Forming an Attachment to Attachment Theory:

a journey to an emergent understanding.

Attachment theory addresses a universal human need to form close affectional bonds. A theory of both spatial and emotional proximity; with a cursory glance it may appear to be behavioural in principle. However, attachment theory has a basis in both ethology and evolutionary biology, incorporating systems of affect regulation and models of relational psychotherapy.

The approach I will take in this paper is that of recounting the formation of an understanding of attachment theory and my tentative explorations of applying some of its perspectives to cases from my client practice; both in the form of a historical review and then an account of an interview process, guided by the key principles of attachment theory as I understood them at that time. The journey of the paper will follow the same chronology as the salient landmarks of my learning process. I shall begin with an outline of my first encounter with attachment theory; a university lecture. A summary of my initial thoughts and intuitions will be followed by a deeper exploration of attachment theory.

A review of the supportive evidence from empirical studies and neuroscience will lay the foundation for the discussion of attachment theory. Relational perspectives will be explored, outlining both the schism between attachment theory and psychoanalysis and contemporary literature documenting the synthesis of their emergent integration. Four case studies will then be presented to demonstrate attachment theory in practice.

Forming an Attachment to Attachment theory: a journal of an emergent understanding.

MSc Psycho-Social Studies – Researching Beneath the Surface - Student no.08031825. May 2009.
Hooked: an instant attachment to a guiding principle

As a student of psycho-social studies at the University of the West of England, I attended a lecture on attachment theory. It was given by a guest speaker, one of many who had, over a period of ten weeks, outlined a chronology of psychoanalytic psychotherapy in the British tradition. I was new to the subject and had no prior knowledge of attachment theory, or of the stature of the guest lecturer, Jeremy Holmes.

Holmes described the origins of attachment theory and how Bowlby felt that psychoanalytic thinking needed to be modified in the light of new evidence, especially from ethology (Bowlby, 1988, p.3). Although I found it interesting to hear of a psychotherapy model that has a basis in evolutionary theory (Craib, 2001, p.137), it was attachment theory’s challenge to Freud’s emphasis on sexuality which caught my interest (Holmes, 2001, p.24). It was largely because of Freud’s models of sexual drives in infancy that I had been disinclined to enter the field of psychoanalytical psychotherapy. To be presented with a paradigm from psychotherapy which acknowledges the Oedipal triad and yet explains it not in terms of sexual drives but as an instinct for self protection and security, was illuminating and exciting (Mitchell, 2000. P.81). While I listened with one ear to an account of the secure base, relationships with attachment figures and modes of attachment behaviour, my attention was drawn into reviewing clients and personal experiences in a new light; my attention was hooked.
Key principles that remain with me from the lecture:

- Ethology studies have shown the need for a secure base is ubiquitous in nature. (Bowlby, 1988, p.33).

- A secure base acts like the sanctuary from which explorations into the world can be launched and into which one can return for safety (Bowlby, 1979, p.125).

- All affectionate bonds are ruptured during the course of ordinary living (Bowlby, 1979, p.86). It is the quality of reparation, satisfactory or otherwise, which forms the basis of a particular style of response to anxiety when security is threatened (Cozolino, 2006, p. 140). These responsive styles are known as attachment behaviours (Bowlby, 1988, p.31).

- There are three main types of behaviour triggered by the arousal of the attachment system, one of which may be viewed in polarity (Cozolino, 2006, p. 141). These will be further discussed in more detail.

  a) Secure Attachment

  b) Insecure attachment type one: Avoidant Attachment

  c) Insecure Attachment type two: Ambivalent Attachment

  d) Disorganised Attachment
• When activated, patterns of attachment are accompanied by an arousal of affect (Schore, 1994, p.387), reparation, or soothing, aids in the regulation of affect (Fonagay et al. 2004, p37).

• Activation of attachment behaviour prompts a desire to seek and return to the secure base with immediate effect (Craib, 2001, p. 137). In adult life, different people may act as attachment figures (Holmes, 2001, p.29). Holmes advised that, in therapeutic practice, asking a client who to call in case of emergency will reveal the identity of their current attachment figure.

• The psychotherapeutic consultation may come to constitute a secure base (Holmes, 1996, p.123), its enduring consistency facilitating a regulation of affect (Schore, 2003, p.262) which, if internalised, becomes affective self regulation from the position of the secure base (Fonagay et al., 2004, p.435).

My initial thoughts after the lecture were that attachment theory made clear sense. It addressed a personal challenge with Freud’s sexual theories, had a firm basis in evolutionary theory and related to another study I was undertaking regarding affect and affect regulation. I found myself thinking of human history with an anthropological perspective; images of the upper primates holding on in the canopy, high above the ground came to mind. To fall may not only be dangerous; one may become lost from the group. My enthusiasm for the topic found expression with an intensity that was obvious to another student. The irruptive affect signified that I had already begun to form a relational bond with attachment theory and I made the instantaneous decision to conduct this investigation.
From apprehension to comprehension: the formation of a deeper understanding.

The concept of attachment can be viewed in two ways. A prefatory attempt to grasp what may be meant by the term, attachment theory, may prompt an instinctive and reductive conclusion that it refers to matters of being attached. When I first heard the term, Attachment Theory, my initial thoughts were of having a familiarity with the concept of being attached to things or objects; people, memories, places, routines and habits. However, further investigation revealed an approach to understanding human behaviour which has a basis in evolutionary biology, relational psychotherapy and neuroscience.

Attachment theory is more than a theory of behavioural typology. It is also a control systems theory which has a dynamic quality at its core. Kirkpatrick writes, ‘the system is organized to activate a particular behaviour or suit of behaviours whenever a stimulus appears’ (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p.28). A vulnerable infant maintains security by remaining in close proximity to care-givers. In *The Search for the Secure Base*, Holmes writes:

> The vulnerable newborn infant on the ancestral savannah needed to ensure proximity to care-givers if he was to be safe from predation. The mother-infant attachment responses (i.e. distress calls and proximity-seeking) keep him safe from macro-predation and help regulate his emotional states, just as the antibody-rich colostrum she provides keeps micro-organisms at bay. (Holmes, 2001, p.1).

Shore reports that the dyadic interaction between the newborn and primary carer modulates and controls the infant’s homeostasis and that, ‘… attachment theory is fundamentally a regulatory theory’ (Shore, 2003, p118). Cozolino asserts that, ‘attachment schemas reflect the transduction of interpersonal experience into the biological structure’, the dynamics of the affective experience correlate with linkages of the orbital medial prefrontal cortex and the amygdala with the regulatory systems (Cozolino, 2006, p. 146).
Shore’s earlier findings show that the psychobiological attunement of attachment occurs in relationships throughout the lifespan. The operation of the attachment dynamic continues to occur in adult life and the activation of an internal system, first developed with the primary carer, maintains an affective state of enjoyment and well being (Shore, 1994, p107).

It may be unwise to think of this regulatory system as akin to that of a thermostat control, because the attachment system has a variable fixed point. In a thermostat, the temperature is compared to the point set and then temperature is adjusted accordingly. In contrast, the desired level of proximity in which a sense of security is engendered may vary according to circumstance, ranging from being tightly held to out of sight (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 29). Bowlby speaks of the fear response that may be stimulated not only because of a high risk of pain or danger, but also because of an increase of risk (Bowlby, 1988, p. 33). Environmental factors such as unfamiliarity, isolation, heights, looming objects and sudden loud noises activate the fear and attachment system. The attachment behaviours, such as crying, are designed to bring an attachment figure into closer proximity. If successful, the system is deactivated. The seeking of a secure base may be complimented with other systems vital to secure development and learning; exploration and the fear (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 30). A relational and autopoietic (Capra, 1996, p.97) control system, comprising attachment, exploration and fear, regulates and guides the ongoing safety and continued development of an individual via a means of activation, or deactivation of these interdependent systems (Fonagay, 2001, p. 9).

The deactivation of affective arousal can be mediated by reunion with an attachment figure, most usually the mother. Shore attests that reunion behaviour is more indicative of the quality of attachment than, for example, a child’s protests at a point of separation (Shore, 1994, p.100). Bion postulated the maternal container, whose capacity for reverie transforms the unpleasant sensations (Fonagat et al, 2002, p. 191). Reunion transactions with the attuned care giver maintain the arousal level; an infant’s reentering into patterned interactive states with the care giver regulates the arousal, affective and attention state of the infant. This is mediated by visual contact with the mother, or care giver.
Shore proposes a visuoaffective transaction during which, ‘the mother’s facially expressed emotional communications provide the infant with salient maternal appraisals of interactions and events (Shore, 1994, p.100). Kirkpatrick reports there are parallels between infant-mother interactions and those between adult lovers; prolonged eye contact, cooing or talking "baby talk," and other intimate behaviors are similar to those displayed by infants to elicit and maintain contact with an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 2005 p 40).

**Psychoanalytic perspectives.**

Conceptual differences that once divided the psychoanalytic and attachment traditions have begun to find common ground in relationality (Mitchell, 2000. P. 83). The internal focus of early psychotherapy; drives, instincts and fantasy, are seemingly at odds with attachment theory’s apparent mechanistic and behavioural emphasis (Criab, 2001, p. 141). Relational theorists such as Sullivan, ‘… portrayed the early interactions between the infant and its human environment as shaping an almost infinitely malleable collection of human potentials to fit an interpersonal niche to which that potential becomes finely adapted.’ (Fonagay, 2001, p.126). In his conclusion on attachment and relationality, Mitchell writes, ‘…the apparent separation between the subject who attaches and the object of attachment overlays a primary process level of organization in which self and other exist in various degrees of undifferentiation from each other.’ (Mitchell, 2000. P. 101). He concludes, ‘…healthy object relations (and by implication, healthy attachments) consist not so much in a clear separation of self from others, but in a capacity to contain in dialectical tensions different mutually enriching forms of relatedness.’ (Mitchell, 2000. P. 101).
Another development in psychoanalytic thought that enables attachment theory to find commonality with psychotherapy is mentalization. Showing the relationship between affect regulation and mentalization, Fonagay et al. suggest a theory of mentalized affectivity in which affects are used to regulate the self and that mentalized affectivity lies at the core of psychotherapy. (Fonagay et al, 2004, p.5). They postulate:

Our theory of affect regulation and mentalization enables us to enrich the arguments advanced by theorists such as John Bowlby about the evolutionary function of attachment. We argue that an evolutionary function of early object relations is to equip the very young child with an environment within which the understanding of mental states in others and the self can fully develop. We propose that self-reflection as well as the ability to reflect on other minds are constructed capacities that have evolved (or not) out of the earliest relationships. Since mentalization is a core aspect of human social functioning, we can infer that evolution has placed particular value on developing mental structures for interpreting interpersonal actions. (Fonagay et al, 2004, p.5).

Attachment systems.

Because attachment behaviour patterns operate on an unconscious level, they continue to function throughout the life span and are known as the Internal Working Models (Holmes, 2001, p 29). In his biographical work, John Bowlby and Attachment Theory, Holmes writes:

Bowlby wished to recast psychoanalytic theory in terms of a systems approach in which feedback loops are a key element, they underlie the 'epigenetic' stability of psychological phenomena: the benign circles of healthy development, and the vicious circles of neurosis in which negative assumptions about the self and others become self-fulfilling prophecies. (Holmes, 1993, p.79).
Contemporary attachment theorists such as Ainsworth and Main have placed an emphasis not on the typology of attachment behaviour but on the degree of coherence, or incoherence in the subject’s account of childhood memories (Mitchell, 2000, p.85). Ainsworth conducted research known as the strange situation in which a child’s reaction to brief separation was observed (Holmes, 2001, p. 33). The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) is foremost among the methods used to assess the propensity to activate attachment systems in adults. The interview takes the form of eliciting from the subject a narrative of their childhood with the therapist’s attention being given to coherence and quality of the client’s expression. The narrative styles are coded: ‘Attachment security in the coding system (the autonomous classification—F) is most closely associated with high coherence. There are three insecure patterns: the dismissing (idealizing or derogatory about attachment—Ds), the preoccupied (angry or passive—E), and the unresolved in relation to loss or abuse (U)’. (Fonagay, 2001, p.23).

In the *Search for a Secure Base*, Holmes presents a table correlating child and adult attachment patterns (Holmes, 2001, p.38). This can be seen in Appendix 1.

Kirkpatrick describes findings from his own research regarding attachment patterns in adult relationships:

1. **Avoidant**: I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous whenever anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

2. **Secure**: I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.
3. Anxious/ambivalent: I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 40).

With regard to adult relationships, Bateman and Holmes also report:

Secure attachment provides a positive primary defence while secondary or pathological defences retain closeness to rejecting or unreliable attachment figures. In 'avoidant attachment', both neediness and aggression are split off and the individual has no conscious knowledge of the need to be near the attachment figure, appearing aloof and distant; in 'ambivalent attachment', omnipotence and denial of autonomy lead to clinging and uncontrolled demands. (Bateman & Holmes, 1995, p. 78)

Patterns of attachment are not typological and are useful guides to assessing the present state of condition of an individual. In practice, clients show both ambivalent and avoidant patterns at different times and according to context (Holmes, 2001, p.28).

Throughout the life span, attachment systems may be activated by threats to security. A variety of things may represent a secure base for an individual, the most obvious being a parent or romantic partner. In addition to therapists, other care workers such as hospital staff can become surrogate attachment figures and non-clinical adults have been known to describe their secure base as pets, family, close friends, hot baths, duvets, photograph albums, being in touch with nature, favourite books and music (Holmes, 2001, p 29). Kirkpatrick reports from his research into the psychology of religions that not just religious figures and leaders, but also God may become a secure base (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p.65). Mental health bodies advise, ‘a stable routine and structure at home will provide a secure base for your child’, (Collingwood, J., 2009), implying that anticipatory time-bound structures may also signify security for an individual.
Attachment theory in practice.

For this study I propose to examine four case studies at varying depths of complexity.

During the lecture when I was introduced to attachment theory, I identified four people from my client history who I thought may be suitable for investigation. The set of four comprised two men and two women. For the purpose of this study, I decided to give them pseudonyms, in order to protect their identity: Amber and Jade, Ash and Dylan.

On the surface the two men seemed to have no common ground, while the two women shared a number of common factors. Both women had been sexually abused by family members when young. Both are in their thirties and neither has yet become a parent. There were a number of contrasting factors which prompted my decision to include them in the study: both women were born in England and yet one had a British-Asian background. Amber, the British-Asian woman had a Muslim family background while Jade’s background was heavily influenced by the tenets of astrological and esoteric philosophy. Jade was a smoker who enjoyed drinking; Amber had never drank alcohol in her life and had only tried a cigarette as a youthful experiment. Both worked in finance, though while Jade was untrained and sustained a medium to low level accounting career, Amber was highly ambitious, driven and had taken senior management roles in global household name companies. Although neither were parents, Jade had taken up the position of caring for a partner’s children on occasion, while Amber had chosen a husband who could not have children. While neither of their partners had become financially successful, it is interesting to note that Jade, the woman who appears to lack ambition, has a partner whose income is in close proximity to hers. This is in contrast with Amber, the successful woman’s husband had an income that measured barely
15% of hers; this may suggest that proportionate and disproportionate economic responsibility may have a bearing on matters of control and security.

On the surface, the two men appear to be very different. Ash is in his early forties, has been married for five years, has a son of eleven and currently lives in South Africa. Originally from Kenya, he has also lived in England. Dylan is also in his early forties, has lived his life either in, or in close proximity to the English village of his childhood. He is a divorcee with no children. Further differences are evident; Dylan went to school in his village, Ash was sent to boarding school at the age of seven. Ash has had a number of jobs and has recently found his vocation as a qualified acupuncturist. Dylan has remained in the same warehouse job for more than twenty five years.
A view from the surface: Attachment to:

In terms of looking at attachment, Ash appears to have a pattern that is ubiquitous. He was close to his parents but when they argued, he would keep his distance, waiting for their cue that they had repaired their bond. Being sent away to boarding school was unbearable for Ash. Once more he found he had to wait for external or environmental cues, namely, school holidays, to have permission to repair the bonds with his parents and return to the secure base of the family home. The enforced exclusion from his secure base appears to have constellated a pattern akin to attachment-elastic, in which Ash is in a constant state of transitioning convergence and divergence with things that represent powerful attachments in his life.

In his youth, Ash became a member of a martial arts training club which, in his words, was like a cult. It was here that he met his wife, daughter of the martial arts leader and a period began in which they were together but not free to live as they wished; many of their decisions were at the behest of the will of the group, the leader or at times, the leader’s new partner. The strain on their marriage was too much and they parted temporarily. His wife came to the UK and a short while later they repaired their relationship and he joined her in Britain. Seven years later, his wife decided to return to South Africa to be near her now divorced father. Once again Ash was uncertain whether to break up or follow and he decided to return to South Africa with his wife. Within a year she had met someone who reminded her of the thrills of blossoming romance on a course she attended in the UK, while Ash remained in South Africa, and subsequently found himself spending the next twelve months waiting for his wife to decide whether she wanted to stay or leave.
During our discussion on attachments, Ash informed me he had a passion for motorbikes and had been a smoker, both of these were experienced as an on-off dynamic.

On the surface it would appear that Ash has an anxious/ambivalent relationship with attachment.

Beneath the surface: Attachment dynamics:

Since 2007, Ash has been engaged in an almost constant process of reviewing his history and seeking reparation and resolution. When recounting early childhood experiences, his voice was sometimes hesitant, occasionally stuttering. His present preoccupation with reviewing his history enabled him to construct a cohesive narrative and when asked about an area that has received previous consideration his manner was clear, concise and articulate, though affect appeared subdued.

My conclusion is that Ash is making a transition from Ambivalent to Secure attachment.
**Dylan:**

A view from the surface: Attachment to:

A word that I would use describe Dylan is consistent. Others may opt for the word secure, but I think even at the surface, this would be an error. Dylan has no desire to change his job or to seek promotion within the company. At the age of forty he found himself living on his own, in his own house, with no outstanding mortgage. He has only had one partner in life; his wife of seven years who he divorced four years ago. Much of his life appears to revolve around his family. His choice of car is influenced by familial needs and wishes, the weekly routine is constant, with Sunday lunch being an event unchanged since his childhood. There is certainly a lack of exploration in his life; even when having broadband installed in his home after fourteen months of consumer assessment; it remained unused for two months after purchase. Dylan appears to manage his life on a continuum of maintaining sameness. He also demonstrates obsessive compulsive disorder behaviours, which remain without formal diagnosis or therapeutic treatment. He was bullied at school, and this experience was repeated in his only adult relationship. An incident of rejection at the age of seventeen is a salient feature of his narrative and supports his present orientation of giving more value to avoiding the risks of rejection than forming affectional bonds with an adult and his own offspring. He reports that he is concerned about expression of his temper, preferring to maintain consistently passive. He appears to self consciously attend to regulating his affect in the company of others.

On the surface it would appear that Dylan has an avoidant attachment style.
Beneath the surface: Attachment dynamics:

When recounting his past, Dylan maintains a subdued affect, normalising his history and is seemingly uninterested in any form of therapeutic resolution of historical issues which continue to cause him either distress or influence current life experience. Dylan is hesitant to begin talking, but once underway, he expresses himself with an easy disposition and good humour. On the surface Dylan is a paradox; a secure man with no attachments. Beneath the surface, a maintenance of distance, controlled affect and disinterest in actively resolving issues and bringing positive change into his life, confirm that Dylan has an avoidant attachment style.
Jade:

A view from the surface: Attachment to:

At the age of thirty three, Jade is navigating the waters of recovery from severe sexual abuse. Her family home was peaceful while her father worked away, but his return would precipitate an atmosphere of anxiety, if not fear itself. Her father was a controlling man, oriented around work and material success. In contrast, Jade’s mother was peaceful, and spiritually orientated and had no awareness that Jade was raped by her father. This occurred on more than one occasion before Jade was five years old. She seemed uncertain about recounting when it came to an end; the details were, understandably, hesitant and vague. Jade’s parents separated when she was around ten years old. Jade later went to boarding school and reports deriving a sense of both exploratory escape and self searching and a denying of a sense of abandonment or rejection. Through her adult life Jade has formed relationships consistent with healthy youth. Long term attachments have endured for approximately three years. Since embarking on her journey of therapy, Jade has made remarkable changes. She had kept her abuse a secret, shared only with her mother and brother. Recently, her brother angrily let the secret out at a family gathering and a schism resulted. In a manner akin to structural coupling (Capra, 1996, p.213), the rupture to the family security has led to sides being taken with calls for a legal prosecution in order to have her account verified. The group dynamic is a response reminiscent of the ambivalent attachment pattern; the family want to know and yet hate having to know, and the suppressed affect is directed as anger towards Jade. These events have proved to be a catalyst for her in a number of ways: she has embarked on a course of professional training, stepping out from her avoidance of heightened material success. She has become engaged, has stopped smoking and displays a greater sense of self confidence.

On the surface, it would appear that Jade has an ambivalent attachment style.
Beneath the surface: Attachment dynamics:

Jade has a voice that resonates with clear ringing tones and an articulate manner of expression. Occasional waves of affect surface though her general communications, which serve to bring a lively effervescence to her social interaction. During therapy, her manner remains the same until historical narrative is investigated. She appears to shift from curiosity to uncertainty, hesitant to explore her feelings and yet feels compelled to do so.

A salient feature of Jade’s narrative was the distress she still experienced from being unable to remove an image of the look on her father’s face, prevalent during his raping of her. The affect transformation was intense and it was decided to apply a hypnotic technique from the field of neuro linguistic programming to enable her to reconfigure the memory and deactivate the aroused affect. The intervention proved successful and Jade reported she was no longer haunted by the image.

The therapeutic journey Jade has undertaken is incubating reparation and enabling her to establish relationships with both others and herself which are life affirming and supportive. Reviewing Jade’s present position, I draw the conclusion that she is making a transition from an ambivalent attachment system to security.
Amber:

A view from the surface: Attachment to:

Amber embarked on a therapeutic journey that has taken a variety of forms around the time of her thirtieth birthday. She had a history of severe, regular and systematic sexual abuse from more than one family member, which began when she was four years old. The perpetrators were brothers and she was also abused by a religious leader in a Mosque. She reported that abuse from males seemed ubiquitous though did this not include her father, who constituted a secure base. Amber was fostered at birth for six months and, she reports, formed an affectionate bond with her foster parents. The degree of affection was absent in her relationship with her mother, who seemed detached and cold, preoccupied with her own concerns and maintaining the reputation of the family name within the culture. Not all of her brothers were abusive, though the ones who were took it in turns. Amber would often hide in cupboards or under the bed to escape; when escape was not possible, she would retreat into a world of television and books. In addition to sexual abuse there was a high level of aggression in family communication and bullying in other forms. At eight years of age, Amber told her mother of the abuse after maintaining secrecy for four years, only to be shunned and called a ‘whore’. The death of Amber’s father when she was fourteen engendered an urgent need in her to assert herself as a matter of self defence and she embarked upon a path of focussed determination to make self reliant progress in life. By the time of her thirtieth birthday Amber had completed a twelve year programme of self-taught study and qualified as an accountant. Professional success was the focus of her life. Romantic attachments were infrequent, comprising two to three years in duration. It was during her thirtieth year that she met her husband. She had an image of a successful, professional life partner and chose instead a man who, while soft, kind and compassionate, lacked material success, was unable to produce children and as an adult with aspergers syndrome, is himself in need of care. Amber, in the search for a secure base, chose a husband with whom she could
represent a figure of secure attachment. An uneasy alliance has grown into a secure companionship which she has now been able to maintain for ten years. During this time she has undertaken additional training in NLP and hypnotherapy, interior design and yoga. She is currently a participant in a two year course in Buddhism and has been accepted for an Msc in economics.

Amber’s journey has taken many steps towards recovery and is ongoing. In 2002, after a period of counselling, she reached a stage of drawing a line beneath her past and she reported her abuse to the police. Although Amber refrained from proceeding to prosecution, this still caused a major rift between the women of the family; Amber, her mother and elder sister. She began a process of cautious reparation in 2006.

During the course of our discussions on attachments, she experienced an overpowering affective response which precipitated the recovery of an amygdala based memory of the very moment when her abuse began. She had previously known of this event, in a vague and intellectual way, but this was her first experience of full comprehension.

As a result of the emotional recovery, Amber has reported that she feels differently towards her past and her abusers. Significantly, the hunger to be accepted and loved by those who hurt has ceased, as if it had melted away. She speaks with a renewed sense of vision and appreciation for the attachments which constitute a secure base in her life.

Amber’s attachment pattern has changed over a long period of time. When I first encountered her, she was an adult, afraid of the dark and displayed powerful disorganised attachment behaviour combined with avoidance. At present, she is apt to display a lesser degree of ambivalent attachment.

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Beneath the surface: Attachment dynamics:

The improved coherence of Amber’s narrative signifies a continuing progress and marks a transition from disorganised attachment towards security via avoidance and ambivalence. The matter of her maternity has yet to be resolved and remains a thorny issue. She does report, however, that her recovery from her childhood is steadily progressing and the improved clarity in her narrative and comprehension suggest this is definitely the case.

I would conclude that Amber is establishing an internal secure base.
Conclusion:

This paper has given an account of my relationship with attachment theory. I have described my initial encounter with the theory during a lecture; given a review of the supportive literature and also given a report of my findings when the theory is applied in practice.

I was somewhat reticent towards the idea of applying set patterns or working models towards an individual, preferring instead to relate with a client’s unique experience. However, I have been surprised at how closely the descriptions of attachment patterns apply to the cases in this paper. This formative study serves as an introduction to attachment theory and I intend to conduct further research in this area.

Attachment perspectives have already begun to inform a greater degree of perception in my own client practice and I have certainly begun to form an attachment to attachment theory.
Bibliography.


Collingwood, J., *Helping a Family Member with a Mental Disorder*, http://psychcentral.com/lib/2006/helping-a-family-member-with-a-mental-disorder/


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### Table 2.1: Adult Attachment Interview classifications and corresponding patterns of infant strange situation behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult state of mind with respect to attachment</th>
<th>Infant strange situation behaviour</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secure/autonomous (F)</strong></td>
<td>Coherent, collaborative discourse. Valuing of attachment, but seems objective regarding any particular event or relationship. Description and evaluation of attachment-related experiences is consistent, whether experiences are favourable or unfavourable. Discourse does not notably violate any of Grice's maxims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secure (B)</strong></td>
<td>Explores room and toys with interest in pre-separation episodes. Shows signs of missing parent during separation, often crying by the second separation. Obvious preference for parent; over stranger Greets parent actively, usually initiating physical contact. Usually some contact maintained by second reunion, but then settles and returns to play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidant (A)</strong></td>
<td>Fails to cry on separation from parent. Actively avoids and ignores parent on reunion (i.e. by moving away, turning away or leaning out of arms when picked up). Little or no proximity or contact-seeking, no distress and no anger. Response to parent appears unemotional. Focuses on toys or environment throughout procedure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preoccupied (E)</strong></td>
<td>Not coherent. Preoccupied with or by past attachment relationships or experiences, speaker appears angry, passive or fearful. Sentences often long, grammatically entangled, or filled with vague usages (‘daddleda’, and that’), thus violating Grice’s maxims of manner and relevance. Transcripts often excessively long, violating the maxim of quantity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resistant or ambivalent (C)</strong></td>
<td>May be wary or distressed even before separation, with little exploration. Preoccupied with parent throughout procedure; may appear angry or passive. Fails to settle and take comfort in parent on reunion, and usually continues to focus on parent and cry. Fails to return to exploration after reunion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unresolved/disorganized (U)</strong></td>
<td>During discussions of loss or abuse, individual shows striking lapse in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse. For example, individual may briefly indicate a belief that a dead person is still alive in the physical sense, or that this person was killed by a childhood thought. Individual may lapse into prolonged silence or eulogistic speech. The speaker will ordinarily otherwise fit Ds, E or F categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disorganized/disoriented (D)</strong></td>
<td>The infant displays disorganized and/or disoriented behaviours in the parent’s presence, suggesting a temporary collapse of behavioural strategy. For example, the infant may freeze with a trance-like expression, hands in air; may rise at parent’s entrance, then fall prone and huddled on the floor; or may cling while crying hard and leaning away with gaze averted. Infant will ordinarily otherwise fit A, B or C categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Adapted from Hesse (1999).

**Notes:** Descriptions of the adult attachment classification system are summarized from Main et al. (1985) and from Main and Goldwyn (1984a, 1998b). Descriptions of infant A, B and C categories are summarized from Ainsworth et al. (1978) and the description of the infant D category is summarized from Main and Solomon (1990). Data from Main (1996).
Forming an Attachment to Attachment theory: a journal of an emergent understanding.

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