



Attachment Style Predicts Coping in Older African American Adults

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INTRODUCTION

- **Attachment theory:** Experiences in close relationships early in life influence the self and close relationships, which can govern social interactions and personality development (Simpson, Rhodes, & Phillips, 1996).
- **Coping:** The method through which people respond to stressors (Carver, 1997).
- Emotion regulation: Cognitive reappraisal & expressive suppression.
- Anxious attachment was positively associated with all types of coping while avoidant attachment was negatively associated with problem- and emotion-focused coping. (Huh, Kim, & Lee, 2018).
- Avoidant attachment had a stronger, negative relationship with both problem- and emotion-focused coping (Shechory, 2012).
 - Only the relationship between avoidant attachment and problem-focused coping was statistically significant (Shechory, 2012).
- Emotion regulation mediated the association between attachment and coping (Cabral, Matos, Beyers, & Soenens, 2012).
- Understanding the relationship between coping and attachment can lead to effective prediction of each variable in older adults and how emotion regulation mediates this relationship.

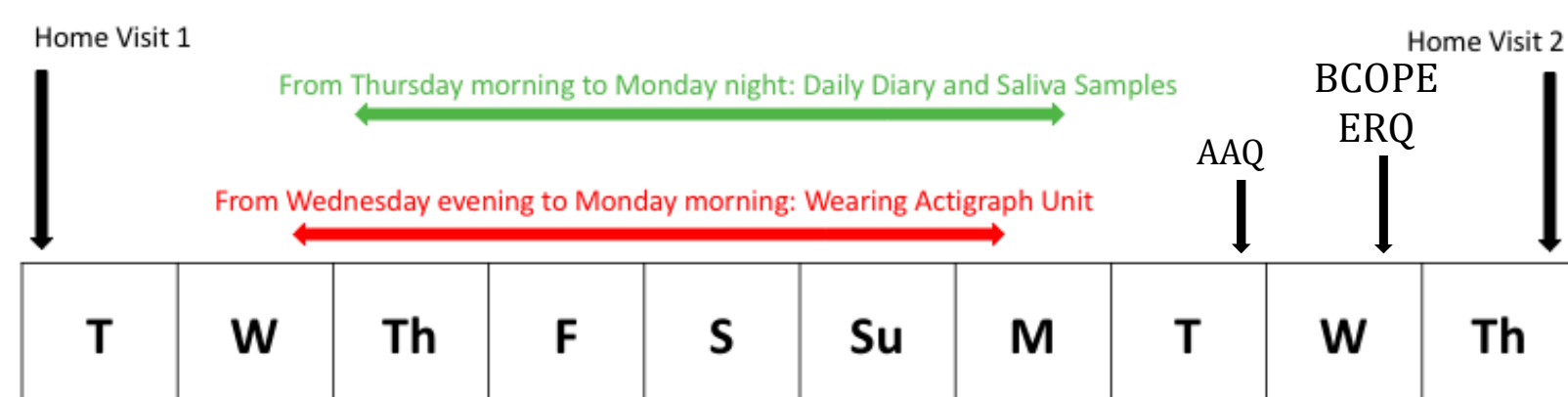
1. Individuals with anxious attachment use more emotion-focused coping and less dysfunctional and problem-focused coping.
2. Those high in avoidant attachment use more problem-focused and dysfunctional coping and less emotion-focused coping.
3. Emotion regulation mediates the relationship between both attachment style and coping process.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

- Participants ($N=211$) were part of the Health among Older Adults Living in Detroit (HOLD) study.
- Adults aged ≥ 50 who live in Detroit and identify as African American or black were recruited into the study via WSU Institute of Gerontology, referrals from past participants, and recruitment events.
- Average age: 67 years old.
- Median pre-tax household income: between \$20,000 and \$29,999 (15.2%).
- Median education level: 1-2 years of college, no degree yet (27.6%).

STUDY TIMELINE

- The study consisted of three components:
 - (1) Initial Home Visit: An RA completed demographic and stress surveys with the participant.
 - (2) Participant measures: Five days during which participants completed saliva samples and daily surveys followed by a two day period to complete other surveys.
 - (3) Second Home Visit: To collect study materials and complete biological health measures.



MEASURES

Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)

- AAQ consisted of 17 self-referent statements.
 - e.g., I find it relatively easy to get close to others.
 - e.g., I'm not very comfortable having to depend on other people.
- Scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*).
- Attachment categorized into anxious and avoidant.
 - Eight measures qualified as avoidant.
 - Nine measures qualified as anxious.
 - Higher scores = more anxious/avoidant attachment.

Brief Cope Inventory (BCOPE)

- BCOPE consisted of 28 self-referent statements.
 - e.g., I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
 - e.g., I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."
- Categorized into 14 subscales.
- Subcategorized into three types of coping:

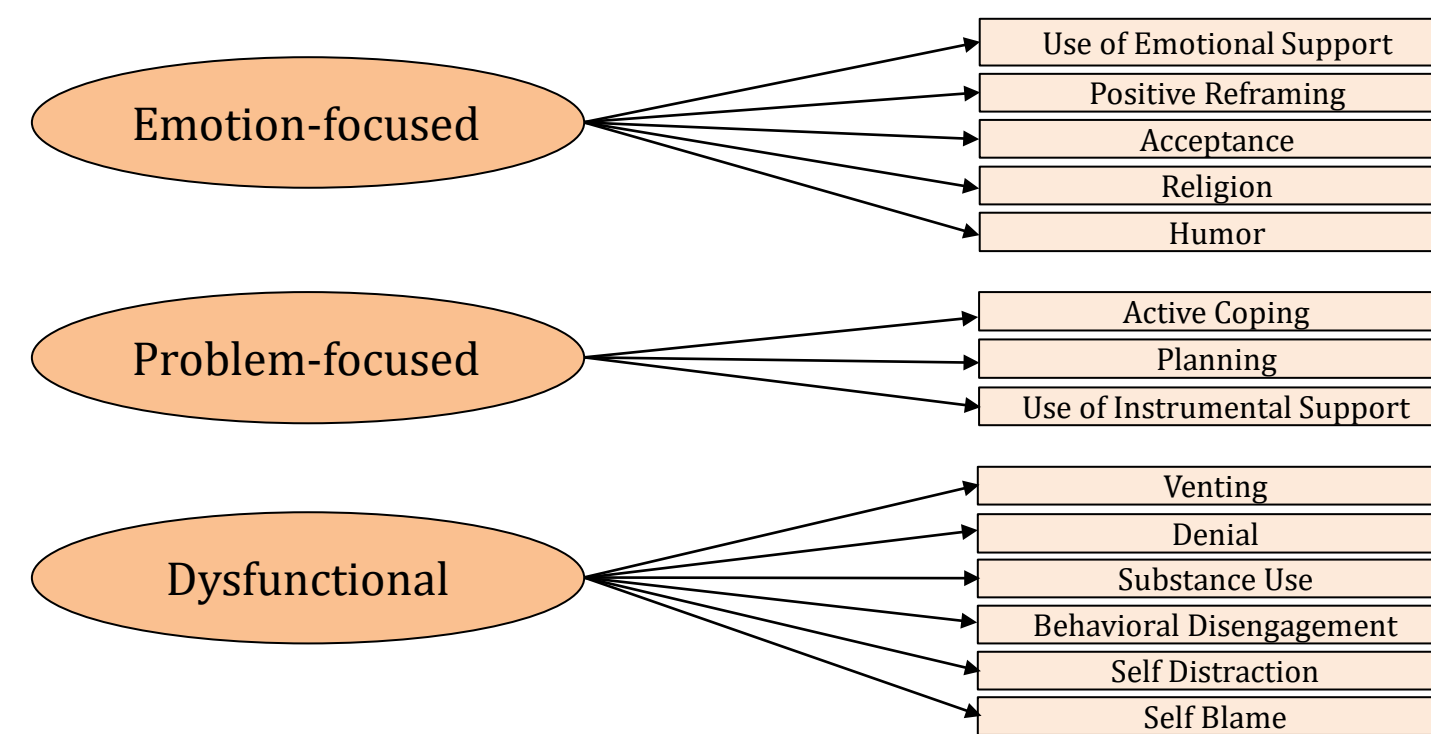


Fig. 1. 3-category model of Brief Cope Inventory (Cooper, Katona, Orrell, & Livingston, 2006).

- Each subcategory was averaged for a final score in which higher scores indicated greater levels of that specific coping method.

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

- ERQ consisted of 10 self-referent statements.
 - e.g., I keep my emotions to myself.
 - e.g., When I feel positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.
- Scored on a Likert scale 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*).
- Categorized into reappraisal (six items) and suppression (four items).

RESULTS

	Problem-Focused Coping	Emotion-Focused Coping	Dysfunctional Coping
Avoidant Attachment	-.048	-.162*	-.097
Anxious Attachment	-.066	-.028	.187*

Table 1. Pearson product moment correlations between attachment and coping. * $p < 0.05$.

- A significant, negative correlation was found between emotion-focused coping and avoidant attachment ($N = 189$, $r = -.162$, $p = .026$).
- A significant, positive correlation was found between dysfunctional coping and anxious attachment ($N = 187$, $r = .187$, $p = .010$).

RESULTS CONT.

	Problem-Focused Coping		Emotion-Focused Coping		Dysfunctional Coping	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Avoidant Attachment	-0.071	.352	-0.174	.021	0.056	.458
Anxious Attachment	0.084	.270	0.017	.819	0.173	.022

Table 2. Regression analyses of attachment predicting coping styles.

- Avoidant attachment predicts lower emotion focused coping.
- Anxious attachment predicts greater dysfunctional coping.

Mediation Analyses

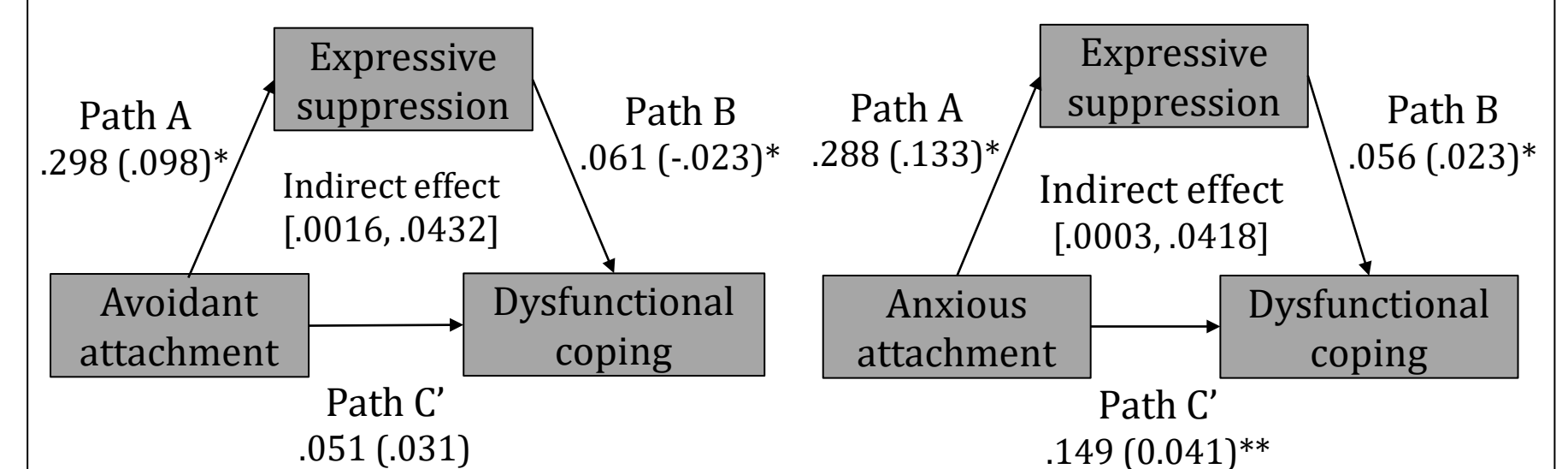


Figure 2. Significant indirect effect indicated by 95% CI not including 0. Path values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients and standard error.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.001$.

- Emotion suppression mediates the relationship between both avoidant and anxious attachment and dysfunctional coping.

CONCLUSIONS

- Neither anxious nor avoidant attachment predict problem focused coping.
- Cognitive reappraisal did not mediate the relationship between anxious or avoidant attachment and problem- and emotion-focused coping.
- Expressive suppression mediated the relationship between both anxious and avoidant attachment and dysfunctional coping.
 - This could be due to the fact that changing one's behavior can create negative outcomes depending on the behavior type.

Limitations and Future Directions:

- The lack of prediction of problem focused coping merits further research into the specific categories of dysfunctional and emotion-focused coping that are predicted by anxious and avoidant attachment.
- Limitations include the cross-sectional data used for the mediation analyses.
- Understanding the relationship between attachment, emotion regulation, and coping can lead to a better understanding of psychological health in older African American adults.

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