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Anxious Attachment as a Predictor of Risky Sexual Behavior

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Poster Presentation P36

ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT AS A PREDICTOR OF RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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Risky sexual behavior (e.g., early sexual debut, multiple partners, unprotected sex, one night stands, and substance use; Kahn et al., 2015; Merianos et al., 2013) tends to emerge and peak in adolescence and persist into young adulthood. This behavior can lead to many negative consequences such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy. Attachment theory states that human infants have evolved to maintain proximity to their caregivers (attachment figures). In turn, the quality of repeated interactions with attachment figures in times of distress shapes future patterns of cognitions and interactions. Researchers have suggested that adult relationships may reflect similar attachment orientations to those observed in children (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002). Since the attachment system is the earliest developing social-behavior system, it may influence the later developing sexual system (Birnbaum, 2007). Thus, relationships involving sexual intimacy may be used to meet attachment needs (Snapp et al., 2007). The current study investigates the relationship between anxious attachment and risky sexual behavior, as well as anxious attachment and motivations for engaging in risky sexual behavior. We predict that individuals who report more anxious attachment will be more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior. We also predict that individuals who report more anxious attachment will engage in risky sexual behavior for reasons related to seeking security and reassurance.

