PART I

Theoretical Perspectives

1 Studying Parenting Representations as a Window to Parents' Internal Working Model of Caregiving

Ofra Mayseless

Abstract

This chapter examines the concept of parenting representations as embedded in the conceptualization of attachment theory regarding the caregiving behavioral system. The growing body of research on parenting representations is extensively reviewed, and the notion of "internal working model of caregiving" is presented in relation to the extant literature. In general, strong reliability and validity of various schemes for coding interviews assessing parenting representations are demonstrated, and their distinctiveness with regards to state of mind with respect to attachment is noted. The implications of this research and the concept of Internal Working Models (IWM) of caregiving are discussed, and future directions for theory and research are suggested.

Historical Overview

What's on a Parent's Mind

The study of parenting has a long history in clinical and developmental psychology. For the most part, researchers treated parents as the independent variable and were interested in them insomuch as they affected the normal or pathological development of children. The interest in the parent, in most cases the mother, as a subject in and of itself, and the focus on the parent's own desires, wishes, thoughts, and affective world, has developed mostly in the last two decades. Four major fields of research displayed such a focus: (1) researchers in the psychoanalytic tradition (e.g., Kraemer, 1996; Stern, 1989; Stern-Bruschweiler & Stern, 1989; see a review in Wiseman, Hashmonay, & Harel, this volume), (2) scholars of a feminist outlook (e.g., Ruddick, 1989), (3) researchers taking the social cognition perspective in

developmental psychology (see a review in Rudy & Grusec, this volume), and (4) scholars in the tradition of attachment theory. This chapter focuses on the last-named, and examines the concept of parenting representations as embedded in the conceptualization of attachment theory regarding the caregiving behavioral system.

Attachment has been the major guiding theory in the area of emotional and social development for the past two decades and is one of the most influential theories in developmental psychology. From the start, Bowlby (1969/1982; 1973), the founder of the theory, discussed two relevant and reciprocal behavioral systems: attachment and caregiving. Attachment referred to the motivational system of the infant to receive care whereas caregiving referred to the motivational system of the parents to give care and protection. Since the inception of the theory, the study of attachment processes has flourished and evinced an increasing number of advances in theory and conceptualizations, as well as in measures (see, for example, the recent *Handbook of Attachment* edited by Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

The study of the parenting motivational system lagged behind. But in the past few years interest in the caregiving system has surged and is exemplified by several publications. George and Solomon suggested that researchers should devote similar research efforts to the caregiving system as they have to the attachment behavioral system (George & Solomon, 1989). Following Bowlby, they further advocated that the two systems, though related, are separate, and each should be studied in its own right. In 1996 they edited a special issue of the *Infant Mental Health Journal* devoted to caregiving, which published several empirical studies of caregiving processes (e.g., George & Solomon, 1996). In the recent *Handbook of Attachment,* they wrote a central chapter on the caregiving system (George & Solomon, 1999a). A book highlighting caregiving from an attachment perspective has been written by Heard and Lake (1997) presenting the authors' perspective on the issue, including also a clinical focus. More recently, a major theoretical target article in *Psychological Inquiry* (Bell & Richard, 2000) was devoted to caregiving, with more than a dozen commentaries by prominent researchers in developmental psychology and other related areas.

Theoretical interest in the parenting motivational system (the caregiving behavioral system) has been paralleled by an empirical attempt to assess parents' views, emotions, and internal world regarding their parenting. This has culminated in a new and expanding area of research involving *parenting representations*. Several researchers in different laboratories have suggested various ways of assessing these. They have mostly employed semi-structured interviews, and have developed various different ways of analyzing those

interviews (e.g., Bretherton, Biringen, Ridgeway, Maslin, & Sherman, 1989; Benoit, Zeanah, Parker, Nicholson, & Coolbear, 1997; Aber, Belsky, Slade, & Crnic, 1999; see the review below). Though not openly stated, their focus on parenting representations seems to reflect an attempt to examine and investigate parents' Internal Working Models (IWMs) regarding caregiving (see the next section). In many respects that research followed the breakthrough in the development of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) with its new conception and method, which provided a way to assess adults' IWMs regarding attachment (Hesse, 1999).

In this chapter, I first present the concept of Internal Working Models and briefly describe the innovation in conceptualization and research following the development of the AAI (a thorough discussion of the research with the AAI can be found in Hesse, 1999). I then extensively review the growing body of research on parenting representations and summarize its main findings. Finally, I discuss the implications of this research and the concept of the Internal Working Model of caregiving, suggesting future directions for theory and research.

The Place of Internal Working Models in Bowlby's Theory

One of the major postulates of Bowlby's (1969/1982) theorizing was that the two motivational systems, attachment and caregiving, are not drives but function as behavioral systems that are characterized by several distinct features. First, behavioral systems are organized as goal-corrected, with specific set goals rather than a pre-wired sequence of behaviors. Behaviors change and adjust to serve the different goals, and this adjustment involves a feedback loop. Similar behaviors may reflect the operation of different goals and the same goal may be served by different behaviors in the same individual and across different individuals. The meanings of specific sequences of behaviors derive from the goals that govern them. In addition, Bowlby suggested that the different behavioral systems (e.g., attachment and caregiving) need to be coordinated in various ways to allow the achievement of the distinct goals. Finally, behavioral systems are seen as governed by higher processes of integration and control, and hence include IWMs, namely representations of the world and how the relevant set goals can be achieved. According to Bowlby (1969/1982; p. 82), working models include a model of the environment (social and non-social) as well as a representation of the person's own skills and potentialities. Because behavioral systems are seen as governed by these IWMs and because the significance of behaviors depends on the meaning imparted to them by these IWMs, researchers started focusing on the

study of IWMs as a major avenue to understand the workings of behavioral systems, in particular the behavioral system of attachment (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985).

Several researchers tried to elucidate and clarify the concept of Internal Working Model, in particular regarding the attachment behavioral system (e.g., Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Collins & Read, 1994; Crittenden, 2000). First, it was claimed that these representations are built on actual experiences, and in the case of attachment on actual experiences with care-givers in attachment-related circumstances. Second, IWMs were seen as serving to regulate, interpret, and predict the person's as well as the caregiver's attachment-related behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. IWMs were not seen just as reflecting a reality but also as regulating and in some cases creating a reality. Third, IWMs were seen as somewhat flexible to some extent in that they can be updated in light of a person's new experiences and information, and modified by a person's changing capacities to interpret and reflect on different experiences. Fourth, the representations of the environment and the self were seen as involving several distinct memory systems: procedural, semantic, and episodic, at various levels of consciousness and involving varying degrees of affective load. Finally, IWMs were also seen as reflecting the operation of diverse defensive processes that serve to protect the person from unbearable anxiety and psychological suffering. These defensive processes are involved in all facets of the IWMs such as the representations of the environment and the self, the goals set, and the plans adopted.

The Adult Attachment Interview: A Conceptual and Assessment Breakthrough

With regard to the attachment behavioral system, the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and its coding (Main & Goldwyn, 1998) proved a very powerful means for gaining some understanding of working models of attachment. The AAI is an hour-long structured interview designed to arouse memories and emotions related to attachment experiences. Interviewees are requested to give a general description of their relationships with their parents (and of other caregivers who acted in an attachment-related capacity) and to support these descriptions by specific biographical incidents. Additionally, they are asked about specific experiences of separation, rejection, or abuse. Furthermore, they are asked to explain their parents' behavior, to describe the nature of their current relationship with their parents, and to assess the influence of child-hood experiences on their development and personality. The interviews are

audiotaped and transcribed verbatim; the coding is based on the transcript. Scores are assigned to inferred childhood experiences of love, rejection, involvement, inattentiveness (neglect), and pressure to achieve exerted by each parent, and to the respondent's state of mind with regard to idealization, anger, derogation, insistence upon inability to recall childhood, passivity, and coherence. Some of the AAI scales refer to the content of the representations (e.g., parental love), but major coding is based on how the coder views the interviewee's reflections, evaluations, and defensive processes, what has been termed the *state of mind with respect to attachment*.

Specifically, from the transcript the interviewee's emotional access and openness to past attachment-related experiences are assessed, as well as the coherence in describing them. Adults with a *secure* (*autonomous*) state of mind with respect to attachment have somewhat easier access to past experiences, positive or negative, which they tend to describe openly and coherently. Insecure adults do not access past experiences easily, or they describe them incoherently. Specifically, *dismissing* adults tend to restrict the importance of attachment in their own lives, or to idealize their parents without being able to illustrate their positive evaluations with concrete evidence. They seem to use the defensive strategy of minimizing attachment behavior and feelings. They often appear to lack memory of childhood experiences related to attachment. *Preoccupied* adults are still greatly involved and preoccupied with their past attachment experiences and are, therefore, not able to describe them coherently and reflectively. They may express passivity or anger when describing current attachment relationships with their parents. In addition, a fourth category was proposed, for people who are *unresolved* with respect to loss or trauma. Such individuals are also placed in one of the other three major categories as a forced categorization.

The AAI was first developed and validated (Main et al., 1985) against the behavior in the Strange Situation of infants of the interviewed adults. Correspondence between the classification of the adult's IWM according to the interview and the infants' attachment classification served to validate the AAI (van IJzendoorn, 1995). In addition, the AAI was related, as anticipated, to observed parenting behaviors (Hesse, 1999). In all, the AAI has proved a valuable and valid measure of the internal working model of attachment as regards parent–child relationships (Hesse, 1999).

The development of the AAI was a major leap forward for understanding IWMs. Specifically, it demonstrated that with regard to predicting children's attachment relationships, the overt content of the caregiver's IWM as well as the presumed quality of the relationships with his or her own parents as

deduced from the interview by the coders are not as important as the current affective and defensive stance with regard to attachment experiences. Secure adults seem to be free to evaluate these experiences, good or bad; dismissing adults seem to reject parts of these experiences, whereas preoccupied adults seem to be over involved in them without the capacity to emotionally disengage and reflect on them.

The success in using the AAI to uncover an important part of a person's IWM in respect of attachment led to attempts by several groups of investigators (see the following sections) to examine parenting representations using similarly constructed interviews. These contained questions about the child and the parent's relationship with him or her instead of questions pertaining to the parent's own parents or caregivers. Though not explicitly stated, these efforts can be seen as aimed to uncover the parents' IWMs regarding their caregiving. The following sections review these efforts extensively.

Assessments of Parenting Representations: Coding Schemes and Findings

In presenting the different ways of assessing and examining parenting representations, I have chosen to organize the review according to the different researchers or assessment methods. I then review studies with a more particular focus on a specific clinical population or a special aspect of the representation. As happens so often in science, many of these investigations started around the same point in time in different laboratories, by different researchers often with only partial knowledge of the others' work at first. The order in which these studies are reviewed does not reflect their importance or their temporal sequence.

The Parent Attachment Interview (PAI): Bretherton and Her Colleagues

Within the attachment tradition, Bretherton and her colleagues (Bretherton et al., 1989) were among the first to suggest examining parents' representations regarding their parenting, and voiced surprise at researchers' neglect of the parental side of attachment till then. On the basis of Main's Adult Attachment Interview, Bretherton and her colleagues devised an in-depth structured yet open-ended interview, the *Parent Attachment Interview* (PAI), which focused on parents' attachment experiences with a specific child. Bretherton and her colleagues used the term attachment but referred to the parental side, namely the parent's provision of caregiving and the caregiving bond

that characterizes most of these relationships. They chose the term "parental attachment" advisedly. In their own words,

> It is not only the infant who keeps tabs on the parent, and who becomes distressed upon separation; parents also tend to keep a watchful eye on their infant, to intervene when the infant is getting into a potentially painful or harmful situation, to experience feelings of alarm when the infant's whereabouts are not known or the infant's well-being is in danger, and to feel relief when the child is found or the danger past. In our view the term "caregiving", though often used to describe the parental side of the attachment relationship, does not sufficiently reflect the depth of the parent-to-child bond. (Bretherton et al., 1989; p. 205)

The interview adapted for mothers of toddlers included structured questions followed by probes asking for examples and elaborations (see Bretherton, Lambert, & Golby, this volume). The questions revolved around the following issues: mother's thoughts and feelings at the baby's birth, the baby's personality, experiences at nighttime and during other separations, autonomy-related negotiations, compliance issues, mother's feelings such as joy, anger, worry, or guilt, comparisons with her own parents' caregiving, and projection into the future. The interview was first administered to 37 mothers of two-year-olds as part of a longitudinal study which included assessments of a number of other constructs (e.g., temperament, maternal personality, attachment Q-sort). Data analysis included content analysis, which focused on the mother's thoughts and feelings regarding particular attachment issues, and a global analysis using a nine-point scale assessing sensitivity/insight concerning the mother's relationship with the infant (see Bretherton et al., this volume). Content analyses exposed meaningful variations among the mothers as well as several joint themes such as quite high tolerance of inconvenient attachment behavior at night. The sensitivity/insight scale was significantly associated with security of attachment as indexed in the Strange Situation, attachment Q-sort, and attachment story completions. The scale was also significantly and positively associated with the child's perceived attention span and sociability and negatively with the child's emotionality. Similarly, it was positively associated with mother's extroversion and cohesive and adaptable family relations.

In another study with 40 mothers and their toddlers (Biringen, Matheny, Bretherton, Renouf, & Sherman, 2000), the interview was further scored using Westen's (1991) six dimensions of the SCORS-Q: Affect tone of relationship schemas, Understanding of social causality, Experience and management

of aggressive impulses, Cognitive structure/complexity of representations, Capacity for emotional investment in moral standards, and Self-esteem. Associations between these scores as well as the sensitivity/insight score and mother's sensitivity and structuring during observations with her child at 18, 24, and 39 months were examined. Several aspects of the maternal representation (but not the global scale of sensitivity/insight) were associated with the mother's behavior. For example, experience and management of aggressive impulses, capacity for emotional investment in moral standards, and particularly self-esteem were associated with observed maternal sensitivity at 18 months. By 24 and 39 months, observed maternal structuring during the interactions was significantly associated with the mother's self-esteem, which refers to her having realistically positive views of herself in the relationship.

Lately the PAI was used to examine maternal representations in divorced mothers (Golby & Bretherton, 1999), and as reported in this volume (Bretherton et al.) it was also administered to intact couples including the fathers. In both cases parents' interviews were subjected to a content analysis aiming to identify themes and categories of responses rather than quantitatively assess specific dimensions in parents' representations. For example, in the divorced-mothers study themes of resiliency were identified and highlighted.

In general the PAI has been employed mostly with parents of toddlers and pre-school children, and has been analyzed qualitatively and also by use of quantitative scales reflecting global aspects of the interview narrative such as insight/sensitivity or self-esteem and sense of competence in the maternal role. It has shown moderate association with a diverse set of measures of attachment security of the child and was associated with mother's behavior during an observed interaction with the child.

Parent Development Interview (PDI): Aber, Slade, and Colleagues

At the same time as Bretherton and her colleagues devised the PAI, Aber and his colleagues (Aber et al., 1985) developed a somewhat similar interview, the Parent Development Interview (PDI), to assess parenting representations. In general the interview addressed similar issues and had a similar format: open-ended questions, followed by probes with a request for specific examples and elaboration. This interview asked the parents to describe the relationships with the child, not his or her personality as in the PAI. In addition parents were asked what they liked or disliked about their child, how different or similar they were to the child and to their own parents, pleasures and difficulties in their relationship with the child, and their own strengths

and weaknesses as parents. They were asked about separations and various feelings and challenging situations (e.g., mother could not give the child her full attention). The PDI is distinguished by the specific coding scheme developed by Slade and her colleagues (Slade, Belsky, Aber, & Phelps, 1999). In this coding scheme, three general dimensions are assessed by means of several rating scales which are scored based on the interview as a whole: (1) parents' representation of their own affective experience, (2) parents' representation of their child's affective experience, and (3) parenting state of mind or thought processes. Parents' own affective experience is measured on scales assessing anger, neediness, separation distress, guilt, joy and pleasure, and sense of competence and efficacy. Child's affective experience is measured on scales assessing child's anger, separation distress, and dependence–independence. Finally, scales for state of mind assess general coherence and richness of perception, the latter adapted from Zeanah, Benoit, Hirshberg, Barton, and Regan (1994).

In a large sample of 125 mothers of first-born *male* toddlers, the PDI was administered twice: when the children were 15 and 28 months old (Aber et al., 1999; Slade et al., 1999). In addition mothers were administered the AAI and observed twice at home with their toddlers. Though they assessed quite a large number of separate constructs in the PDI, following factor analyses the researchers used three major scales: (1) coherence/joy, comprising coherence, richness of perception, and joy–pleasure; (2) anger, comprising degree, acknowledgment, and modulation of parental anger; and (3) guilt/separation distress, comprising parent's degree and acknowledgment of guilt and separation distress. The other scales were not included in the analyses in that study. Coherence/joy was negatively associated with anger to a small to moderate degree.

In terms of validation, these researchers (Aber et al., 1999, Slade et al., 1999) reported that mothers with an autonomous state of mind assessed by the AAI scored highest on the joy–pleasure/coherence dimension of the PDI, and mothers classified as dismissing on the AAI scored highest on the anger dimension of the PDI. In addition, the joy–pleasure/coherence dimension was positively associated with a general scale of positive mothering as observed on the two home visits. Thus, parenting representations of toddlers as measured on global scales reflecting content (i.e., anger) as well as thought processes (i.e., coherence) were associated, as expected, with mothers' state of mind with respect to attachment and their behavior with their toddlers.

Parenting representations were stable across this year at a range of 20–25% of explained variance. Additionally, there was a general increase in anger as the children moved into the terrible-twos; anger at 15 months contributed