Dissatisfaction with and Desire for Touch in Intimate Relationships: Links with Trauma, Need for Control, and Cognitive Rigidity

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Background

Trauma
o Trauma is a psychological and physical phenomenon affecting up to 80% of the population, making it a common and prevalent concern (de Vries and Off, 2009).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines trauma as exposure to actual or perceived threats of death, sexual violence, serious injury, exposure to war, natural or human disasters, or torture (APA, 2013). These adverse events have long-term repercussions on mental health.

Possible psychological disorders resulting from trauma include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), adjustment disorders, and mood disorders, to name a few.

Additionally, traumatic events that are unpredictable and uncontrollable in nature are more likely to lead to trauma-related disorders.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Those who have experienced trauma will report more dissatisfaction with current touch and desire for more touch in their intimate relationships.

Hypothesis 2: This relationship will be mediated by desire for control and cognitive rigidity.

Hypothesis 3: Desire for control will be positively correlated with cognitive rigidity.

Methodology

Participants will be recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk.

An initial pre-screen survey will be conducted to find at least 200 participants who have experienced trauma and also are in an intimate relationship.

Eligible participants will then be surveyed to examine how trauma may facilitate or hinder desire for more touch, dissatisfaction with current touch, desirability of control, and cognitive rigidity.

Questionnaires will include the following:
- Exposure to Trauma Events and Life Events Questionnaire (Bödvördsvölter & Elkilt, 2007).
- Yes/No questionnaire with added component of frequency and intensity of trauma.
- Desirability of Control Scale (Burger, 1979).
- Example: “When things don’t go according to plans, it stresses me out.”
- Resistance to Change Scale (Oreg, 2003).
- Example: “When things don’t go according to plans, it stresses me out.”
- The Touch Scale will be used to gauge views on intimate touch (Brennan, Wu, & Love, 1998).

Expected Results

- We expect to find that desire for more touch and dissatisfaction with current touch will be higher in those who have experienced trauma, and that this link will be mediated by the need for control. Desire for control will also be positively related to cognitive rigidity.

Discussion

The proposed research will examine how touch, as a medium for social support and security, may affect intimate relationships post-trauma. An increased need for relational control and structure may influence one’s desire for more touch and affect satisfaction with current touch.

If results support the hypotheses, this will suggest that desire for control and cognitive restriction due to trauma affects the quality of amount of touch desired from intimate partners. This finding may explain previous results suggesting that traumatized individuals are more likely to be dissatisfied with touch received from their partners yet simultaneously wish for more partner touch.

References


