Insecure Attachments Change the Meaning of Adolescent Autonomy Development: Implications for Adolescent Psychopathology

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Central Question

How Do Adolescent Autonomy and Attachment Work Together To Predict the Development of Greater Social Skills and Lower Levels of Deviant Behavior?
Attachment Security

• Reflects:
  • Coherence in discourse about episodic and semantic memories of attachment experiences.
  • Openness to remembering and discussing affectively charged attachment experiences
  • Balance in considering positive and negative aspects of attachment relationships

Adolescent Insecure Attachment Organization

Characteristics of Two Major Types of Insecure Organizations*:

• Insecure - Preoccupied with Attachment
  • Preoccupied With or By Early Attachments or Past Experiences
  • Confused, Unobjective, & Mentally Entangled
  • Passive & Vague; Fearful & Overwhelmed; or Angry and Conflicted

• Insecure - Dismissing of Attachment
  • Devaluing or Cut-off From Attachment Relationships and experiences
  • May be Derogating of Attachment Experiences
  • Or May be Unable to Recall/describe Them in Convincing Ways.

*Note: Insecure - Disorganized/Disoriented/Unresolved Attachment Classification was not considered in this study
Correlates of Autonomy in *Verbal* Parent-Teen Exchanges

- Both Adolescents and Parents Displays of Autonomy in Discussions have been associated with:
  - Higher Adolescent (and Parent) Ego Development
  - Greater Adolescent Self-esteem
  - Lower Levels of Adolescent Depression
  - Lower Levels of Adolescent Externalizing Behavior

Predictions

- Adolescent Insecurity $\rightarrow$ Relative Declines in Social Skills
Predictions

• Adolescent Insecurity → Relative Declines in Social Skills

• **Combustible Combination:**

  ![Insecure-Preoccupation](image1) + ![Maternal Autonomy](image2) → Increased Delinquency & Decreased Social Skills
Sample

• 125 16-year old Adolescents and Their Parents

• Re-assessed at age 18

• Adolescents selected to represent the “risky half” of their high school class
  • Based on presence of at least one academic risk factor:
    • History of grade retention
    • History of suspension
    • History of a single failing grade for one marking period
    • History of at least one period with 10 or more days absent

• 66% African American; 33% European American
• Equal numbers of Males and Females
• Highly Socio-economically Diverse (Median Family Income= $27,000)

Autonomy Scale from the Autonomy and Relatedness Coding System

• Observational Assessment of Mother and Adolescent Discussing a Major Area of Disagreement

• Assesses both Parental and Adolescent Behavior

• Displaying Autonomy is Reflected in:
  • Focusing *reasons* for the position held
  • Speaking in a *confident* (not passive & not shrill) manner.

*(Allen, Hauser, Boykin & Tate, 1996)*
Assessment of Adolescent/Adult Attachment

- 1-hour semi-structured interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996).

- Yields criterion scores for
  - Security
  - Insecure-Preoccupation with Attachment
  - Insecure-Dismissal of Attachment

- Reliably coded using Kobak et al., (1993) Q-sort technique:
  - Interrater reliability = .84
  - Concordance with Security Classifications from AAI Coding System = 74%

Outcome Measures

Delinquent Behavior

- Problem Behavior Survey (Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989)
- Adolescent report of frequency engaging in 37 non-overlapping classes of illegal behavior in prior six months

Social Problem-Solving Skills

- Adolescent Problem Inventory/Problem Inventory for Adolescent Girls (Freedman, Rosenthal, Donahoe, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978; Gaffney & McFall, 1981)
- Rated from Adolescent responses to nine hypothetical social-problem solving dilemmas.
### Predicting Change in Problem Solving Skills from Teen Attachment Organization And Maternal Displays of Autonomy

**Social Problem-Solving Skills (Age 18)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>? R²</th>
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<tr>
<td>I.</td>
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<td>II.</td>
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**Note.*** p < .001. ** p ≤ .01. * p < .05. + p < .10. N = 106. β weights are from variable's entry into model.

### Predicting Change in Problem Solving Skills from Teen Attachment Organization And Maternal Displays of Autonomy

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<td>IV.</td>
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<td>.34***</td>
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<td>V.</td>
<td>Maternal Display of Own Autonomy</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.35***</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>Teen Preocc. X Maternal Autonomy</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>.38***</td>
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Moderating Effect of Preoccupation on the Relation of Maternal Autonomy to Adolescent Social Skills Development

Social Skills Change

High Teen Preoccupation

Low Teen Preoccupation

Maternal Displays of Autonomy

Predicting Change in Teen Delinquency from Adolescent Attachment Organization And Maternal Displays of Autonomy

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<td>Teen Preoccupation (Age 16)</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Step V.</td>
<td>Maternal Display of Own Autonomy</td>
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<td>.35***</td>
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<td>Teen Preoccupation X Maternal Autonomy</td>
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Moderating Effect of Preoccupation on the Relation of Maternal Autonomy to Adolescent Delinquency Development

Maternal Displays of Autonomy

TOPIC: HOUSEHOLD RULES

Mother: Okay. Now, what I think about what you said is, what I've been tellin you all the time: Daryl, if you are not going to remember, do it now or write it down. And that, you see...you can't do that either. You think there's another solution. And I don't think there is one for either of us.

Teen: You don't think so?

Mother: Because there are so many things I tell you to do, Daryl, like I asked you to take the umbrella downstairs.

Teen: /What umbrella?

Mother: The porch umbrella. The table umbrella. (Oh, okay.) And you said, okay. And I came home and you were gone, and the umbrella was still in the dining room.

Teen: I forgot!

Mother: Why didn't you do it when I said it?

Teen: I probably was doing somethin else.

Mother: No. No you weren't.

Teen: What was I doin?

Mother: You was talking on the telephone.

Teen: Talking on the telephone?

Mother: Yes, as usual.

Main Features:
- Give and Take
- Reasons intended to persuade
Maternal Autonomy Displayed toward a Secure Adolescent (cont.)

TOPIC:  HOUSEHOLD RULES

Teen: If I was talking on the telephone, I could of had-still had the phone, and still (/But you wouldn't) gone downstairs.

Mother: But you wouldn't do it.

Teen: I didn't do it?

Mother: No. Because you finally forgot it and left home to play basketball, and the umbrella was still in the dining room. Like the other day, when I came home. Was the dishes done? It's not dirt-it's, I believe you forget. But I'm trying to make you to know, that in the adult world they're not going to accept that. I mean, you might say you forgot today, or you might say it tomorrow. But after awhile, they're not going to accept that. And you are going to be out there looking for another job or try to get yourself settled again. --Do you accept what I'm sayin?

Teen: Yeah, Yes. (teen smiles)

Maternal Autonomy Displayed toward a Preoccupied Adolescent

TOPIC:  SIBLING RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS

Mother: There, there you go. Well alright, um, first of all, I like the way that you put that to him. I think it makes it easy for me to understand and I want you to understand that I understand exactly how you feel.

Teen: Mm-hm.

Mother: Let me tell you that I'm was older than my sisters/

Teen: Mm-hm.

Mother: /and they were twins and (Mm-hm) so you know that I probably got the same treatment from my mother for the way that I behaved to them that you are getting because of Jerry. Um, I know it seems unfair to you that I expect more out of you in this relationship, uh- but I will tell you why. First of all, one, you are older. You should, in my mind, have the maturity to realize that nine times out of ten what Jerry is trying to do is get your goat. In other words, Jerry is trying to be in control and either way, if you play that game he is in control. If you fuss back at him or have a fight with him, then he wins because who gets into trouble?

Teen: Me.

Mother: Right. If-if, I don't get into it and you and your friends are still in so me kind of altercation, he still wins. The only way for it to be a win-win situation is if you say-if you treat him nicely. I'm not saying you have to let him do what he wants but I don't like it when you make fun of him or when you call him names or when you are physically uh- abusive to him. And then there is one other reason, and I think that you are getting old enough to remember this. Jerry is very bright, but Jerry also has a very severe problem, and it is going to cause him problems all his life.

Main Features:
- Long Monologue
- Reasons offered to overpower, not to persuade
Maternal Autonomy Displayed toward a Preoccupied Adolescent (cont).

Mother (continuing):

... But the biggest problem from Jerry's hyperactivity is going to be the way he thinks about himself when he grows up. If everything works the way that it should, as Jerry gets older, his hyperactivity will lessen. But, if he always thinks of himself as a trouble-maker, as a bad person that people don't want to be around, or as a constant screw-up, or as someone who can never do anything right, then he will have a very negative image of himself and we call that low self-esteem. And that's what causes people to have more problems dealing with other human beings and dealing with themselves than their original problem to begin with. It's like your kidney, the original problem they've corrected but the first problem is what is causing you a problem now. Do you understand what I am saying? What I keep trying to do with Jerry, Jerry is at very high risk for becoming a substance abuser because of a negative self image. Jerry is at very high risk, you know, of getting into trouble with authority figures because he doesn't think before he acts. And I know it's a lot to ask of you to say 'C'mon Jerry why don't we do this'. Do you know-do you understand what I am saying? But I know how it makes you feel because I was in your position and I felt that way too. I often wanted to ring Karen and Sharon's neck and you see the way Karen and Sharen and I are with each other today. We almost don't have any kind of relationship. Ah, you know your aunt Karen uh has a drinking problem. You know your aunt Sheran has some other problems. And a lot of it is the result of their low selfesteem because they were always getting bad grades and always messing up. But you tell me what you think I ought to do when you and Jerry have a fight.

Moderating Effect of Maternal Preoccupation on the Relation of Adolescent Autonomy to Adolescent Social Skills Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skills Change</th>
<th>Low Maternal Preoccupation</th>
<th>High Maternal Preoccupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Adolescent Autonomy</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.15</td>
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Adolescent Displays of Autonomy
Complementary Views of Autonomy and Relatedness in Adolescence

A Preoccupied View of Autonomy vs. Relatedness in Adolescence?
Maternal Control Predicting Peer-reported Delinquency for SECURE Adolescents

Interaction of Security with Maternal Control in Predicting Peer-reported Delinquency

Interaction of Adolescent’s Use of Dismissing Attachment Strategies and Attachment to Peers in Predicting Delinquency

Conclusions

- Attachment Insecurity Predicts Relative Decreases in Social Skills From Age 16 to 18
- Adolescent Insecure-preoccupation Interacts With Maternal Displays of Autonomy to Create a “Combustible Combination” Predicting:
  - Relative Declines in Social Skills
  - Relative Increases in Delinquency
- The Value of “Thick” Data
- Attachment May Alter the Relation of Socialization Factors to Outcomes:
  - “The Rules of the Game Change for Insecure Adolescents”
Copies of Papers Related to Today’s Talk are available at:

faculty.virginia.edu/allen/publications
I. Intro

A. I’d like to begin by acknowledging my co-authors Penny Marsh, Christy McFarland, Kathleen McElhaney, & Kathy Bell, as well as the numerous other current and former students who contributed to making these data available.

B. John Bowlby’s attachment theory has largely revolutionized the study of social development across the lifespan. Not surprisingly many researchers have spent tremendous amounts of time looking for main effects of an individual’s attachment organization on social development.

1. Although this search for main effects has often been productive, there is a second important kind of effect that has not received as much attention.

2. Which is this:

3. An individual’s attachment organization may also function to “change the rules” by which different social and environmental factors predict development.

   a. Said differently, we often identify main effects predictors—for example of parenting relating to delinquent outcomes, but these predictions are modest at best.

   b. In all likelihood that’s because we don’t go the second step to identify the specific combinations of individual traits and environments that turn a risk factor—such as poor parenting—into an actual problematic outcome.

4. That’s what we’re going to try to do today:

5. which is to suggest that an individual’s attachment organization may help us identify conditions under which different types of parenting actually get translated into negative outcomes

C. Our study began as an attempt to explore adolescent autonomy and attachment as predictors of the development of delinquency and poor social skills in adolescence.

1. Attachment Security --In adolescence, attachment security is assessed not as a quality of a current
relationship, NOR as a retrospective report about past relationships, but rather in terms of the degree of coherence, integration and openness in thinking about and discussing attachment experiences

a. Secure adolescents are viewed as open to attachment experiences, able to judge them objectively and with balance.

b. **INSECURE**

c. Insecure adolescent attachment organizations can be either preoccupied or dismissing of attachment (leaving aside the disorganized/disoriented adolescents for now)

d. Insecure-Preoccupied adolescents tend to become overstimulated and confused, and prone to excessive anger when thinking about attachment experiences

e. Insecure-dismissing adolescents tend to work to minimize the extent to which they attend to attachment experiences by minimizing the importance or relevance of those experiences.

2. In adolescence, we would expect that a secure attachment organization should allow adolescents to process their experiences in social relationships more accurately and with greater sophistication.

a. We would thus expect secure adolescents to gain in social skills over time & insecure adolescents to be at risk for declining skills over time

3. **Auton Correlates** Just as attachment security has long been viewed as an important facet of social development, so too have gains in adolescent autonomy also been seen as normative in adolescence.

a. A large body of research has shown that developing autonomy in verbal interactions with parents is linked to everything from higher ego development and self-esteem to lower levels of depression and externalizing behavior.

**D. With that background, let me turn now to our two primary predictions:**

1. Our first prediction was simply that attachment insecurity would be a simple risk factor for the development of poor
social skills over a two-year period.

2. But, even more importantly for our purposes today, we looked at a unique interaction of attachment insecurity and autonomy in the family—an interaction we call the “combustible combination”

a. Our hypothesis quite simply is that insecure-preoccupied individuals—who are hyper-focused on their attachment needs and insecure about getting them met—will NOT be able to cope with seeing other family members display their autonomy.

b. That autonomy, like the match in the slide, might normally be quite useful, but for preoccupied adolescents, will serve a more dangerous and destructive role leading to increasing delinquency and decreasing social skills

c. This is probably easiest to understand and think about as it relates to a childhood phenomenon in attachment research.

4:05

d. In infancy and childhood, the analogue to preoccupation is an insecure-resistant attachment. One of the ways this is displayed is as great anger, frustration, and resistance in the face of separation from a caregiver.

3. We would argue that this type of angry, dysfunctional effort to gain a caregiver’s attention is exactly what we see under some conditions from preoccupied adolescents with their unskillful and delinquent behavior.

4. In adolescence, we have long argued that handling a disagreement is in many ways analogous to handling separations in infancy...

a. Disagreements can be threatening, particularly to less secure individuals, just as can separations.

   i. At 4:30 today, we’ll present evidence that understanding this separation process in adolescence can allow us to capture a remarkable amount of the variance in adolescent attachment security.

5. For this talk, we tested the notion that preoccupied adolescents would find it very hard to tolerate autonomy
displayed by their mothers, and would respond over time with increasingly unskilled and delinquent behavior.

II. Methods

A. **SLIDE#9)-Sample characteristics** We tested our ideas with data from a sample of 125 adolescents and their families.

1. As you’ll see from the overhead, it’s a demographically heterogeneous sample that was intended to be moderately “at-risk.” in nature. Adolescents were recruited through public schools based upon presence of any single, low-level risk factor as you can see on the slide.

2. In essence, this sampling technique appears to capture the half of a typical high school class that is at greatest risk for future academic and behavioral difficulties.

3. Adolescents were 16 at the outset of our study, and were re-assessed two years later at age 18.

B. **SLIDE#10)Autonomy**

a. We assessed autonomy processes using a videotaped revealed differences task, in which parents (mothers in this case) and adolescents take 10 minutes to discuss what they have separately identified as one of their greatest areas of disagreement.

b. We then code displays of autonomy as reflecting both a focus upon the reasons for the position held, and
c. the ability to state the position and reasoning in a confident (but not overly shrill) manner.

2. Attachment **SLIDE#11)Attachment**

a. We assessed adolescent and maternal attachment organization using the Main Adult Attachment Interview and Roger Kobak’s Q-sort coding system.

b. The coding system yields scales for each of the three primary types of attachment organization, as outlined on the slide: secure, preoccupied and dismissing.

c. Notably, in our data, scales for secure and dismissing attachment organizations were so highly negatively
correlated as to be redundant (that is, one is the inverse of the other).

3. Delinquency (SLIDE#12) - Delinq & API (includes social skills with sample item) was assessed as the number of criminal behaviors that adolescents acknowledged reporting in the prior six months, using a well-validated instrument developed by the National Youth Survey Report team headed by Delbert Elliott.

4. Social skills were assessed via a test measure using the Adolescent Problem Inventory, in which teens described their most likely response to a series of hypothetical vignettes regarding problematic social situations, which are then rated in terms of the skillfulness of the adolescents’ responses.

5. Turning now to our results....

C. *7:08

D. First, Attachment Security does predict gains in social skills in the expected direction

1. (SLIDE#13) Change via security Slide shows predictions of relative changes in social skills over a two-year period. After accounting for stability of social skills (in step 1) of this hierarchical regression model and demographic factors in step 2,

2. security adds a small but significant increment to the variance.

3. These findings suggest:
   a. that lawful change in skill levels do occur over this period
   b. and that security in thinking about attachment is predictive of the course of future social development in adolescence.
   c. This fits with our hypothesis that secure adolescents would be able to perceive new social situations most clearly, read subtle emotional cues in interactions most accurately and thereby develop more in skills over time compared to their insecure peers.

E. But the major finding...the “surprise”—given the current focus of the field on main effects—is seen in the next few slides, which is that attachment preoccupation interacts in
the hypothesized ways with autonomy processes to predict outcomes

1. **SLIDE#14)Change interaction** The first slide shows change in social skills and we see that after security... preoccupation and its interaction with maternal displays of autonomy add to the variance explained in teen social skills over time.

   a. **SLIDE#15)Skills graph** The graph on this next slide shows what we have.
      i. Although maternal autonomy isn’t generally associated with negative outcomes in non-preoccupied adolescents—it’s not generally a bad thing—
         • for preoccupied adolescents, high levels of maternal autonomy are associated with declining social skills over time.

2. **SLIDE#16)Delinq Interact** The next 2 slides show much the same effect for delinquency.

   a. We see that this “combustible combination” of maternal autonomy and adolescent preoccupation predicts changes in delinquency over a two-year period (changes that some would argue would be extremely difficult to even detect given how stable delinquency measures can be over time).
   
   b. Here we see that the combination of adolescent preoccupation and maternal autonomy explains 11% of the variance in changing delinquency over time.
   
   c. These are the last 3 rows of the table (in green).
      a. This means that even after accounting for this stability in the first step of our models (accounting for 22% of the variance in our outcome), we get half again as much variance accounted for—an additional 11%—with this duo of variables in interaction.
   
   d. **SLIDE#17)Delinq Graph** Turning to the graph, again we see that maternal autonomy is not particularly a risk factor for future delinquency, EXCEPT for preoccupied adolescents.

3. Clearly, while autonomy may be normative and healthy for family members to display in adolescence, for preoccupied adolescents it appears highly disruptive (perhaps even
threatening or angering) to see one’s parent displaying their autonomy strongly.

4. We believe that the delinquency of these adolescents might even be viewed as a form of disturbed attachment behavior—getting into big trouble with delinquent behavior is likely to heighten the intensity of the parent-adolescent interaction, granted in highly dysfunctional ways.

a. Notably, this is EXACTLY what happens in the infant strange situation procedure, after infants are separated from parents. Insecure-resistant infants (the analogue to adolescent preoccupation) often react with protest, and angry gestures that create an intense, but dysfunctional interaction with parents.

F. Now, the title of our symposium mentions the use of “THICK data” to explain findings such as this.

1. In this case, we went back to our videotaped data to ask just what “maternal autonomy” really means for preoccupied adolescents.

2. As we mentioned earlier, autonomy is coded as reflecting a person’s confident focus on their reasons for disagreeing—with the idea that focusing on reasoning allows for persuasion, not just coercion, and for a real exchange of information between parties.

a. What we saw was in the secure adolescents, maternal autonomy displayed in exactly the way we expected SLIDE# 18)

11:20

For example, in this one family talking about household rules, we see a mother saying:

Mother:  Okay. Now, what I think about what you said is, what I've been tellin you all the time: Daryl, if you are not going to remember, do it now or write it down. And that, you see, you can't do that either. You think there's another solution. And I don't think there is one for either of us.

Teen:  You don't think so?

Mother:  Because there are so many things I tell you to do, Daryl, like I asked you to take the umbrella downstairs.

Teen:  /What umbrella?
Mother: The porch umbrella. The table umbrella. (Oh, okay.) And you said, okay. And I came home and you were gone, and the umbrella was still in the dining room.

Teen: I forgot!

Mother: Why didn't you do it when I said it?

Teen: I probably was doing somethin else.

Mother: No. No you weren't.

Teen: What was I doin?

Mother: You was talking on the telephone.

Teen: Talking on the telephone?

Mother: Yes, as usual.

SLIDE#19) Dialogue/Secure II: And this clearly continues, ending with

Mother: But you wouldn't do it.

Teen: I didn't do it? Mother: No. Because you finally forgot it and left home to play basketball, and the umbrella was still in the dining room. Like the other day, when I came home. Was the dishes done? It's not dirt—it's, I believe you forget. ...in the adult world they're not going to accept that. I mean, you might say you forgot today, or you might say it tomorrow. But after awhile, they're not going to accept that. And you are going to be out there looking for another job or try to get yourself settled again. --Do you accept what I'm sayin?

Teen: Yeah, Yes. (teen smiles) Note the give and take, the interest and quick responsiveness to what the adolescent is saying and that while mom is confident and autonomous and forceful, even critical at times, this is not done in a way that shuts the adolescent out but rather engages him in a dialogue.

G. IF we now look at the displays of maternal autonomy in families with preoccupied adolescents, we see a different picture.

a. SLIDE#20) -Preocc Auton (part 1) Here we see a discussion about a sibling relationship problem.

Mother: There, there you go. Well alright, first of all, I like the way that you put that to him. I think it makes it easy for me to understand and I want you to understand that I understand exactly how you feel.

Teen: Mm-hm.

Mother: Let me tell you that I was older than my sisters/
Teen: Mm-hm.

Mother: /and they were twins and (Mm-hm) so you know that I probably got the same treatment from my mother for the way that I behaved to them that you are getting because of Jerry. Um, I know it seems unfair to you that I expect more out of you in this relationship, uh- but I will tell you why. First of all, one, you are older. You should, in my mind, have the maturity to realize that nine times out of ten what Jerry is trying to do is get your goat. In other words, Jerry is trying to be in control and either way, if you play that game he is in control. If you fuss back at him or have a fight with him, then he wins because who gets into trouble?

Teen: Me.

Mother: Right. If-if, I don't get into it and you and your friends are still in some kind of altercation, he still wins. The only way for it to be a win-win situation is if you say-if you treat him nicely. I'm not saying you have to let him do what he wants but I don't like it when you make fun of him or when you call him names or when you are physically uh- abusive to him. And then there is one other reason, and I think that you are getting old enough to remember this. Jerry is very bright, but Jerry also has a very severe problem, and it is going to cause him problems all his life.

ii. Note here the mother is launching into a monologue; NOT letting adolescent state his/her opinion or even response. She’s also rather cavalier and insulting..she has her opinions and is willing to state them strongly and then just let the chips fall where they may

iii. SLIDE#21) - Preoccupied Autonomy (part 2)

iv. As you see on the next slide, this continues, ad nauseum,

• and yes, she’s stating reasons for her position confidently, but NO, she’s probably not exchanging information—the adolescent is likely to tune out just as you would if I kept reading out loud from this monologue.

v. its an insensitive way to establish autonomy…insensitive to the adolescent’s need to have autonomy occur as part of a dialogue in which the adolescent also has input.

H. Now, we see this with preoccupied teens having trouble with parental autonomy. How about in the other direction: with preoccupied parents observing their teens display their autonomy?

1. First, I should note that maternal preoccupation and adolescent preoccupation relatively independent of one another

2. SLIDE#22) Graph Mat’l preoccupation But, at least for skill development (though not for delinquency), we see much the
same pattern here as before…

a. Here, what we see as the “combustible combination” is not that adolescents can’t tolerate their mothers’ autonomous behavior, but that things go badly awry when preoccupied mothers face their teens autonomy strivings.

b. Again, we have this idea that there’s this combustible combination which can take a normative process and turn it into something negative, and that it can work either way in the dyadic relationship.

I. In almost every talk I’ve ever done on adolescent autonomy processes, I talk about autonomy and relatedness as independent dimensions—

1. high autonomy doesn’t mean low relatedness…

   ...and note this is a contrast from an earlier view which saw A & R as in opposition.  

2. Our data suggest that for preoccupied individuals, however, autonomy MAY be seen as a threat to the relationship…and certainly is associated with increasingly dysfunctional adolescent behavior.

3. And this may be one explanation for some of the findings we have.

III. Now at this point, I would suggest that these data suggest one route by which autonomy processes might be linked to negative outcomes

A. We think that this process may help explain the dramatic increase in problem behaviors during adolescence:

1. It may be that for some adolescents, the normative development of autonomy in family relationships creates strains that are just too threatening to handle well.

B. Even beyond this specific finding, though, these data provide an example of the ways in which an insecure attachment organization can change the rules” by which parental (and even peer) behavior is linked to adolescent outcomes.

1. The obvious question, of course, is are these findings just one quirk in our data that make for an interesting talk, or do
they represent a broader pattern?

2. Given a # of similar findings emerging in our lab, we have reason to think these findings are one piece of a much broader pattern.

C. For example,

1. A long line of research has shown that strong maternal behavioral control of their adolescents is linked to lower levels of delinquency cross-sectionally.

D. SLIDE#25) - Secure only And as we look at our data with our secure adolescents (who are in fact the majority of our sample), we see exactly this pattern.

1. But, just as in the main findings I’m presenting today, we’ve got a very significant moderating effect of attachment organization. When we turn to look at our insecure adolescents, we see the pattern breaks down. SLIDE#26) secure & insecure sr1

a. For INSECURE adolescents, maternal behavioral control is NOT associated with lower levels of delinquency.

E. Notably, We also see much this same pattern with peer relationships. SLIDE#27)Peer relat graph

1. Strong relationships with peers actually predict lower levels of delinquency but only for secure individuals.

a. Insecure adolescents don’t seem to gain any benefit from higher quality close friendships.

2. What these last 2 findings suggest is that relationship factors, both maternal and peer, can be a buffer against delinquency, BUT ONLY IF the teen has a secure attachment organization

a. Without security—and this is the take home message today—otherwise positive relationship factors look largely useless, or in our main example today, possibly harmful.

IV. So To Recap where we’ve been:

A. SLIDE#28) - Conclusions

1. First, we saw a simple main effect: that insecurity predicts relative declines in adolescent social skills over time.

2. BUT, it turns out that this main effect really needs to be
interpreted in the context of the moderating effect of attachment organization on development.

3. This is the “combustible interaction”

4. Although autonomy development is normally a useful and necessary part of adolescence—and we normally see it linked to positive outcomes
   a. for preoccupied adolescents—maternal autonomy becomes a risk factor.
      i. it predicts becoming less skillful and more delinquent in comparison to one’s peers over the following two years.

5. In short the rules of the game change for insecure adolescents
   a. We believe this pattern may have significant implications for understanding which teens will be most likely to suffer from adolescent-era delinquency,
   b. and perhaps also provide one explanation for the dramatic increase in delinquency during adolescence—As insecure preoccupation meets the autonomy-push of this period.

B. More generally, we would conclude that...

C. THICK data is useful, and perhaps essential for understanding the specific processes by which person-oriented factors interact with developmental factors to lead to healthy or unhealthy outcomes.

1. This study outlines one such pattern of interaction and I think suggests there may be many more that bear exploration in the future.

2. 19:10