

Attachment, Trauma, & Emotions

The study aimed to understand how childhood trauma influences emotional reactions during sexual conflicts and whether attachment styles explain the link.



Home > Archives of Sexual Behavior > Article

Attachment Insecurity Mediates the Associations Between Childhood Trauma and Duration of Emotions During a Laboratory-Based Sexual Conflict Discussion Among Couples

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what we found!*



Childhood trauma can **affect the way people handle emotions and relationships**, which can make it harder for couples to work through challenges like sexual disagreements.

These kinds of **sexual conflicts are stressful for couples and may bring out stronger negative feelings** for both partners.

AND

Sexual conflicts can also **bring up attachment insecurities, such as worrying about rejection or feeling uneasy with intimacy**, especially for people who have been through trauma.

**This study looked at the two dimensions of attachment insecurity in adulthood:
Attachment Anxiety & Attachment Avoidance**

Attachment Anxiety

Refers to **fear of rejection and feeling unworthy of love**, it may be represented through **hyperactivation strategies** (e.g., excessive demands, stronger manifestations of negative emotions).

Attachment Avoidance

Refers to **discomfort regarding closeness and intimacy**; it may include **deactivating strategies** (e.g., inhibiting distress to maintain emotional distance from one's partner).

we wanted to know:

1

How **childhood trauma affects the way couples handle sexual conflicts**, especially **how emotions play out in the moment**.

2

Whether **attachment insecurities explain these links**.



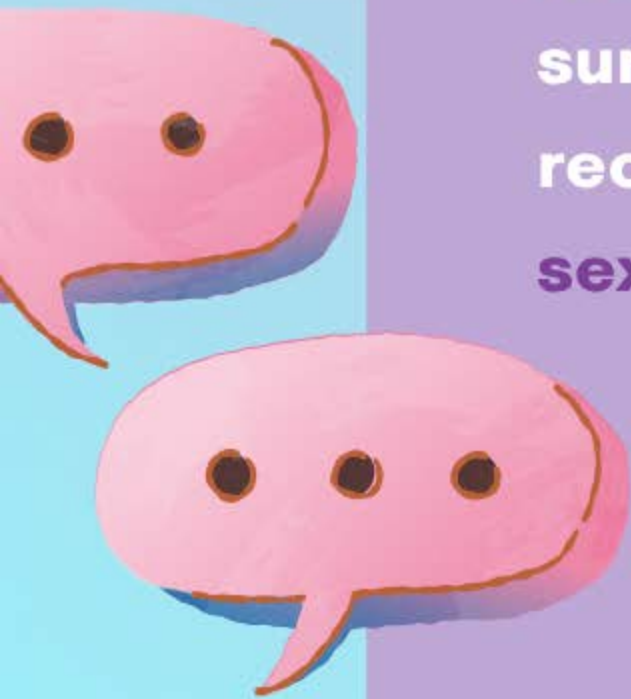
151

couples were recruited.



Participants first completed an online survey, then came to the lab to have a recorded discussion about their biggest sexual conflict.

Afterward, they completed a second survey and watched the recording to rate both their own and their partner's emotions.



we found that...

Partners with more childhood trauma felt fewer positive emotions and more negative ones during sexual conflict:

- Positive feelings were weaker and shorter.
- Negative emotions were stronger and lasted longer.

Trauma was linked to higher attachment anxiety, which caused these emotional patterns. Anxiety led to more intense, longer negative emotions and shorter positive ones for both partners.

Avoidance reduced positive emotions but **wasn't directly tied to trauma**. Overall, childhood trauma affects how people regulate emotions in sexual conflicts—fueling anxiety and sustaining negativity.



so, what does all of this mean?

Childhood trauma can make it harder to manage emotions in **sexual conflicts**, mainly by **fueling attachment anxiety**. The results from this study shows why it's **important to consider trauma and attachment issues** when helping couples navigate sensitive topics like sex.



This is a summary of our published article:

Bigras, N., Rosen, N. O., Dubé, J. P., Daspe, M.-E., Bosisio, M., Peloquin, K., & Bergeron, S. (2025). Attachment insecurity mediates the associations between childhood trauma and duration of emotions during a laboratory-based sexual conflict discussion among couples. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-025-03120-7>



Blog post and infographic by Audrey Chu