

Attachment

Attachment / Basic Concepts

John Bowlby

Proximity Seeking
Secure Base & Safe Haven
Attachment Schema

Mary Ainsworth

Attachment Classification
Infant Strange Situation (ISS)

Mary Main

Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)
Disorganized Attachment

Three Stages of Research

- I. Home Observations of Dyadic Behavior
paralleled Bowlby's work
- II. Infant Strange Situation (ISS)
measures reunion behavior
(schema activation under stress)
- I. Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)
coherence analysis of monologue (neural coherence)

Home Observations / Dyadic Behaviors

Child Categorization

Maternal Behavior

B (Secure)

emotionally available,
perceptive & effective

A (Avoidant)

distant & rejecting

C (Anxious/Ambivalent)

inconsistent availability

D (Disorganized)

conflictual behavior

Infant Strange Situation

Child Categorization

ISS Child Behavior

B (Secure)

seeks proximity, easily soothed,
quickly returns to play and
exploration

A (Avoidant)

Does not seek proximity or appear
upset – indifferent to mother

C (Anxious/Ambivalent)

Difficult to soothe after separation,
angry and seeking comfort at the
same time, slow to return to play

D (Disorganized)

Chaotic, self-injurious

Adult Attachment Interview

- A semi-structured clinical interview focusing on early attachment experiences and their effects.
 - “I’d like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents as a young child...if you could start from as far back as you can remember.”
 - “Chose adjectives that reflect your relation ship with your mother, father, etc...”
 - “Which of your parents did you feel closest to and why?”

Grice's Maxims

Rational discourse follows a cooperative principle that requires adherence to four maxims:

- 1. Quality:** Be truthful, and have evidence for what you say;
- 2. Quantity:** Be succinct, and yet complete;
- 3. Relevance:** Let the direction of the conversation be relevant to the topic at hand; and
- 4. Manner:** Be clear and orderly.

Adult Attachment Interview

(F) - free/autonomous

Narrative coherence
Balanced perspective
Access to episodic memory
Adjectives supported by details

(DIS)- dismissing

Lack of recall & supportive details
Minimizing/idealizing perspective
Dismissing of important attachments

(E) - preoccupied

Intrusion of past into present
Preoccupied with parents & emotions
Lots of intrusive & pressured output
Idealizing or engaged (splitting)

(U) - unresolved

Becomes disoriented/disorganized when
discussing traumatic experiences

Child & Adult Attachment Categories

Child (ISS)

- (B) - secure
- (A) - avoidant
- (C) - ambivalent
- (D) - disorganized

Adult (AAI)

- (F) - free/autonomous
- (DIS) - disorganized
- (E) - preoccupied
- (U) - unresolved

Related Findings

Secure Attachment Correlates with:

Self-reflective capacity & conscience

Coherent autobiographical narratives

Resilience / ego-strength / coping skills

Positive social involvement

Functional adaptation

Acceptance of parental socialization

With father: prosocial interactions with siblings and peers

With mother: mood and affect regulation

Narrative Coherence / Neural Integration

- **Left-Right Hemisphere Communication**
 - Integration of emotion and conscious awareness
- **Cortical-Subcortical Integration**
 - Impulse control and affect regulation
- **Quiet and Safe Internal Environment**
 - Frontal-parietal balance and cooperation

Related Findings

Insecure Attachment Correlates with:

Poor emotional control

Externalization & projection

Neuroticism

Hostility

Antisocial behavior

Relationship violence

Love becomes Flesh

The behaviors that support secure attachment build the social brain:

- Frontal-Amygdala networks
- Smart Vagus – Social Engagement System
- Endorphin & Benzodiazepine receptors
- Autonomic Nervous Systems
- Spindle Cells / Cingulate & Insula Cortices
- Positive Immunological Functioning

Schema Stability

- Do attachment schema change?
- Are they formed <imprinted> during “critical periods” that are unchangeable later in life?
- Plasticity in social brain networks make evolutionary sense given shifting relationships over time.

Schema Stability

- Classifications are largely stable (50-75%)
- Insecure > Secure
 - positive relationships & moderate levels of stress
- Secure > Insecure
 - sustained environmental and familial stressors
 - negative changes in caretaking, marriage
 - loss & bereavement
 - chaos
 - decreased resources

Schema Stability

- Adaptation is always a product of both developmental history and current circumstances (Sroufe et al., 1990)
- Attachment schema are tied to stress and affect regulation throughout life (Allen et al., 2004)
- Secure attachment is vulnerable to subsequent stress (Weinfield et al., 2000)
- Those with “earned autonomy” are vulnerable to depression (Roisman et al., 2002)
- Attachment schema is only one variable in the prediction of attachment behavior (Fraley, 2002)

Schema Generalizability

- Lower SES and oppressed minorities will likely have less attachment security when assessed (Allen et al, 2004)
- Western European countries have more secure attachment ratings while Israel and Japan have more anxious ambivalent ratings (van IJzendoorn et al, 1988)

Attachment Psychotherapy

Assessment

transference / countertransference

relationship quality

cohesion of childhood narratives / AAI

lack of recall / intrusion / pressure

dissociation / magical thinking

Attachment Psychotherapy

Treatment – basic principles

Therapist as safe haven & secure base

The therapy is based in affective attunement, blueprinted by cognition, and navigated by shuttling between the two

Attachment schema are understood as survival strategies instead of resistance and other defenses

Attachment Psychotherapy

Treatment – basic principles

Therapist is an active participant in treatment not a disconnected analyst

Healing requires an interactive dyad

Attachment is negotiated and renegotiated as client can tolerate greater levels of intimacy

Attachment Psychotherapy

Treatment - tools

- Psychoeducation – schema/implicit memory
- Increased awareness of connection between childhood experiences and adult relationship behavior
 - * making attachment strategies conscious
- Transference analysis
- Experiments in Secure Attachment

Attachment Psychotherapy

Treatment - tools

- Assessment of attachment security
- Connect attachment schema to therapeutic relationship
 - Preoccupied = idealization of therapist, clingy
 - Dismissing = overt denial of distress & symptoms
 - Unresolved = fearful of therapist / trust avoidant
- Couples therapy using AAI and schema descriptions to better understand themselves and each other
- infant-parent therapy – giving voice to the infant's needs

Attachment Psychotherapy

Four Foundations of Psychotherapeutic Change

1. The quality of the relationship
2. Sustained moderate levels of arousal
3. Summoning cognition & emotion
4. Co-constructing a new narrative

The Neuroscience of Attachment

- Frontal-Amygdala networks
- Spindle Cells / Cingulate & Insula Cortices
- Smart Vagus – Social Engagement System

The Neuroscience of Attachment

- Autonomic Nervous Systems
- Endorphin & Benzodiazepine receptors
- Cortisol Regulation
- Positive Immunological Functioning

where do we go from here?

Beware of Assumptions such as:

The stability of attachment schema

The superiority of the mother

That relationships are hierarchical and
sequential in nature (Tronick, et al., 1992)

Complex Developmental Interactions

- Attachment theory was, in part, a reaction to radical behaviorism.
- We became very attached to “schema theory” but it turns out to be far more complicated. Both early experience and the current environment matter.

Complex Developmental Interactions

The brain is an organ of adaptation

Different attachment styles may be selected
across cultures and during various
historical eras

Don't marry attachment theory, just date...