

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



Volume 3, Issue 5

May 2010

Dear Colleague,

As our field begins to encompass perspectives and techniques beyond cognitive behavioral therapy, it is essential that we guide our work with empirical data whenever possible. The research being highlighted in this month's issue opens the door to the importance of "Attachment."

With this new study, data suggests that the development of "Attachment" coupled with other factors may be significant in the adolescent's choice to sexually abuse. This single study opens the door for further research and challenges us all to think more seriously about how to integrate attachment work into our practices. For some clients, working through Attachment issues may well hold the key to their ability to stop abusing. For others, the adolescent's age, environment, and clinical realities may require other strategies that are compensatory approaches. As the juvenile field expands, we are pleased to be part of your professional efforts to stay current.

Attachment Theory Can Help our Understanding of Sexual Abuse Perpetration by Adolescents

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

The Question

Does an adolescent's ability to maintain relationships have an impact on re-offense risk or the types of offenses he or she will perpetrate?

The Research

Over the past 10 years, a number of researchers have looked to attachment theory to help explain adult sexual offense pathways. That adult research provided a basis for exploring similar issues among adolescents (e.g., Rich, 2006). Miner, Robinson, Knight, Berg, Romine, and Netland (2010) took up the challenge of using attachment theory as a way to understand adolescents who sexually abuse children. The authors provide important new data about adolescents; they found that anxiety about building and sustaining relationships has an indirect effect on sexual abuse perpetration. The effects of attachment anxiety were evident through:

- Isolation from peers
- Difficulty relating to girls or women

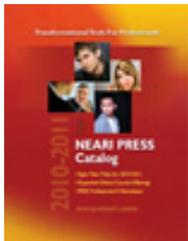
Equally important was the authors' finding that sexual abuse perpetration against children was "negatively related to a cynical misanthropic view of others." In other words, rather than having negative attitudes about others, as might be expected, these youth held positive beliefs about how others should be treated.

These results indicate that adolescents who turn to children to meet their intimacy needs do so because of their need for closeness and

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to explore a particular issue in an upcoming newsletter, please let us know.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

www.nearipress.org



NEARI RESOURCES

Publications from NEARI



Stages of
Accomplishment -
Clinician's Manual and All
4 Workbooks
by Phil Rich

Stages of Achievement is a set of four inter-related workbooks that assist in the treatment of sexually abusive or sexually troubled adolescents. Building from simpler ideas to more complex and richer concepts, the workbooks take youth through a series of guided exercises that touch on many of the most significant elements of treatment. Augmenting individualized treatment, the

because of a deep fear of rejection from their peers coupled with a relatively high sex drive and a preoccupation with sexual thoughts and fantasies.

In their conclusion, Miner and his colleagues suggest that sexually abusive behavior toward children by adolescents is related to the adolescent's:

- Need for interpersonal involvement
- Feelings of inadequacy when interacting socially with girls
- High levels of sex drive and preoccupation

Adolescents with this constellation of factors may turn to children to meet their intimacy and sexual needs, all of which seem to be exaggerated compared with other troubled youth.

Implications for Professionals

Professionals should take attachment styles into account when conducting an assessment and when developing the appropriate treatment plan for an adolescent. Maintaining a therapeutic relationship is crucial to this end. Within this relationship, the professional can address the adolescent's perceived inadequacy and appropriate management of sexual preoccupation. The ability to heal a long history of attachment difficulties is not always possible. In these situations, the professional may want to explore alternative approaches such as: minimizing insistence upon intimacy, working more cognitively, developing coping skills, developing life and transitional skills, and changing thinking errors. Learning to differentiate the appropriate attachment intervention for each adolescent is the "art" of clinical work.

The professional will also want to focus and build upon the strengths of the adolescent in treatment. In many cases this strength may lie with the lack of cynicism and a lack of mistrust more common in other delinquent populations. These strengths can be a building block towards creating healthier attachments later in life.

Implications for the Field

This study demonstrates the importance of considering attachment and other variables' roles in sexual abuse perpetration. As the field expands to encompass a wider variety of treatment interventions to meet the complexity of the adolescents we treat, attachment theory holds promise for many of our clients. This area of study is rapidly becoming one of the key areas for all who work with this population.

Over the past several years, increasing numbers of recognized leaders in the adolescent field (Phil Rich in the USA, Stephen Smallbone in Australia, Bill Marshall and his associates in Ontario) have expanded the literature base and offered workshops on this important facet of treatment. This study brings additional credence to attachment theory to our growing list of helpful treatment approaches.

workbooks are designed to be used in community-based or residential care settings. The accompanying Clinician's Guide will help guide therapists in their use of the workbooks and includes supplemental tests to ensure retention of learning.

For more information, click the image of the book or go to the NEARI Press website at <http://bookstore.nearipress.org/>.

Catalog #: 9996
Special price: \$49.00 +
S&H (regularly \$71.00)

Join Our Mailing List!

Questions/Feedback

Please email us at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413.540.0712, x14 to let us know if you have a question or a topic you would like us to cover.

If at any time you no longer want the e-newsletter, just let us know and we will remove your name from our list.

We value your trust. We will not sell or give your contact information to any other organization.

Reference

- *Understanding Sexual Perpetration Against Children: Effects of Attachment Style, Interpersonal Involvement, and Hypersexuality.*
Michael H. Miner, Beatrice "Bean" E. Robinson, Raymond A. Knight, Dianne Berg, Rebecca Swinburne Romine, and Jason Netland. (2010) *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 22(1) 58-77.

Abstract

This study explores in an adolescent sample hypotheses about child sexual abuse perpetration drawn from contemporary theories that implicate insecure attachment and adolescent social development. Specifically, three 13- to 18-year-old adolescent male samples (sex offenders with child victims, sex offenders with peer/adult victims, and nonsex delinquent youth) were compared in a cross-sectional design. Participants completed a computer-administered self-report questionnaire and a semi-structured attachment style interview. Attachment style was coded by two independent raters blind to study hypotheses and group membership. The results indicated an indirect effect for attachment style. Attachment anxiety affected involvement with peers and interpersonal adequacy. Feelings of interpersonal inadequacy, combined with oversexualization and positive attitudes toward others distinguished sex offenders with child victims from nonsex delinquents and from sex offenders with peer/adult victims. These data provide a preliminary model of sexual abuse perpetration consistent with contemporary theories. Attachment anxiety with a lack of misanthropic attitudes toward others appears to lead to isolation from peers and feelings of interpersonal inadequacy. Individuals with this constellation of factors may turn to children to meet their intimacy and sexual needs, both of which seem to be exaggerated compared with other troubled youth.

To print a pdf of this article, click [NEARI NEWS](#).

FEATURED WEBSITE

International Association for the Study of Attachment (IASA)

www.iasa-dmm.org

The primary purpose of the International Association for the Study of Attachment (IASA) is to seek and promote theoretically meaningful and evidence-based treatment methods to generate a new model of treatment that is systemic, developmental, transactional, and evolutionary. The website includes an excellent overview of attachment across the lifecycle.

About the Editor:
David S. Prescott, LICSW

[David Prescott website](#)

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.