



# Adult Attachment:

## Theoretical Foundations of Research and Practice

A Conference Organized by

The Center for Mental Health Promotion  
The Long Island Attachment Consortium  
SUNY Stony Brook  
Adelphi University

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Dear Dr.

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's attachment theory is a valuable legacy of theoretical, observational, and clinical insights about secure base relationships across the life span. Careful analysis and elaboration of attachment theory and its links to research are essential to preserving and extending this legacy. In 1987, Mary Ainsworth, Alan Sroufe, the Stony Brook Attachment Research Lab, and others met for three days at a conference center in Port Jefferson, N.Y. to discuss the state of the art in attachment theory and frankly discuss problems and opportunities. This proved a very productive exercise. All the participants felt it should be a model for future explorations.

In this spirit, we would like to invite you to participate in a similar conference/workshop organized by the Long Island Attachment Research Consortium. The meetings, sponsored by Center for Mental Health Promotion, SUNY Stony Brook, and Adelphi University will held June 29-July 1 at *Danford's on the Sound* in Port Jefferson, N.Y., the site of the 1987 meetings.

The goals of the project are to (1) examine the logic of Bowlby-Ainsworth attachment theory as it applies to adult relationships, (2) identify areas in which the theory needs to be clarified or extended, and (3) clarify how specific postulates of the theory can be empirically tested. We also want to discuss the concept of an "attachment based therapy" and identify opportunities and obstacles in current theory.

We will reimburse round trip tourist fare to NY and ground transportation to Port Jefferson. We have prepaid lodging at Danfords (check-in June 28: check-out July 1<sup>st</sup> and includes continental breakfast and lunch). Participants will be responsible for dinners and incidental costs. A description of the Danford's site and directions from Kennedy and Laganardia airports are available at [www.danfords.com](http://www.danfords.com). The ride from either airport is about one hour. If you can fly a regional airline such as Southwest, you may find it economical and convenient to fly to MacArthur Airport in Islip, Long Island. We can easily pick you up from there.

### Agenda and Format

The conference agenda will be developed from questions submitted by the participants. These may be questions you would like to address to colleagues or questions for which you have answered for yourself but would like to discuss. Some sample questions are included at the end of this letter.

Each participant should submit a list of 5-10 questions to [everett.waters@stonybrook](mailto:everett.waters@stonybrook) by May 15. We will collate these, add, revise, and organize them into topics for discussion. The resulting agenda will be sent to each participant well in advance of the conference.

Please include also a list of up to three *empirically-based results* (including possibly developmental data) that you think are best-established and most central to adult attachment theory. These too may be useful in organizing the agenda.

We will cover the agenda in a series of 2 - 2 1/2 hour round table discussions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon each day. Everett Waters and Chris Fraley will co-chair the sessions.

In addition to allowing plenty of time between roundtable discussions, we will reserve the meeting room for informal evening gatherings. This will allow plenty of time for socializing, informal discussions, and even brief presentations or discussions of new data that participants may want to share.

**Participants** (Most have already agreed to attend)

Developmental

Inge Bretherton

Judy Crowell

Roger Kobak

Alan Sroufe

Everett. Waters

Harriet Waters

Social

Kim Bartholomew

Nancy Collins

Chris Fraley

Mario Mikulincer

Phil Shaver

Jeff Simpson

Clinical

Joanne Davila

Diana Diamond

Morris Eagle

Sue Johnson

Ken Levy

Karlen Lyons-Ruth

**Additional Consortium Members**

Gary Cox-Steiner

Jenny Cox-Steiner

Tammy Kaminer

Arietta Slade

**Products**

We hope this project will afford opportunities thinking about adult attachment theory in ways that are more immediate and more open to trying out new ideas than is possible through published articles. We expect that the effects on participants' thinking may take a while to incubate and play out in their research. Accordingly, we are not asking participants to prepare articles or presentations in advance. Nor are we planning to publish an edited volume immediately afterward. Our current plan is to have the conference organizers draft a single report of the proceedings that would reflect both the agenda (in itself a useful product) and the discussions. This would combine both prose and quotes or paraphrases from our discussions. Participants could then sign on as co-authors after commenting and offering revisions to the draft. They might also prepare brief commentaries to accompany the article. We could also invite commentaries from non-participants.

We have also discussed the possibility of preparing separate articles of this type for Developmental, Social and Clinical audiences. This would help us reach diverse groups, focus on issues of special interest to these audiences, and make more extensive use of quotes and paraphrases. It would also be a way to lead different audiences toward journals they might not ordinarily follow. There are certainly leading journals in each of these areas that seem likely outlets for such articles.

The key here is not to burden each of the participants with the obligation to write a full chapter, but to make the fruits of our discussions as widely available and as accessible as possible - as soon as possible. We hope that eventually the proceedings will also be reflected in the participants' own research and writing.

If the project is as productive as we hope, we may organize future workshops to cover the range and breadth of the topics that will likely be generated by the proceedings. We will consider organizing future workshops on topics such as emotion regulation and mental representation in attachment relationships and on attachment assessment. To us, it makes sense to let this project run its course before thinking of bringing the products together in chapter length presentations.

### **RSVP**

1. Please respond to this invitation by e-mailing Dr. Gary Cox-Steiner, at **[gcs47@hotmail.com](mailto:gcs47@hotmail.com)**. Please include any questions you may have about travel arrangements and any other special needs.

Most of the rooms we have reserved are doubles. Please have a look at the list of participants and let us know whether you and some else would like to room together or whether you need a single room. Otherwise we'll make what seem sensible assignments.

2. Please e-mail your suggestions for questions (5-8) and your nominations for best established/most important findings (up to 4) to **[everett.waters@stonybrook.edu](mailto:everett.waters@stonybrook.edu)**
3. Please also e-mail Everett electronic copies (Word, WP, or .pdf file format) of one or two of your own papers relevant to the logic of adult attachment theory and its links to empirical research. We will post these on a web site for participants to read in advance. (If you have only a paper copy, send to Everett Waters, 6 Gun Path, Setauket, NY 11733)

We look forward to this gathering as a source of interesting discussions, contribution to the Bowlby Ainsworth legacy, and the beginning of constructive future interactions.

Kind regards,

Gary Cox-Steiner, Ph.D.  
Director, Center for Mental Health Promotion

Everett Waters, Ph.D.  
Professor, SUNY Stony Brook

## Sample Questions

**Please submit your own contributions to this pool to [everett.waters@stonybrook.edu](mailto:everett.waters@stonybrook.edu) by May 15.**

- 1) What are the key postulates of Bowlby's infant attachment theory?
- 2) What are key facets/components of adult-adult relationships other than secure base use and support? How might they interact with the secure base component?
- 3) Does the fact that a prediction is derived from attachment theory mean that other theoretical frameworks are unlikely to generate the same prediction?
- 4) What does Bowlby's theory say about the mechanisms underlying the onset of adult secure base relationships?
- 5) What logic ties predictions about adult personality, relationships, and adjustment to attachment relationships?
- 6) Does Bowlby's theory suggest hypotheses about adult-adult relationships that are testable and have the potential for falsifying key postulates of the theory?
- 7) Does attachment theory afford strong predictions about cross-relationship consistency of attachment security? If so, what is the logic of these predictions and what kinds of designs would decisively address them?
- 8) What predictions about individual differences constructs (either patterns or styles) that can be rigorously derived from attachment theory? That is, are there any results related to attachment patterns or styles that could definitively falsify important postulates of attachment theory?
- 9) What in attachment theory is the relation between attachment patterns/styles and generalized responses to stress in various domains?

## Clinical Issues

What is involved in researching the therapeutic session in terms of attachment theory, and what are the important distinctions to keep in mind?

- 1) How are working models, particularly the internalization of dysfunctional attachments, related to personality development? How can the further delineation of adult attachment categories (and developmental levels within them) be related to forms of psychopathology and can this serve as a useful guide in treatment?
- 2) Are there postulates of attachment theory relevant to change in secure/insecure attachment status in adults?

- 3) What are the implications, if any, of attachment research and theory for specific approaches to psychotherapy?
- 4) How does one understand the reported shift in borderline patients from insecure to autonomous status on the AAI?
- 5) Does a “successful” therapeutic encounter, where one is able to work out dysfunctional attachments through repetition of those earlier established patterns with the therapist, lead to change in attachment status, or an increase in reflective functioning, or both?