

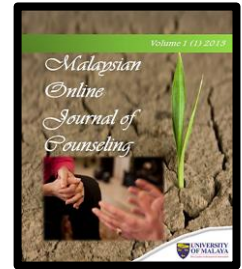
ATTACHMENT STYLE AMONG FEMALE ADOLESCENTS: IT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH COPING STRATEGIES AND LIFE SATISFACTION BETWEEN NORMAL AND LESBIAN FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

Mohamad Irwan Ahmad, Wan Shahrazad Wan Sulaiman, Daniella Maryam Mokhtar,
Haikal Anuar Adnan & Juliza Abd Satar

ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at investigating the relationship between attachment styles, coping skills and life satisfaction. Apart from that, this research also examines the differences of all variables between the normal female adolescents' sexual orientation and lesbians'. A total of 230 respondents were chosen in this study; of these, 132 were normal female adolescents, while 98 respondents were lesbian. Data were collected using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), Brief COPE, Positive Affect and Negative Affect and Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). The results showed that attachment styles correlated positively with problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and life satisfaction, while it correlated negatively with avoidance coping. The results also showed that there were significant differences in all variables between normal female adolescents and lesbians. Normal female adolescents reported high mean values in positive attachment with their parents and peers, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and life satisfaction; while lesbians reported high mean values in negative coping skills which was avoidance coping.

Keywords: Attachment, coping strategies, life satisfaction, normal female adolescents and lesbian



[1]
School of Psychology and
Human Development
Faculty of Social Sciences
and Humanities,
Universiti kebangsaan
Malaysia

Corresponding Author:
Universiti kebangsaan
Malaysia
ahmadirwan@ukm.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are considered as being in a transition stage from childhood to adulthood (Hewstone, Fincham, & Foster, 2005). Nowadays, they face a rather drastic development either physically, emotionally or cognitively (Santrock 2008; Sarnon et al., 2012). These changes include height, weight, body shape, sexual characteristics, feelings and mentality. This developmental process creates high level of stress among those involved, as noted by Stanley Hall (1904) who stated that the adolescent stage is filled with pressures whereby the term used was "Storm and Stress". Therefore, adolescents should manage these changes well in order to achieve the next stage effectively with quality and suitability. This developmental process relates significantly towards the influence and relationship with attachment style by their parents and peers (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) as well as the coping strategies used by the adolescents (Larose et al., 2002).

The factors of attachment style, coping strategies and well-being issues are very popular issues among researchers in Malaysia. Most studies had been carried out among adults as opposed to adolescents who face changes in their life development. These factors are also less tested among those with inversed sexual orientations, which refer to Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender (LGBT). The lack of studies particularly in Malaysia is because this scenario is relatively new though it had emerged since long ago after the claims of equal rights by them. Most studies were done by those in the West which started around 1970 (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Lee, 1977). In fact, the results of those studies led to the recognition of those groups starting with Denmark in 1989, Norway in 1993 and Sweden in 1994 (Badgett, 2004).

Attachment styles are crucial in aiding adolescent development (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Good attachment styles especially from parents tend to form a mental representation in adolescents which in turn leads to the formation of an internal working model. This model is used to organize interpersonal relationships with individuals in their environment which then influences their emotional, cognitive, social development and many more (Hamilton, 2000; Lewis et al., 2000; Waters et al., 2000).

Landolt et al. (2004) and Harry and DeVall (1978) stated that individuals with low attachments with their parents and peers have the tendency towards a reversed sexual orientation as a result of the formation of a weak internal working model. The formation of the lesbian sexual orientation is caused by the rejection of maternal relation while gay orientation is caused by rejection from their father (Evans, 1969; Renzetti & Miley, 1996). Rejection causes individuals to form an opposite sex instinct to seek attachment rejected by the parents. They are said to have a negative association and are cold despite the poor quality of relationship with their parents (Beard & Bakeman, 2000; Harry & DeVall, 1978). Therefore, to meet those needs of attachment a new form of relationship will be produced. In this situation, parents are seen as the closest person to the individuals though peers are those with the most influence towards the formation of a reversed sexual orientation (Carter & McCloskey, 1983; Ridge & Feeney, 1998). Peers share many similarities in terms of thoughts, interests, and are the closest individuals to share experiences and problems and spend most of their time together (Santrock, 2008). Individuals who are often being rejected, teased or abused by their peers especially by those of the same gender will develop LGBT issues. Furthermore, the provision of support and the existence of a role model by their peers with the

same condition will also lead to the development of this minority sexual identity (Rotherum-Borus & Fernandez, 1995).

Studies have also shown that individuals with good attachment style have good personality traits which relates to a positive and effective coping strategy (Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998; Howard & Medway, 2004; Lopez & Gormley, 2002; Zeyrek et al., 2009). Coping can be defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts by an individual to master, tolerate and reduce demands as well as internal and external conflict (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individuals will prefer to solve problems such as the use of strategies and active solutions and will rarely use avoidance such as substance abuse, denial and behavior disengagement (Carver et al., 1989; Howard & Medway, 2004; Sarason et al., 1990; Wijndaele et al., 2007). Individuals with good coping skills who have adaptive coping strategies also report lower levels of problems and depression than those with insecure attachment style. Lopez and Gormley (2002), Penland et al. (2000) and Crockett et al. (2007) state that individuals with problem-focused coping strategies are seen to have lower rates of depression and problems than those with avoidance or insecure attachment styles. They further explained that though individuals with avoiding attachment styles also use the same coping strategies with those with secure attachment style, there will still be a difference in terms of its effectiveness. This is because, those with avoiding attachment style tend to easily give up and end up despaired; this will then cause them to be more depressed when the attempt to solve their problems fails.

Meanwhile, emotion focused coping strategy relates to a reduction in stress temporarily. This strategy positively relates to mental health and poor psychological adjustment including depression, anxiety and self-abuse (Compas et al., 2001; Evans et al., 2008). Individuals using this approach are prone to blame themselves and others (Brown Ryan, & Creswell, 2007), engage in substance abuse and in withdrawal behavior (Brown et al., 2007) and isolate themselves in a room (Evans et al., 2005). This clearly shows that emotion focused coping strategy is not adaptive. However, it is being reported as adaptive by Carver et al. (1989) due to its association with stress reduction and is considered crucial in most cases. This type of coping strategy is able to reduce the negative psychological effects as it relates to the sharing of problems with other close individuals such as expressing their feelings and seeking emotional support (Carver et al., 1989; Guerrero & Jones, 2003; Knibb & Horton, 2008).

Studies also show that individuals who accept insecure attachment styles tend to practice a negative type of coping strategy which is avoidance (Howard & Medway, 2004). Insecure attachment styles also relates to the weakness of coping strategies that are not flexible. These individuals prefer to solve problems in a way that is commonly used and would definitely prefer to take the easy way out. According to Larose et al. (2002), this case happens due to parents or families and close individuals who project insecure attachment style toward their children causing them to have limited ability in applying a more positive coping strategy that is problem focused and emotional-focused.

Individuals who receive avoidance attachment style from other significant individuals will also relate positively with anxiety. This statement was supported by Holahan et al. (2005) who mentioned that a positive association existed between avoidance coping strategy and stress, anxiety and depression. These types of individuals would prefer to solve problems via emotional reaction (Lopez et al., 2001). Through manifestation of strong emotions they tend to avoid and deny the problems, face confusion and avoid understanding the problem. This will automatically reduce

the adaptive characteristics and their functionality where it has high correlation with strong levels of stress. This is due to the failure of avoidance coping strategy in eliminating minor stress. When minor stress is left to worsen, it will increase the intensity of stress resulting in worse scenarios (Abel, 2002; Holahan et al., 2005; Penland et al., 2000; Wijndaele et al., 2007).

Previous studies show LGBT adolescents use more avoidance coping strategy compared to normal adolescents who use more problem-focused strategy. As a result, they tend to avoid problems using withdrawal behaviors and involve in risky behaviors such as sexual activities and frequent misuse of substance such as drugs and alcohol (Patterson, 1995; Suprina et al., 2010; Szymanski & Obiri, 2011). Apart from that, they also frequently use emotion-focused coping strategy by gaining social support from peers as a substitute of parents or close family support (Riggle et al., 2008; Wellman & Gulia, 1997; Weston, 1991). However, the support they get is from the wrong crowd, namely friends with the same type of problems (Rotherum-Borus & Fernandez, 1995). So, their problems will grow in depth rather than be cured permanently.

With that, they experience lower life satisfaction and well-being. They are said to be adolescents with high risk behavior compared to normal adolescents and are prone to risky behaviors which compromises their state of mental health. This is because they are exposed to all sorts of clinical problems resulting from the undesirable type of attachment and the wrong choice of coping strategies. This will then lead to the imbalance life of the LGBT adolescents who are exposed to verbal and physical abuse, involvement in delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, problems in romantic relationship and marriage as well as getting suicidal ideas, depression and the attitude of giving up easily (Balsam et al., 2005; Berg et al., 2008; Davidson et al., 1999; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Fergusson et al., 1999). Therefore, this study is carried out to:

- a) Examine the relationship between attachment styles, coping strategies and life satisfaction of normal female adolescents
- b) Examine the relationship between attachment styles, coping strategies and life satisfaction of lesbian adolescents
- c) Examine the difference between attachment styles, coping strategies and life satisfaction of normal female and lesbian adolescents

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a cross sectional study using surveys to collect data and data analysis employs a quantitative method. Throughout the research, a number of 230 female adolescents between the ages of 18 to 24 were involved, with 132 of them normal while 98 of them were lesbian oriented. Initially, a total number of 250 questionnaires were distributed where 125 sets were given out to normal female adolescents and the remaining were distributed to the lesbian adolescents. However, only 230 sets of questionnaire were returned for analysis. Two types of methods were used to obtain the samples which were purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Three types of questionnaires were used to collect the data and they were:

- 1) The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to measure the individuals' attachment style with their respective parents and peers. It consists of 25 items with a 5 point scale from 1=Very Untrue to 5=Very True.
- 2) Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) was used to measure the coping strategies used by individuals in solving problems. This questionnaire is divided into three dimensions which are problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance dimensions. It consists of 28 items with a 4 point scale ranging from 1=Not at all to 4=Frequently.
- 3) The Satisfaction Work Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) was generally used to measure life satisfaction. It consists of 5 items with a 7 point scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree.

RESULTS

Results displayed in Table 1 showed a positive relationship between mother's attachment style and the use of problem-focused coping strategy ($r = .336^{**}$), emotion-focused coping strategy ($r = .196^*$) and life satisfaction ($r = .340^{**}$). However, it did not correlate with avoidance coping strategy ($r = -.118$). Whereas father's attachment style also had positive relationship with problem-focused coping strategy ($r = .312^{**}$), emotion-focused coping strategy ($r = .287^{**}$) and life satisfaction ($r = .296^{**}$). There was also no relationship reported between the father's attachment style and avoidance coping strategy ($r = -.027$). So was the relationship between peer attachment style that reported a positive correlation with problem focused coping strategy ($r = .564^{**}$), emotion-focused coping strategy ($r = .440^{**}$) and life satisfaction ($r = .241^{**}$). However there was no relationship with avoidance coping strategy ($r = -.170$). Results also reported that problem-focused coping strategy ($r = .292^{**}$) and emotion focused coping strategy ($r = .179^*$) were significant and positively related to respondents' life satisfaction while avoidance coping strategy had no relationship with respondents' life satisfaction.

Table 1 Correlation Matrix between Attachment Style, Coping Strategy and Life Satisfaction among Normal Female Adolescents

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mother's Attachment Style (1)						
Father's Attachment Style (2)	.717**					
Peer's Attachment Style (3)	.467**	.395**				
Problem-Focused Coping (4)	.336**	.312**	.564**			
Emotion-Focused Coping (5)	.196*	.287**	.440**	.751**		

Avoidance Coping (6)	-.118	-.027	-.170	-.186*	.207*	
Life Satisfaction (7)	.340**	.296**	.241**	.292**	.179*	-.580

*p < .01

**p < .05

Results in Table 2 showed negative relationship between mother's attachment style with avoidance coping strategy ($r = -.286^{**}$) and life satisfaction ($r = .370^{**}$). However, it was not related to problem-focused coping strategy ($r = .125$) and emotion-focused coping strategy ($r = -.008$). Father's attachment style was also negatively correlated with avoidance coping strategy ($r = -.381$) and positively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = .465^{**}$). However, it did not have any association with problem-focused coping strategy ($r = .159$) and emotion-focused coping strategy ($r = -.031$). There was also a positive relationship between peer attachment style with emotion-focused coping strategy ($r = .232^*$). However, it did not have any relationship with problem-focused coping strategy ($r = .138$), avoidance coping strategy ($r = -.106$) and life satisfaction ($r = .011$).

The results also proved that problem-focused coping strategy had a significant relationship with life satisfaction ($r = .208^*$) while the other two coping strategies, emotion-focused ($r = .052$) and avoidance ($r = -.224$) had no relationship with life satisfaction.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix between Attachment Style Coping Strategies and Life Satisfaction among Lesbian Adolescents

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mother's Attachment Style (1)						
Father's Attachment Style (2)	.406**					
Peer's Attachment Style (3)	.272**	.100				
Problem-Focused Coping (4)	.125	.159	.138			
Emotion-Focused Coping (5)	-.008	-.031	.232*	.672**		
Avoidance Coping (6)	-.286**	-.381**	-.106	.029	.244*	
Life Satisfaction (7)	.370**	.465**	.011	.208*	.052	-.224

*p < 0.01

**p < 0.05

Table 3 showed that all variables have significant differences with normal female adolescents having higher mean value as compared to lesbian adolescents. There was significant difference of mother's attachment based on adolescents' sexual orientation, $t(228) = 10.825$, $p < .05$. Normal and lesbian adolescents also significantly differed in father's attachment style, $t(228) = 8.548$, $p < .05$ and peer's attachment style, $t(228) = 6.22$, $p < .05$. Apart from that, normal and lesbian adolescents showed significant difference in problem-focused coping strategy, $t(228) = 9.10$, $p < .05$, use of emotion-focused coping strategy, $t(228) = 5.63$, $p < .05$ and avoidance coping strategy, $t(228) = 3.59$, $p < .05$. Finally, normal and lesbian adolescents also showed a significant difference in their life satisfaction, $t(228) = 4.77$, $p < .05$.

Table 3
Results of t-Test of Parents' and Peers Attachment Style, Coping Strategy and Life Satisfaction between Normal Female Adolescents and Lesbian Adolescents

Variable	Sexual Orientation	N	Mean	SD	df	T
ATTACHMENT						
Mother	Normal	132	102.01	13.69	228	10.825*
	Lesbian	98	81.16	15.40		
Father	Normal	132	97.33	15.26	228	8.548*
	Lesbian	98	79.50	16.13		
Peers	Normal	132	93.95	13.75	228	6.22*
	Lesbian	98	82.45	14.02		
COPING STRATEGY						
Problem-Focused	Normal	132	24.14	5.40	228	9.10*
	Lesbian	98	20.54	6.00		
Emotion-Focused	Normal	132	26.27	3.67	228	5.63*
	Lesbian	98	21.05	5.04		
Avoidance	Normal	132	27.17	3.42	228	3.59*
	Lesbian	98	24.31	4.30		
LIFE SATISFACTION						
	Normal	132	25.71	4.98	228	4.77*
	Lesbian	98	23.24	5.42		

* $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that parents' and peers' attachment styles play important roles in influencing the choice of coping strategies used by these adolescents. A safe and positive style of attachment received from parents and peers creates the tendency to solve problems using adaptive strategies such as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Female adolescents prefer this sort of active coping to avoid stress that could be continuous and it will then lead to an increase in life satisfaction (Carver et al., 1989; Howard & Medway, 2004; Sarason et al., 1990; Wijndaele et al., 2007). Emotion-focused coping strategy is also considered as an adaptive strategy as it actually exhibits the emotional attachment characteristics as well as the attachment toward others especially toward parents and peers. Adolescents adopting such strategies are said to be more involved in sharing their problems by expressing their actual feelings (Carver et al., 1989; Guerrero & Jones, 2003; Knibb & Horton, 2008).

Therefore, with the two types of strategies, adolescents will be able to avoid several psychological consequences such as stress and depression (Howard & Medway, 2004; Wijndaele et al., 2007). Meanwhile, avoidance type of coping strategies are less used due to the positive psychological characteristics that they possess and by getting support from their parents and peers. This statement was also supported by Larose et al. (2002) who found that parents exhibiting positive behaviors would lead their children to use positive types of coping strategies. In general, a significant relationship between attachment styles and coping strategies can influence the life satisfaction of female adolescents. This is because, they feel appreciated through the significant relationship with others in their surrounding, use adaptive coping in problem solving and this will then lead to satisfaction in life. As suggested by Howard and Medway (2004), individuals who receive secure attachment tend to use positive coping strategy and indirectly contribute to their own well-being.

When compared to normal female adolescents, lesbian adolescents are reported to have a lower attachment with their parents and peers which then contributes to the choice of using avoidance coping strategy. This is because they have always been pushed aside by their parents and peers and in return causing them to have the tendency to be involved in sexually inversed activities or in other words, lesbian activities. This was explained by Evans (1969) and Renzetti and Miley (1996) who discovered that girls who were usually pushed aside by their significant people have high tendency in becoming lesbians. This being contrary to the norm will then produce a life filled with stress. They will then be prone to avoidance coping strategies and will prefer the easy way out by avoiding problems, substance abuse and other deviant behaviors (Suprina et al., 2010; Szymanski & Obiri, 2011). As a result, it will lead to a decrease in life satisfaction. Consequently, lesbian adolescents experience difficulties in terms of clinical problems such as stress, depression, suicidal ideas, giving up and being pushed away by the community (Patterson, 1995; Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, attachment styles play an important role in developing adolescents with positive behaviors as they are the future generation. A secure and positive type of attachment style is projected to help in avoiding the LGBT issues that are on the rise and becoming worrisome. The right style of attachment would guide and support adolescents in using the right coping strategies. This may then lead them to a life filled with optimum satisfaction and well-being. The findings of this study would help several parties in understanding the behaviour of adolescents and how to increase their potential.

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