

# *SEXUAL OFFENDING IN ADOLESCENT MALES: EFFECTS OF PARENTAL ATTACHMENT, SOCIAL EXPERIENCES, AND SEXUALITY*

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# Purpose of this study

- Identify factors unique to adolescent males who have perpetrated sexual crimes against children.
- Develop a preliminary proposed causal model.
- Identify an at risk population.

To steal from one is plagiarism  
To steal from many is research

# Predictions about Adolescence



Marshall (1989). Vulnerable adolescent who passes through puberty with poor social skills, negative attitudes toward peers and authority, and an inability to separate sexuality and aggression.

# Possible Explanation for Sexual Violence

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## **Marshall (1989, 1993)**

Argued that failure to develop secure attachment leads to a lack of intimacy which leads to loneliness and isolation. Sex offenders attempt to alleviate this through sexual contact.

# Attachment Behavior

Any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious whenever the person is frightened, fatigued, or sick and is assuaged by comforting and caregiving.

Bowlby, 1988

# Attachment Style

- Dependent on the degree to which infants can rely on their parents to meet their security needs (Ainsworth, et al., 1978).
- Consistent behavioral manifestation of the expectations of interpersonal relationships

# Bartholomew's Model of Adult Attachment (1990)

## Affective Component

		ATTACHMENT ANXIETY	
		Low	High
ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE	Low	<b>SECURE</b> comfortable with intimacy and autonomy	<b>PREOCCUPIED</b> preoccupied with relationships
	High	<b>DISMISSING</b> dismissing of intimacy	<b>FEARFUL</b> fearful of intimacy, socially avoidant

# Attachment System: Insecure Styles

Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003

- **Anxious attachment:** hyperactivation of the attachment system, thus sees many threats and has little self agency. Characterized by poor internal working model of self.
- **Avoidant attachment:** deactivation of the attachment system, thus failure to perceive threats and inflated self agency. Characterized by poor internal working model of others.

# Ward, Hudson, Marshall & Siegert (1995)

Incorporated Bartholomew's model of adult attachment in their theory of sex offender behavior.

 <p><b>SECURE</b> comfortable with intimacy and autonomy</p>	<p><b>PREOCCUPIED</b> grooming behavior, concern for victim, little use of aggression or coercion</p>
<p><b>DISMISSIVE</b> impersonal contacts, use of aggression</p>	<p><b>FEARFUL</b> impersonal contacts, little concern for victim</p>

Data indicated that (1) all groups were insecurely attached; and (2) rapists and violent criminals were more likely to have dismissive styles whereas child molesters were more likely to have preoccupied or fearful styles.

# Research Linking Attachment Style with Sexual Offending

- Lyn & Burton, (2004). American Journal of Orthopsychiatry
  - Sexual offending associated with fearful attachment style
  - Almost 90% who ever abused a child vs. 63.6% with only adult victims reported insecure attachment
- Marsa, et al. (2004). Journal of Interpersonal Violence
  - Child sexual offenders and violent offenders had greater interpersonal anxiety and avoidance than nonviolent or non-offenders
  - Within child offenders, the proportion with fearful attachment greater than the proportion with other attachment styles.

# Research Linking Attachment Style with Sexual Offending

- Baker & Beech (2004). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*
  - No significant difference between sexual offenders, violent offenders, and non-offenders on either attachment avoidance or anxiety.
- Smallbone & Dadds (2001). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*
  - No associations between parental attachment and coercive sexual behavior.
  - Small, but significant associations between adult attachment anxiety and avoidance and coercive sexual behavior

# In adolescents....

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Seto & Lalumière (2010)

- Only two studies explored attachment and only one of these explored parent-child attachment.
- Social isolation may play a bigger role than social skills

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# It Takes a Village

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## □ Staff/Students

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# Study Design

Sex Offenders Child Victims	Sex Offenders Peer/Adult Victims	Mental Health/Substance Abuse Treatment	Non-Sex Delinquent
Attending SO Treatment/Adjudicated	Attending SO Treatment/Adjudicated	Attending SA or other treatment	Adjudicated /probation supervision
13-18 years old	13-18 years old	13-18 years old	13-18 years old
Victim 3 years younger and < 12 y.o.	Victim within 3 years or older	No indications of child molesting or rape	No indications of child molesting or rape
No more than 3 months treatment	No more than one victim is child	No arrests for violent behavior	
	No more than 3 months treatment	No more than 3 months treatment	

# Sample Characteristics

(Participants are in both residential and community settings)

	SO-Child Victims	SO-Peer Victims	Mental Health/ Substance Abuse	Delinquents
N	156	92	94	122
Age mean (s.d.)	15.2	15.8	16.1	16.3
Race/Ethnicity				
White	68.4	51.3	80	30.3
African American	11.7	15.7	3.2	48.4
Hispanic	2.3	6.6	3.2	1.6
Asian	0.6	2.6	1.1	4.9
Native American	8.2	5.3	2.1	4.1
Multiracial/Other	7.6	18.4	9.5	10.6

# Sample Characteristics

(Participants are in both residential and community settings)

	SO-Peer Victims	SO-Child Victims	Mental Health /Substance Use	Delinquents
Who lived with in past year:				
Mother and Father	15.8	15.8	40	14.8
Mother Only	21.1	21.1	14.7	36.1
Father Only	7.9	6.4	7.4	5.7
Mother/Stepfather	9.2	8.1	12.6	9.0
Father/Stepmother	2.6	7.0	1.1	1.6
Mother/other Adult	7.9	5.3	3.2	9.8
Father/other Adult	1.3	1.8	0	0
Other	31.6	28.1	8.4	23.0

# *Effects of Anxious Attachment and Attachment Avoidance Controlling for Race and Age*

	Anxious Attachment		Attachment Avoidance	
	Odds Ratio	p	Odds Ratio	p
Child SO vs Delinq.	1.18	<.001	1.04	.412
Child SO vs. MH	1.12	.018	0.98	.614
Peer SO vs. Delinq.	0.94	.246	0.97	.539
Peer SO vs. MH	1.03	.664	0.96	.456
Child SO vs Peer SO	1.13	.001	1.02	.481
MH vs Delinq.	0.94	.242	0.97	.535

# Mother's Problems Predict Anxious Attachment

	Standardized Coefficient Beta	Significance
Psychiatric History	0.17	.003
Criminal History	-0.18	.004
Drug Abuse	0.15	.022

$R=.244, F_{3,306} = 6.45, p < .001$

# Abuse Predicting Anxious Attachment

	Standardized Coefficient Beta	Significance
History of Sexual Abuse	0.28	<.001
History of Any Abuse	0.25	<.001

# Anxious Attachment leads to

- Social isolation as indicated by:
  - ▣ Number of friends
  - ▣ Time spent with friends w/o parental supervision
  - ▣ Perceived isolation

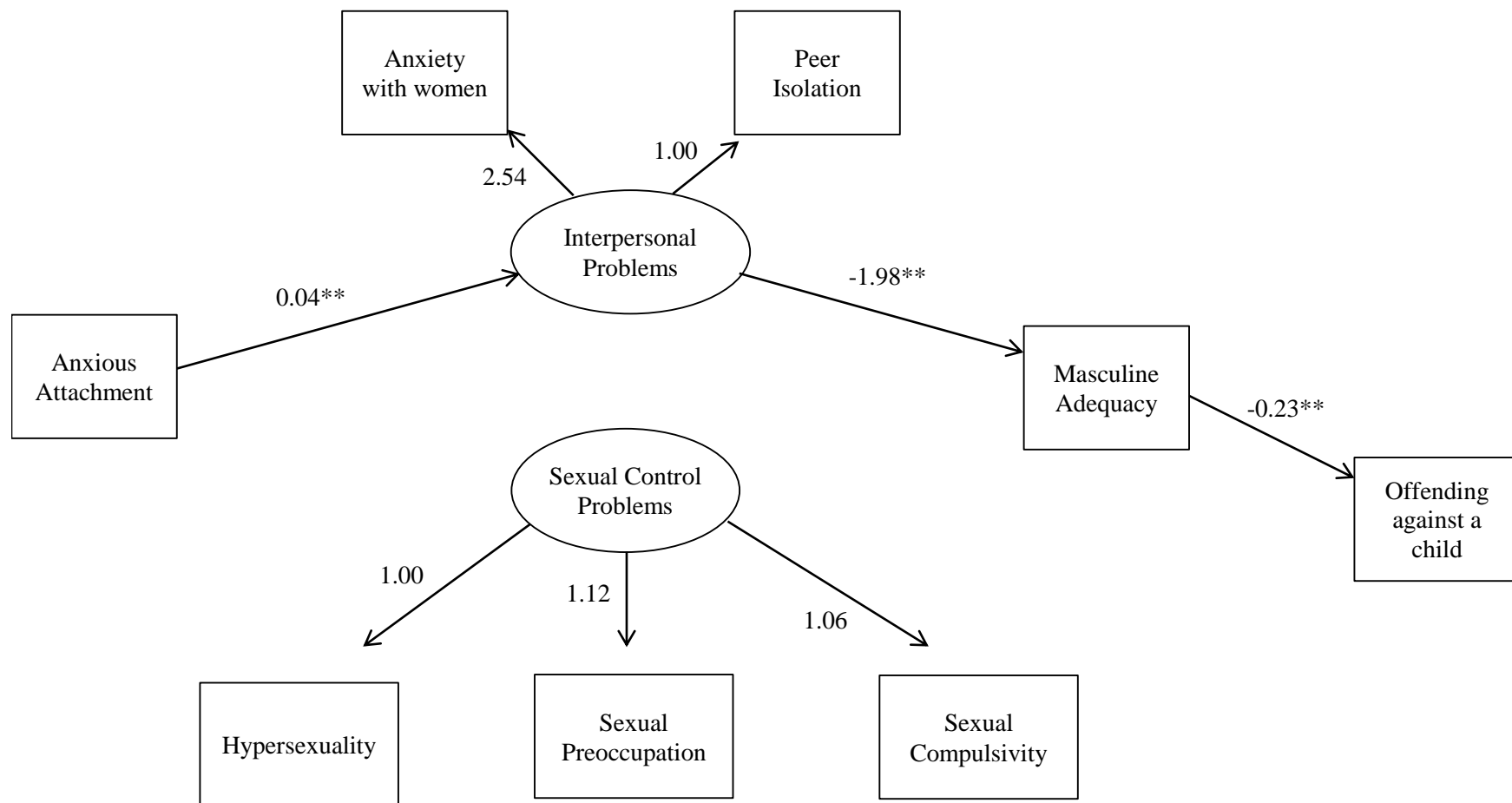
Miner, et al., 2010, 2016

# Social Isolation leads to:

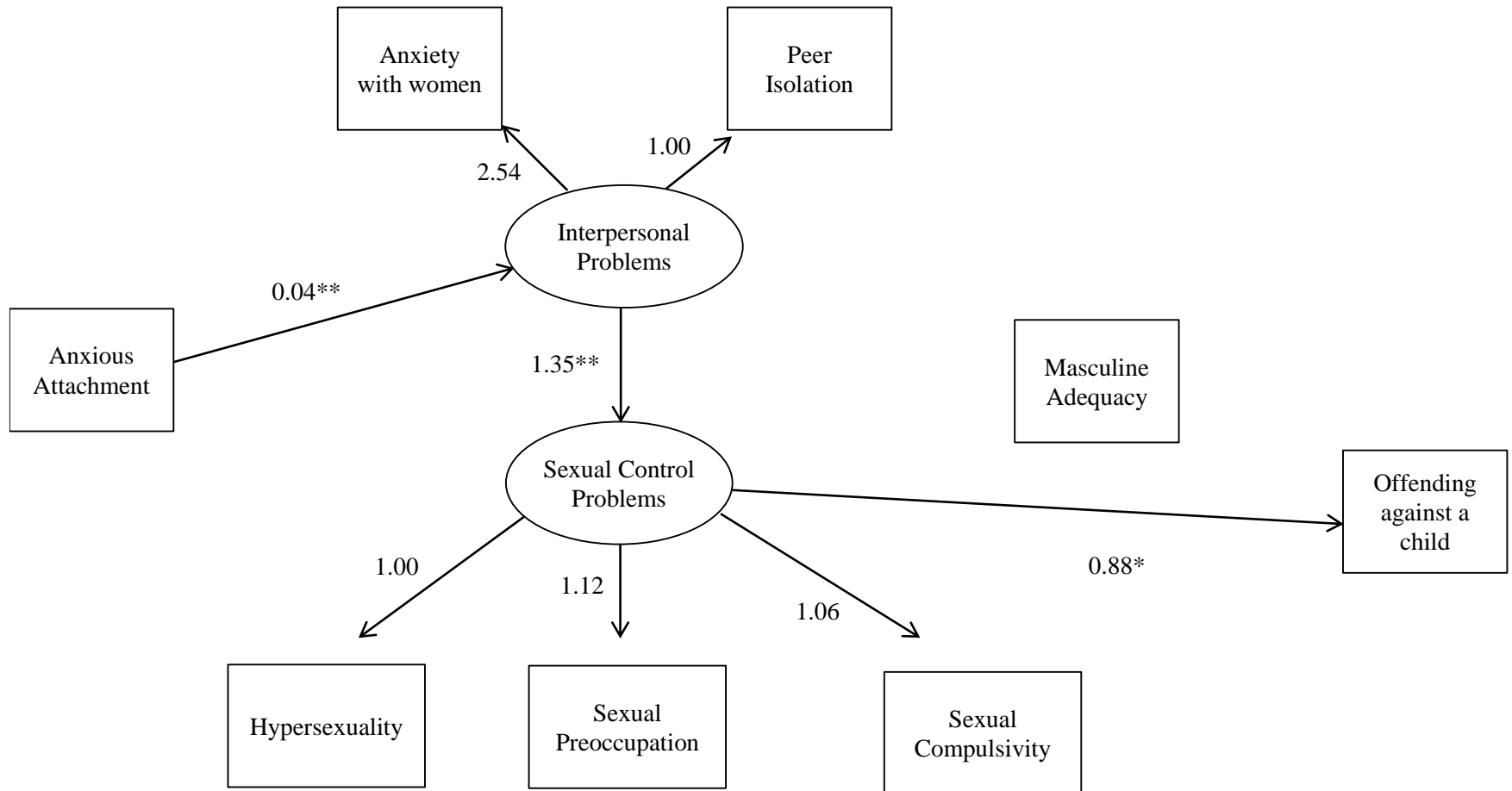
- Sense of inadequacy indicated by:
  - ▣ Anxiety interacting with opposite gender peers
  - ▣ Masculine inadequacy

Miner, et al., 2010, 2016

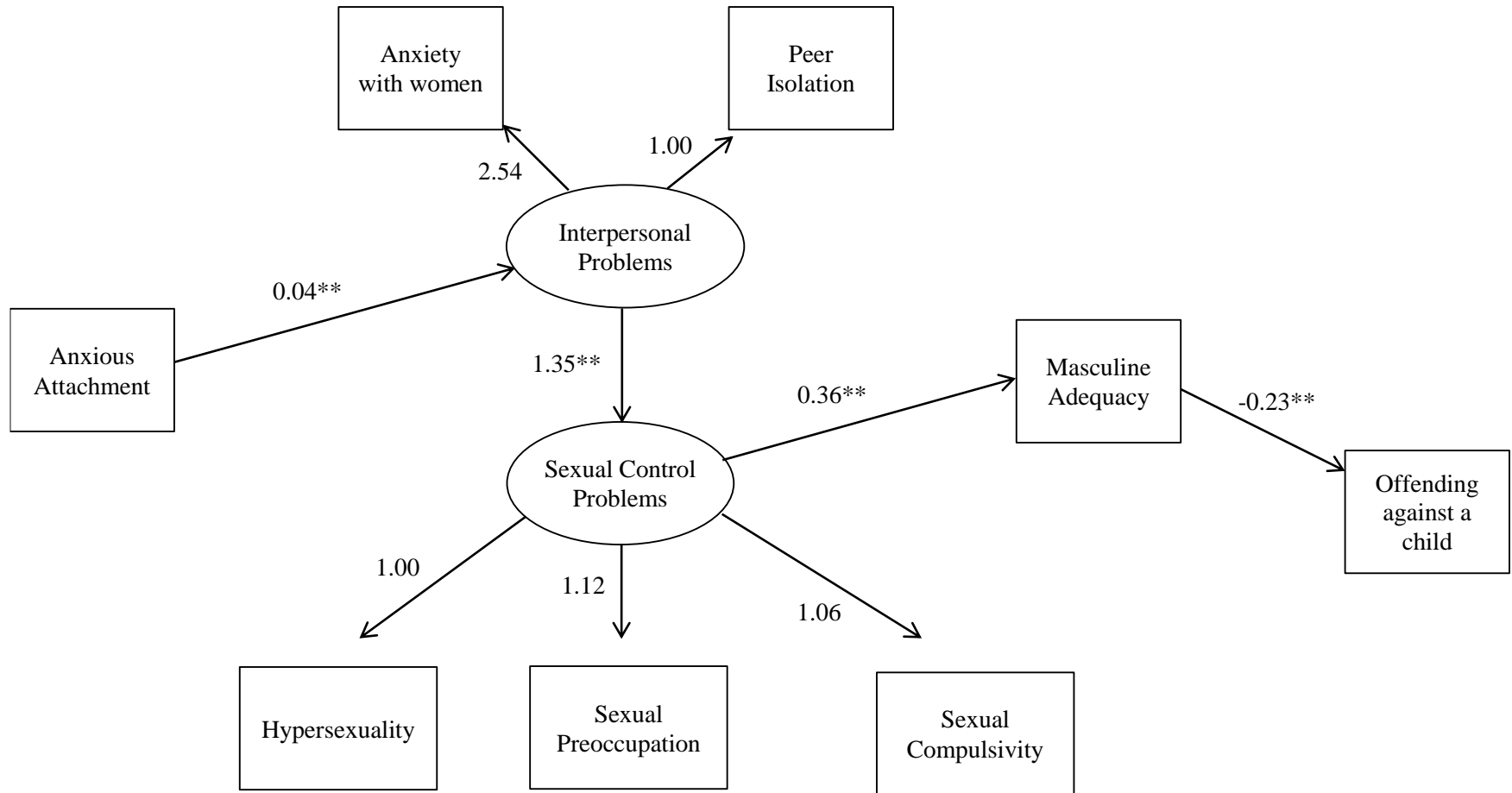
# *Path model 1: Anxious attachment, interpersonal problems, masculine adequacy, and offending against a child.*



# *Path model 2: Anxious attachment, interpersonal problems, sexual behavior problems, and offending against a child.*



*Path model 3: Anxious attachment, interpersonal problems, sexual behavior problems, masculine adequacy and offending against a child.*



# Conclusions

- Child sexual abuse perpetration is related to parental attachment and interpersonal experiences in adolescence.
- Anxious attachment is related to sexual abuse of pre-pubescent children
- Other forms of sexual offending not distinguished from other troubled behavior by attachment variables.

# Conclusions

- Interpersonal problems in adolescence is positively associated with both sexual perpetration against children and with lack of sexual self-regulation.
- When masculine adequacy is low, sexual self-regulation is related to sexual perpetration against children, when high, sexual self-regulation is not related to sexual perpetration against children.

# Population at Risk for Sexual Abuse Perpetration

- Males
- Have mothers with significant social problems.
- Have been victims of abuse, especially child sexual abuse.
- Socially isolated in adolescence

# Implications for Treatment

- Therapists are attachment figures
- Process can reinforce existing working models or can foster more positive working models
- Target personal agency and risk perceptions
- Attention to concepts of masculinity
- Attention to use of sex for coping and self-regulation
- Encourage social involvement

# Implications for Prevention

- Sexuality education can have an impact on sexual abuse prevention
- Focus on building parental bonds and parental consistency
- Cultural definitions of masculinity and adequacy

# Contact Information

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