

Agency in Relationships:

The Concurrent Development of the Individual and of their Attachment Relationships

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SUMMARY

Individual Development and Development of Attachment Relationships are Intertwined and Mutually Reinforcing.

Becoming effective in relationships generally and in attachment relationships specifically is indivisible from individual development and wellbeing.

Development is described in terms of Agency

Agency is a relational phenomenon.

Six Markers or Tasks that indicate the attainment of Agency in Relationships

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AGENCY Vs Determinism

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Having a successful
career comes at a cost
to your family and
friends.

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Agency as a Relational Concept

The relationship context – particularly attachment relationships – is where agency is born and where it finds expression.

If you become too dependent on your loved ones, you may become less effective in your wider relationships and activities.

The Dependence–Independence Paradox

Mother–Infant Research

Adolescence Research

Adult Romantic Relationships

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SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS

“There is no such thing as a child” (Winnicott, 1965)

There is no such thing as an individual.

Internal Working Model of Self and Other
(Bowlby)

Corollary for Individual Wellbeing

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Improvements in Attachment Relationships Result in Improved Individual Wellbeing

Studies showing improved marital satisfaction results in improvements in **depression** (Leff et,al 2000; Beach et,al 2008; Robertson et,al 2008; Johnson 2008)

Improvement with **depression in women with eating disorders** when attachment anxiety was attended to. (Tasca et,al 2007)

Improved attachment relationship experiences results in better outcomes for **PTSD** (Johnson 2009, Allen 2006, Muller & Rosenkranz 2009)

Sexual Dysfunction is increasingly being treated in the context of relational dynamics and the way couples experience themselves in relation to their partner (Schnarch, 1991, 2002).

A series of studies link negative emotional experiences in attachment relationships to poor **physical health, including cardiovascular and immune system disorders** (Johnson 2009).

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Self-Other Mudmaps are Generalised

“Study after study has shown that satisfaction in one domain is associated with satisfaction in the other.....Work lives and love lives have been treated largely as non-overlapping, a perspective called the ‘myth of separate worlds.’” (Hazan & Shaver, 1990)

Relationship patterns correlate in both work and adult attachment relationships (Hazan & Shaver 1990)

Relationship patterns correlate in both group and adult attachment relationships (Rom&Mikulincer 2003)

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Implication

There are developmental tasks that individuals need to work on in order to become effective in their relationships – tasks that arc across and underlie development in both attachment and general relationship realms

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**IN ORDER TO TRULY LOVE
ANOTHER PERSON YOU
MUST FIRST LEARN TO
LOVE YOURSELF**

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The Developmental Markers of Agency in Relationships

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1) Being able to develop one's attachment milieu as a secure base and as a place for intersubjective experiences of secure attachment.

- ▶ Secure Base and Symbolic Contact (Wallin 2007)
- ▶ Secure Self and Other Representations
- ▶ Lifelong elaboration of self-other mudmap, earned security

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2) Being able to effectively and actively access others for need fulfilment and being able to appropriately meet the needs of others.

Self-In-Relation-To-Other Needs

Self-Object Needs - idealising, mirroring, twinship

Intersubjectivity, Interactive Affect Regulation and Empathic Attunement and Mirroring

Healthy Dependency (Solomon 1994, 2009)

Flexibility between interactive and personal affect regulation

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Intersubjective Experiences

Empathic attunement is the mind-body interface of intersubjectivity.

This implicit resonance involves exquisite synchronisation of facial expressions, mirroring of emotions and anticipation of each other's intentions.

"Mirror neurones" (Johnson, 2009; Rothchild 2000) allow each person to know the other from the inside out through associated stimulation of the autonomic nervous systems.

Oxytocin is released creating a cascade of pleasurable and comforting body experiences.

"Each person's mind and emotion are attuned to the other's. Each person knows the other's mind and recursively knows that he or she exists in this mind." (Johnson, 2009,p273)

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3) Being authentic about one's experience and needs, particularly when they are in conflict with the experience and needs of important others. At the same time, being able to take the other's needs into account.

- ▶ The Problem Of Wanting
- ▶ Regulating External Demands and Expectations
- ▶ Secondary Reactive Emotions Vs Softer Expressions (Johnson, 2009)

4) Managing oneself effectively during real or potential rupture in an important relationship, especially when critical issues of personal integrity are at stake

- ▶ The problem of anxiety
- ▶ Emotional Differentiation and the problem of the Other's anxiety
- ▶ De-escalation and Repair

Two paths to an Authentic Self

- continuous acts of risking separateness
- experiencing self-definition through empathy and mirroring by an important other

5) Being able to accurately assess self, the other and your interactions with the other, particularly during conflict

▶ **ICEBERG METAPHOR**

▶ **Mentalizing**

6) Being able to facilitate others to join you in a recursive reflection of the relationship dynamics and of each other's experience during these dynamics

Metaconversation

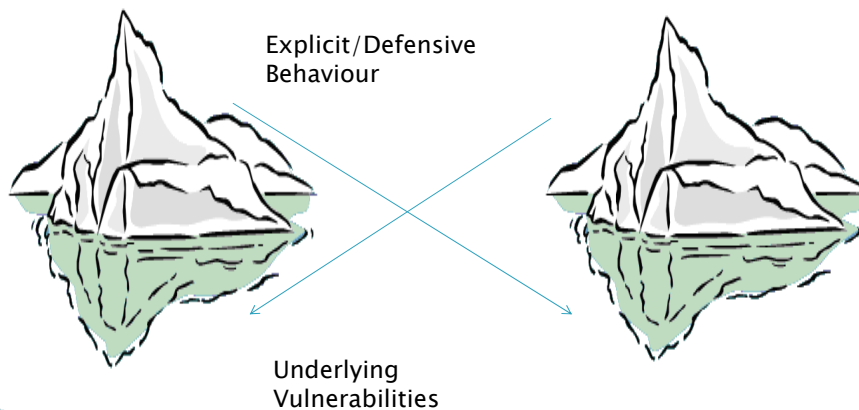
Interlocking Vulnerabilities – dyadic
mentalizing

Recursive Reflection

Conflict Management models

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Interlocking Vulnerabilities



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CASE EXAMPLE

- ▶ Norma is a 55 yrs old, grandmother.
- ▶ She has been married for twenty-five years and has two adult daughters and three grandchildren.
- ▶ She works in a call centre (7 months) that has quite intrusive management practices. She particularly hates the constant “performance counselling” she is subjected to by people in their early twenties who confront her regularly with graphs analysing her “outputs”
- ▶ Panic attacks began two weeks ago, does not recall having panic attacks before
- ▶ Has had mild claustrophobia, but now more severe, is avoiding tunnels and crowded lifts
- ▶ Is taking time off work, doesn't know how much longer her employer will tolerate it

CASE EXAMPLE

- ▶ Norma discusses her dread of being constantly under scrutiny. She is helped to articulate how she feels belittled and incapable, that she can't think straight. She says she feels breathless and constrained.
- ▶ She learns techniques for asserting her boundaries with her performance managers. She learns techniques for armouring herself against unwelcome critique.
- ▶ Within the first two sessions she is ruminating about both her marriage and her mother, both having a tendency to intrusively critique and micro-manage.
- ▶ She learns how this self-other mud-map is self-reinforced by her withdrawal of her opinion and acceptance of their intrusion.
- ▶ Norma begins to go out on her own, in spite of her husband's implicit disapproval. About the same time she starts telling the twenty-year olds that she doesn't agree with their analysis of her work.
- ▶ She starts looking for another job.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

- ▶ Self-In-Relation-To-Other – includes the actual other and the representational other
- ▶ Cognitive Interventions should focus on self-other internal representations
- ▶ Cognitive interventions should enhance people's capacity to contain the emotional dimension of these self-other experience.
- ▶ The actual self-other relationships.
- ▶ Working with more than one person.
- ▶ Recursive relationship between the intra-psychoic and the interpersonal..

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THERAPY

- ▶ Six developmental tasks arc across relationship realms –progress in one context may enhance progress in another
- ▶ Change is Non-Linear and Discontinuous
- ▶ More Useful to Map developmental theme in Therapy than content of Therapy

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THERAPY

- ▶ Six developmental markers serve as guide for psycho-educational and psychotherapeutic interventions
- ▶ They also serve as a guide for recursive reflection of the therapeutic alliance
- ▶ They can also be thought of as markers for the development of the Psychotherapist