
deciding what variables to include in our study we looked at previous research examining psychological well-being and choose to include self-esteem and depression alongside with life satisfaction in our survey. However, after conducting the survey we found that our conceptualized model of psychological well-being was not supported by theory. In hindsight, it is easy to see that this issue could have been avoided if we would have looked for a theory in positive psychology defining which variables to look at when examining well-being. Despite this issue we believe that the results generated by our study is interesting,

In addition the results of the current study is based on a cross-sectional study, conducting a longitudinal study when examining these kind of questions are to prefer since that would give a wider picture when it comes to changes within and the relationships between the examined variables. Thus, in the current study, we cannot make any inferences about causality. Also in the current study we did not see any significant differences in gender. However, as stated before, our sample consisted of 75 % females which means that this could be the reason as to why we could not see any significant differences in gender. The uneven gender distribution could have been avoided by being more specific when recruiting participants. The survey was posted along with the information letter on a Facebook page, participants then chose to participate by clicking on the survey which means that it was not possible to make sure that the sample was evenly distributed across different demographical factors such as age and gender. By using a different method of distributing the survey this could possibly have been avoided since that would have allowed a greater control in terms of distribution across the sample. Furthermore, since our
convenience sample consisted of students at Örebro University our sample can only be
generalized in relation to the specific population which our sample was drawn from.

Despite its limitations this study supports previous research suggesting that attachment is
an important factor in relation to psychological well-being as well as in relation to depression and
self-esteem amongst individual in the ages of 19-25. Our findings could possibly be used by
informing individuals, becoming- and recently became parents, but also current parents about the
very important aspects and implications a good attachment could have on well-being.

Conclusions and future directions
Future research should examine attachment and psychological well-being by using a mix of
different methods. By using mixed methods instead of only relying on self-report measures it
would give a wider understanding of the interactions between the variables as well as enhance
the meaningfulness of the results. Future research should also examine additional attachment
bonds such as the once formed between romantic partners since these bonds might be of greater
importance.

In conclusion this study is underscoring the importance of forming a good attachment,
and also supporting prior research showing that attachment is of importance not only during
childhood but also later in life.
References


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