

Attachment Theory

Seeking and maintaining contact with others is viewed as the primary motivating principle in human beings from childhood into adult relationships.

Attachment

- What do you think of when you think Attachment?
- What is attachment?
 - It's all about **proximity!**

What is Attachment?

- ...the capacity to form and maintain healthy emotional relationships which generally begin to develop in early childhood
- Enduring bond with “special” person
- Security & safety within context of this
- relationship
- Includes soothing, comfort, & pleasure
- Loss or threat of loss of special person results in distress

Theories of Attachment

- John Bowlby
- Harry Harlow
- Mary Ainsworth

Harry Harlow



Attachment Figures

- Those who will serve as attachment figures for children are:
 - The ones who are most responsive to **crying** and to **interact socially**.
- Those who will serve as attachment figures for adults are:
 - The ones who are most responsive to **anxiety/fear** and to **social interaction**



Childhood Attachments

Mary Ainsworth

- Identified attachments “types” based on child responses to the “strange situation” – used with children \approx 1 yr.



Three Types of Attachment Styles (Ainsworth)

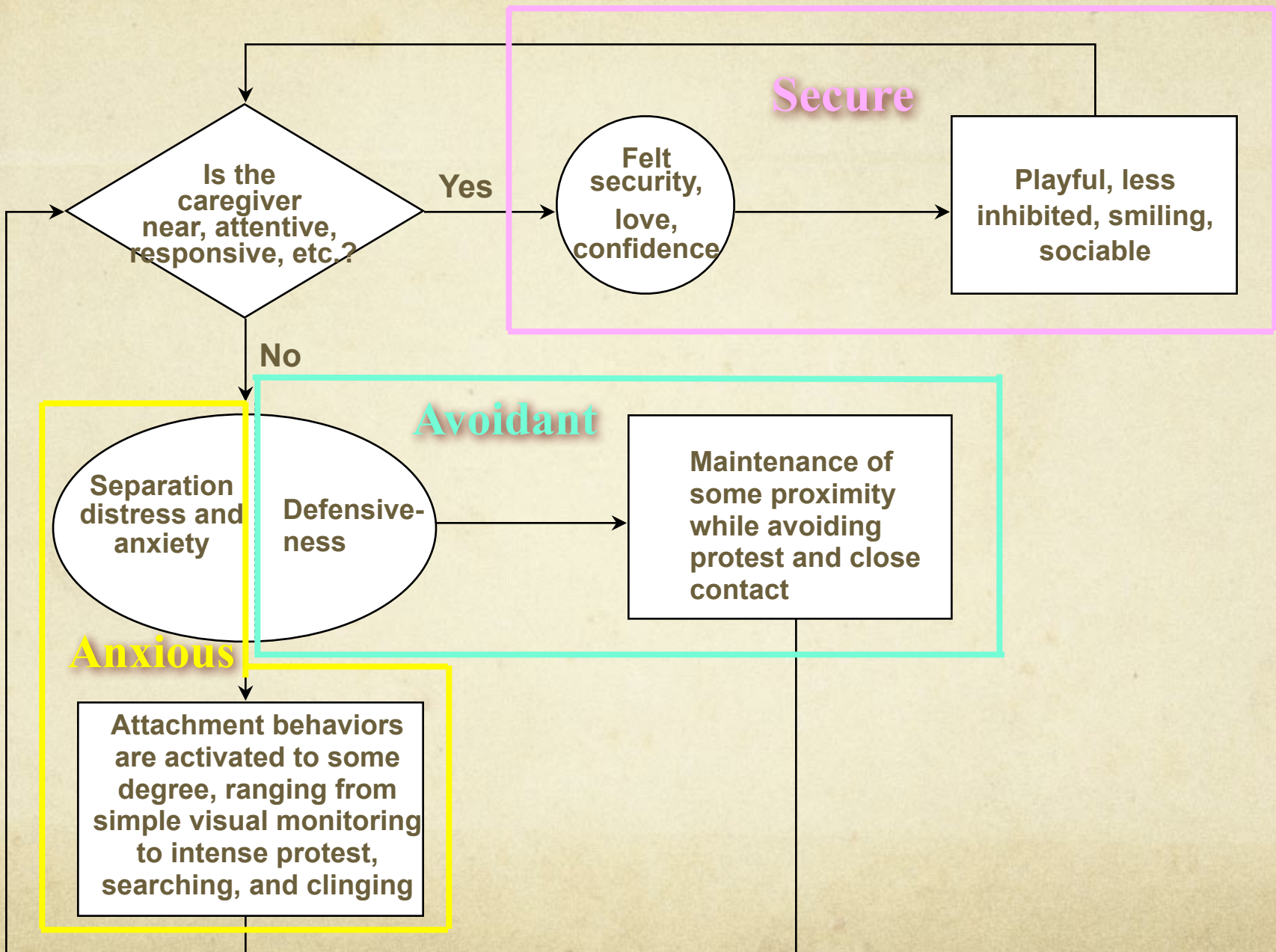
- **Avoidant**
 - Cries relatively little during separation and actively avoids parent upon reunion
 - Engages in “displacement” exploratory activity, “turning to the neutral world of things without the true interest of exploration”
- **Origin:** parental rejection, coolness, discomfort with own and other’s negative emotions and physical contact

Three Types of Attachment Styles (Ainsworth)

- **Anxious**
 - More crying, separation anxiety, and anger
 - Lacks confidence that parent will be accessible and responsive
 - Vigilance and preoccupation interfere with exploration
 - Attachment behavior has low threshold for activation
 - Fussy, angry, immature
- **Origin:** parental anxiety and uncertainty, insensitivity to child's signals, intrusiveness, inconsistency

Three Types of Attachment Styles (Ainsworth)

- **Secure**
 - Seems confident that parent is accessible and responsive
 - Is competent, exploration-oriented, and affectively positive
 - Soothes easily
 - Shows early empathy, communicates clearly about feelings
 - Solves problems effectively
- **Origin:** sensitive, empathic caregiving; coherent discussion of emotions



Childhood Responses to Disruptions of Attachment Bonds

- Three phases that children go through
- Phase I
 - Protest-crying, screaming, anger, pounding the door.
 - Small sounds are temporary respite as child checks for a sign of attachment figures return.
 - Dominant attitude was hope for the attachment figures return
 - Dominant emotion fear, anger, distress.
 - Child rejects alternate care

Childhood Responses to Disruptions of Attachment Bonds

- Phase II
 - **Despair**-increased hopelessness of attachment figures return.
 - Looks like deep mourning.
 - Adults misinterpret as a sign of the child's recovery.
 - Hostility toward other children and favorite objects tends to increase during this time.
 - Child still rejects alternate care

Childhood Responses to Disruptions of Attachment Bonds

- Phase III
 - Detachment
 - Child actively turns his attention to the environment.
 - Alternate caregivers are no longer rejected.
 - Child appears apathetic to attachment figures return.

Impacts of Insecure Attachment

- Biochemical consequences
 - Infants raised without loving touch and security have abnormally high levels of **stress hormones**, which can impair the growth and development of their brains and bodies.
 - The neurobiological consequences of emotional neglect can leave children behaviorally disordered, depressed, apathetic, slow to learn, and prone to chronic illness.
- "affectionless psychopathy",

Issues with Children (4-11 years)

- Low self-esteem.
- Needy, clingy or pseudo-independent.
- Decompensate when faced with stress and adversity.
- Lack of self-control.
- Unable to develop and maintain friendships.
- Alienated from and oppositional with parents, caregivers, and other authority figures.
- Antisocial attitudes and behaviors.
- Aggression and violence.
- Difficulty with genuine trust, intimacy and affection.
- Negative, hopeless and pessimistic view of self, family and society.
- Lack empathy, compassion and remorse.
- Disruptive behavioral as well as academic problems at school

Issues with Adolescents (12-18 years)

- **Behavior:** oppositional and defiant, impulsive, destructive, lie and steal, aggressive and abusive, violence, hyperactive, self-destructive, cruel to animals, irresponsible, fire setting.
- **Emotions:** intense anger and temper, sad, depressed and hopeless, moody, fearful and anxious (although often hidden), irritable, inappropriate emotional reactions.
- **Thoughts:** negative beliefs about self, relationships, and life in general ("negative working model"), lack of cause-and-effect thinking, attention and learning problems.

Other Consequences of Being Unattached

- **Relationships:** lacks trust, controlling ("bossy"), manipulative, does not give or receive genuine affection and love, indiscriminately affectionate with strangers, unstable peer relationships, blames others for own mistakes or problems, victimizes others/victimized.
- **Physical:** poor hygiene, tactilely defensive, enuresis and encopresis, accident prone, high pain tolerance, genetic predispositions (e.g., depression, hyperactivity).
- **Moral/Spiritual:** lack of faith, compassion, remorse, meaning and other prosocial values, identification with evil and the dark side of life.



Techniques for Helping Children Form Attachments

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- Eye Contact
- Create a positive base from which to explore the trauma/ neglect and to build the relationship on. Identify positive memories, values, strengths of the child and family.
- Laugh, have fun- spontaneous and planned, celebrate gains, and acknowledge milestones.
- Teach child to play, cope and love self.
- Avoid control battles,.

Techniques for Helping Children Form Attachments

- Actively watch and encourage child's behavior.
- Realize that the process is developmental and cyclical. The interventions must be repeated over and over until piece by piece the parent-child attachment is established.

Techniques for Helping Children Form Attachments

- Interact or utilize activities with reciprocity.
 - With young children: sing songs together, recite rhymes together, play games that require child to respond or imitate parent.
 - With older children and adolescents: do chores together, or do activities together in which the child must complete something as the parent wants it and that is a contribution to the project.
- Build reciprocity by
 - (1) being tough parents who require that the child learn compliance and do activities on parents terms and
 - (2) removing the child's control, and
 - (3) showing affection and love regardless of child's response.



The End

Thank you!