

# Do boys and girls connect differently? Insights from adolescent counseling perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

During adolescence, peer relationships play a crucial role in an individual's social and emotional development. Understanding gender differences in the formation of peer attachment is crucial for the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in schools. This study aims to identify differences in peer attachment based on gender and their implications for guidance and counseling services. This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive comparative design. The sample consisted of 85 grade X students of State Senior High School 20 Bandung in the 2024/2025 academic year, selected using accidental sampling. The instrument used was a peer attachment scale with 29 valid items ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ). The results of the Independent Samples t-Test showed no significant difference between peer attachment of female students ( $M = 1.46$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) and male students ( $M = 0.89$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ),  $t(83) = 1.83$ ,  $p = 0.07$ . In general, students' peer attachment was in the anxious-ambivalent attachment category. These results demonstrate the need for guidance and counseling services that focus on strengthening trust and communication among peers through activities such as group guidance and sociodrama techniques. This research contributes to the development of gender-sensitive guidance and counseling practices in the Indonesian educational context.

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## 1. Introduction

During adolescence, individuals develop more mature relationships with peers to fulfill their developmental tasks. This is in line with another opinion, which explains that adolescents are in a developmental phase characterized by an increased need for meaningful social relationships (Schoeps et al., 2020). Peer attachment becomes crucial because, during this period, adolescents begin to shift their attachment figures from their parents to their peers. The ideal situation is for adolescents to be able to build healthy peer attachments based on trust, open communication, and emotional support, which serve as an important foundation for their psychological, social, and moral development (Delgado et al., 2022; H. Liu et al., 2021). These peer bonds not only help shape self-identity but also act as a protective factor against stress and social adjustment problems (Jiménez-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Moses & Villodas, 2017; Véronneau et al., 2014). When these relationships are well-formed, adolescents tend to demonstrate better emotional well-being and social skills, as well as resilience to social pressures at school and within the family (Liu et al., 2024; Marquez et al., 2023).

The quality of peer interactions significantly impacts various aspects of student development, including academic achievement (Lorijn et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2016). Conversely, poorly developed attachments can have negative consequences, such as negative feelings and disagreements within friendships (Schoeps et al., 2020; Vagos & Carvalhais, 2020; Xu et al., 2022).

While important, peer attachment dynamics are not universal and are influenced by individual factors such as gender. Research shows that women tend to form more emotional and open attachments than men, who tend to be activity-based and situational (Delgado et al., 2022; Zou et al., 2020). Recent research reinforces previous findings regarding gender differences in peer attachment. A systematic review showed that girls tend to have more intimate and emotionally supportive friendships, while boys focus more on shared activities and social hierarchies within peer groups (Karunarathne, 2023). Research in Indonesia found that adolescent girls exhibit higher levels of empathy than boys, which is influenced by social support from peers (Ramadhanti et al., 2024).

Recent research has universally confirmed that gender plays a significant role in the quality of adolescent social attachment. Female adolescents report higher psychological well-being than males because they tend to develop warmer and more supportive emotional attachments (Geng & He, 2022). Similar findings were also expressed by Yoon et al., (2023), who stated that changes in adolescent mental well-being are significantly influenced by gender-specific peer relationship patterns. Furthermore, research by Therriault et al., (2024) and Feng et al., (2025) added that peer trust is a central factor determining adolescent social adaptation and is negatively associated with psychological problems such as internet addiction. In Indonesia, research on this topic is still limited, particularly linking gender differences in peer attachment with implications for guidance and counseling services (Mukti & Bustan, 2024; Putri et al., 2025). Consequently, services often fail to consider the differences in students' emotional needs based on gender. This can reduce the effectiveness of counseling interventions, which should be personalized and adaptive to individual characteristics (Herrmann et al., 2024; Tremblay et al., 2016).

Several studies have attempted to explain the influence of peer attachment on adolescents' psychological well-being. Çelikkaleli & Demir (2022) demonstrated that strong peer attachments are associated with reduced social anxiety and increased self-confidence. Boele et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of quality peer relationships in shaping emotion regulation. Furthermore, research by Borowski & Zeman (2025) found that peer attachment negatively predicts anxiety in high school adolescents. Research by Adamayora et al. (2024) demonstrated that high peer attachment negatively correlates with internalizing problems in adolescents, such as anxiety and depression. Recent studies further strengthen this relationship. Chan et al. (2025) found that secure peer attachments correlate with a lower risk of eating disorders in adolescents. Research by Ji et al. (2022) in *Frontiers in Psychology* highlights that positive parenting styles contribute to improved peer attachment quality, which ultimately supports psychological well-being.

On the other hand, Dimiyati (2020) found that girls were more emotionally affected by peer conflict than boys, suggesting gender-based vulnerabilities. However, most of this research was conducted outside the Indonesian educational context and has not examined how this data can be translated into school counseling programs. Wulantika & Munawaroh (2025) also highlighted in their meta-analysis that gender differences in peer attachment contribute to variations in adolescents' emotional support needs, but this has not been widely addressed in practical guidance and counseling curricula (Ambarwati & Wangid, 2024).

Although there has been extensive research on peer attachment, its weakness lies in the lack of exploration of gender differences within the context of the Indonesian education system and the limited utilization of these findings in the design of guidance and counseling services. Most previous studies tend to be descriptive or general correlational, without integrating their findings within the framework of guidance and counseling services in schools (Febriana & Fajrianthi, 2022). Another weakness is the lack of a gender-based approach in existing counseling programs, even though differences in emotional and social needs between boys and girls have been shown to be significant in various developmental psychology studies (Herrmann et al., 2024). The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to fill this gap by combining quantitative analysis of gender differences in the formation of peer attachments with its translation into practical guidance and counseling strategies in schools. This approach is expected to enrich the guidance and counseling literature in Indonesia with a service model that is more sensitive to gender differences and based on empirical evidence. By understanding the dominant attachment patterns of each gender, Counselors can design more responsive services, whether in the form of basic services, responsive services, or specialized and individualized planning. This research also provides theoretical contributions to the development of a relational-based counseling approach, which emphasizes the importance of quality interpersonal relationships as a

primary source of emotional support in adolescence (Therriault et al., 2024). Therefore, the results of this research are expected to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

This research draws strong support from previous studies. For example, Chan et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of understanding social relationships in the adolescent counseling process. Li et al. (2025) provided a valid measure of peer attachment that has been used in numerous follow-up studies. Agustin & Prasetya (2025) demonstrated the diversity of emotional experiences based on gender, which is relevant to differentiating counseling approaches. Furthermore, research by Rahman et al. (2025) found that adolescent girls tend to form more intimate and affection-based peer relationships, while adolescent boys focus more on shared activities and competence. The findings of Sezer & Gürtepe (2025) confirm that gender differences in peer attachment are not only statistically significant but also psychologically meaningful. This combined literature demonstrates the importance of further research that not only confirms the phenomenon but also leads to improvements in practical services in the field of guidance and counseling.

## 2. Method

This study used a quantitative approach with a comparative design, aiming to examine differences in peer attachment based on gender. This approach was chosen because it allows for comparative analysis of two independent groups: male and female students. The subjects in this study were 10th-grade students at State Senior High School 20 Bandung. The sampling technique used was accidental sampling, with participants available at the time of data collection. The number of participants in this study was 85, consisting of 39 male students and 46 female students.

The study used a peer attachment response questionnaire designed by the researcher. The instrument used was a peer attachment questionnaire consisting of 30 items. However, after validity testing, one item (item 21) was declared invalid and was removed, resulting in a total of 29 items. This instrument measures three aspects: communication, trust, and alienation. Validity testing was conducted by analyzing three indicators: outfit mean square (MNSQ), outfit z-standard (ZSTD), and point measure correlation (Pt Mean Corr). Of the 30 items, 29 were found valid and 1 was found invalid. Therefore, the instrument was deemed suitable for use in this research. The instrument's reliability test results showed a person reliability of 0.90–0.92 (good–excellent) and an item reliability of 0.95 (excellent). A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.91 indicates that the instrument has excellent internal consistency. These results indicate the instrument is reliable and trustworthy in measuring peer attachment.

Prior to analysis, a normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test and a homogeneity of variance test using Levene's Test were performed to ensure the parametric assumptions were met. The data were then analyzed using the Independent Sample t-Test using SPSS version 26. The t-test was chosen because the data analyzed were interval scaled and came from two independent groups. Furthermore, outliers and score distributions were checked to ensure there were no extreme data points that could influence the analysis results. The results of the analysis were used to determine whether there were significant differences between the levels of peer attachment of male and female students.

All research procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical principles of social research. Participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent form. Participation was voluntary and carried no pressure or negative consequences. Respondents' identities were kept confidential, and all data were used solely for academic purposes. The ethical procedures for this study adhered to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) guidelines for research with adolescent participants, specifically regarding informed consent and protecting the confidentiality of personal data.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the peer attachment instrument that has been processed, it shows that the average student at State Senior High School 20 Bandung has a peer attachment in the anxious-ambivalent category. The following table shows the frequency distribution of peer attachment scores for students in the anxious-ambivalent category. Table 1 show students' peer attachment.

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of students' peer attachment

No	Category	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
1	Secure	$X > 2.05$	11	12.95%
2	Anxious-Ambivalent	$0,27 \leq X < 2.05$	57	67.05%
3	Avoidant	$X < 0.27$	17	20%
Total			85	100%

The table above shows that the majority of students' peer attachments are in the anxious-ambivalent category, with 57 students representing 67.05%. This is followed by the avoidant category, with 17 students representing 20%, and the secure category, with 11 students representing 12.94%. This means that students at State Senior High School 20 Bandung have moderate levels of communication and trust, but tend to feel avoided by their peers or feel isolated from their social circle. Students feel that their peers are sensitive and responsive to their emotional states, as indicated by intense verbal communication. They also feel confident that their peers can help and fulfill their needs. However, in certain situations, students also feel rejected by their peers or social circle. Students feel that their peers cannot understand their feelings and feel disliked by their peers in their social circle. According to Myers (2012), individuals with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style have a negative self-view but a positive other-view, meaning they feel insecure but still trust others to meet their emotional needs. This indicates that most students have high emotional expectations of their peers but are sensitive to social rejection. Table 2. Show students' peer attachment scores by gender.

**Table 2.** Students' peer attachment scores by gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Female	46	1.46	0.90	0.07	3.62
Male	39	0.89	0.86	-0.23	3.75
Total	85				

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the peer attachment of female students has a mean score greater than the logit value of 0.0 with a score of 1.46, indicating that respondents tend to answer options with high scores or agree with positive items. The standard deviation is 0.90 logit and the mean is 1.46 logit, meaning the standard deviation value is smaller than the mean. This indicates that the data or respondents' answers are less varied. The minimum score of 0.07 logit to a maximum score of 3.62 logit, indicating that the peer attachment of students moves from the avoidant attachment category to the secure attachment category. Females show higher attachment in the aspects of communication and trust.

Meanwhile, for male students, the mean score is greater than the logit value of 0.0, with a score of 0.89, indicating that respondents tend to answer options with high scores or agree on various items. The standard deviation is 0.86 logit and the mean is 0.89 logit, meaning the standard deviation value is smaller than the mean. This indicates that the data is less varied. The minimum score is -0.23 logit to a maximum score of 3.75 logit, indicating that students' peer attachment is moving from the avoidant attachment category to the secure attachment category.

Based on these results, it can be seen that there is a slight difference in the standard deviation of the two groups of students. Female students' standard deviation score is 0.90, while male students' score is 0.86. This means there is a difference between the female and male groups of students, but it is not very significant because the difference is not too large. The following data shows the frequency distribution of peer attachment by gender. Table 3 show student peer attachment by gender.

**Table 3.** Frequency distribution of student peer attachment by gender

JK	Category	Criteria	F	%
P	Secure	$X > 2.36$	7	15.22%
	Anxious-Ambivalent	$0.56 \leq X < 2.36$	32	69.57%
	Avoidant	$X < 0.56$	7	15.22%
M	Secure	$X > 1.75$	5	12.82%
	Anxious-Ambivalent	$0,03 \leq X < 1.75$	28	71.79%
	Avoidant	$X < 0.03$	6	15.38%
Total			85	100%

In the next section, we present the results of a comparative analysis of male and female students' peer attachment. The analysis was conducted using an independent sample t-test. The results are presented more clearly in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Comparison of peer attachment based on gender

Unit analysis	Coefficient
2-tailed sig	0.70
Error rate	0.05

Based on the results of the Independent Samples Test comparison using the SPSS program above, a 2-tailed sig. value of  $0.70 > 0.05$  is obtained, indicating no significant difference. These results indicate that although women have a higher average score, the difference is not statistically significant, so the initial hypothesis is not fully supported.

The study aims to examine the comparison between the peer attachment of female and male students. Based on the formulated hypothesis, the research objective was to determine whether female students' peer attachment is stronger than that of male students. The findings indicate no significant difference between the peer attachment of female and male students at State Senior High School 20 Bandung in the 2024/2025 academic year, which contradicts previous findings suggesting otherwise (Rajendran et al., 2023). Furthermore, a meta-analysis summarizing 54 studies also reported gender-based variations in peer bonding (Lan et al., 2023).

The results of this study show differences when compared to findings from research conducted in other countries that identified significant gender variations in peer attachment. These discrepancies can be understood in relation to cultural differences between Indonesia and Western societies. In Indonesia, adolescents' ways of expressing attachment are strongly shaped by collectivist cultural norms that emphasize group harmony rather than individual emotional expression. Emotional openness tends to be moderated by social values such as politeness, modesty, and shyness, which influence how adolescents form and maintain peer relationships. Consequently, attachment among Indonesian adolescents often manifests through shared activities and social participation, rather than through explicit verbal expressions of affection. This cultural distinction explains why gender differences in peer attachment are less pronounced in the Indonesian context compared to those observed in more individualistic cultures.

Cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies can be seen in various aspects of life. Western communities generally emphasize individualism, while Eastern societies tend to prioritize togetherness and social harmony. These differences are also reflected in manners and etiquette, where Western people are often more open and less bound by formalities, whereas Eastern people uphold politeness and behavioral norms as a form of respect for others. In family upbringing, Western children are usually encouraged to be independent from an early age, while in Eastern cultures particularly in Indonesia parents tend to be more protective, which can limit children's independence. In terms of social interaction among adolescents, Western culture allows greater freedom in relationships, whereas Eastern adolescents tend to follow established social norms and boundaries. These contrasts suggest that cultural values play a significant role in shaping how adolescents form and express peer attachments, making it important to explore further how cultural background influences gender differences in these attachment patterns.

The absence of gender differences in peer attachment aligns with findings showing that male and female adolescents generally have similar levels of closeness and trust toward their peers. This similarity can occur because school environments that promote collaboration and mutual support tend to minimize variations in attachment patterns between genders. When students are involved in cooperative activities and inclusive interactions, both boys and girls have equal opportunities to develop trust, empathy, and effective communication with their peers. A balanced pattern of peer relationships can also help reduce avoidant behaviors and foster a sense of security in social interactions among all students, regardless of gender.

A new finding in the study relates to grade level, which does not significantly differentiate peer attachment. The grade level variable can be broken down to students aged 15-18 to further strengthen the research findings. The age range of 15-18 is not very large, but there are differences in age at each grade level, with a relatively close age gap. The results indicate no differences in peer attachment based on age.



The absence of differences in peer attachment based on age is reinforced by research by Lan et al., (2023) on the review of gender and age and their relationship to peer attachment. The findings showed that girls were significantly more attached to their friends than boys. A non-significant correlation between age and peer attachment was also found. The inconsistency of the research results analyzed with several studies documenting a positive relationship between age and peer attachment, some studies reporting a negative relationship, and others reporting a lack of a significant relationship. Based on more specific results, inconsistencies in the relationship were found in each age group examined in various studies: the 8-15 age range and the 13-19 age range. The explanation of the research results is also reinforced by the findings of Sholekhah & Pertiwi (2024) who stated that attachment to parents in early and middle adolescence is not different because when someone enters adolescence, the individual has gained a number of experiences and undergone a series of developments.

Individuals during adolescence experience changes, including socio-emotional changes where individuals begin to demand independence, experience conflict with parents, and spend more time with peers (Pollak et al., 2023). Azpiazu et al. (2025) also emphasized that middle adolescence is a period in which individuals begin to seek a balance between independence and the need for social support. Therefore, small age differences (1–2 years) between high school levels are not strong enough to produce significant variations in peer attachment.

The implications of guidance and counseling in this research are the provision of assistance in the form of guidance and counseling services using various appropriate techniques to improve students' peer attachment so they can fulfill their developmental tasks well. Guidance and counseling services that can improve students' peer attachment are through basic group guidance services and group counseling using various techniques. Basic group guidance services are considered more effective in improving students' peer attachment because they involve peer groups. Group guidance builds attachment because students are involved in a shared activity.

Students who have been detected as having low peer attachment tend to have a high sense of alienation can be involved in the group counseling process to rebuild trust and start building joint communication between themselves and their peers so that it can reduce the level of alienation of students. In line with the research of Fan (2022) to increase adolescent attachment, activities such as forming study groups, group counseling, support groups and other daily activity groups should be carried out. Students can also be encouraged to get involved in extracurricular and intracurricular activities such as scouts, extracurricular sports, and other extracurricular activities (Bouchard et al., 2023).

One of the guidance and counseling efforts that can be carried out is through group guidance using sociodrama techniques. Based on the opinion of Pollak et al. (2023) who stated that sociodrama is an effort to help students to better understand and anticipate social problems that arise through role playing. Social problems that can be resolved through sociodrama include conflicts with peers or misunderstandings in communication. Several studies that serve as the basis for using sociodrama techniques to improve students' peer attachment include the results of research conducted by Muzi et al. (2022) on adolescents aged 16-17 years old, the application of sociodrama techniques can improve social interaction. Another study conducted by Cipolletta et al. (2024) which proved the use of sociodrama techniques is effective in improving students' interpersonal communication skills. Several studies serve as the basis for using sociodrama techniques to improve peer attachment because social interaction, social awareness and interpersonal communication skills can determine closeness and attachment in friendship relationships.

Recent studies indicate that positive peer relationships can be enhanced through interventions that promote trust and open communication within small groups. Strengthening social attachment has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of maladaptive behaviors, such as interpersonal stress and eating disorders, particularly among adolescent girls. Moreover, group-based activities that build social connections are effective in decreasing the likelihood of digital alienation and feelings of loneliness (Warsongko et al., 2024).

Guidance and counseling teachers need to take into account the local cultural context that shapes how students express social attachment. In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, emotional closeness is more commonly shown through shared social activities rather than direct verbal expression. Cultural factors and social norms also play a significant role in moderating the

relationship between the quality of peer attachment and adolescents' psychological well-being. These insights provide a theoretical contribution to the field of guidance and counseling in Indonesia by highlighting the importance of culturally and gender-sensitive approaches that emphasize the development of social relationship-based services.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that students at State Senior High School 20 Bandung generally exhibit an anxious-ambivalent pattern of peer attachment, reflecting a balanced condition between trust and communication with peers, yet still accompanied by anxiety about possible social rejection. The absence of significant gender differences indicates that both male and female students share similar attachment patterns, even though female students tend to communicate emotions more openly, while males express attachment through shared participation in group activities. These findings suggest that differences in attachment are more visible in emotional expression than in the intensity of relationships.

The results also reveal that peer attachment does not differ significantly by grade level or age, indicating that attachment patterns among adolescents are relatively stable as they gain maturity and social experience. The uniformity of attachment patterns across students highlights the influence of cultural and school contexts, particularly within Indonesia's collectivist culture, where closeness is often expressed through joint social activities rather than direct emotional disclosure. From a practical perspective, these findings emphasize the importance of school counselors designing programs that strengthen peer relationships through enhanced communication, empathy, and mutual support. Guidance and counseling strategies such as group guidance, group counseling, and sociodrama can effectively foster positive peer interactions and reduce feelings of social isolation. Theoretically, this research enriches the field of guidance and counseling by supporting the development of a relational-based counseling framework that positions peer attachment as a central factor in adolescent psychological well-being. Therefore, fostering adaptive peer attachment across genders through culturally responsive and collaborative interventions becomes a vital element in promoting students' emotional and social development.

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