



Ressentiment as a silent destroyer of romantic relationships: The importance of attachment styles and life satisfaction in the context of relationship duration¹

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Abstract: Partner relationships play a key role in human functioning, being an important source of emotional support, security, and a sense of belonging. Contemporary psychological research increasingly focuses on the factors determining the quality and durability of relationships, among which particular importance is attributed to attachment styles and less to the phenomenon of resentment. Attachment styles, formed in early relational experience, determine the ways of regulating closeness, trust, and dependence in partner relationships. On the other hand, resentment, understood as a relatively permanent emotional and cognitive disposition of a hidden nature, can act as a “silent destructor” of the relationship, influencing the interpretation of the partner’s behaviour, the emotions experienced and the subjective assessment of the relationship. The paper aims to show the relationship between attachment styles, the level of resentment and life satisfaction in relationships of different seniority. The study included 144 people (72 women and 72 men) in partnerships, with two groups separated: people in relationships lasting up to 7 years and over 7 years. The Attachment Styles Questionnaire (KSP) by M. Plopa was used in the research (2008), the Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS) by E. Diener and colleagues, and in the Polish adaptation Z. Juczyński (2001) and the Resentment Questionnaire (KRe-Psy) developed by M.G. Karbowski (2025). The results indicate that both attachment styles and the level of resentment are significantly associated with life satisfaction in a partnership, regardless of its duration. Resentment manifests itself as a correlate that lowers the quality of relationships, co-occurring especially with non-secure attachment styles. In relationships with more than 7 years of experience, higher relational satisfaction is associated with a lower severity of the key components of resentment – *reluctance* ($\rho = -0.781$), *contempt* ($\rho = -0.802$), and *regret* ($\rho = -0.603$) – suggesting that as the quality of relationships decreases, persistent forms of hostility and feelings of harm increase. This means that in long-term relationships, resentment takes on a relatively chronic character and is associated with a lower rating of the relationship. On the other hand, in relationships up to 7 years of age, relational satisfaction has the lowest level in connection with *revenge* ($\rho = -0.832$) and *jealousy* ($\rho = -0.541$), while other manifestations of resentment are uncorrelated with the quality of the relationship. The results of the study emphasise the universal importance of the analysed variables in and the need for further research, especially of a longitudinal nature, enabling a better understanding of the dynamics of these relationships during the duration of the relationship.

Keywords: attachment styles, life satisfaction, partnerships, resentment.

Introduction

Interpersonal relationships, and in particular partnerships, are one of the key areas of human functioning (Bühler et al., 2021). Their quality has a significant impact on an individual’s mental well-being, sense of meaning in life and overall satisfaction with life (Stahnke & Cooley, 2020). Satisfaction with life in relationships, understood as a subjective sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with relationships, has

been the subject of intensive psychological research for years (cf. Pfund et al., 2020; see: Gold et al., 2024; Roth et al., 2024). The authors of these studies focus primarily on identifying the mechanisms determining the durability and quality of partner relationships, looking for factors that favor their stability or lead to their gradual disintegration. Confirming that people who experience lasting and stable satisfaction

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in a relationship are more likely to have higher levels of life satisfaction and better emotional functioning and mental health (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Downward et al., 2022).

In the literature on the subject, special attention is paid to the role of attachment styles, which are formed in early relational experiences and affect the ways of regulating closeness, the effects of anxiety or interpersonal trust (Bao et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2022). At the same time, research points to the importance of the value system of partners as a factor determining the way of interpreting relational experiences and the level of satisfaction with the relationship. Compatibility of values, especially in the area of relational and prosocial values, is associated with a higher quality of relationships and a greater sense of emotional stability (van der Wal et al., 2023). On the other hand, a study in Slovenia, carried out by the Kus Ambrož et al. (2021) show that the presence of love in a relationship was associated with a person's subjective perception of its quality, but had no effect on the self-esteem of the stability of the relationship.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to further explore this area, because despite the growing number of studies on attachment styles and value systems, relatively little attention has been paid to resentment as a complex psychological phenomenon that can serve as a hidden destructor of partner relationships. Resentment manifests itself as a relatively permanent emotional-cognitive attitude, developing in conditions of frustration, experienced injustice and a sense of powerlessness of the individual. Its essence is not limited only to experiencing negative emotions, but includes the process of systematic distortion of the perception of reality and secondary re-evaluation of the value system (Karbowski, 2025). In this sense, resentment can lead to permanent deformations of the partner's assessments, relationships and one's own position in the relationship, while remaining a regulatory mechanism of a compensatory nature.

The importance of the length of the relationship also remains an important and still insufficiently explored issue. The length of a relationship is associated with different emotional dynamics, ways of coping with conflict, and self-esteem and perceived conflict, as shown by the study of Rauthmann et al. (2021) in the German family panel.

Empirical research indicates that relationship satisfaction is not static, but changes during the relationship. Analytics Bühler and Orth (2024) in a large longitudinal study show that Relationship satisfaction changes differently depending on whether the relationship lasts or ends, and what kind of relationship the person is in later; Participants who started a new relationship after a breakup had higher initial levels of satisfaction in the new relationship than in the previous one, while satisfaction in relationships that fell apart declined faster than in those that continued. On the other hand, the latent class growth analysis approach by Roth et al. (2024) shows that different couples follow different trajectories of satisfaction – some show stable high levels, others decreases, and still others various forms of changes over time, which is proof that satisfaction does not change in a homogeneous way across the entire population of the surveyed couples.

Longitudinal studies on partner satisfaction show an interesting relationship that overall levels of satisfaction often undergo gradual reduction over the years of the relationship (McNulty et al., 2016), which is consistent with the dynamic trajectory of satisfaction model (Anderson et al., 2012). Therefore, the popular concept of 'seven-year itch' is widely discussed in cultural and educational literature, but does not function in peer-reviewed psychological studies as a clearly confirmed crisis point after exactly seven years (Williamson & Lavner, 2019).

On this basis, it is reasonable to distinguish between relationships with shorter and longer experience (e.g., less than 7 years), which may be characterised by different emotional dynamics, the level of adaptation to difficulties, and ways of regulating tensions and resolving conflicts. Relationships with different durations may also differ in susceptibility to destructive factors, such as chronic relational frustration or growing resentment. At the same time, the length of the relationship can modify the way in which attachment styles and the value system recognised by partners affect the subjective assessment of the quality of the relationship. In the light of these arguments, it can be assumed that the analysis of resentment as a "silent destructor" of partner relationships allows for a deeper understanding of the

mechanisms that mediate between relational experience, its interpretation, and long-term satisfaction with the relationship. The analysis aims to deepen the understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the quality of partner relationships and to indicate potential implications for therapeutic and preventive practice.

1. Psychological determinants of the quality of partner relationships: attachment styles, satisfaction dynamics and the role of resentment

The paper's theoretical part discusses attachment theory as one of the key approaches explaining the quality of partner relationships, with particular emphasis on life satisfaction in a relationship as an important indicator of relational well-being and its relationship with the functioning of an individual in a close relationship. Next, the theoretical foundations describing the changes in the level of satisfaction during the relationship are presented, considering the differences between shorter and longer relationships and the dynamics of these processes. Next, the author's approach to resentment as a relatively permanent emotional and cognitive mechanism, leading to the distortion of relational evaluations and the re-evaluation of the value system, which is the theoretical basis for the analysis of resentment as a "silent destructor" of partner relationships, is presented.

1.1. Attachment styles and functioning in partner relationships

Attachment theory is one of the fundamental approaches explaining the functioning of an individual in close interpersonal relationships, including partnerships. Started by John Bowlby in 1958 in the article *The nature of the child's tie to his mother*, the concept of attachment assumes that the need for closeness with an important person has a biological basis and has an adaptive function, serving emotional regulation and a sense of security (Bowlby,

2022; Eilert & Buchheim, 2023; Messina et al., 2024). Early relational experiences with caregivers are internalised in the form of so-called internal operating models, which affect the way we perceive ourselves and others, and the "attachment pattern as an internal active model creates the early experience on which later personality and behaviour depends" (Plopa, 2019, p. 490).

Bowlby's concept was directly referred to by Mary Ainsworth, who in the 1960s and 1970s – first in field research in Uganda and then in a longitudinal project in Baltimore – empirically verified and operationalised attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1967; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Lamb, 1980). Developing Bowlby's concept, Ainsworth distinguished three basic attachment styles: safe, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant, emphasising the key role of the caregiver's availability and responsiveness in forming bonds (Ainsworth, 1969). The safe style is associated with a sense of trust in the attachment figure, the ability to explore and effective regulation of emotions, which is conducive to building stable and satisfying interpersonal relationships (Włodarczyk, 2016). On the other hand, post-protection styles develop in conditions of inconsistent, rejective or unpredictable care and are associated with difficulties in terms of closeness, trust, and affect regulation (Plopa, 2019).

In adult partnerships, attachment styles manifest themselves in an analogous way, as shown by Hazan and Diamond (2000), treating this relationship as an attachment process based on the same attachment functions (safe base, safe haven, maintaining closeness, separation distress) was developed based on key observed similarities between infant attachment traits and romantic attachment traits (Barbaro et al., 2021).

People with a secure attachment style tend to have higher levels of intimacy, commitment, and relationship satisfaction, as well as better communication and a lower frequency of conflict compared to those with anxious or avoidant styles (Sagone et al., 2023). These partners perceive themselves and others in a positive way, which promotes the durability of the relationship.

On the other hand, people with an avoidant attachment style often avoid emotional closeness, show reduced trust in their partner and less willingness to

engage in the relationship (Bhavya & Naila, 2024; Freeman et al., 2023; Swets & Cox, 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2023). The anxious-ambivalent style is associated with an increased fear of abandonment, excessive vigilance towards relational signals and a reduced sense of security in the relationship, which negatively affects relational satisfaction (Metellus et al., 2025; Plopa, 2019). Research indicates that post-secure attachment styles promote the intensification of conflicts, reduced quality of communication and emotional instability in partner relationships (Hansom & Guerrero, 2025).

From the presented considerations, a picture emerges that the anxious-ambivalent style (attachment anxiety) is associated with an increased fear of rejection and hypervigilance to signals of threat to the relationship, which results in a lower level of satisfaction and difficulties in the functioning of the relationship (González-Ortega et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020). On the other hand, unsecured attachment styles promote the intensification of conflict processes and destructive behaviours, weakening the quality of communication and the emotional stability of relationships (Gazder & Stanton, 2020). In this sense, the author of this study shares the opinion that the following approach retains a high research value, because emotional and cognitive processes come to the fore, capable of modifying fixed patterns of functioning during the relationship. One such mechanism is resentment, which can grow based on chronic relational frustrations and gradually play the role of a hidden but important factor destabilising the partner bond.

1.2. The level of satisfaction with the relationship in the perspective of the relationship

The level of satisfaction with a relationship is defined as a subjective assessment of the degree of satisfaction and fulfilment that an individual experiences in a partnership relationship (Freihart et al., 2023; Zhan et al., 2022). It includes both emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components, referring to the fulfilment of emotional needs, the quality of communication, closeness, support, and the overall

balance of experiences resulting from living together with a partner (Fallis et al., 2016). This satisfaction serves as an important indicator of the quality of the relationship, and at the same time a predictor of its durability and stability (Józefacka et al., 2023).

The literature emphasises that the level of satisfaction in a relationship is a dynamic phenomenon, changing with the duration of the relationship. Relationships with a shorter duration are more often characterised by a high level of emotional intensity, idealisation of the partner, and the dominance of positive affects, which promotes a higher initial level of satisfaction (Wider et al., 2025). Over time, the relationship is subject to adaptation processes, in which conflict coping skills, mutual support, and the ability to negotiate problems arising from differences begin to play an important role (Bühler et al., 2021).

Cassepp-Borges et al. (2023) indicate that the impact of passion/affect components on satisfaction depends on the stage of the relationship, which is directly connected to the thesis that the role of emotions vs. stability/security changes depending on the duration of the relationship. Relationship satisfaction is broadly defined as a subjective assessment of positive (passion) and negative (insecurity) thoughts in a relationship (Gable & Poore, 2008), compared to the relationships and experiences of others (Wachelke et al., 2007). Attachment styles also remain an important moderator of the level of satisfaction with a relationship. Securely attached people show a higher and more stable level of satisfaction, regardless of the length of the relationship, which results from their ability to regulate emotions and respond adequately to the needs of their partner (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001). On the other hand, post-protection styles, especially anxiety and reluctance, are associated with reduced satisfaction with relationships, greater susceptibility to frustration, and intensification of tensions as the relationship lasts (Burchell & Ward, 2011; Langeslag et al., 2013).

The outlined analyses allow for a better understanding, especially in the context of understanding relationship satisfaction as a dynamic construct, the meaning and conditions of which are subject to change with the length of the relationship. In the long term, cognitive and emotional processes related

to the interpretation and integration of relational experiences begin to play an increasingly important role. However, this approach does not fully exhaust the analysed issue, because resentment is of particular importance, which – growing on the basis of chronic frustration – can gradually distort the subjective assessment of the quality of a partner relationship and undermine its stability.

1.3. Psychological resentment as a mechanism of distortion of relational assessments

In the context of contemporary changes, it is increasingly clear that resentment can act as a mechanism that distorts the way relationships are understood, influencing the interpretation of the partner's intentions and the assessment of the value of the bond itself. Modern communication technologies, particularly social media, can have a negative impact on the functioning of partner relationships. Research shows that social media addiction is associated with an increase in psychological distress and decreased satisfaction in relationships (Hoşgör & Güngördü, 2025; Satıcı et al., 2021). Excessive use of platforms, such as Instagram, as well as streaming games, can lead to an increase in conflicts and a decrease in satisfaction, especially with limited attention to the partner (Bouffard et al., 2021; Herrero-Báguena et al., 2025; Karbowski, 2023b; Mukherjee & Ghosh, 2025). In addition, envy caused by social media content is associated with lower life and relational satisfaction through communication disorders (Kovan, 2023; Vaillancourt et al., 2024); and mental health and self-esteem issues (Reer et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2014). In this context, the importance of resentment as a complex and at the same time insufficiently operationalised psychological phenomenon is becoming more and more clear, i.e., showing it according to empirical indicators consistent with the accepted theoretical model. Resentment is not a transient affective response, but a relatively perma-

nent emotional-cognitive attitude in which negative emotions – such as jealousy, grief, envy, or a sense of harm – are internalised and secondary cognitive rationalisation (Karbowski, 2023a).

The key mechanism constituting resentment is the process of re-evaluation, which consists not in changing reality itself, but in distorting the way it is evaluated. As Scheler points out, this deformation takes place at the stage of passing experience into consciousness, i.e., in the area of axiological experience of the world, leading to permanent shifts in the hierarchy of values (Scheler, 1961). From a psychological perspective, resentment can be understood as a costly regulatory strategy in which emotions are not extinguished or integrated, but perpetuated and built into the individual's interpretive schemes (Campbell-Sills & Barlow, 2007; Gross, 1998).

By referring to functional models of emotions, resentment is located at the intersection of affect, mood, and cognitive evaluation, which distinguishes it from individual emotional reactions (Lazarus, 1993; Scherer, 1984). As a long-term regulatory “setting”, it promotes cognitive-emotional rigidity, intensification of projection and perpetuation of hostile interpretive schemes (Frijda, 1988; Hofmann et al., 2016). As a consequence, growing emotional frustration is conducive to the perpetuation of hostile attributions and negative patterns, which may be the basis for the development of resentment as a “silent destructor” of relationships. Interesting research indicates that in such partnerships, the experience of phubbing can occur² and lead to a gradual distortion of the partner's assessments, attributing threatening intentions to him, and a decrease in the ability to empathise and mentalise (Chmielik & Błachnio, 2022; Karaman & Arslan, 2024; Ni et al., 2025; Zhan et al., 2022).

This approach seems convincing, particularly concerning the fact that resentment has a compensatory function: enabling the individual to maintain a subjective sense of meaning and coherence of the self in conditions of chronic relational frustration, but at the expense

2 *Phubbing (phone and snubbing)* is a form of behaviour that involves directing attention to a mobile device at the expense of the person present in direct interaction. It manifests itself, e.g., by checking notifications, conducting text correspondence or browsing online content during a face-to-face conversation. This phenomenon is interpreted as a factor weakening the quality of interpersonal relationships, conducive to the feeling of loneliness, intensification of conflicts in relationships and lowering self-esteem in people experiencing this form of ignorance.

of deforming axiological and relational evaluations. This conceptualisation found its operationalisation development in the KRe-Psy Psychological Resentment Questionnaire by Mariusz G. Karbowski (2025), showing resentment as a multidimensional construct including the temporal dimension (perpetuation of harm), spatial (generalisation of assessments), energy (regulatory cost), and informational (interpretative rigidity) (2025, pp. 94–97).

At this point, the author's position is justified because, from the perspective of partner relationships, resentment appears as an imperceptible variable, the effect of which intensifies especially in conditions of reduced satisfaction and long-term tensions in relationships. Longitudinal studies Bühler and Orth (2024) over relationship satisfaction show that its decline – especially when the relationship enters a phase of greater routine and adaptation burden – is associated with an intensification of negative affect and costly patterns of interaction (e.g., negative communication and conflicts), which promote the accumulation of frustration and emotions, such as anger, reluctance, or jealousy (Bühler & Orth, 2024; Jolin et al., 2022; Pirrone et al., 2023; Zorlular & Uzer, 2022).

The outlined position allows us to better understand that the presented research on relationship satisfaction in the perspective of relationship seniority and its analysis is not sufficient without taking into account the axiological processes that mediate between the experience of the relationship and its subjective evaluation. This justifies the need for research on resentment as a hidden but important mechanism of destruction of partner relationships.

2. Own research

2.1. Subject and purpose of the research

The subject of the research, the results of which are presented in this paper, is the analysis of the functioning of partner relationships in the context of satisfaction with life in relationships, attachment styles, and psychological resentment, understood as a relatively permanent emotional and cognitive

mechanism that distorts relational evaluations and leads to a re-evaluation of values. Particular attention was paid to the importance of relationship seniority as a differentiating factor in the dynamics of life satisfaction and the susceptibility of a relationship to hidden destructive processes. The research aims to examine the relationship between attachment styles, the level of life satisfaction in a relationship, and the intensity of resentment in partner relationships of different lengths. An important research assumption is also to determine the extent to which resentment mediates between satisfaction with life in a relationship and its subjective assessment, acting as a “silent destructor” of the quality and stability of the partnership bond.

2.2. Research problems and hypotheses

The research problem of this study focuses on determining to what extent and how resentment, understood as a relatively permanent emotional-cognitive attitude, plays the role of a hidden destructive mechanism in partner relationships, as well as on the analysis of how its intensity is related to attachment styles and the level of life satisfaction in a relationship in relationships of different years.

In order to empirically verify the research problem, the following research questions were formulated, referring to the analysed variables and the characteristics of the studied group:

1. What attachment styles do the participants present?
2. Is the level of resentment significantly related to subjectively assessed satisfaction with life in a relationship?
3. Does the length of time of a partnership differentiate the level of satisfaction with life in a relationship and the intensity of resentment?

Based on the theoretical findings and literature analysis, the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

1. The attachment style and the level of psychological resentment significantly correlate with the level of life satisfaction in a partnership.
2. People who represent a secure attachment style are characterised by a higher level of life satisfaction in a relationship compared to people who present post-secure styles, i.e., anxious-ambivalent and avoidant.
3. At the same time, people declaring a high level of satisfaction with life in a relationship are characterised by a lower level of psychological resentment compared to people with low life satisfaction.
4. In long-term partnerships, it is associated with a higher level of satisfaction with life in a relationship than in relationships with a shorter duration.

2.3. Variables and their indicators

In the adopted research model, attachment styles and relationship seniority serve as independent variables that affect the level of life satisfaction in a relationship, while psychological resentment is an intermediary variable explaining the mechanism by which relational experiences and attachment patterns translate into a subjective assessment of the quality of a relationship.

2.4. Data collection method, group characteristics and research tools

Research on attachment styles, psychological resentment and the level of life satisfaction in a relationship among couples with different relationships was conducted using quantitative methods, in particular the technique of a diagnostic survey using standardised questionnaires. The study included couples in relationships with up to 7 years of experience and couples in relationships over 7 years, which made it possible to analyse differences in relational functioning, considering the duration of the relationship.

The studied group consisted of adults of various ages (from 25 to 65 years), education (primary, secondary, tertiary) and places of residence (villages, cities with up to 50 thousand inhabitants, from 50 thousand to 200 thousand inhabitants and over

200 thousand inhabitants). Such a sample structure allowed to obtain empirical material with high socio-demographic heterogeneity.

At the stage of planning the research procedure, a clear distinction was made between two comparison groups: couples whose relationship experience did not exceed 7 years, and couples with relationship experience of more than 7 years. Each group initially consisted of 160 people (80 pairs). After verifying the completeness and correctness of the questionnaires and rejecting incomplete sheets, 72 couples were qualified for further analysis, which constituted a total of 144 respondents.

The research was conducted in paper form. In the first stage, the participants in the study filled out a sociodemographic metric, including basic information about age, education, place of residence, and seniority of the relationship.

Three psychological tools were used in the study: *Attachment Styles Questionnaire (KSP)* by M. Plopa (2008), *Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS)* by E. Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (2010) in the Polish adaptation of Z. Juczyński (2001) and *Psychological Resentment Questionnaire (KRe-Psy)* prepared by M. G. Karbowski.

2.5. Results of the study

Statistical analyses were carried out using the Yamami program. The analytical procedure was planned in order to answer the formulated research questions and verify the hypotheses. In the first step, the basic descriptive statistics for the analysed quantitative variables were calculated, and then the Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the distributions. Table 1 presents only the results obtained using the *Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS)* and the *Attachment Styles Questionnaire (KSP)*, as the data from the *Ressentiment Questionnaire (KRe-Psy)* are rank-based and require a different analytical approach.

Table 2 presents the results of the Durbin–Conover post hoc test, which made it possible to identify statistically significant differences between the analysed variables. Significant differences between the safe style and other attachment styles were shown ($p < .001$), while the differences between the

anxious-ambivalent and avoidant styles did not reach statistical significance. This means that the respondents most often presented a secure attachment style, while the other styles were at a lower level.

The results presented in Table 3 concern the relationship between attachment styles and the perceived level of life satisfaction in a relationship in the surveyed people. In order to assess the strength and direction of these relationships, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was used, adequate due to the abnormal distribution of the investigated variables.

Similar results were obtained for the correlation of variables: the level of perceived satisfaction and the reluctance style of attachment (Spearman's rho $-0.454, p < .001$). Also in this case, the higher the tendency to show an avoidant attachment style, the lower the satisfaction felt in the subjects.

Table 4 indicates the result of the Spearman's rho correlation for the variable: the level of perceived satisfaction and individual manifestations of resentment depending on the length of the relationship.

In relationships with shorter experience, a diverse and less unambiguous pattern of dependencies is observed. *Reluctance* ($\rho = 0.176$), *hatred* ($\rho = 0.123$), *envy* ($\rho = 0.205$), and *rudeness* ($\rho = 0.188$) show weak positive correlations with life satisfaction in a relationship, which may indicate that in the early stages of a relationship, negative emotions do not always lower the subjective assessment of life satisfaction in a relationship, and are sometimes neutralised by emotional intensity, idealisation of the partner, or rationalisation mechanisms. At the same time, there are clearly negative correlations for vengeance ($\rho = -0.422$), jealousy ($\rho = -0.541$) and particularly

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the studied quantitative variables (N = 144)

	M	Me	SD	SKK.	Kurt.	Min.	Max.	W	ρ
SWLS	25.3	26.4	4.13	-0.04	0.06	13	36	0.912	<.001
Attachment Safe Style	44.8	47	4.81	-2.52	7.38	25	56	0.664	<.001
Anxiety-ambivalent attachment style	18.1	15.0	5.82	2.59	7.03	9	42	0.577	<.001
Attachment Avoidant Style	26.3	27.0	5.13	-0.05	0.07	14	37	0.831	<.001
Ressentiment Questionnaire	40.8	45	5.12	-2.44	7.12	26	58	0.688	<.001

Source: Own study.

Table 2. Comparison in pairs (Durbin-Conover test) for exhibited attachment styles

			Statistics	ρ
Safe style	-	Anxiety-ambivalent style	26.32	<.001
Safe style	-	Avoidant style	23.44	<.001
Anxiety-ambivalent style	-	Avoidant style	1.18	0.261

Source: Own study.

Table 3. The relationship between attachment styles and the level of life satisfaction felt in a relationship

		Safe style		Anxiety-ambivalent style	Avoidant style
The level of life satisfaction felt in a relationship	Spearman's rho	0.621	***	-0.441***	-0.454***
	ρ	<.001		<.001	<.001

Source: Own study.

strong for the tendency to revenge ($\rho = -0.832$). This means that in short-term relationships, hostile, active forms of resentment, directed at acting against a partner, are strongly associated with a decrease in life satisfaction. The lack of data for regret suggests that in this phase of the relationship, this emotion may be less aware of or not yet formed as a permanent attitude.

In relationships with a longer experience, the pattern of dependence changes significantly and becomes more consistent and unambiguously negative. *Reluctance* ($\rho = -0.781$), *contempt* ($\rho = -0.802$), *regret* ($\rho = -0.603$), and *hatred* ($\rho = -0.482$) show strong or moderate negative correlations with relationship life satisfaction. This means that in long-term relationships, chronic, «silent» forms of resentment particularly strongly undermine the quality of life in a partnership. Vengeance also remains significantly negatively associated with satisfaction ($\rho = -0.474$), which indicates the perpetuation of hostile interpretive and emotional patterns. On the other hand, positive but weak correlations for envy ($\rho = 0.190$), rudeness ($\rho = 0.198$), and jealousy ($\rho = 0.476$) may suggest that in long-term relationships, certain emotional tensions are sometimes reinterpreted as manifestations of commitment or are secondarily normalised within the stable structure of the relationship.

The results indicate that the length of relationship significantly moderates the relationship between the manifestations of resentment and satisfaction with life in a relationship. In shorter relationships, active and impulsive forms of resentment (revenge, jealousy, vengeance) have a destructive effect, while in long-term relationships, passive, fixed emotional-cognitive attitudes, such as reluctance, contempt, or regret, have a particularly strong effect. This confirms the concept of resentment as a “silent destructor” of partner relationships, which has a greater intensity with the duration of the relationship and gradually distorts the subjective assessment of the relationship.

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics necessary for the comparison of the isolated groups. The data clearly show that people who function in relationships with a longer period of experience (over 7 years) feel more satisfied with life in a partnership. This is indicated by both the mean values (26.7 vs 29.3) and the median

Table 4. The relationship between resentment and the level of perceived life satisfaction – the Rho Spearman correlation

Manifestations of resentment	Up to 7 years	Over 7 years
Reluctance	0.176	-0.781***
Hatred	0.123	-0.482**
Envy	0.205	0.190
Vengeance	-0.422**	-0.474**
Revenge	-0.832***	0.201
Rudeness	0.188	0.198
Contempt	0.021	-0.802***
Jealousy	-0.541***	0.476**
Regret	Lack	-0.603***

Source: Own study. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (designations adopted exploratory on the basis of correlation strength).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for Mann-Whitney test results

	Relationship Seniority	N	M	Me
Level of satisfaction	up to 7 years	72	26.7	24.0
	over 7 years	72	29.3	31.0

Source: Own study.

(23 vs 31). In other words, it can be considered that people in long-term relationships feel more satisfied with life than people in short-term partnerships.

3. Discussion of results

At the beginning of the discussion of the results, it is necessary to refer to the main research goal, which was to determine to what extent and how resentment – understood as a relatively permanent emotional-cognitive attitude – plays the role of a hidden destructive mechanism in partner relationships, as well as to examine how its intensity is related to attachment styles and the level of satisfaction with life in relationships of different lengths. Both the theoretical and empirical parts of the work have been designed in a coherent way, so as to enable a multifaceted explanation of the

formulated research problems and the interpretation of the results obtained in the light of contemporary psychological concepts.

The first research question concerned the identification of attachment styles presented by the people participating in the study. Its formulation was the basis for the hypothesis assuming that the attachment style and the level of psychological resentment significantly correlate with the level of satisfaction with life in a partnership. The empirical results obtained confirmed the validity of this hypothesis. The correlation analysis showed a strong positive relationship between a secure attachment style and the level of life satisfaction in a relationship ($\rho = 0.621$), which is shown in Table 3. This means that the higher the level of secure attachment style in the surveyed people, the higher the declared level of satisfaction with life in a partnership. The obtained correlation coefficient was characterised by very high statistical significance ($p < .001$), which indicates the stability and reliability of this relationship. A different dependency pattern was observed for post-hedge styles. There was a negative correlation of moderate strength between the level of life satisfaction in a partnership and the anxiety-ambivalent style, also statistically significant ($\rho = -0.441$; $p < .001$). This result indicates a significant relationship between the intensity of the characteristics of the anxious-ambivalent attachment style and the level of subjectively felt satisfaction with life in a partnership.

The presented results are consistent with the findings of the literature on the subject. In longitudinal studies by Metellus et al. (2025), based on the theory of attachment and life satisfaction and the role of jealousy, it has been shown that a higher intensity of the anxiety-ambivalent attachment style features significantly predicts a decrease in the level of satisfaction with the relationship at later points of measurement, which confirms the hypothesis of the negative impact of anxious attachment patterns on the quality of relationships.

The second research hypothesis, derived directly from the first research question, assumed that People who represent a secure attachment style are characterised by higher levels of satisfaction with life in a relationship compared to people presenting

post-protection styles, i.e., anxiety-ambivalent and avoidant. The empirical results obtained unequivocally confirmed the legitimacy of this hypothesis. The correlation analysis showed strong positive significance between a secure attachment style and the level of satisfaction with life in a relationship ($\rho = 0.621$), which is presented in Table 3. This means that the higher the level of the characteristics of the secure attachment style, the higher the level satisfaction with life in a partnership. High value of the correlation coefficient and its very high statistical significance ($p < .001$) indicate the significant nature of this relationship. The empirical results are in full agreement with the current state of psychological knowledge. In the literature on the subject, it is consistently emphasised that a secure attachment style promotes higher levels of relationship satisfaction, better emotional regulation, and more adaptive patterns of interpersonal functioning, while the dimensions of attachment insecurity – anxiety and reluctance – are associated with reduced relational satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2019; Lozano et al., 2021; Quan et al., 2025; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

As a consequence, the analysis of the data obtained allows us to conclude that a secure attachment style is an important factor conducive to life satisfaction in a partnership, while secure styles are associated with an increased risk of reduced life satisfaction from the relationship. These results provide a solid basis for further analyses, in which secure attachment can be treated as a resource to protect the relationship from the negative impact of destructive processes, including growing resentment.

The research question on which the third hypothesis was based was whether the level of psychological resentment is significantly related to the assessed satisfaction with life in a partnership. The hypothesis assumed that people declaring a higher level of life satisfaction are also characterised by a lower intensity of psychological resentment compared to people with lower satisfaction with life in a relationship. The obtained empirical results allow us to confirm this hypothesis. Spearman's analysis of the rho correlation, presented in Table 4, showed statistically significant relationships between the level of life satisfaction in a relationship and selected manifestations

of resentment, with the nature and strength of these relationships differentiating depending on the length of the relationship. In particular, people declaring higher life satisfaction showed a lower intensity of resentment emotions, such as reluctance, contempt, vengeance, or regret, which confirms the assumption that resentment has a destructive impact on the subjective assessment of the quality of a relationship.

This approach seems convincing, especially with regard to the data from research on unforgiveness and satisfaction from life in couples, including the motivation of revenge and withdrawal (Guzmán-González et al., 2020), cynical hostility (Segel-Karpas et al., 2024) and negative communication. In connection with Johnson et al. (2021), research shows that higher satisfaction with life in a relationship co-occurs with a lower intensity of persistent negative emotional-cognitive configurations (e.g., reluctance, vengeance, contempt), which systematically distort the partner's assessment and reduce the subjective quality of life in the relationship.

The third research question, which preceded the formulation of the fourth hypothesis, concerned the relationship between the length of service and the level of perceived satisfaction of life in a relationship, and the moderating factor was resentment. This hypothesis assumed that in relationships with a longer duration, a higher level of satisfaction with life in a relationship is observed than in relationships with a shorter period of experience and a lower level of psychological resentment. The empirical results obtained partially confirmed the validity of this assumption. The analysis of the data showed that people in relationships with more than 7 years of experience declared a significantly higher level of life satisfaction in a relationship compared to people in short-term relationships. At the same time, significant differences in the level of psychological resentment were observed between the studied groups. This result suggests that while a longer relationship is conducive to a higher sense of stability and satisfaction, it does not completely eliminate resentment processes that can build up as a result of long-term relational tensions and accumulated emotions.

Analyses of the results of people in relationships with more than 7 years of experience, numerous statistically significant negative correlations were observed

between the level of satisfaction and key manifestations of resentment. Particularly strong relationships concerned such components as *reluctance* ($\rho = -0.781$; $p < .001$), *contempt* ($\rho = -0.802$; $p < .001$), and *regret* ($\rho = -0.603$; $p < .001$). This means that the higher the level of satisfaction with life in long-term relationships, the significantly higher the intensity of emotions of the nature of permanent hostility, depreciation of the partner and a fixed sense of harm. These results unequivocally support the hypothesis of resentment as a destructive mechanism, the severity of which remains inversely proportional to the quality of life in a partner relationship in the long term. Also, the manifestation of resentment in the form of vengeance showed a moderate, significant negative correlation in both shorter ($\rho = -0.422$; $p < .01$) and longer ($\rho = -0.474$; $p < .01$) relationships, suggesting that retaliatory tendencies and retaliatory impulses are generally inconsistent with high levels of life satisfaction, regardless of the length of the relationship. However, it is worth noting that the strength of these dependencies was more clearly marked in long-term relationships.

In the group of relationships up to 7 years old, the picture of dependency was less clear. Although significant negative correlations were noted for vengeance ($\rho = -0.832$; $p < .001$) and jealousy ($\rho = -0.541$; $p < .001$), many manifestations of resentment (e.g., reluctance, hatred, envy, rudeness) did not show statistically significant associations with the level of life satisfaction. This may indicate that in the earlier phases of the relationship, negative emotions of a resentful nature are less consolidated and more often compensated by emotional intensity, idealisation of the partner or adaptation mechanisms.

Relating the results of one's own research to the literature on the subject, one can notice a consistent regularity: in reports with shorter experience. Reluctance and hatred are less likely to take the form of a fixed disposition, and are more often found as intense but short-term reactions emerging in the conditions of a rapid escalation of the conflict (McCurry et al., 2024; Overall, 2020). In such a system, they primarily serve as an indicator of the crisis and are sometimes associated with a rapid, clear decline in life satisfaction in a relationship, characteristic of couples entering a breakup trajectory (Bühler & Orth, 2024; 2025). In other words,

in shorter-term relationships, strong negative emotions are more likely to signal a turning point in relationship dynamics than to provide a stable emotional-cognitive pattern. A different picture is revealed in long-term relationships, where hatred, regret, or grief can take the form of „silent” hostility – less expressive, more chronic, and embedded in a long-term sense of harm and the accumulation of unresolved conflicts. Such a profile is conducive to the preservation of hostile interpretive schemes and systematic attribution of intentions that threaten the relationship to the partner, which leads to a gradual distortion of assessments in partner relationships. This mechanism corresponds well with the results by Li et al. (2024) and Sowan (2023), who have shown that hostile attributions of partner behaviour have a multidimensional structure (direct hostile attribution, indirect enemy attribution, and benign attribution with potentially protective significance) and thus can constitute a cognitive “scaffolding” to maintain hostility in the relationship. In the perspective of this paper, this means that with the passage of time, the risk of moving from an episodic emotional reaction to a relatively permanent attitude increases, which perpetuates a negative interpretation of the partner’s behaviour and can create a basis for resentment as a “silent destructor” of the bond.

Analysis of the results of our own research in comparison with the literature on the subject indicates that jealousy, reluctance, regret, contempt, and envy play an important role in shaping the dynamics of partner relationships, with their meaning and mechanisms varying depending on the length of the relationship. In shorter-term relationships, these emotions are more likely to relate to social comparisons, such as the perceived attractiveness of the partner, the level of attention received or personal successes, and their intensity is sometimes reinforced by the insecurity of the relationship and the fear of rejection. A special context conducive to the activation of jealousy is social media, which provide ambiguous interpretative stimuli (Xu et al., 2023). This phenomenon has been described in detail in studies of Sullivan (2021), in which online jealousy was operationalised as a reaction to ambiguous online scenarios (e.g., partner activity in social media, exchange of messages) and then analysed in three components: emotional, cognitive, and

behavioural. Of particular importance are the cognitive-behavioural components, including suspiciousness, excessive monitoring and checking of the partner’s activity, which, as the results indicate, can transform over time into a relatively stable style of functioning in the partner relationship, conducive to the growth of resentment. In long-term relationships, jealousy and envy are more often associated with an assessment of the imbalance of contributions to the relationship, and thus with a cognitive balance (“who gives more”, “who sacrifices more”), which is conducive to the perpetuation of feelings of harm and resentment. Such a mechanism has been confirmed in studies by Bühler and Orth (2024), which indicate that long-term comparisons in relationships and the perception of injustice are important predictors of a decrease in satisfaction and the growth of negative emotions of a resentful nature. A similar pattern is observed with regard to manifestations of resentment, such as revenge and vengeance. In relationships with shorter experience, they are more often impulsive and reactive, appearing in response to fresh relational transgressions (e.g., betrayal, lying, rudeness), especially in people with increased sensitivity to rejection. Research by Clemente and Espinosa (2021), Gómez et al. (2021), and Ferreiros and Clemente (2023) indicate that vengeful responses in such situations are predicted both by the nature of the partner’s alleged transgression and by personality traits in the area of individual differences, which promote adaptation strategies in men from the Dark Triad (Jonason et al., 2009). In long-term relationships, revenge, and vengeance are less likely to take the form of overt retaliation, and more often manifest as “cold” revenge, associated with rumination, a fixed sense of harm, and hostile attributions of the partner’s intentions. This mechanism is consistent with the results of Li et al. (2024), which show that chronic hostility in relationships based on cognitive schemes, conducive to interpreting the partner’s behaviour as intentionally harmful.

The largely confirm the hypothesis, especially with regard to long-term relationships. Empirical data suggest that high life satisfaction has a protective function against the accumulation of resentment, while its growth – especially in the form of reluctance, hatred, contempt, and regret – is an important in-

indicator of reduced quality of relationships with life satisfaction in a partnership. These results reinforce the thesis of resentment as a “silent destructor” of relationships, the importance of which is revealed primarily in the long-term dynamics of relationships and whose impact is gradual, but structurally destabilising the partnership bond.

Summary

The issue of this paper concerned the topic “Ressentiment as a Silent Destroyer of Romantic Relationships: The Importance of Attachment Styles and Life Satisfaction in the Context of Relationship Duration”. At the starting point of the summary, it is reasonable to refer to the main research goal, which was to determine whether and how resentment – understood as a relatively permanent emotional-cognitive attitude – can or does serve as a hidden destructive mechanism in partner relationships, as well as to determine how the level of its intensity remains related to attachment styles and life satisfaction in relationships of varying duration. The concept of the work, integrating the theoretical and empirical parts, was constructed in a way that ensured consistent implementation of the research goals, which enabled both an in-depth analysis of the problems posed and the interpretation of the results in relation to contemporary psychological paradigms.

Such a construction made it possible to interpret the results not only at the level of simple correlations, but also in the perspective of relationship dynamics

(up to 7 years vs. over 7 years), in which the processes of accumulation of tensions and consolidation of a repressed emotional-cognitive reaction, directed towards people, situations or oneself in the form of negative affective components, such as aversion, jealousy, hatred, grief, contempt, or envy, up to the desire for revenge.

Overall, the results of the work largely confirm the hypotheses and allow us to formulate a conclusion about the key importance of resentment from life satisfaction in the perspective of partner relationships. Satisfaction appears as a protective resource, while resentment – especially in the form of reluctance, jealousy, contempt, and regret – appears as an indicator of a reduced quality of life and a mechanism that can act gradually, but structurally destabilisingly. From the perspective of the relationship experience, it is particularly important to distinguish between episodic emotions and fixed attitudes: it is the perpetuation of negative interpretative patterns and the re-evaluation of assessment that seems to be the central mechanism by which resentment becomes a silent destructor and erosion factor in the partner relationship. These results are not only cognitive, but also application-related: they indicate the need to identify persistent manifestations of resentment early and strengthen resources related to secure attachment. In this sense, this approach is a contribution to the development of psychology, combining the attachment perspective, life satisfaction with the concept of resentment understood as a silent killer in a partnership, especially significant in the context of the relationship experience.

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