Adult Attachment and Implications for Practice

Continuing Study Outline

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Goal

This continuing study outline provides information about the ways that adult attachment patterns influence the care-giving as well as the therapeutic relationship.

Preparation

In preparation for this continuing study activity please review the following resources:

Edelstein, R. S., Alexander, K. W., Shaver, P. R., Schaaf, J. M., Quas, J. A., Lovas, G. S., & Goodman, G. S. (2004). Adult attachment style and parental responsiveness during a stressful event. *Attachment and Human Development, 6*, 31-52. Available at: http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/Shaver/projects/Responsiveness%20paper%202004.pdf

Fraley, R. C. (2004). A brief overview of adult attachment theory and research. Available at: http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm

Objectives

The participant will:

A. Define how attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety affect the attachment system differently across various relationships throughout one's lifespan.
B. Describe the most significant difference between self report measures of adult attachment and narrative attachment measures.
C. Identify two ways in which attachment insecurity affects beliefs about parenthood.
D. Describe three ways in which attachment avoidance affects parenting behavior.
E. Name one important finding regarding children of a parent with an avoidant attachment pattern.
F. Summarize the relationship between self report measures of adult attachment and parenting behaviors.

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Overview	In clinical work with caregivers and their young children it is critical that *relationship* remains a central focus. Along with efforts to support the caregiver-child relationships, attention is paid to relationships family members and other caregivers form with the clinician. This emphasis stems from a major tenet of Infant Mental Health theory, parallel process, or the idea that one relationship affects another. In this context, the clinician's supportive actions with the parent provide the parent with needed fuel to in turn support the child. In order to build this relationship with caregivers it is necessary for clinicians to develop an understanding of how a caregiver forms relationships, sees relationships and may communicate with us about this. There is no greater influence on our understanding and behavior around current relationships than one's early childhood experiences with a primary caregiver. Early experience is now known to influence an individual not only throughout their childhood but into their adulthood and across various types of relationships. Although there may be mediators of its effects, parenting history remains the predominant influence on current relationships and therefore it is critical to understand.
Expanded Objectives	A: When a person demonstrates avoidance as their predominant pattern of attachment they routinely deactivate the attachment system when stressors or behaviors would typically activate the attachment system. Avoidant individuals report discomfort with close relationships, and avoid depending on others. In contrast, when anxiety is at the core of the attachment pattern, the attachment system is on constant alert. There is a "hyperactivation" which reflects a preoccupation with fears of abandonment and rejection by those one is close to. Anxious individuals are not satisfied with their relationships, are concerned and upset by separations and have "easy" access to negative perceptions and memories. B: Both narrative and self report measures ask individuals to report on their experiences in close relationships. The primary difference is in the interpretation of the responses. The narrative measures interpret the response with the belief that unconscious beliefs and associations are untapped in the discourse and therefore the content of the narrative is not taken at face value. Rather, the coherence, quality and level of detail within the discourse are evaluated to determine likely attachment patterns. In self report measures the information is taken at face value. C: Attachment insecurity, whether avoidant or anxious, has been found in two studies based on self report measures to result in ambivalence about having children and negative viewpoints about parenthood and parent-child relationships. D: Adults with avoidant patterns of attachment tended to ignore or misunderstand their children's cues or bids for attention. In addition, their level of support during stressful events was minimal and parenting interactions were more withdrawn as the level of distress increased. Positive parenting interactions occurred almost exclusively when the child was content.

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	E: Children with parents that demonstrated an avoidant pattern of attachment had a more negative reaction to the stress of the inoculation than others even when controlling for temperament and personality of parent issues. F: The study supports that self report measures as well as narrative measures can predict the types of parenting behaviors as they relate to adult attachment patterns especially in regards to avoidant attachment patterns.
Discussion Points	1. Your group may like to review details about the Ainsworth's Strange Situation. This information may be found in Fraley (2004), the second background reading. 2. Consider why avoidant attachment patterns in caregivers appear to have more of an effect on interactions and child behavior than caregivers with anxious attachment patterns. 3. Invite participants to think about parents they have worked with who demonstrated aspects of anxious, avoidant, and secure attachment patterns. Together, share experiences in which their approaches to relationship building differed with parents with these styles. 4. IAITMH welcomes your feedback about this and all of our training materials. Please send any comments to info@iaitmh.org.
References and Recommended Readings	Further information including the Adult Attachment Interview Protocol, other articles and videos can be found at the Attachment Theory and Research at State University of New York-Stony Brook site: http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/ There is also a line of adult attachment work that considers the formation of romantic attachments. For a good review of this work, go to: http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/Shaver/publications/bartholomew98.pdf. Hesse, E. (2008). The Adult Attachment Interview: Protocol, method of analysis, and empirical studies. In J. Cassidy and P. Shaver (Eds.) *Handbook of Attachment, Second Edition*. New York: Guilford. Oppenheim, D. & Goldsmith, D. F. (2007). *Attachment theory in clinical work with children*. New York: Guilford. Steele, H. & Steele, M. (2008). *Clinical application of the Adult Attachment Interview*. New York: Guilford.

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