

# A Study of Attachment Anxiety and Rejection Sensitivity as Predictors of Academic Performance in Undergraduate Females Studying at University of The Bahamas

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## Abstract

Rejection is a common human experience; however, people respond differently to its occurrence. Employing attachment theory as a framework to examine the extent and presence of rejection sensitivity, this study utilized undergraduate females ( $N = 191$ ) studying at the University of The Bahamas to explore the relationship between attachment orientation, rejection sensitivity (RS), and academic performance. Demographic data questions and two assessment instruments were combined into an electronic survey platform. The Experience in Close Relationships-Relationships Structured Questionnaire and the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Personal were used to measure attachment orientation (across five relationship domains) and RS, respectively. The study utilized a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed no significant relationship between RS and academic performance. Mom and dad attachment anxiety in Model 3, were significantly related to academic performance. However, there was no significant relationship between RS and academic performance, as indicated in Model 4. The study findings are significant as they respond to the growing need for research that examines factors that influence academic outcomes of Bahamian students at various educational levels. Recommendations for student advisement, counseling, mentorship practices, and future research are presented.

doi: 10.15362/ijbs.v31i1.601

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## Introduction

The connection between social-emotional factors, emotion regulation, and academic performance is undeniable (Liu et al., 2019). While rejection is a common human experience, people respond to it differently (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Reyes, 2021;

Set, 2019). According to Downey and Feldman (1996), rejection sensitivity (RS) is the tendency to readily perceive and anxiously expect rejection, even when rejection is not actually occurring. Rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1980), researchers suggest that the onset of RS is associated with inconsistencies in care and

connection in early life between a child and the primary caregiver and/or repeated exposure to abuse (Downey & Feldman, 1996). However, the exact etiology of RS is unknown (Godleski et al., 2018). Correlates of RS, such as resilience, have been studied in The Bahamas (Jones & Lafreniere, 2014); however, this study is the first of its kind in the Caribbean region. The prevalence of research on RS in Europe, America, and Asia further sheds light on the gap in the literature on samples in the Caribbean and, more specifically, in The Bahamas. A systematic review of 11 studies done in the Caribbean addresses the stigma related to mental health challenges and help-seeking, but does not directly address the construct of RS (Gallimore et al., 2023). Maladaptive behaviors, psychological difficulties, and poor academic outcomes, affiliated with the presence of RS have been studied in Western and Non-Western societies and have yielded similar findings (Ding et al., 2020). However, little is known about the constructs in the Caribbean region. Thus, the current study fills the gap in the literature in a multifaceted manner as it addresses the need for educational research on factors that impact academic performance by gender, as well as attachment and RS research on a multicultural population.

While there is substantial literature on factors that influence the academic outcomes of students across multiple global contexts, Stubbs-Young (2024) maintains that the subject area is “understudied in the Bahamas” (p. 45). From pre-K to college, positive teacher/faculty-student relationships have proven beneficial in supporting academic success (Guzzardo et al., 2021; Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018). The impact of parental involvement (Waterman & Lefkowitz, 2017), socioeconomic status (Tripathy et al., 2024), and academic engagement on the academic achievement of

college students has yielded varying results depending on the sample size and population studied. Exploring the correlation between attachment orientation, RS, and academic performance fills the gap in the literature on the presence and impact of constructs in a multicultural population. Thus, the current research utilizes attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1980) to explore the extent and presence of RS and its correlation to academic performance of ( $N = 191$ ) undergraduate females studying at the University of The Bahamas.

Bowe (2023) highlighted the merit of examining factors in homes, schools, and society that influence academic achievement, perceptions of the utility of education, and school experiences of Bahamian students by gender. An investigation into the collaborative responsibility for a national D average in the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education examination indicates the role of teachers, classroom environment, social-economic factors, parental involvement, and student characteristics in the outcome of high school students (Collie-Patterson, 2008). Focusing specifically on parenting styles and academic performance of students in grades 1-12 in The Bahamas, Stubbs-Young's (2024) findings revealed that 94% of parents employed an authoritative parenting style, however, there was no significant correlation to academic outcomes.

Thomas and Viljoen (2020) maintain that findings on the correlation between attachment and academic performance are more consistent in early childhood and middle school samples than in late adolescents and university students. Despite the variance in sample outcomes, Lavy (2017) maintains that educational leaders can benefit from identifying how attachment

in a group setting informs academic performance as peer interaction and the teacher-student relationship are significantly impacted by attachment principles and have implications for RS (Bowlby, 1969; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Thomas & Viljoen, 2020). As an internal working model, research supports that RS impacts interpersonal relationships, perception of self, self-regulation, and openness to receiving academic support (Ding, 2020). A fear of rejection and the anxious anticipation of rejection links attachment theory to RS. Each construct has been explored in research for its correlation to academic performance across educational contexts (Ding, 2020; Reyes, 2021; Thomas & Viljoen, 2020). Predicated upon the definition and correlation between the two constructs, the current research investigates the individual and collective significance and impact on academic performance. More specifically, the current study explored the extent to which demographic variables (such as classification and program of study), RS and attachment orientation (including attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance across five relationship domains) predict academic performance in females at the tertiary level to determine best practices to support the population's social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### *Attachment Orientation*

Developed by Bowlby (1982), attachment theory posits that early life connections between an infant and a primary caregiver formulate a cognitive-affective processing system that informs interpersonal connections, career, health, and well-being throughout the lifespan (Gazder et al., 2025). The need and desire to seek and maintain relational bonds is a primitive means of survival and relief from distress,

thereby leading to repeated attempts for connection (Bowlby, 1982; Gazder et al., 2025). Consistent care informs the development of a secure attachment style. On the contrary, inconsistent, non-responsive care, abuse, and neglect contribute to the development of an insecure attachment style. Attachment theory has been praised for validated cross-cultural findings with support for the universality of its basic tenants. Critics suggest that attachment theory supports a Western, middle-class perspective which excludes other parts of the world (Alareqe et al., 2021). Notwithstanding the versatility of attachment findings, the Caribbean region remains underserved in the implications of attachment and related constructs in educational research. Attachment orientations developed in early life often persist into adulthood and are measured by two dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety develops if a care giver is inconsistent or non-responsive when an infant seeks proximity or fulfilment of needs. In adulthood, these anxious pursuits may resemble proximity seeking attempts in infants but can harm the individual or the relationship. Conversely, attachment avoidance is an overreliance on autonomy and independence void of emotional connection. High attachment avoidance stems from needs being dismissed or ignored, thereby contributing to the belief that people are generally unreliable. High attachment avoidance is also associated with a fear of intimacy and low relationship satisfaction (Gazder et al., 2025). The complexity of variations in adult attachments makes assigning categories limited in capturing the essence of adult attachments. Of particular significance to the variations in attachment is the role of interventions in modifying attachment styles.

Therapeutic interventions and a therapeutic alliance can support shifts in attachment orientations (Bar-Sella et al., 2024; Gazder, 2025). For example, in a study of emotion regulation and attachment orientation (Bar-Sella et al., 2024), the authors examined how shifts in regulation tendency and the therapeutic alliance would impact the attachment orientation of participants. A review of the literature suggests that individuals with high attachment anxiety would benefit from increased self-reliance and less dependence on interpersonal connections to regulate emotions. Conversely, individuals high in attachment avoidance would benefit from turning towards a trusted individual rather than relying on self for emotion regulation. The findings confirmed shifts in attachment avoidance but not attachment anxiety (Bar-Sella et al., 2024).

### *Attachment Theory and Rejection Sensitivity*

Given the implication of attachment on emotion regulation, Downey and Feldman (1996) proposed that the etiology of RS stems from repeated exposure to inconsistent care or unmet needs. Parents alone do not inform the development of attachment orientation or the development of RS. Repeated exposure to rejection from peers, teachers, and other caregivers also contributes to high RS in children and adolescents (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Elballah & Alsayed, 2025). When faced with stressful situations such as rejection, individuals vary in their appraisal of the occurrence and may utilize habitual coping mechanisms developed early in life (Kural & Özyurt, 2023). Coping mechanisms that stem from internal working models are positive or negative appraisals of self and others which inform how an individual reacts to rejection (Bintaş-Zörer & Dirik, 2023; Bowlby, 1982). This internal working

model was further categorized by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) into four types of attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing attachment styles (Bintaş-Zörer & Dirik, 2023).

Researchers, specifically, Fraley et al., (2000), further distinguished attachment anxiety as a model of the lovability of self while attachment avoidance is a model of the availability and dependability of others (Bintaş-Zörer & Dirik, 2023; Bowlby, 1973). For example, a negative appraisal of others in individuals with high RS may be accompanied by high avoidance of social situations that could potentially lead to instances of rejection. Since RS is the tendency to perceive and anxiously respond to rejection, avoiding certain social settings minimizes the risk of potentially emotionally stressful situations.

### *Rejection Sensitivity Across Social and Educational Contexts*

Positive interpersonal relationships can support the attainment of education, career, and family life goals. However, RS negatively impacts interpersonal relationships and the pursuit of life's goals such as higher educational attainment according to a review of literature by Garthe et al. (2020). Before delving further into the relationship between RS and academic performance, as reported in the literature, exploring the construct and its correlates in college students across contexts is beneficial. College environments, like many social environments, can be the sources of much anxiety, change, and the need for adjustment. Within the social environment, individuals with high RS may anxiously anticipate rejection. Even if rejection is not occurring, the appraisal of rejection contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy, further heightening anxiety. As a cognitive-

affective processing system, RS is measured by multiplying the expectancy of rejection and the emotional impact, such as anxiety or anger (Ding et al., 2020; Downey & Feldman, 1996).

The following explores some of the research on RS and its implications on academic performance across educational contexts. Elballah and Alsayed (2025) utilized teacher perceptions of how students with disabilities experience rejection by their peers without disabilities. The participants ( $N = 18$ ) broadly defined rejection as “overt or covert, active or passive, or physical or emotional acts that communicate rejection” (Elballah & Alsayed, 2025, p. 6). Participants endorsed research findings and reported that the expectation of rejection and the feeling of not being accepted results in psychological harm among students ages 6-12 years. In elementary students, RS was negatively correlated with poor academic performance and mental health challenges (Elballah & Alsayed, 2025). Ding et al. (2020) indicated that RS is prominent in Western societies with an emphasis on individualism and sought to explore the presence of RS in Chinese collectivist Chinese culture. In a sample of boys and girls, the researchers found that preoccupation with rejection expectancy was negatively correlated to academic performance. Despite the correlation between the two variables, the regression analysis did not reveal any significant variance in academic performance in the study. This finding is consistent with Chinese cultural emphasis on academic achievement in that negative rejection experiences pale in comparison to the attainment of successful outcomes (Ding et al., 2020).

While Ding et al. (2020) sampled children and early adolescents where the need for

social interactions is particularly salient, other researchers in Western cultures examined the construct in college students and adults. Cheng et al. (2020) found in that a sample of Latinx college students participated in a longitudinal study examining the implications of perceived discrimination on academic distress. The authors found that the impact of discrimination had a more direct and substantial influence on academic distress than grade-point average (GPA). Controlling for depression, perceived discrimination in Time 1 resulted in significant variance in academic distress in Time 2 (one year later) (Cheng et al., 2020).

Several types of RS are explored in the literature (Garthe et al., 2020; Reyes, 2021). Garthe et al. (2020) conducted a literature review of RS among marginalized populations and found that race-based RS was highly prevalent among the 20 studies reviewed. Two of the 20 studies reported a significant negative correlation between high race-RS, high anxiety, and low academic performance. Shi et al. (2025) studied the mediating role of RS in cyber-ostracism and social anxiety within a large sample of Chinese first-year college students. The authors concluded that high RS and negative rumination over the perception of the rejection experience increases the likelihood of the recurrence of the rejection experiences and, by extension, increases the presence of social anxiety. Referring to RS as a psychosocial vulnerability in young people, Huang and Gong (2025) found significant correlations between social appearance anxiety, social interaction anxiety, RS, and problematic dating app use. These constructs promoted positive perceptions of online dating and were affiliated with problematic dating app use. Thus, the authors proposed a significant need to build support for interpersonal

connections and self-presentations, particularly on online dating platforms.

### *Attachment and Educational Factors*

Attachment style informs the impact and reaction to the pressures posed by challenges and stressors affiliated with college years (Kurland & Siegal, 2013). Researchers found that attachment anxiety in high school was associated with lower academic performance in the first semester of college students in the sample. Further highlighting the impact of attachment anxiety on academic performance, Kurland and Siegal (2013) noted that students with high attachment anxiety were more likely to cheat or advocate for cheating. Parental pride in academic performance produced a motive for cheating while helping friends by allowing cheating was a means of social approval or acceptance. More recent research reveals that the relationship between attachment and academic performance among participants at the university level has been inconsistent. However, studies on younger children have shown a significant relationship between the two variables (Thomas & Viljoen, 2020). Ben-Gal Dahan and Mikulincer (2021) studied the impact of attachment orientation and perceived teacher responsiveness on the persistence to complete academic tasks in a high school sample of Israeli students. The authors hypothesized that high attachment anxiety would be associated with lower persistence on academic tasks. Individuals with significant attachment anxiety would perceive academic tasks as potential threats and approach the tasks with self-doubt, pessimism, worry, and overwhelming distress. Conversely, on the same academic tasks, individuals with attachment avoidance would emphasize self-reliance and a positive perception of self, thereby contributing to academic persistence following a setback or failure.

The relationship between attachment relationships and academic performance has been repeatedly explored in the literature. For example, teachers serve as a secure base for children, and that attachment relationship has repeatedly revealed a positive correlation to academic outcomes (Afzal et al., 2023). Omodan and Tsotesi (2018) refer to teachers as the hub whose impact determines the success or failure of educational systems in developed or developing nations. Ben-Gal Dahan & Mikulincer (2021) refer to teachers as a “haven and secure base” for adolescents with anxious attachment patterns and maintaining that consistent and responsive care from teachers can contribute to the development of persistence to complete academic tasks (p. 680). Additionally, resilience mediated the negative correlation between childhood neglect and academic performance in a sample of Chinese high school students (Bai et al., 2022). Omodan and Tsotesi (2018) further stated that student engagement and motivation are significant determinants of academic performance in a sample of Nigerian students.

University adjustment of first-year college students is a significant indicator of academic outcomes. A study of 277 freshmen revealed that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were “negatively associated with university adjustment” (Kural & Özyurt, 2023, p. 1085). Transitional periods of college freshmen resemble the ‘strange situation,’ thus promoting the use of one’s “internal working model” (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1973; Kural & Özyurt, 2023, p. 1088;) to adjust to the stressful situation. Thus, stressful situations are handled with fight or flight coping strategies, which are developed to cope with unresponsive care (Kural & Özyurt, 2023). According to Shi et al. (2025), this transitional period of college

students from adolescence to adulthood is marked by particularly sensitive psychological conditions. When presented with demanding academic tasks, adolescents with higher scores on attachment anxiety also displayed premature giving up, likely reducing successful academic outcomes (Ben-Gal Dahan & Mikulincer, 2021).

## Methodology

The Institutional Review Boards of both Oral Roberts University and the University of The Bahamas approved an explanatory sequential design methodology. To explore the extent and presence of RS in the sample, survey and interview data were collected. Qualitative data from a sample of ( $N = 19$ ) participants explored the research question, “What factors mitigate the presence of RS and the academic outcomes of participants in the sample.?” Both parts of the research were published in a dissertation (Lomax, 2022). This article addresses the quantitative component of the study and its implications for higher education and mental health services for females at the University of The Bahamas.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1 Is there a relationship between RS and the academic performance of undergraduate females studying at the University of The Bahamas?

RQ2 Is there a relationship between attachment orientation and RS in the sample?

RQ3 What independent variables best predict academic performance in the sample?

## Participants

With main campuses in New Providence and Grand Bahama, the University of The Bahamas is the primary tertiary institution in The Bahamas established as the College of The Bahamas in 1974 (University of The Bahamas, 2024). It has a population of about 5,000 students with a diversified nationality of international and Bahamian students from New Providence and the Family of Islands. Statistics provided by the university revealed that 75% of the population was female. While 37% of the population are first generation college students, about 54% of the population are second generation college students. With an alumni community of over 22,000, the university is committed to the development of students through programs offered at the certificate level through master's level. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and convenience sampling was used to target 500 participants. A total of  $N = 323$  participants attempted the survey. After dropping submissions that were significantly incomplete, the final sample size was  $N = 191$ . Each participant met the inclusion criteria as they were undergraduate females enrolled in a 2 or 4-year program. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the ages of the participants.

## Instruments

SurveyMonkey is software that makes collecting questionnaire data efficient. Two assessment instruments were combined into a SurveyMonkey link with preliminary questions to provide demographic data. Demographic data consisted of classification, degree major, age range, campus, nationality, and self-reported GPA. Participants were asked to refer to their unofficial transcripts to accurately report their cumulative GPA (measured on a 4-

**Table 1**  
*Age of Participants*

Age Range	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	134	70.2	70.2	70.2
26-30	26	13.6	13.6	83.8
31-35	15	7.9	7.9	91.6
36 or older	16	8.4	8.4	100.0
Total	191	100.0	100.0	

point scale). Cumulative GPA was used as the dependent variable. Permission was obtained to utilize The Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationships Structure questionnaire (ECR-RS; Fraley et al., 2011). The instrument measures attachment orientation across five relationship domains (mother, father, friend, partner, and other). The instrument developer gave researchers latitude to explore the presence of another significant attachment relationship. Participants were asked to identify an individual who they deemed influential in their academic journey. Therefore, the 36-item instrument rose to 45 after adding the *Other* category. A Likert scale was used to measure the degree of attachment avoidance and anxiety across each relationship domain. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed (7 = *strongly agree*) or disagreed (1 = *strongly disagree*) with questions such as: “It is helpful to turn to this person in a time of need.” Reliability for global anxiety was .80 and .88 for global avoidance (Fraley et al., 2011).

A second instrument was used to measure RS. The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-Personal also utilized a Likert scale to measure the extent of rejection sensitivity (6 = *strongly agree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*). Each of the 18-item questions presented a scenario with common requests college students ask of others. For each scenario, participants were asked to rate two

questions: “How anxious would you be?” “Would the other person be likely to respond?” (Downey & Feldman, 2013). Question A measured the rejection concern and question B measured acceptance expectance. The scale is considered a public domain; thus, no permission was sought for its use. The RSQ had high internal consistency and test-retest reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ; Kelliher, 2013).

#### *Data Collection*

Participation was voluntary and was highlighted in the informed consent statement along with other ethical considerations. An additional parameter of gender ensured that males were excluded from moving forward with the instrument. Prior to collecting data from the final sample, a group of 10 individuals participated in a pre-test and pilot of the study. These individuals were all Bahamian females; some of them were enrolled in an undergraduate program at a 4-year university, while others were professionals in education or psychology with availability to vet questions. The purpose of vetting was to ensure the readability and clarity of survey questions. One notable adjustment was the fifth category of the ECR-RS, which enabled study participants to identify an individual they deemed influential in their academic journey. Table 2 shows the program distribution of the sample. The ECR-RS (Fraley et al., 2011) was used to

assess attachment orientation, followed by the RSQ-Personal questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 2013). At the end of the questionnaire, participants included their contact information if they wanted to be considered for an interview. All participants

who included their contact information were automatically entered to win one of 10 \$25 Amazon gift cards. Incomplete surveys were excluded from the sample. The final sample was  $N = 191$ .

**Table 2**  
*Program of Participants*

Program	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Associate of Arts (AA)	15	7.9	7.9	7.9
ABA	2	1.0	1.0	8.9
Associate of Science (ASc)	3	1.6	1.6	10.5
BARCH	1	.5	.5	11.0
BBA	44	23.0	23.0	34.0
Bachelor of Education (BEd)	68	35.6	35.6	69.6
Bachelor of Laws (LLB)	2	1.0	1.0	70.7
Bachelor of Science (BSc)	56	29.3	29.3	100.0
Total	191	100.0	100.0	

Note. BARCH = Bachelor of Architecture; BBA = Bachelor of Business Administration; ABA = Associate of Business Administration

Classification and program of participants varied enough to be entered into the regression equation. Table 3 shows a description of the sample's classification.

Seniors accounted for 45% of the overall sample. Education majors accounted for 68% of the overall sample.

**Table 3**  
*Classification of Participants*

Classification	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Freshman	20	10.5	10.5	10.5
Sophomore	36	18.8	18.8	29.3
Junior	38	19.9	19.9	49.2
Senior	87	45.5	45.5	94.8
Other	10	5.2	5.2	100.0
Total	191	100.0	100.0	

## Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 25.0 was the data analysis software used for this study to calculate attachment anxiety and avoidance scores across all

relationship domains and the rejection sensitivity scores. A correlational analysis, followed by a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, was employed to determine the answers to test the three null hypotheses. The four regression equation

layers were determined before collecting the data. Only class and program variables contained significant variance to be included in the regression equation and comprised the first layer of the regression model. The second set of independent variables included attachment avoidance scores across five relationship domains. Layer three of the regression model included attachment anxiety scores followed by RS scores in the fourth and final layer. Each layer was controlled for the previous variance of the dependent variable, which was self-reported GPA. The minimum reported cumulative GPA was 1.93, and the maximum reported was 4.0. The average cumulative GPA for the sample was  $M = 3.08$ . The results of the analysis are discussed in detail below.

## Results

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the extent and presence of RS in a sample of Bahamian undergraduate females studying at the University of The Bahamas. As a related construct of RS, attachment orientation was examined for its correlation to RS and academic performance (Bowlby, 1969, 1980; Downey & Feldman, 1996). The range of scores to measure attachment was a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 7 for attachment anxiety and avoidance. Each of the five relationship domains had a score for anxiety and avoidance. Global anxiety and avoidance scores were the average of all relationship domains. The score range of RS was a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 36. Table 4 includes the descriptive statistics of attachment orientation scores, RS scores, and GPA range.

**Table 4**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Variables	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	<i>SD</i>
GPA	190	1.93	4.00	3.0890	.38210
Mom Avoidance	191	1.00	7.00	3.2496	1.7002
Mom Anxiety	191	1.00	7.00	1.9284	1.3854
Dad Avoidance	191	1.00	7.00	4.3176	1.7724
Dad Anxiety	191	1.00	7.00	2.7347	1.8476
Partner Avoidance	191	1.00	7.00	2.5314	1.3793
Partner Anxiety	191	1.00	7.00	3.3264	1.8825
Friend Avoidance	191	1.00	7.00	2.6091	1.3997
Friend Anxiety	191	1.00	7.00	2.5305	1.6230
Other Avoidance	191	1.00	7.00	3.3883	1.4395
Other Anxiety	191	1.00	7.00	2.8290	1.6247
Global Avoidance	191	1.00	6.90	3.2192	.8834
Global Anxiety	191	1.00	5.93	2.6698	1.0291
Rejection Sensitivity	191	1.00	22.72	9.4148	3.2442
Valid N (listwise)	190				

**RQ 1:** Is there a relationship between RS and academic performance of undergraduate females studying at the University of The Bahamas? In short, this study failed to reject  $H_{10}$  as there was no significant relationship between RS and academic performance in the sample ( $r = -.058, p > .05$ ).

**RQ2:** Is there a correlation between attachment orientation and RS in the

sample? No attachment avoidance scores were significantly correlated to RS in the sample. On the other hand, as displayed in Table 5, a significant correlation between global attachment anxiety and RS ( $r = .256, r^2 = .063, p < .01$ ) exists, with a Cohen's  $d = .53$ , indicating a medium effect size. Therefore, null hypothesis 2 ( $H_{20}$ ) was rejected.

**Table 5**

*Correlations for Rejection Sensitivity (RS), Academic Performance (AP), Class, Program, and Attachment Anxiety*

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1-RS	-.058	.074	.100	.148*	.192**	.155*	.188**	.099	.256**
2-AP		-.059	.012	-.240**	-.158*	.054	.021	-.100	-.127
3-Class			-.014	-.006	.148*	-.061	.157*	.553**	.346**
4-Program				-.061	.192**	.060	.137	.639**	.318**
Anxiety									
5-Mom					.257**	.091	.346**	.157*	.553**
6-Dad						.183*	.318**	.137	.639**
7-Partner							.245**	.152*	.582**
8-Friend								.349**	.723**
9-Other									.573**
10-Global									1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**RQ3:** What combination of independent variables best predicts academic performance in the sample? Research supports the idea that any of the independent variables in the current study could yield some variance in academic performance. Thus, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was appropriate to control for each layer of variance. As aforementioned, age and gender were excluded from the regression equation. See Table 6 for the complete model summary.

It should be noted that neither of the

variables global avoidance nor global anxiety were into Models 2 or 3, respectively, due to multicollinearity.

As seen in Table 6, Model 1 was not a significant predictive model academic performance (Model 1,  $F(2, 187) = .337, p = .714, R^2 = .004, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = -.007$ ). Further, Model 2 indicated no significant change in explained variance by adding the attachment avoidance variables (Model 2,  $F(5, 182) = .909, p = .476, R^2 = .028, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = -.010, \Delta R^2 = .0$ ).

**Table 6**  
**Model Summary for Predicting Academic Performance**

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>SE</i>	Change Statistics				
					$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$	<i>df</i> <sub>1</sub>	<i>df</i> <sub>2</sub>	<i>p</i>
1	.060 <sup>a</sup>	.004	-.007	.383	.004	.337	2	187	.714
2	.167 <sup>b</sup>	.028	-.010	.384	.024	.909	5	182	.476
3	.368 <sup>c</sup>	.135	.072	.367	.107	4.387	5	177	<.001
4	.368 <sup>d</sup>	.135	.071	.368	.000	.052	1	176	.819

- Predictors (Constant), Program, Class
- Predictors (Constant), Program, Class, Friend\_Avoidance, Partner\_Avoidance, Dad\_Avoidance, Mom\_Avoidance, Other\_Avoidance
- Predictors: (Constant), Program, Class, Friend\_Avoidance, Partner\_Avoidance, Dad\_Avoidance, Mom\_Avoidance, Other\_Avoidance, Partner\_Anxiety, Dad\_Anxiety, Friend\_Anxiety, Mom\_Anxiety, Other\_Anxiety
- Predictors: (Constant), Program, Class, Friend\_Avoidance, Partner\_Avoidance, Dad\_Avoidance, Mom\_Avoidance, Other\_Avoidance, Partner\_Anxiety, Dad\_Anxiety, Friend\_Anxiety, Mom\_Anxiety, Other\_Anxiety, Rejection Sensitivity
- Dependent Variable: Academic Performance = GPA

However, note that Model 3 was a significant predictive model for academic performance when adding the attachment anxiety variables ( $F(5, 177) = 4.387, p < .001, R^2 = .135, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .072, \Delta R^2 = .107$ ). The nearly 11% change in explained variance from Model 2 to Model 3 demonstrates that the addition of attachment anxiety variables was important in explaining academic performance.

Finally, Model 4 did not improve the prediction of academic performance by adding rejection sensitivity to the previous model (Model 4,  $F(1, 176) = .052, p = .819, R^2 = .135, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .071, \Delta R^2 = .000$ ). Note specifically no change in the percentage of explained variance in Model 4.

Thus, results from the hierarchical linear regression analysis yielded only one significant model for academic performance—Model 3. The next step in the hierarchical regression analysis was to determine which specific regression coefficients in Model 3 significantly predicted academic performance. Table 7 yields the results regarding the coefficients for this model. Note that we did not provide the coefficients table for Models 1, 2, nor 4, since those models did not yield significant prediction models.

**Table 7**  
**Model 3 Coefficients for Predicting Academic Performance**

	B	95% CI for B		SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
		LL	UL					
Constant	3.231	2.935	3.528	.150		.135	.072	.107
Class	-.026	-.074	.023	.025	-.074			
Program	.002	-.026	.030	.014	.010			
Mom ATAV	.015	-.028	.059	.022	.069			
Dad ATAV	.033	-.008	.074	.021	.151			
Partner ATAV	-.020	-.067	.026	.024	-.073			
Friend ATAV	.017	-.030	.063	.024	.061			
Other ATAV	-.024	-.078	.029	.027	-.091			
Mom ATAX	-.076*	-.130	-.021	.028	-.276			
Dad ATAX	-.052*	-.092	-.013	.020	-.250			
Partner ATAX	.020	-.015	.056	.018	.100			
Friend ATAX	.035	-.011	.080	.023	.148			
Other ATAX	-.014	-.061	.034	.024	-.057			

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; ATAV = attachment avoidance; ATAX = attachment anxiety. \* $p < .01$ . Note that the only significant coefficients from Model 3 were Mom Anxiety ( $B = -.076, p = .008$ ) and Dad Anxiety ( $B = -.052, p = .009$ ). Further note that both of the coefficients were negative, indicating that as Mom or Dad anxiety increased, academic performance decreased. Thus, we rejected null hypothesis 3 ( $H_{3a}$ ), determining that Model 3, with significant coefficients mom and dad attachment anxiety, best predicted academic performance in the sample.

## Discussion

The findings of Research Question 1 suggest a presence of RS in the sample ( $M = 9.41, SD = 3.24$ ) similar to the findings by Downey and Feldman (1996) ( $M = 9.60, SD = 3.28$ ). A review of the literature conducted by Reyes (2021) purported a negative impact of RS on academic performance in school, self-esteem, and interpersonal competence. However, the current study does not corroborate those findings, as RS in the sample was not a significant correlate of academic performance. Shi et al. (2025) discussed similar findings in a Chinese sample and concluded that the collectivist emphasis on academic performance overshadowed the impact of RS in the sample. A possible explanation for why RS

had no bearing on academic performance in the current study is the merit placed on resilience, as reported by a sample of high school students in The Bahamas (Jones & Lafreniere, 2014).

In line with previous studies (Simmons, 2021), global anxiety was significantly correlated with RS, suggesting that insecure attachment anxiety or the perception of the level of care (or lack thereof) in relationships in general, contributes to the presence of RS in the sample. Simmons (2021) further concluded that secure attachment is not correlated with RS.

Moreover, the result for Research Question 3 was a notable finding. Utilizing a hierarchical multiple regression analysis,

when controlling for class, program, and attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety accounted for nearly 11% of the  $R^2$  change from Model 2 to Model 3 regarding explained variance in academic performance, and this change was statistically significant. In particular, mom and dad attachment anxiety contributed most to the explained variance and led to the conclusions and recommendations of the current study.

Aside from the research questions, a noteworthy finding from the data revealed that 70% of the population identified a teacher, mentor, or academic advisor as a key attachment figure. This finding supports the value of teacher-student relationships (Afzal et al., 2023) and mentoring (Plaskett et al., 2018) in academic performance at the tertiary level. It further emphasizes the relevance of attachment throughout a lifespan and the merit of having a secure base in buffering insecure attachments with parents.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study fills the gap in the literature and responds to the need to examine factors that influence academic performance in Bahamian students (Stubbs-Young, 2024). Given that Model 3 indicated a statistically significant relationship between Mom and Dad attachment anxiety and academic performance at the tertiary level, University of The Bahamas officials could focus on raising awareness around attachment concerns that students have. Ministry of Education officials can also join efforts to raise awareness about attachment across contexts through psychoeducational initiatives. This enables parents, teachers, and students to examine the potential role attachment plays in educational attainment. School counseling interventions across

contexts can employ attachment-informed, evidence-based interventions to help alter insecure attachment tendencies. The University of The Bahamas should invest in professional development for faculty and staff related to principles of attachment and anxiety in the populations. Since faculty members were listed as influential in academic achievement, professional development sessions can focus on enhancing faculty-student interactions while improving social support efforts of the institution (Elballah & Alsayed, 2025). One form of care highlighted by Guzzardo et al. (2021) revealed that students appreciated when faculty referred them for additional support through counseling services.

A replication of this study on males in the population would give a more comprehensive explanation of the extent and presence of RS. Given the importance of social acceptance in young children and adolescents, a similar methodology would be beneficial in examining the implications of RS and attachment on elementary, middle, and high school students in The Bahamas. Emotion-focused therapy, for example, is an evidence-based intervention that is proven to address attachment concerns in couples' relationships yet has implications for other attachment related relationships. Thus, a study examining the efficacy of best practices for these interventions by school counselors would be beneficial in responding to the challenges highlighted in this study.

## Limitations

The findings of this study are for the specific context and may not be generalizable to other populations in the country or in other countries. Self-reported cumulative GPA could also be a limitation of this study, as numbers could have been inaccurate and

were unverified by the researcher. Moreover, GPA is only one part of educational attainment and many other factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, and student characteristics may also inform AP. Utilizing GPA as a measure of academic performance limits the scope of the

discussion. Finally, some participants reported confusion while completing the RS scale. Using SurveyMonkey to convert the instruments may have influenced the instrument's clarity by altering the questions' layout.

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