

The Relationship Between Adult Romantic Attachment and Disordered Eating Behaviors Among Women

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INTRODUCTION

- The transition into college is associated with increases in disordered eating¹ and muscle-oriented behaviors², as well as a focus on romantic relationships.³
- The attachment framework helps explain interpersonal relationships.
- Literature is mixed on what kind of insecure attachment behaviors or “styles” contribute to disordered eating behaviors in women.⁴
- Attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance have been investigated as independent predictors of disordered eating in college women⁵ but may demonstrate an interactive effect on disordered eating behaviors (DEBs).
- **Hypothesis 1:** Among women with high attachment anxiety, high attachment avoidance will predict greater disordered eating.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Neither attachment anxiety nor attachment avoidance will predict muscularity-oriented eating behaviors.

METHODS

Participants

- 104 White, 31 Hispanic, 10 Black, 8 Asian, and 20 multiethnic women (N = 173) between the ages of 18 and 25 (M = 19.73)

Inclusion Criteria:

- Having been in a romantic relationship for at least 4 months (M = 8.24 months)

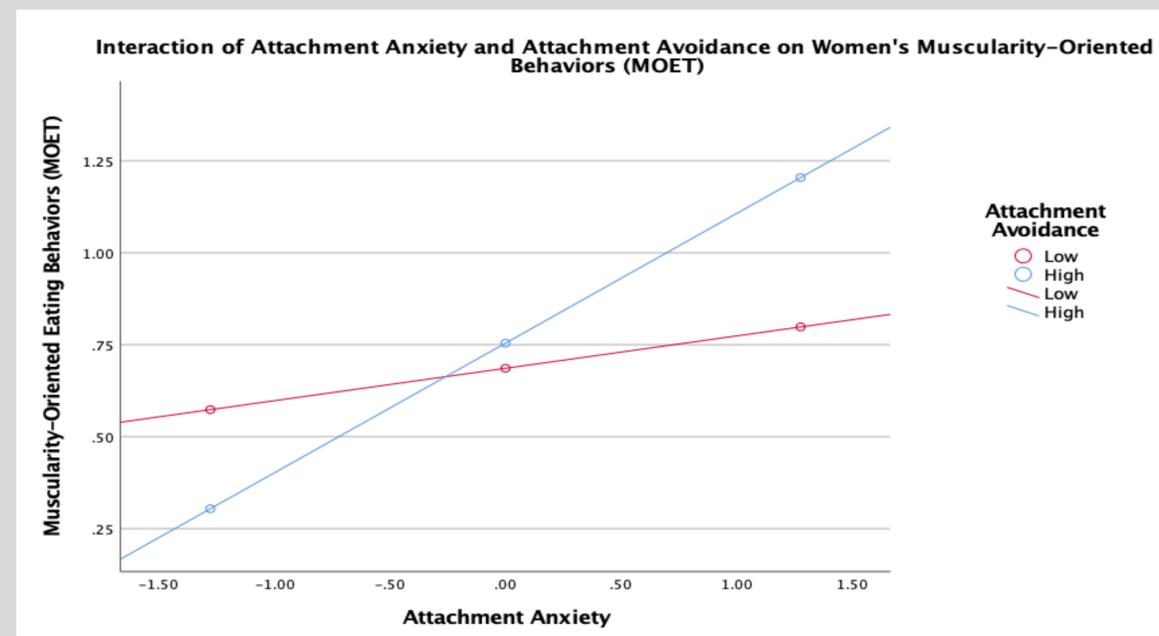
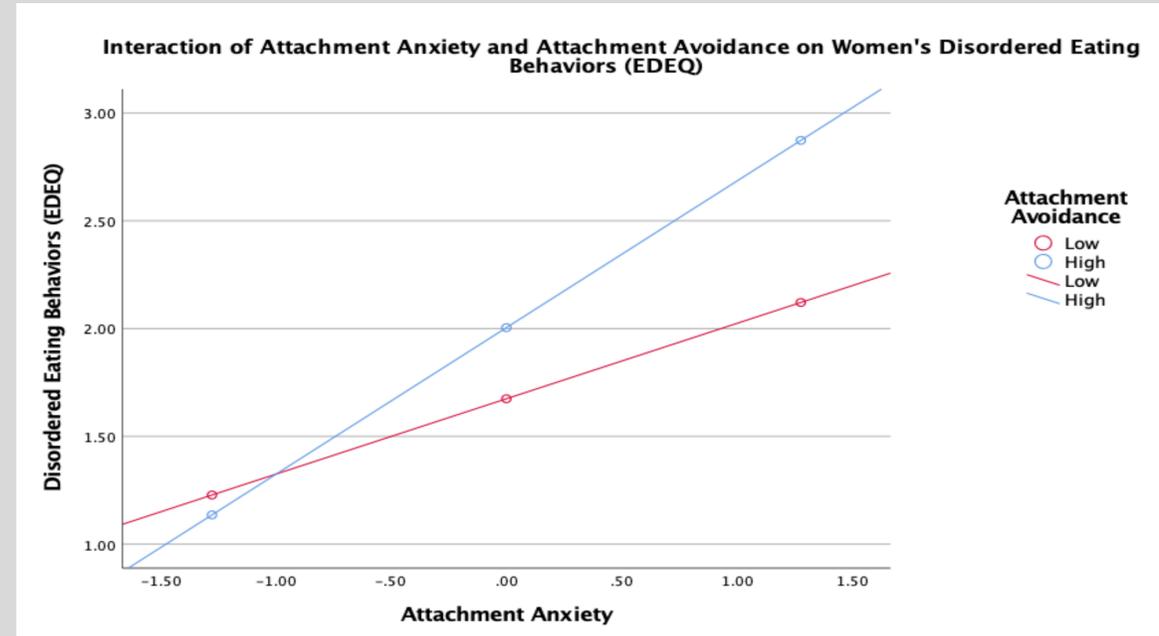
Measures:

- Experiences in Close Relationships Revised⁶
- Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire⁷
- Muscularity-Oriented Eating Test²

Procedure and Analyses:

- Recruited participants through SONA for a 30 minute online, anonymous survey.
- Conducted a moderated multiple regression using PROCESS in SPSS, with body mass index (BMI) as a covariate.

Women high in both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance reported the most disordered eating and muscularity-oriented behaviors.



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RESULTS

- 129 of 173 (75%) participants were currently in a relationship
- Of these participants, 110 (64%) were seriously dating, 16 (9%) casually dating, 43 (25%) single, 3 (2%) married, and 1 (1%) divorced
- Mean BMI of participants = 23.25 (SD = 4.90), falling into the normal range

DISCUSSION

Conclusions and Implications:

- Adult romantic attachment characterized by attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance was associated with disordered eating behaviors in women.
- A combination of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance contribute to DEBs more than one dimension alone.
- Only women high in both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety endorsed muscularity-oriented eating behaviors.

Limitations:

- Men were not included in the study and may have varying level of eating/muscle behaviors to insecure attachment than women.
- Other potential covariates, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety, were not considered.
- Measures of attachment were self-reported, so it may reflect individual's perceptions of how they act in relationships rather than how they truly act in those close relationships.
- This study was cross-sectional, so no casual relationship can be determined.



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