

[Student Poster Symposium Summary; Word count = 446; Rating = 4.5]

Symposium Title: Contributing Factors and Outcomes Associated with Poor Affect Regulation

Attachment, Affect Regulation and Adjustment in High-Risk Adolescents

Attachment and affect regulation strategies develop within the parent-child relationship. Based on the quality of these relationships, children develop secure or insecure attachments (Bowlby, 1980) and adaptive or maladaptive affect regulation strategies (Thompson, 2001). The association between insecure attachment and a wide range of emotional and behavioral difficulties has been well documented (Guttman-Steinmetz & Crowell, 2006). Similarly, maladaptive affect regulation has been implicated in the development of a host of negative outcomes (Rydell, Berlin, & Bohlin, 2003). The range of outcomes suggests that the effects of these processes on outcomes are not specific.

According to Mikulincer and Florian (2004), the relationships between the attachment system, emotion regulation and mental health form the backbone of Bowlby's theoretical framework of attachment. Yet little is known about how these systems interact, particularly in adolescence. A goal of the current research is to explore attachment and affect dysregulation, and to assess whether affect dysregulation moderates the relations between attachment and aggression, depression, and anxiety (Separation Anxiety Disorder).

Method

Participants

Participants were 118 adolescents (59 girls and 59 boys) between the ages of 13 and 18 ($M = 15.3$, $SD = 1.4$). The majority identified themselves as Caucasian (63%), with a significant minority of Aboriginal youth (28%).

Measures

Attachment. The *Adolescent Attachment Interview* was coded based on four prototypical attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, fearful and dismissing (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Four scores (9-point scale) were assigned to each youth based on how well their attachment style fit each prototype.

The *Affect Regulation Checklist* (Moretti, 2003) consists of 12 items and measures three aspects of affect regulation: reflection, suppression, and dysregulation. The *Integrated Measurement Framework of Aggression* (Little et al., 2003), a 25-item self-report measure, was used to assess overt aggression.

Depression & Separation Anxiety Disorder. The presence of depression and SAD were assessed with the *Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents – IV* (DICA-IV; Reich et al., 1997), a structured computer-assisted interview that assesses DSM-IV criteria for psychiatric syndromes.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with attachment theory, preoccupied attachment was significantly related with overt aggression. Preoccupied attachment was also significantly correlated with anxiety as reflected in symptoms of Separation Anxiety Disorder. Fearfulness was not related to aggression but was related to depression. Further, consistent with attachment theory, dismissing attachment was not related to aggression and was negatively correlated with depression and anxiety. Finally, elevated levels of affect

dysregulation were significantly correlated with aggression as well as anxiety and depression (see Table 1).

Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that while fearfulness alone is not related to aggression, the interaction between fearfulness and high affect dysregulation is significantly related to overt aggression (see Figure 1). Interpretations of findings and directions for future research will be discussed.