
CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ATTACHMENT

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Avoidance and its Relation to Other Defensive Processes

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An infant's avoidance of the parent during reunion in Ainsworth's Strange Situation procedure is a striking phenomenon. Whereas the majority of infants seek proximity or at least interaction with the parent following a brief laboratory separation, a substantial minority of infants actively avoid the parent. Avoidant infants ignore the parent's bid for approach or interaction, become preoccupied with a toy, actively turn or move away from the parent, or, if picked up, stiffly hold their bodies away from the parent (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). In a situation in which high activation of the attachment system is normally expected, avoidant infants show a marked absence of distressed affect and attachment behavior; such infants can be viewed as cutting off affective responses. The presence of the avoidant pattern of attachment in approximately 25% of both middle-class and high-risk samples is a well-replicated finding (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Weston, 1981; Waters, 1978), as is the stability of avoidance during infancy (Connell, 1976; Main & Weston, 1981; Owen, Easterbrooks, Chase-Lansdale, & Goldberg, 1984; Waters, 1978).

Avoidance has been viewed as a behavioral manifestation of an underlying attachment-related pattern of organization, and, in particular, as a defensive strategy in response to parental rejection (Ainsworth, 1984; Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Main, 1981). If there is a defensive component in the organization of the attachment system of the avoidant infant (with a behavioral manifestation of avoidance in the strange situation), it is possible that such a defensive component remains, albeit in a modified form, in the personality organization of some children and adults. The question arises: How is this defensive component manifested in the organization of

older individuals? Evidence for the persistence of avoidance during early childhood, and for the stability of avoidance from infancy to early childhood, has emerged from observations of child-parent reunions when children are 6 years of age (Cassidy & Main, 1984; Main & Cassidy, 1986; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). In Main's longitudinal Berkeley Social Development Project, 6 of 8 (75%) of the children classified as avoidant of mother in infancy were also avoidant of her at age 6 (Cassidy & Main, 1984; Main & Cassidy, 1986). This high degree of stability of avoidance has recently been replicated with a southern German sample, in which 6 of 6 (100%) of the children classified as avoidant of the mother in infancy were again avoidant at age 6 (Wartner, 1986). Although the specific behavioral manifestations of avoidance at age 6 differ from those in infancy, the underlying patterns of organization are quite similar. At age 6, the avoidant organization is identified by behaviors that function to maintain or increase physical or affective-emotional distance between child and parent. These behaviors include shifting attention away from the parent and attending to other activities, conversations, or objects. The child is polite but cool, and treats the parent as he might treat a next-door neighbor or teacher with whom he is willing to share social amenities. The child speaks when spoken to, but true interest is missing from the interaction. The tone of avoidance is neutral. Both affection and anger are hidden.

With the extension of attachment research to early childhood and adulthood, there has been an increasing use of methods relying on self-report and representational processes. This new focus raises a second question: How is the defensive component manifested in the organization of older individuals, *at the level of representation*? There are presently only a few studies examining attachment organization at the representational level rather than at the behavioral level. Because of the limited number of such studies, findings must be interpreted with caution. However, when the findings from these studies are examined as a group, a pattern suggestive of associations among various manifestations of avoidance and defensiveness emerges. Findings suggestive of these connections emerge from studies from several laboratories that examine individuals of different ages, use different measures, and explore different content areas. It may be useful for researchers to consider the possibility that these connections exist, particularly given the likelihood that the existence of such connections might have pervasive implications for future empirical work in terms of measurement construction, research design, and interpretation of findings.

The goal of this chapter is to explore the connection between behavioral avoidance as a defensive process and other forms of defensive processes. We begin by describing the experiential precursors of avoidant organization and the development of what Bowlby calls "working models." In

particular, we describe the ways in which avoidance can be viewed as a strategy adaptive within a relationship with a particular parent. Next, avoidant organization at the behavioral level is interpreted as involving early defensive repression (or falsification) of affective responses. Then, in reviewing research on avoidant attachment during early childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, we describe two defensive strategies at the representational level—one of deactivation of the attachment system and one of idealization—that parallel behavioral avoidance in infancy. Finally, we discuss methodological and clinical implications that follow from our consideration of defensive processes associated with avoidance.

EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND WORKING MODELS OF ATTACHMENT

Bowlby's observations of children's lack of response to their mothers following long separations led him to consider the defensive nature of this behavior. Bowlby viewed this behavior, which he called "detachment," as a protective defensive mechanism by children whose attachment needs had been so long unmet (Bowlby, 1960, 1980; Robertson & Bowlby, 1952). Ainsworth, in the early 1960s, studying a small subsample of 1-year-olds, observed avoidance that looked similar to detachment on reunion following a brief laboratory separation. Such avoidance was found to relate to maternal rejection, lack of maternal emotional expression, unpleasant experiences related to close bodily contact, and rigidity in the home environment over the first year of life (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main, 1977). Fraiberg (1982) reported total or near total avoidance of the mother in the home in a sample of infants who had been neglected or abused. According to Bowlby, the activation of attachment behavior that is not met with comfort or support arouses anger and/or anxiety. However, this arousal can be prevented if input that would normally activate attachment behavior is defensively excluded from conscious processing. Bowlby (1980) and Ainsworth (1984) have theorized that avoidance serves the function of preventing processing of information that would trigger attachment behavior.

Main (1981) has elaborated on the function of avoidance, suggesting that avoidant behavior may serve to maintain the attachment relationship. In the context of a history of rejection, attachment behavior may have dangerous consequences for the child. If he/she overtly expresses the anger associated with rejected attachment behaviors, he/she might risk alienating the attachment figure. If he/she makes further demands and becomes more clingy, he/she might risk being rebuffed further. Avoidance reduces the infant's arousal level and thereby prevents the direct, and

possibly dangerous, expression of anger to the attachment figure. Avoidance simultaneously protects the infant from the rebuff that often results from attempts to seek contact as well as from the painful fear of alienating the attachment figure upon whom she/he depends for survival. Cognitive disconnection of input that might activate behavior potentially displeasing to the attachment figure serves to maintain organization during times of stress, and serves to maintain proximity to the attachment figure.

The child's use of avoidance as a strategy is based upon her/his expectations about a particular parent's response to attachment behaviors. Bowlby (1969, 1980) has suggested that these expectations, or "working models," are based on the child's daily experiences. These models provide the child with a guide for the workings, properties, and characteristics of the attachment figure, the self, and the relationship, and can serve a useful purpose for the child when he/she faces new situations. Although Bowlby views working models as remaining open to new input and to change, he believes that because they tend to operate outside the realm of consciousness, they become increasingly resistant to change (Bowlby, 1980; see also Bretherton, 1985; Main et al., 1985). Bowlby proposed that the foundations of working models are laid during the infant's first year, and there is substantial support for the notion that the working models are reflected in infant-parent reunion behavior with the Strange Situation. Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978) has suggested that infants who avoid the attachment figure on reunion are expecting rebuff or rejection, and that those who seek contact in a nonambivalent way are expecting comfort and reassurance. That the infant's expectations accurately reflect his/her experiences with a particular parent has been supported by observations in several studies of parent-infant interactions in the home during the year preceding the Strange Situation assessment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Belsky, Rovine, & Taylor, 1984; Grossmann, Grossmann, Spangler, Suess, & Unzer, 1985; Maslin & Bates, 1983).

AVOIDANCE, DEFENSIVENESS, AND INAPPROPRIATE AFFECT DISPLAYS

Infant avoidance in the Strange Situation can be viewed as a form of masking of negative affect. We propose that just as the infant uses avoidance in the Strange Situation as a defensive strategy designed to reduce anticipated conflict, he/she may use a masking of negative affect as a defensive strategy in order to reduce conflict in other situations as well. Just as the infant's avoidance in the Strange Situation serves to maintain the relationship (Main, 1981), masking of negative affect may also serve to maintain the relationship in other settings. Such masking can be viewed as a

distortion of normally expected affect display, and may be inappropriate for the situation. Fraiberg (1982) noted a similar phenomenon in infants, which she interpreted as a masking of anxiety by "giddy, theatrical laughing." She referred to such behavior as a "transformation of affect." The processes through which a strategy of masking negative affect may evolve, the nature of a relationship in which it may be adaptive, and implications for the organization and regulation of affective experience are discussed briefly in the following paragraphs. (See Kobak, 1987a, 1987b, for a more extensive discussion of these issues.)

The quality of affective communication in the parent-child relationship and the corresponding working model of the relationship can be viewed as providing the context in which the child comes to understand and organize his/her affective experience. For the child who interacts with a parent sensitive to his/her signals, affects will be experienced as useful in alerting the parent during times of distress. Sensitive parental response will in turn enhance the child's sense of efficacy in modulating his/her feeling states (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972). In this type of dyad, the child's experience of negative affects such as fear and anger comes to be associated with expectations of ameliorative parental response. As a result, the experience of negative affect may be less threatening to the child. The experience of security is not based on the denial of negative affect, but on the ability to temporarily tolerate negative affects in order to achieve mastery over threatening or frustrating situations (Kobak, 1985).

In contrast, the child who experiences a relationship in which there is a high level of parental insensitivity to affective signals experiences a unique dilemma. The expression of anxiety and anger, which optimally function to elicit caregiving from the parent, may become dysfunctional and may threaten the relationship. In order to reduce anticipated conflict with the parent, the child may learn to cut-off, repress, or falsify the expression of negative affect. Rather than communicate distress, the child attempts to control her/his affective state, and uses an avoidant strategy.

A process through which avoidant infants may learn to mask negative affect has been identified through observations of maternal and infant behavior. Escher-Graub and Grossmann (1983), using a mother-infant free-play situation, found that mothers of avoidant infants joined in play when the infant was content, but withdrew when the infant expressed negative affect. The pattern was reversed among mothers of securely attached infants, who were more likely to join the play (in a facilitative way) when the infant expressed negative affect. In addition, a study that examined infants' behavior in the Strange Situation suggested the avoidant infants behaved as if guided by a model stating that negative affects must be masked in order to preserve the relationship (Grossmann, Grossmann, & Schwan, in press). Observations of the communication patterns of

mother-infant dyads revealed that avoidant infants communicated directly with their mothers only when they (the infants) were feeling well. When distressed, these infants tended not to directly signal the mother, and they did not seek bodily contact.

Although the avoidant strategy of affect regulation (i.e., masking of negative affect) may be adaptive in the context of the attachment relationship, it may be maladaptive in other contexts. In particular, an avoidant individual's display of affect in social and problem-solving contexts may appear inappropriate and maladaptive. The two studies described below provide examples of the use of restricted affect by avoidant individuals; this restriction can be viewed as a defensive communication that these individuals are unaffected by others. In an experimental study, Lutkenhaus (Lutkenhaus, Grossmann, & Grossmann, 1985) analyzed the affect and behavior of 3-year-olds who had been assessed in the Strange Situation with mother at 12 months. An unfamiliar adult visitor engaged the children in a competitive tower-building game. The children's affective reactions to winning and losing were analyzed. The avoidant children manifested sadness about losing while they were still engaged in the game. This affective display ceased when the game was over and the experimenter was available for social communication. In fact, during the social communicative exchange, there was a tendency for the avoidant children to replace sadness with smiling. In contrast, securely attached children showed their sadness after the game when the adult was more available. It is not the case that avoidant children simply did not feel (or display) sadness, because sad expressions were evident before the game was finished when there was no child-adult eye contact. Lutkenhaus interpreted his findings as suggesting a greater hesitancy on the part of avoidant children to display their sad feelings in social situations. It is striking that this masking of true feelings of sadness is evident as early as 3 years of age. It is also striking that this pattern of masking emotions is used so readily with a new social partner, with someone with whom the child has no history of social interaction.

Defensive restriction in affective expression among avoidant children is also evident in the drawings of these children. Children participating in the Berkeley Social Development Project were asked to "draw a picture of your family" as part of the 6-year follow-up (Kaplan & Main, 1985). Children who had been classified as insecurely attached/avoidant to mother in infancy tended to draw figures that were carbon copies of each other with little or no individuality. The bodies were tense and rigid. Family members often had no arms: individuals were independent, and were literally unable to reach out to each other. This signaling of "emotional unavailability" (Emde, 1980) is congruent with a style of affective

communication organized around the attempt to withhold affect. Another characteristic of this group of drawings was that facial expressions often involved stereotyped, overemphasized smiles. This exaggeration of positive affect in the drawings, with the accompanying masking of negative affect, parallels the behavior of the avoidance children in the Lutkenhaus study described earlier.

AVOIDANCE AND DEACTIVATION OF ATTACHMENT

For Bowlby (1980), the infant's avoidance in a stressful situation represents a defensive effort on the part of the child to "deactivate" the attachment system. With increasing control over the environment, the child and adult can defensively deactivate the attachment system not only at the behavioral level, but also in more complex and elaborated ways involving representational processes. In particular, deactivation of attachment may become anticipatory in two ways. First, the individual may selectively exclude from processing information leading to feelings of anxiety or distress that generally elicit attachment behavior. Second, the individual may develop views of relationships that minimize or dismiss the importance of attachment processes such as giving and receiving care. In effect, these individuals develop information processing biases that serve the function of denying or controlling affective distress (Bowlby, 1980). In older children and adults these processes may combine to form behavior and attitudes that Bowlby has termed "compulsive self-reliance" (Bowlby, 1973).

The existence of both kinds of processes has been suggested by findings from recent studies. Cassidy (in press) explored the connection between child-mother attachment and the child's working models of the self in a sample of 52 white middle-class 6-year-olds. Quality of attachment was assessed on the basis of the child's reunion behavior with the mother following a 1-hour separation, using Main and Cassidy's 6-year reunion procedure (Cassidy & Main, 1984; Main & Cassidy, 1986; Main et al., 1985). The child's working model of the self within the relationship with the mother was assessed by doll play procedures in which the child was asked to complete six stories. Two stories dealt with emotionally-charged and relationship-focused interactions between the child and mother. Two additional stories (taken from Walsh, 1956), dealt with conflict within the family, principally with the mother, and two stores dealt with conflict or a threat from outside the family. Each story was accompanied by a series of probes. Stores were rated on 5-point scales, and each was placed into one of three classificatory groups: secure/confident, avoidant, or hostile/negative. Stories were classified secure/confident when the doll protagonist

was described as someone valuable and worthy, and the relationship with the mother was important, special, and warm. In stressful situations related to mother, there was open negotiation and a sense of fair play; in stressful situations related to an external source there was the ability to turn to the mother for safety and protection and a positive outcome. These stories were most characteristic of children judged secure in the reunion episode. Stories were classified avoidant in which the doll protagonist was isolated and/or rejected and the importance of relationships was denied. In stressful situations stemming from both inside and outside the family, the existence of conflict was denied, as was the need for help; when there was a successful resolution, it was brought about entirely by the child without assistance from the mother. These stories were most characteristic of children judged avoidant in the reunion episode. Thus, the stories of the avoidant children showed a tendency to minimize the experience of distressing affect on the part of the child and a tendency to dismiss the importance of the relationship with parents as a source of comfort or support.

Findings from the Berkeley Social Development Project provide partial support for processes associated with the deactivation of attachment in avoidant children (Kaplan, 1984; Kaplan & Main, 1985; Main et al., 1985). Children who had been classified in the Strange Situation at 12 months with mother and at 18 months with father returned to the laboratory with their parents at 6 years for a follow-up assessment. One way in which the child's working models of attachment were examined was with the Klagsbrun and Bowlby adaptation of the Hansburg Separation Anxiety Test (Klagsbrun & Bowlby, 1976). Children were shown a series of six photographs of young children in situations related to separation; the least stressful showed a child and parents at bedtime, and the most stressful showed a child whose parents were leaving for a 2-week trip. Responses were scored on scales devised by Kaplan (1984). Scores at the high end of the scale were given to children who expressed a balance between feelings of vulnerability, sadness, or anger related to separation, and feelings of a constructive ability to cope with these feelings. Scores at the low end were given to children who responded in passive, depressed, or disorganized ways—who were unable to offer spontaneous feelings or possible responses. Responses were analyzed in relation to the child's 12-month Strange Situation classification with mother. The pattern most characteristic of avoidant children was for the child to acknowledge feelings of vulnerability and/or sadness, but to be unable to suggest possible adaptive coping strategies. Thus, although these 6-year-olds were able to acknowledge distress in their stories, they were unable to suggest related attachment behavior or the use of others as sources of comfort and support. It is conceivable that these problem-solving deficits resulted from

their not processing all relevant information, and particularly from the exclusion of information that would activate attachment needs.

Behavioral avoidance of the parent is associated with an attitude dismissing of attachment not only by the child, but by the parent as well. Main and Goldwyn (1984) used the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1984) to explore the connection between infant attachment and parents' abilities to recall and reflect upon their own childhood attachment experiences. The 1-hour semi-structured interview was administered to parents in the Berkeley Social Development Project during the 6-year follow-up assessment. Interview topics included attachment experiences during childhood such as memories of being upset or ill, memories of separations and losses, and early feelings of rejection. Subjects were asked to provide general descriptions of their relationships with parents and to integrate specific memories with these more general descriptions. The interview provides a method for studying how working models of the attachment relationships may control the ability to represent and integrate thoughts and feelings associated with the attachment system. Three patterns of organization were identified: secure/autonomous, preoccupied, and dismissing.

The majority of interviews of parents whose children had been classified as avoidant in the Strange Situation 5 years earlier fell into the dismissing group. These individuals tried to limit or completely dismiss the influence of attachment relationships and experiences from thoughts, feelings, and daily functioning by viewing attachment relationships as unimportant and inconsequential. When negative experiences were described, there was often an accompanying denial of the effects upon the self. Or, when the effects were acknowledged, understanding remained on a cognitive level; pain and sadness were missing. This inability to relate attachment experiences to the self, i.e., the disconnection of cognitive representation of an event from the normally accompanying affect, is similar to what Anna Freud (1966) called "isolation of affect." Another characteristic of individuals placed in the dismissing group was an inability to remember specific events related to attachment during childhood, an inability similar to what Anna Freud called "repression."

The finding that avoidant infants tend to have mothers placed in the dismissing category also emerged from Eichberg's (1987) study in which the Strange Situation and the Adult Attachment Interview were completed during the same month. Thus, interview findings from two studies provide support for the notion that parents of insecurely attached/avoidant infants tend to "deactivate" thoughts and feelings relevant to their own attachment experiences. Whereas those who cannot remember attachment events in childhood show evidence of a bias toward excluding attachment-relevant memories, those who cognitively represent attach-

ment experience isolate the feeling normally expected to accompany such memories. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed that individuals in this group have often experienced considerable rejection or lack of love in their relationships with their own parents. Thus, by excluding information relevant to attachment, these individuals may be using a defensive strategy to control and minimize negative affects associated with working models of their parents.

Use of the Adult Attachment Interview has also revealed a connection between avoidance and deactivation of attachment in a sample of adolescents (Kobak & Sceery, *in press*), Kobak interviewed 53 first-year college students in the fall, collected self-report measures of perceptions of self and others over the course of the first year, and obtained peer ratings of adjustment in the spring. On the basis of the interview, students were classified into the three groups identified by Main and Goldwyn (1984). Peer ratings of the avoidant individuals (*i.e.*, those in the dismissing group) indicated that they were viewed by their peers as less ego-resilient, more anxious, and more hostile than were secure individuals. However, on self-report measures, the avoidant individuals reported no more self-related distress than did secure individuals. This finding was interpreted as representing a cognitive bias among avoidant individuals toward minimizing the acknowledgment of distress or difficulty in adjustment. Avoidant individuals also reported receiving much less social support from their families than did secure individuals. Together, the biases toward minimizing problems in adjustment and toward minimizing perceptions of support from family were viewed as contributing to maintenance of an image of compulsive self-reliance based on deactivation of attachment thoughts and feelings.

MULTIPLE MODELS AND IDEALIZATION OF PARENTS AND SELF

A second defensive process involving representation is idealization of parents and self. It is assumed that the subject's refusal to perceive and/or report normal human and expectable limitations prevents the processing of information that would distress him/her. Idealization is, in a sense, the individual's avoidance of flexible, realistic, investigation and perception of self or other. To maintain idealization, information must be selectively ignored—in particular, information about negative components of self or other. Because both self and other are viewed as free of problems or distress, the attachment system is not activated; activation of the attachment system is, in fact, considered not relevant.

Bowlby's notion of "multiple models" is useful for understanding the origins of idealization. In families characterized by parent-child difficulties, parents may systematically omit, suppress, or falsify aspects of the parent-child relationship in discussions with their children. By misrepresenting themselves, such parents foster the development of multiple models that the child may hold of the parent (Bowlby, 1973). At the level of verbal reflection and discussion, the parent may be represented in the child's mind as a good parent, despite actions that are experienced quite negatively by the child. The creation of a "good" parent at the level of representation may be perpetuated by the child as a mean of reducing negative affects that would be associated with reflection about the true nature of the relationship. Idealization may also serve to reduce the child's sense of alienation from the parent in a manner similar to what Anna Freud (1966) termed "identification with the aggressor."

In the design of the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1984), idealization was operationalized by examining the extent to which positive characterizations of parents at a general level of description were or were not supported by the recall of specific experiences. Subjects with high idealization claimed, at a global level, an idyllic past with nearly perfect parents. However, careful reading of the interview revealed either a lack of specific examples to substantiate these generalizations or actual contradictory indications of lack of support or rejection of the child by the parent. In two studies, a high rating on the idealization scale was found to be particularly characteristic of individuals with dismissing attitudes toward attachment (Kobak & Sceery, in press; Main et al., 1985). The defensive nature of this idealization has been underscored by the finding of a strong correlation between the subject's idealization of the parent and rejection by that parent in childhood (Main & Goldwyn, 1984). The finding that emerged from Main and Goldwyn's study that mothers of insecure-avoidant infants were more likely than other mothers to idealize their parents and childhood also emerged from a similar study by Eichberg (1987).

Further support for the relation between idealization of parents and avoidance is reported in a study by Ricks (1985). Using a sample of 44 mother-infant dyads from intact middle-class families, Ricks found that mothers of children who had been insecurely attached at 12 months (principally avoidant infants) were more likely to idealize their own mothers on Epstein's (1983) mother-father-peer scale during an assessment when the children were 5 years old. Items tapping idealization included phrases such as, "My mother was close to a perfect parent." In addition, maternal defensiveness on the O'Brien-Epstein Self-Report Inventory (O'Brien, 1981) was found to be more common among mothers of insecurely attached children. These differences had not been found in an earlier

study with a smaller sample in which all assessments were made at 12 months (Ricks & Noyes, 1984).

A third study, by Lyons-Ruth and her associates (Lyons-Ruth, Connell, Grunebaum, Botein, & Zoll, 1984), also reported a connection between avoidance and maternal claims of a relatively "better" childhood. Forty-six mothers completed a maternal family history interview, consisting of questions in eight areas: (a) childhood economic status; (b) major psychopathology of adults in the family; (c) parental warmth; (d) peer friendships; (e) conflict and violence; (f) structure and supervision; (g) family health problems; and (h) liking and attendance at school. The authors note that this interview reflected the mother's perception of her history rather than her actual history. Mothers of infants classified at 12 months as insecurely attached/avoidant reported significantly *less* conflict and *more* liking of school than did other mothers. In fact, the group means for these mothers in all areas tapped by the family history interview were in the more adaptive direction. The authors hypothesized that mothers of avoidant infants are more likely than other mothers to deny negative feelings. They also suggested that the behavior of these mothers may actually consist of an "avoidance of overt conflict." It is equally possible, however, that these mothers merely perceive or admit less conflict; that is, the report of less conflict reflects the mother's working model, but does not reflect her (or her family's) actual behavior. Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that individuals with avoidant organizations are, in fact, observed to be *more* hostile and aggressive than are others (Kobak & Sceery, in press; Main, 1973; Pastor, 1981).

Bowlby has proposed that working models of attachment figures are associated with complementary working models of the self (Bowlby, 1973; Sroufe, in press; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). This raises the question of whether defensively idealized models of the parent may be related to defensively idealized representations of the self in children with avoidant patterns of attachment. Support for a connection between idealization of the self and avoidance emerged in Cassidy's (in press) investigation of the connection between attachment to mother and the child's working model of self in 6-year-olds. One component of the study involved an interview with a large hand puppet (a frog named Bix) for whom the child spoke. The interview questions were about the child. Sample questions included: (1) Bix, do you like (child's name)?; (3) Do you like (child) the way he/she is, or do you want to make him/her better? How?; (9) Tell me Bix, do you want (child) to be your friend?; (16) Do you think (child) is important or not important?; and (17) Do you care what happens to (child)?

Interviews were scored on a 5-point rating scale and were placed into one of three classificatory groups: (a) perfect—the child insisted, even when repeatedly pressed, that he was perfect in every way; (b) negative—

the child made global negative comments about the self; and (c) open/flexible—the child revealed an overall positive acceptance of the self, but when pressed, realistically admitted minor flaws. The interviews of children classified as secure in their reunions with mothers were split between the open/flexible and perfect categories. The interviews of children classified avoidant were likely to be placed in the perfect category. Although the perfect responses were more characteristic of the avoidant children than of the securely attached children, there were a substantial number of the latter whose responses were in the perfect category. Like many self-report measures, this measure has difficulty distinguishing defensive from nondefensive reports of optimal functioning. In a replication with a smaller German sample (Wartner, 1986), *a priori* contrasts revealed securely attached children to have significantly higher scale scores than avoidant children (with high scores given for open/flexible responses and low scores given for either perfect or negative responses). Pattern of response, however, did not significantly distinguish groups, although there was a tendency for more securely attached than avoidant children to fall into the open category.

Additional areas open to defensive idealization include quality of life circumstances, level of stress, and level of social support. These areas are extremely complex, and the existing literature presents no clear picture of their connections with attachment (Crockenberg, 1981; Durrett, Otaki, & Richards, 1984; Egeland & Farber, 1984; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; Kobak & Sceery, *in press*). However, it is possible that mothers of avoidant infants defensively idealize these aspects of their lives. For example, with a sample of 60 high-risk mothers and infants, Spieker and Booth (this volume) found that mothers whose infants avoided them in the Strange Situation reported more social support and less depression during pregnancy than other mothers. The authors hypothesized that these mothers used denial as a coping strategy in dealing with the same stresses and difficulties experienced by others in this high-risk sample. Certainly, there is variation in the extent to which people within the same sample are exposed to stressful events, and in the extent to which this exposure is perceived as stress. Nonetheless, examination of the case histories of the mothers of avoidant infants revealed that “they coped by being tough, distant, and unemotional, and by not acknowledging the extent to which their life situations were chronically difficult.” This connection, however, did not hold over time: at 6 weeks postpartum, the mothers of infants who were to become insecurely attached/avoidant reported the greatest dissatisfaction with their lives; at 3 months postpartum there were no significant differences among groups of mothers. In a study in which amount of stress specifically related to parenting was explored (Green, 1980), it was again the mothers of avoidant infants who reported experiencing the least stress.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The majority of attachment-related research has centered on the infancy period. As a result, behavioral observation of infants and their parents has served as the principal means of assessment. Recently, attachment researchers have extended research to include the study of attachment organization during the childhood, adolescent, and adult periods of development. These shifts have led to the use of methods other than observations of behavior, including interview and self-report methods, and new methodological considerations have become necessary. Measurement construction, research design, and interpretation of results should be conducted with consideration of the possibility that the avoidant attachment pattern may be associated with defensiveness in a variety of forms.

Measurement construction can be carried out in a way that facilitates assessment of defensiveness. The attention to *organization* of behaviors and the *context* in which these behaviors occur (rather than frequency counts of behavior) that has characterized attachment research with infants (Sroufe & Waters, 1977) remains critical to the sensitive use of observational methods with older individuals. For instance, in discussing his study of affective communication, Lutkenhaus (Lutkenhaus et al., 1985) emphasized that attachment groups did not differ with respect to frequency of affective display, but differed strikingly in the *context* within which the display occurred; it was only the attention to context that suggested the defensive nature of the affective display of avoidant children. Measures tapping organization at the level of representation can also focus not only on factual events or outcomes, but on organization, process, and relationships, as well. For instance, with the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1984), although the actual experiences in the subject's childhood were somewhat important, the quality of organization and integration of experience were more important. Similarly, when scoring the child's completions of Cassidy's (in press) incomplete doll stories, the outcome of the story and the competence of the doll protagonist's behavior were not as important as the means by which the outcome was achieved, or as important as the relationship context in which activities took place.

The tendency of avoidant individuals to cut-off negative affect suggests that measures should not be designed in which there is a simple linear relation between number of positive statements and optimal functioning. Standard defensiveness items tapping idealization and perfection can also be included in questionnaires. In addition, specific items that probe for normal human limitations and complexities of the self, other, and relationships can be included. Responses can be monitored for selective exclusion of particular components of relevant information; all

components of relationships should be processed—not only positive ones, but ambivalent and negative ones, as well. Carefully worded self-report items, designed with an awareness of the tendency of avoidant individuals to dismiss attachment, can also help provide information related to defensiveness. For instance, in a study in which college students provided self-classifications for avoidant, secure, and ambivalent types, Hazan and Shaver (in press) reported that avoidant students did not receive higher loneliness scores than their secure counterparts. However, when items from the loneliness scale were divided into those that explicitly mentioned loneliness and those that simply mentioned “distance” from others, an important pattern became clear: Although the items that referred to distance from others were endorsed more often by the avoidant individuals than by secure individuals, the items that explicitly mentioned loneliness did not differentiate groups. In this instance, avoidant individuals admitted to an objective state (tapped by “distance from others”), but denied that such a state activated attachment needs or had emotional meaning for them (tapped by “I’m lonely”).

Research design is another methodological component critical to assessing defensiveness. For instance, the discrepancies revealed in multimethod studies, with information from multiple perspectives, can be informative. In Kobak’s study (Kobak & Sceery, in press) conclusions based on either the self-report or the peer-report measures *alone* would not have provided the information provided by the juxtaposition of the two; for those in the dismissing group only, there was a discrepancy between self and other-report. Dismissing individuals viewed themselves in a more positive light than others viewed them. Similar information useful in identifying defensiveness may be provided by comparing the child’s self-report with sociometric data, teachers’ reports, or naturalistic observations. Incoherency within and across self-reports can also be assessed. For example, the juxtaposition of claims that one’s parent is perfect with simultaneous evidence of rejection by that same parent suggests a defensive idealization (Main & Goldwyn, 1984).

Third, consideration of the connection between avoidance and defensiveness is important in the interpretation of findings. Because the influence of experimental observation on the subject’s behavior may vary according to attachment organization, such a framework may be useful when considering findings using observational methods. For instance, this framework may be relevant when considering findings that mothers of avoidant infants interact with their infants (Belsky et al., 1984; Smith & Pederson, 1983) and choose kissing as the means of displaying affection to their infants (Tracy & Ainsworth, 1981) *more* often than other mothers; mothers with a defensive need to be viewed as “perfect mothers” may alter their behavior under observation in order to portray such a picture (J.

Belsky, personal communication, June 12, 1986). Such a framework may also be useful when considering findings using self-report methods. It may explain seemingly anomalous findings—e.g., a lack of difference in social adjustment between avoidant and secure individuals (e.g., see earlier description of Kobak & Sceery, in press). The defensiveness of those in the avoidant group may also explain a lack of convergence between measures. For instance, this may explain the apparent discrepancy between the finding that those in the avoidant group report less conflict (Lyons-Ruth et al., 1984; Main & Goldwyn, 1984), yet are observed by others as having greater hostility (Kobak & Sceery, in press), aggression (Main, 1973; Main & Weston, 1981; Pastor, 1981), and negative affective expression (LaFreniere & Sroufe, 1985).

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Present research provides a limited understanding about the relation between attachment organization and later behavioral difficulties. From a theoretical perspective, attachment organization is likely to include self-fulfilling expectations about self and others (Bowlby, 1973). However, this organization itself may be subject to change when the quality of the attachment relationship is altered. The conditions that foster naturally occurring changes in relationships are of considerable interest to clinicians who try to create therapeutic change. Research in early childhood suggests that improvements in family life conditions may mitigate the influence of early attachment organization on later behavioral difficulties. For instance, in Sroufe's Minnesota sample, not all children who had been insecurely attached to their mothers in infancy developed behavioral problems in preschool. The mothers of insecure infants who *did not* develop behavioral problems reported more social support than did the mothers of insecure infants who *did* develop problems. In addition, mother-child interaction at age 4 was associated with the presence or absence of behavioral problems. In particular, children who did not develop behavioral problems demonstrated more positive behavior with their mothers during a problem-solving situation than did other insecure children (Erikson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985). It might be inferred that these insecure children had undergone a positive alteration in their attachment relationships as a result of improved family circumstances. Unfortunately, methods for assessing attachment organization at age 4 were not available to determine whether attachment organization had also changed among these formerly insecure children. As new methods for assessing attachment in early childhood develop (e.g., Cassidy & Marvin, 1987; Main & Cassidy, 1986), longitudinal studies can examine the extent

to which reorganization of attachment occurs, and what factors contribute to such reorganization.

Even when avoidant organization remains stable over time, difficulties associated with this pattern of attachment may be manifested only in limited circumstances. For instance, individuals may derive a sense of continuity and satisfaction from intimate relationships in which there is relatively little affective exchange. In addition, an avoidant pattern of attachment may have little influence on productive functioning outside the sphere of intimate relationships. In view of the many variables impinging upon human development, we cannot predict with certainty the ultimate outcome of avoidant behavioral patterns. However, despite these qualifications, research on the social correlates of avoidant attachment during infancy and early childhood suggests that this pattern of insecurity may leave individuals vulnerable to behavioral difficulties. Especially during times of stress or transition, the avoidant individual's inability to gain comfort from others or to use emotion to share and reflect upon experience may result in symptomatic behavior. There is some evidence that avoidant children tend to behave in a hostile and antisocial manner and tend to show impairments in empathy (Erikson et al., 1985; Main & Weston, 1981; Sroufe, 1983). These impairments may be early precursors of affectionless character and antisocial personality (Bowlby, 1944). Difficulties in emotional communication and impairments in the establishment and maintenance of age-appropriate peer contacts are also experienced by some avoidant children and may contribute to antisocial difficulties (Pastor, 1981; Sroufe, Schork, Motti, Lawroski, & LaFreniere, 1984).

For the clinician working with individuals or families, several clinical indicators of problems associated with avoidant attachment are likely to be evident. In particular, feelings of distress or vulnerability, even in conjunction with presenting problems, are likely to be minimized. This may limit an individual's or family's abilities to trust and rely on the clinician for support. In addition, both avoidant individuals and their families may evidence considerable displaced hostility. Although this anger may not be manifest in overt conflict, it is likely to be manifest in passive-aggressive or antisocial behavior on the part of the child. Such behavior serves, in turn, as a source of irritation to the parents, and may justify parental anger and rejection of the child. This pattern may, in turn, foster a family myth in which the parent is viewed as good and the child is viewed as bad. Whereas family therapy allows the clinician to directly observe such family interactions, individual therapy can also provide a context within which problems of trust and displaced anger can be assessed. In both types of clinical setting, the clinician should pay attention to the nonverbal dimensions of interaction, particularly to the expression of support and

affection, to the level of overt and covert anger, and to the parents' reactions to signs of distress in the child.

The attachment perspective also provides a framework within which the therapeutic goals for working with avoidant individuals and their families can be derived. Because avoidant defenses involve the cut-off of negative affect, a primary therapeutic goal is to increase the individual's ability to acknowledge and communicate emotions. In individual work, the therapist can demonstrate special sensitivity and responsiveness to hidden or unacknowledged aspects of an individual's affective experience. In the family therapy setting, the clinician's sensitivity can provide a model to other family members of the constructive potential inherent in genuine emotional exchange. It is important for clinicians to respect the adaptive function of avoidant defenses and to recognize that such defenses often evolve in order to maintain relationships threatened with dissolution. As a result, an important therapeutic goal is to reduce the sense of threat that avoidant individuals and their families associate with emotional expression. This can be accomplished by establishing a "safe" therapeutic environment in which the acknowledgment and expression of negative emotion does not lead to the anticipated consequences of unresolved conflict and rejection (Kobak & Waters, 1984). The establishment of safety in therapy is likely to be evident when the individual or family experiences a sense of trust and security with the clinician. From this therapeutic "secure base" (Bowlby, 1979), the individual or family can explore the origins of "dangerous" emotions and can work toward viable alternatives to dissatisfying interactions.

SUMMARY

With the extension of attachment research into periods beyond infancy, new questions about the nature of attachment organization have been raised. This chapter has attempted to integrate what is known about attachment organization in infancy and early childhood with more recent research on later periods of development. In particular, we tried to identify processes that characterize avoidant organization at both the behavioral and the representational levels. At the behavioral level, avoidant organization has been discussed in terms of infant behavior within the Strange Situation, and in terms of affective repression and falsification. At the representational level, research has been reviewed that points to the existence of information processing biases that serve to deactivate the attachment system and to create idealized images of self and attachment figure. Research relying on self-report and representational processes is in an early phase of development. Nonetheless, our literature review presents a

pattern of findings that suggests that researchers should proceed with increased awareness of the possible role of defensive processes. It is particularly important to consider whether individuals with an avoidant organization have tendencies to dismiss attachment, to idealize self and other, or to mask negative emotions. These tendencies, which may operate selectively with regard to attachment organization, can conceivably influence the measurement of constructs related to attachment. The connection between attachment organization and defensive processes can have important implications not only for methodology, but for theory and clinical practice as well. The study of this connection opens up new research opportunities for collaboration between developmentalists and clinicians.

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