

God and Attachment


Using Integration Techniques to Change Working
Models

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Attachment Theory

- **Historical Perspective, A Different Point of View**
 - **Observational Approach vs. Analytic Approach (Bowlby, 1969/1982)**
 - Rejected Freud's ideas of psychological forces & psychological energy
 - Maintained the ideas of psychological configurations, the role of genetics, and importance of the relationship to environment

Bowlby's Theory

- **Multi-disciplinary**
 - Evolutionary Biology
 - Ethology
 - Developmental Psychology
 - Cognitive Science
 - Control systems theory
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Bowlby's Theory

- Attachment behavior defined:
 - Behaviors which are done in an attempt to maintain proximity, displayed in the child's seemingly natural inclination to seek the parent when distressed.
 - The goal *is not the object*
 - The goal *is a state*
- *Attachment behavior is adaptive*
 - *It is not a drive, and not a sign of immaturity.*

Patterns of Attachment

- Ainsworth noticed individual differences in attachment behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1978)
 - Secure
 - Avoidant
 - Ambivalent
 - Resistant
- Theorized different patterns suggest different “working models”

Bowlby's Theory Expanded

- **Internal Working Models**
 - Acknowledges our ability to forecast the future
 - Tendency to use past experience to predict future occurrences
 - Differences in IWM's are critical for understanding differences in security and anxiety (Bowlby, 1973)
- **Availability seems the critical appraisal**
 - Proximity alone does not lead to security
 - Parent may be physically present, but emotionally withdrawn

Attachment Throughout Development

- **Internal Working Models are Maintained**
 - The notion that the individual can reunite with the attachment figure if necessary remains a fundamental aspect of availability (Cassidy, 1999)
 - Fear of abandonment (lack of availability) is often covered with anger and hidden in defense-mechanisms.
 - Threats to availability and the capacity to manage emotional reactions may change with age, but the core emotional reaction to these threats (fear, anger, sadness) remain similar.

Spirituality & Attachment

- Does attachment impact spirituality??
 - Research suggests yes
 - What attachment has been suggested to impact:
 - Degree of religiosity
 - God concept
 - God image
 - Attachment to God
 - Conversion experiences
 - Glossolalia & religious experience

Attachment & Spirituality

- Two Models:
 - Compensation
 - God as an ideal or perfect substitute attachment figure
 - Correspondence
 - God is experienced consistently to how parents were experienced
 - Or 'attached' to in a similar manner
 - Consistent 'working models' also applied to God
 - Complex relationship
 - Both may be true at different points of development or different situations

Attachment & Spirituality

- What does research say???
- Mixed results
 - Research has supported both models (compensation & correspondence)
- Consistent support:
 - There is a complex relationship between attachment and spirituality

Attachment & Spirituality

- Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1990) – initial research
 - Examined
 - Attachment
 - Personal religiosity
 - Mother's religiosity
 - Various factors from religious history
 - Secure attachment no significant differences
 - Anxious/Ambivalent no significant differences
 - Avoidant
 - Low Mom religiosity connect with high religiosity for the individual

Attachment & Spirituality

- Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1990) – initial research
 - Conversion experiences
 - 28% of individuals with an avoidant attachment had a conversion experience during adolescence
 - Less than 1% of secure attachment
 - 4% of anxious/ambivalent
 - Conclusions:
 - Support for compensation model
 - God as “ideal attachment figure”

Attachment & Spirituality

- Other support for the compensation model:
 - Kirkpatrick (1997, 1998):
 - Insecurely attached adults (not just avoidant) more likely to have a conversion experience
 - Anxious/Ambivalent and Avoidant attachment styles more likely to have conversion experience even in adulthood

Attachment & Spirituality

- Support for the correspondence hypothesis
 - Freud (1927) & Rizzuto (1979)
 - Initial formulations were based upon the idea that the God image would correspond to experience of parents

Attachment & Spirituality

- Support for the correspondence hypothesis:
 - Brokaw & Edwards (1994), Hall & Brokaw (1995), & Hall, Brokaw, Edwards, & Pike (1998)
 - Similarities between object relations development (attachment) and God images
 - Tisdale, Key, Edwards, Brokaw & Kemperman (1997)
 - Similarities between attachment, God image, & personal adjustment (self-esteem)
 - McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy (2004)
 - Similarities between attachment and attachment to God

Attachment & Spirituality

- Support for the correspondence hypothesis:
 - Grandquist & Hagekull (2000)
 - Modest support for correspondence hypothesis
 - 1 of 4 measures of religiosity had significant correlation with *adult* attachment
 - Relationship with God

Attachment & Spirituality

- Support for the complex relationship:
 - Dickie et al. (1997)
 - Perceptions of both parents correlated with similar God images
 - As child gets older, less similar to parents and more similar to idealized attachment figure
 - Suggest later in adult life may be similar to self-concept (non-tested research hypothesis)
 - Complex relationship with both compensation & correspondence hypothesis may be true

Attachment & Spirituality

- Support for complex relationship:
 - Grandquist (1998)
 - Correspondence vs. compensation may depend upon type of attachment and religiosity of parents
 - Religious parents
 - Secure attachment positive relationship with religiosity
 - Insecure – not significant relationship
 - Non-religious parents
 - Secure attachment correlates with being agnostic
 - Insecure attachment correlates with being religious

Spirituality & Attachment

- Hall (Hall & Porter, 2004; Halcrow, Hall, Hill, & Delaney, 2004).
 - Multiple Code Theory / Emotional Information Processing (Hall & Porter, 2004)
 - 3 Levels of Processing
 - Subsymbolic Emotional Processing (Implicit)
 - Nonverbal Emotional Processing
 - Verbal, Symbolic Processing (Explicit)
 - May be difference in experience between the 3 levels

Attachment & Spirituality

- Halcrow, Hall, Hill, & Delaney (2004)
 - Predicted:
 - Implicit, subsymbolic working models fit correspondence model
 - Explicit, verbal symbolic levels fit compensation model
 - Found partial support in initial study
 - Interpretation:
 - Implicit models develop relationally out of awareness
 - Explicit models can serve as conscious ways in which people try to use religion as a defense or as a way to cope with the otherwise insecure attachment

Spirituality & Attachment

- Complex relationship appears clear
- Other factors need to be considered:
 - Culture (Hoffman, 2004; Hoffman et al., 2005)
 - Resiliency Issues
 - Measurement limitations (Hill & Hall, 2002; Nicholas, 2004)
 - Including clearer distinction between God concept & God image
 - Other supporting factors

Attachment and Integration Therapy

■ Brief Re-cap and Overview

- Attachment System
- Working Models
- Working Model is generalized to other relationships, including a person's relationship with God.
- Attachment therapists aim to change a client's working model so that they have a more secure attachment.
- Changing a client's working model would change the way they see themselves, others, and God.

Foundations of Attachment Therapy (Brisch, 2002)

■ Focus on Relationship

■ Being sensitive to the client

- Following their lead – not too much or too little
- Having awareness of their unique verbal and non-verbal way of relating
- Research on infant attachment has shown how they have unique cries and unique ways of relating. Parents who develop secure attachment recognize and respond to these differences. The same is true for therapists who aim to establish a secure relationship with clients.

- Creating a strong alliance or bond with the client. They need to know that you are on their team. Help them differentiate themselves from the problem. Differences b/n Axis I and Axis II or ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic.

Foundations continued...

■ Create a Secure Base

- In childhood, this occurs when the child goes to their chief caregiver to be comforted and consoled.
- Balances the tension between attachment and exploration. That is, the need to be comforted and the need to separate. These drives do not actually oppose one another, but are instead inter-related. If a child feels safe and comforted, then they actually explore more. How would this parallel in the therapy process?
- This translates in therapy to what D.W. Winnicott (1971) called the “holding environment,” which is a frame, or relationship, that allows the client to explore and process painful issues. When people feel safe, they feel ready to process difficult experiences. When they do not feel safe, then they are resistant to exploration. What is resistance?

Techniques

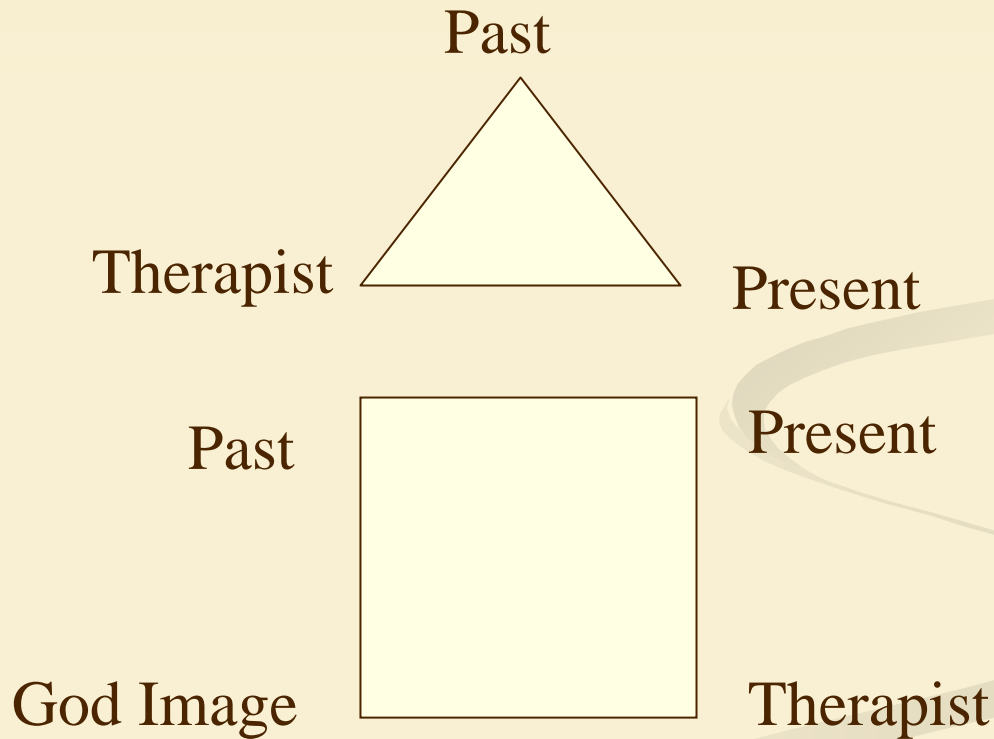
- **Work with Counter-transference**
 - **Traditional View - Countertransference** occurs when therapists project unresolved issues onto clients (e.g., old relationship, issue with parent)
 - Levenson (1995) describes the HOOK, “The therapist will inevitably be pushed and pulled by the patient’s dysfunctional style and will respond accordingly...the therapist inevitably becomes ‘hooked’ into acting out the complimentary response to the patient’s inflexible, maladaptive, pattern (p. 38).
 - Consider a person with an avoidant attachment style. These individuals tend to keep themselves distant from others. They are often afraid of rejection and fearful of opening up. How might you experience a person with this hook?

Techniques Continued

- Provide a Corrective Emotional Experience
 - Once you have identified their attachment style and/or their hook, you can provide them with a different, healing, relationship. One in which they gain a new experience and a new understanding. For example, a person who typically avoids people out of fear of rejection will experience you as interested in them, caring, and empathic. This gives them a new experience (feeling accepted) and a new understanding (other people can care for me and not reject me). This corrective-emotional-experience translates to their understanding of themselves, others, and God. How do you think this may affect their experience of God?

Techniques continued...

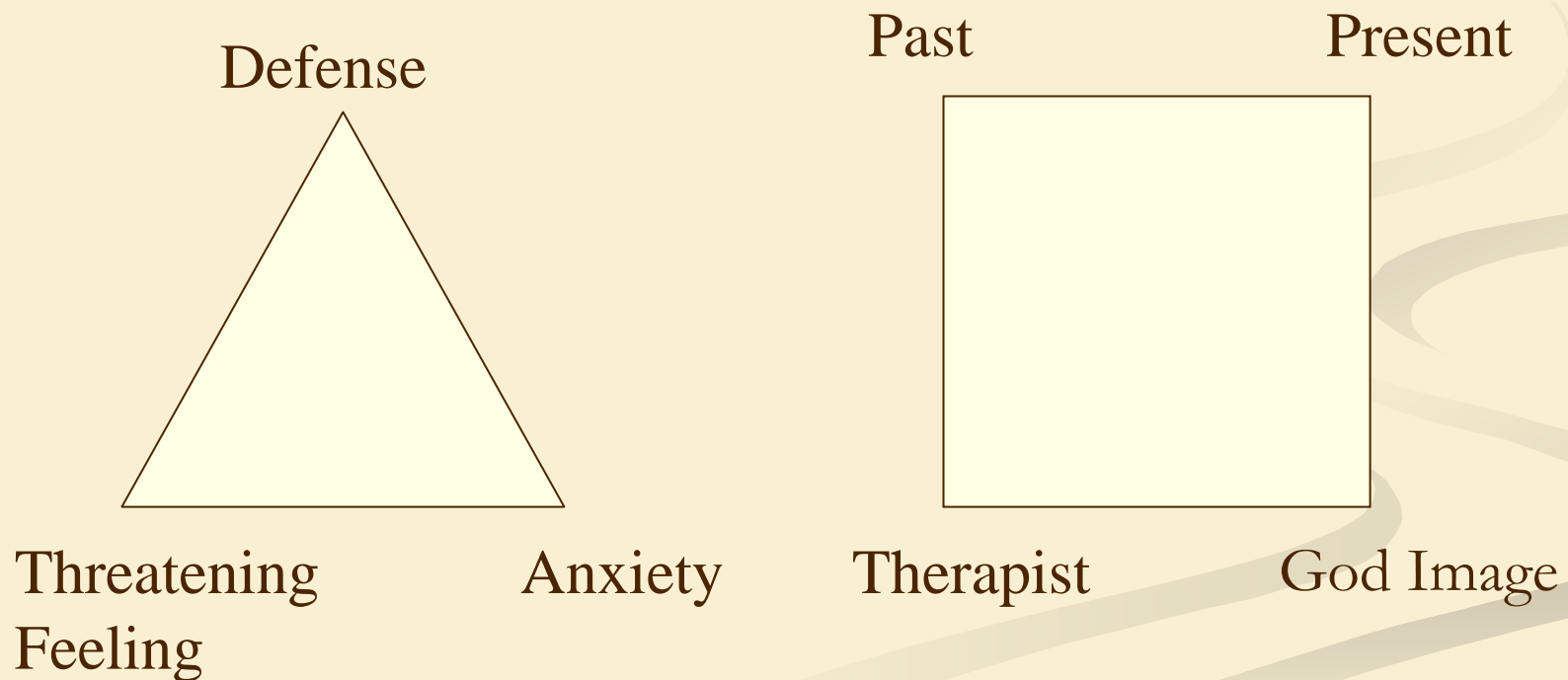
- Use Interpretation (Menninger, 1958, Strength, 1998)



Techniques

Explore attachment style and defenses to see how they affect the client's relationship with God and others.

Triangle of Conflict (Malan, 1987); Related to Square of Persons



Techniques

- Step 1 - Recognize – Validate – the development of the attachment style. It helped protect them when they were children. Help them see that it served a need for a specific time, but it is now outdated.
- Step 2 - Relinquish - Negative costs, Grief over loss caused by defense – in a very kind way, help them look at the costs, so that they can risk the new experience to live in a healthier way.

Questions or Comments?



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