

Appendix A: Theme Descriptions

Article Title: A Qualitative Validation of Two Projective Measures of Attachment Network Structure

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ABSTRACT

In two qualitative evaluation studies we explored the construct validity of two diagrammatic measures of attachment network structure, including the Bull's Eye diagrammatic technique and a significantly modified version, the Web-based Hierarchical Mapping Technique (WHMT). In the first study, 20 young adults completed a Bull's Eye diagram followed by an unstructured interview in which participants explained their placement of support figures in their diagrams. Interview transcripts were analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis to determine the presence of attachment-related themes, including safe haven, secure base effect, and proximity maintenance. Findings indicated mixed support for the Bull's Eye as a measure of attachment networks. Although attachment themes were dominant among participants who identified a parent as their primary attachment figure, this was not the case among participants who identified a peer as a primary attachment figure. Participant justifications for peer attachments relied on non-attachment themes, including identity exploration and companionship. In the second study we applied the same qualitative method to investigate the WHMT. Saturation was reached sooner and attachment themes were dominant for both parent and peer primary attachment. Findings lend support to the construct validity of the WHMT as a new measure of attachment network composition and strength.

DESCRIPTION OF FILE:

The following file contains five theme descriptions that were used to code interviews from participants from our study titled “A Qualitative Validation of Two Projective Measures of Attachment Network Structure” submitted to The European Journal of Psychological Assessment. The themes include three attachment themes, which are safe haven, secure base effect, and proximity maintenance, and two non-attachment themes, companionship and identity exploration

Safe Haven.

Safe haven feelings or behaviors were coded in situations in which support was sought or received following a distressing experience. Attachment distress is indicated by vulnerable feelings such as sadness, anger, insecurity, deep frustration, longing, mourning, or a basic sense of being unmoored or lost (Main, 1999). In contrast, sharing a momentary feeling, such as being annoyed by a coworker or irritated by an assignment, would not be coded as sufficiently distressing, unless the participant described it as such. Safe haven memories coded during the open-ended portion of the interview were tied to the diagram. If, however, safe haven memories were disclosed after the structured questions that targeted distressing event memories and behaviors, the theme may or may not be consistent with the participant's completed diagram. As noted, this targeted question does not directly reference the Bull's Eye diagram, but instead focuses on how participants respond to distressing situations, and whether or not support was sought. Of particular interest here is whether participant responses to this structured safe-haven question are consistent with, or contradict, the ordinal importance of support figures as identified in their Bull's Eye diagram.

Secure base.

Secure base behaviors and feelings are considered the defining feature of attachment relationships, and a necessary quality to be considered a 'clear cut' attachment relationship (Hazan et al., 1991). Secure base is marked by an internal sense of comfort, safety, security, or well-being from knowing the figure is available to them, a reliable assurance that support is durable and unconditional across time and situation. Secure base operates both during times of distress and non-distress. Following a distressing event, secure base feelings are evident in how a

person gains felt security from safe haven behavior directed at an attachment figure. In non-distressing situations, secure base feelings and behaviors are those that indicate a confidence in exploration that emanate from feelings of security. That is, a person may express a willingness to take risks or move outside their comfort zone knowing that the attachment figure will be there for support if something were to go wrong. In addition, individuals that fulfill this attachment function are deeply penetrated into the emotional life of the attached.

Proximity maintenance.

The proximity maintenance feature of attachment relationships is primarily identified by behaviors or feelings that communicate a *need* to remain close to, spend time with, or maintain access to a particular network figure. Importantly, remaining close is about preserving felt security during times of non-distress (i.e., when the attachment system is deactivated) by “checking-in”, analogous to testing a fire-alarm. In the event the attachment figure is determined to be unavailable, separation protest behaviors should ensue. That is, a lack of attachment-figure availability should cause sufficient distress to activate safe haven feelings or behaviors. This type of proximity seeking can be sharply contrasted with companionship, in which person or a group is sought for pleasure and enjoyment. A companion who does not provide attachment support would be avoided during times of distress, and separation would not provoke distress.

Disentangling proximity seeking in the service of attachment versus companionship is a critical distinction that is likely confounded in existing attachment network measures. For instance, the proximity maintenance items in ranking scales such as the WHOTO and the ANQ strongly favor peers over adults among adolescents and young adults, a bias that is likely owed to peer companionship, not peer attachment. Given that the Bull’s Eye evidences an even stronger peer bias compared to the WHOTO or the ANQ, it is reasonable to suspect that

closeness to core self pulls for affiliative functions, in addition to attachment functions. In the current study, participants' explanations for why they place support figures close to their core self will help differentiate when closeness to a person in a social network falls under the attachment behavioral system or other behavioral systems.

Companionship.

As noted under the proximity maintenance theme, companionship feelings or behaviors are conveyed by how much the participant enjoys spending time with the figure in question, especially during times of non-distress. Companionate relationships are those that share interests and activities and where mutuality and consensus are important interpersonal rules to defining the relationship (Youniss & Smollar, 1987). While attachment relationships may certainly possess companionate features, especially peer attachments, proximity seeking for fun and pleasure, without any proximity maintenance qualities, are coded as companionship. Shared meaning is also a relational quality that can be tied to the next theme on identity exploration.

Identity and Individuation.

This theme captures relationship qualities that support identity exploration and individuation that are distinct from secure base effect or companionship. For instance, the reciprocity found in friendships provides an environment of acceptance to try on new selves without fear of judgement and without raising suspicion or alarm (Erikson, 1994). This idea is also captured in relational qualities such as mutuality and shared meaning that provide validation of one's self. Identity exploration that arises from shared meaning and reciprocity can be contrasted with identity exploration that arises from an attachment relationships. Attachment relationships can provide a safe psychological environment for a person to explore new or challenging conceptions and would be coded as *secure-base effect* (see Grotevant & Cooper,

1986). In contrast, interview content that emphasizes freedom to explore or be oneself based on relational qualities of shared meaning and mutuality will be coded under the *Identity and Individuation* theme.

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