

# ATTACHMENT ISSUES IN FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH

Hal Pickett, Psy.D., LP, ABPP

Director, Client Services at Headway Emotional Health Services

Associate Instructor for Adler Graduate School

American Institute for the Advancement of Forensic Science, May 19, 2015 Conference

# What Happens in Attachment

- Trust in others, the world and ultimately self that ones needs can be met. This is the core building block to all healthy relationships.
- Without this, the person learns to mistrust, manipulate or even aggressively do what is necessary to get their needs met.
- Obvious issues may result in criminal behavior, but also these people do not do well when arrested or incarcerated.

# Movement into Criminal Behavior

- Petty crimes and stealing as a juvenile may occur because ownership does not have as much meaning to a person with disrupted attachment. They may simply take things they want.
- Rules in general have less importance to those with attachment problems because the rule makers are not really to be trusted.
- These people can become great manipulators, con artists and search for ways to use loopholes found in the law.
- They often have a need to control everything around them including other people.

# TYPICAL ADOLESCENT/ADULT WITH HEALTHY ATTACHMENT

- According to Bowlby, the attachment system essentially "asks" the following fundamental question: Is the attachment figure nearby, accessible, and attentive? If the child perceives the answer to this question to be "yes," he or she feels loved, secure, and confident, and, behaviorally, is likely to explore his or her environment, play with others, and be sociable.
- **whether an adult is secure or insecure in his or her adult relationships may be a partial reflection of his or her experiences with his or her primary caregivers.**

- A person with an adult attachment disorder tends to be very impulsive and displays frequently negative and provocative behavior patterns. It is also very characteristic of a person to be willing to control everything and manipulate. Lying and cheating are not rare when such a person wants to achieve his or her goals.

- It is also very characteristic of people suffering from this disorder to be very unwilling to accept guidance in any form as well as love. A person does not exactly understand what empathy or sympathy is and how to connect to other people let alone how to create any emotional bonds. Giving and receiving love is complicated and especially for the other party. It is also very characteristic of people suffering from this disorder to be very unwilling to accept guidance in any form as well as love. A person does not exactly understand what empathy or sympathy is and how to connect to other people let alone how to create any emotional bonds. Giving and receiving love is complicated and especially for the other party.

- It is also common for such people to be depressed and sad. Feelings of detachment and frustration are their constant companions and they learn not to show them openly. Instead, they seek ways of relief and often find them in some self-destructive activities. That is why their behavior is often hostile and they do not compromise easily.

# Ross and Pfafflin (2007). Two Reasons That Attachment Is Important in Forensics

- ONE
  - “It provides the framework for a developmental perspective on violent behavior.”
- TWO
  - “It helps us better understand normal and pathological relationship formation in an interpersonal context.”

- In their research, they looked at the attachment styles of violent and non-violent offenders.
- They compared 31 male offenders with an average age of 36 that had been imprisoned for murder, physical injury, sexual offenses, arson and robbery to a group of 22 Prison Service Trainees and 21 male Christian Congregants, that also had an average age of 36.
- The results were that the inmates had a rate of 33% secure attachment compared to 77% in the Service Trainees and 81% in the Christian Congregant group.

- The inmates also scored significantly higher than the others on quarrelsome/competitive and dominance. They score significantly lower on affiliation.
- These characteristics create significant disruption for the expected institutional living environment of prison.

# Van Ijzendoorn et al. (1997)

- Found an over-representation of unresolved/disorganized or cannot classify attachment patterns in incarcerated males in a forensic mental institution and a low representation of securely attached patterns.

## Frodi et al. (2001)

- In a group of incarcerated males in a forensic psychiatric hospital and a medium security prison, they found 0% meeting the assessment of securely attached.

# Fairchild (2009)

- Studied 38 imprisoned fathers and found that 34% met classification of unresolved/disorganized, 24% met dismissive of attachment and 24% were securely attached.
- The need is to not recapitulate multigenerational attachment trajectory of parents that are imprisoned.

# FINDINGS

- Early traumatic losses
- Early physical abuse
- Parental deprivation in childhood

Recommendations: Parent skills programs for incarcerated parents

# Not Extensive Research But Some on Stalkers

- Melroy (1992) described stalking as “an extreme disorder of attachment.”
- “The stalker creates an externalized concretization of his depleted internal world and, through pursuit behavior, forces his victim to identify empathically with his split-off self-state of being vulnerable prey. Through this cycle of self depletion and reconstitution, the stalker regains a sense of psychic equilibrium at the expense of the victim.”

# Angry Martyrs

- Described mostly in estranged batterers who engage in stalking out of the belief that making their ex-partners suffer to re-establish the relationship. Their active aggression comes from a narcissistic inferior position. The stalkers project onto others their disowned poles of the self representation.

# Hungry Ghosts

- Obsessional followers with a preoccupied attachment style. These stalkers feel empty and injured. They aggressively pursue their victims with great hunger and fascination because their victims restore stalkers' narcissistic equilibrium and provide a sense of inner cohesion.

# Shameful Pariahs

- Avoidance of intensely painful affect states move from shame to rage. These are typically the child that has experienced an abusive relationship, often with mothers. The stalker is originally seen as omnipotent like their abuser which can create depression or even suicide. The rage state can become so dangerous that it can result in a murder-suicide.

# Predators and Sadists

- Superior narcissistic position with aggression of self. The other is the inferior passive victim. Dismissive attachment style with inflation of self and deflation of others. They may become kidnappers, torturers or if married, psychologically imprisoning their partner.

# Stalkers as a Paranoid Attachment

- Stalkers are diverse such as estranged batterers, pedophiles, voyeurs and exhibitionists, rapists or the most heinous the mysoped. (Misopedic sadists hate children, so they may kidnap them like a pedophile, but they tend to torture, mutilate and maybe eat their victims.)

# Case Study

# References

- Fairchild, S. (2009). Attachment representations and parental memories of incarcerated fathers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 26, 361-377.
- Ross, T. & Pfafflin, F. (2007). Attachment and interpersonal problems in a prison environment. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, 18(1), 90-98.