

A Brief Synopsis: Daniel Sonkin Lunch Lecture on Attachment

By Gloria Saltzman

The Friday lunch presentations put on by Marin CAMFT are a great reason to escape the city, catch some sunshine and a couple of ceus. June's topic was Attachment Theory and the speaker was Daniel Sonkin. Dan is well known for his work in this area especially in relation to domestic abuse. He is an engaging and eloquent speaker filled with knowledge. He declared that although theory is useful to organize information, the focus in therapy should be on the relationship between the client and the practitioner. He believes it's the 'now moments', those instances of psychic connection and understanding that will be most helpful to the client.

Dan started the discussion with a bit of history. John Bowlby's belief that 'attachment was a biologically based behavioral system' left him ostracized by the psychoanalytic community and it wasn't until 1990, after his death, that a formal apology was made to his family for this exile. His original work on attachment has been expanded on extensively. Object Relations theory grew out of Attachment theory. Much of Bowlby's theory was drawn from his own childhood, in which he felt neglected by his mother.

Dan explained that it's not only expressing what happened to you, but how you make sense of it, how you make the experience coherent, that leads to a healthy state. A secure attachment between an infant and his/her caregiver is a developmental evolution.' How the infant ultimately learns how to regulate his/her emotions will depend heavily on how the caregiver regulates his/her own emotions.' The various attachment styles are secure, anxious-avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized. Phil Shaver and Jude Cassidy have extended this theory to adult romantic relationships.

From the current neurobiological information, we know that 'the attachment behavioral system has correlates in the brain'. After being considered heretical, John Bowlby must be smiling in heaven as he observes the collaboration between neuroscience and psychology. With the advent of more sophisticated technology, we are able to actually look into the brain to better understand Bowlby's original idea, that the prefrontal cortex regulates behavior. While temperament is not changeable, the state of attachment is. Clinicians should know that 'earned security' can grow out of the relationship. Paying attention to a client's signals both verbal and non-verbal, and responding to them with an 'I got it' response is crucial.

In 1993, Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues at UC Berkeley developed the Adult Attachment Interview, or the AAI. Ainsworth applied Bowlby's theory to research and found that there was 80% continuity between infant attachment patterns and the ensuing adult state of mind. Dan has found that in his experience the most profound exercise of this tool is this; think of five adjectives that reflect your childhood relationship with your mother, then again with your father. The next step is to find a memory that correlates to that adjective.

Another interesting statistic is that as a group, therapists have higher rates of insecurity than the rest of the population. Good thing there is hope for us!

Resources:

www.JohnBowlby.com

www.DanielSonkin.com

www.daniel-sonkin.com

www.Yourpersonality.net

The UC Davis Attachment Lab

The Handbook of Attachment by Phil Shave and Jude Cassidy

Work by:

Dan Siegel and Miriam Solomon

Ellen Schore

Dan Stern

Chris Fraley

Everett Waters

Phil and Carolyn Cowan

Now Moments in Psychotherapy by Daniel Stern

The Handbook of Attachment by Phil Shaver and Jude Cassidy