

Adolescent Parental Attachment and Links With Concurrent Risky Behavior Profiles

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Introduction

Although a shift toward greater autonomy takes place during adolescence, the parent-child relationship continues to play a crucial role in the adolescent's competencies (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Research suggests that adolescent attachment with parents is an important predictor of adolescent engagement in risky behavior (Booth, Farrell, and Varano, 2008).

Little is known about *whether* or *how* risky behavior may be organized in adolescence and whether different typologies or profiles of risk taking behaviors may exist. Research suggests that the organization of risk behaviors in adolescence typically involves engagement with multiple risky behaviors (Elliott, 1992; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Jessor, 1992; Osgood, 1991), but the existence of distinct groupings or patterns of risk taking behavior has not been explored. This study examined profiles of risky behavior and associations with parental attachment classifications.

Method

Participants

- Derived from phase 4 of the NICHD SECCYD, when participants were 15 years old.
- 906 adolescents
- 51% Boys, 49% Girls
- 81% White/ European American, 19% non-White/ Other

Attachment Measure:

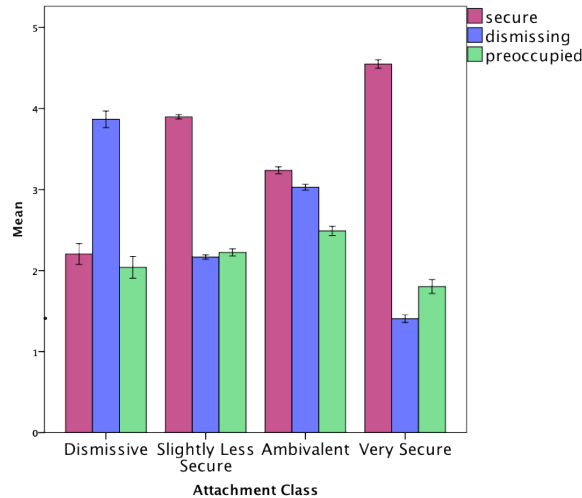
- Adolescent Report of the Parental Relationship Questionnaire (Furman & Simon, 2004). 27 items: 9 items per attachment classification: Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive.

Risky Behavior Measure:

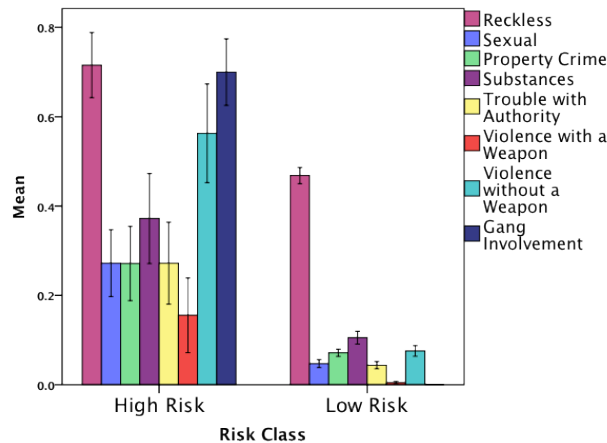
- The Risky Behavior Questionnaire (Conger & Elder, 1994; Halpern-Felsher, Cornell, Kropp, & Tschann, 2005). 61 items total: 8 sub-types of risky behavior.

Results

4-Class Latent Class Model of Attachment



2-Class Latent Class Model of Risky Behavior



Reference Group	OR	S.E.	B
Very Secure			
Dismissive	16.02*	1.142	2.774
Slightly Less secure	2.676	1.053	.986ns
Ambivalent	5.764†	1.046	1.752ns
Slightly Less Secure			
Dismissive	5.98*	.584	1.789
Very Secure	.374	1.053	-.985ns
Ambivalent	2.15*	.361	.767

Note: Odds ratios adjusted for gender, ethnicity, and income.

Conclusion

Results indicate a lack of evidence for further distinctions of groupings of risky behavior at this age in adolescence. Relatively few adolescents reported high rates of risky behavior, therefore different types of risky behavior clusters were not discernable. However, there was generally less engagement in risky behavior when adolescents reported having a secure attachment with their parents. **Is secure attachment a protective factor?**

Limitations

- This is primarily a low-risk sample with regards to prevalence rates of risky behavior.
- The relative lack of ethnic minorities limits generalizability.
- Both of the measures relied on self report, thus findings could be partially due to shared method variance.
- The Directionality is unknown: Does parental attachment influence engagement in risky behavior? Or does involvement in risky behavior undermine secure parental attachments?