

Rebuilding Broken Bonds

Insecure Attachment and Recovery from Infidelity

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Purpose

To better understand how injured partners recover from EMI (Extramarital Involvement)

Focusing on the role of forgiveness and coping resources through the process of recovery.

To better inform mental health providers about the experience of recovery and the factors that may influence treatment.

Treating Infidelity

Integrative Interventions in EMI Recovery
(Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2004)

Three stage approach to recovery conceptualizing infidelity as the treatment of a "relational trauma."

- Addressing affect dysregulation
 - Focusing on interpersonal assumptions
 - Promoting a three stage approach to forgiveness (Gordon & Baucom, 1998)
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Treating Infidelity

EFT: Treatment of Infidelity (Johnson, 2006)
Infidelity conceptualized as an "attachment injury" (Makinen & Johnson, 2006)

- Formed by a significant breach of trust in a couple's relationship that has "attachment significance."
 - Infidelity is experienced as "traumatizing abandonment."
 - Treatment promotes differentiating affective experience, re-engagement, and forgiveness / reconciliation.
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Infidelity, Attachment, & Recovery

Our Focus

To understand how attachment experiences in adult romantic relationships are related to a betrayed spouse's shattered assumptions, interpersonal trust, and stage of forgiveness during the recovery process that follows the disclosure of their spouse's affair.

Hypotheses

Participants with greater attachment anxiety and avoidance will have significantly greater negative assumptions about self, partner, and marriage in general, & significantly less interpersonal trust

Stage of forgiveness will relate to resolution as evidenced by increased trust, attachment security, and fewer shattered assumptions

Sample

Participants recruited via Beyond Affair Network
207 adults responded to an internet based survey

- Female: 89% female, 11% male
- Midlife: 45 yoa (range 27 to 75 yrs old)
- Mostly Married: 85% married, 12% separated, 3% divorced / other
- Parents: 94% of participants have children
- Caucasian: 87% Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, Others < 3%
- Well educated (56% completed a bachelors degree)
- Well off (46.6%) family income > \$100,000

Participant Description

EMI Characteristics

EMI Disruption

- Married avg. of 14 years prior to partner's EMI
- Over one third either divorced (17.6%) or separated following the EMI disclosure.

EMI Characteristics

- Mostly Single EMI (60%), Multiple EMI (27%), 12% Didn't Know
- EMI included sexual intercourse for majority (86%)
- Over half (52%) described the EMI as including "extremely deep emotional involvement"

Treatment Experience

Majority Sought Therapy

- 74% individual treatment
- 74% couple treatment
- 7% no treatment

Compared to:

- 54% individual treatment
- 22% couple treatment (Cano et al., 2002)

Therapy Experience

- 38.7% helpful to very helpful and 16.8 % detrimental or unhelpful
- 66% would recommend therapy to friends facing similar circumstances
- 52.4% wished their spouse's affair would have been discussed more in treatment.

Procedure

Recruitment

- Study announced to BAN group leaders and participants and through BAN publications.
- 262 started survey 207 completed (79%)

Internet Survey

- Experiences in Close Relationships Revised (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000)
- Trust Scale (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985).
- Assumptions Scale (Carels, Coop, & Baucom, 1994)
- Forgiveness Inventory-R (Coop & Baucom, 2003)
- Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS; Schumm et al., 1986)

Analysis

- Correlation analysis, MANOVA, Oneway ANOVA

Attachment Strategies, Trust, and Shattered Assumptions

- Anxious and Avoidant strategies are moderately related to measures of interpersonal trust and shattered assumptions
- Lower magnitude associations were found with the general assumptions scale. This measure also had a non-significant relationship with the measure of marital satisfaction.
- All other measures showed moderate to strong association with marital satisfaction ($r = .39 - .78$)

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-----|
| 1. Avoidance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. Anxious | .48** | | | | | | |
| 3. T-Predict | -.49** | -.40** | | | | | |
| 4. T-Depend | -.48** | -.47** | .64** | | | | |
| 5. T-Faith | -.60** | -.51** | .75** | .79** | | | |
| 6. A- Self | .44** | .41** | -.46** | -.55** | -.57** | | |
| 7. A-Partner | .43** | .48** | -.63** | -.71** | -.76** | .72** | |
| 8. A-General | .19* | .18* | .04 | -.03 | -.01 | .18* | .01 |

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .001$.

Stage of Forgiveness

| | <i>n</i> | Cum. % | <i>m</i> | Z Score Range |
|---------|----------|--------|----------|---------------|
| Stage 1 | 78 | 41.3% | 22.69 | -2.21 - 2.00 |
| Stage 2 | 47 | 24.9% | 31.58 | -2.63 - 1.52 |
| Stage 3 | 64 | 33.9% | 24.08 | -2.35 - 1.87 |

Groups did not differ by: Age, years married, religious attendance.

Stage 2 participants reported higher incomes than Stage 1 ($F = 3.06, p = .05$).

Stage 3 participants reported being married longer on average (19yrs) before the EMI occurred compared to Stage 1 couples (14yrs).

Marital Satisfaction



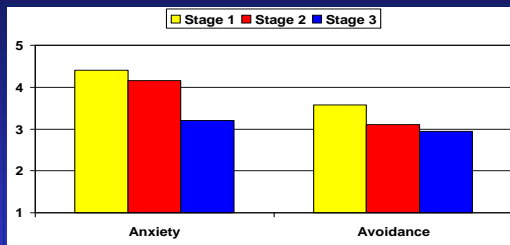
$F(2, 182) = 23.46^{**}$

Scheffe: $3 > 2 > 1$

All groups within the "distressed" range

KMSS scores < 16 predict distressed couples on LWMAT (White, Stahlman, & Furrow, 1994)

Attachment



$F(2, 180) = 18.99^{**}$ 6.55^{**}

Partial Eta² .17 .07

1 > 3 1 > 3

Pillai's .42 $F(16, 348) = 5.73^{**}$ $**p \leq .001$

Attachment & Forgiveness

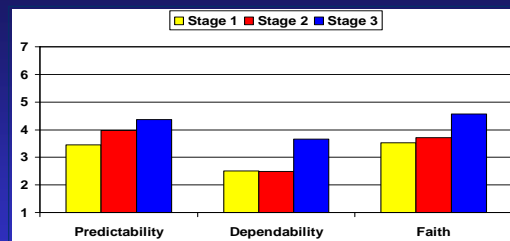
Stage 1 participants reported the highest levels of attachment related anxiety and avoidance.

Stage 3 participants reported significantly lower levels of responses consistent with insecure attachment.

- Female participants reported high levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance compared to males though these differences were not significant.

Findings suggest that participants in Stage 3 are more likely to experience greater felt security in the relationship. This is consistent with Makinen and Johnson (2006) observations of couples who have resolved attachment injuries.

Trust



$F(2, 180) = 7.78^{**}$ 16.91^{**} 11.01^{**}

Partial Eta² .08 .16 .11

3 > 1 3 > 1, 2 3 > 1, 2

$**p \leq .001$

Trust & Forgiveness

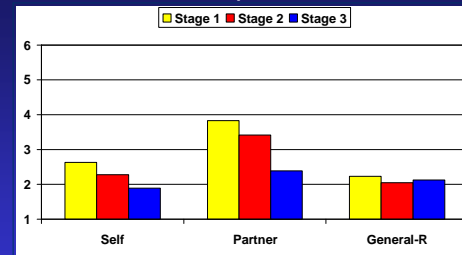
Overall sense of interpersonal trust varied by forgiveness stage.

- Highest scores of trust were found among Stage 3 participants.
- Stage 1 participants reported the lowest scores across all measures of trust.
- Stage 2 did not differ from other stages on predictability.
- Largest group difference found on dependability which is most sensitive to sexual issues in the relationship (Baggarozi 2008).

Trust & Forgiveness

- Findings are consistent with Olson et al. (2002) & Gordon and Baucom (1998) characterizations of the early, middle, and late stages of recovery.
- Distinctive levels of trust were evident in Stage 3. Engaging a new level of trust follows Makinen and Johnson's (2006) recognition of the critical change made by the injured partner in seeking comfort and care from the partner who was the source of the EMI.

Shattered Assumptions



| | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|------|
| <i>F</i> (2,180) | 29.42** | 23.98** | 1.23 |
| <i>Partial Eta</i> ² | .25 | .21 | .01 |
| | 1 > 2 > 3 | 1 > 3 | |

***p* ≤ .001

Shattered Assumptions & Forgiveness

Earlier stages of forgiveness were more often characterized by negative assumptions.

- Participants were more likely to report negative assumptions about their partner.
- Three stages differed on negative assumptions about self.
- Differences in general assumptions were not significant.

Summary

Stage 3 vs. Stage 1 (and often Stage 2)

- Less attachment anxiety and avoidance
- Greater interpersonal trust (all components)
 - Fewer negative assumptions (self, partner)
- Greater marital satisfaction
- Suggests possible interplay between cognitions re: self & partner, attitudinal trust in partner and marital relationship, and attachment anxiety / avoidance (affect).

Implications

Findings are consistent w/ theory and research of attachment injuries (Makinen & Johnson, 2006)

- Trust is indicator and catalyst. A prognostic indicator for resolution of relational betrayals
- Increasing trust is associated with resolution. (Particularly, placing a new / renewed faith in one's partner.)

Implications

Therapists: disclosure of EMI likely is associated with attachment-related behavior (anxiety, discomfort w/ closeness) as coping responses.

- Therapists can use this as a frame to offer structure for containing the early stages characterized by emotional dysregulation.
- Attachment anxiety & numbing/withdrawal can be understood as an adaptive response to the shattered assumptions about one's partner and loss of interpersonal trust.

Implications

Role of Assumptions

- Modifying schemas about partner & self important in recovery process (Gordon and Baucom, 2003)
- Cognitive schemas most affected are specific to relationship and impacted by EMI

Role of Emotion Processing

- Challenge to the therapist in emotional processing with couples in Stage 1 – high levels of affect dysregulation
 - EFT's enactment of trusting engagement consistent with Stage 3 ratings of Trust, Attachment Insecurity, and View of Self and Other.
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Limitations

- Generalization
 - Sampling purposive / convenience
 - Homogeneous sample
 - Process of Recovery
 - Couple data
 - Longitudinal analysis
 - Criteria based outcomes
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Questions

- What is the nature of recovery?
 - Episodic: Event based
 - Emotional regulation-promoting acceptance / security
 - Role of stigma/shame in assumptions/view of self
 - Attachment models and processes
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