

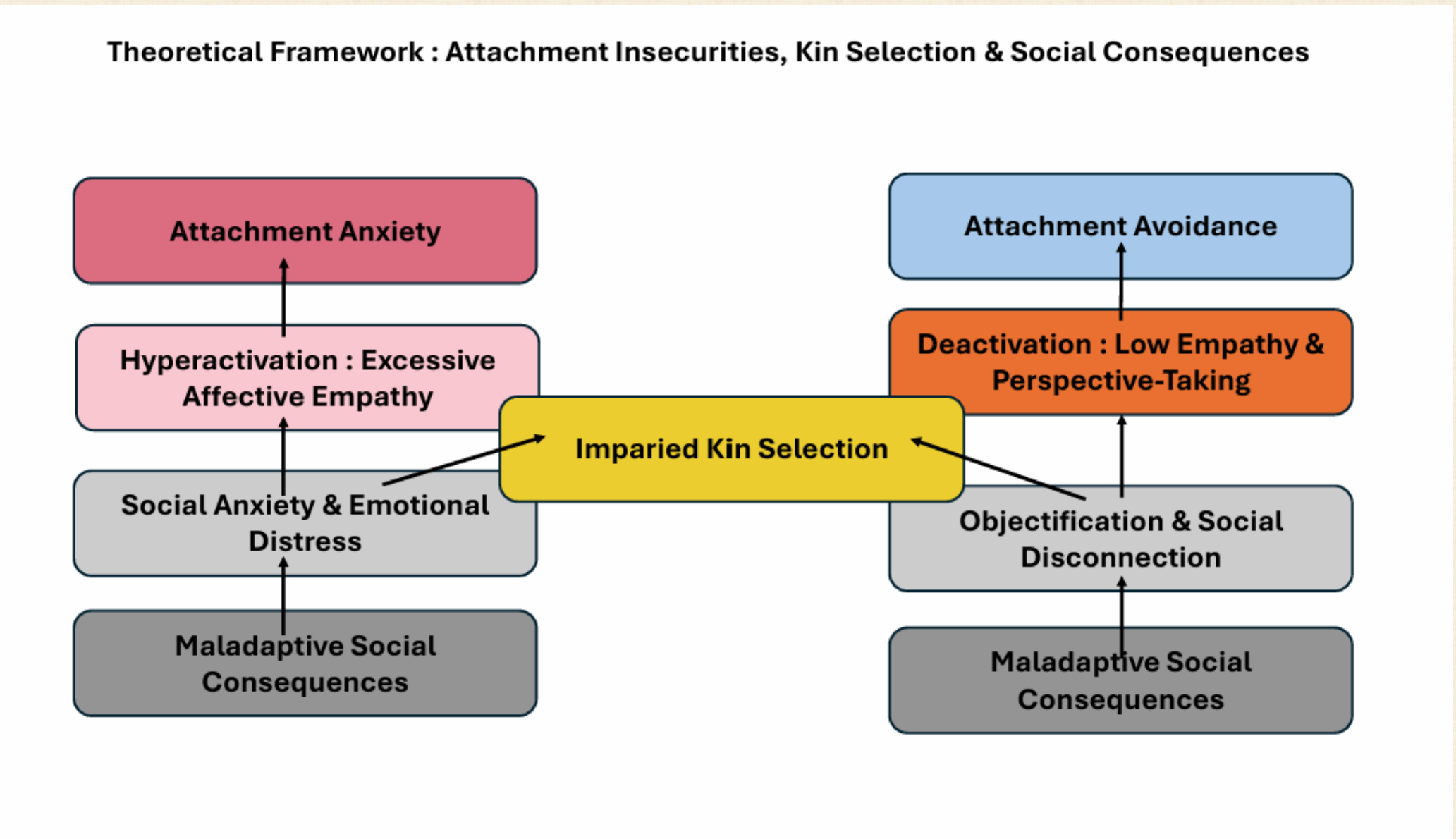
Empathy Towards a Close Person as an Alternative Pathway on the Relationship between Attachment Insecurities and Social Anxiety

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Introduction:

- People with attachment anxiety are likely to experience traumatic, prolonged grief following separations and losses. They are also prone to becoming angry and feeling slighted, even when their partner's behavior is not hostile or hurtfully motivated. They tend to interpret positive events negatively or focus on the downsides of potentially uplifting experiences (1).
- Individuals with attachment avoidance are less likely to react emotionally, whether positively or negatively, with the possible exception of vengeful anger. They may appear resilient in the face of separations and losses, but they are likely to harbor negative thoughts and feelings that can become personally and interpersonally damaging if their defenses are strained and collapse. Their anger is more likely to be destructive rather than constructively transforming for relationships (1).
- Moreover, people with attachment avoidance prefer exchange relationships with close individuals after one year, while people with attachment anxiety tend to adopt a calculative mindset in their relationships (Ecer & Gasiorowska, in prep).
- Additionally, people with attachment avoidance exhibit lower empathy, which contributes to the objectification of others (Ecer et al., in prep).
- However, individuals with attachment anxiety display higher levels of affective empathy (2).
- Affective empathy has been shown to predict social anxiety in a longitudinal study (3).
- Nonetheless, the underlying mechanism linking attachment insecurities and social anxiety remains unclear (4).
- We propose that attachment anxiety is associated with increased affective empathy toward close individuals due to hyperactivating strategies, which, in turn, result in social anxiety. Conversely, people with attachment avoidance exhibit lower levels of affective empathy and perspective-taking toward close individuals, leading to social anxiety. This may be because they prefer exchange relationships and frequently need to interact with strangers.
- Thus, both **hyperactivation (anxiety) and deactivation (avoidance) of attachment-related kin selection strategies** can contribute to **maladaptive social consequences**, affecting interpersonal relationships and long-term well-being.

Attachment Anxiety → Hyperactivation (Excessive Affective Empathy) → Social Anxiety & Emotional Distress → Maladaptive Social Consequences



Attachment Avoidance → Deactivation (Low Empathy & Perspective-Taking) → Objectification & Social Disconnection → Maladaptive Social Consequences

Study 1: Empathy as a Mediator



Method

$N = 255$ Turkish Participants without a psychological disorder (169 women 85 men, $M_{age} = 31.10$, $SD = 10.40$).

Independent Variables:

- Attachment anxiety ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.53$) and attachment avoidance ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.26$).

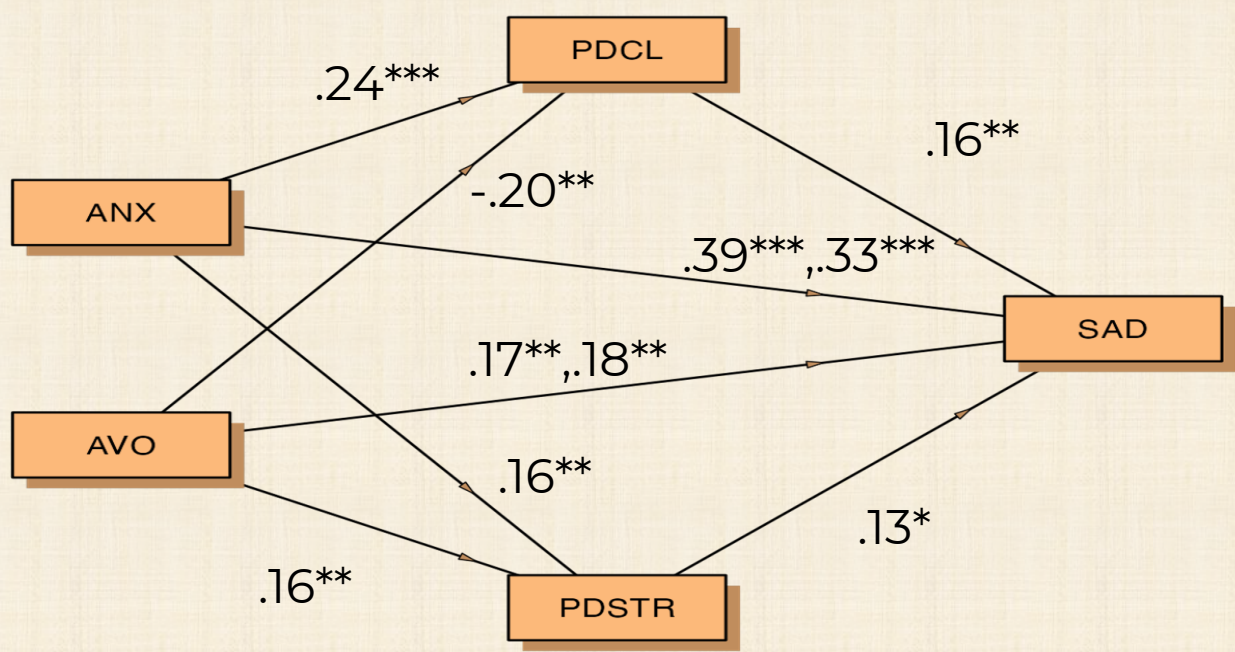
Mediators

- Personal distress CL ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.63$)
- Personal distress STR ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 0.62$)
- Empathic Concern CL ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.74$)
- Empathic Concern STR ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.71$)
- Perspective-Taking CL ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.70$)
- Perspective-Taking STR ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.87$)

Dependent Variable

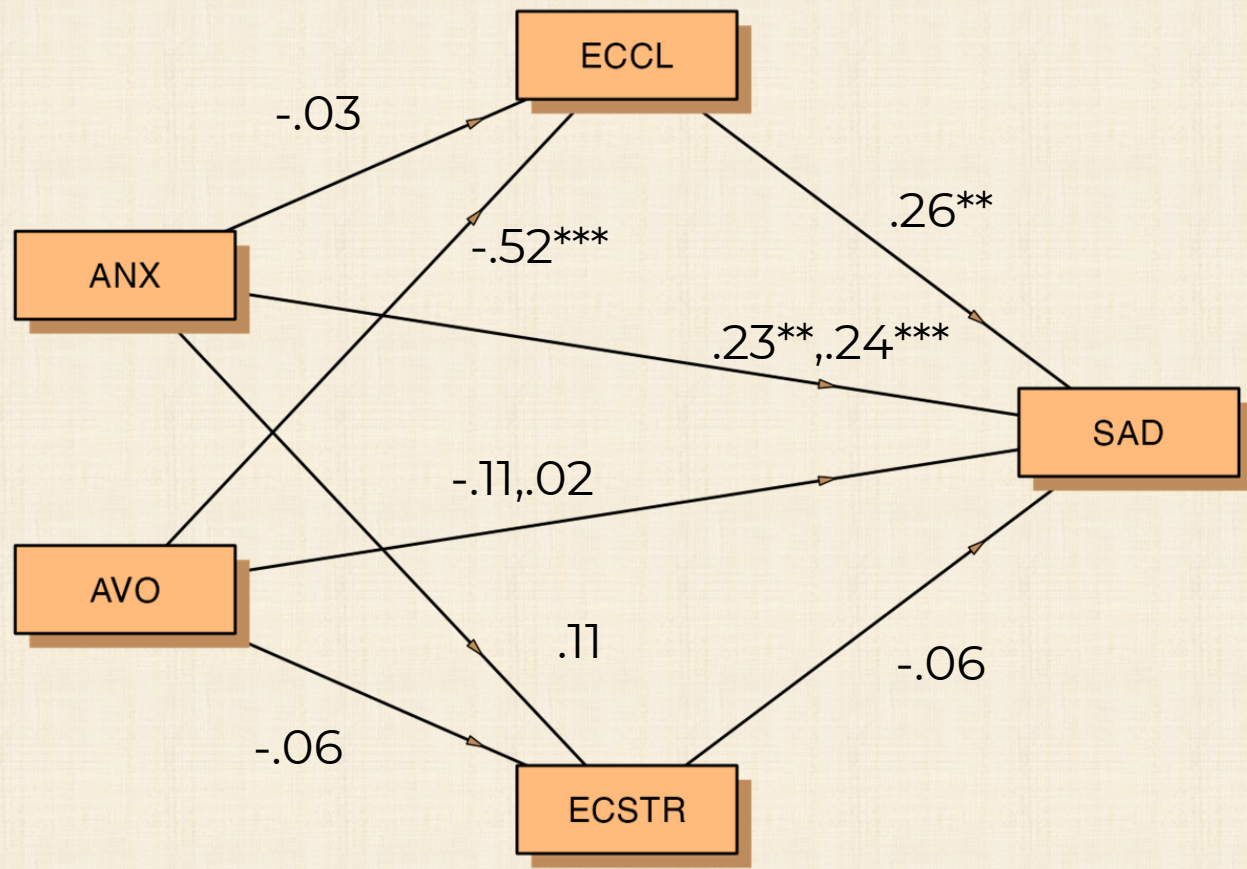
- Social Anxiety ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 0.95$)

Results 1b



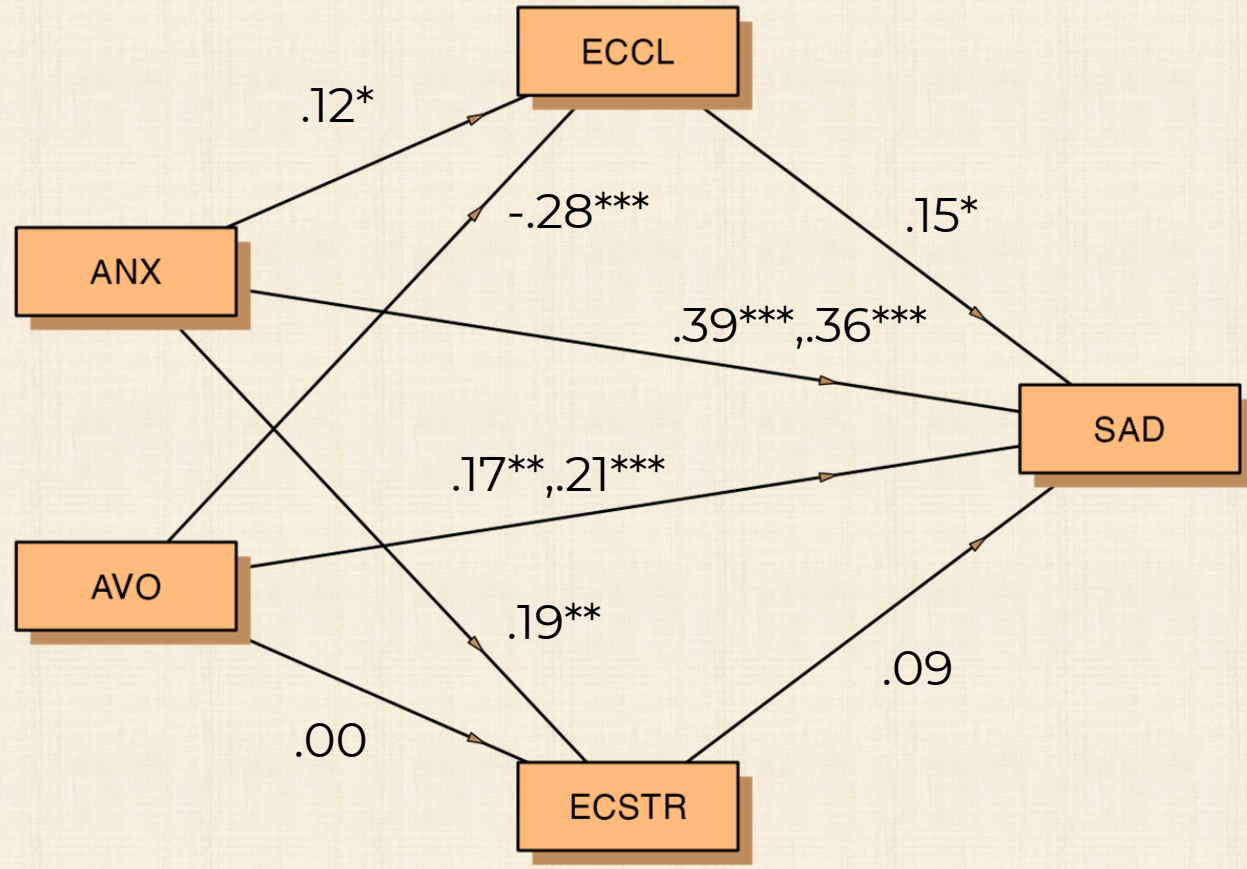
		95% C.I. (a)			
Type	Effect	β	SE	Lower	Upper
Indirect	ANX \Rightarrow PDCL \Rightarrow SAD	.02	.01	.003	.04
	ANX \Rightarrow PDSTR \Rightarrow SAD	.01	-.002	.02	.03
	AVO \Rightarrow PDCL \Rightarrow SAD	-.02	.01	-.04	-.001
	AVO \Rightarrow PDSTR \Rightarrow SAD	.01	.01	-.002	.03

Results 2a



		95% C.I. (a)			
Type	Effect	β	SE	Lower	Upper
Indirect	ANX \Rightarrow ECCL \Rightarrow SAD	-.00	.01	-.02	.02
	ANX \Rightarrow ECSTR \Rightarrow SAD	-.00	.005	-.01	.01
	AVO \Rightarrow ECCL \Rightarrow SAD	-.09	.03	-.15	-.03
	AVO \Rightarrow ECSTR \Rightarrow SAD	.00	.004	-.01	.01

Results 1a



		95% C.I. (a)			
Type	Effect	β	SE	Lower	Upper
Indirect	ANX \Rightarrow ECCL \Rightarrow SAD	.01	.01	-.003	.02
	ANX \Rightarrow ECSTR \Rightarrow SAD	.01	.01	-.004	.03
	AVO \Rightarrow ECCL \Rightarrow SAD	-.03	.01	-.06	-.002
	AVO \Rightarrow ECSTR \Rightarrow SAD	1.26e-4	.004	-.01	.01

Conclusion

- We found that **higher levels of attachment anxiety predict higher levels of affective empathy toward a close person, which in turn results in higher levels of social anxiety.** On the other hand, **higher levels of attachment avoidance predict lower empathic concern and affective empathy toward a close person, which leads to lower social anxiety.** However, **perspective-taking toward a close person or a stranger did not mediate the relationship between attachment insecurities and social anxiety.**

Study 2: Replicated Study



Method

$N = 208$ Polish students without a psychological disorder (182 women 24 men, $M_{age} = 28.40$, $SD = 16.80$).

Independent Variables:

- Attachment anxiety ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.31$) and attachment avoidance ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.21$).

Mediators

- Personal distress CL ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.66$)
- Personal distress STR ($M = 1.53$, $SD = 0.58$)
- Empathic Concern CL ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.80$)
- Empathic Concern STR ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.89$)
- Perspective-Taking CL ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.70$)
- Perspective-Taking STR ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.76$)

Dependent Variable

- Social Anxiety ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.82$)

Intervention

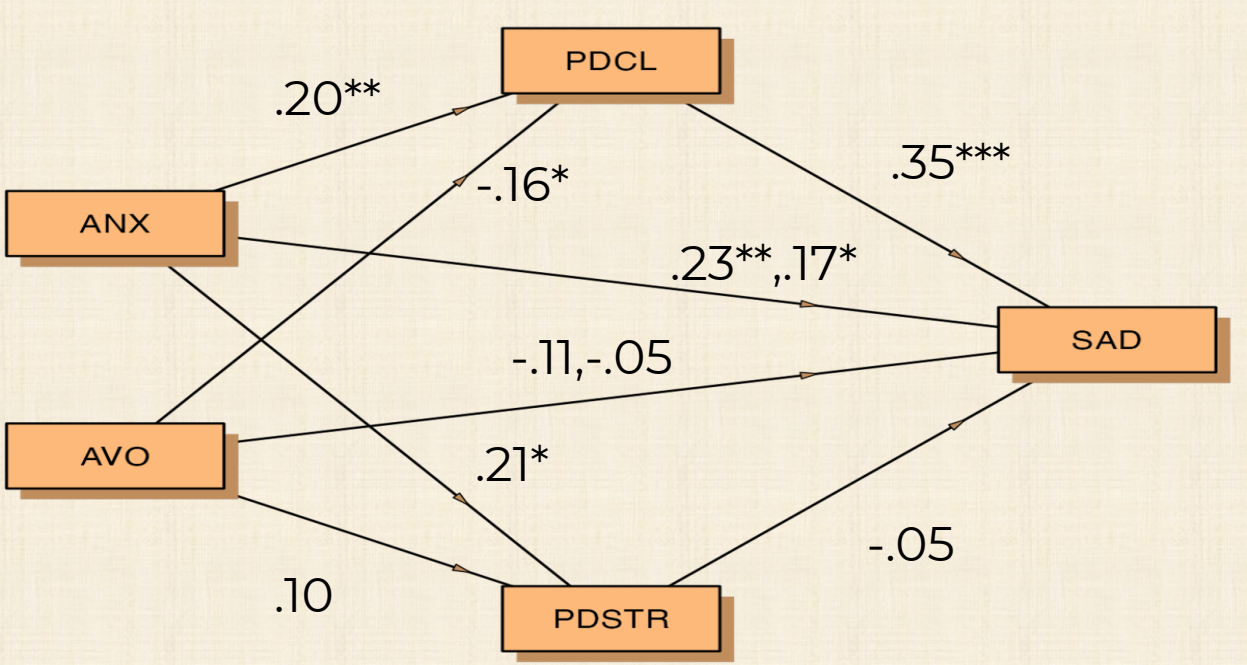
For Individuals with Attachment Anxiety:

- Focus on **emotion regulation training** to help manage heightened affective empathy and reduce emotional overwhelm in social situations.

For Individuals with Attachment Avoidance:

- Promote **empathy-building exercises** (e.g., role-playing, active listening) to increase empathic concern and foster emotional connection in close relationships.

Results 2b



		95% C.I. (a)			
Type	Effect	β	SE	Lower	Upper
Indirect	ANX \Rightarrow PDCL \Rightarrow SAD	.05	.02	.01	.08
	ANX \Rightarrow PDSTR \Rightarrow SAD	-.01	.01	.03	.01
	AVO \Rightarrow PDCL \Rightarrow SAD	-.04	.02	-.08	-.001
	AVO \Rightarrow PDSTR \Rightarrow SAD	-.00	.00	-.01	.01

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