

Personality disorder and maternal mental health

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Implications for maternal mental health: attachment and therapy





Attachment systems in humans

- A biobehavioural system that develops in first 1000 days
- A kind of immune system for stress in social relationships
- Represented in neuroanatomical and psychological structures
- A well functioning system is called 'secure': associated with 'good enough' functioning

If you have a secure attachment system

- You can cope with distress, loss, life-threat
- You still feel distress but you get help
- You don't become violent or psychotic or somatise (very much)
- You reorganise around your loss
- You can symbolise what you think and share it with others

Attachment insecurity

- 40% of the population have insecure attachment patterns
- Insecure avoidant (16%): I'm fine, I don't need help, relying on others is pathetic
- Insecure ambivalent (20%): I must get close to that person because I need help but I can't get too close or I'll be overwhelmed...I can't choose!
- Disorganised: a mixture of both (4%)

Insecure attachment

- NOT a psychopathology in itself
- But a risk state: associated with less good developmental outcomes
- Insecure attachment associated with a range of psycho-social difficulties
- Disorganised/unresolved distress found more commonly in clinical population. High levels of distress but poor mechanisms for managing

PD and attachment insecurity

- High levels of attachment insecurity in people with PD
- Patrick et al (1994) BPD and enmeshed attachment
- Van Ijzendoorn et al (1997) insecure attachment and mixed PD
- Excess of dismissing or preoccupied attachment in people with PD diagnosis

Impact on PF of maternal MH

- Pre-conception PD is associated with both depression and anxiety ante-natally
- Preconception perfectionism associated with postnatal MH problems
- Prenatal BPD mediates between maternal trauma and distorted maternal representations that may involve hostility to the child: mentalising issues

Implications for maternity

- Caregiving and care eliciting systems are both aspects of attachment system
- Carers learn to be carers by being cared for
- Especially at times of distress/threat and perceived vulnerability
- Attachment systems activated at times of care giving and care eliciting
- Attachment insecurity transmitted through attachment relationship

Maternal attachment status predicts infant's attachment

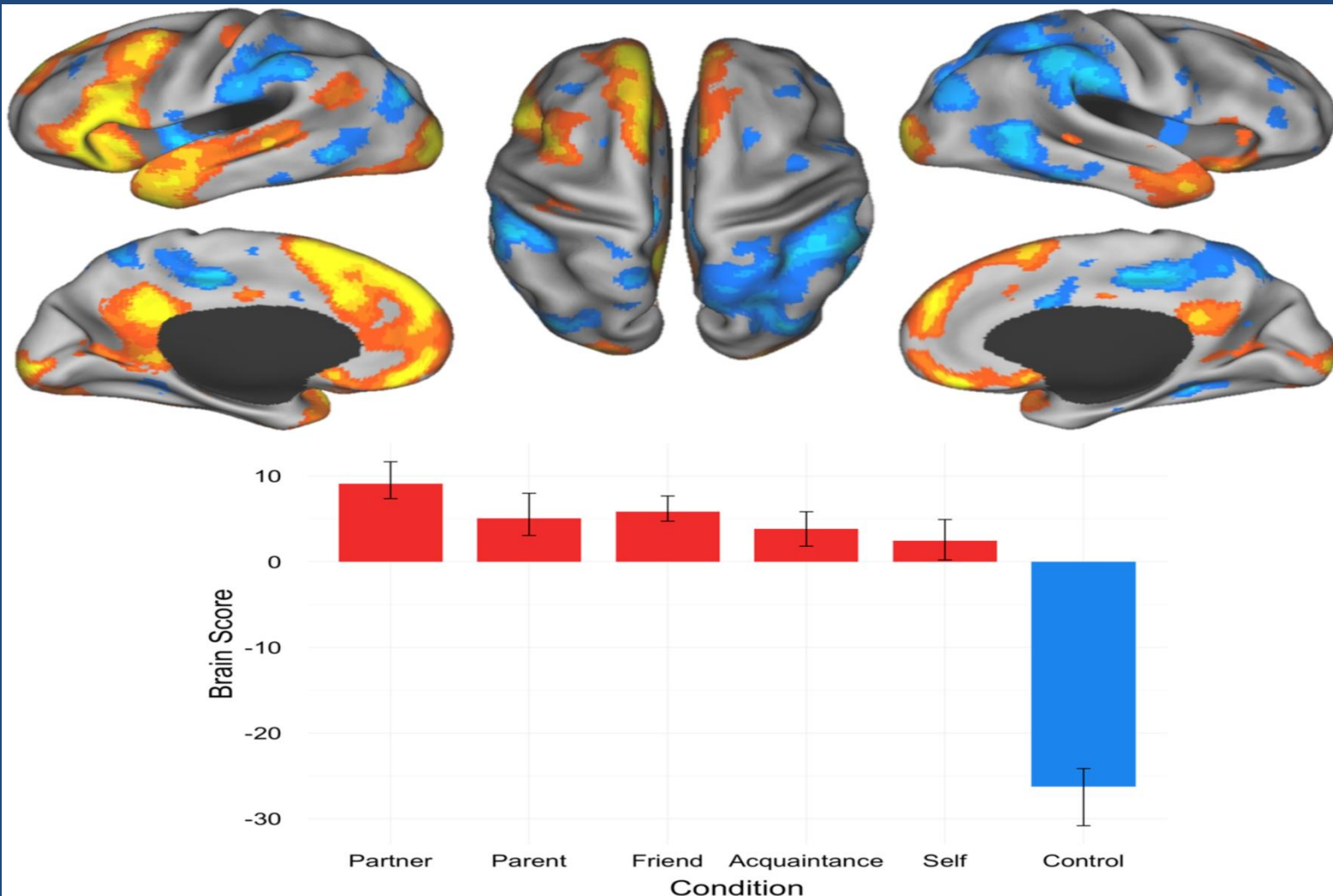
- Assess attachment in adult pregnant women; then assess attachment in their offspring 2 years later
- Maternal attachment security predicts infant attachment with 80% accuracy (Steele et al 1991)
- Maternal attachment has an influence on parenting relationship with child

Personality structure and attachment

- Sroufe et al Minnesota study: studied attachment in high risk mother-baby dyads
- Insecure attachment in childhood tended to persist into adolescence and adulthood
- Associated with later diagnosis of personality disorder
- Relevance for affect and arousal regulation; *mentalising*

Reflective function (RF)/mentalising

- RF subscale: Parental RF correlates with infant security in SS 15 mo later
- Babies had secure attachment in 100% mothers *adversity + high RF*, but only 1/17 mothers with *adversity + low RF*
- Mediating factor is maternal capacity to mentalise: to be mind-minded



From: Dissociable patterns of brain activity for mentalizing about known others: a role for attachment

Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci. 2017;12(7):1072-1082. doi:10.1093/scan/nsx040

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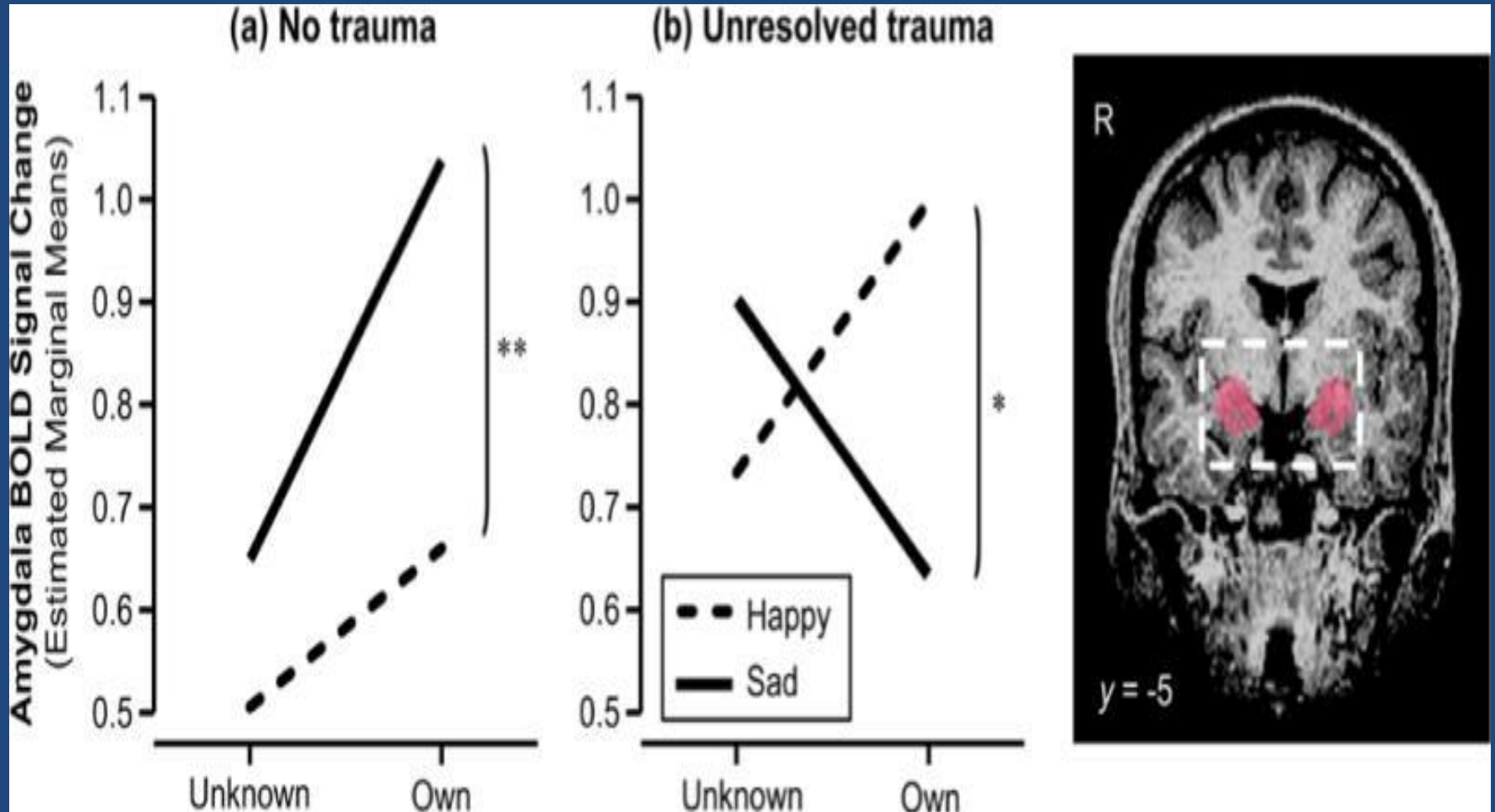
Mind-mindedness is an aspect of personality function

- Recognition and monitoring of other's distress/needs
- Appropriate regulation of arousal and distress response to others' distress
- Appropriate care-eliciting and care-giving behaviour
- Tolerating negative affects in the self
- A 'secure' care giver icon

Hostile helpless states of mind

- Lyons Ruth et al: Studies of maternal attachment in high risk mums who have experienced DV
- Their children had disorganised attachment
- Their adult attachment oscillated between hostility and helplessness
- A kind of *adult* disorganisation of mind
- Related to unresolved distress

Unresolved distress blunts maternal amygdala response



From a nursery observer

Mum seemed vacant...she did not seem to have the capacity to think about what her child might be thinking... so she didn't have the basis for *a true connection*....

Sonia's story

Sonia was 19. When she was younger, her stepfather sexually abused her; but her mother did nothing when Sonia told her and Sonia began to develop self-harming behaviours. She dropped out of school; fell pregnant unexpectedly, and had a little boy called Joel. Sonia fractured his femur when he was 18 months old. When I asked Sonia about her relationship with her mother, she said:

'There's something between us that isn't there'

Personality disorder: association with childhood adversity

- Childhood adversity significantly increases the risk of being diagnosed with a pd in adolescence and adulthood (Afifi et al 2011;)
- Most true for neglect & CPA (Taillieu et al 2016)
- Dose response effect: the worse the abuse/neglect, the worse the pd?
- Important relationship with attachment behaviours and parental sensitivity

ACEs, attachment and parenting

- Moe V, von Soest T, Fredriksen E, Olafsen KS and Smith L (2018)
The Multiple Determinants of Maternal Parenting Stress 12 Months After Birth: The Contribution of Antenatal Attachment Style, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and Infant Temperament. *Front. Psychol.* 9:1987. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01987
- Maternal ACEs predicted parenting stress
- Mediated by attachment insecurity
- Also predicted scores in perceived childhood temperament

PD affects parental sensitivity

- Ability to respond contingently with appropriate affective response
- Mums with BPD show less or disorganised response as early as 6 weeks (Hobson et al)
- PD related to maternal insecurity of attachment
- The way a mother responds to a child's distress