Maternal States of Mind, Reflective Function, Maternal Behavior, and the Mother-Infant Attachment Relationship

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Maternal States of Mind, Reflective Function, Maternal Behavior, and the Mother-Infant Attachment Relationship

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With more than a little assistance from...

- Sandi Bento, Research Coordinator
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- Anneli Sepa
- Deanne Pederson
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Our Research Program - Overview

Attachment - The First Relationship
Its origins in the first year and in the mother’s childhood experience
The First Relationship

Maternal Childhood Experience → Maternal State of Mind

Trauma

Organized and Disorganized Attachment Relationships

Early Mother-Infant Interaction → Attachment Relationship

Future Relationships

Internal Working Model of Attachment
Maternal Representations and the Transmission of Attachment

- Elaborating on the place of representations in the broader picture
- Beyond the AAI-based Internal Working Model (IWM)
- Need for greater specificity - Representation of
  - different types of relationships
  - Different relationships of the same type
A Reconceptualization of the Developmental Path View I

Level of Individual Mental Representation

Maternal Representation of Intimate Relationships

AAI - IWM

Level of Interaction

Spousal Relationships

Same-sex Relationships

Rep’ of another M-I Rel’ship

Generic Representation of Mother-Infant Relationships

Representation of a Specific Mother-Infant Relationship

Particular Mother - Infant Relationship Strange Situation

Mother-Infant Interaction

Opposite-sex Relationships

Parent-Adult Relationships
The Concept of Reflective Function

- Fonagy’s introduction of the concept
  - Capacity to understand one’s own and others actions in terms of mental states
  - Thus, allows for adaptive adjustment of interactive behaviour and, therefore,
  - Critical element in the process underlying the development of secure attachment relationships
Current Conceptualization of Role of Reflective Function in Transmission of Attachment

Reflective Function *mediates* impact of maternal state of mind and the attachment relationship.
Research to Date on Reflective Function

- **Basic Predictions**
  - **Reflective Function/Attachment Security**
    - Fonagy et al, 1991:
      - Secure attachment associated with higher RF
    - Slade (2005)
      - Replicate FonagyRF/AAI
  - **Reflective Function/AAI-State of Mind**
      - Coherency and Autonomy associated with higher RF
    - Replicated by Slade et al (2005)
Research to Date - RF as Mediator

• Slade et al. (2005)
  ▪ Statistical evidence of Reflective Function as mediator between AAI-IWM and Attachment Security is inconclusive

• But even if established, begs question of link between RF and quality of interactive behaviour - Maternal Sensitivity
  ▪ Grienenberger et al. (2005)
    • Problems
      - AMBIANCE and Security...??!!
Problems with Current Model

- What is determinant of maternal behaviour - IWM or RF?
- Are IWM and RF invariantly linked?
- IWM and RF are distinct concepts!
  - Qualitative vs quantitative influences...

- A re-conceptualization of the place of Reflective Function in the transmission of attachment - back to basics
Reformulated Model: RF as Moderator

- Autonomous
- Non-Auton

Hi/Low-Rf

- Hi-Rf
- Lo-Rf

Auton Style Interaction

Secure

Non-Auton Style Interaction

Non-Secure
The Current Study

- 60 mothers and infants
  - community sample avg M age - 31 yrs
  - I age - 13 mos at SSP and home visit; AAI within following 6 mos
- Strange Situation (12-14 mos)
- Mat Beh Q-Sort in home (12-14 mos)
- Adult Attachment Interview (12-18 mos)
Interactive Behaviour Domains

• Conceptually related to specific state of mind
• Scales based on rational selection of MBQS items
  ▪ Autonomous → Responsive (Secure)
  ▪ Dismissive → Withdrawn (Avoidant)
  ▪ Preoccupied → Intrusive (Ambivalent)
• Viewed as IWM-driven pattern of interaction
Specific Predictions

RF Independent

- Autonomous
- Responsive
- Secure

High RF: Dyadic Shaping

- Dismissive
- Less Withdrawn
- More responsive
- Secure

- Preoccupied
- Less Intrusive
- More responsive
- Secure

Low RF: IWM Driven

- Dismissive
- Withdrawn
- Avoidant

- Preoccupied
- Intrusive
- Ambivalent
Results of the Current Study

• Basic Inter-correlations
  ▪ RF and Autonomy or coherency
    • Failure to replicate
  ▪ RF and Attachment security or relationship quality
    • Failure to replicate

▪ Why???
Results of Current Study

• Exploring the Moderator Model
  Reflective Function and:
  ▪ 1. MBQS Sensitivity - Autonomous vs non-Autonomous
  ▪ 2. Quality of interactive behaviour (Behavioural Domains) by AAI categories and Reflective Function... and
  ▪ 3. Quality of the attachment relationship
Maternal Sensitivity and Reflective Function

- Maternal Sensitivity
- Reflective Function

Low RF - High RF

Non-Autonomous

Autonomous
## Correlations Between Maternal Reflective Function and Maternal Behavioral Domains by Adult Attachment Interview Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AAI Category</th>
<th>Maternal Behavioral Domains</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
<td>Intrusive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>-.62**</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-.73*</td>
<td>-.78*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of Results - Moderation

RF Independent
- Autonomous → Responsive → Secure

High RF: Dyadic Shaping
- Dismissive → Less Withdrawn, More responsive → Secure
- Preoccupied → Less Intrusive, More responsive → Secure

Low RF: IWM Driven
- Dismissive → Withdrawn → Avoidant
- Preoccupied → Intrusive → Ambivalent
Summary

- Failure to replicate previous findings of simple associations between RF & AAI, and RF & Attach Security
  - Obviously, then, no evidence that RF is a mediator between IWM and Attach Sec
- BUT found strong evidence of RF as moderating impact on IWM as it affects maternal behaviour
  - Especially impressive given that interactive behaviour measured in the home with a totally different instrument
Discussion Points

- **Failure to replicate**
  - Sample variation - really only 2 other samples studied, or....
  - Coding confound - AAI-trained or sophisticated coders
    - Coding to implicit knowledge of AAI coherence and autonomy....
    - Unusually hi correlations (.73) and could substitute RF for AAI in any results....

- **Strong evidence of a model in which RF moderates impact of IWM on maternal behaviour**
  - Conceptually coherent and consistent with basic concept of RF and extant attachment theory
Supplementary Slides
Level of Representation

Maternal Representation of Mother - Infant Relationships - AAI

Mother - Infant Relationship 1

Mother - Infant Relationship 2

Mother - Infant Relationship 3

Mother-Infant Interaction 1

Non-Dyadic Contextual Factors

Affective Scaffolding

Maternal Sensitivity - MBQ

Cognitive Scaffolding

Attachment Behaviour - ABQ

Other Aspects of Interaction

Level of Interaction

Figure 6