

# Attachment and sexual abusive behavior

W. Berner, Hamburg

Hindsgavl Slot Middelfart

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# The evolutionary evolved mechanisms

- In his seminal work on attachment Bowlby found that in primates and other animals the properties of **attachment** behavior and **sexual** behavior are **distinct** (Bowlby, 1978).
- Many researchers afterwards elaborated this view of **attachment as an evolved mechanism of its own**, which often works in tandem with mechanisms for **mate choice** and **sexual motivation** (Fisher, Aron, Mashek, Haifang, & Brown, 2002; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988).
- Variations in attachment style have a **genetic base** and are shaped by the vicissitudes of the environment a child encounters (Donnellan et al. 2008; Gillath et al., 2008). Once in place individual attachment style does not seem to be much susceptible to change.

# What is attachment ?

- Attachment between mother and infant evolved as a requirement of survival in birds and mammals. It disappears in the time of mating.
- In humans attachment to parents survive in form of inner representations (“working models” for relations in later life).
- The relation to a steady sexual partner (in “romantic relationships”) has a lot of characteristics similar to the attachment to parents (Hazen u. Zeifmann, 1999)

# The four criteria of attachment



- proximity  
maintenance
- separation distress
- secure haven
- secure base

# Attachment in the life cycle

- In early childhood all four qualities of attachment belong to the parents.
- At school-age *proximity maintenance* increases in relations to peers, but *separation distress* remains in the relation to the parents.
- In adolescents in the course of romantic relationships *separation distress* and the feeling of *secure haven* becomes increasingly attached to the love-object. Only the *secure base* remains in the relation to parents.
- In adults mostly the longtime-companion or spouse takes over the role of the main attachment figure which belonged to the parents in childhood (Hazan, Zeifmann, 1999).

# How to measure of attachment ?

- ***Strange situation*** according to M. Ainsworth (1978) differentiation in secure, avoidant, ambivalent and disorganised
- ***Adult Attachment Interview*** according to M. Main (2003) Interview about early experiences with parents. The coherence of narration is decisive.

# How to measure of attachment ?

- **Interview:** target at attitudes and habits of which the person may not be aware.
- **Self-rating:** (paper and pencil) target at self-concepts. The correlation between interview and self-rating *is only 0.39 !*
- **Self-rating of attachment-styles by Bartolomew & Horowitz** (1991) based on view of oneself and others: secure - dismissive - preoccupied and disorganised.
- **Quantitative assessment of the dimensions of avoidance (of attachment) and (attachment-) anxiety:** Experience in close relationships (ECR - Brennan Clark and Shaver 1998)

# Consequences of different measuring

- Different views of attachment
  - Attachment as a working model of the (unconscious) mind with restricted possibilities of change (stable preparedness to react)
  - Attachment as a self-concept, accessible to psychological influences.
    - Smallbone distinguished between attachment to mother and father, and between “state-attachment” and “trait-attachment”.

# Attachment-style in interviews

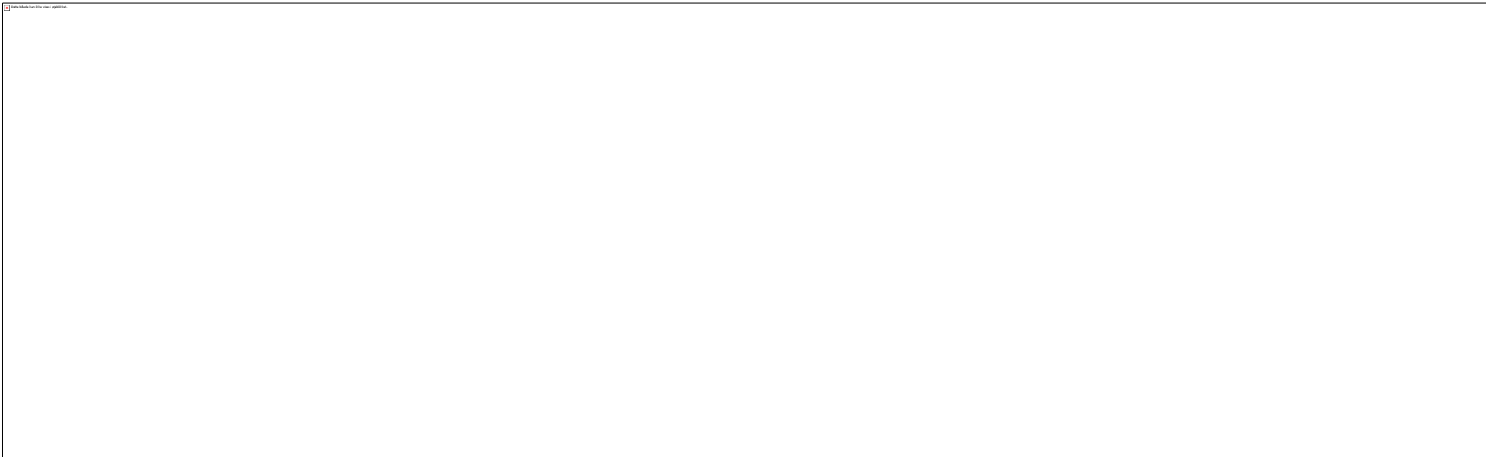
- According to Bowlby and M. Ainsworth: three models of attachment can be differentiated: *secure* – *avoidant* – *clinging-ambivalent* – (*disorganised*)
- In AAI (adult attachment interview ) according to M.Main the differentiation is even more sophisticated:
  - F: free- autonomous (secure)
  - D: dismissing (avoidant)
  - E: entangled enmeshed (clinging-ambivalent)
  - U: unresolved trauma
  - CC: not classifiable

# Attachment in persons diagnosed with sadomasochism\*

- 48 persons who were found by advertisement in a SM-periodical ( no “patients”!). They agreed to participate in a study on attachment. They were compared with 35 readers of an periodical for economics.

\*Rathbone J.(2001): Anatomy of Masochism. New York, Kluver Academic/Plenum Publishers

# AAI in persons diagnosed with sadomasochism



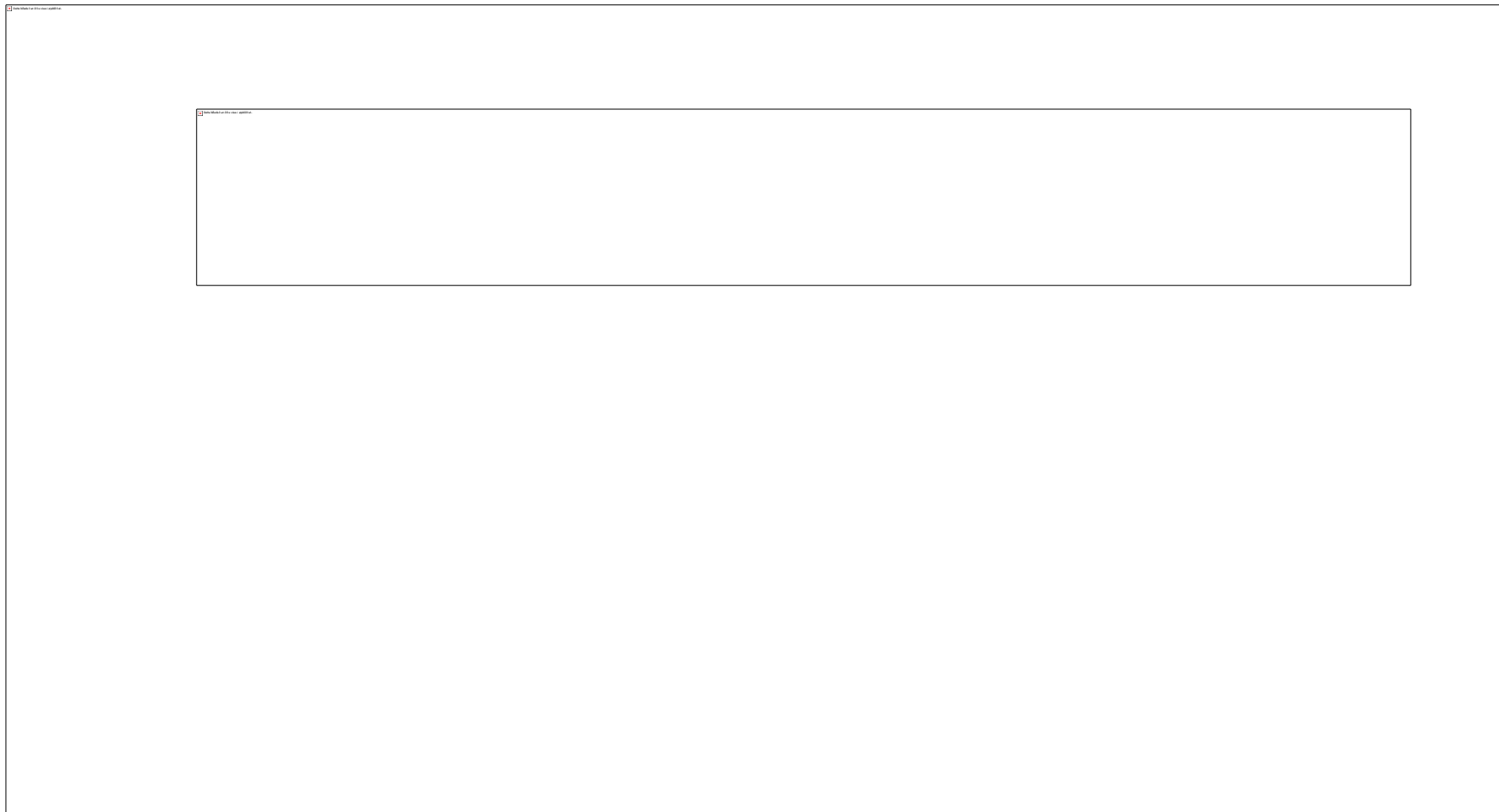
# Attachment and psychopathology among formerly maltreated adults \*

- 66 adults (24 men, 42 women) were physically (89%) and/or sexually (75%) abused as children.
- Attachment was rated by RSQ (Griffin and Bartolomew 1994).

	<b>image of self:</b>	<b>image of others:</b>
– secure:	positive	positive
– dismissing:	positive,	negative
– preoccupied:	negative,	positive
– fearful:	negative,	negative

\*Muller, R.T., Lemieux, K.E., Sicoli, L.A. (2001) Attachment and Psychopathology Among Formerly Maltreated Adults. J. Family Violence 16,2, 151-169

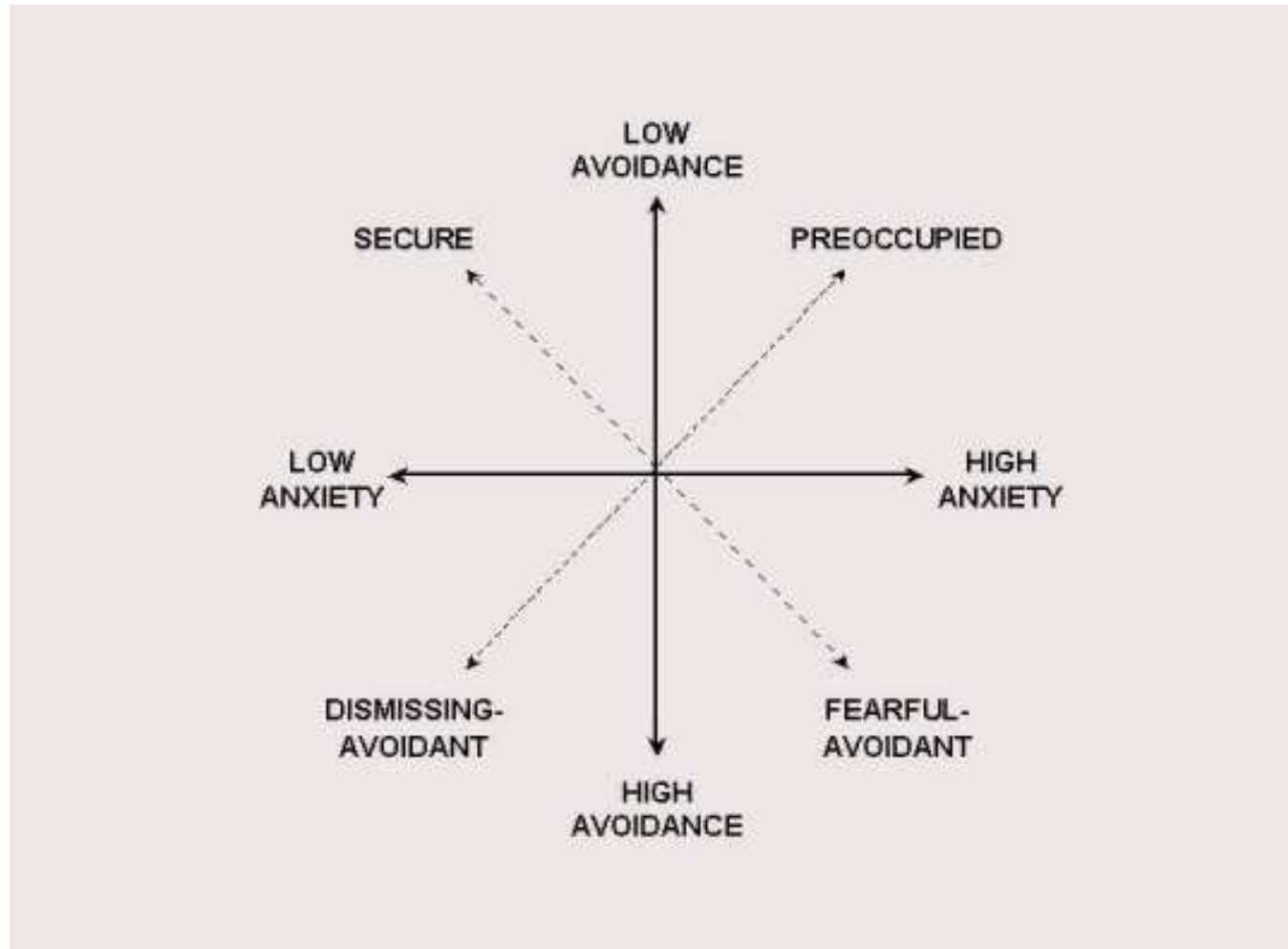
# Attachment-style of the maltreated persons



# Results

- Persons with *preoccupied und fearful attachment-style*) show higher rates of psychopathology than persons with *secure and dismissing attachment style*.
- That means victims of abuse are better off if they develop a negative image of the perpetrator and in consequence a more negatively tuned image of others generally. They develop more psychopathologic symptoms if their self-image suffers or becomes negatively tuned.

# Dimensions of ECR



# Limerence - infatuation – romantic love

Tennov 1979

- Intrusive thinking in connection with the love object (LO)
- Astonishing capacity to find everything in connection with the LO admirable and convert not admirable properties in something positive.
- Fear of rejection
- Only short alleviation by experiences which could be interpreted as reciprocation of feelings.
- Euphoric feelings if reciprocation seems obvious.
- Shyness in the presence of the LO.
- Capacity to see neutral events as proof for the passion of the LO.
- Pains in chest and belly if reciprocation is missing
- The intensity of feelings represses all sorrow – or let it appear unimportant.

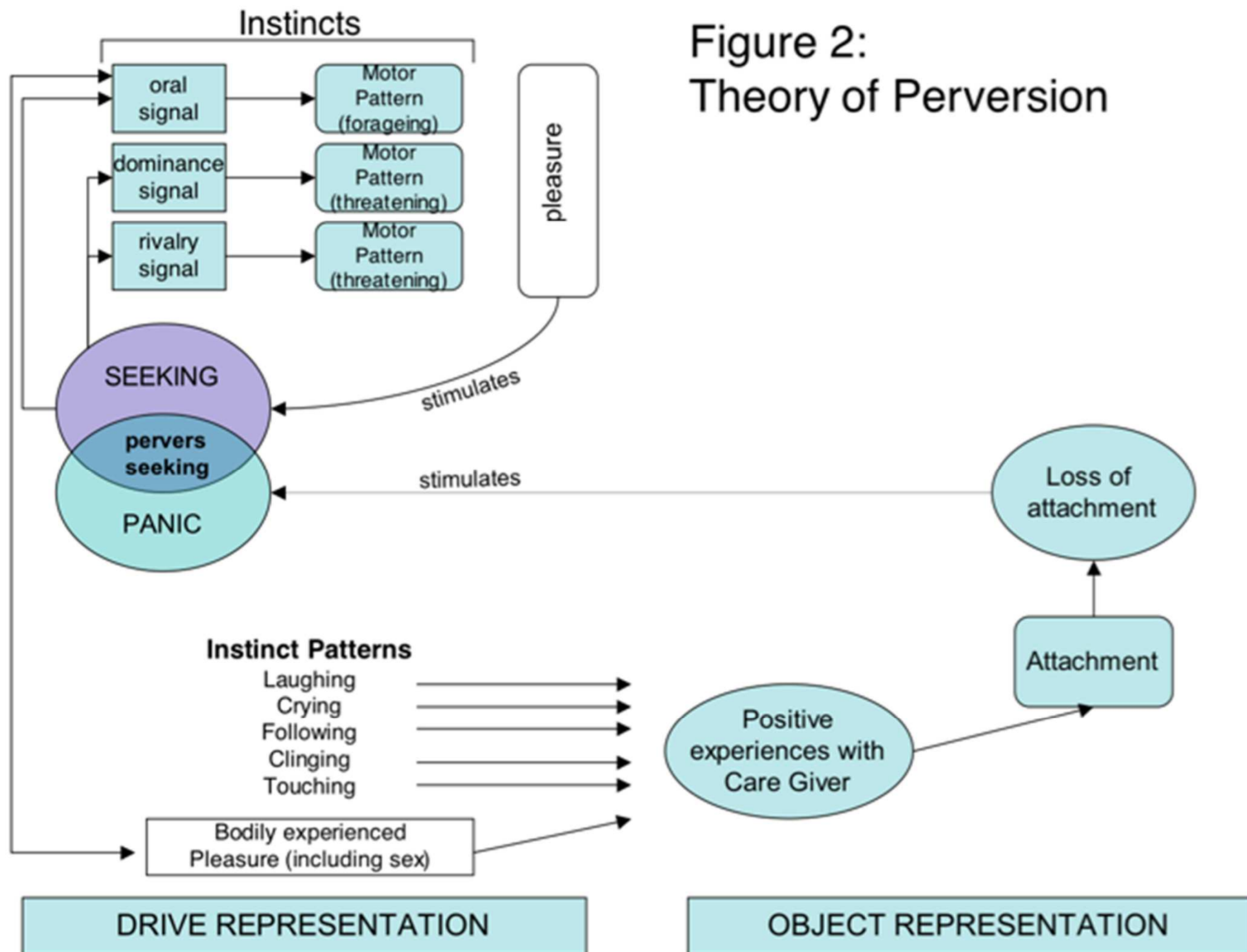
# Relations between attachment and romantic love

- Hazan and Shaver 1987: “romantic love is a biosocial process by which affectionate bonds are formed between adult lovers just as they are formed earlier in life between human infants and their parents”.
- Comparison with Lee’s styles of love 1973:
  - Secure attachment → combination of *eros* (passionate) and *agape* (selfless love)
  - Avoidant attachment → *ludus* (game-playing love)
  - Preoccupied attachment → *mania* (possessive love)

# Attachment and sexual behavior

- ***Insecurely attached four year old boys*** are much more interested in aggression, control and dominance than securely attached ones (Turner 1991).
- ***Securely attached adolescents*** → high estimation of good sex in close (romantic) relationships.
- ***Avoidantly attached juveniles*** → high estimation of unrestricted sex with strangers (no intimacy)
- ***Ambivalently attached juveniles*** → restricted capacity in bargaining about sex practices, unable to avoid high risk-behavior.  
(Feeney und Noller 2004)

Figure 2:  
Theory of Perversion



# Research on attachment style of sexual offenders and patients with paraphilias

- Marshall (1989): Intimacy, loneliness and sexual offenders. Behavior Research and Therapy 27, 491-503
- Marshall (1993): The role of attachment in the etiology and maintenance of sexual offending. Sexual and Marital Therapy 8, 109 - 121.
- Ward T, Hudson SM, Marshall WL (1996) Attachment style in sex offenders . J. Sex Research 33, 17 - 26.  
rape → dismissive  
child abuse → ambivalent (preoccupied)
- Smallbone SW Dadds MR (1998) Childhood attachment and adult attachment in incarcerated sex offenders. J. Interpers. Violence, 13 555 - 573.

# Research on attachment style of sexual offenders and patients with paraphilias

- Marsa F, O'Reilly G, Carr A et al. (2004) Attachment styles and psychological profiles of child sex offenders in Ireland. *J Interpers. Violence* 19, 228 - 251.
- Rathbone J (2001) *Anatomy of masochism*. Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers.
- Smallbone SW, McCabe BA (2003) Childhood attachment, childhood sexual abuse and onset of masturbation among adult sex offenders. *Sexual Abuse* 51, 1 - 10

# The specificity of insecure attachment as a cause for sexual offending

- Nearly all populations selected for their psychiatric problems have significantly higher percentages of “insecurely attached” persons in comparison to unselected populations (low specificity).
- Smallbone and McCabe (2003) found out that there may be a relation between early violent trauma, insecure attachment and later avoidance of intimacy.
- Beech and Michell (2005) suppose that effects of SSRI-medication in sex offending may be connected with attachment problems and depression.

## Studies on the victim-perpetrator-hypothesis

- In a prospective study on 224 boys abused in childhood. 13 % of them became perpetrators before the age of 23. (Salter et al., 2003).
- Veneziano et al. (2000) provided some evidence, that sexual abuse of children by adolescent sex offenders was a re-enactment of their own sexual abuse in a study on 74 adolescent male sex abusers.

# The resilience-factor

- *Lambie et al.*(2002): compared a group of victims of sexual abuse (N = 41 boys) who became later on perpetrators of sexual abuse with a group of victims of sexual abuse (N = 47 boys) who did *not* become perpetrators later on (the “resilient group”).
- The resilient group was *less likely* to masturbate with fantasies of their experienced abuse and *less likely* to derive pleasure from their abuse.
- but they were *more likely* to have frequent social contact to peers and *more likely* to have family support and support by others during childhood.

Lambie I, Seymore F, Lee A, Adams P (2002). Resilience in victim offender cycle in male sexual abuse. *Sex Abuse* **14**: 31–48.

# The relationship between infant, adult and romantic attachment styles

Ward/Polaschek/Beech 2006

Infant attachment style	Adult attachment style	Model of self and others	Adult evaluation of attachment related experiences	Romantic attachment style
secure	Secure autonomous	Self and others seen positive	Comfortable with intimacy, value others but are objective regarding relations	High level of intimacy in close relationships

# The relationship between infant, adult and romantic attachment styles

Ward/Polaschek/Beech 2006

Infant attachment style	Adult attachment style	Model of self and others	Adult evaluation of attachment related experiences	Romantic attachment style
avoidant	dismissing	views himself positive others negative	Emphasises achievement and self-reliance at the expense of intimacy. Sceptical of the value of close relationships	Endorse the idea that sex without love is pleasurable. Likely to engage in "one night stands"

# The relationship between infant, adult and romantic attachment styles

Ward/Polaschek/Beech 2006

Infant attachment style	Adult attachment style	Model of self and others	Adult evaluation of attachment related experiences	Romantic attachment style
ambivalent	preoccupied	views himself negative others positive	Preoccupied by past relationships seeking approval by others	Sexually preoccupied/ possessive in order to meet strong needs for security and affection. Satisfaction with relations unlikely

# The relationship between infant, adult and romantic attachment styles

Ward/Polaschek/Beech 2006

Infant attachment style	Adult attachment style	Model of self and others	Adult evaluation of attachment related experiences	Romantic attachment style
Disorganised / disoriented	Unresolves/ disorganised	views himself and others negative	Generally fear of attachment generally avoidant to others.	Fear of rejection and avoidance of closeness will lead to the seeking of impersonal sex.

# Five pathways model (Ward & Siegert 2002)



# Practical consequences

- *Mann et al. 2001*: SOTP extended: getting group members aware of their of their attachment style. Work on their intimacy deficits
- *Ward, Hudson& McCormack 1997*: working on self-disclosure, expression of physical affection, giving support, empathy and conflict resolution.
- *Hudson & Ward 1997*: especially in disorganized patients working on loneliness.
- *Beech & Mitchell 2005*: emotional isolation and low mood in insecurely attached persons → good effects with SSRI.

Thanks for your attention !

[bernerwolfgang44@gmail.com](mailto:bernerwolfgang44@gmail.com)

## A typical case study

- A 48 y. old antiquity-merchant abused the daughter of his common law spouse in the age between 8 and 12 y. The daughter informed mother at the age of 14. when her school-performance deteriorated. When the spouse confronted him with the facts he admitted immediately to her and went to the police by himself.
- He was the father of three boys from two former relationships. In all three of his relationships he was shy introverted and easily found himself offended by his partners (ambivalent-fearful attachment)

## A typical case study

- He was the youngest of three boys of a German merchant married to a Indonesian house-wife.
- His father was not available – always abroad in business
- His mother was often depressed lying in bed and giving advices to her children how to cook and clean the home. He was allways afraid to be abandoned by her. By the same token he was irritated when she tenderly stroke his backside expressing her affection for him with this gesture. He had a suspect that perhaps she abused him and he had forgotten.

## A typical case study

- Fact was that during a boy-scouts-camp he slept in the tent of one of the leaders pressing his body against his and that in the next morning he realised that he had spoiled his trousers with faeces but did not dare to say something or clean himself till he arrived at home.
- He had the feeling that the little girl was harshly treated by her mother – like himself, who was always a little bit afraid of her critics – and he thought they were accomplices.
- It turned out that the girls mother was abused herself.