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The Nature and Origins of Attachment in Infancy and Early Childhood: Constructing Life’s Foundations

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The Nature and Origins of Attachment in Infancy and Early Childhood: Constructing Life’s Foundations

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Presentation to
Members of the Aga Khan University Community
Nairobi, Kenya
June 20, 2011
Our Research Program

Attachment - The First Relationship

Its origins in the first year and in the mother’s childhood experience and its developmental consequences
Overview

1. Background - Attachment theory and research... and some of our own past research

2. A overview of our program, including illustrative examples of research findings and a brief description of current projects
Some Background to Today’s Talk

The Nature, Sequelae and Origins of Attachment
The First Relationship
Basic Tenets

- Attachment
- Internal Working Model of Attachment
- Epigenetic Effects
- Emotion Regulation
- Social-Cogn Processes “Reflective Function”
- Population Health
- Individual Adjustment
- Future Relationships And Psycho-Social Mal/Adaptation

- Trust
- Self
- Internal Working Model of Attachment
- Attachment Relationship
The First Relationship
Basic Tenets

Social-Cogn Processes
Reflective Functioning

Internal Working
Model of Attachment

Affect Regulation
Self
Others

Avoidant
Secure
Ambivalent/Resistant

Early Mother-Infant Interaction

Attachment Relationship

Future Relationships
And
Psycho-social Mal/adaptation

Western
Developmental Origins of the Attachment Relationship

Mother as Secure Base and Safe Haven

The Circle of Security

• Presence of mother promotes exploration of the environment by the infant
  ▪ “Secure Base”

• When infant is distressed or fearful, attachment system activated
  ▪ Seeks proximity/contact with the mother - “Safe Haven”
Circle of Security

Secure Relationship

Parent Attending to the Child’s Needs

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organize my feelings

I need you to

Support My Exploration

- Watch over me
- Help me
- Delight in me
- Enjoy with me

I need you to

Welcome My Coming To You

Adapted from
© 2000 - Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin & Powell
Secure, Avoidant and Ambivalent - all Organized attachment relationships - and...

Disorganized Relationships
Disorganized Attachment Relationship

- First noticed in the Strange Situation in infants with a history of maltreatment - difficult to classify
- Unusual, conflicted, contradictory behaviour
  - Approach parent in odd ways
  - Move away from parent when upset or frightened
  - Freeze
  - Display fear of parent
- Breakdown/absence of attachment system - no consistent or coherent strategy
- 15% in non-clinical samples; as high as 80% in at-risk samples
Consequences of Disorganized Attachment

- Secure attachment acts as a buffer, Non-Secure as a risk factor, but **Disorganization** has more direct impact:
  - Disturbances in emotion regulation
  - Externalizing behaviour problems in childhood
  - Dissociative behaviour
  - Disturbed interpersonal relationships in childhood and adolescence
  - Other...

(Carlson, 1998 and others)
The First Relationship
Elaboration of the Theory

Maternal Childhood Experience

Maternal State of Mind

Early Mother-Infant Interaction

Organized and Disorganized Attachment Relationships

Attachment Relationship

Future Relationships And Psycho-Social Mal/Adaptation

Internal Working Model of Attachment

Trauma
A Ridiculously Complicated Single Slide Summary of the Key Assessment Instruments
The First Relationship
The Assessment of Attachment

Maternal State of Mind

Maternal Childhood Experience

Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

Atypical Maternal Interaction

AMBIANCE and Frighten/ed/ing Behaviour

Coding Scheme - FR

Internal Working Model of Attachment

Strange Situation Paradigm (SSP)

Future Relationships
And Psycho-Social Mal/Adaptation

Early Mother-Infant Interaction

Maternal Behaviour Q-Sort (MBQS)

Attachment Behaviour Q-Sort (AQS)

Atypical Maternal Interaction

Interesting-but-Scary (IbS)

Attachment Relationship

Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI)
Longitudinal Studies of At-Risk and Community Populations

A Illustrative Sampling of Research Findings
1. The cross-generational transmission of attachment security: From maternal experience through sensitive interaction to a secure relationship

   *(Developmental Psychology, 1998)*

2. So, too, with Disorganized attachment: From traumatic childhood to anomalous parenting to Disorganization

   *(Developmental Psychology, 2006; Attachment & Human Development, 2006)*

3. A simple intervention can make a difference --- but not for some mothers: The enduring impact of trauma in childhood

   *(Infant Mental Health Journal, 2005)*
4. Disorganized relationships become organized with change in maternal interaction

   (Child Development, 2007)

5. Attachment experiences in early childhood can promote cognitive processes that increase risk of later depression

   (Clinical Psychology Review, in press)
Our Current Projects

1. **Over Time, Across Generations and Within the Family:** 
   Continuity and Change in Early Social Development
   (Social Sciences and Humanities research Council of Canada)

2. **The Trans-Generational Transmission of Trauma** (Private donor supported)

3. **Transactional Processes in the Development of Emotional-Behavioural Regulations:** Individuals in Contexts - The Kids, Families and Places Project
   (Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Co-Investigator; Jenny Jenkins, U of Toronto, and Michael Connor, McMaster U. - P.I.)

4. **Bridging the Gap Between Infant Mental Health and Infant Health:** Bringing Attachment Theory into the Infant Acute Pain Context
   (Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Co-Investigator; Rebecca Pillai-Riddell, York U, P.I.)
With more than a little assistance from...

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For additional information:

The Pederson-Moran Research Group
at the University of Western Ontario

http://works.bepress.com/gregmoran/
“Just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so are parents, especially their mothers, dependent on a greater society for economic provision. If a community values its children it must cherish their parents.”

John Bowlby, 1951, p.84, WHO Report
Cited by Inge Bretherton,
Developmental Psychology, 1992
I thank you...