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Abstract

Background & Aim:

Background & Aims: Attachment theory postulates the role of primary caregivers on the formation of working models of behavior and emotions related to interpersonal relationships. The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between attachment style and emotion regulation strategies, specifically the tendency to use maladaptive coping methods to regulate distress over adaptive strategies like utilizing social supports. The current investigation aims to examine the following hypotheses: (1) Individuals with greater levels of secure attachment will have less fear of intimacy, (2) Individuals with greater levels of secure attachment will report higher perceived social support, and (3) Individuals with greater levels of insecure attachment and maladaptive coping will have greater difficulties in emotion regulation. Within a proposed three-level hierarchical model, avoidant attachment was expected to account for a greater proportion of the variance in difficulties in emotion regulation in comparison to anxious attachment.

Methods:

Methods: 36 female undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 19.08$, $SD = 1.32$; 75% White, 88.9% Non-Hispanic/Latinx) recruited from a public university in the Northeast completed self-report measures on attachment style, fear of intimacy, perceived social support, and emotion regulation.

Results:

Results: Greater secure attachment was associated with lower fear of intimacy and higher perceived social support. Data analysis provided support for a predictive model of difficulties in emotion regulation based on both insecure attachment styles $F(2,33) = 14.76$, $p = .001$; $R^2 = .472$, wherein anxious attachment accounted for a greater proportion of variance ($\beta = .528$, $p = .001$).

Conclusion:

Conclusions: Such observations support a broader relationship between attachment style and the use of adaptive versus maladaptive coping strategies to regulate emotions. Findings from the hierarchical model add to our understanding of a disorganized insecure attachment style, consisting of both anxious and avoidant characteristics.

Clinical Implications:

Clinical Implications: Differences in attachment style may inform treatment selection. Acceptance-based interventions, such as mindfulness-based cognitive-behavioral therapy, may benefit those with disorganized attachment by building emotion regulation strategies.