

Lecture: Attachment and group psychotherapy: Developing a projective test to measure mental representations of group- trusting inclusion vs. imprinting patterns of social incoherence based on the AAP.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

my name is Christine Iuga and in gratitude to the invitation of our chair Jutta Gliem I am delighted to be here today to talk to you about the development of a new method to assess mental representations of group attachment in adults. As a doctor, psychoanalyst and a group analyst I come from a developmental perspective influenced by neurobiological research, the Foulksian matrix-concept and sociological ideas.

Slide: overview

My speech is divided into 4 parts: beginning with a brief review of Bowlby's concept of the Inner Working Model of attachment I will then look at the current assessments of adult attachment, I will also introduce the Adult Attachment Projective AAP and finally, I'll take a look at different concepts of group attachment and the new test Adult group attachment projective Picture System (AGAP).

Slide: Bowlby's Inner Working Model

In John Bowlby's trilogy (attachment, separation and loss) from 1980 he established a new developmental paradigm and became one of the most influential psychoanalysts. He formulated his attachment theory based on observing and understanding the responses of children separated from their mothers and their developmental sequelae. Drawing on neo-Darwinian ethology and control systems theory, he proposed attachment as the primary motivational force. The attachment dynamic is a product of our „environment of evolutionary adaptation“ in which protection from predation was essential. The „set goal“ of attachment is the physical proximity to a secure base when a child is threatened, stressed, or ill. Only when attachment needs are assuaged, exploration and play can resume. Grounded in his own psychoanalytical theory he formulated a new understanding of defense mechanism – defensive exclusion- and how it influences our perception and processing of attachment- related sometimes painful information via deactivation and cognitive disconnection.

The increasing neurobiological knowledge confirms Bowlby's findings about the Inner Working model of attachment. We are hardwired to connect with one another throughout life and to seek the most attuned attachments available to us as Allan Schore pointed out. Our initial relationships shape the very structure of our brains and ongoing meaningful interpersonal encounters with family members, peers and neighbourhoods continue modifying our brain wiring. These embodied anticipations in the long-term memory, continue their influence as so called „Inner Working Models“ by guiding our choice of partner, style of parenting, our levels of resilience and hope, our capacity to make meaning of our lives and of course of our level of trust and mistrust towards groups.

In the third edition of Cassidy and Shaver's „handbook of attachment“ in 2016, Inge Bretherton formulates the dynamic structure of the attachment related inner working model in the following sentence:

„To function adequately, infants' embryonic working models of self and attachment figures must be updated in step with their developing communicative, social and cognitive abilities.“

Slide: Attachment measures

Attachment theory today offers a huge framework for scientific questions beginning with Mother-Baby-Interactions, Peer-relationship, Partnerships, Coping with severe illness and many others. The common ground of all numerous different kinds of diagnostic approaches towards this scientific

paradigm is Bowlby's concept of the Inner Working Models of attachment. The researchers are interested in how these cerebral representations influence our perceptions, emotions and behaviour in different ages and life-events. On the one hand there are social psychologists asking their probands via questionnaire directly about their attachment related experiences, attitudes and expectations. On the other hand there are developmental psychologists using for example the strange situation test, doll play settings, interviews like the AAI (Adult attachment interview) or projective Tests like the AAP (Adult Attachment Projective) to activate the attachment system and measure its regulation strategies.

Slide: Projective assessment of personality

Beginning in the 1930s with Morgan and Murray's Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and the famous Rorschach Test, researchers with psychoanalytic background use projective tests to investigate unconscious processes such as defence and object relations. These tests provide a window towards the more right-brain related intrapsychic, implicit, automatic and unconscious personality characteristics. Within the dyadic test-situation they foster a deeper understanding of how someone experiences his or her world and conveys those experiences to others. The limitation of this form of personality assessment lies in its relatively high effort to provide satisfactory statistical reliability and validity.

Slide: Adult Projective Attachment

Carol George and Malcolm West, both very famous attachment researchers grounded in the Bowlby-Ainsworth (AAI) theoretical background developed in the 1990s the only projective Test for adult attachment until now. Their first aim was to develop a test with the same high standard as the gold standard of developmental assessment, Mary Ainsworth's „Adult attachment interview“ AAI. Different validation studies showed a high correlation between the 4 attachment categories secure, dismissing, preoccupied and dysregulated between the AAI and the AAP measured in half of the time. That means they reduced the time to determine the attachment status of their probands from about 6 to 3 hours per measurement. Although the latest studies (in Germany Strauss and colleagues) come to a lower correlation between AAI and AAP-outcomes compared with the first validation-studies, the AAP is used worldwide successfully in a number of attachment related and neurobiological studies. Latter are notably implemented by Prof. Anna Buchheim who translated the originally English AAP into a German version and formulated a new neurobiological research paradigm by using the AAP-picture stimuli in the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). The AAP uses adults story responses to 8 ambiguous pictures of hypothetical attachment situations. The Coding system is amongst other items grounded in Mary Ainsworth's criteria for the AAI and unique in the diagnosis of Bowlby's defence mechanism: deactivation, disconnection and segregated systems. An important theoretical difference in the theory and assessment of defence mechanism lies here, which is compared, for example, with projective Tests like the TAT based on ego-psychology and its conceptualization of defence mechanism. For more information I'd like to refer to Phebe Cramer's Book „The development of defense mechanism“ from 1991.

Slide: Zitat Marmarosh

The question now is: How can we integrate the knowledge of mostly dyadic attachment measurement and theories of group attachment to diagnose what influences the cerebral group representations more specifically?

Is it possible to measure up the cerebral embedding of secure and joyful patterns of early peer-interactions, the experiences of severe conflict and divorce in families, bullying and social exclusion on the schoolyard? Is there a way to measure also the possibly permanent mental representations

and partly dysregulated defence strategies after growing up in times of war, social persecution, loss and flight?

Prof. Marmarosh and colleagues tried to fix these questions in their book „Attachment in group psychotherapy“ and opened up a new space to think after similarities and differences between the concept of dyadic and group attachment.

Slide: Biology of group attachment

The concept of group attachment finds support in the neurobiological research such as the influence of oxytocin, pain and social rejection or the findings of regions in the brain which seem to relate specifically to situations of social affiliation.

Slide: The task

Although there is a number of self-report and interview-based tests to measure attachment patterns, there is only one self-report questionnaire to test group attachment: the social group attachment scale from Prof. Smith and colleagues, developed 1999. Currently there is a diagnostic gap concerning the representational assessment of trust and mistrust towards groups.

To provide a more wholistic approach to measure up group attachment in a theoretically consistent fashion, it would be helpful to combine self-report and interview-based methods in a multimethod assessment paradigm like it is used for example in the latest study of Sergio Barile and colleagues 2016 in Albania to measure up group cohesiveness in combining the sociometric test with the picture apperception value test.

Slide: From the Inner Mother to the Inner Group

The development of the projective AGAP picture stimuli was based on the AAP stimuli for the assessment of secure and insecure attachment patterns in an imagined social extension. The affects and impulses evoked are depicted in areas relevant to social attachment in a similar way as in the AAP, but expanded by group-immanent specifications such as the aforementioned inclusion or exclusion of depicted persons.

My attempt is to use two different approaches towards the concept of group attachment by stimulating the group attachment system in individuals and small groups via picture stimuli and narrative-analysis. The first aim is to develop a test for individuals which will be explained in the following slides. The second approach is more an experimental part and will never be statistically valid I guess. Nevertheless for group analysts this paradigm offers very interesting insights about the „glue“ that holds a group together in association to the concept of group cohesiveness traditionally measured via self-report questionnaire and described dimensionally in terms of attraction and affiliation towards groups. From a more evolutionary perspective towards the social brain and the relevance of group attachment to survival combined with Foulkes matrix-idea I analyze different aspects in the narratives of small-groups-unities. I am interested for example in the ability of jointly regulated affects, the mental exploration and synchronized story-telling capability without denying attachment-related feelings or the capacity of the group members to play with painful realities by utilizing aggressive, humoristic or even eroticised material freely and creatively.

Slide: Study

The procedure of the development and validation of the test contains 3 Phases:

Phase 1: Developing of the test including the narratives of 20 patients with different kinds of mental disorders. Additionally to the AAP and AGAP-Test I collect the data from two self-report

questionnaires: the symptom checklist and the opd-structure questionnaire. The task in the second phase will be the refining of the test by using a higher number of probands and test-retest-measurements. After that I planed the validation study and developing of interjudge-reliability.

Slide : Picture stimuli

On this slide you can see the 8 AGAP-Picture stimuli:....

The projective AGAP test enables a gradual simulation of social stress - psychological integration is put under pressure and its ability to regulate is tested by the direct narrative in the presence of the interviewer. Carrying it out is usually more painful for the patient than the cognitively distanced questionnaire and he counters it with his (current) psychological resistance with more or less success. In analogy to the physical examination, *psychological pain trigger points* are pressed here and the subject can indicate where it hurts him socially. A dysregulation that occurs after confrontation with the AGAP-picture stimuli is interpreted as a past experience of serious and repeated container failure in situations of need: there is no sufficiently secure structure of the external regulation of individual attachment needs internalized by a social group. The test therefore does not primarily measure how strongly someone, based on a corresponding self-image, manifestly commits themselves to a group and supports others and thus appears socially competent, as is predicted for secure attachment. He should measure how resilient his confidence is in the ability of the group to give him support as a safe base or safe haven and his inner willingness, based on the strength of the group, to grant this care to others. In order to remain within the theoretical construct, the AAP was recorded in parallel in the 40 subjects tested so far. Of interest here are both the cases with a continuity of security with a stable internalized inner basis, as well as characteristic deviations from more secure monadic and dyadic patterns to uncertainty in the multi-person situation. These are chosen from the realm of close family and non-relative relationships, each drawn with ambiguous adult and child stimuli. These images are now used both on individuals and, somewhat more experimentally, on small group units and are supplemented by AAP, SCL-90 and the OPD structure questionnaire. The pilot study is based on the AAP development process and is positive voted by the ethics committee of the german medical association.

The aquired narrativs are recorded, transcribed and analysed by applying a metatheoretical framework of how people internalize a stable "inner group" via repeated succeded dependency in groups and the following criteria:

Slide: Content coding dimension

The content criteria follow the Bowlby-George Framework in inclusion of the items : Agency of self and others, Connectedness and Reciprocity

Slide: Defensive Exclusion

Scoring of the defense against social pain is based on Bowlbys Attachment theory and its own concept of defense mechanisms.

Slide: AGAP evaluation form

This is our shield in which we score the transcribed narratives to come to a categorial output.

Slide: Formation of insecure representations of group attachment

In our model, the emergence of insecure mental representations of group attachment is explained by the following drastic experiences:

Slide: Case Report 1

Now, I would like to introduce you a brief case report of a 36 -year-old patient, suffering from anxieties, depression and social withdrawal seen through the lens of social attachment trauma.

In his formative years he experienced a number of difficulties containing the war in Iran, anxious and disputing parents and a dangerous flight with his parents and 3 siblings to Germany at the age of 7. The overwhelmed parents weren't able to give him support in adjusting to the new social environment. He felt lonely and he was learning to deal with his emotional threat on his own. All these experiences shaped his assumptions concerning relationships: objects are untrustworthy.

Slide: Case Report 2

These are his core-answers evoked by the picture stimuli

Slide: Retest

Slide: Case Report: first measurement

Slide: Case Report: Retest after one year

Slide: group attachment measure

To sum up: The development of a representational assessment to measure up group attachment is rooted in developmental psychology with influences from social psychology and neurobiology. The narrative approach gives insight into the unconscious patterns and regulation strategies.

Slide: End:

That brings me to the end of my presentation, thank you for your attention, it was a pleasure being here today. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

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