Attachment, the Big Five, and Suicide Risk

Stephen Dal Cerro, Ph.D.

Why do people do what they do?

- Situation (3/4ths?)
  - Situation demand characteristics
  - Social expectations
  - Environmental triggers

- Personality (1/4ths?)
  - the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's distinctive character.

Implicit vs Explicit Motivation (What's Lurking Beneath the Surface?)

- Neuroscientists believe:
  - behaviors derive from unconscious processes
  - conscious "decisions" merely follow

  - automatic; pre-attentive; implicit; procedural
### Unconscious: Adaptive vs Psychodynamic

- **Adaptive unconscious** (internal motivations, cognitive biases)
  - Derives from evolutionary selection pressure (plus formative early experiences?)
  - Confabulation actually the norm
  - Real motivations written in code, cannot be retrieved directly
    - Picking a stocking
    - Buying a house

### Psychodynamic Unconscious

- Unwanted material is repressed
- Can be retrieved
  - Hypnosis
  - Free association
  - Dreams
- Protected information wants to re-emerge
  - 'return of the repressed.'

### Explicit vs Implicit Causes of Suicide

- Explicit motivation usually involves (conscious) desire to end over-powering, negative emotion:
  - Grounded in fear.
- Underlying, implicit motivations reflect the influence of personality traits, pre-verbal learning.
  - Our emotional core wires itself in the first three years, in interaction with the environment.
Stages of Suicide
1. Falling short of expectations
2. Turning on self
3. High self awareness
4. Negative affect
5. Cognitive deconstruction
6. Disinhibition

Preverbal and Non-Verbal Learning
• The hippocampus and amygdala are shaped by, and begin to store, experience before the advent of explicit memory.
• Emotionally salient stimuli are stored, not accessible to conscious memory.
  • Ex: getting bit by a dog.

Emotional Hijackings
• In many heart attacks, sudden death if the first sign of heart disease.
• Suicides can also come without warning.
Where does personality come from?

- Heredity (about 50%)
- Parenting Style
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Early Attachment experiences

Heredity

- Around 50% of personality is hereditary (twin studies, etc.)
  - Empathy about 40% (empathy not always good)
  - Better than 70% of intelligence (always good)

Parenting Styles
Attachment Theory

• From Freud to Bowlby

“There is an intimate connection between the story of a patient’s sufferings and the symptoms of his illness.” Sigmund Freud, 1895

John Bowlby: British Psychoanalyst

• Bowlby emphasized the actual history of the relationship.
• Freud and Behaviorists believed infant attachment to mother was not instinctual, but a by product of conditioning, or association of mother with satisfaction of appetite.
• Human ethologists and “Human Instinct”
Bowlby Cont.

- Infants cared for by intellectually disabled inmates.
- Young children in isolation
- Influenced by ethologist (Lorenz, Wilson)
  - Imprinting
  - Critical and Sensitive periods in development.

Harry Harlow

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrN8Ehjig8I
Mary Ainsworth, Ph.D.

- American Psychologist
- Partnered with Bowlby to study attachment patterns in young children.
- Developed the Strange Situation test.
- Launched a thousand dissertations.

### Ainsworth Classification Based on Strange Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Type</th>
<th>Caregiver Behaviours</th>
<th>Child Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Secure                | • React quickly and positively to child’s needs  
|                       | • Responsive to child’s needs                  | • Distressed when caregiver leaves                  |
|                       | • Happy when caregiver returns                 | • Cries comfort from caregiver when scared or sad     |
| Insecure – avoidant   | • Unresponsive, uncaring                      | • No distress when caregiver leaves                  |
|                       | • Dismissive                                  | • Does not acknowledge caregiver                     |
|                       |                                               | • Does not seek or make contact with caregiver       |
| Insecure – ambivalent | • Responds to child inconsistently            | • Distress when caregiver leaves                     |
|                       |                                               | • Distressed by return of caregiver                  |
| Insecure – disorganized| • Abusive or neglectful                        | • No attachment behaviours                           |
|                       | • Responds in frightening, or frightened ways | • Often appear dazed, confused or apprehensive in presence of caregiver |

### Ainsworth cont’d

- Secure attachment
- Insecure attachment
  1. Anxious: clinging to caregiver, proximity seeking
  2. Avoidant: rejects caregiver
  3. Disorganized: alternating between clinging/rejecting caregiver (Ambivalent)
Secure. It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

Preoccupied. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them.

Dismissing. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

Fearful. I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
Security Score very highly correlated with:

- Moral self-approval
- Body appearance
- Self-esteem
- Lovability self-control
- Competence
- Academic success
- Suicidal ideation
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Interpersonal problems
- Career problems
- Substance abuse

Insecure attachment types

- **Avoidant**
  - Narcissistic
  - Antisocial
  - Schizoid

- **Fearful**
  - Avoidant
  - Schizotypal
  - Obsessive
  - Compulsive
  - Borderline
  - Paranoid

- **Anxious**
  - Dependent
  - Histrionic
  - Borderline
  - Paranoid
Big Five personality traits (OCEAN)

1. **Openness to experience**
   - inventious/curious vs. consistent/consistent

2. **Conscientiousness**
   - organized/organized vs. haphazard/unorganized

3. **Extraversion**
   - outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved

4. **Agreeableness**
   - friendly/compassionate vs. analytical/irritable

5. **Neuroticism**
   - sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident

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### Openness

**High**
- Fantasy: Unrealistic, lives in fantasy
- Aesthetics: Bizarre interests
- Feelings: Intense, in turmoil
- Actions: Eccentric
- Ideas: Peculiar, weird
- Values: Radical

**Low**
- Fantasy: Concrete
- Aesthetics: Disinterested
- Feelings: Alexithymic
- Actions: Mechanized, stuck in routine
- Ideas: Closed-minded
- Values: Dogmatic, moralistically intolerant

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### Conscientiousness

**High**
- Competence: Perfectionistic, preoccupied with organization
- Dutifulness: Rigidly principled
- Achievement: Workaholic, acclaim-seeking
- Self-Discipline: Single-minded, doggedness
- Deliberation: Ruminative, indecisive

**Low**
- Competence: Disinclined, lax
- Dutifulness: Careless, sloppy, haphazard
- Achievement: Irresponsible, undependable, immoral
- Self-Discipline: Aimless, shiftless, desultory
- Deliberation: Negligent, hedonistic, hasty, rash
### Extraversion

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Intense attachments</td>
<td>Cold, distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregariousness</td>
<td>Attention seeking</td>
<td>Socially withdrawn, isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Dominant, pushy</td>
<td>Resigned, uninfluential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Frantic</td>
<td>Lethargic, sedentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement Seeking</td>
<td>Reckless, foolhardy</td>
<td>Dull, listless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>Melodramatic, manic</td>
<td>Grim, anhedonic</td>
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### Agreeableness

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low (disagreeable)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Guileless</td>
<td>Cynical, suspicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straightforwardness</td>
<td>Guileless</td>
<td>Deceptive, dishonest, dishonest, manipulative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Self-sacrificial, selfless</td>
<td>Greedy, self-centered, exploitative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Yielding, subservient, meek</td>
<td>Combative, aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Self-effacing Self-denigrating</td>
<td>Boastful, vain, pretentious, arrogant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender-Mindedness</td>
<td>Overly soft-hearted</td>
<td>Callous, mercerless, ruthless</td>
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### Neuroticism

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<th></th>
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<th>Low</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiaeousness</td>
<td>Fearful, Anxious</td>
<td>Oblivious to signs of threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger hostility</td>
<td>Rageful</td>
<td>Won’t even protest exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressiveness</td>
<td>Depressed, suicidal</td>
<td>Unrealistic, overly optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-consciousness</td>
<td>Uncertain of self, ashamed</td>
<td>Glib, shameless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>Unable to resist impulses</td>
<td>Overly restrained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>Helpless, overwhelmed</td>
<td>Fearless, feels invincible</td>
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Big Five Misery Triad

- High Neuroticism - negativuity bias
- Low Conscientiousness - high impulsivity
- Low Extraversion - low positive affect

Disordered Personality

- A personality disorder is a type of mental disorder in which you have a rigid and unhealthy pattern of thinking, functioning and behaving. A person with a personality disorder has trouble perceiving and relating to situations and people.

The Big Five: Borderline

- Neuroticism (high) – emotional lability, separation insecurity, depressivity, anxiousness, self-harm
- Conscientiousness (low) – impulsive
- Agreeableness (low) – compliance
The Big Five: Narcissistic Personality

- High on Extraversion, low on Agreeableness, Neuroticism ("disagreeable extraverts")
- 'Vulnerable Narcissists'
  - High neuroticism, low extraversion, low agreeableness

The Big Five: Antisocial PDO

- Agreeableness (low)
- Conscientiousness (low)

Assessment of Suicidality

- Situational Stressors
- The Misery Index
  - Depression
  - Insomnia
  - Chronic Pain
- History of Suicidality
  - Lethality
  - Chronicity
But also; Personality Factors

- Heredity and earliest emotional experiences at the core of the personality
- They form implicit biases and automatic reactions
- Implicit features are often the opposite of the surface, or explicit features: 'compensatory façade'

  - Do they feel they are a burden?
  - Do they not fear death?

Case study: Authoritarian/Dismissive Father

- Matthew, taken from mother at two-and-a-half, acrimonious divorce
- Returned to mother at 14, shot himself three months later.

Attachment Parenting

- Co-sleeping
- Breast Feeding
- Day Care
Rejecting-Neglecting Parenting

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0

Breastfeeding
Day Care

• 2 out of 62 more likely to be rated insecure.
• Higher self-esteem in children with working mothers.
• Negative effects when women works from home.
“Good Enough Parenting”

- Validation
- Acknowledgment
- Acceptance
- Approval