Attachment as a Moderator of the Negative Outcomes of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Jeff Aspelmeier
Department of Psychology
radford university

In collaboration with Dr. Ann Elliott
Childhood Sex Abuse (CSA)

• Prevalence
  – Females = between 20-30%
    • 54-62% when non-contact abuse is included.

• Outcomes in Adulthood
  • Negative Psychological Outcomes vary from non-existent (40%) to extremely persistent
  • Depression (4 times as likely)
  • Suicidal Ideation (2 times as likely)
  • Anxiety (5 times as likely)
  • Anger
  • PTSD (36 – 66% prevalence rate)
  • Dissociation
  • Personality Disorders
  • Cognitive Distortions (self-blame, low self-esteem helplessness)
  • Externalized Behaviors (Self Mutalation, Bulimia, Substance Abuse)
  • Interpersonal Difficulties
Attachment Theory

• Ethological Approach to Parent-Child Bonding (Bowlby, 1969, 73, 80)
  – The attachment Behavioral System

• Individual Differences in Attachment styles
  – Variation in parent’s willingness to provide a secure base, and child’s secure base behavior.
  – **Secure** = P. is consistently responsive to C’s needs. C. uses P. as secure base from which to explore
  – **Avoidant** = P. is consistently unresponsive to C’s needs. C. uses pseudo-exploration to minimize affect expressions.
  – **Ambivalent** = P. is inconsistently responsive. C. is preoccupied with monitoring the P.
Adult Attachment Styles

Bartholomew (1990)

Four Category Model

Secure: It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don’t worry about being alone or having others not accept me. (+ SELF / + OTHER)

Dismissing: I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me. (+SELF / - OTHER)

Preoccupied: I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them. (- SELF / + OTHER)

Fearful: I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others. (-SELF/- OTHER)
CSA and Attachment

- Attachment offers theoretical organization to an atheoretical area of research.
- A majority of the research addressing the role of attachment in CSA outcomes has focused on using attachment to explain (mediate) the relationship between CSA and negative outcomes.
- Fewer studies have focused on the role of secure attachment in preventing negative CSA outcomes.
Mediation vs. Moderation
Barron & Kenny (1986)

• Mediators are Variables that Explain the relationship between an IV and DV.
  – Demonstrated when the effects of the mediator are statistically controlled for and the overall association between the IV and DV are Reduced.
    – IV → DV       IV →///→DV (when MV is controlled for)
  – This suggests that the impact the IV has on the DV is attributable (in part or completely) to the influence of the Mediator.
    – IV → MV → DV
Mediation vs. Moderation
Barron & Kenny (1986)

• Moderator variables influence the strength and direction of the relationship between the IV and DV.
  – E.g.,
    • MV low : IV $\rightarrow$ DV (strong relationship)
    • MV high: IV $\rightarrow$ DV (weak relationship)

• Moderator effects are demonstrated by statistical interactions between the IV and DV.
CSA, Mediation & Moderation

• The Mediation Model of Attachment, CSA, & Outcomes: (MV precedes IV)
  Child Attach $\rightarrow$ CSA $\rightarrow$ - outcomes

• The Aspelmeier-Elliott model of Attachment, CSA, & Outcomes
  Ch. Attach $\rightarrow$ CSA $\rightarrow$ Attach. Curr (mv) $\rightarrow$ Outcomes
  1. Ch. Attach $\rightarrow$ CSA $\rightarrow$ sec attach $\rightarrow$ few neg. Outcomes
  2. Ch. Attach $\rightarrow$ CSA $\rightarrow$ insec attach $\rightarrow$ more neg. Outcomes
Participants

• 336 female Radford University Undergraduates
• Age: 18 – 21 years (Mean = 18.40, SD = 2.11)
  – one 31 year old & one 52 year old
• Ethnicity:
  • 88.1% Caucasian
  • 7.2 % African American
  • 0.6 % Latino/Hispanic
  • 1.3 % Asian/Pacific Islander
  • 2.8 % Other
• Class Rank:
  • 84.4 % Freshmen
  • 11.8 % Sophomores
  • 3.1 % Jr.
  • 0.3 % Sr.
CSA Frequencies

• Abuse Type

  – Adult or older person (teenager, babysitter) tried to touch or look at your private parts. 19.7%
  – Older person tried to make you look at or touch their private parts. 10.1%
  – Older person tried to grab you, or kiss you in a sexual way that made you feel afraid or bad 16.9%
  – Someone (or group) own age tried to threaten, force, or trick you into doing something sexually that you did not want to do 16.9%
  – Anyone (older or same age) acted suspicious or strange in a way that made you wonder if they were trying to get sexual with you: too friendly, hanging around when unwanted, unwanted touching, or try to get you to do weird things 32.7%
CSA Frequencies

• Abuse Type
  – Total Attempted and Complete Sex Abuse 48.8
  – Total Contact and Exposure Abuse 1, 2, & 4 28.8
  – Self Label as Sexually Abused 11.7

• Association between Self Label & Reported Experiences
  – Attempted or Completed X Self Label
    • $X^2(1, n=325)= 44.93^{***}$
    • 76% reporting the behavior don’t endorse the label
  – Contact or Exposure X Self Label
    • $X^2(1, n=325)= 98.06^{***}$
    • 61% reporting the behavior don’t endorse the label
Attachment Measures

- Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994)
  - 30 items responded to on a 5 pt. numerical rating scale (note: we also used the classic 4 paragraph RQ)
  - Averaged to form scores for 6 scales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SECURE</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISMISSING</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>PREOCCUPIED</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEARFUL</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIEW OF SELF</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>14.94</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIEW OF OTHER</td>
<td>.842</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attachment Measures

- Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).
  - Only Parent portion reported
    - 25 items responded to on a 5 pt. numerical rating scale.
    - Responses averaged to form 3 scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.851</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.939</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>.87</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Psychological Functioning Measures**

- **The Trauma Symptoms Inventory (TSI)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean (M)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (SD)</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious Arousal</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anger/Irritability</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive Experiences</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>0-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive Avoidance</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>0-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Concerns</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>0-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional Sexual Beh.</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>0-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Self Reliance</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension Reduction Beh.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CSA x RSQ SEC x Dissociation

Correlations (β)
CSA = .21***
SEC = -.28***
CSA x SEC
Low Sec = .16^  
Med Sec = .13
High Sec = .35***
CSA x RSQ SEC x Anxious Arousal

Correlations (β)
CSA = .14**
SEC = -.35***
CSA x SEC
Low Sec = .07
Med Sec = .07
High Sec = .33***
CSA x RQ SEC x Anger Irritability

Correlations (β)
CSA = .16**
SEC = -.18***
CSA x SEC
Low Sec = -.03
Med Sec = .17^ 
High Sec = .29***
CSA x RQ SELF x Anger Irritability

Correlations (β)
CSA = .16**
SEC = -.22***
CSA x SEC
Neg Self = .03
Neut Self = .18^
Pos Self = .30**
CSA x Par Alienation x Impaired Self Reliance

Correlations (β)
CSA = .13*
SEC = -.413***
CSA x SEC
High Alien = .08
Med Alien = .14
Low Alien = .29**
CSA x Par Alienation x Anger/Irritability

Correlations (β)
CSA = .07
SEC = -.37***
CSA x SEC
High Alien = -.05
Med Alien = .06
Low Alien = .35***
Conclusions

• CSA
  – Correlations between CSA and Outcomes are consistent with past research
  – Correlations between Attachment and Outcomes are also consistent
  – Significant support for the Moderation Model of Attachment and CSA
Conclusions

- Further, it seems that Parent Attachment and Adult Romantic Attachment buffer different types of CSA outcomes
  - Romantic Attachment Moderated the relationship between CSA and Dissociation and CSA and Anxious Arousal
  - Parent Attachment quality moderated the association between CSA and Impaired Self Reliance
  - Both types of attachment seemed to moderate the CSA and Anger/Irritability relationship
Conclusions

• More analysis and Further investigation is required.

• A prospective study is called for, to track the attachment, CSA, and outcome path across childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood.

• This study highlights the role of attachment as a partial buffer against negative CSA outcomes.