

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF EMPATHY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTACHMENT ANXIETY AND MORAL REASONING AMONG COUNSELING STUDENTS

by

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This study investigated the relationship between attachment anxiety, type of empathy, (cognitive empathy, emotional contagion, and emotional disconnection) and moral reasoning among counseling students. A total of forty-three students enrolled in a practicum or internship course at a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited program completed a survey consisting of basic demographics, the anxiety subscale of the Experience in Close Relationships short (ECR-S) to measure attachment anxiety, the Basic Empathy Scale-Adult version (BES-A) to measure type empathy, and the Defining Issues Test version 2 (DIT-2) to measure moral reasoning.

This study tested nine hypotheses using hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine a) the main effect of attachment anxiety on levels of moral reasoning, b) the main effect of type of empathy, (cognitive empathy, emotional contagion, and emotional disconnection) on levels of moral reasoning, and c) the mediating effect of type of empathy on the relationship between attachment anxiety and moral reasoning. A bivariate correlations analysis was also conducted to assess the relationship between attachment anxiety, cognitive empathy, emotional contagion, emotional disconnection, moral reasoning and the main demographic variable sex.

Data supported the research hypothesis this study, however, attachment anxiety and

moral reasoning was not found to have a significant relationship. Therefore, type of empathy did not have a mediating effect between attachment anxiety and moral reasoning as no relationship was present to be influenced. One finding of particular interest was cognitive empathy significant relationship to moral reasoning. Neither attachment anxiety, emotional contagion, or emotional disconnection were significantly correlated with levels of moral reasoning. Sex and cognitive empathy were significantly correlated with levels of moral reasoning. Additionally, attachment anxiety was correlated to emotional contagion. The implications for clinical practices are discussed, and recommendations for future research are provided.