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Adult Attachments and Gambling, Gaming Addictions

Attachment

- Attachment is a biological phenomenon that occurs as soon as an infant is born.
- Without caregivers responding to an infant's physiological and emotional needs the infant will die.
- Therefore the infant instinctively signals the caregiver, usually a mother initially through primitive behaviors such as crying, sucking, body and eye movements.
- If the caregiver responds to the signals with empathy and consistency the infant comes to believe that the caregiver will protect and care for him or her and develops a feeling of security- Secure Attachment

- If caregivers are insensitive and inconsistent infants develop strategies to give more emphatic signals
- If infants sense or experience that there is danger to their survival (neglect or abuse) infants develop strategies for survival and protection, which may include engaging the caregiver or disengaging from the caregiver.
- These experiences form an infants perception of relationships and belief in their need for their particular strategies.
- These beliefs operate unconsciously in the child throughout life and influence their perception of self, expectations of relationships and perception of social reality.

With the greater knowledge of the neurology of Attachment, Attachment is also understood as the regulator of affect and affective behavior.

- The infant's biological needs act as a stressor and motivate the infant to signal the caregiver.
- If the caregiver responds empathically and timely the stress chemicals decrease and the infant's affective state is calmed.
- If the caregiver does not respond to the infants signals the infant becomes more stressed, activated by the brain chemistry, becomes more agitated with stronger signals and remains in this dysregulated affective state longer.

- The less responsive the caregiver is the longer and more dysregulated the infant remains.
- The brain does not develop optimal functioning in its capacity to experience stress and to deactivate the stress and regulate affect if it does not experience comfort and soothing in early childhood.
- The repeated mutual interaction between the infant and caregiver, either results in secure attachment with affect regulation or insecure attachment with dysregulation of affective responses.

Addictions can be understood as a means of deactivating the stress and regulating affect and avoiding the feelings of insecurity.

There are 4 categories of Child Attachment:

- **Secure:** developed when children have consistently available, loving and comforting caregivers.
- **Insecure/Anxious/Ambivalent:** when caregivers are inconsistently available because of their own needs and issues
- **Insecure/Avoidant:** when caregivers are rejecting, unavailable or critical and demanding of certain behaviors and expectations.
- **Insecure/Disorganized:** When caregivers are extremely neglectful, or physically, sexually and emotionally abusive.

Adult Attachments

- Adult attachments serve the same function as in childhood – to ensure that the needs for safety and security are provided in an intimate relationship.
- Adults need to know that they have a secure base, someone to support them, protect them, offer them security and nurturance, particularly at times of stress or vulnerability.
- Adults, similar to children, experience great anxiety at the loss of or the threat of loss of an adult attachment relationship.

Adult Attachments

- It is the combination of poor early childhood attachment experiences plus the failures in relationships in childhood, adolescence and adulthood that establish insecure adult attachments
- One unconsciously chooses a partner that often confirms for him or her his beliefs and expectations of relationships.
- Individuals with insecure attachments continue to fear abandonment, rejection, unavailability or abuse.
- Individuals will respond differently to these fears depending on their Internal Working Model and Attachment Styles

Similar to child Attachments there are 4 categories of Adult Attachment. These were developed by a researcher Dr. Mary Main, to determine the Attachments of parents. Dr. Main developed an assessment tool, the Adult Attachment Interview to determine the category of the Adult's Attachment.

Child Attachments ----- ***Adult Attachments***

Secure

Anxious/ambivalent

Avoidant

Disorganized

Autonomous

Preoccupied

Dismissing

Unresolved

Secure/autonomous

- Adults who fit into this category describe their childhoods in a realistic balanced and believable narrative.
- They often have had positive childhood experiences in which they felt close to at least one parent
- They would describe their primary parent as loving, available, affectionate, fun and supportive during times of stress, illness or pain.
- They value relationships and understand the impact their childhood relationships and experiences have had on their development.
- They are able to develop mutually satisfying adult intimate relationships.

Earned Security

- This is a subcategory of Secure Attachment
- These are individuals who describe a difficult early history that would likely produce insecure attachments
- Either through later experiences of positive interpersonal relationships or through therapy these individuals have resolved early childhood experiences and appear secure in their attachments
- They are able to describe a coherent and balanced childhood history although relating difficulties in relationships with caregivers.

Insecure/preoccupied

- Adults in this category often describe confusing childhood experiences, with mothers who were both available and unavailable.
- Their narrative is often vague and inarticulate and they have difficulty remaining on the topic of past experiences.
- Their sense of self is strongly identified with relationship to parents.
- They continue to struggle in their current relationship with parents, often feeling anger in active or passive expressions.

Insecure/dismissing

- Adults in this classification may have difficulty recalling details of their childhood which limits the amount of discourse.
- They may idealize their parents and childhood experiences without evidence for this description.
- If they describe an early history of rejection they either deny the importance of this on their development or claim it may them strong and independent.
- The interviewee's responses are often abstract lacking in feelings, particularly feelings of hurt, distress or vulnerability.

Unresolved Attachments

- Adults have experienced severe trauma and early losses, have not mourned lost attachment figures and not integrated losses into their lives.
- They describe confused and incoherent family histories
- They may be disoriented in time, confusing the past with the present.
- They may become disoriented in the interview, triggered by questions and have memories and flashbacks.

Secure/Autonomous Attachment

- Value relationships and believe having a close intimate other is important in one's life
- Ensure they have time for relationships and turn to intimate other for support and care when stressed
- Able to accept the autonomy of partners, spouses and children
- Able to resolve problems in relationships and are not threatened that conflict will destroy a relationship
- Able to express needs, wants and feelings in relationships in an emotionally balanced manner
- Able to examine their part in relationship issues, reflect on this, learn from mistakes and change behavior

- Able to be sympathetic, empathic and understanding of the needs and feelings of others.
- Able to accept that other people have different views and values without judgement
- Successful in careers, parenting and close relationships
- Have good self-worth and a realistic view of self.

- Are very low risk of becoming problem gamblers, gamers or internet addicts.

Preoccupied Attachments

Adults in this category

- Need close relationships
- Seek approval from others and fear being devalued
- Are overly dependent on intimate others and cling to partners
- Are hypersensitive to unavailability or abandonment, often misinterpreting the behavior of intimate others
- Easily experience jealousy and insecurity
- Exhibit high levels of emotional intensity

- Are impulsive in their reactions
- View themselves as unworthy and initially overvalue their partners
- Have great difficulty making independent decisions and trusting their own judgment. Rely on others but may need many opinions.

Dismissing Attachment

Adults in this category:

- Need to feel independent and self-sufficient
- Prefer not to depend on others
- Avoid feelings of vulnerability, sadness, fear and the need for closeness
- Focus more on careers and activities to avoid intimacy
- Suppress feelings and needs
- Distance themselves from others who may reject them
- May view themselves as superior
- Often successful in careers and activities but emotionally distant in relationships

Unresolved

Adults in this category:

- Have a deep fear of relationships
- See relationships as dangerous where they can be physically, emotionally or sexually hurt
- View themselves as a victim but may avoid this feeling by becoming the aggressor
- They are easily triggered, have memories and flashbacks and may dissociate to avoid feelings.
- Difficulty controlling emotions and have mood changes without apparent cause

- React to perceived danger by either being aggressive, avoidant or shutting down feelings and responses.
- Difficulty sleeping, concentrating
- Difficulty in sexual relationships
- In more extreme cases dissociate and may not recall events or their whereabouts



Barbara Smaller

"I'm not saying that I don't have intimacy issues. I'm just saying that I prefer to work on them by myself."

ID: 40549, Published in the New Yorker 12/7/1998

"I'm not saying that I don't have intimacy issues. I'm just saying that I prefer to work on them by myself." (Man talking to woman outside of cafe.)
by Barbara Smaller, therapist

Addictions

- Gambling, Gaming and Technological Addictions involves an individual's continued use of these activities despite its negative impact upon his or her daily functioning, finances and personal and social relationships.
- An individual's daily functioning is impaired because of the effect on the brain, usually involving the brain's reward system.
- Eventually dependency develops with increased tolerance, withdrawal symptoms with abstinence and continued usage to avoid withdrawal stress.

Research

There is little research on the association between Adult Attachment and Gambling Addictions.

One study by Matthew Keough, Tinda Penniston et al. with an N of 275 showed that people with insecure attachments are more likely to experience depression and therefore, may engage in excessive gambling behaviors to cope with depression. Both anxious/ambivalent Attachment and avoidant attachments were at risk of using gambling as coping strategies for their moods.

Another Study by R. Testa, P. Grandinetti, M. Bruschi and others in 2017

Attachment Styles and severity of pathological gambling: preliminary evaluations.

Results: Ambivalent Attachments correlated with high scores on severity of gambling and a shorter period of abstinence. Sample was small and needs to be replication with a larger number of participants.

Addiction and Attachment Categories

Preoccupied Adult Attachment (Anxious/Ambivalent)

Are at high risk of gambling and gaming addictions:

- Have poor impulse control
- Have dependent personalities
- Need immediate gratification
- to lessen feelings of insecurity, anxiety and generally intense feelings
- May use these addictions to feel more comfortable in social situations
- May use substances to cope with feelings of being unworthy and to gain a false sense of independence and empowerment

Addiction and Dismissing Attachment

- Dismissing or avoidant Attached adults are generally emotionally repressed and threatened by feelings and intimacy
- Some research indicates they are not susceptible to addictions because of their ability to overregulate and be in control.
- They also view themselves as superior and able to control gambling and gaming addictions

People with Dismissing Attachments may be vulnerable for Gambling, Gaming and online addictions because:

- they may welcome some feelings that come with the excitement of gambling
- interaction with fellow gamblers is safe, lacking true intimacy
- Those that need to excel in activities may continue to gamble to ensure feelings of success and avoid feelings of failure
- Online gambling allows for isolation or interaction without direct contact
- Their lack of empathy allows for denial of the affect on their gambling on intimate others

Addiction and Unresolved Adult Attachments

- Adults with Unresolved Attachments have early histories of significant loss, neglect or emotional physical and/or sexual abuse.
- The association between addictions and trauma is well documented.

Unresolved Attached Adults may use gambling and gaming addictions:

- to provide their need for intense arousal that such addictions create
- to provide for their need for high risk behaviors
- to avoid the constant disorganized inner state they feel
- to confirm their feelings of shame
- to provide a social context without intimacy
- If lose confirms their belief they are inadequate
- If win become addicted to the false sense of competency
- **Can offer a false sense of power and control**

For people with Unresolved Attachments from a history of sexual abuse online sexual addictions provide:

- a safe context for sexual pleasure
- a safe context for divergent sexual needs
- sex without true intimacy
- secrecy to avoid shameful feelings

Attachment Based Therapy

Goal: to Change the client/patient's internal working model of attachment from Insecure to Secure (Earned Security)

Secure adults are open, flexible, adaptable, self-aware, affect regulated, accepting of differences and sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, including their children, partners, spouses and friends and colleagues.

In order for Adults with addictions to benefit from Attachment Focused Therapy they would need to abstain from their addiction so they could explore their histories, understand their Attachment Categories and tolerate the feelings as the therapy progresses.