British Journal of Psychiatry (1986), **149**, 430–438

The Attachment Dynamic in Adult Life

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A case is presented for regarding the Attachment Dynamic as a theoretical model for hypotheses on the aetiology and management of neuroses and personality disorders. It is proposed that man has a number of natural propensities, including: (1) attaining 'companionable interactions' with peers, in which competence is affirmed, self-esteem enhanced, and a state of well-being ('assuagement') is promoted. (2) when hindered in the pursuit of interests and companionable interaction, an urge to seek support through proximity to, and often 'supportive interaction' with support-givers. (3) severe psychological distress ('disassuagement') when support-givers cannot be induced to act effectively, with a propensity to devise defensive strategies, supplemented by psychological defence mechanisms; when maladaptive, these strategies are the source of neurotic symptoms and antisocial traits. Through these propensities, movement between companionable interaction and effective support sustains the urge to develop skills and explore interests creatively. However, this movement is hindered by the experience of repeated disassuagement and the need to maintain maladaptive defensive strategies.

Clinicians working with adults continue to look for more reliable and testable theoretical models that can be used as a basis for examining and treating patients suffering from various forms of psychopathology, notably neuroses and personality disorders. Much interest has been aroused by Bowlby's Attachment theory (Parkes & Stevenson-Hinde, 1982) but clinicians have had difficulty in using it as a developing conceptual framework (Bowlby, 1980) or as an open-ended model (Ainsworth *et al*, 1978). There are three major impediments to the fuller use of Attachment concepts in clinical work. Firstly, as it stands, the theory is not sufficiently comprehensive to be used as a basis for the assessment and management of adult patients. Secondly, the predominant emphasis on objective observation in the way the theory is framed, while constituting an attraction for behavioural scientists, under-emphasises the significance of a patient's experience, which is an essential currency for clinicians. The third impediment is the absence of a sufficiently formulated definitive framework that can act as a bridge between attachment phenomena in children, on which the theory was developed, and those phenomena in adults.

The theoretical model which we outline here, is a minimum first step to deal with these limitations. It is a development of the concept of the Attachment Dynamic (Heard, 1978, 1982), reformulated to generate hypotheses regarding the aetiology, management, and treatment of neuroses and personality disorder. Clinical findings can then be used to correct the theoretical statement, and to determine its explanatory power.

Basic Concepts

The concept of the Attachment Dynamic (Heard, 1978, 1982) emerged from integration of the theoretical innovations of Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982) with the experimental findings of Ainsworth (1969, 1977) and the insights of Winnicott (1971, 1972). The first version outlined an interpersonal dynamic which sets out some of the situations in which three kinds of behaviour relate to one another, namely (1) care-giving, (2) care-seeking (attachment behaviour) and (3) exploratory behaviour or play, as conceptualised by Winnicott (1971).

The transition to this second version came about after the concepts on which the first was based were integrated with concepts of: (1) peer interactions; (2) competence, mastery, and self-esteem (Hendrick, 1947; White, 1959; Frank, 1979; Phillips, 1967); (3) demoralisation (Frank, 1979); (4) the closed sado-masochistic system (Fairbairn, 1952; Rubens, 1984); and (5) qualities of interactions (Hinde, 1979).

Two experiences led to the transition: the first entailed clinical observations on adult clients who showed distress over the absence of like-minded companions of similar experience and stamina with whom to engage in mutually interesting and enjoyable activities. This evoked the concept of 'companionable interaction' as an essential component of exploratory behaviour. The second experience arose during the translation into operational terms of the concept of ego strength (Lake, 1985) by rating observable abilities in terms of personal and social competence. This brought together ideas from a number of different schools

of thought, and led us to focus on the commonplace concepts: (1) that an individual's monitoring of his/her own effectiveness is essential for the attainment and maintenance of selected goals, (2) that such monitoring is markedly influenced by the views expressed by those he holds as significant, and (3) that the recognition of potential and actual competence by others, as well as by oneself, is commonly associated with a sense of increased well-being. Lack of such recognition is associated with loss of autonomy and with a sense of being devalued.

This new emphasis prompted us to distinguish (1) two interpersonal, continuing goals for the dynamic-of companionable interaction, and of supportive interaction; and (2) the conditions which in everday life lead individuals to seek one goal rather than the other. It is important to distinguish the set goals of the dynamic from its function. The function enables man to survive by developing exploratory propensities, executive skills, and autonomy, within a limited but expanding network of trusted relationships. In so doing, man maintains his "environment of evolutionary adaptiveness" (Bowlby, 1982), which enables him to evolve features distinguishing him as a species. An essential feature of man's environment of adaptedness is the continuing presence, in the life of each individual, of a hierarchy of preferred relationships through which a state of 'assuagement' can be maintained.

Attachment Dynamic in Adults

Intrapsychic events will be described from the point of view of an individual's experience; as the dynamic describes movement between interpersonal aims, we have to break into a "story" (Medawar, 1967), which is circular.

Companionable interaction and the state of 'assuagement'

The concept of companionable interaction is supported by research on the social behaviour of children (Mueller, 1979), Harlow & Harlow's (1965) concept of peer-peer affectional systems, and Hartup's (1980) observations on peer interaction and the growth of social competence. It has an affinity with Murray's (1938; 1959, Murray & Kluckhohn, 1953) concept of affiliative relationships, Sullivan's (1953) conceptualisation of the relationship between 'chums', and corresponds closely to Weiss's (1982) concept of affiliation.

The exploratory nature of companionable interaction

We postulate that individuals have a natural propensity to have 'companionable interactions' in specifiable circumstances with peers, i.e. people of broadly equivalent intelligence, stamina, capacity to handle fear and panic, and competence in the pursuit of interests. Companions are peers who have similar commitments to sharing one or more interests. Companionable interactions may take place in twosomes, threesomes, or in small or larger groups. It has the function of providing both shared awareness and understanding of an interest, and the recognition of competence; such interactions are therefore episodes in an exploratory endeavour. 'Interest' is used in the most general sense for work and leisure activities, e.g. dancing, football, teaching, cooking, engineering, and literature; some are pursued alone, with episodes of companionable interaction, while others are more social, and the interest is pursued in small groups.

Factors evoking companionable interaction

Factors which evoke the seeking of companionable interactions include: (1) reaching new levels of understanding in regard to an interest, or of achievement in an associated skill; (2) observing other individual(s) doing likewise; (3) recognition that a companion requires support in the area of the interest; or requiring such support oneself.

Emotive messages and the goal of companionable interaction

The goal of companionable interaction is reached during the sharing of new information about an interest and the skills associated with it; this comes about through the exchange of 'emotive messages', which relate to the command aspect of a communication (Bateson, 1951). In these each participant conveys, in non-verbal as well as in verbal language, the feelings, thoughts, and wishes each has about the behaviour of the other(s). They are the means by which each participant in the interaction conveys whether or not he is anticipating, or experiencing the goal of the interaction. We describe here the emotive messages associated with reaching or failing to reach the goals of the two interactions of the dynamic. We do not discuss details of facial expressions, gestures, tones of voice, and syntax that may be used in conjunction with verbal information to communicate emotive messages, but paraphrase the spirit of the messages.

The goal of companionable interaction is reached whenever an individual construes from the emotive messages sent by companions, that they are taking interest in and showing appreciation of his contribution and the way he has made it; and at the same time, realises that the interest he is taking in the contribution of his companions is also appreciated.

'Assuagement' as a consequence of effective companionable interaction

As a consequence of experiencing the goal of the interaction, a state of mind is reached which, for want of a better term, we call 'assuagement'. In this state, there is: (1) an affective experience of mental and physical well-being, a feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment in what one is doing; (2) a sense of confidence and self-esteem in the ability to achieve short or longer-term aims which are consistent with stages of life, abilities, and interests; and (3) awareness that one's personal supportive environment is secure and that opportunities for companionable and supportive interactions are available.

In the state of assuagement, an individual is also able to: (1) consider the consequences of his actions; (2) see issues from another's point of view; (3) reappraise past experiences; and (4) integrate new approaches with known

routines to carry out short-and longer-term plans. There is also the disposition and readiness to develop ventures and pursue interests creatively, in ways that expand meaning and widen relationships with others. This purposive dimension embodies the motivation to engage in companionable interaction and so to maintain a state of assuagement. The state can consequently be considered as experience of basic trust, autonomy, and initiative (Erickson, 1965). In the contrasting state of 'disassuagement', all these abilities tend to be over-ridden.

Support and the maintenance of creative exploration

Circumstances which evoke movement towards psychological support

Support-seeking is evoked when an individual finds himself hindered in pursuing an interest and engaging in companionable interaction. This may occur through the recognition that competence and effectiveness are, or are about to be diminished (for physical or psychological reasons), or that companions are not available. Once pursuit of an interest has been threatened, psychological support is required before an individual is able to become sufficiently self-reliant to deal with the interfering circumstances. This support restores the individual's confidence in his ability to: (1) review his goals concerning a particular interest, and his relationship with companions; and (2) make and carry through plans likely to be effective; in so doing, loss of confidence is reduced, hope of acting competently and autonomously increased, and self-worth and self-esteem raised. A state of assuagement may be anticipated at this stage but support, however effective, does not in itself bring about assuagement until companionable interaction over an interest is attained.

Psychological support for adults and the use of internal representational models of experience in relationships (IMERs)

Psychological support for adults comes from two interdependent systems. An internal system interconnects with an external one which is used whenever the support provided by the internal proves insufficient. The internal system comes into being during infancy, and continues to evolve throughout life; it is derived from the experience of the interactions an infant has with principal care-givers (attachment/care-giving interactions described by Bowlby, 1982). These interactions with people in the external environment are continuously encoded into internal representational models which the individual constructs of himself and his environment. This concept of representational models has been extensively explored (Bartlett, 1932; Piaget & Inhelder, 1948; Fairbairn, 1952; Craik, 1943; Cantril, 1950; Miller *et al*, 1960; Young, 1964; Bowlby, 1982). We postulate that some representational models, viz- of experiences in both companionable and supportive relationships (IMERs) form the basis of an individual's internal supportive system. IMERs store information (see Appendix) in ways that enable the lessons continuously learnt from interactions to be integrated with other related experiences, so that it can be used to: (1) construct and correct attributions about causes for success or failure in such interactions; and (2) predict how competence can be increased, and companionable and supportive relationships be found and maintained. Each relationship an individual has with others is recorded in different IMERs as a sequence of episodes, during which different kinds of interaction between that individual and another take place. Any information about the other(s) already encoded on other IMERs is added to the record, so that personal histories of particular relationships are reconstructed over time. For example, a man after marriage adds an IMER of himself relating to his wife, later an IMER of himself relating to his child, and then a third IMER of himself relating in a threesome with his wife and child. These histories include beliefs about what can be expected to take place within each relationship.

People who feature in a personal history of a relationship appear in various roles, covering every combination of companion, support-giver, or support-seeker. Thus, someone may feature in a history of a relationship as a reliable support-giver, seeking minimal support but only marginally acting as a companion; another may appear in a more reciprocal relationship, weighted towards seeking and giving support or perhaps towards companionship. The combination of roles tends to change as each partner in the relationship develops greater psychological maturity and deals with the vicissitudes of fate. When the search for support is evoked, an individual automatically uses his IMERs to provide memories of analogous situations in which he has experienced effective support, and then adds to his knowledge of the availability of effective support-givers. If these internal resources are insufficient, external support is sought.

The external supportive system: use of the personal supportive environment, attachment network and supportive interaction

The external supportive system in adults has three components. The 'personal supportive environment' describes the ambience in which an individual feels secure: this has affinities with Lewin's (1952) life space, and covers the concept of transitional and/or attachment phenomena (Winnicott, 1972; Boniface & Graham, 1979). It includes activities, recreations, personal routines, pace of life, disposition of belongings, kind of terrain and house found to be congenial; the degree of light, colour, warmth and physical comfort one enjoys; and the spatial and psychological distance from and closeness to, companions, support-givers and support-seekers found comfortable. This environment is constructed through the integration of information derived from memories of: (1) contexts in which an individual has experienced harmonious forms of companionable and supportive interaction; (2) natural phenomena and works of man which evoke a sense of wonder and often awe; and (3) religious experience.

Such memories are distilled from information in the IMERs, and act as a vision of a secure environment which an individual sets about creating in tangible form by means of the style in which he lives his everyday life. Whenever an individual is unable to maintain enough of his personal

supportive environment to supply the reminders necessary to supplement the internal supportive environment, he checks over the availability of preferred relationships of his 'attachment network'. Finally, if availability alone is not sufficient, supportive interaction – the third component of the external system – is sought.

'Preferred relationships' refers to relationships in which individuals regularly expect to find opportunities for companionable and/or supportive interactions which are experienced as more rather than less effective. People who are so classed constitute an individual's attachment network, and the degree to which they are preferred establishes a hierarchical order of preference. The concept of preferred relationships in the attachment network circumvents difficulties in describing attachment relationships and affectional bonds in adults (Parkes & Stevenson-Hinde, 1982; Ainsworth, 1982; Weiss, 1982; Cohen, 1974; Svejda *et al*, 1982). Preferred relationships are experienced in twosomes, threesomes, or small groups; the people concerned will tend to be members of an individual's family and close friends, though we are inclined to include well-loved pets in the network of some people. An individual's attachment network varies in size and composition throughout life, as opportunities for interaction come and go, as commitment to different interests wax and wane, and as locality changes. In response to such changes, those people who remain in the network over a considerable time may move up and down the hierarchical scale. The place a person occupies on this scale at any one time appears to be reviewed regularly on the basis of how: (1) available and enjoyable that person is as a companion; (2) available and effective as a support-giver; (3) congenial as a support-seeker in situations in which support may be sought; and (4) the degree to which defensive strategies and the personal supportive environments of the individuals concerned are compatible.

Effective supportive interaction, its participants, and associated emotive messages

Supportive interaction takes place between one or more individuals who seek support and one or more willing to give it. Support-givers who are able to fulfill the role have greater experience, stamina, and judgment in the areas in which support is sought, as well as a greater capacity to handle the anxiety and fear that may be generated by the circumstances in which support has to be given. The aim of support-givers is to provide the support-seeker with the appropriate mixture of comfort, protection, and relevant educative information that enables the seeker to choose the lines of action that best suits his needs and aims. The aim of the support-seeker is to elicit the mixture that enables him to reappraise his goals and his attitudes about himself, and to remake plans, so that he can return with some confidence to old or new interests and companionable interaction. This mixture is found and given during one or more episodes of interaction, over the period required for the support-seeker to make his reappraisal. The giver finds the effective mixture by being attentive to the seeker's emotive messages and, guided by his empathic understanding of the messages, modifies his behaviour so that the seeker approaches the goal of the interaction. In supportive interaction, the seeker's emotive messages signal to the giver whether the mixture on offer is good enough, whilst the giver's emotive messages signal his willingness or refusal to adapt the mixture until the goal is reached.

Emotive messages and psychological proximity

To discuss issues of agreement or conflict over the messages expressed by the giver or seeker, we have extended Bowlby's concept of the need for physical proximity to preferred persons in defined circumstances, by introducing the notion of the need for comfortable psychological closeness and distance from such persons; and we contrast it with uncomfortable or distressing psychological distance or closeness (impingement). Comfortable psychological closeness is experienced by individuals whenever they consider their interactional goals are being approached or attained. Uncomfortable psychological closeness or distance is experienced whenever the behaviour of the other(s) is antithetical to the goals of the particular interaction.

Emotive messages exchanged between giver and seeker, during a period in which comfortable psychological closeness is experienced by both, show that each is prepared to relate to, be interested in, and value (although maybe not agree with) the feelings, ideas, and actions expressed by the other. Furthermore, each shows he is prepared to relate to the other, whatever aspects of personal supportive environment or form of defence the other is using. Finally, the support-giver shows pleasure and enjoyment in the seeker's achievements. In effective support, the giver notices the messages from the seeker which indicate uncomfortable closeness or distance, and adapts the mixture of support he offers until comfortable psychological proximity is re-established. Furthermore, the giver monitors his own requirements for support, and if necessary interrupts giving in order to gain support for himself elsewhere.

Consequences of experiencing effective support

Whenever a support-giver recognises that the seeker is able to carry out effective plans that enable the interest(s) about which support has been sought to be resumed or changed, the giver feels free to diminish proximity and to attend to other affairs. For the support-seeker, the end-point of the interaction is the realisation that he can make plans that are likely to enable him to find companionable interaction – through resuming the pursuit of a particular interest or engaging in another – and also maintain a comfortable physical and psychological distance from the support-giver. Provided the most effective members of an individual's attachment network remain available and the individual can maintain the most essential features of his/her personal environment, each experience of effective support increases expectations of finding such support in the future, by increasing the adequacy of his internal supportive system.

The integration of effective companionable and supportive interaction

Companionable and supportive interactions are seen in

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.149.4.430 Published online by Cambridge University Press

combination throughout life. Integration can be seen from the time of the first social smile, when exploration of interests and companionable interaction needs to be enjoyed within a framework provided by support-givers, until a child is old enough to pursue mutual interests with peers. The roles taken in companionable and supportive interaction are influenced by epigenetic factors; they show different forms, commensurate with concurrent levels of psychological and physical development and interactional experience encoded in the IMERs. The most significant contribution from the IMERs which influences the effectiveness of the internal supportive system is the balance between experiences of effective and ineffective support-giving from the support-givers and companions. Experience of both effective and ineffective support is common to all; an individual draws on one or other of these types of experience in different contexts, using them as models of giving support both to himself and to others. Examples of the combination and integration of companionable and supportive interaction can be seen in the ordinary pursuit of interests with companions, in friendships, and sexual relationships based on companionship.

Support as part of companionable interaction

It is commonly observed that companions give each other support (effective or ineffective) whilst pursuing or attempting to pursue an interest, in either work or recreational settings. Interests are pursued most competently in adult life when companions show each other a sufficient degree of effective support in the development and practice of the requisite skills. However, it is not possible to give attention to the exploratory pursuit of an interest, and simultaneously give effective support in an area outside that interest, although the two activities may alternate with each other, as can be observed in friendships.

Friendship, shared interests and reciprocal support

We regard friendship primarily as a companionable relationship, within which interests are enjoyed and support given and received, not only in the pursuit of shared interests but embracing other aspects of life. The more issues over which companionship and reciprocal support can be expected and the more compatible the defensive strategies and personal supportive environments, the closer and deeper the friendship and the more its loss will be mourned. The weighting given to interest-sharing and reciprocal support as an aspect of friendship means that relationships with parental figures will tend to move down the hierarchy of the attachment network, as an adult grows older.

Sexual relationships as a form of intimate friendship

Another example of the integration of companionable and supportive interaction is found when peers express and explore sexual interests. We distinguish two categories of sexual interest: (1) sexually intimate friendships, characterised by shared interests and reciprocal support, to which shared sexual attraction is added, experienced as an intensely enjoyable sense of physical and psychological closeness. The more sexually intimate the friendship, the greater its claims to the highest place in the hierarchy in the attachment network. (2) defensive sexual relationships, characterised by an absence of friendship.

Ineffective support, defense and disassuagement

We have considered how the Attachment Dynamic maintains and develops an individual's creative capacity, but should supportive interaction fail to take place (support figures not being available when needed, or available but regularly acting in ways that are antithetical to the goals of supportive interaction) the sense of inadequacy that evoked support-seeking in the first place is exacerbated, and a state of distress – 'disassuagement' – is experienced. Regular and/or intense experiences of such disassuaging interaction induce individuals to devise defensive strategies, in order to reduce intolerable distress and to restore self-esteem and the potential for competence; as a result, interests associated with ineffective support are either pursued with anxiety or abandoned. In these contexts, the supportive system has been put under stress, and the individual either evades companionable or supportive interactions, or else engages in them in maladaptive ways that are tormenting or damaging to himself and/or others.

A view of defensive processes in the attachment dynamic

Psychological processes of defence are a complex and contentious field of study; this discussion will be limited to a view which considers that defensive processes are designed to handle the pain of disassuagement and the fear of loss of autonomy. This derives from psychotherapeutic encounters with clients and from consultations over the management and treatment of patients suffering from neurosis. We find it useful to consider defensive processes as: (1) behavioural strategies which are, for the most part learnt; (2) processes which involve the concept of automatic selective exclusion of information (Bowlby, 1980), and the general paradigm that memory is structured in ways that allow us to learn from experience, using the phenomena of reminding in the process (Schank, 1982).

Disassuaging experiences stored in individual IMERs are partially or wholly segregated from conscious awareness, through automatic exlusion of information. A similar view was expressed, in different terms, by Fairbairn (1952), Guntrip (1961; 1968), and Kernberg (1976). These stores are kept under surveillance, in such a way that any current circumstances that seem similar to previous disassuaging events act as reminders of them; such reminders appear to be glimpses into segregated events, and evoke a wide range of conscious experiences. The glimpses range from re-experience of intensely distressing affects to an apparently inexplicable recall of some incident – with or without any particular affect – which, on later reflection in a supportive setting, is connected with a distressing event. They also elicit defensive patterns of behaviour, seen e.g. in transference and counter-transference phenomena. Using whatever degree of sophistication their cognitive development can command, individuals supplement automatic responses by

devising strategies to minimise each particular type of regularly repeated ineffective support. Once an effective strategy is learnt with particular support figures, it tends to become habitual with those figures, and generalises to analogous situations, so becoming a character trait.

Defensive strategies, although adaptive in the context in which they are devised, may be grossly maladaptive when used in contexts which only seem similar to the original. These strategies are recognised by the presence of the compulsive pursuit of closeness to or distance from certain people, settings, and activities; they include both compulsive sexual activities, many of which may be deviant, or a total inhibition of sexual activity. Common examples include: (1) inducing ineffective support-givers in the network to interact in ways that are less disassuaging, through compulsively compliant or rebellious behaviour (2) excluding from supportive interactions persons predicted to be more successful in claiming the attention of a support-giver – a common aspect of sibling and other forms of rivalry (3) staying in contact with ambivalent support-givers by creating the illusion that they are effective, through the selective exclusion of contrary information. Common examples of defensive strategies associated with an individual giving up the pursuit of proximity to ineffective support-givers, include imagining effective interactions with idealised support-givers, or the ruthless exaction of retribution from punitive and rejecting figures.

The emotive messages of ineffective support

Psychological distancing which is uncomfortable and distressing arises; firstly, when a companion or support-giver fails to recognise or acknowledge a request for supportive or companionable interaction, or having recognised it, devalues or rejects it; and secondly, when someone assumed to be either a support-giver or -seeker refuses to accept the expected role. In contrast, uncomfortable and distressing closeness arises when individuals, as seekers, are pressurised to accept unsolicited support and/or support they construe to be inappropriate and inadequate; or as support-givers, are subjected to intense demands which they cannot satisfy. In each instance, giver and seeker put each other under painful pressure to accept the meaning and point of view of the other. Giving in to such pressure is frequently experienced as submission, with loss of autonomy which increases the experience of disassuagement.

When psychological distancing or closeness becomes increasingly uncomfortable, messages from each participant express frustration, tension, and increasing fears of being hurt by or of hurting the other. If unacknowledged, such messages, tend to be repeated with escalating degrees of emotional intensity, and epitomise a struggle to regain comfortable psychological proximity or relief. Anger in such situations is frequently an expression of the intensity with which an individual endeavours to force the other to comply with his wishes and beliefs. During such struggles, each of the participants fails to be empathic, and the capacity to negotiate differences is severely limited. Adult support-givers are usually ineffective only when they find themselves having to give support when they themselves need supportive interaction. In such circumstances, they tend to reverse roles and seek support rather than give it, or mask their own disassuagement by defensive strategies.

Description of disassuagement

States of disassuagement are frequently masked by defensive strategies, and are revealed in adults when defences have been breached or when undefended losses are sustained, as in natural mourning. The clinical picture fits Frank's (1979) description of demoralisation and Engel's (1968) giving up/given up complex, in their somewhat less severe forms. Briefly, an individual suffers loss of a sense of confidence and competence in his ability to manage not only external circumstances, but his own feelings and thoughts, and tends to lose faith in what previously gave him a sense of security and significance. These losses reactivate memories of earlier losses and failures, and increase feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. A sense of low self-esteem is induced, frequently associated with guilt and shame; the individual loses sight of his long-term goals, and is preoccupied with avoiding further failure and loss of autonomy. Resentment is commonly felt because those from whom help is expected seem unable or unwilling to give it. In states of disassuagement, depending on the effectiveness of defences, the dominant moods are those of anxiety, irritability, and depression, ranging from mild to severe.

Disassuagement and the three forms of the Dynamic

We distinguish three forms in which the Dynamic is expressed and disassuagement experienced – one adaptive and two maladaptive. Each is associated with different levels of an individual's exploratory capacity, defences, and the effectiveness of his internal and external supportive system. These factors lead to the development of three different approaches to the pursuit of interests – companionable interaction, support-giving, and support-seeking, and hence to three different forms of the Dynamic.

Disassuagement and the adaptive form of the Dynamic. This form has already been described. It is shown when individuals have enjoyed and anticipate sufficiently effective support and companionable interaction over a range of interests, so that few interests are obstructed by defensive strategies. Disassuagement is suffered by these individuals following the threat or actual loss of highly preferred and effective support-givers, e.g. following natural catastrophe or loss of contact. The experience is seen in pangs of homesickness, or in grief, when mourning is followed by natural resolution over time.

Disassuagement and maladaptive forms of the Dynamic associated with anxious exploration. These forms of the Dynamic occur whenever individuals have been exposed over long periods of time to the experience of ambivalent and/or highly conditional support with key figures. The experience of ineffective support in relation to a few interests is probably a universal experience. When, however, affected interests are widespread and the internal system is

relatively inadequate, the individual has to rely mainly on the external supportive system. Interests are pursued with anxiety, and only in so far as defences will allow, so that the capacity for effective support-giving and companionable interaction is limited.

Disassuagement and maladaptive forms of the Dynamic associated with pseudo-assuagement. In these forms of the Dynamic, support has been less effective, more inappropriate, and less predictable than in those associated with anxious exploration. The support-seeker has few expectations of being able to gain realistic appreciation and/or recognition of his abilities and work, over the range of interests associated with disassuagement. In these areas, the goals of companionable and supportive interaction have been replaced by a secondary defensive goal – pseudo-assuagement – which is egocentric and markedly hedonistic. We adopted this term because individuals give up the search for supportive and companionable interaction associated with a creative pursuit of interests in work or recreation to become compulsively attached to various forms of excitement and relief.

When disassuagement is associated with almost everything an individual does, it is experienced as a severe form of demoralisation and associated with a pervading sense of futility. Defensive responses which have to be continuously maintained include: Firstly, types of maladaptive self-support which enhance various forms of self-comfort, geared to providing immediate relief from tension, e.g. common forms of addiction associated with denial and rationalisation; and secondly, forms of defensive companionship in which various modes of achieving excitement and/or status are idealised and pursued as ends in themselves. However, the search for effective support is seldom completely abandoned, and should appropriate skilled support be found, the primary goal of the Dynamic may be reinstated.

Individual styles within the attachment Dynamic

The forms in which the dynamic may be expressed in different contexts contribute to an individual's unique personal style; e.g. the way the Dynamic is expressed over a day may change from an adaptive form to forms associated with anxious exploration or pseudo-assuagement, as an individual moves from life at home to work, or to leisure activities. Similarly, individual styles in maintaining the goals of the Dynamic are likely to change over a lifetime, as different developmental stages are approached and life events affect the opportunity to maintain an effective attachment network and personal supportive environment. An observer of any one area or stage of an individual's life will therefore see only that one aspect of the total picture. However, it is possible, for clinicians to work out the style in which the Dynamic is currently, or has previously been expressed by examining the present nature and history of: (1) states of mind associated with companionable interaction, and both roles of supportive interaction; (2) the size, availability, and effectiveness of the attachment network; (3) emotive messages concerning psychological proximity regularly used during companionable interaction, and in both roles of supportive interaction; (4) the level of commitment to, and effectiveness in the range of interests pursued in the various contexts of everyday life; and (5) the kind of personal supportive environment maintained and the degree of preoccupation in maintaining it.

Discussion

The outline we have presented represents a loom on which may be woven the rich, elusive and at times repellent tapestry of human relationships. Our concern has been to set up a sufficiently comprehensive warp to investigate the possibilities and limitations of human potentialities.

This model leads to the conclusion that men and women cannot be co-operative and look after themselves and others unless they can enjoy practising skills that reveal creative talents with their peers. But the model shows that this can best be achieved when individuals live in the secure knowledge that they have relationships with people who recognise their potential for creativity, and who can provide information, protection, and comfort that enables them to restore the experience of competence, whenever their skills are no longer effective. Whilst recognising the intensely destructive nature of certain defences against disassuagement, the model suggests that much hostile aggressive behaviour is a strategy to handle fear concerning survival, arising from failure to find effective support.

Experience of sustained disassuagement is associated with psychopathology, which can range from mild to severe forms of neurosis, personality disorder, and borderline state. In our view these disorders are manifestations of an interplay between constitutional factors, the history of past interactions in preferred relationships encoded in the IMERs at all stages of life, and 'here and now' experiences in social relationships. Therefore treatment should take into account both the history encoded in the IMERs, and the quality of the interactions with those who provide formal or informal treatment. Some of the features of the therapeutic relationship required are discussed by Frank (1979) according to the model of the Attachment Dynamic, these are highly specific elements of effective supportive interactions, and will therefore play a part in all forms of management, counselling, adult peer self-help groups, different forms of individual and group psychotherapy-psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural, and family therapy.

It should not be thought that all psychological distress, particularly that associated with organic disorders, depressive illness and schizophrenic disorders, is primarily a manifestation of states of

disassuagement. Loss of competence is, however, associated with any illness, physical or mental, and because it evokes a desire for support, it will exaggerate co-incidental neurotic manifestations.

We conclude with a reminder that the aim of this model is to generate hypotheses regarding the aetiology, categorisation and treatment of neuroses and personality disorder and to modify the theory in the light of the findings.

Appendix

Information in each IMER is stored in chronological order, and relates to: (1) the content of verbal exchange during interaction and the perception of the meaning of emotive messages; (2) perception (from the five senses) of the environment in which interactions take place; (3) other environmental information preceding or following the interaction that is available for association with it. We class these three categories as external information, and think that most attention is given to information relating to one's value, the roles one is expected to take, the rules one is expected to follow, and the level of performance required.

Other information comes from internal sources: (4) affective responses to environmental information regarding oneself, others involved in the interaction, the surroundings, and perceived consequences. (5) information related to defensive strategies, including handling disassuaging relationships through phantasies of revenge, retribution, idealised forms of pleasurable interaction, and/or attaining levels of unparalleled admiration and esteem. (6) the evaluation of one's worth and performance after comparison with: (a) information already stored in the IMERs of previous interactions with appearances similar to those currently evaluated; (b) external information from other(s) before, during, and after the interaction, concerning one's worth and performance; and (c) one's personal judgment of personal performance concerning immediate and/or long-term aims.

On the basis of these evaluations, beliefs about one's worth and capacity to perform effectively are revised or confirmed, and rules concerning conduct formulated. However, there are two instances when the opportunity for revision and/or reappraisal is severely restricted: (1) instances where similar events have been followed by similar consequences over lengthy periods of time, and habituation has occurred; (2) the defensive segregation and systematic exclusion of disassuaging information.

We conceptualise the self as a form of "overall dynamic structural matrix" (Sutherland, 1979; Kernberg, 1980), constructed so that an individual can: (1) relive his experiences within a particular IMER or some part of it; (2) compare and contrast himself in different relationships and different contexts by extracting information relating to his experience from a number of IMERs. We consider that the latter facility underlies the phenomenon of the observing ego, which probably develops after infancy, but is often overridden during experiences of disassuagement.

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(*Accepted 31 January 1986*)