ATTACHMENT and FAMILY DYNAMICS - LOOKING at ADHD

IASA – Cambridge

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2010
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A meeting of 3 perspectives?

1. Attachment Theory - DMM
2. Social Constructionist - Narrative practice
3. Systemic Theory and therapy
SOMETIMES I THINK YOU'VE SPENT THE LAST FORTY YEARS LULLING ME INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY!
DYADIC ESCALATION : C - patterns

**CARER: MOTHER, FATHER….**

- angry – worried *
- deception
- does not keep promises
- inconsistently available
- unpredictable

* **Shut down cognition**

- clings – cries, prolonged protest
- coercive – prolonged negative feelings
- angry - charming
- Lying - deception
- risky behaviour, drugs, violence, problems
- angry and dependent – needs help

**CHILD**

* When mother ‘really’ angry, ‘had enough’ child often changes from angry to charming, or desperate
DYADIC ESCALATION: A patterns

CARER: MOTHER, FATHER...

rewrite family memories of distress
encourage self-reliance
encourages false affect
discourages show of feelings
unresponsive to distress

*shut down feelings*

suppress feelings
false affect
compulsive caring
compulsive self-reliance
anger towards self

CHILD
ATTACHMENT STRATEGIES as FAMILY COMMUNICATIONAL PATTERNS

CO-CONSTRUCTION and MAINTENANCE of patterns in continual flow of family communicational patterns

ATTACHMENT AS ‘OPEN’ or ‘CLOSED COMMUNICATION’ IN FAMILIES

FAMILY RULES re. WHAT IS SAFE TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT

SECURE: Expression of feelings met by acknowledgement, reflection and negotiation – semantic and emotional responses

- DISMISSIVE: Communication of feelings met by injunction to suppress feelings, avoidance, rejection – semantic responses

- PRE-OCCUPIED: Symmetrical escalating expressions of feelings, mutual accusation, blaming – emotional response

COMMUNICATION: Memory Systems

Content – process
Verbal – Non-verbal,
Explicit - Implicit
TRANSITIONS and ATTACHMENTS

Family life cycle stages represent periods where change and re-organisation of existing relationships styles and attachment strategies may be required. This can lead to distress and conflict as well as opportunities for revision and growth:

EXAMPLES

- New baby – if mother has been employing an avoidant strategy – keeping feelings and emotional intimacy away, this may not be workable with a new baby requiring emotional contact, comfort and intimacy
- Child starting school may need to become more independent less anxiously/ambivalent attached (clingy) than at home
- Teenager may be driven by need for sexual intimacy to revise an avoidant pattern
- Young adult entering work/college may need to become more independent than had been the case at home
Rene Magritte
ATTACHMENT S in THREE-PERSON SYSTEMS

- Each Parent’s attachment strategy with the other parent
  - Contrasted (A/C, B/C, A/B)
  - Similar (A/A, C/C, B/B)
    - Complementary
    - Symmetrical

- Child’s attachment strategy with each parent
  - Contrasted
  - Similar

- All of these variations may show escalation – instability, except B/B?

- Escalation and conflict – detoured through a third person
ATTACHMENT STRATEGIES: children need to develop attachment strategies relating to each parent/carer and the mix of the parents’ similar or contrasting attachment strategies.
“Triangulating parents try to protect the children from problems in the marriage or, in more severe cases, engage the children in protection of the marriage…In triangulated relationships, children perceive themselves as having a direct relationship with the parent, whereas in actuality; the parent’s interest is tied to how the children function to preserve the spousal relationship…….Changes in parents’ perceived threat can have a powerful impact on the parents’ behaviour, often in the form of emotion based action. When the threat is not tied to, nor visible to the children, but is acted out with the children as if they had caused the parents’ behaviour, children become very confused about their causal contribution to the relationship.”

Crittenden, 2008
TRIANGULATION: Problems in the marriage may be played out through the child, e.g. emotionally drawn in to meet their needs.

CONFLICT

MOTHER ← − − − − − → FATHER

CHILD is pulled in by each parent to take sides against the other
attachment dilemma: trying to gain enough emotional space distance to be able to function independently

attempted solutions

- shut down cognition – develop C strategy
- A – strategy towards one or other or both parents to gain separation
- become entangled in escalating patterns of hostility, anger, violence in the family

possible symptoms – conduct disorders, violence, drug usage
**ATTACHMENT Dilemma**: trying to gain enough care and comfort from either parent

**ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS**
- Shut down feelings – develop A strategy
- C – strategy towards one or other or both parents
- withdraw from the family system (not option for young child)
- Possible symptoms – depression, drug usage, psycho-somatic problems etc.
ATTACHMENT Dilemma: trying to meet conflicting invitations - mother’s emotional requests for involvement and father’s distancing

ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS
- Alternate – switch when with each
- Shut off from one
- Alternate when with parents together, shout and withdraw
- Try to keep parents apart as much as possible

Possible Symptoms - disorientation, dissociation, depression, anorexia, BPD etc
RESEARCH DESIGN and METHOD

- Qualitative study

- Case Study Series – 15 families in each group:
  Young person with anorexia, or ADHD, or self-harm, sibling, mother and father

- Interviews - 4 individual interviews & 1 family interview
  - AAI, TAAI, and open ended
  - Specific questions added re relationships between the symptoms and attachment processes, comfort, emotional regulation etc

- Observation – family interview, video taped
Peter – older brother, very difficult sent to boarding school, sees Diana as indulging Rick, he sees relationship with his own mother as ‘unhealthily close’

Anthony – dv? Cut himself in front of children

Rick- cut himself, sees himself and seen as like Anthony – seen as BPD? As well as ADHD?,
Rick and his Birth Father

‘he em smashed a glass and shoved it into his [own] face in front of the children so there was blood in every direction he just completely lost the plot’
(Peter step-father - re, Anthony , Rick’s birth father )

‘I find that I'm a lot like my dad - kind of scary really but everyone who really knows him says we're very much alike it’s not such a good thing’
( Rick about himself and his father)
Rick - Earliest memory

I wonder if you could tell me a bit about what your earliest memory is as a child?

Yeh I there's no photo of this so this is probably a memory, I used to sit on my Dad's knee in in the lounge and ask him to count to a hundred then I'd do it again and do it again because I was amazed that he could count to a hundred I think I was like two or something that's the actual memory that I have

Fantastic now I wonder if you know why or why you think that that memory sticks in your mind?

I don't know I never had a lot of, I suppose Dad was with me and he's quite important so you try to hang onto memories like that I suppose of people that aren't available it's just a I suppose it's quite a nice memory I mean if I was someone hearing it I'd be like 'ah'
Ok and if you look back on that I wonder why do you think that you did that (self-harm)?

Because it was I'd had a really really bad night that must sound so stupid when you watch this but I was being really hurt by a lot of people around me uh I was really confused at school why was I so rejected why could I never concentrate why did I never behave like everyone else why did I never make friends or fit in why was I never valued despite me being this kind of I've I've often considered myself as quite caring and emotionally kind of aware ...................ever since well that's more since I've started taking medication but I've often been caring and not selfish .......................and there was this(can’t hear) about Mum and Dad that sparked it off and I was quite I was just rude to Mum rude to Dad rude to Chris. and everyone was rude to each other and it was a big argument that sparked off and I was like slammed the door in my room and just got away I suppose but that was quite a really big thing
Triangulation

it's always always been complicated because we're two families and my Mum really really does not like Dad and my step Dad thinks nothing of him at all he's just pff. So so many complications to do with money to do with support to do with where I stayed, who I lived with um who I love actually I suppose that's obviously a question that is always underlying but was there but he's really really I mean basically cos he's my Dad but I mean I'm fed, kind of but Mum and Dad have never turned me against him as such but you can't help but have a negative view on someone if you're around people who really have a negative view of him and often, in their eyes, and in the most kind of obvious of circumstances, he's been like an absolute idiot and um but living with people that have that view obviously that makes you so so biased when I go over there I talk to him about these things and often, when we have arguments I kind of unwind with all these things I've heard about him and been told about him and its often so much of it is on a completely different perspective than him so it's complicated that I never really know what to believe, what to understand, what I should be thinking, who I should be believing or loving so many times I've heard that what Mum's saying or what I'm hearing about what he's done was often he says well that was obvious that was because of something else and Mum and Dad never understood that so I never understood it so I've always had a negative view of him’
Can you remember a particular argument or a particular time that you 've had these discussions ( about his dad with mum) ?

.................Mum says well you know it was an abusive relationship it would have been awful for you to grow up in that situation we just didn't love each other well actually she never said that she just said that he was just a really unsupportive irresponsible man ................. I had a massive row with him when for the first time I actually brought up something most people don't really do with their dads, but 'you left' you know “how can you say that you are responsible that you care” and he said um for the first time it was so so stupid of me to be deluded by what Mum had been telling me, not saying it was lies but it actually occurred to me for the first time that she left because the relationship was failing not because, not because he was irresponsible

................................whenever I live with him it's often problematic because I've been taught things very differently and I just feel like I felt horrible because I basically said to him how can you call me your son if you've never committed, if you've never done anything if you've never cared and when we come over to you you don't care and you don't know how to treat us and everything we do is wrong he says that's because you've been raised in a completely different way and your Mum left me, let's not forget that but she didn't leave because I was irresponsible and didn't commit, she left because our relationship was failing and it would have been damaging. I left for Italy because your Mum said I should because I could escape, I could change things I could sort things out for me then I could come back when I'd changed and he did actually and I never knew any of this and it. ..
And the second word was safe I wonder whether you can remember a sort of clear example?

Em it was the I had a childhood and you won't find too many people that in today's world can say that so it was it was erm a period in which I was to a large extent norm shielded from ehm from the outside you know the sort of negativity, my mother’s approach on life is always to ehm stick her head in the sand and distance herself from everything which is probably quite a shrewd approach really. Drawbridge mentality, which I guess I I probably have increasingly as well so it just it felt very safe very secure erm you know and I and didn't worry I didn't feel threatened Although having said that there was an incident that you know my mother told me about later which I I wasn't aware of at the time where she was pushing a pram along er the canal side and there ended up being a erm a bit of a weirdo danger who started following her and then he started chasing her and I was in a pram and she had my brother as a as a small child and basically she had to grab me from the pram and run because he was he was probably going to rape her. My mother was a model you know she was quite a successful photographic model and you know she was a a bit of a target and obviously found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. but em ..................................................................
Memories of Comfort

I wonder if you can remember a particular event or a particular time where you did become, emotionally upset

Hhh hhh erm I'm sure there were occasions under which I was sort of initially upset but I probably would 've talked to my mother about it erm and em but I I was I was on the whole very self contained and er always always have been really so.

I wonder if you needed comfort what would you do?

Erm go to my mother and she would probably make me something to eat

Erm no I liked eating as I grew up .. hh I erm when I was when I was young I ate everything erm and I had a particular passion for sea food and I used to have scallops with bordelaise on them the they were roasted in the oven so that in the restaurants in France and em in France I love those so my mother so my mother did used to make those and pancakes mm and erm she used to make er em thinking about er taste she used to make this er cake erm which em as a child I loved cake but I kind of grew out of it but em the best the best possible thing in the world was to eat this mixture out of the bowl and er I used to erm do that at er every available opportunity the closest thing is Ben and Jerry's er chocolate chip cookie doe ice cream (yeah) its the closest approximation
SCALLOPS BORDELAISE

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 tablespoon flour
- ½ cup fresh sliced mushrooms
- 1 lbs. sea scallops
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup mild chicken stock
- ¼ cup Chardonnay
- salt and black pepper to taste
- 1 tbs. fresh chopped parsley
- 4 slices imported Swiss Cheese
- 1 cup mashed potato
- pinch of nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon grated Romano Cheese

Method:

Prepare as you normally would, enough mashed potato to yield 1 cup (About 2 cups peeled and diced potatoes). Add the grated cheese to the mashed potato along with a pinch of nutmeg. Using a pastry bag make an ornamental border round the edges of 2 small shallow baking dishes.

In a medium sauté pan over a low fire heat the oil and sauté the mushrooms lightly (about ¾ cooked), remove from the pan and place aside. Add the butter to the same pan and sauté the scallops until the they are firm to touch and lose their translucent appearance. Add the chicken stock, the wine, and the chopped parsley and return to a simmer. Return the mushrooms to the pan along with 2 slices of Swiss cheese, salt and pepper and simmer until the cheese melts.

Spoon the scallops and sauce into the baking dishes, place 1 slice of Swiss Cheese over each casserole and place under the broiler until the casseroles are golden brown. Serve at once.
Diana: Relationship with mother

OK ok. So the next one is about relationships with your parents. I wonder if you could describe your relationship with your Mum? As far back as you can remember so your very earliest types of memory

D:Um, I think that the relationship I had with my Mum is close but not loving well no, that's not true not loving... she always said 'you're my daughter, of course I love you' but that isn't the same as somebody voluntarily telling you like I do with the boys all the time, you know, it's different. I think my Mum had a very very difficult childhood, I think her mother was very neurotic and my Mum was a product of that and I think her and her sister were beaten when they did something wrong and so my Mum is very guarded you know, she doesn't make friends easily, she's totally um insular really doesn't actually like anybody very much and, I think, frequently didn't like me (laughs)so but we spend, you know I see her, she only lives up the road still and I see her a lot, she's only in her early 60's, she's very beautiful, still very glamorous and very active and very fit but it's take.. I think it's taken my Mum a long time to be able to say something really warm and generous, you know, if I if I was ever ill she would she would say 'Oh you must never give in to yourself, and you must never be give in to the illness or anything like that, she was a very tough Mum – tough

..........................................................
Relationship with Father

Um OK and the next word was tough (Dad)

when I was a child many phobias and it was, they were either ridiculed, um I mean that was horrible, look at you, now you've made me remember something. One of my terrors was spiders and I always remember my Dad putting my pocket money in a jar and telling me to get my pocket money out and he'd also put a huge spider in the jar........................................he thought that was funny and actually that wasn't funny that was horrible, and when I remind him of that memory now, he is ashamed but I don't think he thought about it then, I don't think he recognised that actually that was a really horrible thing to do. I think what he thought is that I might have been playing on my fear of the spider and that it actually wasn't as bad as it was. I became completely hysterical which anybody with a fear of spiders - but even from a very young age I had terrible phobias about feathers and cobwebs and spiders and sick all sorts of funny things I had phobias about as a child. But they were not really given any credence,.............................. I think a lot of it is because he didn't want me to feel like he often felt with all these anxieties and so tried to make me believe that actually they didn't exist in me, and I kind of understand it cos I sometimes do that with my own children (laughs)now
Chris (brother) First Memory

What's the very earliest memory that you have as a child

Apparently when I was just coming up to 2 but sometimes I think whether it's a dream of whether it's just not reality I am never really sure but I just remember this one time living on S..... Avenue just up the road when I lived there with my Mum and my real Dad I remember him coming in and my Mum in the Kitchen my Dad gave me a little orange train

This is when you were two?

Apparently

You say apparently so you're not sure if it's your memory or someone told you?

no no no it's my memory but it could have been a dream it could have been anything I am not really sure because I I mean yeah it could have been but what really makes me sure that it is a memory is because I've still got that train
Comfort

So again going back to childhood when you needed comfort if you needed comfort what would you do?

um when I needed comfort I would probably go to my Mum cos she's a very comforting person you know she could take an upset person and turn them into a jolly person and so I would normally go to my Mum if when I was upset

OK ok can can you remember a time that that happened?

um (pause) um (pause)I was upset in year 7 when my girlfriend dumped me but we we still speak to each other so you know but we just decided to be friends and I went to my Mum about that and you know I just remember that she she just made me feel less worried about the situation

Right right how did she do that?

She just said you know don't worry there's plenty more fish in the sea and, you know, move on .......
Family Attachment Strategies

- **Rick** – **DO Ut** (d) divorce and self–harm, A/C pattern A(4-6) C (3-5) - attempts to both shut off his feelings and tries to please everybody but cannot make sense of the complex triadic processes he is in. Can’t cope and difficult feelings intrude – becomes angry with himself and others, especially when thinking about the parents’ relationships

- **Diana** C (3-5) Utr(p) dv, self-harm, unresolved trauma re. Rick’s self harm. Some A patterns as well – self –blame, and exoneration of parents, possibly A/C with C related to trauma

- **Peter** A (2-4?) - dismissive, reserved - self – reliant

- **Chris** A (2-4) – dismissive (possibly pre-occupied re. Rick) – possibly some DO ?
Two Triadic Patterns

Rick triangulated between Diana/ Peter and his father Anthony

Domestic violence, continued conflict. Mum and step-dad strongly dislike and fear birth dad. Rick has split loyalties. Rick is seen and see himself as similar to his dad

Rick appears to be in two complex triads: A - C between Diana and Peter, we don’t know his birth father’s AAI - but possibly A with intrusions of anger.

Not only the conflicting attachment demands but intrusions from unresolved trauma constitute the attachment dilemmas Rick struggles to solve
Look at it this way father, if they’re going to rebel against their upbringing you may as well bring them up the wrong way ?!
http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/ant/
ANT WEBSITE