The Use of the Adult Attachment Interview with prospective adoptive parents

Dr Steve Farnfield

Roehampton University
London
Attachment and reproduction

The function of attachment is to:
Keep yourself alive
Long enough to reproduce
Have grand children
And pass on your genes
Adoption

Challenges all this
Core dimensions of parenting (Farnfield 2008)

Childhood attachment system

1. The parent’s state of mind regarding their childhood attachments

2. Parent’s resolution of loss and trauma

Pair bonding/sexual partnership system

3. The spousal system

Affiliative/wider support system

4. Kinship, friends and wider support system

Parenthood/care giving system

5. The meaning of the child to the parent
Prospective adopters

Typically suffer unresolved loss of fertility

Have no children whose signals can elicit parental behaviour / care giving
Infants placed at any age during the first 20 months with foster mothers who were assessed as secure on the AAI were significantly likely to be assessed secure rather than disorganized in the Strange Situation Procedure.

No other foster mother attachment strategy produced this result.
Hypothesis

Assessment should focus on:

Resolution of loss and trauma
Spousal system
Support networks
Mental integration (Mentalization) – in particular ability to change/adapt strategies when they are not working (e.g. with the placed child)
Sample

Adult Attachment Interview on all people applying to one authority to adopt a child in 2007.

47 AAIs were collected representing 94% of the total applicants

This report is based on 42 AAIs (4 have yet to be coded and one is not codable).
Interviewees

Males 19
Females 23
Total  42

Couples 18
Single  2
Status N/K 3
Partner to be coded 1
Average age TBC

Likely 40 males and late 30s females

Mainly professional / career orientated people
15 Applicants already had a child of their own
8 men (2 with a previous partner)
7 women (1 by a previous relationship)
5 Women had 1 or more miscarriages
7 couples had IVF + 1 IUI
Modifiers

Intrusions forbidden negative affect

Depression

Disorientation

Reorganisation
The expected distribution of attachment strategies in a safe population

Distribution of strategies in North American non-clinical mothers using the Main and Goldwyn system:

23% dismissing (A),
58% secure (B)
19% preoccupied (C)
18% for unresolved loss or other trauma

(Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009).
Previous adoption studies using the Main & Goldwyn system: Steele et al 2008

40 mothers: 27 (68%) secure B, 5 (12%) were judged insecure-dismissing, and 0 (0%) insecure-preoccupied C and 8 (20%) unresolved with respect to past loss or trauma.

34 fathers: 18 (53%) secure B, 12 (35%) were judged insecure-dismissing, and 2 (6%) insecure-preoccupied C and 2 (6%) unresolved with respect to past loss or trauma.
Previous studies using the Main & Goldwyn system: Steele et al 1999

25 men and women: 32% (n8) autonomous B; 52% (n 14) dismissing A; 16% (n 4) preoccupied C.

96% reported loss of person close to them in childhood or adulthood

Only 3 interviews rated unresolved.
Santona and Zavattini 2009

Distribution of attachment models across the subjects
The expected distribution of attachment strategies in a safe population

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23% dismissing (A),
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(Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009).
This sample compared with the typical safe population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North American Safe</th>
<th>Prospective Adopters</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 23% dismissing (A),</td>
<td>• 48% A or A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 58% secure (B)</td>
<td>• 7% secure B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 19% preoccupied (C)</td>
<td>• 12% C or C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 18% for unresolved loss or other trauma</td>
<td>• 33% A/C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 60% for unresolved loss or trauma</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• 3 AAlIs were rated secure Type B
• 5 interviews were rated Type C
• 29% (n 12) Type A 1-2 and 19% Type A3-4
• 33% were rated A/C
• 24% of interviews rated Disorientated
• 3 were rated Reorganising to B: One was included under normative A1-2; the other two were complex
• 3 were rated cannot classify and given a best fit classification: Female A2; Female A/C (low) and Male C5-6 – no UI/Utr or DO in any.
Unresolved Loss and Trauma

- NO unresolved Trauma or Loss: 40.43%
- Unresolved Trauma AND Loss: 19.05%
- Unresolved Trauma OR Loss: 40.48%
Three distinct groups

1. Type A2 with no modifiers or Unresolved Loss or Trauma

2. Type A3-4 with significant lack of resolution of loss or trauma

3. Disorientation A/C or AC + significant Unresolved loss or trauma
Typical strategies

Number 18

3 B
3 C1-2
12 A-12
Type A2

N 12 – only 3 + Uloss or trauma
Close to Type B2
Socially adept
Most expressive of the As
Type A defences re intimacy and rejection
Type U loss or U trauma A3-4

Number - 8
6 males 2 females 1 couple
4 of whom A4
7 with U loss or U trauma
Males notable complex/severe trauma (e.g. CSA)
2 males (A7 and/or 8)
Type A/C or AC

Number 13

6 A/C
7 AC
Disorientation

• Dropped out of the original infant work on disorganisation – disorientation

• DMM

- A modifier
- Person has a problem locating the source of their memories/information about protection
- Over attributes the self as the source of what they know
- A/C or AC strategy
Disorientation A/C or AC

In the DMM ratings of disorientation are rare and this sample is remarkable in that:

24% (n10) of the interviews were rated disorientated

No difference in terms of sex (5M and 5F)

4 DO A/C
6 DO AC

9 with Ulloss or U trauma

1 A1/C1-2
Santona and Zavattini 2009

Distribution of the forms of "Space Government"

- Fragmentation: 22
- Gathering-Contracting: 12
- Filling up: 7
- Measuring: 1
- Dynamic balance: 8
Who marries whom?

Numerically people in typically insecure patterns were more likely to marry atypically insecure partners but this was not statistically significant.

Does not support hypothesis that secure people tend to marry each other.

No significant difference between people in typical patterns and atypical patterns who married people with a Ul or Utr.

50% (n5) of the people in DO married a typically insecure partner.

One couple (paired DOs) and of the other people in DO (n 8) – 5 married normative partners.
Fertility

This is all about reproduction?
Fertility

36% of the applicants had at least one child of their own, either with their spouse or by a previous relationship.
**Males**

There was a mild statistically significant association between men who had a child of their own and attachment security: men with their own child were more likely to be atypically insecure and men with no child of their own normatively insecure (Pearson Chi-Square two tailed test p 0.1)

There was a stronger significant association between childless men and Unresolved loss or trauma: men with their own child were more likely to be unresolved than expected by chance and childless men less so (6 out of the 9 had no Utr or Uloss). (Pearson Chi-Square two tailed test p 0.05)

7 out of these 8 men were Utr with striking number of serious traumas such as CSA and parental suicide

2 of the 7 had children by other relationships, the rest with their current spouse and in 3 cases they had 1 or more miscarriages.

Supports previous studies that already having had a child does not equate with successful adoption (?)
Males with child of their own and attachment security

Bar Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has own child</th>
<th>No child of own</th>
<th>Nor clear</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative insecure</td>
<td>Atypical insecure</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Men and childlessness and UI or Utr

Bar Chart

- **Has own child**: Utr or UI
- **No child of own**: No UI or UI
- **Nor clear**: Utr or UI

Count:
- Has own child: Utr or UI (6)
- No child of own: No UI or UI (6)
- Nor clear: Utr or UI (3)
Females

No association between DO and childlessness but a fascinating association between childlessness and attachment security:

Women who had a child of their own were MORE likely to be in the normative insure group whereas childless women were distributed evenly between the normative and atypical attachment groups (i.e. no effect) (Pearson Chi-Square two tailed test p 0.05)

There was no significant difference between women with/without a child and Uloss or trauma
Women and attachment security

![Bar Chart]

- **Has own child**
- **No child of own**
- **Nor clear**

**Count**

- **Normative insecure**
- **Atypical insecure**

Legend:
- Norm/Atypical
  - Normative insecure
  - Atypical insecure
Disorientation and fertility

Just under a third (n 6 out of 19) of the 19 cases where loss of fertility was unexplained were in DO.

80% people in DO were not clear/unexplained re infertility. Although the number is more than to be expected by chance this was not statistically significant.
8 couples had IVF (1 couple had IUI and were coded IVF)

There was no significant association between attachment security and IVF (equal nos) nor between IVF and Uloss or U trauma nor IVF and DO

There was no significance for women and IVF and loss/trauma or attachment or DO

There was a significant association between male Utr+Loss and a wife who underwent IVF but not for UI or Utr or DO or attachment security (Pearson Chi-Square two tailed test p 0.1)
Placement

Two years following assessment

• 73% (n 31) of applicants had one or more children placed with them
• 10% (n4) were rejected
• 14% (n6) withdrew
• Datum was missing for 1 case.
Placement decision and security of applicants attachment

![Bar Chart]

- Count

- Has child placed:
  - Child placed
  - Rejected
  - Withdrawn
  - Missing data

- Norm/atypical
  - Normative insecure
  - Atypical insecure
Placement

• The concordance between attachment security and acceptance to adopt by the Social Services was exactly that expected by chance (14 typical insecure and 17 atypical insecure)

• There were slightly more acceptances of people with atypical attachment (but not statistically sig).

• There was no association between placement and Uloss or U trauma
People who withdraw

• There was a significant association between applicants who withdrew voluntarily and attachment security: the typically insecure people were MORE likely to withdraw (Pearson Chi-Square two tailed test p 0.05)

• 3 couples withdrew: 5 people were in the typically insecure group (including one B)
Acceptance and rejection by A/C and AC strategy
Rejection

People with AC coded interviews were significantly correlated with rejection, 2 couples were rejected and 3 out of the 4 AAIs were coded AC

(Pearson Chi-Square  two tailed test p 0.01)
A/C and AC interviews and rejection

Bar Chart

- Has child placed
  - Child placed
  - Rejected
  - Withdrew
  - Missing data

Count

A/C or AC

- Not AC
- A/C
- AC
Limitations

• Interviewing was sometimes less than required
• Applicants desire to satisfy the interviewer

Both of these may have led to the large number Type A(+) interviews
Observations

Should we give up psychologising selection of adopters?
Further research

1. replicate this study
2. compare with a sample of people who unsuccessfully underwent IVF and decided Not to adopt a child
3. Increase understanding about attachment and reproduction in terms of sex/gender
4. Look at impact of DO and U loss and trauma on the placed child
Implications for practice

1. Screen for U loss and trauma
2. Males who already have a child of their own may require extended and sensitive consideration
3. Post adoption treatment **MUST** include AAIs with the parents as a matter of course
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Roehampton University

2011 MSc in Attachment Studies

s.farnfield@roehampton.ac.uk