



Comparing Childhood Trauma with Childhood Nesting on Adult Sociality

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ABSTRACT

To investigate predictors of adult sociality, we compared the statistical influence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) versus evolved developmental niche history (EDN-H) on prosociality (perspective taking; Davis, 1983) and self-protective sociality (social dominance; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994) in two structural equation models (SEM).

BACKGROUND

Increasingly, psychologists are attending to the long-term effects of childhood experience on adult wellbeing. Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) shows that adversity experienced during childhood (e.g., sexual abuse, violence in the home) predicts poor mental and physical health outcomes in adulthood (Felitti & Anda, 2005). Contrastingly, greater childhood history of the evolved developmental niche (EDN-H; supportive childhood; positive emotional home climate; family togetherness, free play, positive touch) relates to better mental health and sociomoral capacities in children (Narvaez et al., 2019) and in adults (e.g., perspective taking; Narvaez, Cheng & Wang, 2016). Thus, two questions emerge: 1) in predicting adult sociomoral outcomes, are adverse or positive childhood experiences stronger indicators? 2) if one predictor is stronger, which childhood experience components (subscales) are most important?

PURPOSE

We investigated the influence of childhood experience (trauma vs. nesting) upon adult sociomoral outcomes.

HYPOTHESES

- (1) EDN-H (childhood nestedness) will outperform ACEs when predicting both positive and negative adult sociality, perspective taking and social dominance.
- (2) Controlling for other EDN-H subscales, home climate will predict both adult sociality as measured by perspective taking and social dominance.

METHODS

We recruited an adult sample (N=252; Mage=35.19 years, 62% male, 84% Euro-American) who completed a survey online. Participants were recruited through Amazon Turk.

MEASURES

LIFE HISTORY PREDICTORS

Evolved Developmental Niche History (EDN-H; Narvaez, Wang & Cheng, 2016): Assesses childhood experience based on evolved expectations for positive touch and support, play, responsiveness of caregivers.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); Felitti & Anda, 2005): Assesses adversity in childhood experiences, N=10.

ADULT SOCIALITY OUTCOMES

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994).

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983): Perspective Taking

Evolved Developmental Niche (Evolved Nest) for Young Children

Provisioned by a community (Most practices are 30-40 million years old)

Hunter Gatherer Childhood Model: Common practices around the world (Konner, 2005)

TOUCH: Held or kept near others constantly

- Shapes epigenetics for anxiety (Meaney, 2001); promotes DNA synthesis; separation from mother dysregulates multiple systems

RESPONSIVITY: Prompt responses to fusses and cries (mitigating distress)

- Involved meeting child's needs in the moment
- Foster reciprocal communication, synchrony and repair of dysynchrony
- Shapes HPA axis (McEwan, 2016) and Vagal tone (10th Cranial Nerve, Porges, 2011)

BREASTFEEDING: Nursed frequently (2-3 times/hr initially) for 2-5 years

- Mother produces antibodies for protective agents in the vicinity; provides basic immunoglobulins (Power & Schulkin, 2016)
- Promotes intelligence and health

ALLOPARENTS: Frequently cared for by individuals other than mothers (fathers and grandmothers, in particular)

- Mothers need support to care well for their young (Hrdy, 2009)
- Promotes greater openness

PLAY: Enjoy free play in natural world with multiage playmates

- Fosters self-control and more developed social skills
- Develops right brain which is major components of socio-moral functioning

SOCIAL SUPPORT: High social embeddedness

- Promotes positive emotions (joy, expansiveness) rather than negative emotions (sadness and fear)
- Greater health and wellbeing

SOOTHING PERINATAL EXPERIENCE: No separation or imposed harm to infant

- More success at the rest of the components

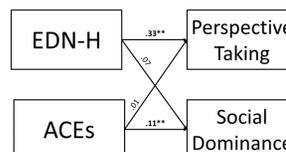
RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. EDN-H Composite	3.45	0.75									
2. EDN-H Responsivity	3.71	1.07	0.9**								
3. EDN-H Social Embeddedness	3.32	1.03	0.78**	0.71**							
4. EDN-H Positive Home Climate	3.15	1.07	0.81**	0.76**	0.67**						
5. EDN-H Negative Home Climate	1.6	1.1	-0.63**	-0.46**	-0.31**	-0.38**					
6. EDN-H Positive Touch	3.46	0.94	0.86**	0.71**	0.55**	0.56**	-0.5**				
7. EDN-H Free Play	3.66	0.94	0.7**	0.65**	0.51**	0.59**	-0.35**	0.45**			
8. ACEs	10.63	2.23	-0.42**	-0.35**	-0.24**	-0.29**	0.47**	-0.41**	-0.17**		
9. Perspective Taking	3.73	0.81	0.3**	0.27**	0.22**	0.26**	-0.27**	0.21**	0.25**	-0.12	
10. Social Dominance	3.19	1.08	-0.05	0.04	0.1	0.16**	0.43**	-0.1	0.02	0.2**	-0.31**

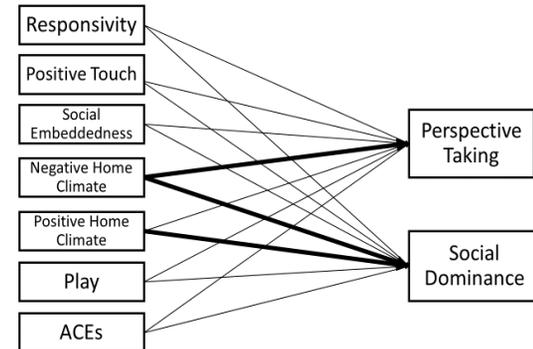
Structural Equation Models

Figure 1. The model demonstrated a good fit, (CFI=1.00, SRMR=.00). When controlling for the other variable, EDN-H composite predicted perspective taking, not ACEs (β EDN=.33, $p<.001$; β ACEs=.01, $p=.753$), and ACEs predicted social dominance, not EDN-H (β EDN=.07, $p=.515$; β ACEs=.11, $p=.001$).



Next, a second SEM model was tested to further investigate the role of each subscale of the EDN-H in order to assess which childhood experiences were the most outstanding when predicting adult sociality.

Figure 2. The second model demonstrated a good fit, a saturated model (CFI=1.00, SRMR=.00), with EDN-H subscales outperforming ACEs: adverse experiences no longer significantly predicted either outcome variable but EDN-H predicted both. For perspective taking, the EDN-H subscale of negative-emotion home climate outperformed all other variables ($\beta=.13$, $p=.017$). Unexpectedly, both negative-emotion home climate ($\beta=.53$, $p<.001$) and positive-emotion home climate ($\beta=.33$, $p<.001$) positively predicted social dominance. Bolded paths were significant, $p < .05$.



DISCUSSION

Childhood history of the evolved developmental niche (EDN-H) outperformed adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in predicting adult perspective-taking and social dominance, with childhood emotional home climate uniquely predictive. Aligning with prior research, EDN-consistent history relates to sociomoral capacities whereas ACEs are risk factors that lead to more self-protective social orientations (Narvaez, 2014, 2016).

Although preventing childhood trauma is vital for adult psychological outcomes, so is providing the evolved developmental niche. ACEs are a risk factor and EDN may serve as a buffer.

Further research is needed to unpack why nestedness better predicted social dominance, taking the variance from childhood adversity. We speculate that the American character has a tendency to perceive itself to be superior to others politically. Avoidant attachment, on the increase in college students (Konrath et al., 2014), is correlated with feelings of superiority and desire for control, so perhaps there is relationship to SDO scores.

IMPLICATIONS

In alignment with previous research of the EDN, this study suggests that promotion of the EDN in childhood facilitates prosociality in adulthood and may mitigate adverse experiences. Consequently, support of the EDN functions to support childhood development two-fold: it protects against symptoms of adversity as well as building healthy prosociality.