

THE EFFECTS OF ATTACHMENT ANXIETY ON TRAIT ANXIETY AND BORDERLINE PERSONALITY SYMPTOMS THROUGH SPECIFIC PATHWAYS OF EMOTION REGULATION

Jessica Good
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Defense Outline

- Introduction to the Current Problem
- Background and Hypotheses
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Questions and Comments

Introduction to the Current Problem

Current Problem

- Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and anxiety disorders can impair daily emotional functioning of individuals
- Common treatment error of disorders = treating each disorder independently rather than identifying similarities in processes
- Similar psychopathological processes are called transdiagnostic variables

Background

Attachment and Attachment Anxiety

- Attachment = The degree of security one feels in a relationship and the nature of affectionate bonds
- Secure attachment = feeling confidently dependent on parents to achieve goals
- Anxious attachment = feeling intense worry about losing contact with a loved one
- Attachment anxiety has been associated with the development of several other disorders

Emotion Regulation/Dysregulation

- Emotion regulation = responding flexibly to your environment
- Emotion dysregulation = inability to appropriately handle emotional responses
- Gratz and Roemer (2004) = the ability to:
 - *Be aware of and understand emotions*
 - *Accept emotions*
 - *Engage in goal-directed behavior and refrain from engaging in impulsive behavior*
 - *Have access to emotion regulation strategies that are effective*

Attachment Anxiety leads to Emotion Dysregulation

- Theory discusses a child's emotion-related goals and outcomes contribute to how they handle future emotional events
- Research demonstrates individuals with attachment anxiety tend to feel negative emotions due to repeatedly failing attachment-related goals

Attachment Anxiety, Emotion Dysregulation, & BPD

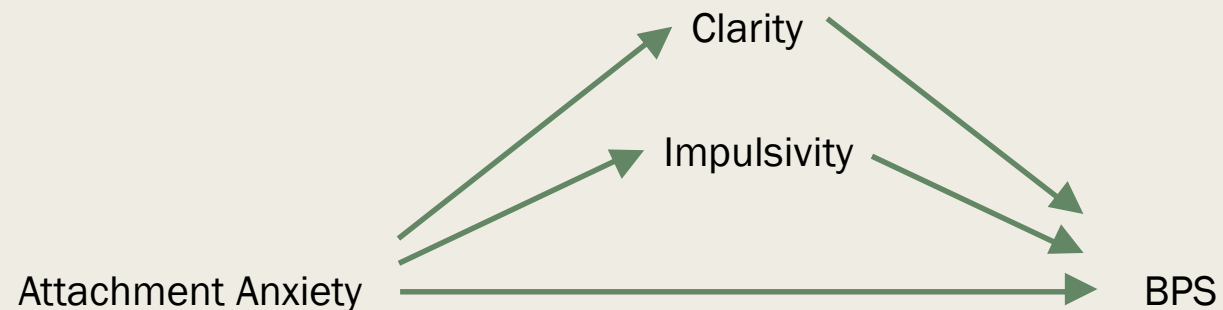
- Biosocial theory of BPD is consistent with attachment anxiety theory
- Insecure attachment has greatly impacted the course of BPD symptoms through trouble regulating emotions
- Most common emotion regulation deficits in BPD
 - *Impulsivity with emotions*
 - *Lack of clarity*

Attachment Anxiety, Emotion Dysregulation, & Anxiety Disorders

- Literature implicates that individuals with anxiety tend to have deficits understanding and accessing their emotions
- Emotion dysregulation has mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and GAD
- Most common emotion regulation deficits in anxiety disorders
 - *Nonacceptance of emotions*
 - *Lack of strategies*
 - *Lack of clarity*

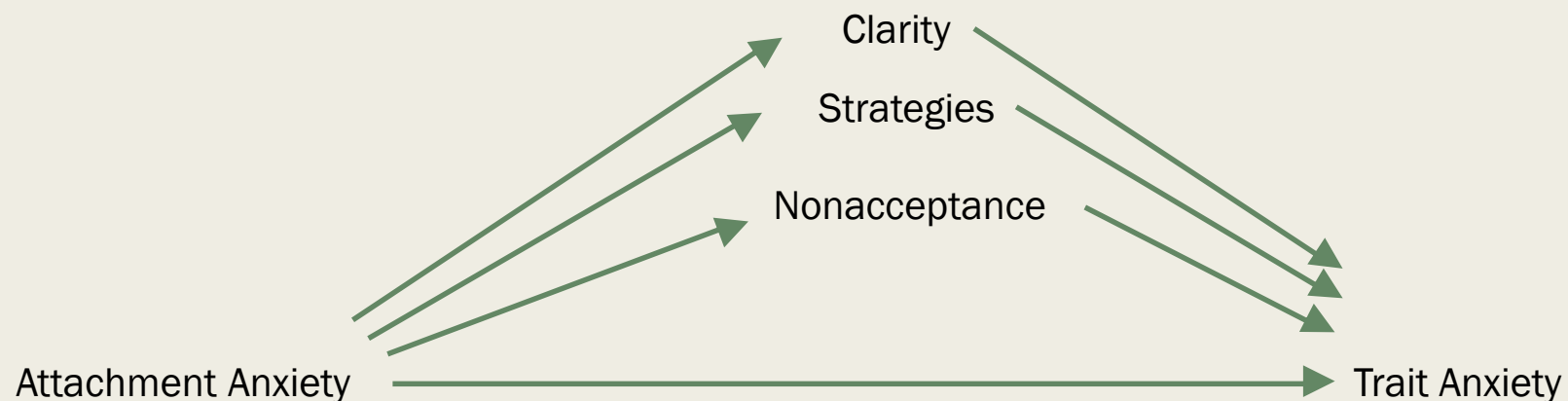
Hypothesis 1

- Research has shown mediation with clarity and associations with impulsivity
- The emotional dysregulation factors of impulsivity and lack of clarity would mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and borderline personality symptoms (BPS)



Hypothesis 2

- Research has shown associations with nonacceptance and clarity and mediation with strategies
- The emotional dysregulation factors of nonacceptance, lack of strategies, and lack of clarity would mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and trait anxiety

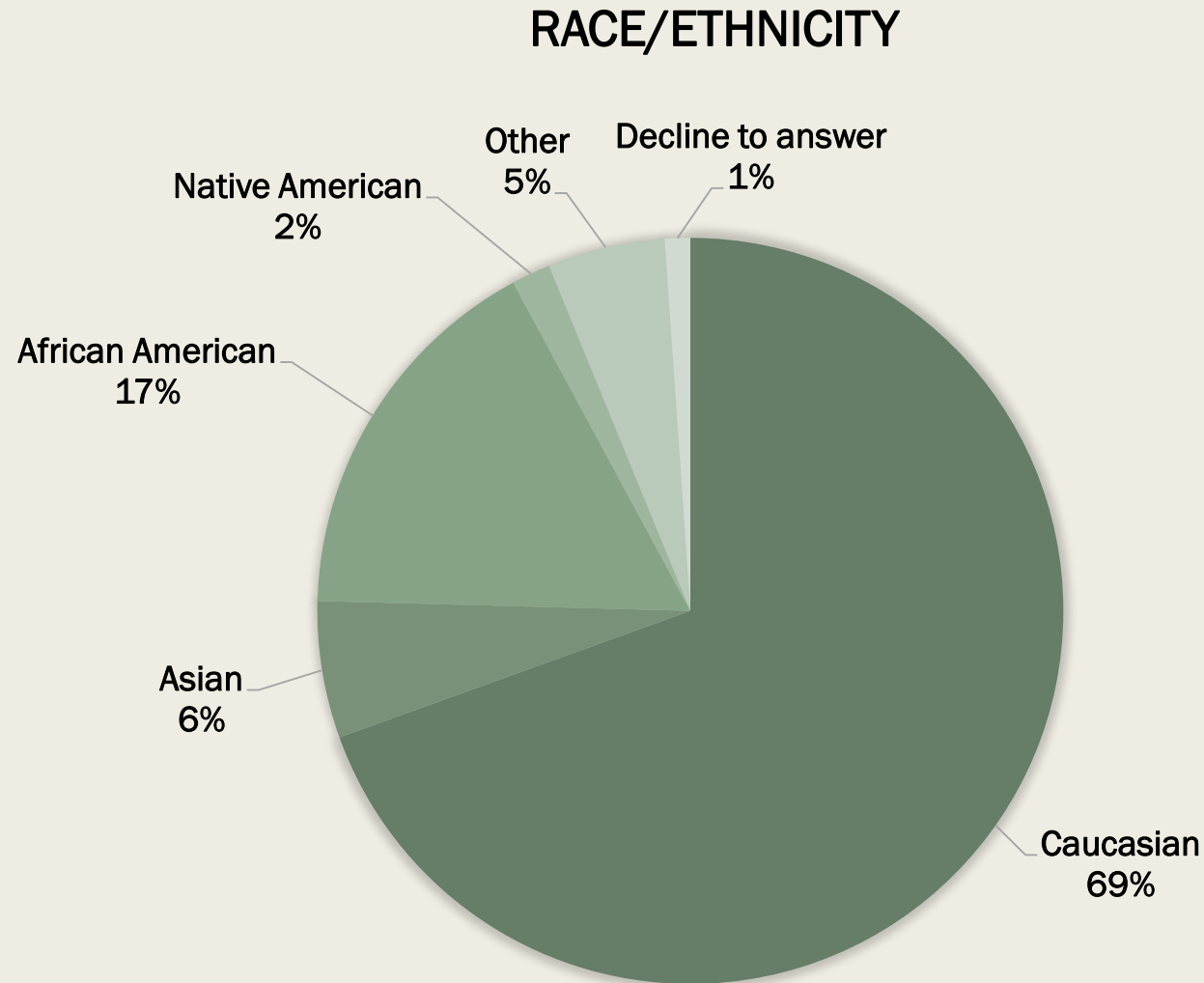


Methods

Recruitment

- Recruited from lower-level classes
- Research assistants scheduled times to run participants
- Self-report measures distributed through Qualtrics
- N = 152 undergraduate WMU students 18 years or older

Demographics



Gender: 75% women
24% men
1% other

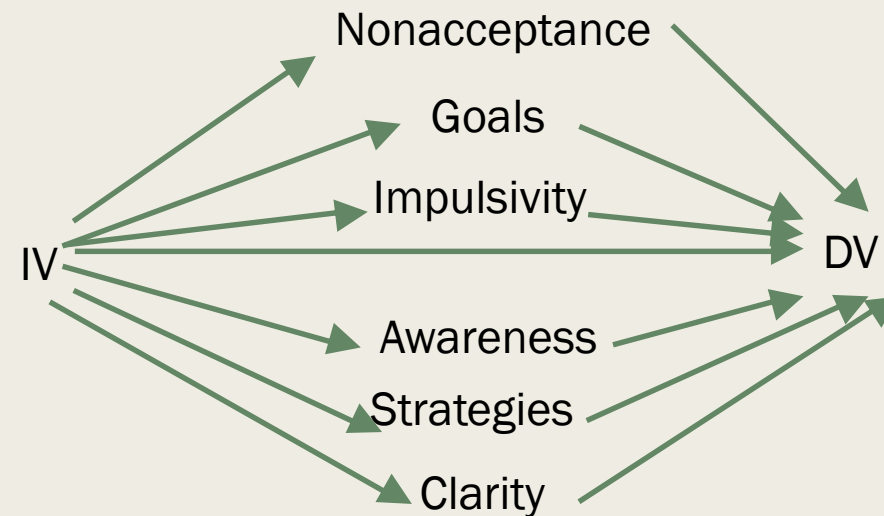
Age: 18-52, mean = 20
(SD = 3.51)

Measures

- Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)
- Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)
- State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)
- Borderline Symptoms List-23 (BLS-23)

Analyses

- Cross-sectional study design
- Hayes (2013) multiple mediation model used with bootstrapping
- Paths were significant if the confidence interval of the indirect effect did not contain zero



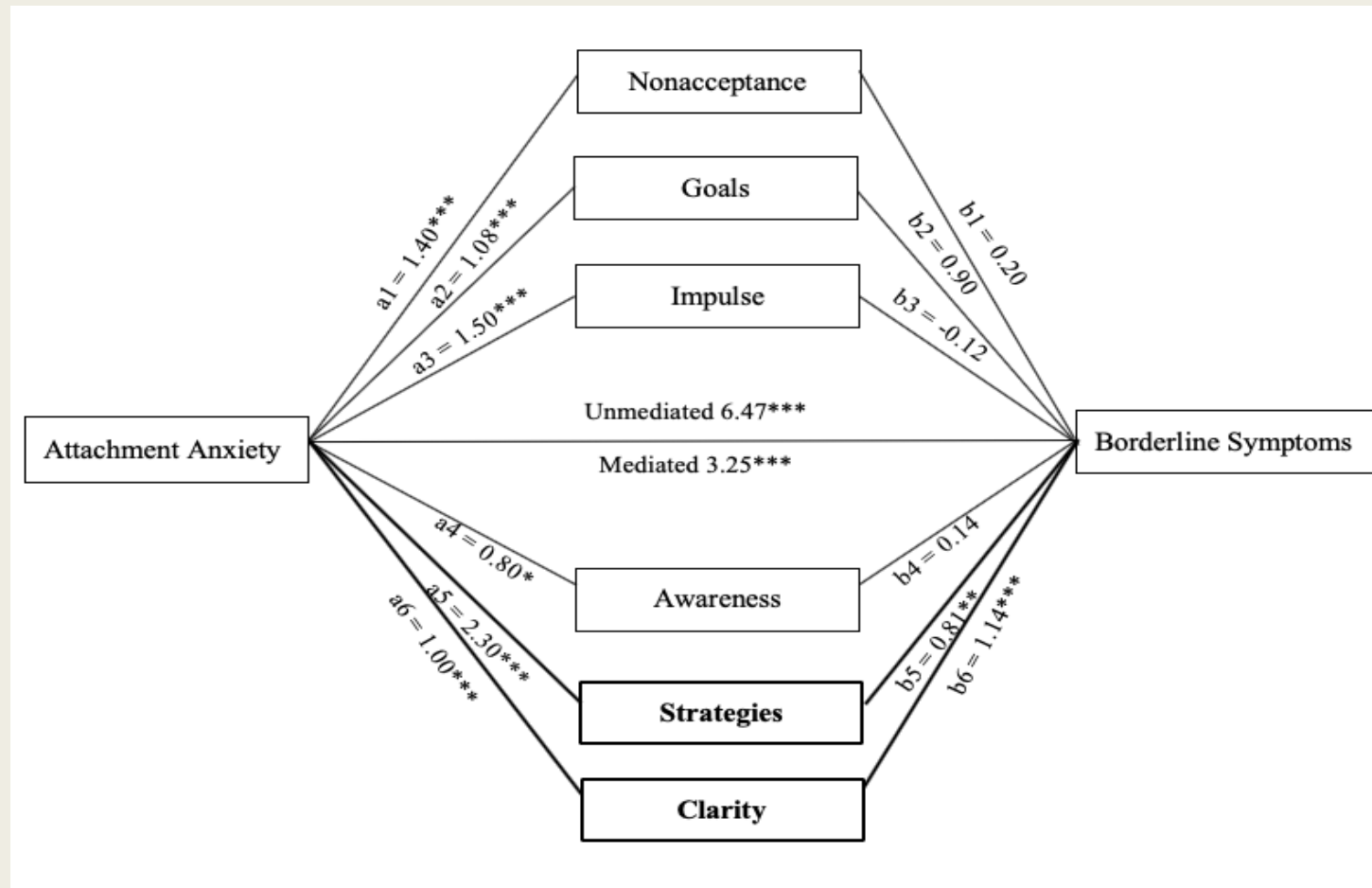
Results

Results

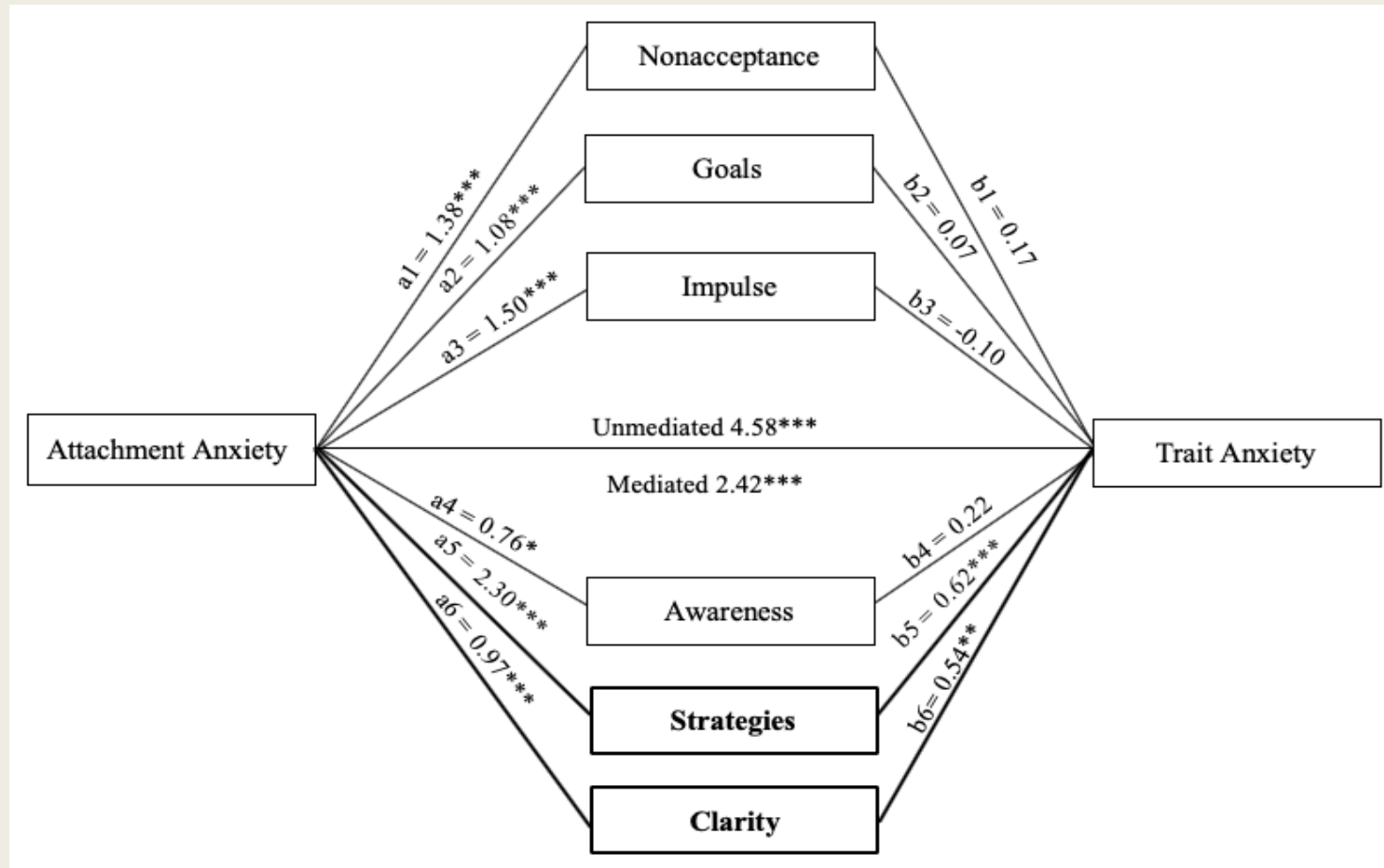
- **Hypothesis 1:** Lack of **strategies** and lack of **clarity** were significant mediators between attachment anxiety and BPS
 - *Indirect:* $b = 6.47, p < .001, SE = .87 [1.8696, 4.9286]$
 - *Strategies:* $b = 1.86, SE = .77 [0.5326, 3.6414]$
 - *Clarity:* $b = 1.12, SE = .44 [0.4395, 2.2105]$

- **Hypothesis 2:** Lack of **strategies** and lack of **clarity** were significant mediators between attachment anxiety and trait anxiety
 - *Indirect:* $b = 4.58, p < .001, SE = .55 [1.4020, 3.0552]$
 - *Strategies:* $b = 1.42, SE = .4908, [0.5632, 2.5068]$
 - *Clarity:* $b = .53, SE = .23 [0.1746, 1.0957]$

Mediation Model for Hypothesis 1



Mediation Model for Hypothesis 2



Discussion

Results Summary

- Hypothesis 1: Those with BPS may have:
 - *Less access to effective emotion regulation strategies*
 - *Confusion with clarity of emotions*
- Hypothesis 2: Those with trait anxiety may have:
 - *Less access to effective emotion regulation strategies*
 - *Confusion with clarity of emotions*

Implications of Findings

- New finding: Both emotion regulation deficits significantly mediated BPS and trait anxiety
- Disorders/symptoms may have the same developmental process but different outcomes
- Therapists may have a new treatment focus

Limitations and Future Research

- Generalizability of results
 - *Non-clinical population*
 - *Cross-sectional design*
- More research needed for transdiagnostic variables and co-morbidity

Questions or comments?