

Adult Attachment: An Integration and Suggestions for New Directions

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Is Attachment the Same in Infants and Adults?

- Attachment studies with infants have emphasized
 - Security versus Insecurity
- When secure, an infant
 - Uses the caregiver as a “base” for exploring the environment
 - Relies on the caregiver as a resource under stressful conditions
- Researchers working with adults have looked for and found
 - Similar patterns of security and insecurity
- These patterns are considered to remain largely unchanged over development
 - As long as the environment is reasonably continuous
- These accounts do not integrate research on positive development in many domains
 - from childhood into adulthood

Questions and Answers: this Study

- How might individuals' understanding of relationships change with development?
- Might these changes effect the quality of relationships?
- To illustrate changes in relationship understanding:
 - This study presents interview data from children and adults
 - Uses these data along with theoretical knowledge about the Model of Hierarchical Complexity
 - To propose a set of relationship-understanding stages
- What changes in terms of:
 - Perspective-taking
 - Reciprocity
 - Who bears responsibility for a relationship going well or badly
 - Other aspects

Primary Stage

- In the reasoning domain, individuals recount what has happened reasonably accurately
 - Relate single actions to reality
- In talking about relationships
 - Individuals might talk about what happened
 - Or tell how they felt
 - These are always specific, one-time events in a story
- Understand their own perspective, or that of another person
 - Do not relate these two at the same time (Rodriguez & Commons, 1991)

Primary Stage Examples

- Coders remarks are in red
- (J, F, age 25) Primary Step 4
 - [*When her friends had left*] I went out in the rain, and walked around in the rain and wept.
 - Just a story about herself and her feelings
- (E, M, age 23) Primary Step 4. He was my clarinet teacher and I was, I think I was in fifth or sixth grade.
 - Telling details about the clarinet teacher; note that while there are two people, it is really just two phrases chained together

Concrete Stage

- At this stage, statements are also story-telling
 - They refer to reality-based events as at the primary stage
 - But they also show coordination between two people, or between two attachment entities (Commons, Danaher-Gilpin, Miller & Goodheart, 2002)
- Friendship is now mutual (Selman, 1981)
 - But still face-to-face
- Relationships in general are discussed in terms of exchanges between people
 - Exchanges are based in actual physical actions, objects, or other concrete instantiations
- People at this stage have new attachment objects
 - For example, heroes and very local teams
- Groups of friends can form very small cliques

Concrete Stage Examples

- (J, F, age 25) Concrete, Step 4. Yeah, I wrote for awhile, and we planned a trip, uhm, some of us. They left in the middle of September...at the end of August, and I met them in uhm, California for two weeks at the beginning of October
 - A story with at least two primary stage perspectives fully coordinated in it
- (M, M, age 41) Concrete, Step 3, smash. I think because there were interactions that I missed with my father
 - There were specific interactions that he missed with that specific father
 - That shows mutuality and coordination of perspective.
 - There is no description of those interactions, but the suggestion is that his relationship with his father would have been made up of these specific, concrete interactions.
 - He missed having a father who played the 'father' role

Abstract Stage

- Previously concrete instances are joined together to form abstractions
 - E.g. characteristic of a person can be quantified or abstracted
- People do not, however, interrelate two variables or abstractions
 - They can only focus on one variable at a time
- May take the perspective of another abstract person, in addition to an actual or concrete person
- Relationships become based more on social norms than on specific agreements between individuals
- New attachment objects are learned
 - For example, group identification develops along with serious attachment to groups
 - One might begin to see attachment to certain abstract ideals, such as the idea of harmony, having a good personality

Abstract Stage Examples

- (D, F, age 41) Abstract, Step 4. I didn't have, there was nothing adversarial between her and me
 - “There was nothing adversarial” is a quantification statement
 - Adversarial is a value of the kinds of interactions that can range from adversarial to cooperative
- (E, M, age 23) Abstract, Step 4. This is probably the most painful loss I ever experienced
 - Quantifying the experience

Formal Stage

- The individual concentrates on identifying causal behaviors that produce specific social/interactive outcomes
 - Isolation of variables, applied to relationships
- May enumerate all/many possible causes, effects and other characteristics of interactions
- May devise general causal rules to specify
 - Which effects in social interactions can be expected to result from which antecedent causes
- Focus on one aspect of a situation as a cause for everything that went wrong
- Descriptions or explanations of relationships often include
 - blaming the other (or oneself) for a critical fault

Formal Stage Examples

- (J, F, age 25) Formal Step 4. Being able to absolve myself from feeling guilty, for not loving him like he loved me
- Not loving him caused me to feel guilty
- And this event, whatever it is, would absolve me
 - This statement illustrates a simple causal model for the ending of the relationship, as well, which is that she did not love him enough
- E, M, age 23) Formal Step 4. I guess the main point would be that someone else is important enough to you that they become a high priority in your life
 - If they become important to you, then they become a high priority.
Relationship between variables

Systematic Stage

- Moves beyond linear causal relationships between two variables
- Explicitly uses multivariate systems or refers to such systems
- People can see interrelationships between
 - The actions of one person and another and
 - How that interaction affects the system (the relationship)
- Social behaviors within relationships are seen as resulting from:
 - Complex interactions, not simple, single causes
- The following are seen as interrelated:
 - The contexts in which events occur
 - The behaviors that occur
 - The outcomes that are seen

Consequences for Relationships

- A specific event may trigger an outcome
 - BUT, it can be recognized that it is not the only cause or even the most important one
 - Events can also be understood to have unintended side effects.
- A person may be able to understand that
 - The way an attachment figure behaved with them was due to the situation they were in at the time
 - Given more ideal circumstances, that attachment figure could have behaved differently.
- Friendships and marriages are potentially more complex
 - With each person spending considerable time working on understanding the other and the surrounding circumstances
- New attachment objects include the “system”
 - That is the culture and atmosphere of the entities within which the person is located.

Systematic Stage Examples 1

- (J, F, age 25) Systematic Step 1 Because I just graduated from college and I was sort of looking at,... my road maps had run out and I was gonna have to start making them myself
 - She is thinking or reflecting on her “road maps” or life plan or plans
 - Therefore this is systematic
 - A road map is in this sense, is a system
- (M, M, age 41) Systematic Oh yeah, I had pets, I sometimes think that losing pets is the way we learn to deal with loss in general.
 - There is a system of dealing with loss, and one of the ways that this system develops is through early losses of things like pets
 - Systematic 11

Systematic Stage Examples - 2

- (E, M, age 23) Systematic Well, I think that when you grow up it's a natural process to have an idealized portrait of your parents
 - A relationship between
 - a) How old you are
 - b) Your view of your parents
- and then when you become an adolescent I think that's the time you start to judge
 - 10 -relationship between variables when and then
- and there's a certain loss associated with that
 - 11- There are two variables here
 - X is the age that you are
 - Y is how you see your parents (idealize/judge).
 - How you see or view your parents is a relation
 - Between what you see or perceive and what they actually are like.
 - You are therefore looking at a relationship between a variable (age) and a relation (the perception/actuality relation)
 - That is what makes it systematic

Metasystematic Stage

- Metasystematic-stage actions compare two or more systems in a variety of systematic and somewhat exhaustive ways.
- Each person's perspective in a social situation is perceived as a system of linked actions and ideas coordinated by abstract systems of relationships to everyone else's.
- The metasystematic stage reflection is on the “perspective systems” of the different individuals in the social interaction
 - What is the form of or schematization of the systems
 - How are they similar and or different
 - Individuals thinking about why their marriage went wrong, might think about:
 - Their own view of different kinds of relationships
 - Contrasted with that of their mate
 - They might trace some of their difficulties to the different ways in which they think about a variety of issues.
- While attachment to abstractions such as ideals is seen as early as the abstract stage, here there can be attachment to abstract principles (Kohlberg, 1984).

On the Way to Metasystematic

- (D, F, age 41) Systematic, Step 0. [Sounds like a comparison of ideal and real views] And during the war I completely lost my ideal view of life
 - This suggests that one could have different views of life - ideal, real, for example. One's "view of life" could be, by definition, a system
 - Therefore, she is implicitly comparing the ideal and the real view
 - In some sense this statement could be seen as the individual reflecting back and reporting on the fact that she can explicitly remember giving up her earlier, more limiting view
 - Implicitly, this suggests that she is currently somewhere beyond that negation step

On the Way to Metasystematic

- (J, F., age 25) Systematic, Step 3 (smash). [When asked to describe her emotions after breaking up with her boyfriend:] And yeah, I was angry too. I was angry at him because... because I knew there were some things about him that were wrong, and created these adverse reactions in me, and I didn't really know what they were, but I was really mad at him for just being himself.
 - She was angry for at least two reasons:
 - He did things or had characteristics that were wrong
 - But there was also something about her that had adverse reactions to the things he did.
 - So she is describing a kind of multi-variable system that determines her emotion, in this case, anger.
 - Also, just the phrase “being himself” is a systematic notion
 - It consists of multiple behaviors occurring at multiple times and occasions.
 - But this is not fully metasystematic because she does not know what is driving her nuts.
 - » She does not fully specify either her self system enough, or the “other” system enough to have a clear sense of what is wrong.
 - » She is at step 3, smash, in the transition to metasystematic, and most likely at substep 1.

Integration

- A simple security/insecurity dichotomy may not continue to exist in the same way in those (few) adults who progress to a systematic or metasytematic view of relationships
- We have argued that changing individuals' views about relationships is difficult
 - Few individuals have the opportunity to have the experiences that would bring about development