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

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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

Early Mother-Infant Interaction

Maternal State of Mind

Organized and Disorganized Attachment Relationships

Future Relationships

Internal Working Model of Attachment

Attachment Relationship

Trauma

Western University of Western Ontario Child Study Group
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

Level of Individual Mental Representation

Maternal Representation of Intimate Relationships

Spousal Relationships

Same-sex Relationships

Opposite-sex Relationships

Parent-Adult Relationships

Generic Representation of Mother-Infant Relationships

Representation of a Specific Mother-Infant Relationship

Rep’ of another M-I Rel’ship

Particular Mother - Infant Relationship Strange Situation

Rep’ of another M-I Rel’ship

Level of Interaction

Mother-Infant Interaction

AAI - IWM
Maternal Representation

Maternal Generic Representation of Mother-Infant Relationship

M's Representation Particular Mother - Infant Relationship

Mother-Infant Relationship Strange Situation

M's Representation Rel'ship with Another Child

M's Representation Rel'ship with Another Child

M's Representation of Mother-Infant Relationship

I's Representation of Mother-Infant Relationship

Infant Generic Representation of Caregiver-Infant Relationship

Infant Representation
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
    • Fonagy et al (1998)
      - 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
- Hi/Lo-Rf
- Auton Style Interaction
- Secure

- Non-Auton
- Hi-Rf
- Auton Style Interaction
- Secure

- Non-Auton
- Lo-Rf
- Non-Auton Style Interaction
- Non-Secure

Western
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 $\rightarrow$ Responsive (Secure)
  - Dismissive $\rightarrow$ Withdrawn (Avoidant)
  - Preoccupied $\rightarrow$ 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 rel’ship 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

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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>.49*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of Results - Moderation

RF Independent
- Autonomous
  - Responsive
  - Secure

High RF: Dyadic Shaping
- Dismissive
  - Yes!
  - Less Withdrawn
  - More responsive
  - Secure
- Preoccupied
  - Yes!
  - Less Intrusive
  - More responsive
  - Secure

Low RF: IWM Driven
- Dismissive
  - Yes!
  - Withdrawn
  - Avoidant
- Preoccupied
  - Yes!
  - 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
Maternal Representation of Mother - Infant Relationships - AAI

Mother - Infant Relationship 1

Mother - Infant Relationship 2

Mother - Infant Relationship 3

M-I Interaction 2

M-I Interaction 3

Level of Representation

Non-Dyadic Contextual Factors

Mother-Infant Interaction 1

Affective Scaffolding

Maternal Sensitivity - MBQ

Cognitive Scaffolding

Attachment Behaviour - ABQ

Other Aspects of Interaction

Level of Interaction

Figure 6