

Attachment security in adult partnerships

Judith Crowell and Dominique Treboux

Bowlby and Ainsworth made clear statements about the importance of attachment in adult life. According to Bowlby, human attachments play 'a vital role . . . in the life of man from the cradle to the grave' (1969: 208). Ainsworth (1985, 1991) highlighted the function of the attachment behaviour system in adult relationships, emphasising the secure base phenomenon at its core. She stated that a secure attachment relationship facilitates functioning and competence outside of the relationship. She noted there is 'a seeking to obtain an experience of security and comfort in the relationship with the partner. If and when such security and comfort are available, the individual is able to move off from the secure base provided by the partner, with the confidence to engage in other activities' (Ainsworth, 1991: 38). Attachment relationships are distinguished from other adult relationships as those that provide feelings of security and a sense of belonging, without which there is loneliness and restlessness. This is in contrast to relationships that provide guidance or companionship, sexual gratification, opportunities to feel needed or to share common interests or experiences, feelings of competence, alliance and assistance (Ainsworth, 1985, 1991; Weiss, 1974, 1982).

Although Bowlby and Ainsworth identified the normative elements of the attachment system in adult life, they provided relatively few guidelines for its specific function and expression. Despite great attention to the study of adult attachment in the past ten to fifteen years, the research has emphasised and explored individual differences, the patterns of attachment and attachment representations (Crowell and Treboux, 1995; Hazan and Shaver, 1987, 1994; Main and Goldwyn, 1994), and has not focused on normative development. In this chapter, we propose to return to the ideas expressed by Bowlby and Ainsworth, and address the normative elements of the attachment system, its development, function, and manifestations in adult partnerships, from both theoretical and empirical perspectives.

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND ADULT ATTACHMENT

In the development of attachment theory, Bowlby preserved Freud's hypothesis that the infant–parent relationship is a prototype for later love relationships (Bowlby, 1958; Freud, 1949/53; Waters et al., 1991). This tenet of attachment theory can serve as a guide in the investigation of the adult attachment system.

First, and most importantly, this hypothesis suggests the attachment system is active in *both* the parent–child relationship and later love relationships, and that in infancy, childhood and adulthood, attachment relationships are powerful influences on behaviour, cognitions and emotions. Such relationships are not given up voluntarily or completely; the disruption of an attachment relationship is painful and leads to grief and mourning (Bowlby, 1969; Freud, 1949/53). Just as it is in childhood, Ainsworth (1991) described the secure base phenomenon as the core of the attachment system in adult attachment relationships. That is, a secure relationship with an attachment figure perceived as available and responsive provides a base for confident exploration (Ainsworth, 1985, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Weiss, 1982). It is important to note that in focusing on the secure base phenomenon, Ainsworth and Weiss provide a relatively narrow definition of an attachment relationship, a definition that does not include all aspects of close relationships. This definition suggests what to look for (and what not to look for) in either empirical or clinical exploration of the attachment system in adults.

Although attachment theory supports the level of understanding of the prototype hypothesis described above, Bowlby and Ainsworth did not offer more complex interpretations. The nature of later love relationships was broadly specified (Bowlby, 1969), and possible differences among close and loving relationships were not addressed: for example, a parent/adult–child relationship versus an adult partnership. Nevertheless, the prototype hypothesis suggests that the pattern or quality of attachment in the parent–infant relationship may be similar to or even influence the pattern or quality of attachment in later love relationships. An extreme view of this interpretation suggests that whatever happens in infancy is fated to be played out again in later life regardless of what happens in between. A more moderate view suggests that continuity of early and late relationship patterns can be explained in two ways. First, there is an expectation of relatively stable ongoing caregiver–child interactions (Sameroff and Chandler, 1975; Waters et al., 1991; Waters et al., in press). Second, Bowlby hypothesised the development of mental models or attachment representations that would operate outside of conscious awareness and serve as guides to behaviour, thoughts and feelings in attachment-related situations.

The secure base relationship

Ainsworth and colleagues identified specific behavioural components of secure base use by the infant and secure base support by the caregiver (see Chapter 1). These behavioural interactions occur routinely and repeatedly in the course of ordinary life, as well as operating in more emergent situations (Bretherton, 1985). In the context of repeated experiences with the caregiver, the child develops expectations of his or her availability and responsiveness. In complement to the caregiver's behaviour, the child signals his or her needs clearly and consistently, seeking proximity and contact with the caregiver. The contact is maintained until the child is comforted. The child is able to re-establish equilibrium and return to normal activity and optimal exploration.

In the most adaptive or secure relationship, the caregiver maintains an ongoing pattern of support for exploration, and responsiveness in times of stress and danger. The caregiver is available and sensitive in detecting signals, correctly understands the child's need, and gives an appropriate response in a timely fashion. The way in which the caregiver understands the child's need may not match the child's expressed wishes. The caregiver presumably has a larger frame of understanding than and a different perspective from that of the child, and hence her responsiveness may be appropriate and timely even if it does not directly match the expressed desires of the child.

In the context of repeated interactions with the parent, individual differences emerge in the expression of the child's attachment behaviour, differences that reflect expectations about the infant's own behaviour and parent's likely behaviour in various situations (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bretherton, 1985). We have described the secure pattern above: the infant seeks and receives protection, reassurance and comfort when stressed. Confident exploration is optimised because of the support and availability of the attachment figure. Insecure patterns (avoidant, ambivalent, disorganised) develop when attachment behaviour is met by rejection, inconsistency, or even threat from the attachment figure, leaving the infant 'anxious' about the caregiver's responsiveness should problems arise. To reduce anxiety, the infant's behaviour comes to fit or complement that of the attachment figure – it is adaptive or strategic within that relationship. Nevertheless, exploration is compromised because of the child's lack of confidence in parental availability and responsiveness.

Attachment representations

Bowlby (1982) hypothesised that individuals develop an attachment representation of the functioning and significance of close relationships – that is, the sum of a person's beliefs and expectations about how attachment relationships operate and what one gains from them. With repeated experiences and interactions with the caregiver(s), certain behaviours and expectations of the

young child become automatic, not requiring active or conscious reappraisal for each relevant occasion. The child abstracts a model about how close relationships operate and how they are used in daily life. They are the basis for action in attachment-related situations and, in principle, are open to revision as a function of subsequent significant attachment-related experiences. Because the caregiving environment is usually stable and mutually reinforcing (Sameroff and Chandler, 1975), the models are relatively stable constructs which operate outside awareness, guide behaviour in relationships with parents and influence expectations and strategies as well as behaviour in later relationships.

In childhood, attachment patterns and representations are subject to change only if there is a corresponding change in the quality of parent-child interactions (Bowlby, 1969). However, Bowlby hypothesised that change in attachment patterns could occur in later life through the influence of new emotional relationships (that is, another type of change in the caregiving environment) and the development of formal operational thought. This combination of events would allow the individual to reflect on and reinterpret the meaning of past and present experiences. Incorporation of mental representations within attachment theory allows for a life-span perspective of the attachment behaviour system, providing a way of understanding developmental change in the expression of attachment and its ongoing influence on development and behaviour in relationships.

The secure base phenomenon in adult partnerships

The behavioural components of the secure base phenomenon in adult partnerships can be extrapolated from Ainsworth's outline of infant and parent behaviour (Crowell et al., 1998). The 'child role' can be considered as secure base *use* and the 'parental role' is thought of as secure base *support*. In optimal secure base use, a partner signals his or her needs clearly and consistently until there is a response, approaching the other partner directly for help or support. The support received is comforting. That is, the adult is able to re-establish emotional equilibrium and return to normal activity and exploration. In providing secure base support, the other partner is interested and open to detecting signals, recognises that the partner has a need or is distressed, correctly interprets the need and gives an appropriate response in a timely fashion. One partner's responsiveness to the other's concerns need not exactly match what the partner expresses s/he wants at that moment. It is possible for a partner to give a response which is appropriate and timely even if it does not match the immediate desires of the other, as long as the response considers the well-being of the partner and the relationship as a whole.

We hypothesise that the existence and quality of such exchanges in adult relationships lead to their development as attachment relationships. Just as the attachment relationship in infancy develops out of countless interactions

in the course of daily life with a particular caregiver, it seems likely that adults require repetitive interactions of the secure base type for a romantic partnership to develop into an attachment relationship.

A major difference between adult-adult attachment relationships and parent-child relationships is that, as we saw in Chapter 1, the attachment behaviour system in adults is reciprocal. In other words, adult partners are not assigned to or set in the role of 'secure base support/caregiver' or 'secure base use/care seeker'. Both secure base use and secure base support should be observable in adult individuals, and the partners must shift between the two roles. The potential for flexible reciprocity adds complexity to assessment issues in adult attachment from both empirical and clinical perspectives.

Another critical difference rests in the issue of past history. Whereas the parent-infant relationship can be considered 'new', at least from the infant's point of view, both adults in a partnership have had many attachment-related experiences. Integration of past attachment experiences and representations into a new attachment relationship is one of the great challenges for the individuals and the developing relationship. Both partners have been influenced by a history of attachment experiences in three broad domains, although the relative importance of these domains can be debated. The three domains, or sources of influence, can be roughly divided into parent-child attachment relationships, peer and romantic relationship experiences (including the experience of the parents' marriage) and the current adult attachment relationship. What are the implications for the relationship when the new caregiving environment does or does not match the one from which the partners have developed their representations of attachment?

The Stony Brook Attachment Relationship Project was started to investigate these and related issues of adult attachment. It is a longitudinal study of young couples; 157 were recruited just prior to their weddings and 101 were recruited as steadily dating couples. We have used and developed several assessments of attachment that are particularly useful in exploring adult relationships and the secure base phenomenon. In the next sections, we present a brief review of the key measures and early findings from our study.

ASSESSMENTS OF ADULT ATTACHMENT

The Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1985)

Exploring their interest in attachment representations, George, Kaplan and Main created the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) 'to assess the security of the adult's overall working model of attachment, that is, the security of the self in relation to attachment in its generality rather than in relation to any particular present or past relationship' (Main et al., 1985: 78). As we saw in Chapter 1, it assesses adults' representations of attachment based on their

discussions of childhood relationships with their parents and the effects of those experiences on their development as adults and as parents. The purpose of the AAI is to demonstrate that 'mental processes vary as distinctively as do behavioural processes' (ibid.) based on the idea that representational processes are reflected in language, itself a form of representational thought. Construct validity and discriminant validity of the AAI have been well established (Crowell and Treboux, 1995; Crowell et al., 1999).

The semi-structured interview elicits information about an adult's early childhood experiences and the perceived influence of those experiences upon subsequent development. Scoring is based upon the quality of parenting experiences in childhood (*in the coder's opinion, not via the expressed views of the adult*), the language used to describe past experiences and the ability to give an integrated, believable account of those experiences and their meaning (Main and Goldwyn, 1994). Hence, the scoring system goes beyond the individual's report of what s/he feels about attachment and attachment experiences by having the goal of tapping processes which are not necessarily available to direct enquiry. Coherence is the core component of the scoring system – the degree to which the narrative is believable and consistent in its content, is relevant, gives enough (but not too much) information to present a clear picture and is free of jargon and other mannerisms (see Table 2:1).

Coding yields classifications of secure-autonomous, insecure-dismissing, and insecure-preoccupied states of mind with respect to attachment. Two other insecure classifications may be given: unresolved state of mind with respect to a loss or abusive experience, and 'cannot classify' due to high insecurity and mixed discourse style. Depending on the research question, studies have used the classifications in a variety of ways (Crowell and Treboux, 1995; Crowell et al., 1999). Discriminant analyses based on the AAI scales of 364 individuals have demonstrated that a continuous score of security is correlated with discourse coherence (Fyffe, 1997). Hence the score of coherence may be effectively used as a score of security.

The Current Relationship Interview (Crowell and Owens, 1996)

The Current Relationship Interview (CRI) is one of several interviews developed to address adult attachment within close relationships. In particular, the CRI was developed as a way to examine the prototype hypothesis and to explore the process by which a new attachment relationship is either integrated into an already existing representation of attachment or a new representation develops. As a narrative assessment, it is intended to examine the influence of the partner's attachment behaviour and ideas on the individual's representation of attachment and his/her own attachment behaviour.

The interview investigates the attachment representation within the adult partnership. The scoring system parallels the AAI scoring system in that

Table 2.1 Adult Attachment Interview classifications (based on Main and Goldwyn, 1994)

	Secure	Dismissing	Preoccupied	Unresolved
Past experiences:	Loving or unloving parents.	Rejecting parents.	Role-reversing parents.	Significant loss.
Present state of mind:	Recognises importance of early relationships in development; Balanced view of self and parents; Coherent: believable and consistent.	Minimises or denies effects of early experience; Idealises parents; Emphasis on personal strength; Incoherent: lack of evidence, poor recall.	Preoccupied with parents; Angry or passive; Incoherent: vague, irrelevant, oscillating.	Abuse. Expresses disbelief; Feelings of causing loss/abuse; Incoherent: disoriented, disorganised, confused.

experiences with the partner, discourse style and believability/coherence are assessed using a number of scales. Rating scales are used to characterise (a) the individual's behaviour, (b) the partner's behaviour and (c) the individual's discourse style, including overall coherence. Scale scores are used to assign classifications that parallel those of the AAI: Secure, Dismissing, Pre-occupied and Unresolved. CRI scale scores reflecting state of mind regarding attachment, and the individual's specific attachment behaviours of secure base support and use, are given primacy in the determination of attachment security rather than the individual's reported feelings about the relationship or the behaviours of the partner (see Table 2.2). As with the AAI, the coherence score is highly correlated with a continuous security score based on discriminant function analysis with 290 individuals.

The Secure Base Scoring System for adults (Crowell et al., 1998)

Secure base behaviour is scored within the Secure Base Scoring System (SBSS) from an observation of partners interacting in a standard couple task. Each partner is asked to identify topics on which the couple disagrees and the frequency with which they disagree. The most frequently discussed topic is then selected from the lists and the couple is asked to discuss it in a 15-minute videotaped session. The disagreement is stressful for both partners and hence likely to activate the attachment system. It is a valid task with strong links to marital research.

The scoring of the interaction involves the identification of one partner, and possibly both, as having a concern, and apparently seeking help, reassurance or comfort from the other in relation to it. Not all interactions involve such issues (some arguments are more philosophical or are problem-solving), but most discussions prompt more personal material and an expression of a concern about the relationship, a personal need or desire for the partner to do something. When a partner is identified in the role of 'secure base user', s/he is scored on each of the following scales: initial clarity of the concern, continued expression of the concern when necessary, approach to the partner with the expectation that the partner will be helpful and ability to be comforted. A summary scale of secure base use is also given that is not an average of scores, but weights some scales more heavily than others and relies also on the coder's opinion.

When one partner expresses a concern and seeks a response from the other, the other partner is put in the role of 'secure base supporter'. S/he is scored on the following scales: interest in the partner's concern, recognition that the partner is distressed, interpretation of the meaning of the partner's distress, and responsiveness. Again, a summary score of secure base support is given. It is not uncommon for partners in this secure base supporter or caregiver role to raise their own concerns in response to the partner's problem. They

Table 2.2 Current Relationship Interview classifications (based on Crowell and Owens, 1996)

	Secure	Dismissing	Preoccupied	Unresolved
Experiences with partner:	Partners' behaviour does not distinguish the classifications.			Loss of or abuse by previous partner.
Present state of mind:	<p>Acknowledges importance of partnership in personal development;</p> <p>Balanced and empathic view of self and partner;</p> <p>Notes influence on relationship;</p> <p>Clear and coherent;</p> <p>Valuing of attachment evident in own behaviour.</p>	<p>Minimises or denies effects of relationship on self;</p> <p>Idealises partner, self or relationship;</p> <p>Emphasis on independence;</p> <p>Describes self as rejecting;</p> <p>Incoherent: lack of evidence, remote, terse; materialistic relationship goals.</p>	<p>Preoccupied with partner;</p> <p>Active anger at partner or vague, passive speech;</p> <p>Confusion and ambivalence;</p> <p>Describes self as involving or controlling;</p> <p>Incoherent: unclear, irrelevant, oscillating.</p>	<p>Strong emphasis on previous relationship;</p> <p>Confused statements;</p> <p>Disoriented/disorganised speech;</p> <p>Describes alterations in current relationship behaviour that are related to previous experiences.</p>

are then scored in the 'secure base use role' and the original secure base user is scored in the 'secure base support' role.

The combination of measures described above can provide insight into how generalised attachment representations based on experiences with parents in childhood relate to attachment representations and attachment behaviour in couples. We have used them to investigate important questions of adult attachment.

EARLY FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter explore the attachment system in adults and the prototype hypothesis. Most of the results are from the study of 150 young adult couples recruited within three months of their marriages, and followed across the early years of marriage. The couples were recruited from the general population of a predominantly suburban and rural county of Long Island, New York. The participants were predominantly white, had not been married prior to the current engagement, and had no children at the time of recruitment.

Our results indicate there is modest concordance between partners for attachment status as assessed with the AAI (Owens et al., 1995; Crowell et al., 1995). This finding has been reported in other studies as well (van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996). The concordance is accounted for by the secure/secure pairings (50–60 per cent for three major classifications). Thus there is some evidence for assortative mating. However, attachment status based on childhood experiences does not appear to be a dominant factor in partner selection for most people. The premarital CRI concordance between partners of the three major classifications is approximately 63 per cent ($k = 0.29$; $p = 0.05$).

AAI classifications in the sample are very stable: 86 per cent over 18 months ($k = 0.73$). CRI classifications are also stable with 66 per cent of the men ($k = 0.28$; $p = 0.05$) and 74 per cent of the women ($k = 0.49$; $p = 0.001$) having the same classification across an 18-month period from before marriage to after marriage. These findings support the idea that attachment representations are resistant to change, although those related to the current, potentially still developing attachment relationship appear to be somewhat less stable than those based on childhood experiences.

Examining the relation between the AAI and the CRI enables us to understand the potential influence of early attachment relationships on the development of later attachment relationships. Using the coherence scores for each interview as an index of attachment security, there is a correlation between the two types of representations ($r = 0.51$; Crowell, 1998). Sixty-seven per cent of individuals had matching classifications – that is, they were either secure for both representations or insecure for both. This finding is consistent with

the hypothesis that early experience influences later relationships, but not in a 'strong sense'. That is, it suggests that the child's interactions with an attachment figure are not the only framework by which later love relationships can be understood. Rather the findings support the hypothesis that the quality of the current attachment relationship and ongoing interactions, as well as previous experiences with romantic partnerships, influence the construction of attachment representations of the shared relationship.

Couples' security and secure base behaviour

The relations between the couples' secure base behaviour and the AAI and CRI have also been explored (Gao et al., 1996). With respect to secure base behaviour, men and women are equally good at using a secure base or providing secure base support. Engaged men and women classified as secure with the AAI or with the CRI are more likely to be effective in using secure base support, and providing support to the partner, than individuals classified as insecure. Their behaviour is also related to the AAI security of their partners and, to a lesser degree, to the CRI status of their partners. Thus a secure partner of either gender helps an individual both use and provide secure base support (see Table 2.3). No interactions of the individuals' and partners' security status were found for either the AAI or CRI, suggesting that there is no particular type of couple (e.g., insecure/secure versus secure/insecure) that significantly differs from the others.

Couples' AAI security and self-reports of feelings and behaviour in the relationship

With few exceptions, AAI security is not related to individuals' premarital or five-year anniversary reports of their feelings in the relationship (with regard to satisfaction, dedication, constraint, commitment, intimacy and passion) or the reported conflict behaviour of their partners (verbal aggression, physical aggression and threats of abandonment). The exceptions are that men who are AAI insecure were more likely to threaten to leave the relationship premaritally and to be more verbally aggressive premaritally. Their partners also tended to be more likely to threaten to leave the relationship before marriage and to be more verbally aggressive. Secure men felt more committed/constrained to stay in the relationship before marriage, and men who reported such feelings also tended to have secure partners.

These findings (a detailed breakdown of which is contained in Appendix 1) suggest that, premaritally, individuals' representations of attachment based on childhood experiences (AAI) do relate to their secure base behaviours in interactions with their partners, and with some of the conflict tactics they employ as reported by their partners. Their partners' security status also

Table 2.3 2 x 2 Analysis of variance: her security status (secure vs. insecure) and his security status (secure vs. insecure) for the AAI and the CRI with premarital secure base behaviour

Means scores and standard deviations for the AAI							
Secure base behaviour	Women		Men		Her security F (1, 109)	His security F (1, 109)	Interaction F (1, 109)
	Secure	Insecure	Secure	Insecure			
Her secure base use	4.3 (1.7)	3.5 (1.6)	4.2 (1.6)	3.7 (1.6)	5.32*	2.80†	ns
Her secure base support	4.5 (1.9)	3.4 (1.7)	4.5 (1.8)	3.6 (1.7)	7.46**	4.72*	ns
His secure base use	4.5 (1.6)	3.6 (1.5)	4.8 (1.5)	3.5 (1.6)	4.54*	14.83***	ns
His secure base support	4.3 (1.8)	3.5 (1.7)	4.7 (1.5)	3.3 (1.8)	3.23†	15.65***	ns
Means scores and standard deviations for the CRI							
Secure base behaviour	Women		Men		Her security F (1, 86)	His security F (1, 86)	Interaction F (1, 86)
	Secure	Insecure	Secure	Insecure			
Her secure base use	4.3 (1.7)	3.1 (1.5)	4.2 (1.8)	3.5 (1.6)	9.56**	ns	ns
Her secure base support	4.3 (1.6)	3.2 (1.9)	4.3 (1.7)	3.5 (1.9)	3.95*	3.66†	ns
His secure base use	4.3 (1.6)	3.6 (1.5)	4.8 (1.4)	3.5 (1.6)	2.78†	4.01*	ns
His secure base support	4.4 (1.9)	3.4 (1.6)	4.7 (1.5)	3.3 (1.9)	ns	5.14*	ns

†p = 0.10; *p = 0.05; **p = 0.01; ***p = 0.001

behaviour, individuals' AAI attachment security has little association with the feelings that they report about their relationships.

Couples' CRI security and self-reports of feelings and behaviour in the relationship

Premarital

In contrast to the AAI, CRI security is related to premarital reports of feelings as well as behaviour (see Appendix 1). For the women, premarital self-reports, with the exception of discord, are significantly related to their own CRI security status. In addition, men's CRI security was related to their partners' premarital feelings of satisfaction. Secure men's partners reported less discord and were less verbally aggressive. CRI insecure women married to CRI insecure men were significantly different from women in the other three groups: they were the most verbally aggressive and reported the lowest feelings of intimacy and commitment.

For the men, several of the premarital reports were related to CRI status. Men classified as CRI secure were more satisfied, less verbally aggressive and reported more feelings of dedication, passion and intimacy. Their premarital reports of satisfaction, feelings of constraint and intimacy, as well as their partners' reports of his conflict tactics, were related to the partner's premarital CRI. Men with CRI secure wives were more satisfied and felt more constrained and intimate. The CRI secure wives also reported their partners were less verbally aggressive, less physically aggressive and less likely to threaten to leave.

Five years of marriage

Women's premarital CRIs were unrelated to their self-reports at their five-year anniversaries. However, their spouses' CRI security was related to the women's verbal aggression, such that CRI insecure men reported their wives to be more verbally aggressive than secure men did, and the wives of CRI secure men reported greater feelings of dedication to the relationship. Women in couples in which both partners were insecure reported the lowest feelings of intimacy and dedication after five years.

With respect to husbands' behaviour and feelings after five years of marriage, there were few main effects of premarital CRI security of the men or women. Men with CRI secure wives were reported to be less verbally aggressive and tended to feel more satisfied and constrained. It was noteworthy that men classified premaritally as CRI insecure endorsed significantly greater depressive symptoms than CRI secure men, and CRI insecure men married to insecure wives had more depressive symptoms than men in the other

There were several other interaction effects, such that insecure CRI

men paired with insecure women were significantly lower in feelings of dedication, constraint, commitment, passion and intimacy than insecure CRI men paired with CRI secure women.

Thus, in contrast to the AAI, CRI security status for both men and women is related to reports of their behaviours and their feelings both concurrently (premarital) and over time (five years later). Couples in which both partners were insecure premaritally stand out as more emotionally distressed, although interestingly, most of their reported behaviour was not significantly different than other pairings.

Couples' AAI and CRI status and marital break-up

Concordance and/or discordance of security status could place couples at risk of marital break-up. However, with respect to the AAI, no such risk appears: couples of all pairings (secure/secure, insecure/secure, etc.) were equally likely to have divorced or separated when marital status was examined five years after the initial assessment. The four groups each had a break-up rate of about 20 per cent (see Table 2.4).

In contrast, CRI security status of couples is related to marital break-up. Couples in which both partners are classified insecure are significantly more

Table 2.4 Couples' security status: AAI and CRI concordance and rates of marital break-up after five years

Couples' security	Still married	Separated/divorced
AAI pairings (<i>n</i> = 146)	<i>n</i> =	<i>n</i> =
Secure/secure	21 (78%)	6 (22%)
Secure woman/insecure man	22 (79%)	6 (21%)
Insecure woman/secure man	24 (80%)	6 (20%)
Insecure/insecure	49 (80%)	12 (20%)
CRI pairings (<i>n</i> = 115)	<i>n</i> =	<i>n</i> =
Secure/secure	28 (87.5%)	4 (12.5%)
Secure woman/insecure man	25 (89%)	3 (11%)
Insecure woman/secure man	13 (81%)	3 (19%)
Insecure/insecure	24 (61.5%)	15 (38.5%)

likely to break up than couples of other types. Therefore, while attachment representations based upon childhood certainly are related to secure base behaviour in the relationship, it is the representation of attachment in the current relationship that is associated with separation and divorce. When both partners were insecure in their descriptions of the attachment elements of the current relationship there was a high rate of marital break-up.

In summary, the relations between secure base behaviour and attachment representations are consistent with predictions from attachment theory. Attachment representations based upon childhood experiences are clearly linked to relationship behaviour, both observed and reported by the couples themselves. The attachment representation of the current relationship, even at the premarital stage, is linked to relationship behaviour and feelings before marriage and into the early years of marriage. These findings support the prototype hypothesis and provide the foundation for further exploration of the secure base phenomenon in adult relationships.

The work we have described can be used to explore how partnerships develop as attachment relationships over time and what benefits accrue to couples with secure attachment relationships. Early findings suggest there may be gender differences. A particularly important extension of this work is to examine the relation between the couple's attachment relationship and their parenting behaviour.

Attachment theory and the secure base phenomenon present us with an ideal: how an attachment relationship works optimally, and what its function is. Such an ideal is appealing and potentially of great value to clinicians attempting to redirect and reframe dysfunctional behaviour, as it provides both a clear rationale for change and a goal towards which to work. Attachment-based clinical work with couples is a new arena for attachment researchers and clinicians that hopefully will be beneficial to all involved.

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