

NAME OF PRESENTING AUTHOR: Maya Rieselbach

EMAIL ADDRESS OF PRESENTING AUTHOR: maya.rieselbach@colorado.edu

A protective role of internalizing symptoms in adolescent substance use: popularity and harm avoidance as potential mediators

Maya M. Rieselbach^{1,2}, Shelley Gresko^{1,2}, Robin P. Corley², John K. Hewitt^{1,2}, and Soo Hyun Rhee^{1,2}

¹Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of Colorado Boulder, USA,

²Institute for Behavioral Genetics, University of Colorado Boulder, USA

KEYWORDS: *substance use, internalizing, popularity, harm avoidance, adolescent*

ABSTRACT:

Psychological symptoms are generally considered to pose risk for substance use, yet findings suggest that internalizing symptoms may protect from adolescent substance use after controlling for co-occurring externalizing symptoms. The present study examined two potential mediators of the internalizing-specific association with substance use: popularity and harm avoidance. Adolescent substance use typically occurs in social contexts, so more socially-connected teens may have more opportunities to access substances. Internalizing symptoms may be associated with reduced popularity with peers, which may in turn lead to fewer connections through which to obtain substances. Also, internalizing symptoms may be positively associated with harm avoidance (i.e., depressed or anxious adolescents may be actively avoiding potential risks associated with substance use). The present study used data from the Colorado Longitudinal Twin Study and Colorado Adoption Project. Assessments of internalizing, externalizing, social competence, and harm avoidance were collected between the ages of 7 and 17. Substance use was assessed at age 17 and analyses included a latent substance use factor with loadings on alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and other drug use. Results supported an internalizing-specific negative association with substance use. Popularity was negatively correlated with both substance use and internalizing, suggesting that it does not mediate the association between internalizing and substance use. Harm avoidance was positively correlated with internalizing and negatively correlated with substance use, yet mediation analyses did not support harm avoidance as a mediator of the association between internalizing and substance use. Future research is needed to explore the protective influence of internalizing on substance use.

GRANT SUPPORT: National Institutes of Health Grants AG046938, DA011015, DA038504, and DA017637