

A Study on Moderating Role of Self Esteem on the Relationship Between Gamophobia and Relationship Sabotage Among Young Adults

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Abstract

This study looks at how self-esteem influences the connection between gamophobia (fear of commitment) and relationship sabotage among young adults. A total of 132 participants, both men and women aged 18 and above, took part in the research. They were selected through convenience sampling. To collect information, three tools were used: the Relationship Sabotage Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Fear of Marriage Scale. The data was analysed using statistical tests like Spearman Rank Correlation, Kruskal Wallis test, pairwise comparison, and regression analysis.

The results showed that people who have a stronger fear of commitment are more likely to engage in behaviours that harm their relationships. There was also a meaningful link between gamophobia and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and relationship sabotage. Birth order did not seem to play a big role in gamophobia or relationship sabotage, but it did affect self-esteem. For example, there were clear differences in self-esteem levels between firstborns and only children.

Finally, the study found that self-esteem acts as a moderating factor. In other words, a person's level of self-esteem changes the strength of the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage.

Keywords: gamophobia, self-esteem, and relationship sabotage, birth order

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world that is moving forward at a very fast pace, and this speed of change has a direct as well as indirect effect on the way we live. Modern life is already complex, and these constant changes make it even more demanding. People often feel pressure to keep up with expectations related to career, education, finances, family, and society. Because of this pressure, they become more careful and hesitant while making decisions. Important life choices are sometimes delayed for a long time, as individuals may struggle with doubts and uncertainties.

One of the most common examples is the decision about marriage. Deciding when to marry is never easy because it brings not only personal concerns but also social and cultural expectations. This situation often creates feelings of fear, stress, and anxiety. In some cases, the fear becomes very strong and takes the form of gamophobia a fear of marriage. This fear can disturb an individual's peace of mind and emotional stability. It may also affect their ability to trust others, commit to relationships, and build a healthy future with a partner. Over time, such hesitation and fear can lower confidence and disturb overall psychological well-being, making it difficult for a person to move forward in life smoothly. (Ali Yasmeen 2024)

Gamophobia

Gamophobia, which means the fear of marriage, is becoming increasingly common among graduate students in Jordanian society. This trend is reflected in the delay of marriage, which often has harmful effects on an individual's psychological health and overall well-being (Jabr & Hassan, 2022). The fear of marriage does not always come suddenly; in many cases, it develops as a conscious state that grows out of earlier negative emotional experiences within the family. For example, when children witness constant conflicts, disagreements, or lack of harmony between their parents, they may develop an aversion to marriage themselves. Researchers such as Sanni and Eneh (2003) point out that parental incompatibility and clashes within the household can create a negative impression of married life, discouraging the next generation from committing to it.

The family is considered the first and most influential social institution in a person's life, as it is the environment in which the child grows, learns, and begins to form their identity. Every experience within the family leaves a lasting impact on the development of personality. In particular, the way family members communicate with each other whether through spoken words, tone of voice, body language, or even silence plays a key role in shaping children's behaviour and understanding of relationships. Healthy communication patterns help children build confidence, learn social values, and develop positive attitudes towards future relationships. On the other hand, negative or harmful communication can distort their view of marriage, increase fear of commitment, and influence them to delay or avoid it altogether.

Therefore, the patterns of family interaction become central not only to a child's socialization but also to their long-term attitudes toward forming close bonds and entering into marriage. When children grow up in homes where respect, care, and constructive communication are missing, their ability to trust and to imagine a healthy married life becomes fragile. This fragile foundation can then give rise to gamophobia, which not only affects decisions about marriage but also impacts the individual's psychological stability, self-esteem, and capacity to form healthy interpersonal relationships in adulthood.

Concept and Causes of Gamophobia

Marriage phobia, also known as gamophobia, is generally described as an abnormal and exaggerated fear of marriage. People who suffer from this phobia often feel intense anxiety whenever the thought of marriage comes to mind. They may fear the idea of living with another person, worry about the heavy responsibility of raising children, or constantly imagine themselves failing as a husband or wife (Fani & Kheirabadi, 2011). Al-Jundi (2017) explains that marriage phobia is a psychological disorder that turns into an uncontrollable state of fear, even when there is no real or logical reason to avoid marriage. This condition is often seen more in men, as they may view marriage as a risk due to financial responsibilities, personal sacrifices, or social expectations.

A person with gamophobia usually shows a range of signs and symptoms. The most common one is an intense and irrational fear of marriage and the responsibilities it brings. In severe cases, even hearing others talk about marriage or watching someone else get married can trigger this fear. Some people go so far as to completely avoid weddings, family gatherings, or discussions related to marriage. This avoidance can lead to panic attacks and mood changes whenever marriage is mentioned. Panic attacks may include physical symptoms such as trembling, crying, fast heartbeat, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, and sweating (Jabr & Hassan, 2022). Alongside these physical reactions, psychological problems may also appear, such as depression, loss of interest in daily life, low self-worth, and feelings of hopelessness (Ossia & Chujor, 2023).

Fania et al. (2011) define gamophobia as a long-lasting, irrational, and overwhelming fear of marriage. Researchers have suggested several reasons why this phobia develops:

1. Fear of commitment, some people cannot handle the thought of being tied to one person for the rest of their lives. Marriage requires constant emotional investment in the form of love, loyalty, trust, honesty, respect, and compromise. The high demands of a marital relationship may feel overwhelming, leading some individuals to develop avoidance.
2. Negative past experiences, for some, failed relationships or broken marriages in the past cause deep emotional scars. If they were betrayed, cheated on, or emotionally hurt by a partner, they may fear going through the same pain again. As a result, they protect themselves by avoiding marriage altogether.
3. Exposure to unhealthy family relationships, People who grow up in homes where parents fight frequently, show disrespect, or display incompatibility may develop a negative view of marriage. They worry that their own marriage might repeat the same unhealthy patterns.
4. Fear of personal failure, some individuals feel that they may not be able to meet their partner's expectations or maintain a stable married life. This fear of disappointing their loved one often leads to anxiety and avoidance.
5. Influence of rising divorce rates, the increasing number of divorces in society also adds to the fear. Many people see divorce as proof that marriages are unstable and risky. Moreover, divorce itself is stressful, lengthy, and expensive, which discourages them from even considering marriage.
6. Fear of raising children, Marriage is often linked to starting a family, and for some individuals, the responsibility of raising children is the main source of their anxiety. The thought of providing financial, emotional, and physical care for children can feel too heavy to handle (Fadeiye, 2008; Caughlin et al., 2000; Nwoye, 2001).

Theoretical Perspectives on Gamophobia

Several psychological theories have attempted to explain why some individuals develop gamophobia, or fear of marriage. Two important frameworks that help in understanding this fear are Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Bandura's Social Learning (Modelling) Theory.

1. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development (1950)

Erik Erikson proposed that human personality develops through eight stages of psychosocial development, beginning from infancy and extending into late adulthood. Each stage presents a conflict or crisis that individuals must resolve in order to progress healthily into the next stage of life. If a stage is not resolved successfully, difficulties from that stage can resurface later in life. The stages, as described by Erikson, are:

1. Trust vs. Mistrust (birth to 1 year)
2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1–3 years)
3. Initiative vs. Guilt (3–6 years)
4. Industry vs. Inferiority (6–12 years)
5. Identity vs. Role Confusion (12–18 years)
6. Intimacy vs. Isolation (20s–40s)
7. Generativity vs. Stagnation (40s–60s)
8. Integrity vs. Despair (65 years and above)

In each stage, individuals face a psychological challenge that results from the interaction between

biological needs and social influences. Successfully resolving these conflicts helps a person gain strengths or “virtues” necessary for later stages, while failure can result in long-term difficulties.

Gamophobia is most closely linked to the sixth stage: Intimacy vs. Isolation, which takes place in early adulthood (roughly ages 20–40). In this stage, individuals seek to build close, meaningful relationships and may also begin to make decisions about marriage and family. If a person has had positive experiences in earlier stages, such as developing trust, identity, and self-confidence, they are more likely to enter intimacy successfully. However, if earlier experiences were negative such as growing up in a conflicted home, facing rejection, or struggling with identity then they may lean toward isolation rather than intimacy.

At this stage, fear of marriage can arise due to unresolved conflicts from earlier life stages. For example, someone who lacked trust in infancy or who witnessed conflict in the family may doubt their ability to form stable marital relationships. Peer influences, cultural pressures, and family history (such as parental divorce or unhappy marriages) may also contribute. According to Olotu (2016), the choice to marry or avoid marriage during this stage is shaped by a combination of personal maturity, childhood experiences, and the surrounding social environment.

2. Bandura’s Social Learning (Modelling) Theory (1977)

Another important explanation comes from Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that much of human behaviour is learned through observation and imitation rather than direct experience. Bandura argued that people do not simply respond to rewards and punishments, but actively process information about the consequences of behaviour and decide what to adopt.

Children and young adults observe behaviour from parents, peers, teachers, media figures, and other role models. These observed behaviours can either encourage or discourage certain actions. In the case of gamophobia, if a person frequently observes unhappy marriages, conflicts, or divorce, they may internalize the idea that marriage is risky or painful. Over time, these observations shape their attitudes, leading them to fear commitment.

Bandura explained this process using the concept of reciprocal determinism, which highlights the interaction of behaviour, environment, and personal thought processes. He also identified different forms of modelling stimuli, such as:

- **Live models:** actual people demonstrating behaviour (e.g., parents arguing).
- **Symbolic models:** behaviours shown through media, such as movies or television characters.
- **Verbal instructions:** being told what behaviours to follow or avoid.

He also described three types of reinforcement:

- **Direct reinforcement:** personally, experiencing rewards or punishments.
- **Vicarious reinforcement:** seeing someone else experience consequences for their behaviour.
- **Self-reinforcement:** judging one’s own behaviour against personal standards and feeling satisfied or dissatisfied.

For observational learning to occur, Bandura identified four essential processes:

1. **Attention:** The observer must focus on the model’s behaviour. Factors such as how much the observer admires or relates to the model affect this.
2. **Retention:** The behaviour must be remembered, which depends on the ability to mentally organize and recall the information.
3. **Reproduction:** The observer must be capable of performing the behaviour, even if it requires new

skills.

4. **Motivation:** The observer must have reasons to imitate the behaviour, which can come from rewards, observing others being rewarded, or personal satisfaction.

Applied to gamophobia, this theory suggests that individuals who grow up seeing troubled marriages or hearing negative narratives about marriage may internalize these behaviours and fears. Even if they have never personally experienced marital problems, simply observing them in close role models can lead to avoidance of marriage. As Olotu (2016) points out, identifying the negative models and experiences in a young person's life can help explain the roots of their marriage phobia.

Both Erikson's psychosocial theory and Bandura's social learning theory shed light on why gamophobia develops in some individuals. Erikson emphasizes the role of life stages and unresolved conflicts, particularly the challenge of intimacy versus isolation, while Bandura highlights the role of learning from models in the social environment. Together, these perspectives show that the fear of marriage is not a random or irrational occurrence, but rather a result of personal history, family background, social influences, and learned experiences. Understanding these theories can help in designing strategies for prevention, counselling, and treatment of gamophobia.

Relationship Sabotage

For some individuals, building and maintaining relationships is not an easy task. Even though they may long for intimacy and closeness, their own behaviour often prevents them from sustaining healthy bonds. This puzzling situation is known as relationship sabotage. It can be deeply confusing for partners who are on the receiving end, as they are often pushed away without a clear explanation. Interestingly, even the person engaging in sabotage may not fully understand why they behave in ways that ultimately harm the very relationships they want to protect.

Researchers Raquel Peel and Nerina Caltabiano (2021) argue that a person's attachment style is an important factor in understanding why relationship sabotage occurs. For example, someone who grew up in a household where parents were neglectful or emotionally unavailable may develop difficulties with closeness later in life. These early experiences can make adult relationships feel insecure or unsafe. People with such backgrounds often struggle to trust others and may expect rejection, which makes long-term commitment feel threatening rather than comforting.

Individuals with insecure attachment styles tend to experience relationships as fragile and unpredictable. They may avoid intimacy because they fear being hurt, or they may become overly anxious and clingy in an effort to hold on to love. According to Peel and Caltabiano (2021), attachment style alone does not fully explain sabotage. Motivation also plays a role. People with insecure attachment often enter relationships already expecting failure. Because of this belief, they are less likely to address problems openly or use constructive strategies to resolve conflicts. Ironically, this mindset increases the chances that the relationship will indeed collapse, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is useful to compare relationship sabotage with self-sabotage or self-handicapping. In self-sabotage, individuals set themselves up for failure in work, studies, or other personal goals because deep down they may feel undeserving of success. In the case of relationships, a similar mechanism occurs: people may feel unworthy of love or happiness, so they unconsciously act in ways that undermine their romantic connections. However, not all cases of relationship sabotage look the same. Some individuals jump quickly from one partner to another if they feel their current relationship is not perfect, while others stay in unsatisfying relationships but refuse to make efforts to improve them. In both situations, the end result

is the same relationships fail to thrive.

Attachment Theory and Its Role in Relationship Sabotage

Attachment theory, first introduced by John Bowlby (1969), helps explain why some people sabotage their relationships. The theory suggests that the way caregivers interact with children in the early years influences how individuals form emotional bonds later in life. When children receive consistent love, trust, and support, they usually develop a secure attachment style, which carries into adulthood and makes healthy, stable relationships more likely. On the other hand, inconsistent, neglectful, or traumatic caregiving often leads to insecure attachment styles, which create difficulties in adult intimacy.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) identified four main attachment styles:

1. Secure Attachment

- Comfortable with closeness and emotional trust.
- More likely to form stable, long-lasting relationships.
- Less likely to sabotage relationships, as they feel confident in their worth and ability to connect.

2. Anxious Attachment (Preoccupied)

- Worry excessively about being abandoned or unloved.
- May become clingy or overly dependent on partners.
- Relationship sabotage may take the form of jealousy, controlling behaviour, or emotional outbursts.

3. Avoidant Attachment (Dismissive)

- Fear of intimacy and discomfort with closeness.
- Prefer independence and often withdraw emotionally.
- Likely to sabotage relationships by distancing themselves or avoiding commitment.

4. Fearful-Avoidant Attachment (Disorganized)

- Desire closeness but simultaneously fear it.
- Often linked to inconsistent or traumatic childhood experiences.
- Push partners away even though they deeply want connection.

For individuals struggling with gamophobia (fear of marriage), attachment theory provides valuable insights. People with avoidant or fearful-avoidant attachment styles may feel overwhelmed when intimacy deepens. Instead of dealing with their fears openly, they may sabotage the relationship by withdrawing, creating conflict, or pushing their partner away. In their minds, these behaviours serve as self-protection against possible rejection or emotional pain.

Self-esteem plays a major role in relationship sabotage. Leary and Baumeister's (2000) sociometer theory explains that self-esteem functions as an internal "gauge" of social acceptance. People with high self-esteem generally feel worthy of love and are more capable of handling challenges in relationships without fear. On the other hand, people with low self-esteem are more sensitive to rejection, more fearful of abandonment, and therefore more likely to sabotage relationships, even when they truly want them to succeed.

Self Esteem

Self-esteem is one of the most widely studied topics in psychology, with tens of thousands of publications exploring its causes, consequences, and connections with other aspects of life. The reason for this intense interest is that self-esteem was long believed to be central to many important outcomes, including

academic success, relationships, and even social behaviour.

The idea became especially popular in the 1970s and 1980s, when researchers and policymakers linked low self-esteem to social problems such as drug use, unemployment, school failure, and even violence. By the late 1980s, the movement had grown so influential that the California Task Force on Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility was created (1990). Its goal was to raise self-esteem among citizens in the hope that social issues could be reduced. While these initiatives increased public awareness, they did not produce the large-scale societal improvements that had been expected. As a result, self-esteem is no longer seen as a simple cure-all. Instead, researchers today debate how important self-esteem truly is. Some still argue that it is fundamental for health and well-being (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Swann et al., 2007), while others believe its benefits are overstated and limited (Baumeister et al., 2003; Seligman, 1993).

The concept of self-esteem was first described by William James (1890). He defined it as the sense of self-worth people feel when they are successful in achieving important goals. His definition remains relevant today. In modern terms, self-esteem is seen as the evaluative part of self-knowledge how much a person likes themselves and how competent they believe they are (Brown, 1998; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995).

- **High self-esteem:** People have a positive view of themselves and feel confident.
- **Low self-esteem:** People doubt themselves or hold negative views about their worth.

It is important to note that self-esteem is based on perception, not reality. Someone may feel highly confident even if their accomplishments are modest, while another may underestimate themselves despite real achievements. Self-esteem also has both motivational (driving behaviour) and cognitive (shaping thoughts) aspects, making it a relatively stable trait across time (Kernis, 2003).

Human beings naturally desire to feel good about themselves. But the strategies they use to manage self-esteem vary depending on whether it is high or low:

- **High self-esteem:** People with high self-esteem often try to further enhance their self-worth. They take risks, pursue challenges, and show resilience because they believe they can handle setbacks. Their behaviour is usually open, confident, and self-promoting.
- **Low self-esteem:** People with low self-esteem are more focused on protecting what little self-worth they feel they have. They avoid risks, try not to draw attention to their weaknesses, and behave cautiously. They often fear failure or rejection because they lack the psychological “buffer” that helps them bounce back. In other words, the cost of failure feels much heavier for them (Josephs et al., 1992).

Many psychologists (e.g., Allport, 1955) have described self-esteem as a basic human need. People generally prefer to feel good about themselves, even when compared with other enjoyable experiences. For instance, research shows that some individuals value self-esteem boosts more than pleasures like eating favourite food or engaging in sex (Bushman et al., 2011). Positive life events are often satisfying precisely because they increase self-esteem (Sheldon et al., 2001).

Two key functions of high self-esteem have been proposed:

1. **Information value** – Self-esteem helps people interpret their social world by signalling whether they are accepted or rejected by others.
2. **Protective function** – It acts as a buffer, helping people cope with challenges, rejection, or failure more effectively.

From James’s early writings onward, psychologists have recognised that self-esteem is deeply tied to

interpersonal relationships. People who feel accepted, valued, and respected by others tend to have higher self-esteem, while those who feel ignored or rejected usually report lower self-worth (Leary et al., 1995). However, research also shows some complexity. A meta-analysis (Blackhart et al., 2009) found that while people's self-esteem rises after acceptance, rejection does not always lead to a dramatic drop. This suggests that responses to rejection may depend on the person's existing level of self-esteem.

- **Low self-esteem individuals:** They are more likely to anticipate rejection even before it happens (Downey & Feldman, 1996). They pay closer attention to rejection cues (Dandeneau & Baldwin, 2004, 2009), fail to use strategies to prevent rejection (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002), and react more strongly both emotionally and physically when rejection occurs (Murray et al., 2002; Gyurak & Ayduk, 2007). Their feelings of self-worth are fragile and heavily dependent on immediate feedback from others.
- **High self-esteem individuals:** They are better able to withstand negative experiences because their self-worth is more stable. Even if they face rejection, they can rely on an inner sense of value that protects them.

This heightened sensitivity to rejection makes it difficult for people with low self-esteem to build or sustain healthy relationships. Unfortunately, this can create a cycle: fear of rejection leads to difficulties in relationships, which further lowers self-esteem, reinforcing the problem (Murray, 2006).

Theoretical Perspective on Self-Esteem

- Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory
- Sociometer Theory

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory. Morris Rosenberg (1965) developed one of the most influential theories of self-esteem, defining it as a global, stable sense of personal worth or self-acceptance. According to Rosenberg, self-esteem reflects how much value people place on themselves as a person. It is not merely a momentary feeling of pride or satisfaction but a consistent self-evaluation.

Rosenberg proposed that individuals develop self-esteem based on their interactions with the social environment, especially family, peers, and significant others during formative years. If a person receives validation, respect, and positive reinforcement, they are more likely to develop high self-esteem. Conversely, constant criticism, neglect, or emotional invalidation can contribute to low self-esteem.

- **Global self-worth:** It reflects an overall sense of value rather than confidence in specific abilities.
- **Relatively stable:** Self-esteem is fairly consistent over time, though it can shift with major life events.
- **Measured using Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** A widely used 10-item scale that evaluates positive and negative feelings about the self.

Rosenberg's theory helps explain how birth order may influence self-esteem development: Firstborns often receive more parental attention early in life, which may foster higher self-esteem. Middleborns, who may feel less noticed or valued, could develop lower self-esteem. Lastborn may be overprotected or idealized, influencing their self-esteem in varying ways.

This baseline level of self-esteem shaped by early family dynamics can then affect how individuals experience gamophobia (fear of commitment) or engage in relationship sabotage. For example, someone with low self-esteem may doubt their worthiness in a relationship and either avoid commitment or unconsciously sabotage intimacy. (Rosenberg 1965).

Sociometer Theory: Sociometer Theory was developed by Mark Leary and colleagues to explain the purpose and function of self-esteem from a social-evolutionary perspective. Unlike traditional views that consider self-esteem as an internal measure of personal competence or worth, this theory proposes that

self-esteem operates as a "sociometer" a psychological gauge that monitors the quality of our interpersonal relationships and level of social inclusion. Humans are inherently social beings whose survival and well-being depend on social belonging. Self-esteem serves as an internal monitor of the degree to which an individual is accepted or rejected by others. When people perceive social inclusion, their self-esteem rises; when they sense rejection or disapproval, their self-esteem drops. This system evolved to motivate behaviour that minimizes the risk of social exclusion.

Sociometer Theory provides a compelling explanation for how social feedback from early family roles shapes self-esteem, which in turn influences romantic behaviour. Firstborns often receive more praise and responsibility, potentially increasing their sense of social value higher self-esteem. (Leary & Baumeister, 2000)

Theoretical perspective of Birth order

Alfred Adler's birth order theory suggests that a child's position within the family (oldest, middle, youngest, or only child) influences their personality development and how they interact with the world. Adler believed that these ordinal positions create unique experiences and pressures that shape a child's social interactions, striving for superiority, and overall lifestyle.

Oldest Child: Often experiences a period of pampering and attention before the arrival of younger siblings. This can lead to feelings of dethronement and a sense of responsibility, potentially fostering leadership qualities and a desire to maintain control.

Middle Child: May feel squeezed between the older and younger siblings, leading to a competitive spirit and a drive to surpass their older sibling. They may also develop a strong sense of fairness and a desire for attention.

Youngest Child: Often receives a lot of attention and may be pampered, potentially leading to a sense of being special and a desire to be unique. They may also develop a tendency to be more dependent or rebellious.

Only Child: Typically receives undivided attention and may develop a strong sense of self-importance. They may also be accustomed to being the centre of attention and may struggle with sharing or cooperation.

The exploration of birth order's impact on personality traits and relationship behaviours is a rich area of study within psychology. Birth order theory suggests that the position of a child within the family whether firstborn, middleborn, or lastborn can significantly influence their development and interpersonal relationships. The population of the study consists of three separate groups of male and female: firstborns, middleborn and lastborn. The dynamics of birth order have long fascinated psychologists, sociologists, and educators alike, as they explore how position within the family can influence personality traits, behaviours, and interpersonal relationships. Firstborns, middleborns, and lastborn often exhibit distinct characteristics shaped by their unique experiences in the family environment.

Firstborns often embody qualities such as responsibility, high achievement, and leadership. These traits may stem from the expectations set by parents, positioning them as role models for their younger siblings. As a result, firstborns may develop a strong sense of self-esteem, equipping them with the confidence needed to engage in committed relationships. This heightened self-esteem can potentially buffer against gamophobia and reduce tendencies toward relationship sabotage, allowing firstborns to pursue stable, lasting partnerships.

In contrast, middleborns may experience a unique set of challenges. Positioned between older and younger

siblings, they often cultivate skills in negotiation and compromise. However, they might also face feelings of being overlooked or undervalued, which can lead to lower self-esteem. This variability in self-esteem may manifest in their romantic relationships, potentially heightening susceptibility to gamophobia and increasing the likelihood of relationship sabotage as they struggle to assert their identities.

Lastborn, characterized by their charm and spontaneity, often benefit from a more permissive upbringing. While they may exhibit a carefree approach to life, the attention they receive from parents can fluctuate, leading to inconsistent self-esteem levels. This instability may affect their ability to commit to relationships fully, as they could experience fears around vulnerability and rejection. Consequently, lastborn may engage in self-sabotaging behaviours that hinder the development of healthy, lasting partnerships.

Understanding the interplay between birth order, self-esteem, and relationship dynamics is essential for several reasons. First, it illuminates the psychological underpinnings of individual differences in romantic behaviours, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how familial roles influence adult relationships. Additionally, the findings could have practical applications in therapeutic settings, where addressing self-esteem issues could help individuals confront gamophobia and mitigate relationship sabotage.

Understanding how self-esteem interacts with birth order to influence gamophobia and relationship sabotage provides valuable insights into individual differences in romantic relationships.

Statement of the problem

The present study entitled as a study on moderating role of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage among young adults

Need and Significance of the Study

Self-esteem plays a big role in how we connect with others. People with low self-esteem may feel they're not "good enough" for a healthy relationship, which can lead to avoiding commitment or unintentionally pushing their partners away. While a lot of research has been done on self-esteem and relationships, very few studies have looked at how birth order and self-esteem work together in shaping these behaviours. That's the gap this study aims to fill. This study explores how a person's birth order (whether they are a firstborn, middleborn, or lastborn) and their self-esteem might affect their behaviour in romantic relationships especially when it comes to fear of commitment (gamophobia) and relationship sabotage (doing things that harm the relationship, often unintentionally).

Although people have long believed that birth order shapes our personality like firstborns being more responsible or lastborn being more carefree research has shown mixed results. Some experts agree with this idea (like Sulloway, 1996), while others (like Ernst & Angst, 1983) argue that things like parenting style and life experiences matter more. This shows us that birth order may not directly affect behaviour unless we also consider other factors like how confident or insecure a person feels about themselves, which is where self-esteem comes in.

This research is important because it can help us better understand why people behave the way they do in relationships. It can also help counsellors and therapists tailor their advice based on a person's background and self-worth. For example, someone who is a middle child and struggles with self-esteem might benefit from different support than a confident firstborn.

Beyond romantic relationships, the study's findings may also be useful in understanding workplace behaviour, friendships, and mental health. Overall, by looking at how early life roles and self-image shape

relationship patterns, this study hopes to promote healthier, more self-aware individuals and relationships.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

Gamophobia

Gamophobia refers to the fear of marriage or worry that arises considering marriage.

Relationship sabotage

Relationship sabotage doing things that harm the relationship, often unintentionally.

Self Esteem

Self-esteem means how a person feels about themselves, how much they like, respect, and value who they are. It shows whether someone sees themselves in a positive or negative light.

Objectives

- To find out the relationship between self-esteem, gamophobia and relationship sabotage among firstborns, middleborns, and lastborn.
- To find out the differences in gamophobia on the basis of birth order.
- To find out the differences in relationship sabotage on the basis of birth order.
- To find out the differences in self-esteem on the basis of birth order.
- To determine the moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and Relationship sabotage.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be no significant relationship between gamophobia, relationship sabotage and self-esteem among young adults.

H2: There will be no significant difference in relationship sabotage based on birth order among young adults.

H3: There will be no significant difference in gamophobia based on birth order among young adults.

H4: There will be no significant differences in self-esteem scores based on birth order among young adults.

H5: There will be no significant moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage among young adults.

Review of Literature

When we talk about the collective work done by earlier researchers, it is called literature. Any scientific study usually begins with a review of this literature. Going through existing studies is an important step in research because it helps in shaping ideas, raising meaningful questions, and planning the research design (Singh, 2019).

In simple terms, a literature review is a summary and connection of what has already been written on a topic (Pan, 2008 as cited in Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010). Creswell (2005) explains it as the process of finding books, articles, journals, and reports on a subject, and then carefully selecting which ones to include in the research (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2010).

By reviewing earlier studies in the field, researchers become aware of what is already known and what still needs to be explored. One of the biggest advantages of this process is that it prevents repetition of past work and opens up new directions for future studies (Singh, 2019).

Studies Related to Gamophobia

Dr. Jarwan and colleagues (2024) carried out a study at Yarmouk University, Jordan, to understand gamophobia (the fear of commitment in relationships) and how it relates to the way families communicate. The study focused on unmarried postgraduate students and included 255 male and female participants chosen through convenience sampling. The findings showed that, overall, the students had a moderate level of gamophobia. Interestingly, women and employed students reported higher levels of gamophobia than men and unemployed students. However, age and level of education did not seem to make any difference. When looking at family communication, the study found both positive and negative links between gamophobia and different communication styles within families. Most students reported that their families' communication ranged from medium to high levels, with the balanced style of communication (where family members interact openly and respectfully) being the most common, and the blaming style the least common.

There were no major differences in communication styles between male and female students. But some patterns did stand out. Doctoral students showed higher use of the placating style (trying to keep peace by agreeing with others). Employed students leaned more toward both placating and super-reasonable styles (focusing too much on logic and rules). Students under 25 tended to show more of the irrelevant style (avoiding serious issues), while those 30 and above showed more of the balanced communication style.

In 2024, Chang explored the question "Why do Chinese women experience gamophobia?" using psychoanalytic theory to understand the deeper psychological reasons behind it. The study analysed 879 online posts about gamophobia from the social media platform Little Red Book, using both content and sentiment analysis. The research showed that gamophobia can affect women not just emotionally, but also physically and socially. From the analysis, nine major factors were identified as contributing to women's fear of marriage. Growing sense of independence, witnessing unhappy marriages around them, Anxiety about adjusting to new family relationships, Desire for personal and career growth, Issues from their family of origin, changing views on old-age care, Influence of media portrayals, Concerns about parenthood, Expectations and standards for choosing a partner

The study suggested that women experiencing gamophobia should work on recognising negative defence patterns and practice more rational, balanced thinking. On a broader level, it recommended that society and the government play a role in easing these fears for example, by creating a supportive environment where women are not pressured by media messages, by strengthening family education to build young people's self-awareness, and by offering supportive measures that reduce worries about marriage.

In 2024, V. S. Parvathy studied the link between fear of intimacy and attachment styles among unmarried individuals in Kerala. The research looked at how people experience closeness, dependence, and anxiety in relationships. A total of 202 participants (101 men and 101 women) aged 18–35 took part in an online survey using the Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) and the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS). The findings showed that people with higher attachment anxiety also had a stronger fear of intimacy. On the other hand, those who were more comfortable depending on others had less fear of intimacy. Interestingly, the study found no major difference between men and women in fear of intimacy both showed similar levels of relational anxiety. However, there were some differences in attachment styles Women scored higher in closeness and anxiety. Men scored higher in dependence.

Overall, the study highlighted that attachment anxiety plays a key role in shaping fears of intimacy. It also pointed out that gender differences in attachment styles may influence how individuals experience relationships. These insights are valuable for counselling, as they can help professionals address

attachment insecurities and improve relationship satisfaction among unmarried individuals. The study also suggested that future research could look at how attachment patterns change over time, explore other populations, and examine more psychological factors linked to intimacy fears.

In 2024, Nisa and Abdullah carried out a study to understand how parental divorce affects the experience of gamophobia (fear of marriage) among Generation Z. The main aim of the research was to see how the separation of parents could shape young people's attitudes towards marriage. The study used a descriptive qualitative method, and data was collected through questionnaires. The participants were specifically chosen using a purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of three young adults aged 21–25, who were of marriageable age but showed signs of gamophobia, and all of them came from families where their parents had divorced.

The findings revealed that gamophobia in these young individuals was closely linked to unresolved trauma from their parents' divorce. This trauma had left a lasting impact on their emotions and thinking. It shaped their mindset in such a way that they developed negative views about marriage. For them, the painful experiences from childhood created fear, doubt, and resistance when it came to the idea of building long-term marital relationships. The study showed that when parental divorce is not emotionally processed or healed, it can strongly influence how children, even as adults, see marriage. Instead of viewing it as a supportive partnership, they may associate it with conflict, instability, or loss. This makes them more prone to experiencing gamophobia.

In conclusion, the research emphasises that deep emotional scars from family experiences, especially parental divorce, can play a big role in shaping young people's attitudes toward marriage. The study underlines the need for emotional healing and support for children of divorced parents so that these unresolved issues do not carry over into their adult relationships.

In 2024, Cantekin and Kunduraci conducted a study in Turkey to understand marriage phobia (fear of marriage) among public university students. Their research specifically looked at how family affiliation (the sense of belonging and closeness to one's family) and parental attitudes might influence the development of this fear. The study included a large sample of 992 male and female students from public universities. By examining their responses, the researchers wanted to see whether students' feelings toward family bonds and the way they perceived their parents' behaviour played a role in shaping their attitudes toward marriage.

The results revealed some clear patterns. Students who reported a high level of marriage phobia also tended to have a low sense of family belonging. In other words, when students felt less connected or less attached to their families, their fear of marriage was higher. These students also expressed the view that their parents did not pay much attention to them. As a result, their psychological independence the ability to grow as confident and emotionally secure individuals was also lower. This lack of parental attention and weakened family bonds appeared to create uncertainty and fear about forming their own marital relationships in the future. On the other hand, students who had a stronger sense of family affiliation who felt supported, connected, and secure within their family showed a lower level of marriage phobia. A close family bond, combined with positive parental attention, seemed to help these students develop greater confidence and psychological strength, which reduced their fears about marriage.

Overall, this study highlights the important role of family dynamics and parental care in shaping young people's attitudes toward marriage. It suggests that when students grow up in families where they feel neglected, disconnected, or unsupported, they may develop anxieties and fears about forming close, long-term marital bonds. On the other hand, when family ties are strong and supportive, young people are more

likely to view marriage positively and with less fear.

In 2024, Ridhani Ayu Nur Hikmah, Khoirun Nidhom, and colleagues carried out a study titled “Gamophobia in Contemporary Society: An Integrative Analysis of Qur’anic Exegesis and Marital Psychology through Tafsir Al-Munir.” The main aim of this research was to understand the reasons behind gamophobia (fear of marriage) and to propose solutions based on Qur’anic teachings, particularly as explained in Tafsir Al-Munir by Wahbah Az-Zuhaili. The researchers used a qualitative method, focusing on library research and thematic Qur’anic interpretation (tafsir maudhu’i). What makes this study different from earlier work is that it combined two fields marital psychology and Islamic studies—to give a more holistic understanding of gamophobia. The findings of the study identified three main factors that contribute to gamophobia: Fear of infidelity often rooted in past experiences of betrayal, which makes individuals doubtful about loyalty in marriage. Concerns about stability worries about not being able to build or maintain a stable household. Emotional unpreparedness feeling incapable of handling conflicts, responsibilities, and long-term commitments that come with marriage.

While most previous studies looked at gamophobia only from a psychological angle, this research introduced Islamic perspectives as guiding solutions. Some of the recommended approaches include. Choosing a spouse with good conflict-resolution skills, so that disagreements can be managed in a healthy way. Practicing tawakkul (placing trust in Allah) after making genuine efforts in decision-making, which helps reduce excessive worry. Developing a positive outlook on qadar (divine decree), which encourages acceptance and resilience in the face of challenges. By bringing together psychology and Qur’anic exegesis, the study suggests that gamophobia can be reduced through a blend of spiritual strength, emotional readiness, and mental resilience. It highlights the importance of preparing not just materially but also spiritually for marriage. This way, individuals can enter marital life with more confidence, hope, and faith, rather than fear.

In 2023, Jannati explained that gamophobia, or fear of marriage, is a problem that can affect anyone, though it is often more noticeable among men. This fear does not come from a single reason but from a mix of personal, social, and economic factors that influence a person’s decision to marry. Some of the key factors include low self-confidence, financial struggles, and past negative experiences in relationships. Many individuals fear the idea of being tied to one person for life, or they worry about the heavy responsibilities that marriage brings such as meeting daily needs, handling housing expenses, and managing family duties.

Beyond material concerns, the emotional side of marriage also creates anxiety. People may question whether they can truly give and receive trust, loyalty, love, friendship, and respect. For those who have already been in unhappy or failed marriages, these fears become even stronger. Betrayal or unfaithfulness from a partner can cause deep emotional pain, and as a way of protecting themselves from going through the same heartbreak again, individuals may avoid marriage altogether. The fear is not only about personal experiences. Seeing friends or peers struggle in their marriages, or noticing the rising divorce rates in society, can also make people doubtful and hesitant about marriage. Another significant worry for some individuals is the possibility of having children and the responsibilities that come with raising them (Nwoye, 1991; Caughlin et al., 2000).

In 2022, Ren carried out a study to explore the psychological traits of young Chinese adults who fear marriage. The researcher used a qualitative approach, interviewing six individuals between the ages of 20 and 30 who openly identified as experiencing marriage phobia. The findings highlighted four major psychological concerns that shaped their fear of marriage: Fear of losing career opportunities many

worried that marriage would limit their professional growth or stop them from achieving their career goals. Fear of infidelity there was anxiety about the possibility of a spouse being unfaithful, which created doubt about long-term commitment. Fear of repeating parents' mistakes some participants had seen unhappy or failed marriages in their families and were afraid of going through the same painful experiences. Fear of unmet expectations many felt pressured by the high standards of what marriage "should be" and worried they would not be able to live up to those expectations. The study revealed that young people's fears about marriage are strongly tied to both personal ambitions and family experiences, as well as the emotional risks of trust and commitment.

In 2021, Tabatabai conducted a study to see whether schema therapy could help reduce the fear of marriage (gamophobia) among single men. The study was designed as a quasi-experiment, using a pre-test and post-test format with a control group for comparison. The participants were single men over the age of 35 living in Tehran. From a public call for volunteers, 28 men completed a fear of marriage questionnaire developed by Samiei, Yousefi, and Neshat Doost (2013). Out of these, 24 participants were chosen and randomly divided into two groups: Study group (12 men) who received the therapy. Control group (12 men) who did not receive any therapy. The men in the study group attended eight sessions of schema therapy, each lasting 90 minutes, based on the approach developed by Young, Klosko, and Weishaar (2003). The control group, meanwhile, did not receive any intervention during the study period.

When the results were analysed using analysis of covariance, the findings were clear: schema therapy had a significant effect in reducing the fear of marriage ($F = 11.10$, $p = 0.003$). The conclusion of the study was that schema therapy is an effective method for helping individuals overcome gamophobia. By addressing deep-rooted thinking patterns and emotional schemas, the therapy helped participants reduce their fears and anxieties about marriage.

Studies Related to Relationship sabotage

In 2025, Rahele Sadeghi, Ahmadrza Kiani Chalmardi, Ali Rezaei Shar and colleagues conducted a study titled "The model of the effect of attachment on marital quality with the mediation of relationship sabotage." The purpose of the research was to build a model explaining how attachment styles specifically anxious and avoidant attachment influence the quality of marital relationships, with relationship sabotage acting as a mediating factor.

This was a descriptive correlational study that used structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyze the data. The study population consisted of married individuals living in Tehran during the autumn of 2023. From this group, 420 participants were selected through convenience sampling from four psychology centres. To measure the key variables, the researchers used the following tools: Relational Connectivity Scale (RCS, Galovan et al., 2022) to assess marital quality. Relationship Sabotage Scale (RSS, Peel & Caltabiano) to evaluate self-sabotaging behaviours in relationships. Experiences in Close Relationships Relationship Structures (ECR-RS, Fraley et al., 2011) to measure anxious and avoidant attachment. The data were analysed using Pearson's correlation and SEM techniques with the help of SPSS-26 and AMOS-24 software. The results of the study highlighted some important findings: Insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) significantly affect marital quality. Individuals with these attachment tendencies often struggle with emotional closeness, trust, or dependency, which reduces relationship satisfaction. Relationship sabotage was found to play a key role in this process. Both anxious and avoidant attachment styles can increase self-sabotaging behaviours, such as unnecessary conflicts, distancing, mistrust, or withdrawal. These behaviours further weaken the marital bond and lower relationship quality.

In conclusion, the study emphasized that addressing insecure attachment styles is essential for strengthening marriages. By recognizing and reducing self-sabotaging behaviours, couples can improve their communication, resolve conflicts more effectively, and enhance the overall quality of their relationship.

In 2021, Merve Çelik and Mehmet Kanak carried out a study titled “An investigation of the relationship between the narcissism levels and self-sabotage levels of university students.” The main aim of the research was to understand how narcissism a personality trait involving self-focus and a need for admiration is related to self-sabotage, which refers to behaviours that hold people back from reaching their goals. The study also looked at whether these tendencies varied depending on certain personal and academic factors.

The research was conducted with a large group of 580 university students from different faculties and colleges within a medium-sized province’s central campus during the 2018–2019 academic year. The participants were selected through a simple random sampling method to ensure fairness in representation. To collect the data, the researchers used three main tools: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) to measure narcissism levels. Self-Sabotage Scale to measure students’ tendencies to undermine themselves. Demographic Information Form to gather background details like gender, faculty, and other variables. For analysis, several statistical methods were applied, including the independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Post Hoc tests, Levene’s test of homogeneity, regression analysis, and Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The findings showed that narcissism scores varied based on the faculty students were studying in and their gender. This means that the academic environment and gender differences played some role in shaping narcissistic tendencies. However, for other demographic variables, there were no significant differences. The study also shed light on the link between narcissism and self-sabotage, showing that certain personality traits may influence how students behave when facing challenges in education or personal growth.

In 2020, Kirrily Ackerman conducted a study titled “An exploration of demographic differences in relationship sabotage.” The main goal of this research was to see how age, gender, and sexual orientation might influence the ways people self-sabotage in their romantic relationships. The study gathered data from 599 participants across the world through an online survey. To measure self-sabotaging behaviours, the researcher used the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale (RSSS), which focuses on three important patterns: Defensiveness putting up walls and avoiding openness in relationships. Trust difficulty struggling to believe or rely on one’s partner. Lack of relationship skills having trouble managing conflicts or maintaining healthy communication. The researcher began with three expectations: As people get older, their relationship skills would improve (meaning less lack of skills). Men would be more defensive than women. Non-heterosexual people would experience more difficulty with trust compared to heterosexual people. When the results were analysed, some interesting patterns appeared: For gender and sexual orientation, the differences were not statistically significant. However, there were trends suggesting that men may be slightly more defensive and non-heterosexual participants may have more trust issues. For age, the results were surprising. People in middle adulthood actually showed higher lack of relationship skills compared to younger adults. This was the opposite of what was predicted, suggesting that relationship challenges can persist or even increase with age, depending on life experiences.

Overall, the study highlighted that while demographic differences do not always show strong statistical effects, there are noticeable patterns and trends worth exploring further. The research also pointed out the need to refine the RSSS scale and to consider additional factors, such as attachment style, relationship

history, and even parenthood, to better understand how demographics shape self-sabotaging behaviours in romantic life.

In 2020, Slade and Rachel carried out a study titled “Relationship Sabotage in Adults with Low Self-Esteem from Attachment Trauma in Childhood.” The study explored how painful or traumatic experiences in childhood especially those connected to attachment and bonding can shape the way adults behave in their romantic relationships. The researchers explained that when children go through attachment trauma for example, neglect, inconsistency, rejection, or emotional unavailability from caregivers they may grow up developing insecure attachment styles. Two of the most common insecure patterns are anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. Anxious attachment: Adults with this style often crave closeness and may appear very caring and attentive in relationships. On the surface, their behaviour’s might look positive such as constantly checking in or wanting reassurance. However, these actions often come from unhealthy motives, such as fear of abandonment or insecurity. Over time, this constant need for validation can overwhelm partners and damage the relationship. Avoidant attachment: Adults with this style usually try to protect themselves from emotional pain by keeping their partners at a distance. They may seem withdrawn, emotionally detached, or unwilling to open up. While this helps them avoid getting hurt, it also creates barriers to intimacy and leaves their partners feeling neglected or unloved. The study concluded that both anxious and avoidant attachment styles, rooted in early trauma, can lead to relationship sabotage. Even if unintentional, the behaviour’s that stem from these patterns often reduce relationship satisfaction, making it harder for individuals to build healthy, lasting connections.

The researchers showed how childhood wounds can carry into adulthood and shape how people connect with their partners. Unless these issues are recognized and worked on, they can lead to patterns of self-sabotage that harm romantic relationships.

In 2018, Raquel Peel carried out a study titled “What do psychologists have to say about self-sabotage in romantic relationships?” The research aimed to better understand how self-sabotage plays out in love and relationships, since the concept has not been fully explained in existing studies. Traditionally, self-sabotage was described as something linked to external factors for example, drinking too much, being under extreme stress, or other physical barriers that interfere with performance (as described in earlier works by Jones & Berglas, 1978; Rhodewalt, 2008). However, this definition doesn’t capture the deeper, inner struggles that people face within relationships. In the context of romance, self-sabotage is better understood as behaviours that come from a person’s own emotional or psychological battles (Post, 1988). The study also highlighted an important gap in research: while much attention is given to breakups themselves, very little is known about how relationship breakdowns affect mental health in the long term (Mirsu-Paun & Oliver, 2017).

To explore this further, Peel interviewed 15 psychologists across Australia who specialise in romantic relationships. Through these semi-structured interviews, the psychologists shared how relationship sabotage is not always obvious in therapy sessions. Many clients first come in for counselling because of symptoms like anxiety or depression, and only later does it become clear that struggles in their romantic relationships are at the core of their distress. The psychologists identified two layers of issues: Surface issues These are the concerns that bring clients to therapy, such as fights with a partner, feeling distant, or ongoing stress. Core issues These are the deeper reasons behind self-sabotaging behaviours, often tied to low self-worth, unresolved trauma, or fear of vulnerability.

The study concluded that while psychologists can see clear patterns of self-sabotage in relationships, there is still a need for future research to develop a proper model that can be tested empirically. Such a model

could help counsellors and therapists better identify and address self-sabotage, leading to healthier outcomes for individuals and their relationships.

In 2006, Lloyd and Ogbonna carried out a study titled “Service sabotage: A study of antecedents and consequences.” Their focus was on understanding why frontline employees in customer service roles sometimes deliberately sabotage the service they provide and what effects this has on both the organization and its customers. The researchers developed a model to examine both the causes (antecedents) and the outcomes (consequences) of service sabotage. To test this, they conducted a survey with 259 employees (out of 1,000 contacted). These employees worked in frontline roles where they regularly interacted with customers.

The findings showed that several factors influence why employees might engage in service sabotage: Personal characteristics Certain traits or attitudes of employees made them more likely to act in ways that deliberately harmed service quality. Management control the way managers monitored, supervised, and controlled employees influenced their behaviour. Sometimes strict or unfair control increased the likelihood of sabotage. Labour market conditions When employees felt they had limited job opportunities or when working conditions were tough, service sabotage became more likely.

The study also found that service sabotage does not only harm customers it has wider consequences. It can affect group dynamics among employees, influence individual and team rewards, and lower overall organizational performance. For customers, it often means poor experiences that damage trust and satisfaction.

Sertel, Gülsüm, Tanrıögen, Zeynep Meral, and colleagues carried out a study titled “The Relationship between Self-Sabotage and Organizational Climate of Schools.” The research looked at how the behaviour of self-sabotage among teachers and school administrators is connected to the way they perceive the school’s organizational climate in other words, how they view the atmosphere, culture, and working environment in schools. To do this, the researchers used a quantitative research design with a correlational screening model. Their study involved 1204 teachers and 166 administrators working in 74 schools in Turkey. Participants were chosen using the stratified cluster sampling method, which ensured representation from different schools. Two tools were used to collect data: The Self-Handicapping Scale to measure self-sabotage behaviours (like creating excuses or avoiding responsibility). The School Climate Scale to understand how teachers and administrators felt about their school environment.

The results showed a negative relationship between self-sabotage and school climate. This means that when the school environment was perceived more positively, self-sabotage behaviours were lower. Although the correlation was not very strong, it was still significant. The regression analysis went deeper and revealed that one part of the school climate collaboration was especially important. Schools where teamwork, cooperation, and support were stronger had significantly lower levels of self-sabotage among staff.

Based on these findings, the study recommended that schools should work on building a more positive organizational climate. Encouraging trust, respect, open communication, sincerity, and friendship among teachers and administrators can reduce self-sabotaging behaviours. This, in turn, can improve the overall functioning of the school and help create a healthier environment for both staff and students.

Studies Related to Self esteem

In 2014, Ulrich Orth and Richard W. Robins studied how self-esteem develops over a person’s lifetime and how it influences important areas of life. Their research brought forward three main findings. First,

they found that self-esteem generally grows from adolescence into middle adulthood, reaching its highest point between the ages of 50 and 60. After this peak, it usually declines steadily in old age. Interestingly, this pattern of change was found to be quite similar across different generations, showing that age rather than social or cultural shifts plays the larger role. Second, the study showed that while self-esteem tends to be fairly stable, it is not fixed. People who have high or low self-esteem at one stage in life are likely to show the same pattern many years later, but changes can and do happen depending on life experiences. Third, the researchers discovered that self-esteem has a real impact on life outcomes. People with higher self-esteem were more likely to experience better relationships, career success, good health, and overall well-being.

The study highlights that self-esteem is not just a personal feeling it is a powerful psychological resource that shapes how people live, work, and relate to others throughout their lives. Because of this, understanding how self-esteem develops and changes has deep importance for both individuals and society.

In 2014, Ruth Yasemin Erol and Ulrich Orth carried out two large studies to understand how self-esteem and relationship satisfaction grow and change together in couples. Their research followed thousands of couples over long periods of time 885 couples for 12 years in the first study and 6,116 couples for 15 years in the second study. The results from both studies showed a very similar pattern. First, they found that relationship satisfaction can best be understood as something that develops at the couple level, meaning both partners contribute to the ups and downs of how satisfied they feel in their relationship. Second, a partner's initial level of self-esteem played an important role. If someone started the relationship with higher self-esteem, both partners tended to report higher satisfaction early on. Likewise, when a partner's self-esteem grew stronger over time, the couple as a whole experienced improvements in relationship satisfaction. Third, these effects were consistent for both men and women and remained true even after considering other factors such as age, relationship length, health, or employment status. Fourth, interestingly, whether or not partners had similar levels of self-esteem did not make a difference in how their satisfaction developed over time.

In 2010, Brittany Gentile, Keith Campbell, Jean Twenge, and colleagues studied how self-esteem has changed across generations of American students from 1988 to 2008. They carried out a large meta-analysis (a study combining many studies) and focused on results from middle school, high school, and college students using the well-known Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). The findings showed that, over those 20 years, self-esteem levels increased: Middle school students showed the largest rise. High school students had a moderate increase. College students showed smaller changes, but there was a catch when the scale was slightly adjusted (a 4-point format with no middle option), their scores also showed an upward trend. By 2008, self-esteem was at its highest point ever recorded among these groups. In fact, a perfect score (meaning extremely high self-esteem) became the most common response among college students, with nearly 1 in 5 choosing it, and more than half scoring very high overall. The researchers connected these increases to broader cultural changes in American society, particularly the growing emphasis on self-worth, self-expression, and confidence-building. For high school students, small gains in academic competence also seemed to play a role. However, the study raised an important question: Did rising self-esteem actually solve any real-world problems? Despite the clear boost in confidence among young people, other social and educational indicators told a different story: SAT scores and academic performance stayed about the same. U.S. students still underperformed compared to many peers in other developed countries. Substance use among teens showed little change. Mental health problems among

adolescents actually increased.

The only areas that seemed to improve during the same period were declines in violent crime and welfare dependency, but it was unclear whether higher self-esteem was responsible.

In 2007, Joseph M. Boden, David Fergusson, John Horwood, and colleagues carried out a study to explore whether a young person's self-esteem in adolescence had any link with later violent behaviour and hostility. They used long-term data from a birth cohort in New Zealand, following more than 1,000 young people up to the age of 25. The researchers first looked at self-esteem measured when participants were 15 years old and compared it with records of violent offending and hostility reported at ages 18, 21, and 25. The initial findings suggested that low self-esteem in adolescence was linked with a higher chance of being violent or hostile later in life. In other words, teenagers who had lower confidence and self-worth seemed more likely to engage in aggressive behaviour as they grew older. However, when the researchers took into account other important factors such as family background, personality traits, and life circumstances the strength of these associations became much weaker. Most of the links between early self-esteem and later violence or hostility were no longer statistically significant. One exception stood out: there was still a small but consistent link between low self-esteem at age 15 and self-reported hostility in later years. Interestingly, when they looked back even earlier at self-esteem at age 10, they found a very similar pattern.

Another important finding was that unstable high self-esteem when someone shows confidence outwardly but their self-worth fluctuates was related to greater risks of violent offending. This suggested that it's not just "low" self-esteem that matters, but also how stable and secure a person's self-esteem is.

Why People Need Self-Esteem: Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 2004) Another influential line of research comes from the work of Tom Pyszczynski and Jeff Greenberg, who developed Terror Management Theory (TMT) along with Sheldon Solomon. This theory addresses the fundamental human need for self-esteem by linking it to our awareness of mortality. According to TMT, people seek self-esteem because it acts as a psychological buffer against the fear of death and existential anxiety. The evidence they reviewed showed that people with higher self-esteem tend to experience less anxiety and show less defensive behaviour when faced with stressful or threatening situations. On the other hand, when individuals are reminded of their mortality, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that protect or enhance their self-esteem. For example, they may become more attached to their cultural values, more defensive about criticism, or more eager to achieve success. Interestingly, when people are given strong reassurance about the afterlife, their need to defend self-esteem becomes weaker.

This research shows that self-esteem is not just about feeling good about oneself it serves a much deeper function of helping people manage existential fears. Pyszczynski and Greenberg compared this view with other explanations of self-esteem, such as sociometer theory, which sees self-esteem as a gauge of social acceptance. They argued that while social acceptance is important, self-esteem's role in reducing existential anxiety is a fundamental reason why people strive to maintain it.

Global vs. Specific Self-Esteem (Morris & Carmi). Morris and Carmi examined how different forms of self-esteem affect outcomes in life. They distinguished between global self-esteem an individual's overall sense of self-worth and specific self-esteem, such as confidence in academic ability. Using statistical modelling, they tested how these two types of self-esteem influenced well-being and performance. Their findings showed that global self-esteem is more strongly linked to psychological well-being, meaning people with a higher overall sense of worth tend to feel happier and mentally healthier. However, academic self-esteem, a more specific form, was a better predictor of school performance. This means that students

who believe in their academic ability are more likely to perform well, regardless of their general self-image.

Another important finding was that academic self-esteem can influence global self-esteem, especially when academic achievement is personally important to the individual. For example, if a student values academic success, their sense of achievement in school can raise their overall self-worth. This study highlights that self-esteem is not one-dimensional, but comes in different forms, each shaping life outcomes in its own way.

Identity Theory and Self-Esteem (Allacia & Peter, 2002). Allacia and Peter proposed that identity theory offers a strong framework for understanding self-esteem. They argued that self-esteem develops through the process of self-verification, which means receiving recognition and validation of one's social roles and identities from others. When individuals feel that their roles such as being a student, teacher, friend, or parent are acknowledged and respected, they experience an increase in both worth-based self-esteem (feeling valued) and efficacy-based self-esteem (feeling competent). This type of validated self-esteem serves as a protective shield, helping people manage negative emotions during times of stress or disruption. Their theory also emphasised that the desire for self-esteem stabilises groups, because individuals are motivated to maintain relationships that confirm their identities. In this way, self-esteem not only benefits the individual but also strengthens social bonds and community life.

Self-Esteem in Marriage (Shackelford, 2001). Todd K. Shackelford explored the role of self-esteem in marriage from an evolutionary psychology perspective. He suggested that self-esteem evolved as a way to help people solve two adaptive problems within relationships: To keep track of the costs and benefits received from a spouse. To monitor one's value as a long-term mate. In a study with 214 married individuals, Shackelford found that husbands' self-esteem was negatively linked with their wives' reports of jealousy, abuse, and infidelity. In other words, men with lower self-esteem were more likely to have conflictual and problematic relationships. For women, self-esteem was tied to how attractive their husbands perceived them to be, and also to how independent interviewers rated their attractiveness. Women with higher self-esteem were less likely to face derogation of their looks and were generally more satisfied in their marriages.

These results suggest that self-esteem in marriage plays an important role in how partners perceive each other and maintain satisfaction, reinforcing the idea that self-esteem acts as a personal and relational safeguard.

Friendship, Marriage, and Self-Esteem (Kirsten & Anna). Kirsten and Anna conducted a study with 219 married couples to investigate how friendship both with spouses and with same-sex best friends affects self-esteem. They discovered that men and women view spousal friendships differently. Women tended to see their spouse and best friend as offering similar forms of support, while men made clearer distinctions between these two types of friendships. Despite these gender differences, the study revealed that both men and women experienced strong links between relationship quality, marital adjustment, and self-esteem. One key finding was that conflict in marriage lowered self-esteem for both men and women, although women appeared more sensitive to disagreements. The study highlights the importance of positive, supportive relationships both within marriage and outside of it in maintaining healthy self-esteem.

Studies Related to Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Gamophobia

In 2020, Obeid and Haddad carried out a study to create and validate a new tool called the Lebanese Fear of Relationship Commitment Scale (LFRC-17). Their goal was not only to develop a reliable way to

measure fear of commitment but also to explore how this fear connects to psychological factors such as self-esteem, social avoidance, and trust in others. The study involved 568 Lebanese adults from the general population, with equal numbers of men and women. The participants had an average age of about 29 years. To gather data, the researchers used several tools: The LFRC-17 (the new scale measuring fear of relationship commitment), The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Other measures related to social avoidance and interpersonal trust.

The results highlighted an important finding: there was a strong negative relationship between self-esteem and fear of commitment. In simpler words, people who had higher self-esteem were less likely to struggle with gamophobia (fear of marriage or long-term commitment). On the other hand, those with lower self-esteem tended to experience more fear of entering or maintaining committed relationships. This shows that self-esteem acts as a protective factor helping people feel more secure, confident, and open toward commitment. When individuals believe in their own worth and capabilities, they are less likely to avoid long-term relationships out of fear or insecurity.

In 2023, Apostolou and Teke carried out a study to explore the connection between self-esteem and the fear of relationship commitment (gamophobia). They were especially interested in how this link might be shaped by two important factors: a person's mating performance (how well they handle dating and attracting partners) and their relationship quality (how satisfied and stable their relationships feel). The study included 453 Turkish-speaking adults (about 55% women), with an average age of 26 years. Participants were recruited online and completed several questionnaires: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Mating Performance Scale, a Relationship Quality Index, and a Commitment Fear questionnaire.

The results painted a clear picture. People with higher self-esteem tended to do better in romantic interactions they were more confident and skilled in forming connections (good mating performance). They also reported better quality relationships ones that felt stable, supportive, and satisfying. Both of these factors being good at handling relationships and having fulfilling ones were linked to lower levels of fear of commitment.

In 2012, Khanam and Moghal carried out a study with 200 undergraduate students aged 18–24 years from universities in Karachi, Pakistan. Their goal was to understand how self-esteem relates to the fear of being judged by others. To do this, they used two well-known psychological tools: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (to measure how positively or negatively people see themselves) and the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (to measure how anxious people feel about others' criticism or disapproval).

The results showed a strong negative link between the two ($r = -0.51$, $p < 0.01$). This means that students with low self-esteem were far more likely to worry about how others judged them. They often avoided situations where they might feel exposed, criticised, or emotionally vulnerable. This behaviour also makes it difficult for such individuals to build or maintain close relationships, since they may withdraw or protect themselves out of fear of being hurt or rejected. The study highlights that low self-esteem doesn't just affect how people see themselves it also shapes how they connect with others, sometimes leading to patterns of avoidance that resemble the struggles seen in commitment-related fears like gamophobia.

Method

This chapter deals with methods and plan of action of the present study. This chapter provides the sample size of the study, measures used for data collection, procedures used during administration of questionnaire and statistical analysis used for the interpretation of results. The present study is aimed to

investigate the relationship between the variables, gamophobia, relationship sabotage and self-esteem according to birth order.

Research Design

The research design is basically the plan or roadmap of the study. It explains in detail how the hypotheses will be tested and how the collected data will be analysed. In simple terms, it lays out the steps to be followed so that the right information can be gathered and examined objectively (Singh, 2019).

In the present study, a quantitative, correlational research design was used. This type of design is commonly used in psychology and social sciences to explore how different variables are related, build theories, and guide further research (Singh, 2019).

The sample for the study was selected using a non-probability sampling method. In this method, the researcher chooses participants based on their convinces. The collected data was then analysed using appropriate statistical techniques with the help of SPSS software.

Variable

Variables are the qualities or factors in a study that can be observed, measured, or influenced. In research, the independent variable is the factor that the researcher chooses or changes to see how it affects something else. The dependent variable is what changes as a result of this it is the outcome that the researcher measures. In short, the independent variable is the cause, and the dependent variable is the effect (Singh, 2019).

Independent Variable

In this study, gamophobia (fear of commitment or marriage) is taken as the independent variable, meaning it is the main factor that is being studied to see how it influences other aspects.

Dependent Variable

In this study, relationship sabotage is taken as the dependent variable. This means it is the outcome that may change depending on the level of gamophobia (fear of commitment).

Moderating Variable

In this study, self-esteem is considered the moderating variable. This means it acts like a balancing factor that can influence or change the strength of the relationship between gamophobia (fear of commitment) and relationship sabotage.

Sample

A sample is a smaller group taken from a larger population for research purposes. Instead of studying the whole population which can be difficult, expensive, and time-consuming researchers study a sample to gain insights that can reflect the larger group (George, 2000).

In this study, 132 people took part, including both men and women, all aged 18 years and above. They were chosen using the convenience sampling method. This method means participants were selected because they were easily available and willing to take part. It is a quick and cost-effective way to collect data, though it may not always represent the entire population accurately (Singh, 2019).

Inclusion Criteria

Male and female, between 18 to 60.

Exclusion Criteria

- Third gender
- Less than 18 and above 60.

Instruments

In psychology, many different tools are used for research, teaching, and practice. These tools are known as psychological instruments. In this study, the data was collected using scales.

1. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)
2. Fear of marriage questionnaire (FMQ)
3. Relationship sabotage scale (RSS)

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

The **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)** is a 10-item scale developed to measure self-esteem. Although it was first designed for high school students, it is now widely used with different groups, including adults. Norms are available for many populations, making it a reliable tool across age groups.

Reliability and Validity. The RSE shows very high reliability. It has strong internal consistency (reproducibility of .92) and stability over time, with test–retest correlations around .85 to .88. It has also been shown to be valid, as it correlates well with other self-esteem measures like the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and it relates as expected with measures of depression and anxiety.

Scoring. The RSE includes both positively and negatively worded statements. Responses are scored on a 4-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” For scoring, the negatively worded items are reverse-coded, and then the scores are added up. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem, while lower scores reflect lower self-esteem.

Fear of Marriage Questionnaire (FMQ)

This instrument was adapted from the Fear of Marriage Index developed by Stanley and Markman (1992) to measure people’s feelings and concerns about marriage. It is a 50-item self-report questionnaire that directly asks participants how they feel about different aspects of marriage.

Reliability and Validity. The original scale showed a high reliability value of 0.91. For this study, the instrument was adapted and some items were rewritten to make them easier for participants to understand. A pilot study showed that the test–retest reliability after two weeks was 0.77, which indicates good consistency.

Scoring. The scale uses a 4-point response format: Completely True (4), Mostly True (3), Mostly False (2), and Completely False (1). The total scores can range from 50 to 200. For positively worded items, a lower score means less fear, while for negatively worded items, a lower score can mean greater fear. The highest possible score is 200, and the lowest is 50. In this study, the average score was 38.67 with a standard deviation of 4.7.

Relationship Sabotage Scale (RSS; Peel & Caltabiano, 2021)

The Relationship Sabotage Scale (RSS), developed by Peel and Caltabiano (2021), is used to measure behaviours that may harm or weaken romantic relationships. The scale has 39 items divided into six areas: Defensiveness, Trust Difficulty, Lack of Relationship Skills, Partner Compatibility Doubt, Insecurity, and Destructive Behaviour. Each area reflects common patterns that can interfere with closeness and stability in relationships.

Reliability and Validity. The RSS has been shown to be highly reliable, with an overall reliability score (Cronbach’s alpha) of .95. Each of the six areas also showed strong reliability, ranging from .79 to .89, meaning the items in each section measure their intended behaviours consistently. Validity was tested using different statistical methods, and the results confirmed the six clear factors of the scale. It was also found that higher sabotage scores were strongly linked with higher levels of relationship anxiety and

insecurity, while showing weak links with unrelated traits. This shows that the RSS measures relationship sabotage specifically, not just general stress or personality factors.

Scoring. The scale uses a 7-point response system, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores mean higher levels of relationship sabotage. Scores are grouped as follows: 4–11 = Low, 12–20 = Moderate, 21–28 = High. The six subscales are scored using their respective items, for example: Defensiveness: Items 1–4, Trust Difficulty: Items 5–8 Relationship Skills: Items 9–12 (these are reverse-scored to reflect lack of skills)

Procedure

The samples were collected by convenience sampling method for the research purpose. An online survey method was followed. The questions were typed into a Google form to facilitate online collection of data. A sentence regarding assurance and confidentiality and privacy of the data collected were also added to it. The fear of gamophobia, self-esteem and relationship sabotage rating scale were administered. Demographic information of the participants was also collected by providing personal data sheet. The link of Google form was then shared to participant and the participant were requested to open the link and to kindly cooperate with the study. They were also requested to share it to further groups of appropriate participants.

When participants entered the study, they first read the consent form and confirmed that they understood the details and were willing to take part. The form explained that some questions might be personal or sensitive. It also made clear that they were free to stop participating at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Once enough responses were collected, the data was carefully reviewed and entered for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves comparing the results across different groups to see whether the goals of the research were achieved (Kothari, 2004). Statistical methods play an important role in this process. While simple calculations can be used in almost any study, more complex statistical tests are often needed for in-depth research. In educational and social research, both descriptive and inferential statistics are commonly applied to make sense of the data.

In this study, the scores from different variables along with participants' demographic information were arranged in an orderly way. The data was entered into a spreadsheet for checking and further statistical analysis. Statistics are used in two main ways: Descriptive statistics: These are used to summarise and describe the main features of the data. Methods include classification, tabulation, and calculating measures like mean, standard deviation, and range. These give a clear picture of the overall trends. Inferential statistics: These go a step further by helping researchers make generalisations from the sample to the larger population. This allows conclusions to be drawn about how the findings may apply more broadly.

For this study, data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS is a widely used software that helps researchers organise data, identify patterns, run statistical tests, and draw conclusions. It also makes data entry easier by allowing variable names, types, and labels to be set up in advance, saving time and effort (Alchemer, 2018).

Shapiro–Wilk Test

The Shapiro–Wilk test is used to check whether data follows a normal distribution, also called a bell-curve pattern. Many statistical tests, such as t-tests, ANOVA, or Pearson's correlation, assume that the data is

normally distributed. The Shapiro–Wilk test helps us see if this assumption is true. The test gives a p-value as the result: If the p-value is greater than 0.05, it means the data is close enough to normal, so parametric tests (like t-tests or ANOVA) can be used. If the p-value is less than 0.05, it means the data is not normally distributed. In that case, it is better to use non-parametric tests, such as the Kruskal–Wallis test or Spearman’s correlation.

Spearman Rank Correlation

Correlation is a way of showing how strongly two things are related to each other. In simple terms, it tells us whether changes in one variable (X) are linked with changes in another variable (Y).

One of the most commonly used methods is the Spearman Rank Correlation. This is a non-parametric test, which means it does not require the data to follow a normal distribution. Instead of working with the raw values, it ranks the data and then checks how similar the rankings are between the two variables.

Spearman’s method is especially useful when dealing with ordinal data (data that can be ranked) or when the relationship is not strictly linear but still moves in a consistent direction (monotonic). The correlation coefficient (r_s) can range between -1 and +1. +1 means a perfect positive correlation (as one increase, the other also increases). -1 means a perfect negative correlation (as one increase, the other decreases). A value close to 0 means little to no correlation. (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000)

Kruskal Wallis test

The Kruskal–Wallis test, introduced by Kruskal and Wallis in 1952, is a non-parametric test used to check whether three or more groups come from the same distribution. It is an extension of the Mann–Whitney U test, which is used when comparing only two groups.

The test works by comparing the ranks of the data rather than the actual values. The null hypothesis is that all groups have the same average rank. Because it uses ranks, this method is often called the “one-way ANOVA on ranks.”

Unlike the regular one-way ANOVA, the Kruskal–Wallis test does not require the data to follow a normal (bell-curve) distribution. This makes it especially useful when data are not normally distributed or when outliers are present. Instead of being influenced by extreme values, the test focuses on the order of the data, giving a more reliable result in such cases.

Pairwise Comparison

Pairwise comparison is a method used to evaluate or analyze differences between items, groups, or variables by comparing them two at a time. This approach is commonly applied in research and statistics, particularly after conducting an analysis of variance (ANOVA), to determine exactly which groups differ significantly from each other. Instead of evaluating all groups at once, pairwise comparison breaks them down into every possible pair, allowing for a more detailed examination of the specific relationships or differences. For instance, if a study involves three groups—Group A, Group B, and Group C—the comparisons would be made between A and B, A and C, and B and C. This method is especially useful in post hoc testing, where techniques such as Tukey’s HSD or Bonferroni correction are employed to control for errors that may arise from multiple comparisons. Beyond statistics, pairwise comparison is also widely used in decision-making processes, where options are compared in pairs to assess preferences or importance. Overall, pairwise comparison offers a straightforward and systematic approach to identifying meaningful differences or making informed choices among several alternatives.

Regression

Regression is a statistical method used to study the relationship between one outcome (the dependent variable) and one or more predictors (independent variables). It helps in predicting results, understanding how variables are related, and testing research ideas.

In this study, we used moderation analysis. This type of analysis looks at whether the relationship between two variables changes depending on the influence of a third variable, called the moderator.

Instead of assuming that an independent variable affects everyone in the same way, moderation analysis checks if this effect is stronger, weaker, or different depending on the moderator's level.

For example, in a psychology study on stress and academic performance, researchers might test whether self-esteem acts as a moderator. Students with higher self-esteem may not be as negatively affected by stress as students with lower self-esteem. In this case, self-esteem moderates the relationship between stress and performance.

In regression, this is usually tested by adding an interaction term between the independent variable and the moderator. Moderation analysis is especially valuable in social sciences and behavioural studies because it shows when and for whom certain effects are stronger or weaker.

Ethical Consideration

Foremost important ethical consideration which is followed in this study is the respect towards the participants. It is because participants in the study form a foundation for different ethical principles. Another ethical consideration Followed is the free will to participate in this study and informed consent. On The front page of the google form, an informed consent was added. Complete freedom is assigned to them regarding their participation in this process. Another important ethical consideration involves privacy, confidentiality, and Anonymity. The confidentiality and privacy are focused more by the researcher. It is because these are the foremost and prior consideration of the researcher. The form made it clear that both the anonymity and the information submitted by the participant would be protected. The information Provided by the respondent will be kept private and used solely for research purposes. The participant can withdraw from the study at any time, if they want to. And also, it won't do any physiological or psychological harm to the participants.

Results and Discussion

This section primarily focuses on providing a clear and concise presentation of the study's findings. It involves reporting the empirical results obtained from data collection and analysis in a structured manner. This section allows the researchers to delve deeper into the implications, significance, and meaning of the obtained results. The discussion involves interpreting and analysing the findings in relation to the research questions or hypotheses, comparing them with existing literature, and addressing any discrepancies or unexpected outcomes. Analysis helps to make sense out of gathered data by proper application of statistical methods. In any type of investigation, analysis and interpretation is considered as the best way to test the hypotheses formulated by the investigator. The different statistical analysis carried out in the study can bring some definite result and clarification in the established theories of variables under the study, comparing firstborns, middleborns and lastborn: The moderate role of self-esteem on gamophobia and relationship sabotage. Results of the statistical procedure are discussed under various headings.

Table 1 Significances values of the study variables in Normality testing

Variables	Significance Level (p-value)
Relationship Sabotage	0.015
Self-Esteem	0.003
Gamophobia	0.001

This table shows the results of a normality test. We used Shapiro-Wilk test for the three variables relationship sabotage, self esteem and gamophobia. the p-values for relationship sabotage, self esteem and gamophobia is 0.05,0.003 and 0.001. $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ it indicates that none of the three variables are normally distributed based on the Shapiro-Wilk test, indicating a statistically significant deviation from a normal distribution. Hence, the assumption of normality is violated for each of these variables. So, we have to use non parametric tests

H1: There will be no significant relationship between gamophobia, relationship sabotage and self-esteem.

Table 2 Spearman Correlation Coefficients Between Gamophobia, Relationship Sabotage, and Self-Esteem

Variables	Gamophobia	Relationship Sabotage	Self-Esteem
Gamophobia	—	.526**	.250**
Relationship Sabotage	.526**	—	.286**
Self-Esteem	.250**	.286**	—

This table shows the Spearman rank-order correlations between three psychological variables relationship sabotage, self-esteem and gamophobia.

The results shows that there is significant positive correlation between gamophobia and relationship sabotage ($p=.526$, $p<.01$). It indicates that as gamophobia increases, the likelihood of sabotaging relationships also increases. This strong, positive, and significant relationship supports the view that individuals with a greater fear of commitment are more likely to engage in self-sabotaging behaviours in romantic contexts. This can include distancing, ghosting, or initiating conflict to avoid deeper intimacy. According to attachment theory, individuals high in avoidant attachment may fear dependence and vulnerability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), leading them to pre-emptively sabotage relationships when commitment becomes imminent. This finding strengthens the case for gamophobia being a key predictor of relational dysfunction. The results reveal a significant positive correlation between gamophobia and relationship sabotage ($\rho = .526$, $p < .01$), supporting prior research that links fear of commitment to self-defeating interpersonal patterns (Jones & Paulhus, 2012).

There is significant correlation between self-esteem and gamophobia ($\rho = .250$, $p < .01$). It indicates that Individuals with higher self-esteem tend to show slightly more gamophobia, though the strength is low. Although positive, this is a weak association, indicating that higher self-esteem does not necessarily protect individuals from commitment fears. This means that individuals with higher levels of self-esteem reported slightly higher levels of fear or anxiety related to commitment and long-term relationships (gamophobia). While this finding may appear counterintuitive at first glance given that self-esteem is often associated with healthier emotional functioning and greater relational security it opens up meaningful avenues for interpretation.

One possible explanation is that individuals with higher self-esteem may possess a stronger sense of independence and personal boundaries, which can sometimes be misinterpreted or experienced as avoidance of deep emotional attachment. These individuals may value autonomy and personal space more, leading to a cautious or reluctant approach to intimate commitments. This tendency might manifest as germophobic behaviours, such as avoiding long-term relationships or showing anxiety when confronted with the idea of permanent partnership.

Another interpretation might stem from cognitive dissonance or protective mechanisms. Those with relatively higher self-esteem may be more likely to avoid situations where they fear emotional vulnerability could challenge their self-concept. In this case, gamophobia could function as a defense mechanism, helping individuals maintain their self-worth by avoiding situations that might threaten it, such as the perceived loss of control or fear of failure in romantic relationships.

This is particularly interesting, as self-esteem is traditionally associated with healthy relationships. Studies quoted that higher self-esteem is consistently associated with better relationship quality across the life span. People with higher self-esteem tend to have more secure attachments, better communication skills, and a stronger sense of trust and intimacy in relationships. Self-esteem predicted future relationship satisfaction, rather than the other way around. This suggests a causal direction: people with high self-esteem are more likely to initiate, maintain, and enjoy satisfying romantic relationships. Low self-esteem is linked to negative relationship behaviours such as over-sensitivity to rejection, jealousy, difficulty expressing needs or asserting oneself, often leading to dissatisfaction or conflict. (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). One interpretation could be that individuals with high self-esteem may still fear losing autonomy or being emotionally exposed, feeling gamophobic tendencies. Alternatively, overly inflated or defensive self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1996) might coexist with a fear of rejection or failure in intimate contexts.

There is moderate positive correlation between relationship sabotage and self-esteem ($p = .286, p < .01$). Suggests that individuals with higher self-esteem also show tendencies toward relationship sabotage. This moderate, positive correlation suggests that self-esteem plays a more complex role in relational sabotage. Instead of always being protective, it may at times contribute to maladaptive behaviour, especially when tied to entitlement or narcissism (indicates a nuanced relationship where self-esteem may coexist with maladaptive relationship behaviours.) Research by Knee et al. (2005) supports this perspective, showing that autonomy-oriented individuals often exhibit “independent goal regulation” in relationships. While this can foster healthy boundaries, it can also result in distancing or disengagement when intimacy is perceived as controlling or invasive behaviours that closely mirror relationship sabotage.

According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), autonomy, the need to feel in control of one's own behaviour is a fundamental human need. In romantic relationships, individuals with high self-esteem and a strong need for freedom may perceive closeness or emotional dependence as a threat to their autonomy. This can lead to acts of sabotage, not out of fear of unworthiness, but rather as a means of preserving personal space, freedom, or identity. These individuals might resist vulnerability or long-term commitments, opting instead to end relationships before they feel "trapped" or emotionally overwhelmed.

H2: There will be no significant difference in relationship sabotage based on birth order

Table 3 Group, sample size, Kruskal Wallis Htets, degrees of freedom and significances value for relationship sabotage by birth order

Variable	Group	n	H (df = 3)	p value
Relationship Sabotage	First-born child	45	2.735	.434
	Middle-born child	32		
	Last-born child	44		
	Single child	11		

This table show the Kruskal–Wallis Test Results for relationship sabotage by birth order. It is used to check whether relationship sabotage is different among people with different birth orders (first-born, middle-born, last-born, and single child). Test statistic $H = 2.735$, Degrees of freedom = 3 (four groups: first-born, middle-born, last-born, single child) $p = .434$ (which is greater than 0.05). Since $p > .05$, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This means there is no significant difference in relationship sabotage based on birth order in this sample. analysis reveals that birth order does not have a significant effect on self-sabotaging behaviour in relationships. Despite theoretical assumptions suggesting that personality traits tied to birth order may influence interpersonal behaviours (Sulloway, 1996), this particular study did not find empirical evidence to support such a claim for the variable of relationship sabotage.

The birth order theory, primarily advanced by Alfred Adler and later supported by Sulloway (1996), suggests that first-borns may be more responsible or controlling, middle-borns more adaptable, last-borns more sociable, and only children more independent. These personality tendencies are often assumed to influence relational behaviour, including conflict management and commitment dynamics.

However, the present findings using the Kruskal–Walli's test suggest that birth order does not significantly differentiate individuals in terms of relationship sabotage behaviour ($H = 2.735$, $p = .434$). This result aligns with recent critiques of birth order theory, arguing that contextual and personality factors (e.g., parenting style, family size, attachment, and self-worth) may override any systematic effects of ordinal position (Rohrer, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2015). This supports more recent studies that say birth order is not always a strong predictor of personality or relationship behaviour. Other factors like self-esteem, past trauma, or fear of commitment (gamophobia) might play a bigger role.

H3: There will be no significant difference in gamophobia based on birth order

Table 4 Group, sample size, Kruskal Wallis Htets, degrees of freedom and significances value for gamophobia by birth order

Variable	Group	n	H (df = 3)	p-value
Gamophobia	First-born child	45	4.743	.192
	Middle-born child	32		
	Last-born child	44		
	Single child	11		

The Kruskal–Walli's test checks if gamophobia (fear of commitment) is significantly different across birth order groups: first-born, middle-born, last-born, and single children.

Table shows the Test statistic $H = 4.743$, Degrees of freedom = 3 (four groups: first-born, middle-born,

last-born, single child) $p = .0192$ (which is greater than 0.05). Since $p > .05$, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This means there is no statistically significant difference in Gamophobia based on birth order in this sample. While classical birth order theories suggest systematic behavioural and emotional patterns associated with one's ordinal position within the family (e.g., first-borns being more achievement-oriented, last-borns being more attention-seeking), the empirical robustness of these claims has been increasingly scrutinized (Rohrer, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2015). The present finding is consistent with a growing body of literature suggesting that birth order has limited predictive power for personality and related psychological constructs when compared to more proximal variables such as attachment style, self-esteem, and early relational experiences (Damian & Roberts, 2015).

In the context of gamophobia, it is plausible that attachment-related anxiety or avoidance, negative relational schemas, or prior relational trauma are more influential predictors than family position. The absence of a significant relationship between birth order and gamophobia here supports a multi-factorial understanding of romantic fear and avoidance behaviours one that moves beyond simplistic ordinal categorizations.

H4: There is no significant differences in self-esteem scores based on birth order

Table 5 Group, sample size, Kruskal Wallis Htets, degrees of freedom and significances value for self-esteem by birth order

Variable	Group	n	H (df = 3)	p-value
Self-esteem	First-born child	45	12.589	.006*
	Middle-born child	32		
	Last-born child	44		
	Single child	11		

The Kruskal–Wallis H test was conducted to examine whether there are statistically significant differences in self-esteem scores based on birth order (First-born, Middle-born, Last-born, Single child). The test yielded a chi-square value (H) of 12.589 with 3 degrees of freedom, and a p-value of .006, ($p < .05$), which is statistically significant at the conventional alpha level of 0.05. The finding indicates a statistically significant relationship between birth order and self-esteem, supporting prior literature that has found personality and self-concept variations based on sibling hierarchy (Sulloway, 1996; Kidwell, 1982). The first-born children, often characterized by responsibility and leadership roles, may exhibit higher self-esteem due to early parental attention and expectations (Whiteman et al., 2003). Conversely, middle-born children might experience identity diffusion, while last-borns are often more socially driven but may have self-esteem affected by constant comparison with older siblings.

The significance of the Kruskal–Wallis H test here suggests the impact of family dynamics and sibling roles on psychological constructs like self-esteem. Given the observed difference, further pair wise comparison would be warranted to identify which specific birth order groups differ significantly from each other.

Table 6 Pairwise Comparisons of Self-Esteem by Birth Order

	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Z-Value	Adjusted Sig.
First vs Second	-13.467	8.793	-1.531	0.754
First vs Last	-13.489	8.062	-1.673	0.566
First vs Single	-44.467	12.790	-3.477	0.003
Second vs Last	-0.023	8.835	-0.003	1.000
Second vs Single	-31.000	13.291	-2.332	0.118
Last vs Single	-30.977	12.819	-2.417	0.094

This table presents the results of pairwise comparisons of self-esteem scores among birth order groups, following a significant Kruskal–Walli’s test. The comparison uses pair wise comparison to correct for multiple testing. The only statistically significant difference is found between the first-born and single-child groups ($p = .003$). All other pairwise comparisons (first vs second, second vs last, last vs single, etc.) are not statistically significant (adjusted $p > .05$).

The Kruskal–Wallis test previously indicated that birth order has a significant effect on self-esteem. This post hoc pairwise comparison helps pinpoint which groups differ.

The significant gap between first-borns and only children suggests that familial structure and social dynamics unique to single children may affect the development of self-esteem. Single children often grow up with exclusive parental attention, potentially leading to heightened expectations, overprotection, or isolation from sibling influence and Single children were found to be more achievement-oriented and had higher self-esteem (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Only children tend to be more self-reliant and mature, but sometimes less cooperative due to lack of sibling socialization. (Falbo& Poston 1993). Single children, due to continuous validation from adults, may develop greater self-confidence and emotional independence, influencing their relationship styles differently (Kidwell,1982). In contrast, first-borns share parental attention but may assume leadership roles and responsibilities within the sibling group, which are linked to higher confidence and self-worth (Sulloway, 1996). First born show more nurturing or protective behaviour, having acted in a caregiver role to younger siblings (Falbo& Poston 1993). First-borns tend to internalize parental expectations and may struggle with self-worth if they feel they have failed (Kidwell,1982).

There is lack of significant differences between other groups (middle-born, last-born) suggests that the effect of birth order on self-esteem may not be as linear or strong as once theorized. These findings are in line with contemporary large-sample studies that suggest birth order effects on personality and self-esteem are minimal or context-dependent (Rohrer et al., 2015).

H5: There will be no significant moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage.

Table 7 Regression analysis results for the moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between relationship sabotage and gamophobia

Step	variables	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F
1	RS	.5787	.3349	—	21.4819
2	SE	—	—	.0224	
3	RS × SE	—	—	.0203	

This table presents the results hierarchical regression analysis predicting gamophobia from relationship sabotage and self-esteem interaction.

A hierarchical regression was conducted to examine whether self-esteem moderated the relationship between relationship sabotage and gamophobia. While relationship sabotage significantly predicted gamophobia ($R^2 = .3349$, $F(1,130) = 21.4819$, $p < .001$), the addition of self-esteem and the interaction term ($RS \times SE$) significantly improve the model ($\Delta R^2 = .0224$ and $.0203$, respectively). These results suggest that self-esteem moderate the effect of relationship sabotage on gamophobia. Individual with high self-esteem moderate the effect of relationship sabotage on gamophobia is less than compare to low self esteem individual.

The results demonstrated that as relationship sabotage behaviors increase, levels of gamophobia also increase significantly, suggesting that individuals who frequently engage in behaviors that undermine or disrupt relationships tend to report greater fear of commitment or relational anxiety. This aligns with existing literature which suggests that sabotage behaviors such as creating distance, initiating unnecessary conflict, or devaluing the partner often function as protective strategies used by individuals who harbor fears of vulnerability or abandonment.

Moreover, the analysis showed that higher self-esteem is associated with higher levels of gamophobia, although this relationship is nuanced. While self-esteem is generally considered a protective factor in psychological adjustment and interpersonal functioning, the current findings challenge this assumption by highlighting a complex interplay between self-esteem and commitment-related fears. It is possible that individuals with high self-esteem may overvalue autonomy or fear loss of control in close relationships, which could contribute to an avoidance of commitment.

Crucially, the moderation analysis confirmed that self-esteem significantly influences the relationship between relationship sabotage and gamophobia. Specifically, the association between sabotage and gamophobia was stronger at higher levels of self-esteem. This suggests that individuals who perceive themselves positively may still exhibit high levels of fear and anxiety in romantic commitment, particularly when they are prone to sabotaging relational closeness. This pattern implies that high self-esteem does not necessarily buffer against the development of gamophobia, and in some cases, may even reinforce it when combined with maladaptive relational behaviours.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter contains a brief summary about present study, statement of problems, definition of key terms, objectives of the study, hypothesis, tenability of hypothesis, methods, major findings of the study, implications of the study, limitations of the study and suggestions for the future research. The aim of the

study was to find out the relationships between self-esteem, gamophobia and relationship sabotage, with a particular focus on whether birth order influences these variables.

Study in brief

This study examines the relationships between self-esteem, gamophobia and relationship sabotage, with a particular focus on whether birth order influences these variables.

Gamophobia refers to the fear of marriage or worry that arises considering marriage. Relationship sabotage is doing things that harm the relationship, often unintentionally. Self-esteem means how a person feels about themselves, how much they like, respect, and value who they are. It shows whether someone sees themselves in a positive or negative. Romantic relationships are an important part of many people's lives. However, not everyone finds it easy to build or maintain a healthy relationship. Some people experience gamophobia, which is the fear of commitment. Others may unknowingly sabotage their own relationships, for example, by pushing their partner away, picking fights, or ending things when they start to get serious. These behaviours can be confusing and painful, both for the person doing them and their partner.

Psychologists have long been interested in what causes these patterns. One idea that has received a lot of attention is birth order, whether someone is the oldest, middle, or youngest child in their family. According to theories by people like Alfred Adler, the position you are born into in your family can shape your personality. For example, firstborns are often thought to be responsible and serious, middleborns more independent or neglected, and lastborn more social or attention-seeking. These differences could affect how someone acts in romantic relationships, but research so far has shown mixed results.

Another important factor is self-esteem, or how people feel about themselves. People with high self-esteem tend to feel more secure and confident, which usually helps them form better relationships. But it's not always so simple. Sometimes, people with very high or defensive self-esteem might avoid emotional closeness or act in ways that hurt their relationships without even realizing it. This study investigated the interconnections between self-esteem, gamophobia and relationship sabotage behaviours, with an additional focus on how these variables may vary according to birth order. Understanding these relationships can help in identifying key psychological obstacles to gamophobia, relationship sabotage and self-esteem and inform support strategies to adults.

The objectives of the study are;

- To find out the relationship between self-esteem, gamophobia and relationship sabotage among firstborns, middleborns, and lastborn.
- To find out the differences on Gamophobia on the basis of birth order.
- To find out the differences on relationship sabotage on the basis of birth order.
- To find out the differences on self-esteem on the basis of birth order.
- To examine the moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage.

The hypothesis of the study is;

H1: There will be no significant relationship between Gamophobia, Relationship sabotage and self-esteem among young adults.

H2: There will be no significant difference in relationship sabotage based on birth order among young adults.

H3: There will be no significant difference in gamophobia based on birth order among young adults.

H4: There will be no significant differences in self-esteem based on birth order among young adults.

H5: There will be no significant moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage among young adults.

This study examines the relationships between self-esteem, gamophobia and relationship sabotage, with a particular focus on whether birth order influences these variables. Data were collected using the convenience sampling method. A total of 132 including male and female participated in the study. The data collection process was conducted online using Google Forms, ensuring ease of access and wider reach among the target population. Participants were provided with a brief overview of the study and were assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes. The questionnaire consisted of standardized instruments, including the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, Relationship sabotage scale and Fear marriage questionnaire scale. In addition to these measures, a section to gather demographic information was also included.

After data collection, responses were systematically scored and coded in Microsoft Excel, and the dataset was imported into SPSS for analysis. Appropriate statistical techniques such as the Spearman Correlation Coefficients, Kruskal–Wallis Test, Pairwise Comparisons and regression analysis were employed to analyze the data. The results obtained were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and discussed in light of existing literature.

Table 8 Tenability of hypothesis

S.I No	Hypothesis	Tenability
H1	There is no significant relationship between Gamophobia, Relationship sabotage and self-esteem	Rejected
H2	There is no significant difference in relationship sabotage based on birth order	Accepted
H3	There is no significant difference in Gamophobia based on birth order	Accepted
H4	There is no significant differences in self-esteem scores based on birth order	Rejected
H5	There will be no significant moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between gamophobia and relationship sabotage.	Rejected

Major Findings of the Study

1. There is significant correlation between gamophobia and relationship sabotage
2. There is significant correlation between gamophobia and self esteem
3. There is a significant correlation between relationship sabotage and self-esteem
4. There is no significant difference in relationship sabotage based on birth order
5. There is no significant difference in gamophobia based on birth order
6. There are significant differences in self-esteem based on birth order

7. A significant difference is found in self-esteem between the first-born and single-child groups
8. Self-esteem moderates the effect of relationship sabotage on Gamophobia.

Conclusion

The findings revealed a significant and positive correlation between gamophobia and relationship sabotage. This suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of commitment fear are more likely to engage in self-sabotaging behaviours within romantic relationships, such as emotionally withdrawing, initiating conflicts, or ending relationships prematurely. This supports the theoretical understanding that fear of vulnerability or dependency may trigger pre-emptive distancing to avoid deeper intimacy.

There was also a significant correlation between gamophobia and self-esteem. While traditionally self-esteem is thought to act as a protective factor in relationships, this finding implies that even individuals with higher self-esteem may exhibit commitment-related anxiety, perhaps due to fear of losing autonomy or due to defensive forms of self-worth. Similarly, a moderate positive correlation between self-esteem and relationship sabotage was observed. This nuanced result indicates that higher self-esteem does not always correspond with healthier relational behaviours and, in some cases, might align with traits like emotional detachment or entitlement, which can contribute to maladaptive relationship patterns.

In exploring the impact of birth order, the study found no statistically significant differences in gamophobia or relationship sabotage among first-borns, middle-borns, last-borns, and only children. These findings challenge traditional birth order theories, which posit that ordinal position influences relational behaviour. Instead, the results align with contemporary critiques suggesting that variables such as attachment style, family dynamics, and individual psychological experiences may be more influential. However, birth order was significantly associated with self-esteem. Post hoc analysis revealed that only children had significantly higher self-esteem compared to first-borns. This may be attributed to only children receiving uninterrupted parental attention and validation, which can foster a stronger sense of self. In contrast, first-borns often carry greater familial expectations and responsibilities, which may contribute to internalized pressure and fluctuations in self-worth.

The hierarchical regression tested whether self-esteem moderates the relationship between relationship sabotage and gamophobia. The initial model showed that RS is a strong, significant predictor of gamophobia, explaining 33.49% of its variance. The addition of self-esteem and the interaction term ($RS \times SE$) significantly improve the model ($\Delta R^2 = .0224$ and $.0203$, respectively). These results suggest that self-esteem moderate the effect of relationship sabotage on gamophobia. Individual with high self-esteem moderate the effect of relationship sabotage on gamophobia is less than compare to low self-esteem individual

Implications of the Study

The findings of the study titled “A Study on the Moderating Role of Self-Esteem on the Relationship Between Gamophobia and Relationship Sabotage Among Young Adults” hold several important implications. Firstly, the study sheds light on how self-esteem plays a crucial role in influencing romantic behaviour among young adults. When individuals experience fear of commitment (gamophobia), those with low self-esteem may be more likely to engage in behaviours that sabotage their relationships. This suggests that interventions aimed at improving self-esteem could potentially reduce such self-defeating behaviors in romantic contexts.

From a developmental perspective, the findings suggest that early interventions in adolescence or young

adulthood that focus on enhancing self-esteem could serve as a protective factor against the emergence of commitment-related fears and dysfunctional patterns in relationships. This is especially important for youth navigating identity formation and interpersonal roles. Educational and community institutions can design workshops, seminars, or mentorship programs that not only talk about romantic relationships but also emphasize emotional resilience, self-compassion, and assertiveness training.

Additionally, the study has significant clinical implications. Therapists working with clients who exhibit fear of intimacy or patterns of sabotaging relationships can benefit from assessing and working on the client's level of self-esteem. Therapy models such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or Schema Therapy could be employed to challenge negative core beliefs and replace them with more adaptive, empowering ones. Understanding the role of self-esteem can also help therapists predict which clients might be more at risk of repeating harmful relationship patterns and tailor interventions accordingly.

For researchers, this study paves the way for exploring intersectional factors such as gender, culture, and upbringing that may influence the self-esteem–gamophobia–sabotage triangle. For example, cultural norms around marriage and gender roles might amplify or diminish the impact of self-esteem on relationship behaviours. It also raises questions about the directionality and causality of these variables: Does low self-esteem lead to sabotage in the presence of gamophobia, or does sabotaging relationships repeatedly lower self-esteem over time?

Lastly, for young adults themselves, this study offers an empowering realization: that their relationship fears and difficulties may not reflect who they are or what they truly want, but instead may stem from unresolved issues related to self-worth. By becoming aware of this dynamic, individuals may be more open to personal growth, therapy, or introspection, ultimately leading to healthier relationships and improved emotional well-being.

Limitations of the Study

1. The samples were collected through the convenience sampling method.
2. Low sample size
3. The study was conducted only in males and females
4. The study was conducted in a limited period of time
5. The truthfulness of the study is depending on the honesty of the participants.

Suggestions for Further Researches

1. A similar study with an extended and more diverse sample could be conducted to enhance the generalizability of the findings.
2. A qualitative research design may be used to explore the underlying causes and deeper relationships between Gamophobia, Relationship sabotage and self-esteem.
3. Cross-cultural studies could be conducted to examine how cultural backgrounds influence the relationship between the variables studied.
4. Future studies could include longitudinal research to track changes in Gamophobia, Relationship sabotage and self-esteem over time.
5. Gender-based or discipline-specific studies could help understand how these variables operate in different states or demographic subgroups.

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