

Associations between attachment and depressive mood among undergraduate students: Mediating effects of social comparison and belongingness

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Depression is a significant public health issue that diminishes quality of life, contributes to mental health problems, and imposes substantial social costs worldwide (WHO, 2022). Recently, mental health fields have increasingly recognized the importance of a relational perspective in understanding depression (Haehner et al., 2024). Especially with the advent of social networking services, the relational dynamics influencing depression are becoming increasingly multifaceted. It is particularly essential to understand how attachment theory (Kim, 2021), social comparison (Powdthavee, 2024), and the sense of belongingness (Janke et al., 2024) apply to Korean culture, characterized by its collectivistic values (He et al., 2021). This study aimed to identify direct and indirect effects of attachment on depressive mood among undergraduate students via social comparison and belongingness. To achieve this, self-report questionnaires were administered to 278 undergraduate students in the metropolitan Seoul area. Bootstrapping methods were used to verify the mediating effects. Results revealed significant paths among attachment, belongingness, social comparison, and depressive mood. However, the path between avoidant attachment and social comparison was found to be not significant. Second, social comparison significantly mediated the relationship between anxious attachment and depressive mood but not between avoidant attachment and depressive mood. Third, belongingness significantly mediated both associations between anxious attachment and depressive mood, and avoidant attachment and depressive mood. It relates to higher levels of social sensitivity in anxious attachment and social withdrawal tendencies in avoidant attachment (Borowski et al., 2021). Despite these attributes, belongingness is a common mediating factor for depression. It implies the need to move beyond individual-focused interventions to interventions considering familial and relational aspects to effectively cope with depressive mood among undergraduate students in metropolitan Seoul in Korea. Furthermore, it provides empirical grounds for the need of distinctive therapeutic approaches considering different interpersonal risk and protective factors of depression depending on attachment types.

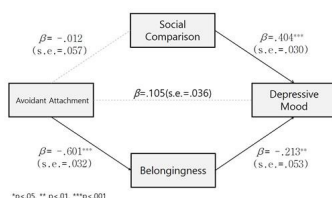


Figure 1: Verification of the Mediating Effects of Social Comparison and Belongingness in the Relationship between undergraduate students' Avoidant Attachment and Depressive Mood

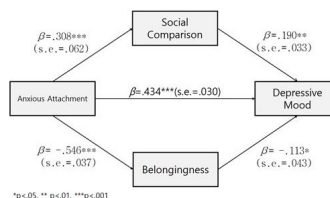


Figure 2: Verification of the Mediating Effects of Social Comparison and Belongingness in the Relationship between undergraduate students' Anxious Attachment and Depressive Mood

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Biography

Yeirim Jun is a nurse dedicated to enhancing both physical and mental health. During her master's studies in Family Counseling, she found that the intense competition and frequent social comparisons in Korean society significantly contribute to university students' depressive moods. She highlighted the crucial role of attachment as an interpersonal factor in depression, particularly within Korea's collectivist culture. Jun explored how family factors like attachment, and individual psychological factors, such as social comparison tendencies and a sense of belonging, affect depressive moods. Her thesis offers a thorough analysis of these issues and proposes practical solutions, moving beyond theoretical discussions to implement actionable strategies in counseling settings. By developing counseling techniques grounded in attachment theory, Jun aims to improve students' mental health and support the formation of healthy relationships. Her work not only enhances university students' mental well-being but also contributes to their overall quality of life.

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