



Attachment and Defensive Functioning: A Preliminary Investigation of Their Interplay with Internalized Homophobia in Gay and Homoflexible Men

Vincenzo Calvo¹, Marco Aurelio Cappellini¹, Giulio Paoletti¹, Chiara Masaro¹, Lucia Ronconi², Cristina Marogna¹, Camilla Pellicelli¹

¹ Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy, and Applied Psychology, University of Padua, Padua, Italy

² School of Psychology, University of Padua, Padua, Italy

Abstract

Introduction: Internalized Homophobia (IH) — defined as the internalization of negative views about homosexuality and their application to oneself — is known to interfere with LGB persons' psychological well-being. Extant literature has shown the detrimental effect of insecure attachment on IH in gay and bisexual men. Conversely, the role of defensive functioning on IH has prompted almost no empirical research, despite recent studies suggesting an association between attachment styles and defense mechanisms. The aim of this study was to investigate the mediating role of defense mechanisms on the association between romantic attachment and IH, and to outline the interaction between attachment and defensive functioning in gay and bisexual men belonging to the general non-clinical population. *Methods:* 139 adult gay and homoflexible men (mean age = 31.4 yrs., SD = 11.8) completed an online survey including self-report measures of romantic attachment (ECR-R), defensive functioning (DMRS-SR-30), and internalized homophobia (MISS-LG). Data were analyzed using correlational and path analyses. *Results:* High levels of mature defenses were associated with lower attachment anxiety and avoidance as well as lower IH; conversely, high levels of neurotic and immature defenses were associated with higher scores on all the aforementioned dimensions. Path analyses showed that only mature defenses significantly mediate the association between an overall insecure attachment score and IH, while no effect was found for neurotic and immature defenses. Moreover, anxiety and avoidance showed direct positive associations with immature and neurotic defenses levels respectively, and direct negative associations with mature defenses levels. *Discussion:* To our knowledge, our study provides the first empirical evidence that mature defenses could have a protective role in the expression of higher levels of IH, potentially mitigating the negative effects of insecure attachment. Through the implementation of a newly published gold-standard tool for defenses assessment (DMRS-SR-30), these results expand previous findings



regarding the interplay of attachment and defensive functioning, thus providing a first preliminary investigation of the potential effects of different attachment dimensions on specific defense mechanisms in non-clinical homosexual and homoflexible men.