Attachment, Exploration, and Internalized Homonegativity

by

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Background: Internalized homonegativity (IH; a.k.a. internalized homophobia), has been implicated in health disparities between lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (LGBs) and their heterosexual peers. Yet, little available research has explored factors that may increase or decrease IH.

Objective: This dissertation investigates relations between child and adult attachment and IH. It further examines the mediating and moderating roles of exploration and mentalization, respectively, in the attachment–IH relation.

Method: One hundred fifty cisgender LGB adults participated in two waves of an online survey. The first assessed recalled child–maternal and child–paternal attachment and current attachment to the romantic partner. The second, conducted two years later, assessed exploration, mentalization, and explicit, implicit, and modern IH. Mediation models and moderated mediation models were examined using ordinary least squares regression to test relations between attachment and IH, including the mediating and moderating effects of exploration and mentalization, respectively.
**Results:** Child–paternal attachment was related to explicit IH. Individuals with fearful child–paternal attachment demonstrated higher levels of IH than securely attached peers. Those with dismissing child–paternal attachment demonstrated lower levels of IH than securely attached peers. High exploration partially explained the relationship between fearful attachment and high IH, and low exploration fully explained the relationship between dismissing attachment and low IH. Mentalization moderated the effect of exploration on IH: those high in mentalization benefitted from exploration, in that more exploration was related to less IH. Those low in mentalization showed the opposite pattern: more exploration was related to more IH. Relative to secure attachment, dismissing child–maternal attachment and anxious romantic attachment were related to lower levels of mentalization. However, no direct or indirect relations were observed between child–maternal or romantic attachment and explicit IH. No direct or indirect relations were observed between any form of attachment and implicit or modern IH.

**Conclusion:** Results of this study highlight the importance of child–paternal attachment for IH in LGBs. They further suggest that exploration and mentalization are important mechanisms in the attachment–IH relation. Future research should confirm these results by investigating child–paternal attachment as a factor predicting IH. Results of this study suggest that interventions aimed at increasing child–paternal attachment security, exploration, and/or mentalization may be effective in reducing IH.