

Pursuit of Desired Affect among Young Adults

Purva Tekkar^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Emotions are the most humane thing about being alive. They are the cardinal element in the manifestation of a psychological illness and therapeutic interventions as regulating emotions is in fact an enormous challenge for every human being. Gross (1998) have presented the idea of affect regulation as an adaptive response to a situation. Affect regulation has been researched with both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the past literature, exploring its nature as a construct as well as a process. The present study has made the effort to view affect regulation in a similar way among young adults (age group: 18-29 years), since young adulthood is inherently a time of growth and settlement into a newer identity for the person that comes with its own set of build-in obstacles and given the socio-cultural and expanding turmoil in every direction, the research explores how effectively are the future of the country managing their emotions. The present study has adapted a mixed method approach and have taken Gross's conceptualisation of affect regulation and has tried to broaden the psychological understanding into how strongly the young adults are able to regulate their emotions and what kinds of difficulties they are facing in that process. For this purpose, interviews were conducted which were subjected to thematic analysis for interpretation. Affect regulation as a construct has also been studied using the variables of difficulties in emotional regulation; emotional expressivity; and psychological defenses in the study. Since, there is a known strong connection between the attachment pattern and emotional development of the individual (e.g., Diamond & Fagundes, 2008), the study also dwells into the adult attachment pattern and how it is associated with the ability of an individual to regulate their emotions effectively. The data from the survey using standardized scales was analysed through Pearson Product Moment Correlation; Independent t-test; and ANOVA methods of statistical analysis. The findings supported the existing literature (e.g., Besharat, 2013; Ciocca et al., 2020; Prunas, 2019) on the nature of positive relationship between secure attachment and healthy regulation of emotions accompanied by more use of mature defense mechanisms as well as between insecure forms of attachment and poor affect regulation due to issues related to lack of emotional expression and adapting to immature defenses, among others. Gender differences were also observed where males had comparatively lesser difficulties in regulation, higher use of defense mechanisms and a stronger secure attachment than females.

Keywords: *Affect Regulation, Emotions, Emotional Expressivity, Defense Mechanisms, Adult Attachment Patterns, Young Adults, Mixed Method*

¹Masters in Applied Psychology; Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

*Corresponding Author

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Human beings are inherently emotional creatures since the very beginning of their life. The first behavioural expression of a new born is that of an emotion of distress via crying and that expression is the symbol of life. Paul Ekman (1972), a pioneer in the field of study of emotions has emphasized that emotions are the guides that drives the human behaviour. The ability to respond to the world in affective terms is what really makes our species *human*. Although that response is biologically grounded, affective operations are performed automatically in our body and do not require much conscious reflection on the process. Meaning that humans are constantly engaged in managing or tampering with their affective states even without their awareness. Affect or emotions are regulated by humans in order to achieve their goals or specifically a desired emotional state (Tamir et al., 2015).

As individuals attain a certain level of maturity in life they begin to depend upon more internal approaches to regulating their emotions (Gross, 2001). The kind of strategies used become more stable and are adapted for the long run that shapes the individuals' psychological environment and determines how they would deal with their problems in their future. But in case such capacity of the individual is compromised at any point in time, emotional dysregulation occurs that has been theoretically as well as scientifically linked to psychological disorders and disturbances (Hoffman et al., 2012). The crucial step in this process of regulation is the individual's choice and ability to down-regulate their negative emotions as they arise amidst a situation. Thus, many interventions like Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and Trauma- focused therapies have now begun to focus on improving the emotional regulatory skills of the person. The following section discusses the concepts that are cardinal to understanding how emotions are regulated and what role attachment styles play in that process.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is defined as the ability of an individual to monitor and modulate their emotional experience (Gross & Thompson, 2007). It refers to attempts that one involves to influence what emotions one has, when one has them, and how one chooses to express them (Gross, 1998). Emotion regulation is an ongoing process of an individual's emotional pattern in relation to the moment-to-moment situational demands (Cole et al., 1994). Emotion regulation as a construct has multiple facets: awareness and understanding of one's emotions; acceptance of emotions; ability to control impulsive behaviour driven out of emotions; ability to work towards their goals during emotional experiences; and ability to use appropriate strategies to modulate their emotions adaptively (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).

When viewed from a functionalist approach, the dysregulation of emotions specifically deals with patterns of emotional experience or expression that impede the actions that are driven towards accomplishment of goals (Beauchaine, 2015; Thompson, 2019). From a developmental standpoint, Thompson (2019) illustrates emotion dysregulation as a biologically dynamic, experience-based aspect of adaptation to environments and relationships that, in conditions of risk for the emergence of developmental psychopathology, motivate patterns of emotional responding that serve immediate coping but usually at the cost of long-term maladaptation.

Psychological Defenses

Sigmund Freud in his topology of the human mind described its three levels: the conscious, subconscious and the unconscious. The unconscious is what formed the basis for his further theoretical conceptualizations. One of such concepts were the defense mechanisms which

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are understood as a way of keeping every anxiety provoking thought buried in the unconscious and act in a way that would not be threatening to our reality, basically regulating our anxiety provoking thoughts and emotions. This protective cognitive operation of adaptation is practiced by every human being, mostly unknowingly and helps keep any unpleasant sexual or aggressive instincts at bay. Plutchik (1995) proposed that psychological defenses are evolutionarily derivatives of emotions such as repression comes from anxiety; displacement comes from anger; compensation arises from sadness or a more depressed state. Under the circumstances where strong emotional impulses trigger an unconscious anxiety, defense mechanisms come into play with the inherent potential to generate dysregulated affects (Frederickson et al., 2018).

Developmentally speaking, during childhood and early adolescence, people are known to engage more in immature and neurotic defences, but as they enter early adulthood, mature defences come into play (Vaillant, 2011). This newly found understanding of the defenses is continuing to aid into understanding how making use of defenses leads to a particular psychopathology, for instance, individuals with a low level of mature but high level of neurotic and immature defense pattern (known as “susceptible” pattern) require more robust intervention in treatment (Andrews et al., 1993). Research is eminent in the area of how particular groups of people began to favour certain forms of defense patterns and why it predicts certain pathological outcomes. For instance, in a study done by Ungerer et al. (1990) it was found that the group of pregnant women with susceptible defense patterns predicted a maladjusted mother-infant interaction and impaired development of child’s self-regulation.

Adult Attachment Pattern

According to Bowlby (1977), attachment is the tendency of human beings to make strong bonds with those who are affectionate to us. The attachment style remains relatively stable and active during the lifetime but as a person transitions into different developmental stages their attachment figure also changes. According to Hazan and Shaver (1987) as individuals enter adolescence and young adulthood, they replace their parents or primary caregiver as base for emotional security with their peers and romantic partners respectively. Thus, adult romantic relationships are taken as analogues to infant-caregiver relationships in the similar neurological, social, and behavioural manner (Diamond & Fagundes, 2008). According to research by Hazan & Zeifman (1999) on how attachments are shifted from their caregivers to peers and partners, as developmental changes take place in two ways – degree of mutuality and integration of sexuality in the person. Attachments in early life are *asymmetrical* in nature where the infant seeks and receives the security from caregiver but does not offer that in return are supposed to be replaced by a more *symmetrical* and reciprocal form of attachment in adults. Also, infants require caregivers to take care of their basic need of hunger and protection, while for adults – sexual attraction and need for intimacy is often what brings partners together. Thus, in such a pair-bond relationship of a typical adult attachment, mutual security, caregiving, and sexual intimacy often becomes integrated with attachment systems especially in the later stages of the relationships.

Hazan & Shaver (1987) used Ainsworth’s three-category model of attachment styles and used to develop a measure for studying romantic attachment styles among adults – the way adults think, feel, and behave in a romantic relationship. Collins & Read (1990) then went on to deconstruct their model and added items relating to beliefs about the partners availability and responsiveness as well as the response to being away from the partner to the Hazan and Shaver’s measure. Another group of researchers built up a measure based on

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Bowlby and Ainsworth's structures which was more suitable for adolescents who have not had much experience in romantic relationships (Feeney et al., 1994).

Several attempts at constructing instruments to measure degree of attachment style in adults and adolescents basically used two underlying dimensions: anxiety and avoidance. Anxiety related to insufficient love and affection, abandonment, separation; and Avoidance from expressing emotions, being intimate with others and depending on them. Bartholomew (1990) made use of Bowlby's internal working models of self and others to interpret these dimensions. The anxiety dimension was conceptualized as 'model of self' and the avoidance dimension was conceptualized as the 'model of others' which were plotted as negative vs. positive against each other. As a result, a four-dimension model of attachment styles was created, illustrated in Figure 1.

		Model of Self	
		(Anxiety)	
		Positive (Low)	Negative (High)
Model of Other (Avoidance)	Positive (Low)	SECURE	PREOCCUPIED
	Negative (High)	DISMISSING	FEARFUL

Figure 1: Four-category attachment styles model given by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991, p. 227)

Among these four categories, three of them (secure, preoccupied, and fearful) are similar to that of Hazan and Shaver's prototypes (secure, anxious, and avoidant). However, fearful and dismissing individuals are considered as an extension of the avoidant prototype and often represented as fearful-avoidant and dismissing-avoidant attachment styles. This model describes the four prototypes of attachment pattern as the following.

- **Secure individuals** characteristically possess a positive view of self and others. They are low on both anxiety and avoidance. Responsive and supportive caretaking in infancy leads to such an attachment style. Such individuals are comfortable with intimacy and autonomy and are able to use others for support whenever needed.
- **Preoccupied individuals** have a negative view of self but a positive view of others. Consequently, they are more occupied with their relationships with others rather than with their own selves. They are high on anxiety and low on avoidance which is hypothesized as a result of inconsistent parenting. They are focused on fulfilling their attachment needs and seek that desire in their close relationship. Thus making them dependent on validation from other's approval.
- **Fearful individuals** possess a negative model of self and others both. They believe that that they themselves are unlovable and others are uncaring and not available for them. Such people are high on avoidance and anxiety both. Thus they are constantly aware of their need to form close attachments but avoid others out of their fear of rejection.
- **Dismissing individuals** have a negative view of others but a positive view of themselves. They are high on avoidance but low on anxiety. Such individuals maintain a positive image of themselves by being dependent only on oneself. They distance themselves from attachment figures and remain self-reliant thus protecting

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themselves from being vulnerable to rejection from others. Their adult behaviour exhibits denial of the need for attachment (Bartholomew, 1990).

The model certainly succeeded in distinguishing two forms of avoidant attachment patterns with a difference in self-view and anxiety level. The model is also progressive in a sense that here attachment styles are not considered as strict categories to label individuals with but a prototypic representation of styles that people develop over their lifetime in their interaction with other people and how they relate to them. It began to look at the interconnections of the establishment and existence of attachment styles as pertaining to how their affect is regulated by the person on two broad dimensions.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE: AFFECT REGULATION AND ATTACHMENT PATTERN

Parameters of emotional dysregulation involves difficulties engaging in goal-directed behaviour, difficulties in impulsive behaviour control, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and non-acceptance of emotional responses have been known to be strongly related to the manifestation of such psychopathological symptoms (Mazaheri, 2015). Research findings have suggested that older adults are better able to regulate their negative emotional experiences especially in emotionally laden problem-solving situations as compared to the younger adults (Blanchard-Fields et al., 1995). In a study on healthy Caucasian young adults, it was found that continued use of dysfunctional ways to regulate affect may result in wide range of impulsive behaviours (e.g., substance use, gambling addiction, aggressive behaviour, etc.) amongst the youth (Schreiber et al., 2012). Adolescents and young adults with psychiatric disorders such as eating disorders (Anderson et al., 2018); alcohol addiction (Ottonello et al., 2019); and anxiety and depressive disorders (Loevaas et al., 2018) have shown higher levels of emotional dysregulation in clinical and subclinical population than the nonclinical population. Similarly amongst the Indian youth, use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies such as rumination, catastrophizing, self-blame have been found to be positively associated with various psychological problems including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, avoidant personality among others, while adaptive emotion regulation strategies were negatively correlated with psychopathological disturbances (Lavanya & Manjula, 2017). Research has empirically supported the notion that difficulties in understanding, communicating and regulating emotions are related to mental health and subjective well-being of an individual (Saxena et al., 2011). Therefore, there is past and newly emerging research with empirical data on how poorly chosen strategies have continued to result in manifestation of psychopathology.

Emotional expression is also intertwined with the impulse strength of the emotional experience and the emotion regulation strategy that the individual engages in. Although limited to a great extent but a few studies from different parts of the world have talked about factors such as hostility and empathy (Contardi et al., 2016); emotional neglect and avoidance (Frewen et al., 2012) that suggests that expression of negative emotions are associated with difficulties in regulating one's emotions rather than expression of positive affect. Expression of emotions differs across culture as well harbouring notions that also take form into stereotypes, for instance, Indian Bollywood culture is all about singing and dancing and celebration. Asian cultures like the Japanese are known to show less of their felt emotions than the Euro- Americans (Matsumoto, 1991). In Indian cultures, according to the belief systems and display rules, individuals are expected to express positive and prosocial emotions adhering to the traditional values while keeping the negative emotions in check and refrain from expressing them in order to maintain cordial relations and social

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expectations due to the collectivistic nature of the cultures which is something that is in contrast to the Western belief system of independence and individual assertion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Research by Wilson et al. (in press) showed that American children are more likely to express emotions like sadness, aggression, and physical pain when compared to the Indian children of school going age. Even the female gender has always carried the impression that women are emotional beings than men, a notion that has been reported by number of researchers across the globe and cultures where females report experiencing as well as expressing more vulnerable emotions such as shame, fear, sadness in addition to more positive emotions such as joy and excitement (e.g., Gross & John, 1988). While men contrastingly own and express emotions like anger and pride that has a powerful and hardy connotation to them (Fischer & Jansz, 1995).

Use of psychological defense mechanisms is also a form of involuntary emotional regulation in itself as it protects the person from the looming anxiety that is too threatening to be consciously dealt with and thus helps the person in emotional adaptation so that they could work towards achieving their goals or task at hand (Rice & Hoffman, 2014). Defense mechanisms are not necessarily maladaptive coping but rather evidence has suggested that this unconscious mechanism is eminent for a healthy psychological functioning on the individual (Gyurak et al., 2011). Freud formulated the concept of anxiety regulation focusing on the affective bases of defense mechanisms which is structurally similar to the contemporary work of Gross's emotional regulation. But regulating anxiety through psychological defenses is not actually warding off the anxiety but burying it deep in our unconscious which is reborn as an unhealthy defense. That is why there always an underlying affect in every defense mechanism that is used, like being unable to own one's anger and projecting it on a less threatening target; using humor as a way of avoiding to deal with the social anxiety. Thus, psychoanalysis focus not necessarily on regulating emotions but the excessive debilitating anxiety created due to the dysregulating affects which would help the person in expressing the emotion underlying the defense (Hartmann, 1964). Apart from a psychological toll, excessive anxiety is capable of producing distressing physical symptoms due to its neurobiological nature and the unconscious takes charge curb the stress and creates certain defense mechanisms that might appear in the somatic forms. Such a defense can be highly dysfunctional for a person and psychotherapy aims at restricting those defenses that results in resolution of the dysregulated affect into a much healthy coping. The idea is that making use of psychological defenses is necessary at times but depending on such mechanisms to regulate emotions can leave a person in a pit of repressed and undealt emotions. This hampers a healthy catharsis or expression of emotions, for instance, suppression of emotions is negatively associated with positive expressivity and well-being of the individuals (Gross, 2002; Gross & John, 2003) and with the indicators of psychological health (Hu et al., 2014). In order to properly manage pathological affective states, one must (a) be encouraged to engage in healthy expression of their emotions; and (b) try to down-regulate their anxiety by expressing their emotions rather than relying on their defenses (Frederickson et al., 2018). That is why mental health practitioners or therapists emphasize on exploring one's feelings and identify the dysfunctional patterns and defensive affects rather than avoiding them.

In addition to affect, adult attachment style has been researched and talked about over decades and its implications of multiple maladaptive patterns of behaviour in life. Absence of healthy attachments in childhood can influence proper functioning relationships and difficulty in forming close relationships in adult life (e.g., Bartholomew, 1993; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Attachment patterns among adults are quantitatively measured on the

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dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. Insecure attachment style with an anxious and avoidant pattern of behaviour is likely to influence the onset of mental and physical illness in life by predisposing a person to stress, influencing how a person maintains his or her relationships and social support, and influencing how any person appraises a life event as well as react to it (West et al., 1986). Anxiously attached people live with pervasive feelings of unease and insecurity about their close relationships, also prone to experience negative affect and are more likely to act negatively when faced with difficulties in their relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). They have a fear of abandonment that distresses them in the event of unavailability of proximity they seek. Contrarily, people with an avoidant attachment pattern are more likely to remain disengaged, avoiding attempts at intimacy due to feelings of discomfort with closeness and prefer to be self-reliant in their relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Such tendencies have an impact on one's health behaviours (e.g., Pietromonaco et al., 2015). Avoidant attachment has resulted in improper immune system regulation, while anxious attachment is a predictor of severity in anxiety symptoms (Gouin et al., 2009; Nielsen et al., 2017). Research by Scharfe & Eldredge (2001) on the late adolescent population suggested those with insecure attachment patterns displayed poor adherence to health promotion activities and frequent engagement in risk taking behaviors. Individuals with a preoccupied and fearful attachment styles characteristically possess a negative self-image and a higher level of attachment related anxiety, thus making them most relevant to the development of psychological distress (Ciocca et al., 2020). Bottom line is that insecure attachment patterns (dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied) fuels the chances of a person developing psychopathology in their lives of varying degrees, for example, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, psychotic disorders, and suicidality (Bowlby, 1988; Dagan et al., 2018; Ehrental et al., 2018; Marganska et al., 2013; Miniati et al., 2017), while on the contrary, individuals with healthy emotional functioning have a secure attachment pattern in their lives (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012).

Besides talking about how crucial proper and healthy regulation of emotions and secure attachment style are, research over the decades has also explored different dimensions of emotion regulation (e.g., coping style, psychological defences, difficulties, reappraisal and suppression) and attachment styles (e.g., insecure involving dismissing, avoidant, preoccupied and secure attachment) together as key indicators of psychological problems later in life. Insecure attachment has been found to be positively associated with difficulties in emotion regulation among adults in numerous research literature including both past and current work and this combination has known to be further associated with psychological disorders (e.g., Marganska et al., 2013; Mortazavizadeh & Forstmeier, 2018). Kotler and colleagues (1994) reported that the insecurely attached individuals indulged in maladaptive emotion regulation strategies like suppression of negative emotions and avoidance of seeking support for emotional problems. This links avoidant attachment style to experiencing negative affect and poor psychological and physical health due to maladaptive coping mechanisms. In a study of Indian college youth by Kharsati & Bhola (2016) it was found that the participants engaged in self-injurious behaviour had higher levels of anxious attachment pattern, preoccupation with relationships, increased need for approval from others, and difficulties in all the six domains of emotion regulation. The regression analysis revealed that preoccupation with relationships and impulse control difficulties were predictors of self-injurious behaviour among the youth. Studies with a non-clinical population have revealed that immature forms of defense styles were positively correlated with all kinds of insecure attachment patterns while secure attachment patterns were

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associated with mature defenses (Prunas, 2019). Recent studies with complex statistical models have further suggested that the impact that an insecure attachment style has on psychological distress is mediated by the existence of immature defense mechanisms in adults, as well as the presence of secure attachment and mature defenses have little protective effect on developing distress (Ciocca et al., 2020). It is also proposed that association of insecure attachment pattern with a dysfunctional emotion regulation would result in inhibition of the development of mature defenses in adults (Besharat, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study follows concurrent triangulation designs where quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed simultaneously. Data from the interviews was used to corroborate the findings from the statistical analysis.

Participants

The participants for the study were selected using snowball sampling technique. The sample consisted of 150 participants between the ranges of 18-29 years of age. The sample consists of 67% females and 33% males. About 60% of the participants were graduates, 30% post graduates, and 10% had only school level education. Occupation of the participants indicated that were 70% students while 30% of them were employed. When the matter of relationship status was concerned, around 72% categorized themselves as single and the rest 28% were in a relationship with a partner. The participants of the study belonged to mainly middle socioeconomic status and were from metro cities like Delhi and Mumbai of the country. For the purpose on in-depth interviews, 8 participants were selected according to the convenience sampling.

Measures

Self-report measures with rating scales were used in this study for measuring each variable.

- **Difficulties in emotional regulation scale (DERS).** Developed by Gratz & Roemer (2004) as a self-report inventory to measure the emotional ability of adults. DERS has been often used for treatment and research purposes with adults going through emotional problems (mood disorders, anxiety disorders or trauma-related disorders). It is a 36-item measure where each statement is rated on a 5-point rating scale from “Almost never” (1) to “Almost always” (5). The scale has six dimensions or domains that measure different areas of emotion regulation: non-acceptance of emotional responses; difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior; impulse control difficulties; lack of emotional awareness; limited access to emotion regulation strategies; and lack of emotional clarity. The scale has reported satisfactory internal consistency among the items ($\alpha = 0.93$) along with promising results with test-retest reliability as well as construct and predictive validity on adult population (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).
- **Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ).** This scale was designed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) as a measure for adults to rate the statements to the extent that best describes their characteristic styles in close relationships. The original version of the scale contains 30 items but the study used the 17-item version of the questionnaire that involved the items pertaining to the four adult attachment styles: secure (3, 7, 8, 10, 17), preoccupied (5, 6, 11, 15), dismissing (2, 5, 12, 13, 16), and fearful (1, 4, 9, 14), out of which item no. 5, 7, and 17 were reverse coded. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from “Not like me at all” (1) to “Very much like

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me” (5). The test-retest reliability of the scale falls under the range of $\alpha=0.54$ and $\alpha=0.78$ (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

- **Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ).** The scale was designed by Gross & John (1997) to measure the extent to which the individual chooses to express their emotional impulses behaviourally. It is a 16-item scale divided into three facets: negative expressivity (3, 5, 8, 9, 13, 16); positive expressivity (1, 4, 6, 10); and impulse strength (2, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15) where item no. 3, 8, and 9 are reverse scored. Each item is rated on a 7- point Likert type rating scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). The internal consistency of the total scale has been found to be ranging from $\alpha=0.82$ to $\alpha=0.86$ and for the three subscales it has been found to lie between $\alpha=0.65$ to $\alpha=0.80$, also the test-retest reliability of the scale was found to be $\alpha=0.86$ (Gross & John, 1997).
- **Defense Styles Questionnaire (DSQ).** The self-report inventory was devised by Bond et al. (1983) for measuring the hierarchy of ego defenses that was based on the psychoanalytic theory of defense mechanisms given by Vaillant (1971). The original version of the scale comprised of 88-items but a shorter version of the scale with 40-items has been used for this study with a 9-point rating scale as fatigue factor comes into play when using lengthy questionnaires. The scale consists of 20 defense mechanisms with two items for each defense distributed in three forms of styles: mature styles (sublimation, humor, anticipation, suppression); neurotic styles (undoing, pseudo-altruism, idealization, reaction formation); and immature styles (projection, passive aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, dissociation, splitting, rationalization, somatization). The internal consistency of the DSQ-40 has been estimated to be $\alpha=0.801$ and the split-half reliability was $\alpha=0.706$ (Watson & Sinha, 1998).
- **Interview Schedule:** An interview guide was prepared in order to understand the strategies participants uses to up or down-regulate their emotions.

Procedure

The items of all the scales were compiled into a single schedule with different sections for each main variable. The demographics section was added in the beginning of the schedule that consisted of the age, gender (male or female), occupation (student or working), education (school level, undergraduate or postgraduate), and relationship status (single or dating). An introductory disclaimer was added at the beginning of the form stating the details of the researcher; the purpose of the research; time to be consumed in filling out the form; freedom to leave the study at any moment; take breaks; answering of questions without too much contemplation and the contact details in case of a query, thus ensuring that the participants could consent for taking part in the study after being informed of how the recorded data is going to be used later and be assured that the confidentiality will be maintained.

Data Analysis

The data collected was scored, encoded by replacing descriptive terms like Males and Females with numerical values like 1 and 2 for the statistical computation. The descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) tool of version 25. The transcripts from the interview were subjected to thematic analysis following a bottom-up approach.

RESULTS FROM STATISTICAL DATA

Relationship among variables

From the close perusal of Tables 1 and 2 the following findings can be indicated for the relationships between different variables relating to adult attachment style and affect regulation.

Secure attachment style showed a negative significant relationship with impulse strength and difficulties in emotion regulation which means that the individuals who are more securely attached are less likely to express their emotions with a higher impulsivity and hence, are better at regulating their emotions on their own. Secure attachment was also positively correlated with mature defense styles including humor, suppression and also rationalization while it is negatively correlated with immature defense styles including projection, passive aggression, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, displacement and somatization.

Fearful attachment style had a significant negative correlation with both negative and positive emotion expressivity which indicates a lack of expression or display of emotions in such individuals. However, fearful attachment showed a significant positive relationship with difficulties in emotion regulation, non-acceptance of emotional responses, impulse control difficulties, and lack of access to regulation strategies. Since fearful attachment by default indicates a high level of avoidance and anxiety within the individual, it is understandable how such individuals would find it hard to accept their own emotions and seek out others to help co-regulate their emotions. It was also found to be positively and significantly correlated with the dimensions of anticipation and the category of immature defenses including passive aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, splitting, and somatization, indicating a high level of usage of immature defenses.

Preoccupied attachment style showed a significant positive correlation with Emotional Expressivity, Impulse strength, and Suppression which suggests that since preoccupation with others and thus more expressive and indulgent in their relationship with them. This style also showed a positively significant relation with difficulties in emotion regulation, Non acceptance of emotional responses, Difficulties engaging in goal directed behaviour, Impulse control difficulties, Limited access to emotional regulation strategies, and Lack of emotional clarity. This indicates that carrying a preoccupied attachment pattern is more likely to result in a lack of self-regulation and dismissal of one's own attachment needs with a dependence on others for affection and approval. Neurotic defenses including undoing, pseudo-altruism, and reaction formation and Immature defenses including projection, passive aggression, acting out, autistic fantasy, displacement, splitting, and somatization are positively and significantly correlated with preoccupied attachment style.

Dismissing attachment style, out of the four attachment patterns showed least relationships with any variables except a positive correlation with Immature defense styles including Somatization, perhaps since this attachment pattern is characteristic of self-reliant individuals who do not let themselves be vulnerable. Somatization was the only defense style which displayed a significant relationship with all forms of attachment styles.

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Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Emotion Regulation and Attachment Styles

	Attachment Styles			
	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Emotional Expressivity	-.062	-.130	.268**	.023
Negative Expressivity	-.004	-.221**	.135	-.045
Positive Expressivity	.105	-.184*	.183*	.000
Impulse Strength	-.183*	.051	.320**	.092
Difficulty in Emotional Regulation	-.508**	.255**	.331**	.032
DERS 1	-.445**	.332**	.212**	.009
DERS 2	-.369**	.034	.362**	.058
DERS 3	-.272**	.191*	.291**	.011
DERS 4	-.293**	.060	.067	-.068
DERS 5	-.459**	.288**	.326**	.063
DERS 6	-.431**	.140	.203*	.053

*p <.05, ** p < .01

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Defenses Mechanisms and Attachment Styles

Defenses	Attachment Styles			
	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Mature Defenses	.288**	.156	-.132	.102
Sublimation	.183*	.099	-.013	.071
Humor	.240**	.037	.024	.094
Anticipation	.118	.181*	-.050	.089
Suppression	.233**	.124	-.312**	.028
Neurotic Defenses	-.011	.013	.259**	.011
Undoing	-.141	.111	.214**	-.083
Pseudo-altruism	.006	-.008	.283**	.093
Idealization	.126	-.057	.049	.077
Reaction Formation	-.045	-.001	.175*	-.059
Immature Defenses	-.319**	.334**	.358**	.168*
Projection	-.214**	.117	.403**	.112
Passive Aggression	-.289**	.195*	.328**	.011
Acting Out	-.136	.184*	.243**	.119
Isolation	-.162*	.269**	-.046	-.008
Devaluation	-.341**	.339**	.126	.149
Autistic Fantasy	-.398**	.208*	.320**	.037
Denial	.048	.096	.003	.043
Displacement	-.262**	.144	.322**	.125
Dissociation	.128	.040	.006	.075
Splitting	-.088	.199*	.161*	.099
Rationalization	.164*	-.034	.009	.113
Somatization	-.337**	.280**	.322**	.191*

*p <.05, ** p < .01

Comparison Means for Gender Differences

This section describes the differences that were found on different on the basis of gender: male and female in the study. Out of the four kinds of adult attachment style, females showed a significantly lower score on just secure attachment style than males (as shown in

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Table 3). Although on other attachment patterns, females did score higher than men but those scores were not significant enough for the $p < .05$ levels to be considered.

Table 3: Gender comparison for Adult Attachment Styles

Adult Attachment Styles	Gender		t	Sig (2-tailed)
	Males N=48	Females N=102		
	M	M		
	(SD)	(SD)		
Secure Attachment Style	3.15 (0.73)	2.86 (0.64)	2.39*	.018
Fearful Attachment Style	3.24 (0.63)	3.47 (0.70)	-1.93	.055
Preoccupied Attachment Style	3.14 (0.93)	3.18 (0.78)	-.26	.793
Dismissing Attachment Style	3.63 (0.54)	3.72 (0.47)	-1.08	.280

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

On the variable difficulties in emotion regulation and its dimensions Non acceptance of emotional responses, Difficulties engaging in goal directed behaviour, Limited access to emotional regulation strategies, and Lack of emotional clarity, gender difference was observed (as shown in Table 4) where females obtained a significantly higher mean score than males suggesting that female participants reported going through more difficulty in different areas of regulation. This may be attributed to simply lack of self-regulation due to numerous factors that are entangled with gender or perhaps because of a perceived sense of ability to regulate poorer or better.

Table 4: Gender group comparison for Difficulties in Emotion Regulation and Emotion Expressivity

Variables	Gender		t	Sig (2-tailed)
	Males N=48	Females N=102		
	M	M		
	(SD)	(SD)		
Difficulty in Emotion Regulation	91.79 (26.33)	106.02 (26.27)	-3.09**	.002
DERS 1	15.60 (6.71)	18.97 (6.95)	-2.79**	.006
DERS 2	15.69 (4.27)	17.53 (5.26)	-2.11*	.036
DERS 3	15.13 (5.99)	17.04 (5.77)	-1.87	.063
DERS 4	12.27 (3.62)	13.52 (4.96)	-1.55	.121
DERS 5	21.10 (7.56)	24.93 (7.90)	-2.80**	.006
DERS 6	12.00 (4.37)	14.04 (5.10)	-2.38*	.018
Emotional Expressivity	74.35 (14.92)	79.10 (15.10)	-1.80	.074

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Negative Expressivity	20.85 (6.68)	22.86 (7.34)	-1.60	.110
Positive Expressivity	22.83 (3.76)	22.72 (4.20)	.165	.869
Impulse Strength	30.67 (8.13)	33.52 (6.76)	-2.25*	.026

*p <.05, ** p < .01

The results revealed that males engage significantly more in mature defenses like suppression than the females in the study (as shown in Table 5).

Table 5: Mature Psychological Defense Mechanisms Means compared for Males and Females

Variables	Gender		t	Sig (2-tailed)
	Males N=48	Females N=102		
Mature Defenses	6.41 (1.07)	5.82 (1.27)	2.794**	.006
Sublimation	5.77 (1.80)	5.41 (1.81)	1.13	.257
Humor	6.90 (2.02)	6.40 (1.88)	1.46	.146
Anticipation	6.79 (1.51)	6.36 (1.58)	1.56	.119
Suppression	6.20 (1.88)	5.12 (1.82)	3.34**	.001

*p <.05, ** p < .01

No significant difference was observed on the variable of neurotic defenses (see Table 6) but the male participants obtained a higher mean than the females on different defenses of this category with an exception of reaction formation.

Table 6: Neurotic Psychological Defense Mechanisms Means compared for Males and Females

Variables	Gender		t	Sig (2-tailed)
	Males N=48	Females N=102		
Neurotic Defenses	5.67 (1.40)	5.51 (1.27)	.673	.502
Undoing	5.83 (2.10)	5.55 (1.97)	.79	.428
Pseudo-altruism	6.28 (1.82)	6.21 (1.58)	.24	.809
Idealization	5.24 (2.65)	4.66 (2.25)	1.39	.164
Reaction Formation	5.32 (2.09)	5.64 (1.88)	-.91	.359

*p <.05, ** p < .01

When considering the pattern of use of immature defenses, males can be seen obtaining a higher score on most defenses than females and significantly more on denial under this

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category. While females with an exception reported engaging more in the defenses of displacement and somatization. Moreover, the overall profile of the psychological defenses also shows a pattern where males are leading on most of the defenses showing higher engagement than females (see Table 7).

Table 7: Immature Psychological Defense Mechanisms Means compared for Males and Females

Variables	Gender		t	Sig (2-tailed)
	Males	Females		
	N=48	N=102		
Immature Defenses	4.90 (1.20)	4.86 (0.99)	.258	.797
Projection	5.22 (2.16)	5.17 (1.60)	.15	.881
Passive Aggression	4.53 (2.13)	4.41 (1.73)	.366	.715
Acting Out	5.23 (2.63)	5.49 (2.07)	-.646	.519
Isolation	5.85 (2.05)	5.26 (2.22)	1.554	.122
Devaluation	4.54 (1.98)	4.88 (1.78)	-1.055	.293
Autistic Fantasy	4.98 (2.61)	5.54 (2.31)	-1.327	.186
Denial	4.38 (1.87)	3.20 (1.67)	3.871**	.000
Displacement	4.27 (2.00)	5.04 (2.05)	-2.160*	.032
Dissociation	4.20 (1.58)	3.86 (1.73)	1.154	.250
Splitting	4.90 (2.57)	4.31 (2.09)	1.487	.139
Rationalization	6.29 (1.80)	5.81 (1.70)	1.575	.117
Somatization	4.47 (2.14)	5.30 (2.11)	-2.250*	.026

*p <.05, ** p < .01

DISCUSSION

Adult Attachment Pattern

In order to study the pattern of attachment styles and its relationship with affect regulation in young adults, Griffin & Bartholomew's (1994) four-category conceptualization was used. The scores on RSQ clearly showed a lower score on secure attachment style than insecure attachment patterns (fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing attachment). This pattern of result was contrasting to that found in other studies (Ambruster & Witherington, 2016; Nelson, 2015; Okozi, 2010; Shvil, 2011) where the scores on secure attachment were higher and lower on insecure attachment patterns as compared to the present study. There is also a significant gender difference on secure attachment style where females scored relatively lower than males.

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Young adulthood is a time of growth in psycho-social terms of career, education, and developing intimate relationships. Erikson (1968) theorized that emerging adults at this stage of their life face a conflict of intimacy versus isolation. As an individual moves into their adulthood, their attachment style becomes more symmetrical and reciprocal than before (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). They develop more intimate and romantic feelings towards their prospective partners than in their adolescence (Melanie, 2012). Ideally, having a secure attachment would mean that the individual is able to trust their partners without a constant worry or fear of rejection. But having a certain type of attachment is not a fixed category but more like a continuum that allows a person to move from being secure to dismissing in how they relate in their relationships from time to time in their life. India has historically been a very collectivistic society but the current times are experiencing a cultural shift and with this, socialization processes are also changing. This has also given the youth the freedom to choose a partner for themselves, something that was earlier considered a taboo and against the cultural ethos. Since the scores suggest that the young adults are more towards the dismissing end than the secure one of the attachment pattern, it shows that the youth is choosing to be more independent and this desire is being accompanied by a desire to avoid attachments as well. In a recent study by Raheemudheen et al. (2015) on emerging adults in Indian population, the majority of the participants possessed a dismissive-avoidant pattern of attachment with a very little sample of secure attachment pattern.

Attachment Pattern and Affect Regulation

Individuals with secure attachment pattern showed a significant negative association with all the domains of difficulties in emotion regulation and impulse strength. This provides supporting evidence that securely attached individuals are far less likely to experience hurdles and perhaps better adapted to overcome those hurdles in maintaining a regulated emotional state. Secure attachment also shows a significant positive association with mature defenses including sublimation, humor, and suppression, but a significant negative association with immature defenses including projection, passive aggression, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, displacement, and somatization. Mature defenses are characteristic of healthy adults who rely on adaptive coping mechanisms. Previous researchers have found that such individuals also possess higher levels of extroversion, self-esteem, and tend to depend on internal locus of control (e.g., Mickelson et al., 1997) and do not need to depend on defenses that distort the reality (Cramer & Kelly, 2010). Research by Kobak & Bosmans (2019) has suggested that possession of both secure attachment style and mature defenses would lead to emotional stabilization of a healthy adult.

Fearful attachment negatively and significantly correlated with negative and positive expressivity suggesting that individuals high on avoidance and anxiety do not prefer to express either negative emotions like sadness, anger or positive emotions like joy, excitement with others in their relationships. Fearful attachment also showed a significant positive correlation with difficulties in emotion regulation including the domains of non-acceptance of emotional responses, impulse control difficulties, and a perception of lack of strategies available to regulate emotions. The disparity between lack of expressivity and difficulty in maintaining impulse control could be explained by Bowlby's (1988) earlier conceptualization of attachment patterns and the upcoming trauma-based research which suggests that in a disorganised fearful attachment state, individuals lack any consistent pattern of response and tend to sway between the states of hypoarousal and hyperarousal. Such children seek proximity but at the same time avoid the caregiver (Lahousen et al., 2019). In the case of adults, with a predominance of disorganized fearful type of attachment, there is a tendency to have poor self and interpersonal regulation. This type of attachment

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style is also found to be characteristic of patients with dissociative and borderline personality disorders (Liotti, 1992; 2014). The fearful attachment domain showed a positive significant relationship with anticipation and immature defenses including passive aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, and somatization. This further proposes how inability to express one's emotional turmoil in a healthy manner leads one to depend on maladaptive outlets.

Preoccupied attachment which is a representative of attachment anxiety showed a significant positive association with emotional expressivity along with positive expressivity and impulse strength. It is also significantly and positively correlated with neurotic defenses including undoing, pseudo-altruism, and reaction formation and also immature defenses like projection, passive aggression, acting out, autistic fantasy, displacement, and somatization. It is also negatively correlated with suppression. Such preoccupation with feelings and their overt expression leads one to depend on more hyperactivating forms of defenses and acting more hypervigilant to threats or danger (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995). According to the polyvagal theory, such individuals must be spending more time in their sympathetic arousal zone and might find it difficult to stay in their window of tolerance (Porges, 2007). These strategies although intensify negative emotions but also serve adaptive functions of grasping and maintaining the attention of others (Lopez et al., 2001). Such strategies up-regulate negative affect and distort perception of others' response (Ein-dor et al., 2016).

Dismissing or avoidant attachment showed a significant relationship only with immature defenses including just somatization. Individuals with such a pattern are indifferent to separation and reunion with attachment figures and are better at dealing with stressful situations. They possess a belief of competency and find it easier to inhibit negative emotional states such as fear, aggression, and anxiety with a greater capability to use hypoarousal (Hesse, 1999). Though such a lack of expressivity and ability to regulate is adaptive but only for a short period of time, but if left unchecked can contribute to anxiety disorders, eating disorders, or antisocial personality factors (see Pascuzzo et al., 2015). Research has also indicated that scoring high on attachment avoidance or dismissing attachment is an indication of lack of psychological awareness about one's attachment-related concerns (Mikulincer et al., 2000). This also implicates that since emotions lack an open communication, unconscious expression through physical manifestation, that is, association with somatization is likely to take place (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Such extreme forms of self-reliance and avoidance might lead to denial of personal shortcomings, repression of painful thoughts, and failure to acknowledge negative self-traits and emotions (Fraley & Shaver, 1997).

None of the insecure-type of attachment patterns showed any positive association with mature defenses but were found to be so with emotion dysregulation, unlike in the case of secure attachment pattern. Besharat (2013) have suggested that having an insecure attachment would lead to using maladaptive emotion regulation strategies and inhibit the use of mature defenses.

Affect Regulation and Gender differences

In the present study, males scored higher on all three levels of defense mechanisms (mature, neurotic, and immature defenses) and on most of the individual-level defenses than females. This finding supports evidence for the implication from previous research that men use more defenses to manage their affect (see Petraglia et al., 2009), while females showed significantly greater difficulties in regulating their emotions than men. These findings

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clearly suggest that somehow, in the young adult population, men are somewhat better at managing their own emotions and are using more nonconscious strategies to do so vis-a-vis females who in the interviews reported engaging in more conscious forms of regulation but lacking in managing the areas of acceptance, clarity, focusing on goals, and accessing internal and external means to regulation.

The mean scores from the results show an existence of a pattern of difficulties in almost every area of regulation which is higher than the scores observed in previously existing literature (Anderson et al., 2017; Bytamar et al., 2020; Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Sumida, 2010). The findings also revealed that the young adults possess a somewhat moderate level of clarity and awareness of their emotions that comes with a primary recognition of the physiological manifestation of the emotion followed by an inner awareness of the feelings. Since, the study investigated a retrospective account of participant's emotional experience, the relatively higher level of clarity and awareness of emotion could be explained by the fact that individuals in remembering a past event might sub-consciously have a backward-looking bias for that event and the feelings associated with it. This also implicates that the young adults of the country are able to recognize their negative emotions but are failing to regulate them in a healthy manner on their own. This would point into the direction that both self-regulation and availability or utilization of the resources (like availability of mental health services in the vicinity, seeking social support, etc.) both are hampered in some way.

From the gender differences in the it is scores, evident that females are more reluctant to show acceptance of emotions. The findings of this study also highlight that non-acceptance of emotions has a significant positive relationship with fearful and preoccupied attachment style. Most of the interview participants were less favourable towards accepting the feelings of sadness since they believed that it is an unacceptable emotion including the source of the origin of that sadness, its behavioural expression and the feelings that comes along with it. According to the display rules followed in most Indian cultures, people are supposed to show pro-social behaviour accompanied by positive affections like joy and hospitality while refraining from displaying characteristics that do not fit into the collectivistic notions of the society. The belief of sadness having this negative connotation is embedded in the cultural fibre, perhaps which is why use of strategies like denial and suppression is shown as necessary to adhere to such societal norms.

Contrary to sadness, anger was seen differently by both male and female young adults when it comes to the acceptance of the emotion. Female participants viewed both the arousal and expression of anger, as justified on their part and furthermore, it seemed to occur when it was a necessary evil and their threshold of patience had been crossed. A participant also described how, if the situation demands display of anger, then the refusal to do so, would be acting emotionally numb, which is morally incorrect. Whereas, the male participants reported resorting to violent expressions to in an attempt to regulate their aggression which would defeat the purpose of regulation and instead up-regulate their negative emotions. But this form of expression, in addition to being a socially acceptable form of releasing their emotions in men, could also be seen more as a cry for help due to lack of better ways to manage one's emotions. Thus, unlike women, men find it easier and societally accepted to show anger but also find it consciously unmanageable. Studies have shown that women tend to react more negatively when exposed to unpleasant stimuli than men across life-span (Bradley et al., 2001; Gomez et al., 2013), but interestingly, men react more positively to pleasant stimuli (Gard & Kring, 2007). From a neuropsychological explanation, men and women use different areas of the brain to modulate their response to unpleasant stimuli

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(McRae et al., 2008). Decades of research has also indicated that women are better at recognizing and processing negative events and emotions associated with it than men (e.g., Babchuck et al., 1985).

Avoidance of a situation that would force the individual to deal with potentially threatening and anxiety-provoking emotions came out as a common pattern for some young adults. This form of delay, though provides an immediate relief, fails to resolve the problem in the long run. Two insecure forms of attachment styles: dismissing and fearful adult attachments are also found to be high on avoidance parameters (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Displacement as a defense mechanism turned out to be used significantly more by female young adults than male young adults. A female participant also spoke about how it is easier to throw a tantrum on a potentially less threatening target than actually face the real issue from which those emotions are arising out of. This suggests that taking an easier route to express or release emotions is preferred rather than dealing with the problem head-on. Both avoidance and displacement are just ways to escape the undesirable situation by selecting another one.

Male participants scored significantly higher on the defense of denial than females. During the interviews as well, the males did not elaborate much on their emotional experiences and the process involved in its regulation vis-a-vis the females in the study. Denial is a refusal to believe in the reality of things; of refuting the facts that point towards the direction of that reality. Earlier research has shown some mixed results when it comes to gender differences on denial. This pattern of result was consistent in a study done using DSQ-40 where it was found that men engage more in denying their reality as a way to cope with their painful experiences (Watson & Sinha, 1998). Prior to that, Cramer (1987) using projective methods found that it is women who use denial more often than men. While Mahalik et al. (1998) failed to report any differences between males and females on denial.

The results indicated suppression as both, an emotion regulation strategy as well as a defense mechanism in the participants. In order to regulate affect, suppression came in handy during response inhibition through situation modification in situations that do not welcome natural response tendencies or opinions of an individual. Also, through response modulation emotions that might be appropriate for the given moment to be expressed, for instance, suppressing socially unacceptable feelings from expression. As a defense style, suppression showed a significantly positive correlation with secure and preoccupied adult attachments. Individuals with a secure attachment would be able to use suppression as a healthy form of regulation in social situations while individuals with preoccupied attachment worry about other's needs and live with a fear of abandonment and thus suppressing of one's own thoughts and feelings could be an unhealthy form of regulation and defense. Studies (e.g., Ciuluvica et al., 2019) have shown a similar biological mechanism for suppression and stress which is linked to the activation of a sympathetic nervous system that substitutes appropriate or natural response tendencies of the individual. Although it leads to inhibition of expression, it does not result in inhibition of emotional arousal thus ultimately resulting in a poor and incomplete regulation. Additionally, male participants reported significantly more use of suppression as a psychological defense than females. Men in general are stereotypically viewed as the gender that has a tendency to suppress their emotions or just avoid dealing with them (Nolen- Hoeksema, 2012). This implicates that male young adults are more prone to push down their thoughts and urges that potentially arouse emotions of anxiety or anger which might be difficult to handle or deal with. Previous researchers (Granieri et al., 2017; Tamres et al., 2002; Watson & Sinha, 1998) have also shown very

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similar results where suppression was more preferred by the male population. In order to deploy the attention away from an undesirable situation towards a neutral or desirable one, distraction was reportedly a common strategy. Engaging oneself in academic work, job related tasks, household chores, watching television, listening to music, going to dance or swimming lessons, reading, writing, or simply dissociating into inattentive blindness were few activities that participants expressed as their means of distracting themselves mainly from the constant rumination about their thoughts or self-blame that make them feel miserable. These activities could have acted as pacifiers for the individual to soothe them during a dysregulated state. According to Mikulincer & Shaver (2008) emotion-focused strategies (like self-blame, rumination) can exacerbate negative emotional experience which can contribute to psychopathological manifestations later in adulthood. Other researchers have proposed that distraction can help mitigate the adverse effects that rumination has on mood and possibly prevent disorders like depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Distraction also allows an individual to create a distance from the situation that is leading to a negative arousal or from the ruminating thought itself. Distancing involves active inattention and suppression of stressful thoughts and feelings are referred as “preemptive” since they by-pass the distressing experience (Fraley et al., 2000), while suppression as a defense is a “postemptive” approach since it takes place after the arousal of a threatening memory has taken place.

Other strategies that were employed by respondents in the present study were cognitive change like mindfulness, acceptance, and poetry helped better manage and orient one’s emotions in the present. Journaling was reported as a mood regulation exercise as a healthier way to articulate and thus better regulate one’s thoughts and feelings especially when they did not prefer to share it with anyone else but themselves.

Humor was yet another prevalent form of mature defense that young adults reported using in the face of difficult situations. Unlike other strategies, it helps up-regulate the mood and respond to a situation in a healthier manner. Humor replaces more unacceptable impulses and emotions like aggression or jealousy with a more social and pleasurable response of laughter (Christoff & Dauphin, 2017). Humor also turned out to be strongly associated with a secure attachment style in the study. Freud (1928) himself had called humor as a healthy defensive attitude that enables a person to get through their sufferings and adapt to challenges in life.

Somatization as a psychological defense showed a significant correlation with all four types of adult attachment styles. Also, females secured a significantly higher score on somatization than males. Since Freud, other researchers have reported that females are more prone to exhibit internalizing defenses like somatization (Granieri et al., 2017; McDougall, 1989) in which painful thoughts and feelings are expressed through physical manifestations subconsciously (or unconsciously) as it is a defense mechanism.

From the analysis of the discussion on how they chose to express themselves and those feelings, all the participants talked about a common strategy, that is, crying. For young adults in the study, crying had potential effects on the self-soothing as well as a social-soothing that led to a down-regulation of emotions followed by it. Research has indicated that crying serves multiple purposes including mood repair, self-soothing, catharsis (Gračanin et al., 2014) but there has been a disparity between the post-mood changes due to crying (Simons et al., 2013). This study revealed positive changes in the mood after a crying episode in a distressed state. Although, in retrospective studies, individuals more readily

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remember the events that associate crying with an enhanced mood due to a possible memory bias as well as they are more likely to report positive experiences than negative (Cornelius, 1997).

Lower scores were observed on negative emotional expressivity but higher scores on positive emotional expressivity and impulse strength of that expression. This indicates a reluctance in sharing negative thoughts and emotions such as those of helplessness, aggression, sadness, loneliness, and jealousy with others. Even after taking time for processing those difficult emotions, their expression is limited to only those with whom the individual shares a close relationship or secure attachment. One of the roadblocks in that expression was reported as a belief of lack of understanding in others about one's problems. The other individual does not understand the gravity or the emotional impact it is creating on the individual who is going through that situation. Individuals also reported difficulty in finding an optimum balance or a state of homeostasis after an emotional arousal due to a negatively overwhelming situation.

Polyvagal theory has been used to describe the premise behind emotional dysregulation in children and adults (Beauchaine et al., 2007). It seeks to provide an understanding of how activation of autonomic nervous system contributes to development of maladaptive and adaptive responses of an individual. In therapy, especially trauma-focused therapies, up and down-regulation of emotions helps modulate one's response to stressful situations. Polyvagal theory suggests the presence of three zones of arousal. Ventral vagal zone is the safety zone that allows an individual to make relationships and restore themselves; sympathetic zone where the individual perceives a threat and gets ready to choose the defensive response; and dorsal vagal zone in which the individual is overwhelmed due to neuroception of threat and their fight or flight system shuts down leading them to dissociate or disconnect. Its applications have been known in the therapeutic realm to combat regulation of hyperaroused and hypoaroused states. The results of the study suggest how young adults are using more defenses and are more dysregulated that forms a recipe for psychological and lifestyle disorders. This proposes that there is a lack of flexibility in the nervous system to move up and down on the ladder of different zones of arousal. Perhaps using polyvagal theory to understand the manifestation of physiological, psychological, and behavioural arousal due to interpersonal stressors could be better regulated.

CONCLUSION

Researchers like Bowlby and Ainsworth have worked intensively on the areas of attachment and affect regulation amongst infants and children and later on for adolescents for decades. In recent years, other researchers like Gross and Bartholomew have extended these theories for adults as well. The current research is an attempt to build on those conceptualizations for young adults and see how their implications play out in the current times. The study used a mixed method approach with a concurrent triangulation design with 150 participants in the quantitative phase and 8 participants for the open-ended interviews. Upon analysis, the data revealed moderately high levels of dysregulation in the areas of non- acceptance of emotional responses, difficulties in engaging in goal-directed behaviours and impulse control issues with a limited access to strategies for regulating their affect. While a relatively average scores could be seen for the domains of awareness and clarity of emotions. The expressivity of negative emotions was also lower than positive emotions. A number of gender differences were also observed as a part of the results. Females displayed higher impulse strength in expressing their emotions and faced more difficulty in emotion regulation than men. Men were more engaged in using psychological defenses to manage

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their emotional responses than females. Men were also significantly more involved in denial and suppression of emotions while females were more prone to use displacement and somatization as regulatory mechanisms. Strategies for regulating affect reported in the study are avoidance, distraction, rumination, denial, suppression, displacement, somatization, humor, self-soothing through crying, mindfulness, acceptance, and journaling among others. A perception of lack of understanding in others and difficulty in achieving a balanced emotional state after arousal were additional difficulties reported by the participants. The study also showed that the young adults are more towards a disorganized-dismissing pattern of attachment style than a secure attachment and this pattern is significantly more prevalent in females than males. The results support the existing evidence of associations between use of immature and neurotic forms of defense mechanisms and insecure attachment pattern vis-à-vis use of mature defenses and secure attachment. Males are also evidently facing although not less but relatively lesser difficulties in regulating their emotions but they are also using more psychological defenses for that regulation.

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