

Attachment Theory and Transactional Analysis

Part Two - Developing Security by Robin Hobbes

Note: The people described in this article don't exist. They are creations by the writer to further his argument and are composite constructions to that effect. This paper may be freely distributed provided the author is acknowledged.

This is the second article of a two part series on Attachment Theory and Transactional Analysis. In the first article I showed how the theory of Attachment and the subsequent research supports Transactional Analysis theory. I identified four patterns of attachment or security seeking behaviours which correspond to Life Positions. In this second article I will focus on the topic of developing security. Firstly I will make some general comments on how we develop security. Then I will show how the different patterns of attachment can be assessed. Next I will describe the ego state structure of the three insecure groups. Finally I will outline ways to approach the three patterns of insecure attachment in order to promote a growing sense of security.

How We Develop Security

Security and its experience is our essence. Security lies at the core of us and is found through being. As security is at the core of us, the bedrock of ourselves, it will make its presence known as that which is not secure dissolves. Whenever we move away from security and notice fear we understand this to be a cue for us to *realise* security. Realising that we can make ourselves secure we take whatever action .. like reaching out to someone .. to re-establish security. Security is an inner experience that is influenced by events and people outside but is not to be found on the outside of us. It has been described as “to be found in the cave of the heart”(Swartz) Security comes from the core of us and expands outwards from our centre with warmth, balance and ease.

Security is found in the present. Maintaining a sense of physical awareness or groundedness (Ken Mellor) allows security to reveal itself. Being aware of the external world through the senses and cultivating an inner physical awareness allows whatever is there to be fully experienced. This may be an intense experience. It will always result in a rapid dissolving of thoughts and feelings and an emerging deeper and deeper sense of inner security.

Security is only to be found in the body so taking care of the body .. eating a balanced diet .. exercising regularly .. practising relaxation.. tends the garden of security.

Thinking security develops security .. what we focus on we become (Ken Mellor). When we affirm “I am perfectly secure” we fan the flames of our inner security which expands and grows within us.

Attachment Theory and Life Positions

Attachment Theory is a theory about security and about how we attempt to maintain a sense of security. Using the framework I introduced in Transactional Analysis and Attachment Theory - Understanding Security we have the following diagram:

You are OK

	You are OK I am not OK Attachment Pattern Insecure - Ambivalent	You are OK I am OK Attachment Pattern Secure	
I am not OK	You are not OK I am not OK Attachment Pattern Insecure - Disorganised	You are not OK I am OK Attachment Pattern Insecure Avoidant	I am OK

You are not OK

From this diagram four patterns of security seeking behaviour emerge that correspond exactly with the Life Positions as outlined by Berne.

Assessing The Four Patterns of Attachment

These patterns are the four ways people use to develop a sense of security. We utilise all four patterns at times but most of us seem to have a favourite attachment pattern or life position that we return to in times of stress. If the attachment pattern is one of the insecure types then security is likely to be a key issue in this person’s life as that pattern is maladaptive in terms of achieving a sense of security.

There are two ways to assess the patterns. One is to ask your client how they make themselves secure in day to day life. Secondly you can observe the transference relationship and notice the various ways security can become an issue in the transference relationship.

1) A simple question to ask is “How do you make yourself secure?”

People who have developed a secure pattern will describe how they seek out contact with others, experience that contact as comforting, and then react purposefully to the stressful situation in order to increase their sense of security. Those utilising an ambivalent pattern tend to say “How can I .. no one was really ‘there’ so I couldn’t” and will describe themselves as being with people or in situations where the other is perceived as a potential but failing source of security. Avoidant people will look puzzled by the question maintaining that they don’t feel vulnerable and that they just ‘get on with it’. Ordinarily they do not recognise experiences of vulnerability. The disorganised group will not answer the question. They have the greatest difficulty making themselves secure. They don’t know how to answer the question because when they are in stressful situations they become highly dysfunctional. They feel themselves either “overwhelmed” with feeling or they start to act out feelings in an attempt to get some relief. This can result in self-harming actions etc.

2) Noticing the Transference Relationship

When the need for security arises within the therapeutic relationship then the response to this need will be influenced by the pattern of attachment the client uses. You will start to experience a transference re-enactment in your client of their primary pattern of attachment. They will assume that you will relate to them in a way which will compliment their attachment pattern. The secure group will expect you to be aware of their need for security and to be able to help them realise it.

They will congruently express the experience of insecurity and seek out the experience of security *with* you. Mark says he feels scared, looks frightened and then makes moves to establish reassurance. He settles himself and goes back to whatever he was exploring in the session. The insecure-disorganised group will expect you to be unpredictable and unreliable to their security needs. They will start to respond in a disorganised way when security emerges within the therapeutic relationship. Often this is triggered early on in therapy. Alice starts to feel frightened of me, wondering if I will physically assault her if she doesn't agree with me. She starts to shake her head vigorously banging it against the back of the sofa, screwing up her eyes.. she quickly stops.. then in a dazed, vacant sort of way says she is sorry.

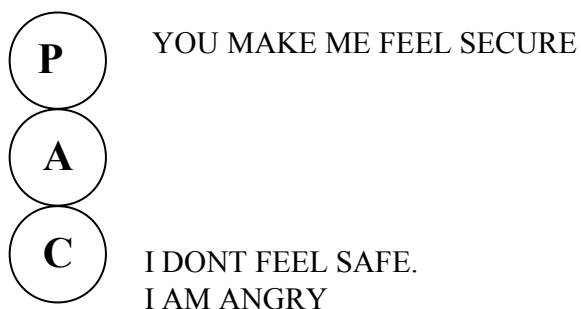
The insecure-ambivalent group will expect you to be aware of the cues they are expressing in their need for security but experience you as unavailable to their expression of that insecurity. They experience you as a potential source of security but find the experience of security *with* you to be either illusive or temporary. John looks anxious and has a 'childlike' pleading tone to his voice as he asks for reassurance .. relaxing as he senses reassurance he quickly becomes anxious again, seeking reassurance again.

The insecure - avoidant group will look unaffected by events that impede on a sense of security. They are unlikely to realise they are experiencing vulnerability but often will be giving off subtle cues that they are frightened. I ask Elaine " What are you feeling?" .. she looks tense. This frightens her. She responds in a critical way wondering why I had asked such an 'odd' question.

Ego State Structures of Insecure Groups

Insecure - Ambivalent

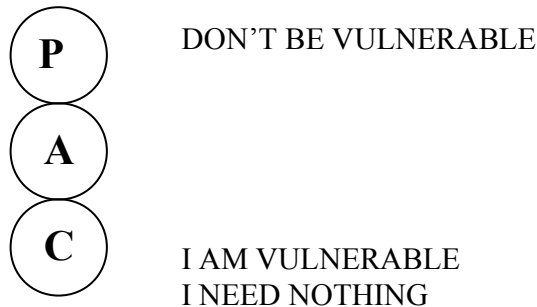
Characteristic parenting has involved an overprotective primary caretaker whose prime motivation is to realise their own security through the presence of the child. This is introjected into the Parent ego state as unresponsiveness to the cues for security seeking behaviour in others and a Parental expectation that others provide security. The young child adapted this style of parenting by angrily clinging to the parent. The Child ego state contains a dual fixation to this parenting style. Firstly an open expression of insecurity and secondly an angry response to 'parent figures' who may try to respond to this expression of insecurity.



Insecure Avoidant

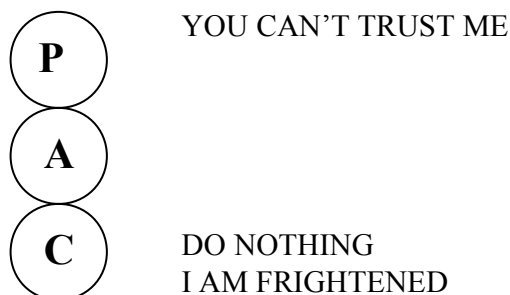
Characteristic parenting has involved a distant primary caretaker who made themselves unresponsive to any signs of vulnerability in the child. Indeed it is highly likely that the primary caretaker found the expression of vulnerability in the child as quite unsettling. This is introjected into the Parent ego state as unavailability to and discounting of security seeking behaviour. The young

child adapted to this style of parenting by experiencing vulnerability but deciding to give no expression of it. The Child ego state contains this psychic conflict between the experience of vulnerability and the decision to try and need nothing. Often this conflict is resolved through identification with the Parent ego state which excludes awareness of this specific conflict.



Insecure Disorganised

Characteristic parenting from the primary caretaker has been marked inconsistency towards the expression of insecurity in the child. This style of parenting has been consistently inconsistent so at one point the parent may have been highly responsive to distress in the child and the next minute scornful and shaming of the same cues for security. This is introjected into the Parent ego state as an intense inconsistency in relation to security seeking behaviour that can rapidly veer between 'caring' and 'shaming' responses. The young child adapted to this by attempting to acquire security through 'doing nothing, over adapting, agitating, violence and incapacitation' (Schiff). The Child ego state contains both intense experiences of fear and the range of passive behavioural responses to that fear.



Treatment Approaches

Firstly I will say some general things about treatment. I will then give some guidelines on how to respond to each of the three maladaptive groups. In my view a style of psychotherapy in which the transference relationship is highlighted is essential. This means that the therapist needs to act in a flexible, predictable and responsive way towards the security needs expressed (however subtly) by his or her client. As the therapist responds to the client's expressed security needs, this encourages the establishment of new ways for the client to develop and maintain security. At the same time the client will transfer on to the therapist his own Parent ego state and expect a similar response to his security needs as he experienced when younger. Another possibility is for the client to project his insecure Child ego state onto the therapist and relate towards the therapist from his introjected Parent. Once this transference relationship is established, the therapist then engages in Transactional Analysis, Game Analysis and Script Analysis. Using this Analysis and the experience of responsiveness to security needs from the therapist, the client identifies Parental introjects and Child adaptations that have been maladaptive in realising security. As the client develops this awareness the therapist needs to facilitate a working through of this material on an affective level. This will often trigger a grief response involving many feelings such as sadness, numbness, anger,

guilt and self-reproach, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning and fulfilment. (Worden 1983 p.22) Everyone's grief is expressed in a way that is unique to that person and is an expression of their own life. The therapist needs to maintain a level of responsiveness that encourages full affective release. As this material is worked through the client will naturally alter his security seeking behaviours, and will experience that security is realisable and can be found inside himself in the company of others.

I will now turn my attention to the three insecure groups and illustrate some psychotherapeutic approaches pertinent to each group.

Insecure - Ambivalent

This group will be over-attentive to the outside in relation to security and so will be highly sensitive to the responsiveness in the therapist to their (the client's) need for security. John, who demonstrated an insecure - ambivalent pattern, would often discount my responsiveness to his security needs. I adopted an approach of responsiveness towards his cues for security. He would often feel angry with himself and me as he perceived me as being unresponsive to his distress and say that he felt I wasn't really 'there' with him. I also noticed an intense, passively expressed, angry reaction to me whenever I failed to respond to his cues for security. I would explore this with him enquiring about these experiences of either me being unresponsive to him or him not noticing my responsiveness. Often he would talk of a Parental ego state that was over protective and a corresponding Child ego state adaptation of trying to make others feel secure in the hope that he himself would eventually experience security. As he gave expression to these experiences he would increase Adult ego state functioning integrating past experiences into the present - the place where he was able to notice security. His growing ability to make himself secure was achieved through maintaining an awareness of others, but not a *reliance* on others. His therapy was a process of realising that I wasn't creating his security, he was.

Insecure - Avoidant

This group will not be attentive to the outside in relation to security and will experience the need for security as something not to be owned or expressed. Elaine, who has an insecure - avoidant pattern, would deny her security needs. She wanted to take a task centred orientation to psychotherapy and expressed criticism of attempts by me to explore relational experiences. I would ask her what she needed when noticing her cues of insecurity. Often her initial response would primarily contain Parental ego state material.. she would scornfully say "nothing". As I drew her attention to the look in her eyes, the gesture she made.. shared that I wondered if she was actually scared .. she cautiously started to express the fear with an intense watchfulness. Underlying this superficially critical response was a deep hunger for a relational experience that is based on the acceptance and recognition of security. This can quickly be opened up with a cautious but consistent approach that provides a non-intrusive recognition.

Insecure - Disorganised

This group are highly vulnerable and easily experience the need for security but have no internal model to act in a way that will produce the experience of security. They have a tendency to act out feelings of fear in an attempt to realise security. One of the psychotherapeutic challenges is that the more reliable the therapist becomes there is an increasing possibility of the client making disorganised responses to their security needs. In the transference relationship the client will experience you as both inviting the experience of insecurity and then unpredictably failing to "create" security. They are then likely to act out from a place of intense feeling. This means that one of the primary therapeutic tasks is for the therapist to provide a structure in which the client can start to take a purposeful security oriented approach to their security needs. Therapist's will need to ensure that escape hatches are closed. (Hollaway) and encourage attachment behaviours like

reaching out to other people, being held and developing the capacity to feel relaxed while being held by others. This helps the building of an internal model of security seeking behaviours.

As Alice committed herself to life through closing her escape hatches she started to see me and relate to me as a predictable and secure person. We both noticed her intense pull towards security, which was often expressed with intense affect. Cautiously she started to request that I hold her. I would respond by holding her in a structured way. The previously held disorganisation around the need for security started to dissolve. She progressively developed organisation around her security needs. Fear, which was previously experienced as disorganising, was now understood as a need for security. She started to involve others in the realisation of that security by reaching out to them.

Conclusion

Developing security is a task for the life cycle. It is a continuing, evolving experience. Psychotherapy can facilitate a push towards the realisation of security. When Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was asked what practices to adopt to realise security he said: "If they ask you what to do, what practices to adopt, which way of life to follow, answer: 'Do nothing, just *be*. In being all happens naturally.'" (Nisargadatta P.227)

Acknowledgements: My thanks to George Kohlreisser PhD TSTA for reawakening my interest in Attachment Theory, Sylvia Rose and Judi Hobbes for editing.

References:

Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy - J. William Worden 1983

Attachment and Loss - 3 Vols. - J Bowlby

The Role of Infant-Caregiver Attachment in Development - A Stroufe, in Clinical Implications of Attachment Ed J Belsky and T Nezworski

Security in Infancy, Childhood, and adulthood: A Move to the Level of Representation - M Main, N Kaplan and J Cassidy in Growing Points of Attachment Theory and Research Ed I Bretherton E Waters

Metacognitive Knowledge, Metacognitive Monitoring, and Singular (coherent) vs. Multiple (incoherent) Model of Attachment: findings and directions for future research - M Main

Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation - M. Ainsworth , M Blehar, E Waters and S Wall

What Do You Say After You Say Hello - E Berne

I Am That - Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Atma Bodha by Adi Shankar, Commentary by James Swartz 1991

Passivity: Schiff A.W. & Schiff J, Transactional Analysis Journal Volume 1:1

The OK Corral: The grid to Get-On-With - Ernst. F. - Transactional Analysis Journal Vol. 1:4

Creative Release Meditation - Mellor K

Shut the Escape Hatch - Holloway 1973

The Author : Robin Hobbes, BA, CQSW, CTA, TSTA is co-director of elan training and development a psychotherapy and counselling training centre. He is the former chairperson of the British Institute of Transactional Analysis and spends most of his professional life training psychotherapists and counsellors.