



Conference and Meeting:
Attachment Theory At Work

21 and 22 September, 2017

Copenhagen, Denmark

Dept. of Psychology, University of Copenhagen,

Øster Farimagsgade 2 A, DK-1353 Copenhagen.

Organizers:

Johanne Smith-Nielsen; University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Elia Psouni; Lund University, Sweden

Elin Alfredsson; University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Pehr Granqvist; Stockholm University, Sweden

Tommie Forslund; Uppsala University, Sweden

Plenary speaker:

Pasco Fearon

Pasco Fearon is Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at University College London and joint Director of UCL's of Clinical Psychology Doctoral Training Programme. He trained as a developmental psychologist prior to clinical training, and has been involved in research on the role of attachment and early parental care in child development for the last 20 years. He is particularly interested in the interface between the social environment and children's biology as they mutually interact to influence later development. He is also extensively involved in studies testing the effectiveness of parenting interventions to improve children's outcomes.

Invited speaker:

Sarah Ingrid Franksdatter Daniel

Sarah Daniel is an authorized clinical psychologist with a PhD in psychotherapy research. Her research focus is on psychotherapy implications of adult attachment and she has published several journal articles in this area as well as the book "Adult attachment patterns in a treatment context" (Routledge, 2014). Particular points of interest are the differential treatment implications of different insecure attachment patterns in clients, narrative markers of attachment in the therapeutic dialogue, and the importance of the therapist's own attachment pattern. Sarah is a reliable coder of the Adult Attachment Interview. She has worked as an associate professor at the Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen, but has recently shifted to private practice.

Program

21st September 2017

- 12:00-13:00 Arrival and Lunch
- 13:00-13:15 Welcome and Information
Elia Psouni & Johanne Smith-Nielsen
- 13:15-14:30 ***DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT – KNOWS AND DON'T KNOWS***
Chair: Elia Psouni
- 14:30-15:00 *Networking, mingling and Coffee*
- 15:00-17:00 ***CAREGIVING, MENTALIZATION, ATTACHMENT AND CHILD OUTCOMES***
Chair: Johanne Smith-Nielsen
- 17:00-17:15 *Short break*
- 17:15-18:30 Plenary talk and discussion: **Pasco Fearon**

Putting biology back into attachment theory
Chair: Elia Psouni
- 18:30-19:30 *Appetizers and Posters*



SESSION 1

Disorganized attachment: Knows and don't knows

1.1

Disorganized Attachment Representations are associated with Symptoms of ODD but not Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity-Disorder: A small step towards developmental integration

Tommie Forslund

Department of Psychology, University of Uppsala

Background: Disorganized attachment has long been emphasized as a risk-factor for externalizing behavior problems such as ODD symptoms. Recently, disorganized attachment has also been theorized as a possible environmental pathway to ADHD symptoms, but findings are conflicting, significant associations have generally been obtained one attachment instrument (George and Solomon, 2000), and few studies have simultaneously examined ODD symptoms. Answering to calls for developmental integration the present study therefore examined disorganization longitudinally in relation to both ODD and ADHD symptoms.

Method: T1; 105 children (M age = 80 mos, 50% girls) completed the Separation Anxiety Test (SAT; Kaplan, 1987) and parents rated ODD and ADHD symptoms (DMS-IV criteria). T2; (M age = 104 mos), parents ($N = 96$) and teachers ($N = 80$) rated symptoms of ODD and ADHD.

Results: Disorganized attachment representations were associated with ODD symptoms at T1 ($r = .23^*$) and T2 ($r's = .21^*$ and $.31^{**}$), but not with ADHD symptoms (all $r's > .10$). Follow-up analyses (avoidant and ambivalent collapsed) suggested a linear trend at both time points with secure children showing least ODD symptoms:

Discussion: The present findings support disorganization as a predictor of ODD symptoms while contesting theories suggesting disorganization as a pathway to ADHD symptoms.

1.2

Expanding the model: Exploring precursors and sequelae of disorganized attachment using data mining

S. Reijman¹, R.C.A. Rippe², R. Duschinsky¹, A. Tharner³, M.P.C.M. Luijk³, H. Tiemeier⁴, M.J. Bakermans-Kranenburg², M.H. van IJzendoorn²

¹ *Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge*

² *Centre for Child and Family Studies, Leiden University*

³ *Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam*

⁴ *Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Erasmus University Medical Centre*

In the current study we use a data mining approach to identify potentially new precursors and developmental outcomes of disorganized attachment. The project is embedded in a prospective, population-based cohort study on development and health in The Netherlands, Generation R. A subgroup of $n=900$ infants and their parents was selected for in-depth measurements, including ultrasounds, cortisol samples, parent-child interactions, and attachment, which were completed from pregnancy up until 9 years of children's age. Attachment was assessed at 14 months using the Strange Situation. Data for infant-mother attachment is available for over 700 dyads; around 20% of children were classified as disorganized (varying somewhat according to the examined correlate). Underlying patterns are visualized via decision trees which display a progressive division of the dataset into homogeneous subsets, based on the features that best distinguish between children with low versus high levels of disorganization. Preliminary decision trees showed that those features included child empathy and problem behaviour (both mother-reported, and therefore controlled for maternal psychopathology). Findings also suggested differential developmental risk for the two groups of children with the highest levels of disorganized attachment. The data mining approach has the potential to generate new, firmly grounded hypotheses for future research.

1.3

Consensus Statement on the Implications of Disorganized Attachment for Clinical and Social Welfare Practice

Pehr Granqvist

Dept of Psychology, Stockholm University

I present a consensus statement on the *Implications of Disorganized Attachment for Clinical and Social Welfare Practice*. This statement grew out of a filmed panel discussion ([youtube.com/watch?v=UY7hhVvKGo0&t=1372s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY7hhVvKGo0&t=1372s)) held in conjunction with an expert meeting on disorganized attachment in Berkeley earlier this year and organized by Dr. Robbie Duschinsky within his Wellcome Trust project. The panel members also re-congregated at IAC in London. The aim with the consensus statement and the associated panel discussions is threefold. First, we set out to characterize and explain the concept of disorganized attachment for practitioners, given that misinformation about the classification is widespread. Second, in the service of preventing future misuse, we identify misconceptions and misapplications of the idea of disorganized attachment, especially in the context of assessment. Third, we provide recommendations for the relevance of attachment theory and the value of evidence-based applications of attachment theory in clinical *formulation* and *supportive* family work. This is, we argue, where the real practical utility of attachment theory resides. In this presentation, I will give a précis of the consensus statement. At the time of writing this abstract, the consensus statement has some 40 co-signatories drawn from the Berkeley meeting.

SESSION 2

Caregiving, Mentalization, Attachment, and Child Outcomes

2.1

Teenagers' attachment and parent caregiving representations: links to emotion regulation and internalizing/externalizing problems

Elia Psouni & Hedda Skyllbäck

Department of Psychology, Lund University, Sweden

Background/Methods: As neither single parental caregiving qualities nor parental attachment IWMs explain sufficiently child attachment security, particularly not in adolescence, in the present study we hypothesized instead that parental caregiving IWMs are longitudinally linked to attachment IWMs and internalizing/externalizing behavioral problems associated with emotion dysregulation during transition to adolescence. Mother–pre/adolescent dyads with no psychiatric diagnoses (N=82) were tested when children were 11(T1) and 13(T2) years old. At both times, children (49 girls/33 boys) and mothers completed self-reports of symptoms and emotion regulation strategies and were interviewed for attachment scripts and attachment IWMs and caregiving IWMs, respectively.

Results/Conclusions: Quality in child attachment and parental caregiving IWMs converged. Indices of child attachment security were linked to levels of internalizing/externalizing behaviors. Mothers' reports of children's internalizing/externalizing symptoms were strongly predicted by maternal anger toward the father and feelings of guilt. Children's internalizing/externalizing symptom-reports were predicted by attachment security and idealization of father (FFI), extending to pre/adolescence recent evidence of the specific importance of the relationship to father in middle childhood. Our findings highlight the importance of examining parental caregiving representations along with attachment, in order to understand how mutual influences between mothers, fathers and their adolescent children impact on emotion regulation/dysregulation in adolescence.

2.2

Maternal mental state language during play mediates between maternal mentalization and child's capacity for solitary symbolic play

Camilla Overbye, Johanne Smith-Nielsen, Simo Køppe, Mette Skovgaard Væver

Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

Background. A child's capacity for symbolic play is an important developmental milestone and an indicator of a child's mental well-being. Though theory assumes it develops within the context of a secure caregiver-child attachment relationship and the caregiver's capacity for mentalization the association between parental mentalizing skills and child's capacity for solitary symbolic play has never been empirically tested.

Objectives. We examine the link between parental mentalization (measured both in an offline and on-line context) and their four-year old children's capacity for solitary symbolic play.

Methods. 104 4-year old children and their mothers were recruited via Facebook parenting groups. Mother's off-line mentalization was measured using the PRFQ-1. We assessed mother's online mentalization by coding her use of mental state language during a play session with her child. Child solitary symbolic play was assessed with the symbolic play scale during another play session where the mother was present but not participating in the play.

Results. Mother's off-line mentalization significantly predicts child solitary play level and this association is mediated by maternal capacity for online mentalization.

Conclusions. The results suggest that mother's capacity for mentalization not only has an online effect when she is playing with the child but also a spill-over effect on her child's capacity for symbolic solitary play.

2.3

Maternal Sensitive and Overriding Behavior: Associations with Reflective Functioning in Postpartum Depression

Katharina Cordes¹, MSc., Anne Tharner², PhD, Johanne Smith-Nielsen¹, PhD, & Mette Skovgaard Væver¹, PhD

¹*Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark*

²*Department of Psychology, Education, and Child Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Holland*

High mentalizing or Reflective Functioning (RF), i.e. the ability to reflect upon ones' own and others behavior in terms of underlying mental states, has been linked to more positive and less negative caregiving behavior in the mother-infant interaction. However, a few studies did not find these associations and it has been proposed that the association between RF and caregiving behavior might differ in clinical and nonclinical populations. Thus, in the present study we investigated associations between RF and positive (i.e. sensitive) and negative (i.e. overriding) caregiving behavior in mothers with and without postpartum depression, an episode of depression following childbirth. RF was measured on the Adult Attachment Interview. Caregiving behavior was measured using the Coding Interactive Behavior Measure in a face-to-face interaction with the child at four months postpartum. Results of hierarchical regression analyses showed that in the clinical group (n = 26), higher RF was associated with higher sensitivity. In the nonclinical group (n = 48), moderate RF was associated with higher sensitivity than both low and high RF. We did not find an association between RF and overriding behavior in clinical and nonclinical mothers. The significance of RF in regard to caregiving behavior in clinical groups and nonclinical groups is discussed.

2.4

Parental Embodied Mentalizing in mothers with and without postpartum depression

Sofie Garset-Larsen¹, Katharina Cordes¹, Dana Shai², Mette Væver, Rose Spence³, & Simo Køppe¹

¹*BabyLab, Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.*

²*Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Herzliya, Israel.*

³*School of Psychology, University of East London, England*

Background. Parental Embodied Mentalizing (PEM) is the parents' ability to understand the infant's kinaesthetically manifested mental states and adjust his/her own kinaesthetic accordingly. PEM focuses on moment-to-moment whole-body expressions in parent-child interactions. It has been suggested that depression can have a major influence on the individual's embodied sense of self. Thus, when a mother experiences a depressive episode after birth (Postpartum depression, PPD) this might affect the way she behaves on an embodied level in regard to her child. As the mother-infant interaction is mainly characterized by nonverbal communication, maternal PPD might disturb the (nonverbal) communicative exchanges between a mother and her child. However, little is known on how mothers with and without PPD mentalize the infant on an embodied level.

Objectives. The aim of the present study was to investigate whether mothers with and without depression in the postpartum period differ in regard to their PEM abilities, using a newly validated measurement instrument.

Methods. We used the PEM Measure to compare 30 mother-infant dyads with mothers meeting criteria for PPD and 60 non-clinical dyads. PEM was coded on ten-minute long face-to-face interactions at four-months postpartum.

Results. The data is currently analysed and the results are still being formulated.

SESSION 3

Attachment-based Intervention

3.1

Proximity via Smartphone? Effects of repeated Smartphone Security Priming on Mood, Attachment Security, Perception of Stress and Social Support in Daily Life

Manuela Oehler & Elia Psouni

Lund University, Sweden

Background: Secure attachment representations are considered a fundamental resource for a happy and healthy life. According to meta-analytical data, every third adult does not have secure attachment representations. Lacking secure attachment representations is associated with numerous health-related problems, perhaps mediated by increased susceptibility to stress and impaired emotion regulation. Even though cognitive representations of attachment tend to favour confirmation over information in order to ensure predictability in life, research has shown that early attachment experiences are non-deterministic and can be positively influenced.

Methods: By inducing a feeling of attachment security through visualisation tasks, the present study tested security priming on several attachment-related variables in daily life. In a randomised control trial, adults ($N=78$) were primed via smartphone on seven consecutive days. Effects on attachment security, the perception of stress and social support, resilience and self-compassion were assessed in a mixed between/within-subject design.

Results/Conclusion: Higher values of self-compassion and resilience, up to seven days after the last prime, illustrated positive influence of the priming. The effectiveness of the attachment security induction was higher for participants in steady relationships and for those who reported less effort associated with accomplishing the visualisation tasks. The need for further research in order to develop differentiated interventions is outlined.

3.2

Circle of Security for parents of children with psychiatric symptoms: a randomized and controlled trial

Aida Bikic^{1,2}, Søren Dalsgaard³, James Leckman⁴, James Swain⁵ & Peter Fonagy⁶

¹*Institute of Regional Health Research, University of Southern Denmark, Odense*

²*Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services, Kresten Phillipsens Vej 15, 6200 Aabenraa*

³*National Centre for Register-based Research, Department of Economics and Business, Aarhus University*

⁴*Child Study Center, Yale School of Medicine, 230 S Frontage Road, 06511 New Haven, Yale University*

⁵*Stony Brook College, New York, USA*

⁶*University College London, UK*

Background: The quality of attachment is greatly influenced by parental sensitivity. So far no randomized controlled trials have been conducted investigating the effect of the parent training Circle of Security (COS) on children's psychiatric symptoms and functional outcome.

Objectives: Our primary objective is to investigate whether COS has an effect on parental sensitivity after 10 weeks of intervention and at a 24 weeks follow up. The secondary objectives consider children's behavioral and emotional symptoms. Explorative outcome measures include parental reflective functioning, parental attachment style, parental stress and well-being index for parents and children's functional outcome.

Methods: We expect to randomize 136 families of children, aged 4-6 years, who are referred to child psychiatric services to COS+ Treatment as Usual (TAU) or TAU only. The parents will participate in ten weekly 2-hour group sessions.

Perspectives: This will be the first randomized and controlled trial of COS in a child psychiatric sample in Denmark. Generally there is a lack of interventions aiming to improve parental sensitivity and attachment security in psychiatric child populations. Working with the parents to become more responsive to their children, might have an important impact on the children's current psychiatric symptoms and could additionally prevent future psychopathologies.

3.3

Copenhagen Infant Mental Health Project (CIMHP): Effects of Infant Mental Health Screening and Indicated Prevention Approaches- Preliminary Results from a Randomized Control Study of Circle of Security-Parenting

Mette Skovgaard Væver¹ Johanne Smith-Nielsen¹ & Theis Lange²

¹*Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen*

²*Department of Biostatistics, University of Copenhagen*

Background. One in five Danish families is at risk of inadequate parenting resources and child neglect. Despite a solid body of evidence on the importance of infant mental health, insufficient knowledge exists on best practice in screening for and preventing adverse infant mental health risks and no systematic approaches are currently implemented in Denmark.

Objectives. Testing the feasibility of an infant mental health screening and indicated prevention system and its capacity to (1) detect children at risk of longer term mental health adversities and (2) alter these risks in a cost effective way in a general population.

Methods. 18.000 mothers and infants in Copenhagen are screened: 1) Alarm Distress Baby Scale (ADBB) and 2) Edinburg Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS). 314 eligible parents enter into a RCT to test the efficacy of an attachment based intervention, Circle of Security–Parenting (COS-P), compared to Care As Usual (CAU) in preventing mental health adversities and enhancing parental sensitivity and attachment security.

Results. Outcomes are measured at follow-up and include parental sensitivity and reflective functioning, and child attachment. The COS-P RCT design, a model of mechanisms of change in COS-P, status and preliminary results from the study will be presented and discussed.

3.4

Does a universal parenting intervention improve the parent-infant relationship? – A randomized controlled pilot trial of the Incredible Years Parents and Babies program in Denmark

Maiken Pontoppidan

The Danish National Center for Social Research

There is a growing interest in early universal intervention for parents of newborn infants. The aim of this pilot trial was to evaluate the effects of the Incredible Years Parents and Babies program (IYPB) on child and parent well-being on a universal sample of parents.

IYPB is a group-based programme for parents with infants 0-1 year old. The goals are to strengthen parenting competencies, parenting confidence, and parent-infant attachment. In the eight-week programme, six to eight parents attend with their babies and participate in hands-on role plays and exercises with their own babies. Usual Care consists of five home visits by a health visitor.

Parent and child outcomes were assessed by interviewers at home visits at baseline (T1), post intervention (T2), and when the child was 18 months old (T3). Health visitors in two municipalities recruited 112 families (IYBP:75; Usual Care:37). For all parent report outcomes we find no difference between the two groups at T2 and T3. At T2 we find that intervention mothers with the lowest scores at baseline may experience negative effects. We will present the preliminary results of the parent-infant relationship measured with a 15 minute video and coded with the Coding Interactive Behavior system.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Consequences of adversity

1.

The impact of childhood adversity on parenting stress in new mothers: The mediating role of current depressive symptoms.

Eva Back Madsen, Johanne Smith-Nielsen, Mette Væver

Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

Aims. Increased maternal stress has been associated with negative child outcomes. Childhood adversity (ACEs) have been shown to predict maternal stress. This study was part of Copenhagen Infant Mental Health Project and examined the association between mothers' ACEs and maternal stress, and the mediating role of maternal depressive symptoms.

Methods. Our sample was recruited by public health visitors and comprised 185 new mothers (clinically depressed, $n = 64$; non-depressed, $n = 121$). During a home visit, maternal stress, ACEs, and depressive symptoms were assessed using self-reported measures: Parenting Stress Index, Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire, and Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. Maternal depression status was assessed with the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 (SCID-V).

Results. More ACEs was associated with more current maternal stress and depressive symptoms. Mothers reporting more depressive symptoms also reported more maternal stress. Mothers' depressive symptoms mediated between ACEs and maternal stress.

Conclusions. Maternal depressive symptoms may be an important pathway through which ACEs can be linked to increased current maternal stress. This study stresses the impact of early childhood experiences with caregivers on later parenting functioning. The need for intervention directed at mothers' ACEs to prevent intergenerational transmission of childhood adversity is discussed in an attachment perspective.

2.

Influences of Maternal Perinatal Depression on New Fathers' parenting stress: Does fathers' own adverse childhood experiences play a role?

Tina Wahl Haase, Johanne Smith-Nielsen and Mette Skovgaard Væver

Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen.

Background. Parenting stress has been found to have negative effects on a range of outcomes e.g. parental sensitivity, parenting difficulties and infant attachment. Studies investigating parenting stress in mothers are well represented and research shows that current parenting stress in mothers may be associated with adverse childhood experiences. However only few studies have focused on factors associated with parenting stress in fathers.

Objective. In a sample 130 fathers enrolled in Copenhagen Infant Mental Health Project we examined the influence of current maternal clinical depression on fathers' parenting stress (fathers with depressed partners, $n = 51$; fathers with non-depressed partners, $n = 79$). Moreover, we investigated whether the extent to which fathers had experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) played a role in this association.

Methods. Participants completed the Parenting Stress Index, 3rded. and the ACE-questionnaire. Partners' depression was assessed with the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5.

Results. Fathers with depressed partners reported significantly more parenting stress on the parent-domain. ACEs predicted parenting stress only in fathers with a non-depressed partner.

Discussion. These findings highlight the need for studies incorporating fathers to better understand the complexity of family dynamics in the context of maternal perinatal depression and consequences for infant attachment.

3.

Fathers' Parenting Expectations and Experiences and Their Longitudinal Links to Postnatal Depressive Symptomatology

Marlis Wullenkord & Elia Psouni

Department of Psychology, Lund University, Sweden

Background: Despite increasing focus on their role as parent, fathers have been ignored in research concerning the transition to parenthood. This study explored longitudinal paths between fathers' attachment related anxiety and avoidance, marital satisfaction and parenting expectations prenatally, and actual parenting experiences, parenting stress, and burdening depressive symptoms postnatally.

Methods: Fathers (N=182) completed a self-report survey twice, during the third trimester of pregnancy (T1) and 3 months after the birth of the child (T2). Most participants were 30-39 years old, married and employed. At T1, attachment related avoidance and anxiety, parenting expectations and parenting representations were assessed. Assessment at T2 included actual parenting experiences, self-image as father, parental stress and burdening depressive symptoms. Marital satisfaction was assessed both at T1 and T2.

Results: Marital satisfaction and anticipated parenting satisfaction were associated with one another prenatally and postnatally, particularly in first-time fathers. Fathers' anticipated parenting satisfaction was higher than their experienced satisfaction, and relationship quality declined after the birth of the child, but only when fathers were expecting their first child. Attachment avoidance predicted less positive expectations, and negatively violated expectations were linked to depressive symptoms postnatally.

Conclusion: Despite difficulties in determining the causal direction in these relationships, results highlight the importance of specific psychological features of the transition to parenthood for first-time fathers' wellbeing.

4.

Difficult socioeconomic situations and attachment representations: A study about of Greek young adults and resilience to unemployment

Lydia Xourafi & Elia Psouni

Department of Psychology, Lund University, Sweden

Background/Methods: Unemployment, underemployment and stressful working conditions in today's Greece comprise common phenomena whose consequences are evident in both the socioeconomic and individual psychological sphere. Considering evidence that psychological resilience to such social conditions is important for the psychological health of each, this investigation comprises a mixed-methods project focused on the psychological impact of unemployment and underemployment on individual wellbeing, and on the role of individual attachment representations for resilience. In Study 1, 120 unemployed young adults in Greece completed an online survey assessing self-reported depressive symptoms, history of and features of the present unemployment, and other demographic data.

Results/Conclusions: Over 60% of participants reported symptoms suggesting major depression, while the level of severity (mild to severe) was related to the duration of unemployment. In Study 2, unemployed young adults (N=7) were interviewed with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and with a semi-structured interview focusing on the experience of unemployment. Besides attachment representation classifications and coherence based on the AAI, narrative thematic analysis was conducted based on the interview concerning unemployment. Results suggest an association between attachment representation quality, coherence of narrative, and resilience, contributing to a better understanding of the experience of unemployment and attachment related themes of resilience.

5.

Anxiety towards anticipated emotional interactions with the clients in clinical psychology trainees.

Isabelle Letellier, Emma Neal, Stephan Hau

Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Sweden

Preparing clinical psychology trainees to be able to manage the relationship with the client is an important goal of psychotherapeutic training. However, this goal may be particularly difficult to achieve as the skills to manage the emotional interactions with the client are likely to depend on stable personal features that root in the trainee's early relationships. Indeed multiple findings have confirmed that the attachment style developed in relation to early caregiver(s) impacts one's skills to respond to other's emotions as well as to manage one's own emotions. Therefore attachment-related representations such as self-representations and representation of other might impact trainees' anticipation of difficulties in the psychotherapeutic relationship.

The present study analyzes semi-structured interviews conducted with Swedish clinical psychology trainees (N=20) before they start their clinical training in the end of their education. The interviews were inquiring about the trainee's representations of emotions in their life and in the therapeutic context. The framework analysis conducted with Nvivo reveals that the lower the self-representation and the lower the representation of other, the more expressions of anxiety about engaging in psychotherapeutic relationships have been coded. Trainees' scores in the ECR-R are consistent with the notion that insecure attachment correspond to higher levels of anxiety and more anticipated difficulties in the psychotherapeutic relationship. The present results provide interesting knowledge to guide supervision work with trainees.

PARTICIPANTS	E-mail
Elin Alfredsson	Elin.Alfredsson@psy.gu.se
Tommie Forslund	tommie.forslund@psyk.uu.se
Elia Psouni	Elia.psouni@psy.lu.se
Johanne Smith-Nielsen	johanne.smith-nielsen@psy.ku.dk
Katharina Cordes	katharina.cordes@psy.ku.dk
Ingegerd Wirtberg	ingegerd.wirtberg@mariestad.mail.telia.com
Anna Blomkvist	anna.blomkvist@psychology.su.se
Sandra Reinholdt Gufler	sandra.gufler@psy.ku.dk
Maiken Pontoppidan	mpe@sfi.dk
Eva Back Madsen	ebm@psy.ku.dk
Eva Vejlø Bender	evb@psy.ku.dk
Dorte Birk	dbj@psy.ku.dk
Karen Svendrup	ksh@psy.ku.dk
Mette Skovgaard Væver	mette.vaever@psy.ku.dk
Britta Danø	brittadanoe@gmail.com
Godette Walmod	godette@mail.dk
Birgit Moselund	familien@wiedemoselund.dk
Marlis Wullenkord	sam14mwu@student.lu.se
Kenn Scheibel	kesc01@frederiksberg.dk
Mette Dalgaard	meda02@frederiksberg.dk
Anja Christensen	anch04@frederiksberg.dk
Emilie Nayberg	emilie.nayberg@psy.ku.dk
Sophie Reijman	s.reijman@fsw.leidenuniv.nl
Camilla Overbye	camilla.overbye@psy.ku.dk
Nina Marie Lassen	nina.marie.lassen@psy.ku.dk
Ida Egmos Pedersen	ida.pedersen@psy.ku.dk
Jeanne West	jw@psy.ku.dk
Pasco Fearon	p.fearon@ucl.ac.uk
Sarah Ingrid Franksdatter Daniel	psykolog@sarahdaniel.dk
Annette Bugge Dias	abd@moedrehjaelpen.dk
Rie von Wowern	rvonwowern@gmail.com
Sophie Yung Madsen	sophie.yung.madsen@regionh.dk

PARTICIPANTS (cont.)	E-mail
Ida Marie Ankerfeldt	ima@psy.ku.dk
Katrine Havelund	khp@psy.ku.dk katrinehavelund@gmail.com
Maiken Hørning Mortensen	Maiken.hoerning.mortensen@regionh.dk
Eva Tedgård	evatedgard@hotmail.com
Aida Bikic	aida.bikic@rsyd.dk
Lene Munch	lmq@HVIDOVRE.DK
Mia Taul Knudsen	mct@hvidovre.dk
Sofie Garset-Larsen	sofie.garsetlarsen@gmail.com
Signe Kærsgaard Mortensen	ksx181@alumni.ku.dk
Christine Kähler Høegsberg	ckh@psy.ku.dk
Manuela Oehler	manuoe@googlemail.com
Lydia Xourafi	lydia.xourafi.253@student.lu.se

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