

# Can psychological flexibility discriminate mothers' attachment styles? A study during pregnancy



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## INTRODUCTION

- Psychological flexibility (PF) has been associated with greater well-being, less psychopathology and better parent's and child's adjustment (Fonseca et al., 2020; Monteiro et al., 2019).
- Research suggests a negative association between PF and anxious attachment (Salande & Hawkins, 2017).
- A recent study found that the relationship between insecure attachment and individuals' well-being is mediated by psychological inflexibility (Calvo et al., 2022).

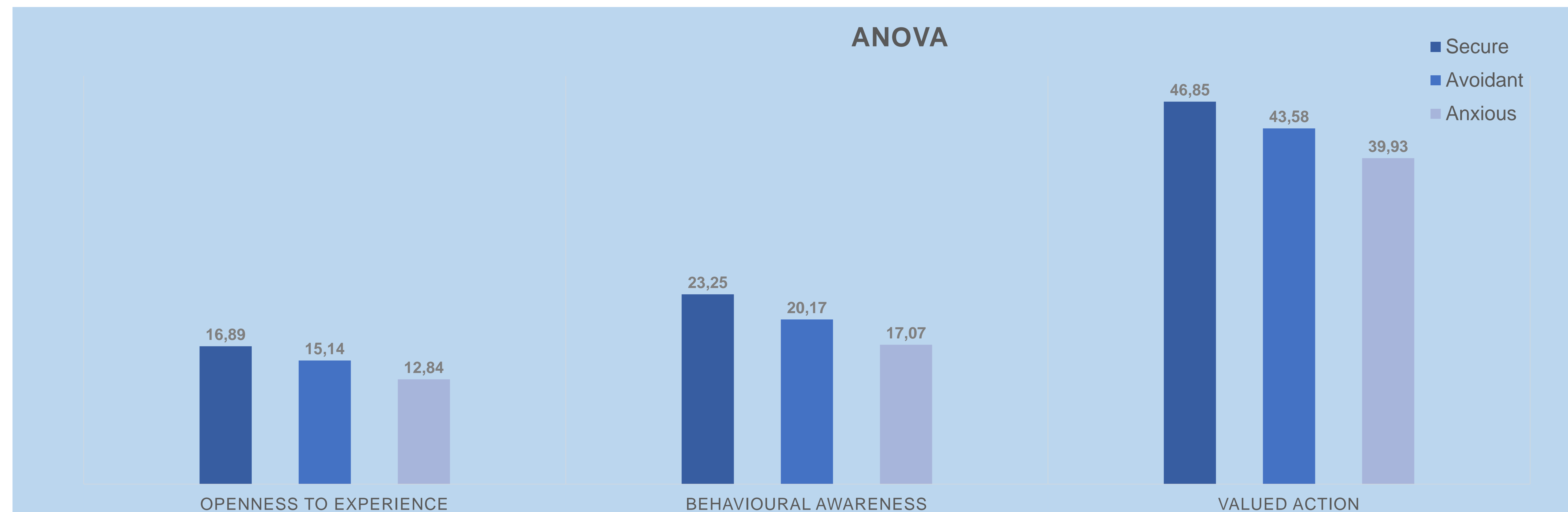
## GOAL

To explore differences in PF processes (openness to experience, behavioural awareness, and valued action) in mothers with different adult attachment representations.

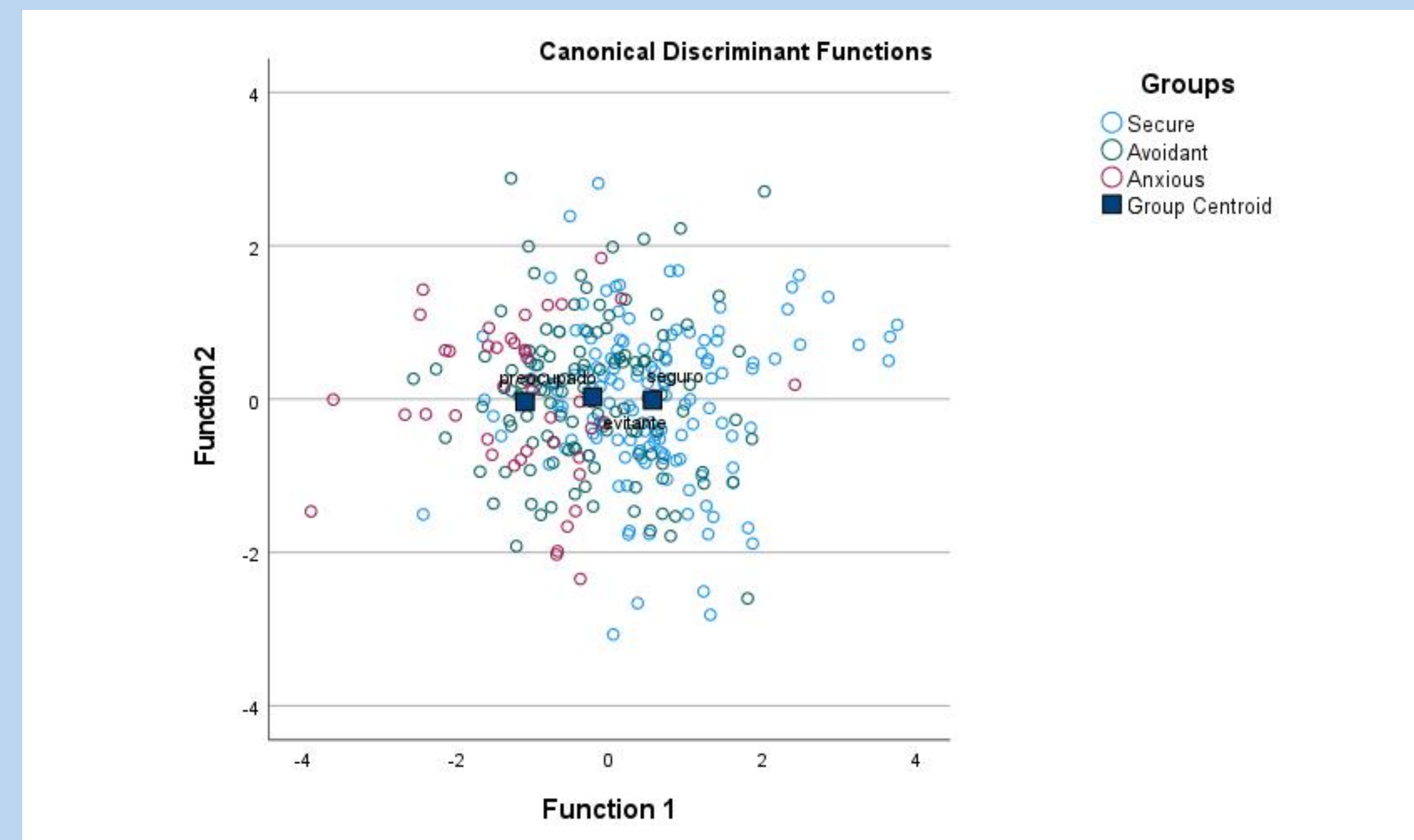
## METHODS

- Participants were 298 pregnant women (between 22-30 weeks of gestation), who were aged between 18 and 45 years old ( $M = 31.92$ ,  $SD = 4.41$ ). Most women were married or in a de facto relationship ( $n = 219$ , 73,5%) and had completed higher education ( $n = 234$ , 78,5%).
- Data was collected via a Qualtrics link with the following self-report measures:

Instrument	Dimensions
Sociodemographic information	e.g.: age, educational level, marital status, length of gestation
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Comfort with promixity</li> <li>Trust in others</li> </ul>
Comprehensive Assessment of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Processes (CompACT; Francis et al., 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Openness to experience</li> <li>Behavioural awareness</li> <li>Valued action</li> </ul>



## Psychological flexibility appears to discriminate mothers' attachment styles, specifically secure and avoidant styles



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## RESULTS

- Mothers were divided into groups according to their attachment style using a clusters analysis: 135 belonged in the secure, 118 in the avoidant and 45 in the anxious attachment group.
- MANOVA** revealed significant differences in PF between different attachment styles ( $V = .259$ ;  $F(6,588) = 14.587$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Secure attachment was related to higher levels of PF, followed by avoidant and anxious attachment styles.
- Discriminant function analysis** revealed two discriminant functions that significantly differentiated attachment groups ( $\lambda = .741$ ;  $\chi^2(6) = 88,116$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Function 1 explained 99.8% of the variance,  $R^2 = .26$ . Function 2 accounted for 0.2% of the variance,  $R^2 = 0$ . **Valued action** loaded more highly in **function 1**, which discriminated secure attachment from insecure attachment styles. **Openness to experience** loaded more highly in **function 2**, which discriminated avoidant attachment from secure and anxious attachment styles.

## DISCUSSION

- Results are in line with previous research suggesting that mothers with insecure attachment styles are less psychological flexible.
- The valued action dimension significantly distinguished mothers with a secure attachment style from the other groups.
- Openness to experience distinguished avoidant attachment style from the other groups.
- It might be important to promote PF, particularly among mothers with insecure attachment styles.

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