Associations Between Attachment and Resilience During a College Semester

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Introduction

•There is some research that suggests attachment might be related to traits such as resilience. According to Atwool (2006), the attachment system is related to how people manage stressful experiences, which is an important aspect of resilience.

•Gartland et al. (2011) found that coping strategies in resilient individuals included problem solving abilities and social support-seeking skills. Thus, resilience involves recovering from negative emotions, potentially through how people cope.

•Li and Nishikawa (2012) found that among both Taiwanese and U.S. students, trait resilience and secure attachment were predictors of active coping.

•My hypotheses:
- Securely-attached individuals will possess the active coping style.
- Avoidant/ambivalent-attached individuals will possess the avoidance/distraction coping style.
- The active coping style will predict high levels of resilience and the avoidance/distraction coping style will lead to low levels of resilience.
- Students who have developed a secure attachment with a caregiver at an early age possess a high level of resilience in adapting to and actively coping with college stressors. On the other hand, I expect that avoidant and ambivalent-attached individuals are less resilient in the face of stressful experiences in college.

Methods

•A total of 36 students (6 male, 30 female) participated in the first week of the spring semester and 32 students (11 male, 21 female) participated during the week of midterms.   Ages ranged from 18 to 41 both weeks.

•Participants were required to be a student at IUPUC and at least 18 years old.

•Self-reported questionnaires included the following:

•The Intensity and Time Affect Scale (Schimmack & Diener, 1997), had 23 mood items based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach's α=.87. Students answered this questionnaire 3 times per week.

•The BriefCOPE Scale (Carver, 1997) was based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) with 4 items that captured the avoidance coping style (Cronbach's α=.64); 2 items that captured active coping by problem-solving (Cronbach's α=.68) and active coping by social support-seeking (Cronbach's α=.69).

•The Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures (Fraley, 2002) had 9 items across 4 relationship domains (mother, father, friend, romantic partner) based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This was broken down into an avoidance scale (Cronbach's α=.88) and anxiety scale (Cronbach's α=.70).

Results

•Midterm Week

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):
- Securely-attached individuals were more likely than avoidant-attached individuals to actively cope by seeking social support: $F(2,28)=7.537$, $p=.002$.
- Anxiously-attached individuals were more likely than securely-attached individuals to possess the avoidance coping style: $F(2,28)=5.545$, $p=.009$. (See Figure 1).
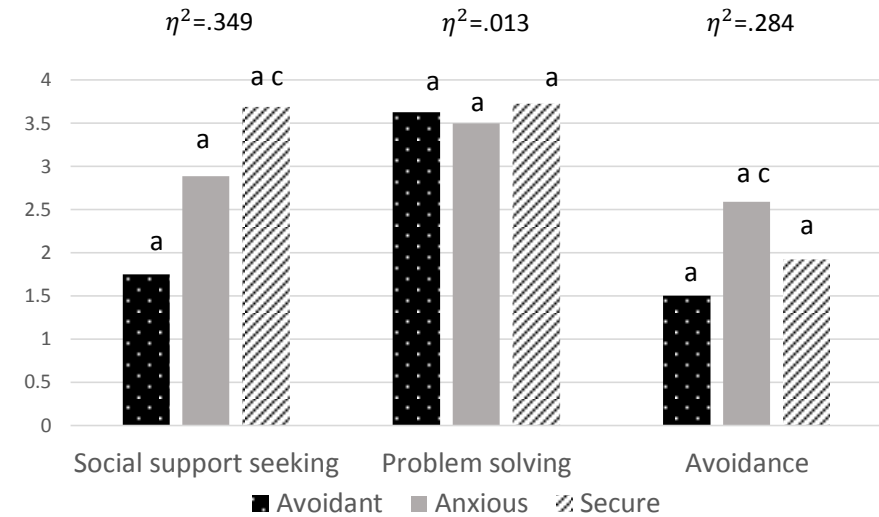
Pearson's Correlation:
- Those who coped by seeking social support were the most likely to have high negative feelings by the end of the week: $r(5)=.907$, $p=.012$.
- Those who were high on anxious attachment were the least likely to have high negative feelings by the end of the week: $r(2)=-.999$, $p=.032$.

•During the first week, securely-attached individuals were less likely than their counterparts to have higher positive moods: $F(2,18)=-.688$, $p=.556$.

•Securely-attached individuals were the most likely to seek social support: $F(2,33)=.790$, $p=.075$.

•Those who coped by problem solving showed a pattern of increasing positive feelings and decreasing negative feelings by the end of the beginning week: $r(20)=.388$, $p=.082$.

Figure 1: Attachment and Coping during Midterms

$\eta^2=.349$ $\eta^2=.013$ $\eta^2=.284$

Social support seeking   Problem solving   Avoidance

■ Avoidant   ■ Anxious   ▧ Secure

Common letters are not statistically significantly different from each other at p=.05.

Discussion

•My first hypothesis was supported that securely-attached individuals would actively cope. This was only found in the sample during the week of midterms. It is possible that students' coping behaviors were more utilized as the semester progressed.

•My hypotheses regarding insecure attachment styles and resilience were not supported. Higher negative feelings indicated less resilience and higher positive feelings indicated resilience across three times a week during high-stress weeks. There were not significant results indicating that attachment styles predicted resilience. My biggest limitation was my small sample size and lack of statistical power. Even though the results for coping and resilience were not statistically significant, the effect sizes were medium and large, thus, future studies should be done with larger samples.

References
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