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# Gender Differences in the Role of Parent and Peer Attachment in College Adjustment for Childhood Maltreatment Survivors

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## Background

- Childhood maltreatment (CM)
  - Physical, emotional, sexual abuse and/or neglect
- Attachment
  - Emotional bond formed with caretakers, and later with peers and romantic partners
- College adjustment (CA)
  - Transition to college in educational, psychological, and relational domains
- CM survivors may have difficulty with CA, as evidenced in higher first year college dropout rates

- Social adjustment is an important part of CA
- CM survivors may struggle using critical social resources
  - Poor attachment to peers and/or parents may impact ability to adjust socially, particularly for female survivors
  - May lead to feelings of isolation
  - Some have reported wanting to leave college and return to established social support systems back home

**Hypothesis:** Women and men would both experience impaired attachment post CM but women would experience poorer CA than men as a result of impaired relationships

## Methods

- N = 114 first and second year undergraduates
- Self-report questionnaires
  - Demographics
  - Childhood Trauma Questionnaire
  - Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment
  - College Adjustment Questionnaire
- PROCESS macro for SPSS tested:
  - Parent, peer attachment mediating CM – CA link
  - Gender as a moderator

## Results

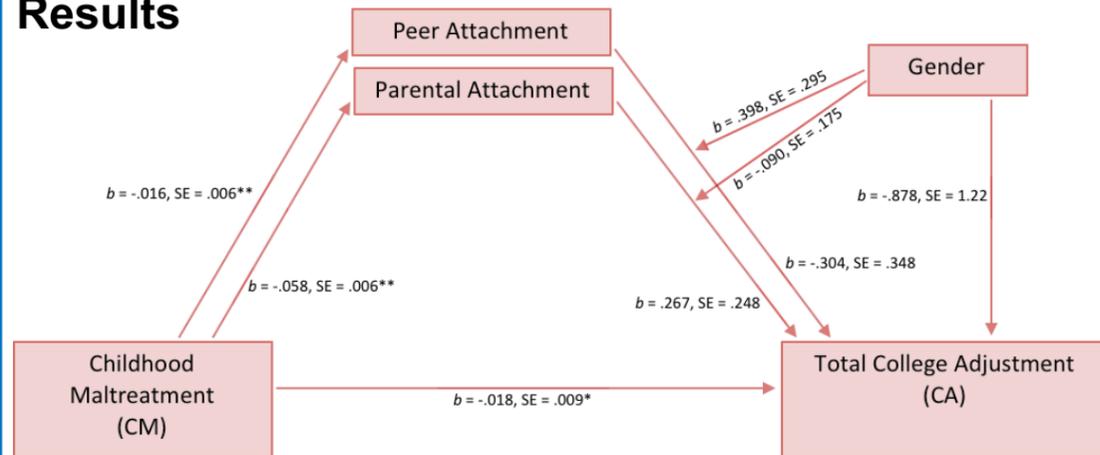


Figure 1. Those who experienced more CM reported worse attachment to friends, worse attachment to parents, and worse total CA. Men, but not women, reported lower total CA ( $b = -.008, SE = .006, CI = -.021, -.000$ ) through impaired peer attachment.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

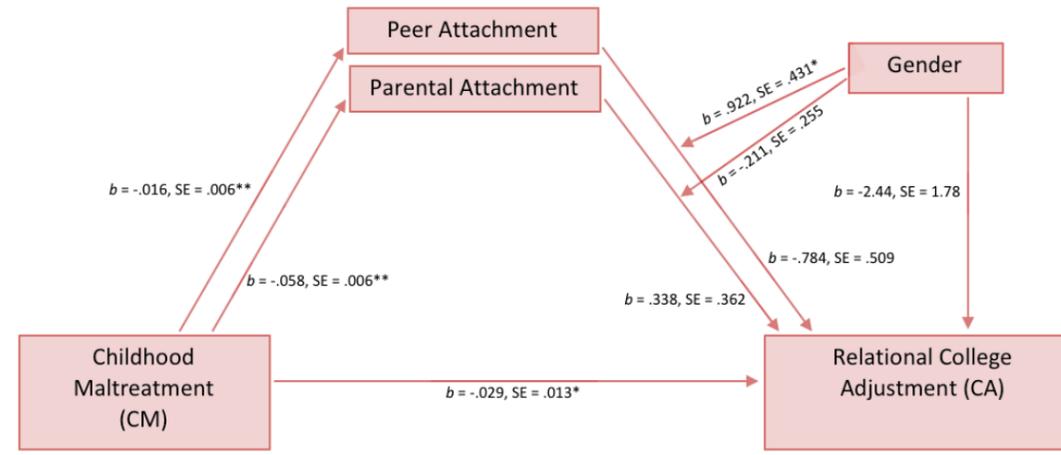


Figure 1. Those who experienced more CM reported worse relational CA. Gender moderated the link between peer attachment and relational CM. Men, but not women, reported lower relational CA ( $b = -.017, SE = .009, CI = -.038, -.002$ ) through impaired peer attachment.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

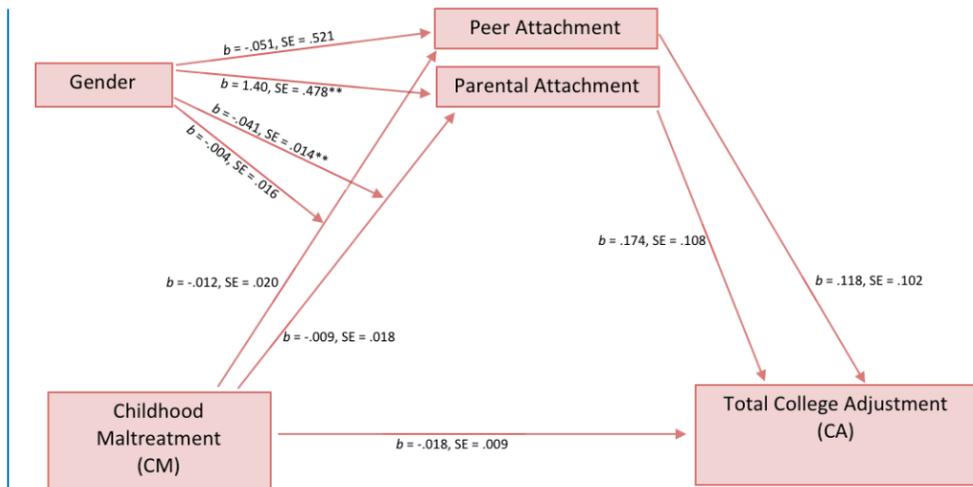


Figure 2. Gender moderated the link between CM and parental attachment ( $p = .01$ ) with a stronger relation for women ( $b = -.09$ ) than men ( $b = -.05$ ). There were no indirect effects found through parental or peer attachment.

\*\*  $p < .01$

## Discussion

- Both men and women report impaired attachments with parents and peers following CM
- Only men's impaired relationships with friends reduced total and relational CA, counter to prediction
- This may be consistent with documented stigma of CM in men
  - May decrease openness to use existing social resources after CM and during CA
- Women may be more open to peers about experiences of CM allowing them to better use their social resources
- College counseling centers could be critical in helping male survivors adjust.
  - Enhancing the use of relational resources
  - Working to reduce stigma of CM in men, both culturally and individually

## References

- Banyard, V. L. & Cantor, E. N. (2004). Adjustment to college among trauma survivors: An exploratory study of resilience. *Research in Brief, 45*, 207-221.
- Hiester, M., Nordstrom, A., & Swenson, L. M. (2009). Stability and change in parental attachment and adjustment outcomes during the first semester transition to college life. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*, 521-538.