

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Amanda Rose, Psychological Sciences; Dr. Ashley Groh, Psychological Sciences

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Stress and Adjustment in Adolescents: Analyzing Co-Rumination, Coping, and Physiological Regulation as Moderators

Kassandra Ramos, Caroline Davey, Brayden Langendoerfer, Sarah Borowski, Amanda Rose, and Ashley Groh

Stress in adolescence can cause adverse effects and the more negative life experiences in adolescence, the higher levels of internalizing symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Kim et al., 2003). Past research indicates stress has negative implications for adolescent well-being (Nicolai et al., 2013). Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the factors that exacerbate or relieve stress is crucial. Coping style and physiological regulation are factors that may alleviate stress, whereas co-rumination worsens it (Rose et al., 2016). The current study considers the role of stress as a possible predictor of internalizing symptoms. Further, we investigate how physiological regulation, coping style, and co-rumination affect the relation between stress and internalizing symptoms.

Participants were 180 adolescents (118 girls; 62 boys; M age = 14.09 years). Adolescents completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) to report their overall stress levels (e.g., “I worry a lot of the time; 1 = Not at All True, 5 = Really True”). They completed questions from a depression scale (e.g., “In the past week I was sad, lonely, or fearful”) (CES-D; Eaton et al., 2004). Participants completed the Co-rumination Questionnaire (Rose, 2002) and Brief COPE scale (Carver, 1997) to assess positive and negative coping.

Respiratory sinus arrhythmia was used as a measure of physiological regulation. To assess physiological regulation, three disposable electrodes are applied to the participants' torsos to monitor heart rate. To monitor respiration, a belt is applied around their diaphragms. Physiological responses are recorded while the participants sit quietly for three minutes at different times during the visit. Analyses will consider stress as a predictor of adjustment. They will also consider coping style, co-rumination, and physiological regulation as effects on the relationship between stress and internalizing symptoms. We will also examine sex differences among stress, indicators of regulation, and internalizing symptoms.