

Forms of Expression of Love and the Intensity of Young's Early Maladaptive Schemas in a Group of Adult Poles

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Abstract

Introduction: Romantic relationships are a key component of an individual's mental health and overall well-being. Attachment theory and Young's early maladaptive schema theory indicate that early childhood experiences shape how close relationships are established in adulthood. The aim of this study was to examine the associations between forms of expressing love (distinguished on the basis of Chapman's theory) and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas in a group of adult Poles in romantic relationships (the term "intensity of schemas" refers to the overall level of consolidation and the strength of the influence on an individual's functioning of the beliefs underlying early maladaptive schemas). An additional objective was to determine whether the quality of a romantic relationship depends on the forms of expressing love and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas in the individual being assessed.

Material and method: The study involved a group of 296 adult Poles in romantic relationships (aged between 18–70 years ($M = 30.11$; $SD = 10.97$); 65% women). Participants completed the following questionnaires: the Young Parenting Inventory (YPI); the Forms of Expression of Love Questionnaire (FOREM) and the Partnership Questionnaire (PFB). Since the distributions of the variables studied were not normal, non-parametric statistical methods were applied.

Results: Retrospectively assessed paternal behaviors were found to be significantly associated with the development of early maladaptive schemas in two domains: Disconnection/Rejection and Impaired Limits, whereas maternal behaviours, in the participants' assessment, were significant for the development of two other schema domains: Impaired Autonomy and Performance and Other-Directedness. For the domain Overvigilance and Inhibition, both parents were perceived to have a comparable influence on the formation of schemas in this area. Higher intensity of early maladaptive schemas was associated with lower intensity of preferred forms of expressing love, particularly in the domains of physical touch, acts of service, quality time, and words of affirmation. Relationship quality was positively correlated with preferred forms of expression of love, whereas the intensity of early maladaptive schemas showed no significant association with relationship quality.

Conclusions: 1. Higher intensity of early maladaptive schemas is linked to less frequent displays of intimacy in romantic relationships. This applies to four forms of expression of love: physical touch, acts of service, quality time, and words of affirmation. 2. A greater variety of intimacy expressions is positively related to the subjectively perceived quality of a romantic relationship.

Keywords: love languages, early maladaptive schemas, relationship quality

Streszczenie

Wstęp: Relacje romantyczne są kluczowym elementem zdrowia psychicznego i dobrostanu jednostki. Teorie przywiązania i wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów Younga wskazują, że wczesnodziecięce doświadczenia kształtują styl nawiązywania bliskich związków w dorosłości. Cel prezentowanego badania określono jako poznanie powiązań pomiędzy formami okazywania miłości (wyróżnionymi w oparciu o teorię Chapmana) a natężeniem wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów w grupie dorosłych Polaków pozostających w romantycznej relacji. Podjęto również próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy jakość związku romantycznego jest zależna od form okazywania miłości oraz natężenia u osoby badanej wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów.

Materiał i metody: Badanie objęło grupę 296 dorosłych Polaków pozostających w związku romantycznym. Uczestnicy wypełnili kwestionariusze: Young Parenting Inventory (YPI) oceniający natężenie wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów, Kwestionariusz Form Ekspresji Miłości (FOREM), mierzący preferowane i otrzymywane formy okazywania miłości, oraz

Kwestionariusz Stosunków Partnerskich (PFB), pozwalający na ocenę jakości związku partnerskiego.

Wyniki: Retrospektywnie oceniane zachowania ojca były istotnie znaczące dla kształtowania się wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów z dwóch obszarów: Rozłączenie / odrzucenie oraz Uszkodzone granice, podczas gdy w ocenie badanych zachowania matek były istotne dla rozwoju dwóch kolejnych domen schematów: Osłabiona autonomia i brak dokonań oraz Nakierowanie na innych. W przypadku domeny – Nadmierna czujność i zahamowanie, w ocenie badanych oboje rodzice mieli zbliżony wpływ na kształtowanie się schematów z tego obszaru. Wyższe natężenie wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów wiązało się z niższym natężeniem preferowanych form okazywania miłości, zwłaszcza w obszarach: dotyku, pomocy, czasu i akceptacji słownej. Jakość relacji romantycznych korelowała dodatnio z preferowanymi formami ekspresji miłości, natomiast natężenie wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów nie wykazało istotnych zależności z jakością związku.

Wnioski: 1. Wyższe natężenie wczesnych nieadaptacyjnych schematów powiązane jest z mniejszą częstotliwością okazywania bliskości w relacjach romantycznych. Dotyczy to czterech spośród form okazywania miłości: Dotyku, Pomocy, Czasu, Akceptacji słownej. 2. Mnogość form okazywania bliskości pozytywnie wiąże się z subiektywnie ocenianą jakością związku romantycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: języki miłości, wczesne nieadaptacyjne schematy, jakość związku

Introduction

John Bowlby, the creator of attachment theory, proposed that every human being possesses a biologically determined attachment system, which explains the human tendency to form strong emotional bonds. Attachment is defined as a state in which an individual feels inclined to seek closeness with an attachment figure – a person from their immediate environment [1]. Patterns of attachment develop during the earliest years of a child's life (between the first and third years of life) [2], and are based on the so-called internal working models. These are understood as dynamic internal representations whose function is to structure and organise the child's subjective world. They emerge by the end of the first year of life and remain stable for many years, determining the style of forming close relationships in childhood and subsequently in adulthood [3].

Research conducted in the late 1960s by Ainsworth, a collaborator of Bowlby, led to the identification of several attachment styles formed between a child and their primary caregiver (most often the mother): the secure style and three insecure styles – avoidant, anxious-ambivalent, and disorganised. Their development depends on the presence or absence of a relational sense of security [4].

Secure attachment is characterised by the child's trust in the attachment figure and a belief in their consistent availability, sensitivity, and readiness to provide support and care. The development of this attachment style is facilitated by frequent and sustained contact with the mother, her responsiveness to the child's signals, an organised environment enabling free exploration of the world, and opportunities to experience the consequences of one's actions [5]. The avoidant style is manifested in low intensity of visible signs of distress

during separation from the mother. Typically, the child ignores her upon reunion, avoids acknowledging her presence, or avoids eye contact [5]. Anxious-ambivalent attachment is associated with strong fear, anxiety, and agitation in response to separation from the mother, as well as difficulty in being comforted upon her return [6]. Due to the caregiver's inconsistent fulfilment of the child's needs and frequent unavailability, the anxious-ambivalent attached child develops insecurity regarding the stability of the relationship with the attachment figure. They perceive themselves as unlovable and ineffective. Consequently, they seek closeness at the expense of exploratory behaviors, experience constant overarousal and stress, and are easily irritated or annoyed [7]. Infants with a disorganised attachment style display behaviors indicative of resignation – they freeze and exhibit stereotypical movements. These children fail to develop a coherent, organised strategy for coping with the stress of separation [7].

In the 1990s, Hazan and Shaver [6] demonstrated that early childhood attachment styles are also manifested between partners in romantic relationships. The way bonds are formed with a caregiver in childhood constitutes a prototype for later romantic relationships (in their classification, Hazan and Shaver [6] distinguished three attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant).

Individuals securely attached to their partners experience satisfaction with closeness and a sense of safety in the relationship. When expecting help or support, they trust in their partner's availability. Open communication, the willingness to self-disclose, and the genuine trust occur between partners [8].

Avoidantly attached individuals are reluctant to engage in relationships and do not fully trust their

partners; consequently, they do not experience satisfaction from closeness. When a partner seeks intimacy, the avoidantly attached person may feel discomfort, anxiety, or resistance [9].

Anxious-ambivalent attachment is characterised by anxiety regarding the stability of the relationship and fear of losing the partner. Heightened vigilance and relationship concerns increase when the partner does not behave as expected, typically stemming from the insecurity of the individual's diminished sense of safety [10].

Young's theory of early maladaptive schemas (EMS), developed under the influence of Bowlby's attachment theory, identifies four types of early childhood experiences that may underlie the formation of maladaptive patterns of perceiving oneself, the partner, and the romantic relationship. These are: toxic frustration of needs, traumatisation, overindulgence, and excessive enmeshment with significant other relationships [11]. A shared theoretical premise of both approaches is that the child's emotional development progresses from attachment towards independence, autonomy, and individuation. A stable bond with the attachment figure is a fundamental need of every child, and Young's maladaptive schemas are rooted in the infant's relationship with this figure [12]. Within his conceptual framework, Young identified 18 maladaptive schemas, grouped into five domains representing distinct categories of unmet childhood needs. They are: Disconnection/Rejection, Impaired Autonomy and Performance, Impaired Limits, Other-Directedness, and Overvigilance and Inhibition [11].

Both attachment styles and active early maladaptive schemas in adult romantic relationships manifest through a range of behaviors. One conceptual framework describing these behaviors is Chapman's Five

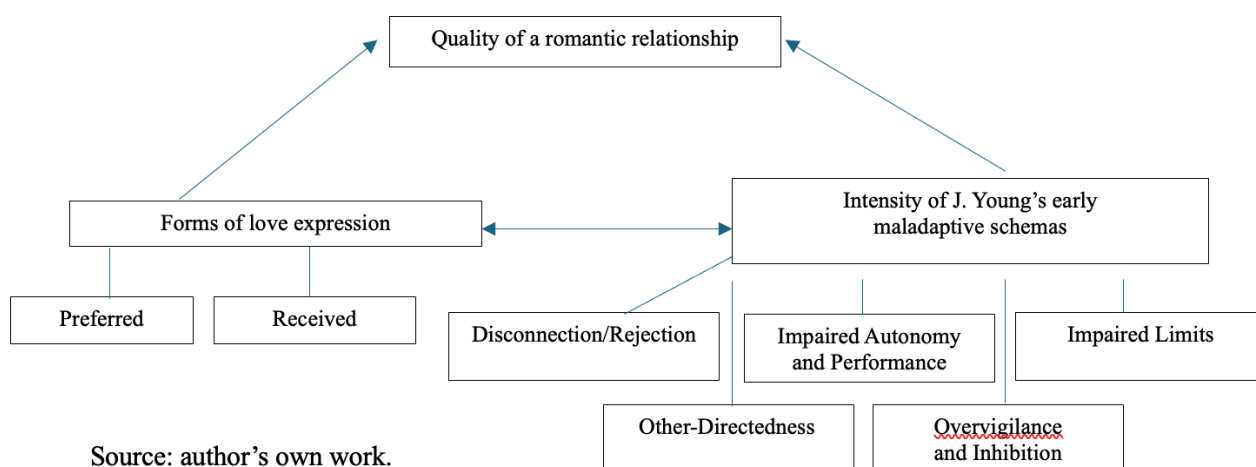
love Languages theory (Chapman, 2018). The author distinguishes five modes of communicating affection: words of affirmation (including direct statements of love and kindness, as well as words of appreciation or support), physical touch, quality time (characterised by undivided attention to the other person and enjoyment of their presence), acts of service (understood as the willingness to do what the loved person needs at a given moment), and gifts, that symbolise ing thoughtfulness towards the other person [13]. These behaviors foster the building of satisfying, deepened bonds. In Poland, this theory has been explored in research by Jaworska [14], Ryś [15], and Gorbacewicz [16].

In seeking associations between early maladaptive schemas and ways romantic relationships are built, the aim of the present study was defined as examining the links between forms of expressing love (as distinguished based on Chapman's theory) and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas in a group of adult Poles in romantic relationships (term "intensity of schemas" refers to the overall level of consolidation and the strength of the influence on an individual's functioning of the beliefs underlying early maladaptive schemas). An additional objective was to determine whether the quality of a romantic relationship depends on the forms of expressing love and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas in the individual being assessed. The model of the present study is shown in Figure 1.

Material and method

The study involved 296 participants aged 18 to 70 years ($M = 30.11$; $SD = 10.97$), of whom 65% ($N = 192$) were women and 35% ($N = 104$) were men.

The research was conducted remotely via the Microsoft Forms platform from the Open Office suite. Participants were recruited by students of the Institute



Source: author's own work.

Figure 1. Quality of a romantic relationship, preferred forms of expression of love, and the intensity of J. Young's early maladaptive schemas – research model

of Psychology, University of Łódź, between March 2023 and December 2023, through announcements posted in publicly accessible social media groups. Inclusion criteria comprised: age over 18 years, a monogamous relationship of at least two years' duration, and provision of informed consent to participate in the study.

Sixty per cent of respondents were in informal relationships, 29% were in formal relationships (marriage), and the remaining 11% were engaged. The mean relationship duration among participants was

7 years ($SD = 3.7$ years). Sociodemographic characteristics of the study group are presented in Table 1.

The project was approved by the Ethics Committee for Scientific Studies of the University of Łódź (Resolution No. 1/KBBN-UŁ/II/2021-2022 of 13 December 2021).

The study procedure adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki of the World Medical Association [17] and the ethical codes outlined in the Belmont Report [18].

After providing informed consent to participate

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the study group

	Total		Men		Women	
	N = 296	%	n = 104	%	n = 192	%
Age						
18-35	232	78.4	90	86.5	142	74
36-64	57	19.2	13	12.5	44	23
65-70	7	2.4	1	1	6	3
Type of relationship						
Informal	177	59.8	81	77.9	96	50
Engaged	34	11.5	6	5.8	28	14.6
Married	85	28.7	17	16.3	68	35.4

Notes: N – total number of participants in the study group; n – number of participants in the subgroup; % – percentage of the given subgroup relative to the total number of participants.

in the study, each respondent completed an online questionnaire consisting of a demographic survey, the Partnership Questionnaire (PFB), the Forms of Expression of Love Questionnaire (FOREM), and the Young Parenting Inventory (YPI).

- a) The Partnership Questionnaire (Partnerschaftsfragebogen, PFB) – developed by K. Hahlweg and adapted into Polish by I. Janicka [19] – is used to diagnose the quality of relationships both between married couples and between cohabiting partners. The questionnaire comprises 30 statements concerning various behaviors occurring in romantic relationships, which are grouped into three scales: mutual communication (MC), intimacy (I), and quarrel behaviors (Q). Each scale contains 10 statements. Respondents rate the extent to which each statement applies to their relationship on a scale from never/very rarely (0 points) to very often (3 points). Scores for each scale range from 0 to 30 (with scores above 15 are considered high), and for the total questionnaire from 0 to 90. In contrast to the intimacy and mutual communication scales, higher values on the quarrel scale refer to particularly negative behaviors. For the purpose of structural equation modelling analyses, an additional overall index – Relationship Quality – was created. This index represents the sum of the ranks obtained in the three scales

(maximum score 12, minimum score 3). For the intimacy and communication scales, the following ranks were assigned to the raw scores: 1 – 0 to 7 points; 2 – 8 to 15 points; 3 – 16 to 23 points; 4 – 24 to 30 points. For the quarrel scale – since it differs from the others in that higher scores represent negative behaviors – the same ranks were assigned to reversed score ranges: 1 – 24 to 30 points; 2 – 16 to 23 points; 3 – 8 to 15 points; 4 – 0 to 7 points. Examination of the internal structure of the scales indicates satisfactory psychometric properties, with internal consistency coefficients of 0.88 for mutual communication, 0.91 for intimacy, 0.93 for quarrel behavior, and 0.95 for the sum of the three scales. Reliability was also assessed using the test-retest method, yielding favorable coefficients for all three scales and for the total score. The Polish version of the questionnaire, as adapted by Janicka (2008), demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability indices.

- b) The Forms of Expression of Love Questionnaire (FOREM) ,developed by M. Ryś on the basis of Chapman's Five Love Languages concept, is designed to assess different ways of expressing love (word of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch) [15]. The names of the scales correspond to the love languages identified by Chapman [14]. The first part of the

questionnaire involves indicating the forms of love whose receipt makes the respondent feel loved (preferred forms of expression of love). High or very high scores in a given love language indicate that the respondent would feel most loved if affection was expressed in that form. In the second part, respondents indicate the forms of love they actually receive from their closest person (received forms of expression of love). High or very high scores in a given scale indicate that significant others express love through that particular love language. Each part contains 25 items, five for each of the five love expression modes. Responses are given on a five-point Likert scale: 1 – “definitely not,” 2 – “rather not,” 3 – “cannot say,” 4 – “rather yes,” 5 – “definitely yes.” The maximum possible score in each scale is 25 [16]. Reliability coefficients for the scales were as follows: word of affirmation – 0.748, quality time – 0.844, physical touch – 0.871, acts of service – 0.849, gifts – 0.843 [14].

- c) c) The Young Parenting Inventory (YPI) – authored by J. Young – is designed for the retrospective assessment of parental behaviors (assessed separately for the mother and father) that may have influenced the formation of core beliefs underlying early maladaptive schemas [20, 21]. In this study, the 72-item questionnaire was used in the Polish translation by J. Oettingen (unpublished version). The analyses used the results for 17 early maladaptive schemas (the questionnaire does not include the Social Isolation schema) and the total scores for five schema domains: Disconnection/Rejection, Impaired Autonomy and Performance, Impaired Limits, Other-Directedness, and Overvigilance and Inhibition.

Sheffield et al. [21] confirmed that the 72-item version of the questionnaire, covering 17 early maladaptive schemas, demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity indices. Cronbach's α coefficients for individual scales ranged from $\alpha = 0.70$ to 0.94 , and test-retest correlations (after two weeks) for selected subscales ranged from $r = 0.75$ to 0.90 . Construct validity was supported by satisfactory correlations between YPI scales and the corresponding schemas measured with the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ), with correlation values ranging from $r = 0.45$ to 0.75 . Factor analysis confirmed a 17-factor structure consistent with Young's theoretical model, and the model fit indices (for both exploratory and confirmatory samples) were satisfactory.

Statistical Methods

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 29.0) was used to compute descriptive statistics

and correlation analyses.

For nominal variables, the frequency in the sample was presented as an absolute value (number of observations, N) and as the percentage share in the sample (%). Continuous variables were presented as the mean and standard deviation. Normality of the distribution for continuous variables was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The significance level for all analyses was set at $p = 0.05$.

Given the lack of normality in the distributions of the variables under study, non-parametric statistical methods were applied. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare the distribution of variables in two dependent groups.. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (r) was employed to examine the existence, direction, and strength of relationships between variables.

Results

A summary of the results obtained in the individual questionnaires (PFB, FOREM, and YPI) for the entire study group is presented in Table 2.

Assessment of differences between the roles of both parents in the formation of individual early maladaptive schemas

In the first stage of the analyses, an attempt was made to determine whether, in the respondents' retrospective assessment, the behaviors of both parents were equally responsible for the intensity of individual early maladaptive schemas and their domains. The obtained results are presented in Table 3. This table also includes information indicating which parent (mother or father) had a significantly stronger impact on the formation of a given early maladaptive schema or schema domain.

The obtained results indicate that paternal behaviors in the study group were significantly important for the formation of early maladaptive schemas in two domains: Disconnection/Rejection and Impaired Limits, whereas in the respondents' retrospective assessment, maternal behaviors were significant for the development of two other schema domains: Impaired Autonomy and Performance and Other-Directedness. Regarding the domain Overvigilance and Inhibition, both parents were perceived as having a comparable influence on the formation of schemas in this area.

Relationships between preferred forms of expression of love and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas

To examine the potential relationships between entrenched patterns of thinking, experiencing, and behaving, namely, early maladaptive schemas, and the needs related to the dominant forms of intimacy in a romantic relationship, we used the first FOREM scale indicator: preferred forms of expression of love. For this

Table 2. Summary of results obtained in the PFB, FOREM, and YPI questionnaires in the study group (N = 296)

	M	SD	Min	Max
PFB	66.43	14.02	22	90
Communication	21.56	5.40	5	30
Intimacy	22.42	5.43	3	30
Quarrel behavior	22.45	6.56	0	30
FOREM (TOTAL)				
Words of affirmation	41.69	5.99	23	50
Physical touch	43.42	6.53	21	50
Gifts	36.86	8.05	14	50
Acts of service	43.71	5.85	20	50
Quality of time together	44.16	5.50	21	50
FOREM 1				
Words of affirmation	21.65	2.99	9	25
Physical touch	22.31	3.23	6	25
Gifts	18.62	4.66	7	25
Acts of service	22.98	2.78	7	25
Quality of time together	23.09	2.54	9	25
FOREM 2				
Words of affirmation	20.04	4.38	5	25
Physical touch	21.11	4.67	5	25
Gifts	18.24	5.07	5	25
Acts of service	20.73	4.36	5	25
Quality of time together	21.06	4.16	6	25
YPI – Mother				
Abandonment/instability	7.54	4.64	4	24
Mistrust/abuse	7.01	4.81	4	24
Emotional deprivation	12.92	6.77	5	30
Defectiveness/shame	9.31	6.05	4	24
Dependence/incompetence	8.35	4.04	3	18
Vulnerability to harm or illness	13.89	4.59	4	24
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	10.82	4.14	4	24
Failure to achieve	7.46	4.62	4	24
Entitlement/grandiosity	10.69	3.76	4	24
Insufficient self-control/discipline	9.51	4.42	4	24
Subjugation	8.09	5.39	4	24
Self-sacrifice	11.61	4.21	4	24
Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking	11.74	5.07	4	24
Negativity/pessimism	12.27	5.29	4	24
Emotional inhibition	16.17	4.76	5	30
Unrelenting standards	21.85	8.62	7	42
Punitiveness	10.22	5.86	4	24
<i>SD. Disconnection/Rejection</i>	36.79	18.78	17	93
<i>SD. Impaired Autonomy and Performance</i>	40.53	12.75	16	90
<i>SD. Impaired Limits</i>	20.21	7.08	8	48
<i>SD. Other-Directedness</i>	32.25	11.87	12	72
<i>SD. Overvigilance and Inhibition</i>	60.52	19.98	22	120

YPI – Father				
<i>Abandonment/instability</i>	9.53	5.18	4	24
<i>Mistrust/abuse</i>	8.24	5.46	4	24
<i>Emotional deprivation</i>	17.82	7.97	5	30
<i>Defectiveness/shame</i>	9.67	6.03	4	24
<i>Dependence/incompetence</i>	6.77	3.51	3	18
<i>Vulnerability to harm or illness</i>	9.43	4.37	4	24
<i>Enmeshment/undeveloped self</i>	8.91	4.03	4	24
<i>Failure to achieve</i>	8.18	4.92	4	24
<i>Entitlement/grandiosity</i>	10.69	3.57	4	24
<i>Insufficient self-control/discipline</i>	10.38	4.78	4	24
<i>Subjugation</i>	10.35	5.52	4	24
<i>Self-sacrifice</i>	9.82	4.06	4	24
<i>Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking</i>	10.33	5.01	4	24
<i>Negativity/pessimism</i>	10.88	5.03	4	24
<i>Emotional inhibition</i>	17.26	4.89	5	30
<i>Unrelenting standards</i>	21.72	8.72	7	42
<i>Punitiveness</i>	10.96	6.07	4	24
<i>SD. Disconnection/Rejection</i>	45.25	20.76	17	98
<i>SD. Impaired Autonomy and Performance</i>	32.57	11.86	15	90
<i>SD. Impaired Limits</i>	21.08	6.83	8	48
<i>SD. Other-Directedness</i>	30.51	11.06	12	72
<i>SD. Overvigilance and Inhibition</i>	60.83	19.74	20	120

Notes: PFB – Partnership Questionnaire; FOREM – Forms of Expression of Love Questionnaire; FOREM 1 – preferred forms of expression of love; FOREM 2 – received forms of expression of love; YPI – Young Parenting Inventory; SD. – Schema Domain; Min – minimum; Max – maximum; M – mean; SD – standard deviation.

Table 3. Comparison of the influence of maternal and paternal behaviors on the intensity of early maladaptive schemas and their domains in the study group (N = 296)

Variable	Mother	Father	Wilcoxon signed-rank test	
			Z	P
Abandonment/instability		+	6.762	.000***
Mistrust/abuse		+	4.046	.000***
Emotional deprivation		+	9.514	.000***
Defectiveness/shame	No differences		1.085	.277
Dependence/incompetence	+		5.889	.000***
Vulnerability to harm or illness	+		11.737	.000***
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	+		7.171	.000***
Failure to achieve		+	2.902	.003**
Entitlement/grandiosity	No differences		0.533	.593
Insufficient self-control/discipline		+	3.124	.001**
Subjugation		+	4.623	.000***
Self-sacrifice	+		6.16	.000***
Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking	+		4.517	.000***
Negativity/pessimism	+		3.783	.000***
Emotional inhibition		+	3.221	.001**
Unrelenting standards	No differences		.126	0.899
Punitiveness		+	2.082	0.03*
SD. Disconnection/Rejection		+	7.035	.000***
SD. Impaired Autonomy and Performance	+		9.801	.000***
SD. Impaired Limits		+	12.615	.000***
SD. Other-Directedness	+		2.831	.004**
SD. Overvigilance and Inhibition			.201	.804

Notes: YPI – Young Parenting Inventory; SD. – Schema Domain; p – statistically significant; *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001.

purpose, a correlation analysis was conducted using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (r). The obtained results are presented in Table 4.

The results of the analyses indicate that among the preferred forms of expressing intimacy, two groups of behaviors – physical touch and acts of service –

Table 4. Associations between preferred forms of expression of love and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas

YPI	FOREM 1				
MOTHER	Words of affirmation	Physical touch	Gifts	Acts of service	Quality time
Abandonment/instability	-.151**	-.181***	-.079	-.202***	-.181***
Mistrust/abuse	-.116*	-.0144*	-.0072	-.143*	-.114*
Emotional deprivation	-.223***	-.212***	-.167**	-.194***	-.159**
Defectiveness/shame	-.155**	-.183***	-.087	-.205***	-.185***
Dependence/incompetence	-.087	-.156**	-.073	-.164**	-.147*
Vulnerability to harm or illness	.044	-.014	.074	.074	.031
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	-.073	-.123*	.012	-.107	-.089
Failure to achieve	-.193***	-.236***	-.018	-.203***	-.218***
Entitlement/grandiosity	-.139*	-.168**	-.102	-.146*	-.161**
Insufficient self-control/discipline	-.193***	-.209***	-.052	-.186**	-.204***
Subjugation	.0134*	-.146*	-.077	-.154**	-.138*
Self-sacrifice	-.134*	-.151*	-.001	-.109	-.102
Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking	.012	-.071	0.032	-.071	-.079
Negativity/pessimism	-.141*	-.219***	-.115*	-.169**	-.152*
Emotional inhibition	-.038	-.069	0.002	-.051	-.046
Unrelenting standards	-.043	-.089	-.016	-.053	-.064
Punitiveness	-.099	-.109	-.036	-.124*	-.061
SD. Disconnection/Rejection	-.198***	-.228***	-.105	-.225***	-.195***
SD. Impaired autonomy	-.106	-.183**	-.006	-.118*	-.125*
SD. Impaired limits	-.196***	-.215***	-.092	-.186**	-.207***
SD. Other-directedness	-.103	-.148*	-.023	-.131*	-.127*
SD. Overvigilance and inhibition	-.0097	-.148*	-.049	-.118*	-.097
FATHER					
Abandonment/instability	-.164**	-.164**	-.006	-.153**	-.162**
Mistrust/abuse	-.119*	-.152**	.047	-.113*	-.118*
Emotional deprivation	-.159**	-.159**	-.062	-.124*	-.077
Defectiveness/shame	-.105	-.123*	0.012	-.139*	-.116*
Dependence/incompetence	-.067	-.131*	.043	-.082	-.106
Vulnerability to harm or illness	-.001	-.008	-.092	0.024	-.025
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	-.054	-.071	0.084	-.071	-.073
Failure to achieve	-.171**	-.201***	0.037	-.196***	-.193***
Entitlement/grandiosity	-.097	-.088	.029	-.067	-.081
Insufficient self-control/discipline	-.147*	-.195***	-.031	-.076	-.139*
Subjugation	-.097	-.086	.028	-.109*	-.059
Self-sacrifice	-.081	-.113*	.018	-.104	-.103
Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking	.077	.052	.112*	.024	.038
Negativity/pessimism	-.043	-.073	.035	-.084	-.086
Emotional inhibition	.001	.009	-.001	.027	.064
Unrelenting standards	.013	.017	.088	-.034	.007
Punitiveness	-.051	.003	.062	-.055	-.061
SD. Disconnection/Rejection	-.159**	-.179***	-.012	-.166**	-.131*
SD. Impaired autonomy	-.103	-.127*	-.122*	-.009	-.136*
SD. Impaired limits	-.051	-.067	.069	-.082	-.045
SD. Other-directedness	-.051	-.067	.069	-.082	-.045
SD. Overvigilance and inhibition	-.042	-.009	.062	-.052	-.031

Notes: FOREM – Forms of Expression of Love Questionnaire; FOREM 1 – preferred forms of expression of love; YPI – Young Parenting Inventory; SD. – Schema Domain; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

demonstrated the strongest (negative) associations with most early maladaptive schemas (EMS) and their domains. Less significant associations were found for two other forms of expression of love: quality of time together and words of affirmation (also negative). Gifts as a form of love expression showed no significant correlations with individual EMS or their domains.

We also analysed the overall intensity of both preferred and received forms of expression of love in relation to the intensity of EMS. The results mirrored those described above – physical touch and acts of service as expressions of intimacy displayed the strongest significant correlations with most EMS.

Further, the findings suggest that higher intensity of EMS formed through maternal behaviors correlated with a lower need to express intimacy in romantic relationships.

The results of the analyses indicate that among the preferred forms of expressing intimacy, two groups of behaviors – physical touch and acts of service – demonstrated the strongest (negative) associations with most early maladaptive schemas (EMS) and their domains. Less significant associations were found for two

other forms of expression of love: quality of time together and words of affirmation (also negative). Gifts as a form of love expression showed no significant correlations with individual EMS or their domains.

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Interrelations between relationship quality, forms of expression of love, and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas

In the final stage of the analyses, we examined the associations between participants' subjectively assessed relationship quality and their preferred/received forms of intimacy, as well as the intensity of EMS (Table 5).

Each form of love expression proved to be significant

Table 5. Interrelations between relationship quality, forms of expression of love, and the intensity of early maladaptive schemas

FOREM (TOTAL)	PFB	
	Spearman's r	
Words of affirmation	.64**	
Physical touch	.60**	
Gifts	.36**	
Acts of service	.62**	
Quality of time together	.61**	
YPI	MOTHER	FATHER
Abandonment/instability	-.084	-.136*
Mistrust/abuse	-.072	-.136*
Emotional deprivation	-.059	-.099
Defectiveness/shame	-.079	-.091
Dependence/incompetence	-.103	-.036
Vulnerability to harm or illness	-.021	-.023
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	-.141*	-.152**
Failure to achieve	-.161**	-.172**
Entitlement/grandiosity	-.152**	-.037
Insufficient self-control/discipline	-.175**	-.086
Subjugation	-.092	-.086
Self-sacrifice	-.105	-.109*
Approval-seeking/recognition-seeking	-.031	.027
Negativity/pessimism	-.092	-.092
Emotional inhibition	-.037	-.034
Unrelenting standards	.021	-.003
Punitiveness	-.012	-.028
SD. Disconnection/Rejection	-.092	-.143*
SD. Impaired autonomy	-.143*	-.122*
SD. Impaired limits	-.181*	-.081
SD. Other-directedness	-.094	-.084
SD. Overvigilance and inhibition	-.042	-.043

Notes: FOREM – Forms of Expression of Love Questionnaire; YPI – Young Parenting Inventory; SD. – Schema Domain; p – statistically significant; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

for relationship quality, with the weakest (positive) associations observed for the gifts scale.

Interestingly, only a small number of significant associations were found between subjectively assessed relationship quality and the intensity of EMS. Significant relationships were observed for a few individual EMS from the Disconnection/Rejection domain, the Impaired Autonomy and Performance domain, and two schemas from the Impaired Limits domain. The activation of schemas such as abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, and self-sacrifice, all of which were influenced by paternal behaviors, was negatively correlated with subjectively assessed relationship quality. Among the schemas shaped by maternal behaviors, entitlement/grandiosity and insufficient self-control/self-discipline had a negative correlation with relationship quality in our study. Finally, negative correlations were observed between the schemas failure and enmeshment/undeveloped self, shaped by both maternal and paternal behaviors, and subjectively assessed romantic relationship quality.

Discussion

Romantic relationships in which we experience a sense of safety and love constitute one of the most important components of life. The topic of romantic relationships, their dynamics, and the factors determining their quality is frequently addressed in psychology. However, there is a scarcity of studies linking early maladaptive schemas, which reflect our early childhood experiences and beliefs about close relationships, with dominant forms of expressing commitment in romantic relationships and with subjectively assessed relationship quality.

In the first stage of our analyses (Table 3), we examined differences in the intensity of early maladaptive schemas shaped by maternal or paternal attitudes. Our findings indicate the predominant role of paternal behaviors in shaping schemas in the Disconnection/Rejection domain and the Impaired Limits domain. The former is associated with the failure to meet the most fundamental need for safety and belonging, while the latter is linked to insufficient boundaries in the parent-child relationship (Talarowska & Juraś-Darowny, 2024). It therefore seems that a lack of adequate paternal involvement in a child's development may be regarded as a cause of schemas from these areas. Maternal influence, in turn, was found to be significant for the Impaired Autonomy and Performance and Other-Directedness domains. Both domains are connected to the loss of personal autonomy in favor of meeting the needs or expectations of others [22]. This suggests that in our cultural context, maternal behaviors have a decisive impact on the development of behaviors leading to

excessive focus on others' needs. Both parents appear to be equally responsible for shaping schemas from the fifth domain – Overvigilance and Inhibition – which is related to environmental behaviors that suppress self-awareness of one's own emotional experiences and the ability to express them [23].

Our findings are important because the dominant domains of early maladaptive schemas shaped by our caregivers significantly influence on a range of behaviors in romantic relationships [24, 25], including prevailing ways of expressing intimacy.

When analysing the associations between early maladaptive schemas and forms of expression of love (Table 4), it can be concluded that maternal behaviors more strongly shape the child's preferences regarding expressions of intimacy in romantic relationships. The activation of early maladaptive schemas is linked to difficulties in expressing love, whether in the form of verbal interaction, temporal or physical closeness, or offering support and assistance to one's partner.

The co-occurrence of negative associations between love languages and maladaptive schema domains can be explained by the nature of unmet childhood needs and the characteristics of the beliefs underlying these schemas. Schemas within the Impaired Limits domain are related to a lack of respect for others' needs, a sense of superiority, difficulty of tolerating frustration, and challenges in achieving goals. The entitlement/grandiosity schema manifests in close relationships through controlling the partner, engaging in abusive behaviors, and focusing solely on one's own needs [26]. Such attitudes and beliefs may lead to placing less importance on expressing and receiving affection within a relationship. Love languages such as words of affirmation, physical touch, acts of service, and quality time appear to be less significant for individuals with higher intensity of schemas from this domain than for those with lower levels. The frustration of needs for safety, stability, empathy, and acceptance that precedes the development of schemas in the Disconnection/Rejection domain may account for the preference for lower intensity of various forms of affection. When succumbing to schemas from this domain, individuals are less inclined to express feelings, deny their existence, or remain inattentive to the partner's problems and needs – mirroring the behavior of their caregivers during childhood [27]. The internalisation of parental behaviors, or those of one parent, likely translates into less frequent expressions of love through words of affirmation, physical touch, acts of service, and time devoted to one's partner. Of particular interest is the emotional deprivation schema, associated with the sense that others (including one's partner) will not sufficiently meet the need for emotional support, and

the defectiveness/shame schema, characterised by perceiving oneself as inferior and unworthy of love [25]. The relationship between higher intensity of schemas from the Impaired Autonomy and Performance domain and lower intensity of three forms of expression of love (physical touch, quality time, acts of service) may be the result of obsession with a lack of autonomy and competence [11]. Enmeshment in family relationships, difficulties separating from the attachment figure, and a lack of independence hinder engagement in close romantic relationships and reduce focus on expressing and receiving affection from one's partner. Overvigilance and Inhibition and Other-Directedness are linked to reduced expressions of affection – touch and acts of service in the case of the former, and touch, acts of service, and quality of time together in the case of approaching others, when the formation of these schemas was influenced by maternal behaviors. As noted earlier, maternal attitudes more often contribute to the development of maladaptive schemas that result in lower intensity of various forms of affection. A plausible explanation for this finding is that the mother is usually the primary attachment figure for the child. While fulfilling basic physical and psychological needs, she influences the child's overall development [28].

The results presented in Table 5, that indicate strong positive correlations between participants' subjectively assessed relationship quality and each form of expressing attachment, are therefore unsurprising, although material gifts appear to be the least significant for relationship quality. According to Hahlweg [29], intimacy, a key component of romantic relationship quality, is manifested in both verbal and non-verbal expressions of affection. These may include physical affection, positive responsiveness to the partner's needs, giving compliments, touching and hugging one's partner [29]. A possible explanation of the findings is that relationships in which affection is expressed frequently and with adequate intensity are perceived as higher in quality due to the fulfilment of each partner's need for love, recognition, and acceptance. The feeling of love for another person is not, therefore, a sufficient guarantee of relationship quality unless it is accompanied by its external manifestations, verbal expressions of affection, physical closeness, spending time together, offering help in various activities, and gift-giving, i.e., the various forms of love languages. According to Floyd, it can be concluded that "communicating affection" is a crucial component of building and maintaining close relationships [30]. Previous research on the quality of formalised relationships suggests that global marital satisfaction correlates positively and strongly with such dimensions of emotional communication as non-verbal affection, verbal communication, and social support

[31]. Our analyses revealed analogous patterns. Two love languages – words of affirmation and acts of service – which appear to correspond closely to the dimensions of emotional communication, showed positive and relatively strong correlations with romantic relationship quality. Gifts, compared to other love languages, demonstrated some weaker correlations with relationship quality. In the search for the reasons to explain this, it may be assumed that the material and relatively superficial nature of this form of affection is insufficient for the long-term fulfilment of the need for love, which may explain its weaker association with high relationship quality. The results presented in this section are consistent with those obtained by Mostova et al. [32].

The literature indicates that the higher is the intensity of maladaptive schemas, the lower is the quality and satisfaction in a relationship. When considering schema domains, Disconnection/Rejection appears to have the greatest importance for the formation of relationship quality, with Impaired Autonomy and Performance playing a slightly lesser role [27]. Our analyses confirmed these assumptions (Table 5). The Disconnection/Rejection domain demonstrated statistically significant associations with relationship quality, but only when the schemas from this domain originated from paternal attitudes in childhood. Such schemas typically form in abusive families characterised by emotional coldness and indifference to the child's problems and needs [27]. Research shows that men tend to exhibit lower emotional expressiveness [33] and statistically higher levels of aggressive behavior than women [34], hence the paternal role may be of particular importance in the context of this domain. The Impaired Autonomy and Performance domain proved to be significantly correlated with the quality of future romantic relationships, regardless of whether the schemas from this domain were shaped by maternal or paternal attitudes. This relationship may result from the child's enmeshment in family relationships and their inability to separate from the family of origin in adulthood – a characteristic feature of this domain [11]. Furthermore, we also found that maternal attitudes, as a source of schemas from the Impaired Limits domain, were associated with relationship quality in adulthood. The formation of such schemas usually occurs in permissive and indulgent families, where the family of origin does not teach the child to face the consequences of their actions, develop self-discipline, or cope with discomfort [27].

The influence of schemas on romantic relationship quality is explained by the work of Hazen and Shaver [6] and Seiffge-Krenke et al. [10]. According to their findings, partners in ongoing relationships exhibit relatively stable patterns formed in childhood with the attachment figure, typically the mother and/or father [6]. Early maladaptive

schemas are precisely such patterns, repeated in adult relationships. Romantic relationships can thus be seen as a context in which specific schemas emerge, potentially limiting an individual's interpersonal functioning [35]. Seiffge-Krenke et al. [10] also observed that mother-adolescent relationships were clearly associated with feelings of closeness and sexual attraction experienced in the romantic relationships of young adults. Conversely, emotional distance in father-child relationships during adolescence was linked to a later anxious approach towards intimate relationships.

The most significant finding of the present study is the demonstration that early childhood experiences are related to preferences for forms of intimacy expression in adult romantic partnerships. Further exploration of these issues may lead to a better understanding of the sources of emotional and communication difficulties in close relationships. However, longitudinal studies in this area are needed to allow for an analysis of cause-and-effect relationships between early maladaptive schemas, forms of love expression, and relationship quality, which is a crucial aspect from the perspective of psychological and psychotherapeutic practice. Research based on an adult Polish sample in relationships should also be extended to other age groups, as well as to individuals who are single and those from different cultural backgrounds. This would help to verify the universality of the observed associations and identify factors specific to various populations.

Further research on this topic is important not only from the perspective of attachment theory and early maladaptive schemas but also for practical reasons – it increases the chances of developing more effective support and therapy programs for couples. It enables the identification of individuals particularly vulnerable to relationship difficulties and supports them in developing healthier patterns of love and intimacy. Understanding how early childhood schemas translate into the emotional lives of adults may contribute to improving relationship quality, relationship satisfaction, and overall psychological well-being.

Conclusions

1. Higher intensity of early maladaptive schemas is linked to less frequent displays of intimacy in romantic relationships. This applies to four forms of expression of love: physical touch, acts of service, quality of time together, and words of affirmation.
2. Greater variety of intimacy expressions is positively related to the subjectively perceived quality of a romantic relationship.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this study, it should be noted

that the data were self-reported and retrospective, which may have introduced bias into the results. Future analyses should also address potential differences related to age, gender and relationship stage (e.g., relationship length or type) to control for developmental variability. Other limitations of the study include the use of nonparametric methods.

Future Directions

Future research should employ mediation and moderation models to test the mechanisms underlying the observed relationships.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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