

6-20-2011

# The Nature and Origins of Attachment in Infancy and Early Childhood: Constructing Life's Foundations

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## Citation of this paper:

Moran, Greg, "The Nature and Origins of Attachment in Infancy and Early Childhood: Constructing Life's Foundations" (2011). *Psychology Presentations*. 35.

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# The Nature and Origins of Attachment in Infancy and Early Childhood: Constructing Life's Foundations

Greg Moran

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London, Ontario, Canada

Presentation to  
Members of the Aga Khan University Community

*Nairobi, Kenya*

*June 20, 2011*



# Our Research Program

## Attachment - The First Relationship

Its origins in the first year and in the mother's  
childhood experience  
and  
its developmental consequences



# Overview

1. Background - Attachment theory and research... and some of our own past research
2. A overview of our program, including illustrative examples of research findings and a brief description of current projects

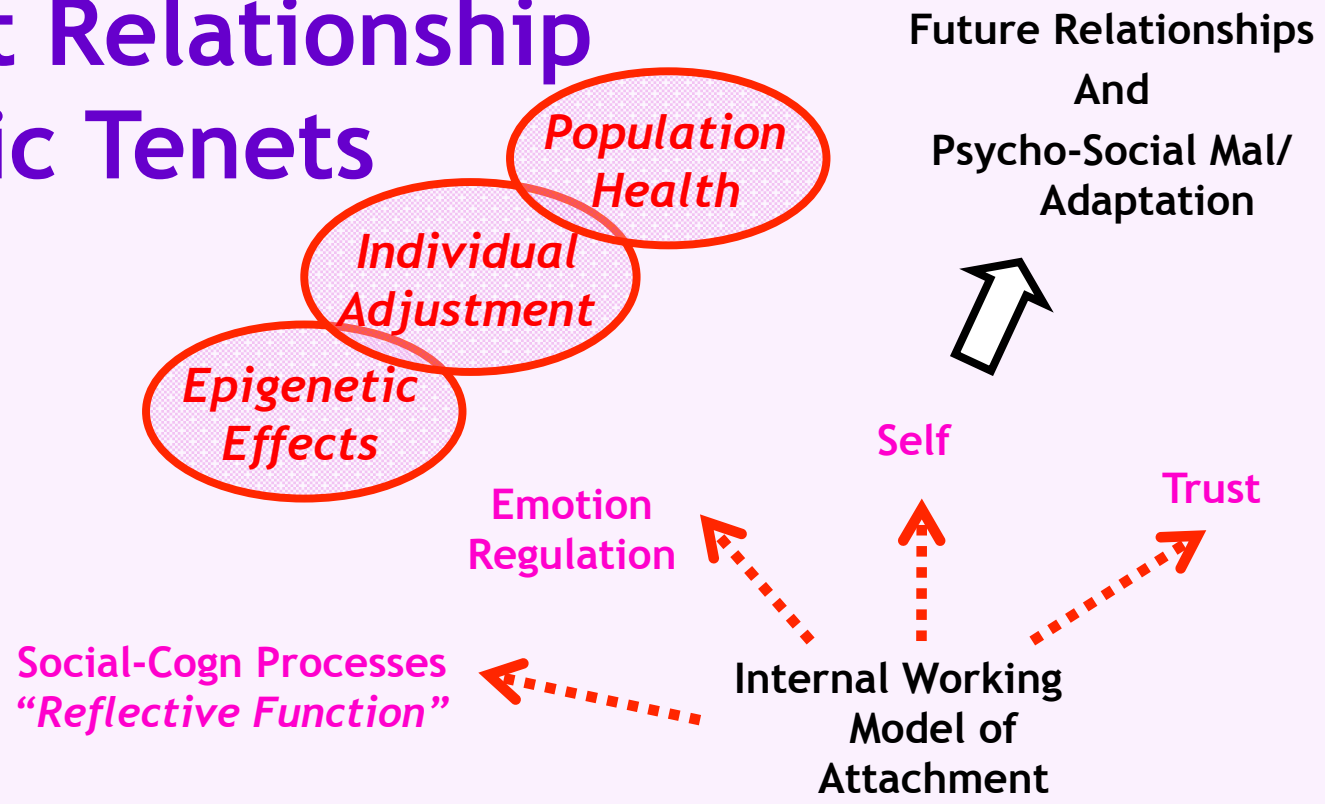


# Some Background to Today's Talk

## The Nature, Sequelae and Origins of Attachment

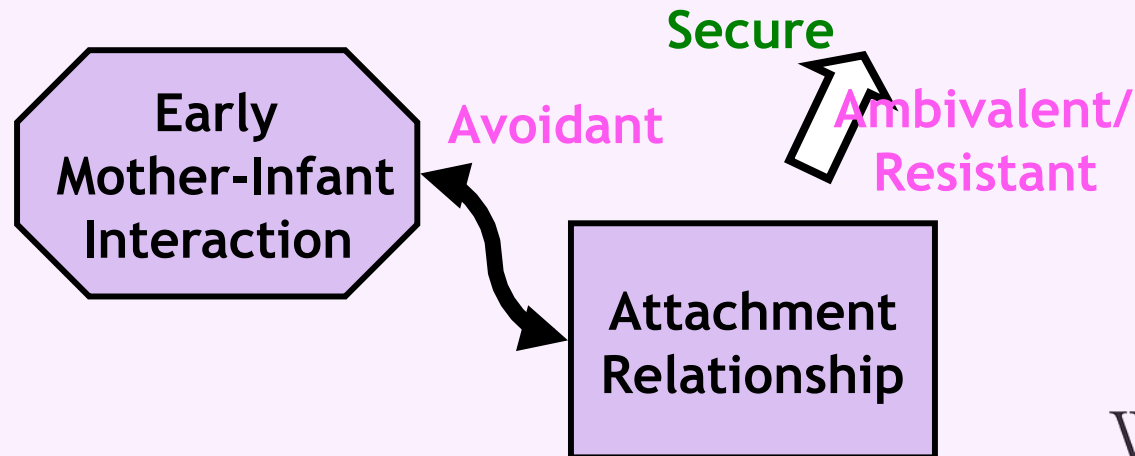
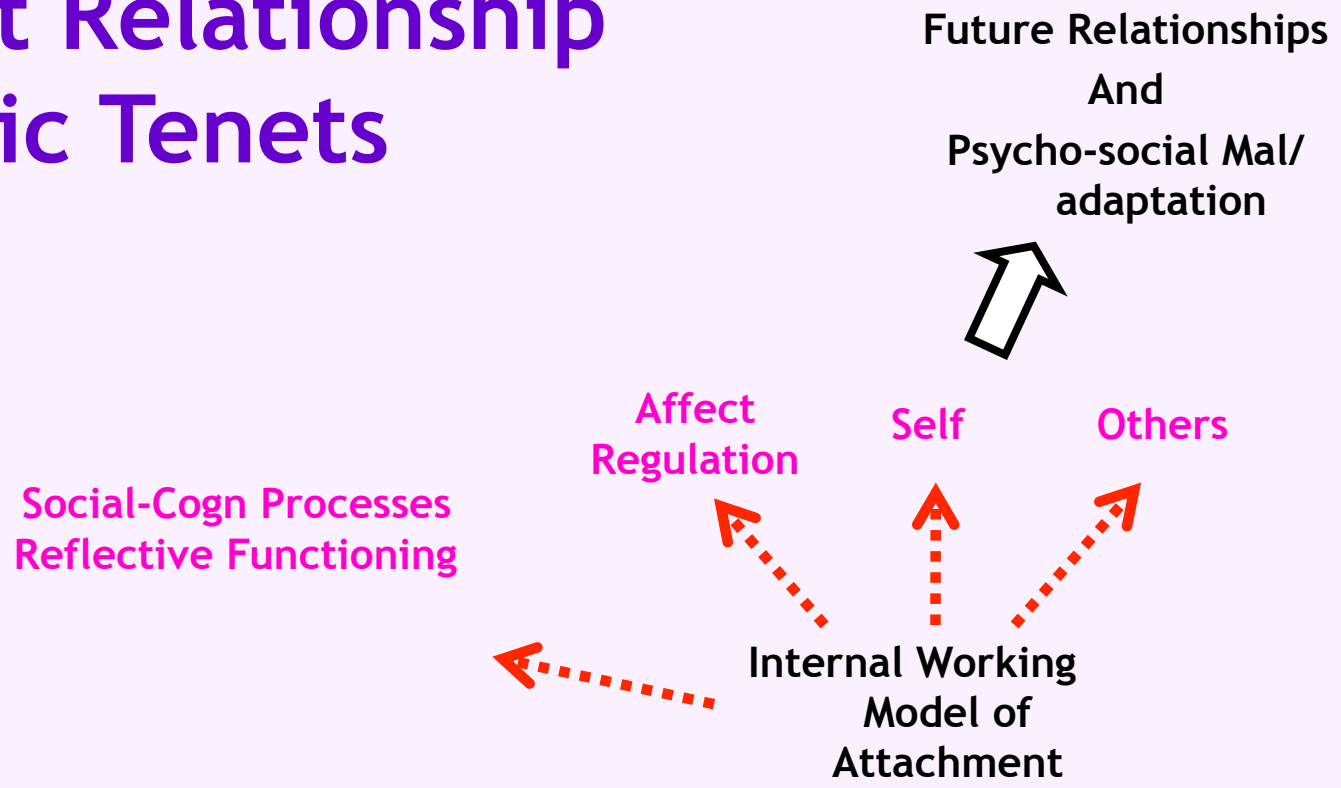


# The First Relationship Basic Tenets



# The First Relationship

## Basic Tenets



# Developmental Origins of the Attachment Relationship

## Mother as Secure Base and Safe Haven

### *The Circle of Security*

- Presence of mother promotes exploration of the environment by the infant
  - “Secure Base”
- When infant is distressed or fearful, attachment system activated
  - Seeks proximity/contact with the mother - “Safe Haven”

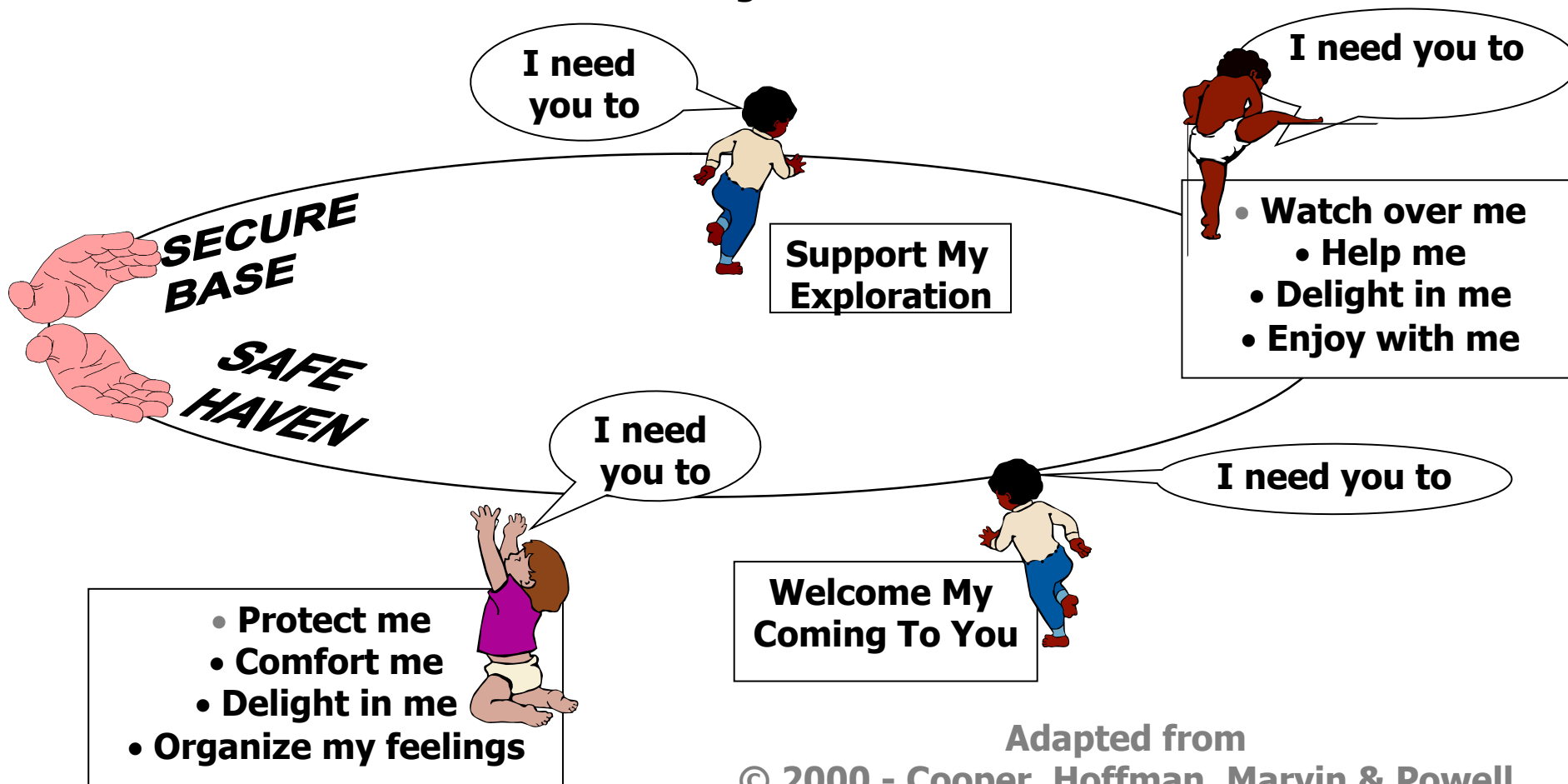




# Circle of Security

## Secure Relationship

Parent Attending to the Child's Needs



Adapted from

© 2000 - Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin & Powell

Secure, Avoidant and  
Ambivalent - all Organized  
attachment relationships -  
and...

Disorganized Relationships



# Disorganized Attachment Relationship

- First noticed in the Strange Situation in infants with a history of maltreatment - difficult to classify
- Unusual, conflicted, contradictory behaviour
  - Approach parent in odd ways
  - Move away from parent when upset or frightened
  - Freeze
  - Display fear of parent
- Breakdown/absence of attachment system - no consistent or coherent strategy
- 15% in non-clinical samples; as high as 80% in at-risk samples

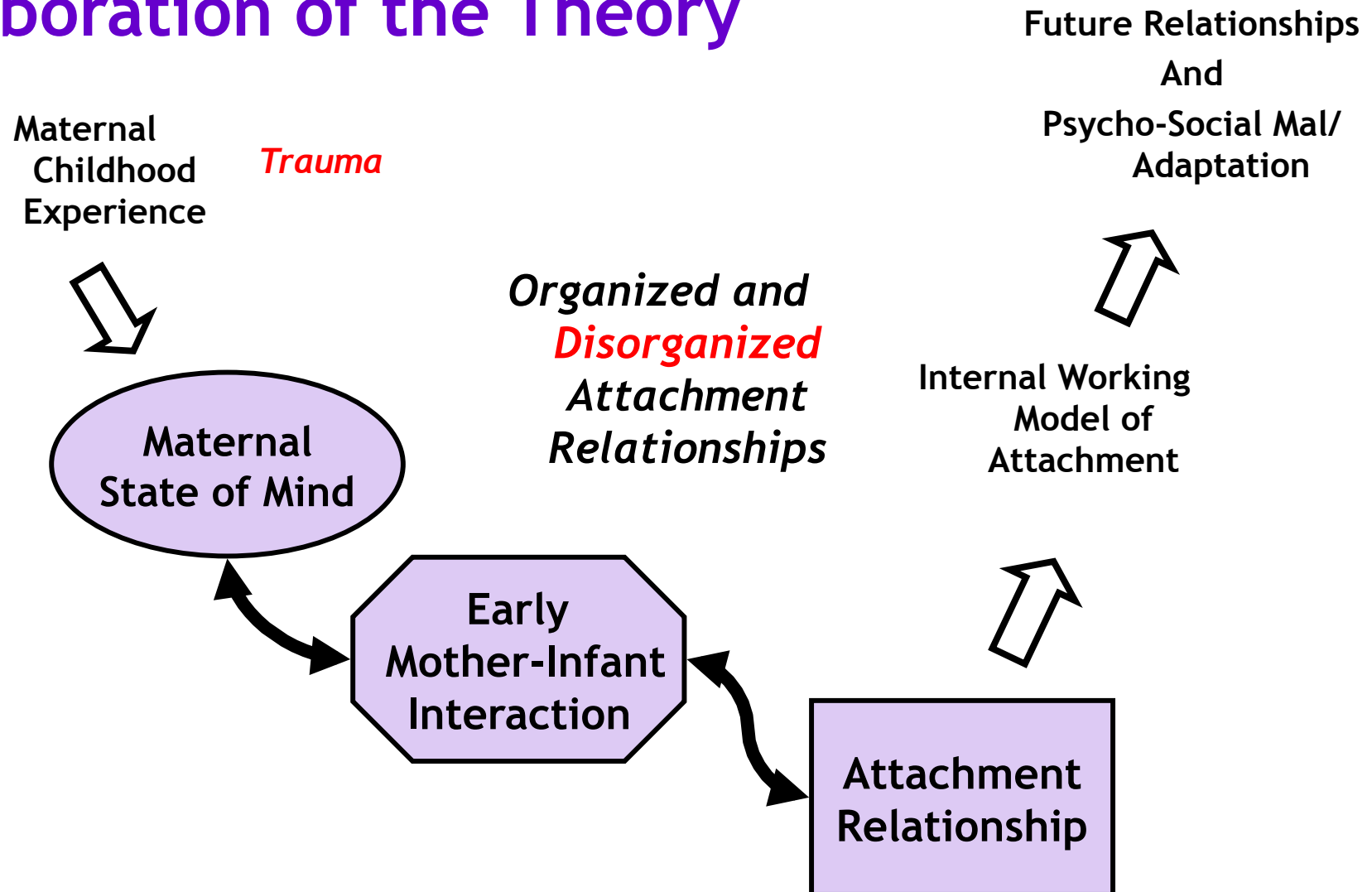
# Consequences of Disorganized Attachment

- Secure attachment acts as a buffer, Non-Secure as a risk factor, but **Disorganization** has more direct impact:
    - Disturbances in emotion regulation
    - Externalizing behaviour problems in childhood
    - Dissociative behaviour
    - Disturbed interpersonal relationships in childhood and adolescence
    - Other...
- (Carlson, 1998 and others)



# The First Relationship

## Elaboration of the Theory

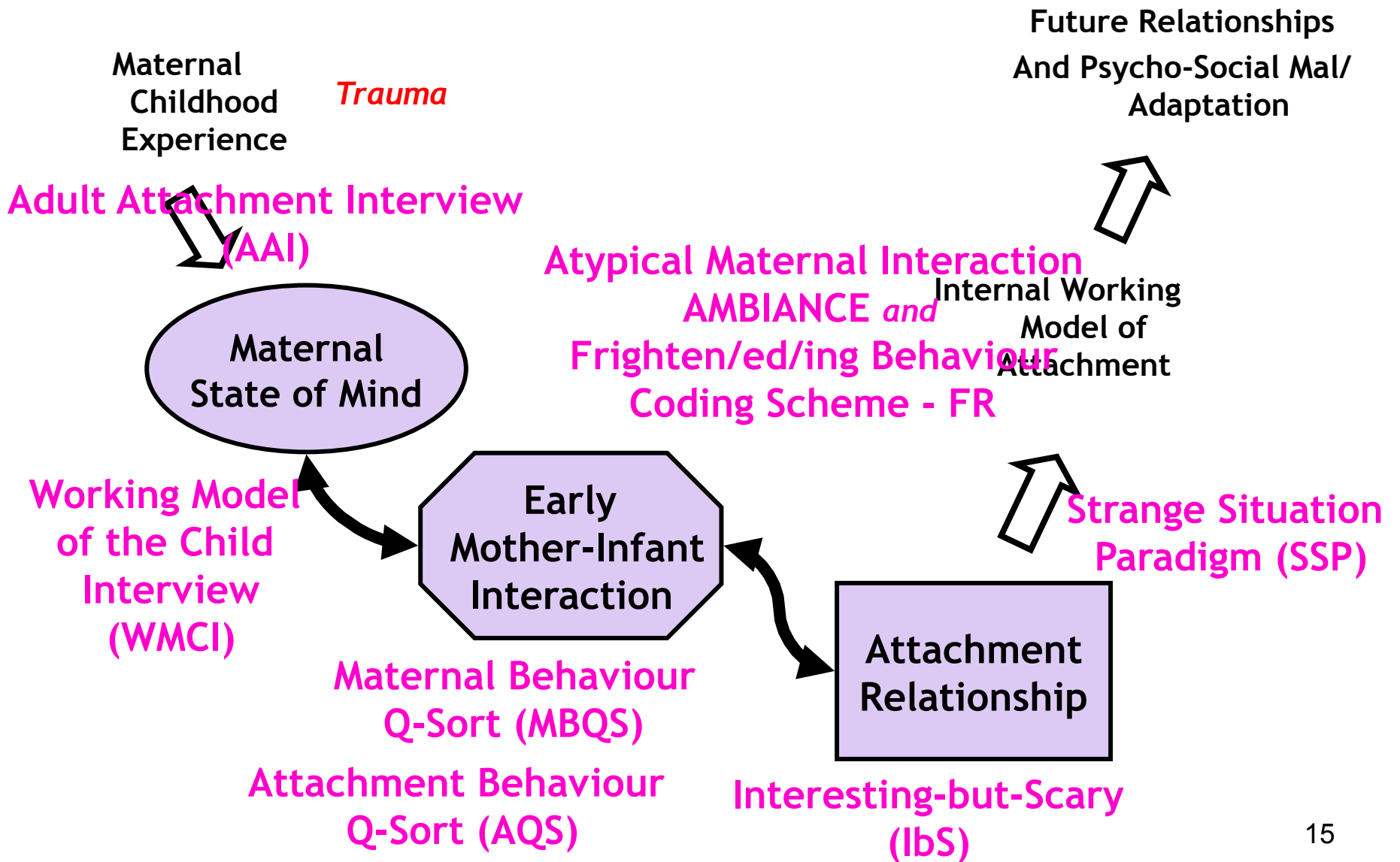


# A Ridiculously Complicated Single Slide Summary of the Key Assessment Instruments



# The First Relationship

## The Assessment of Attachment



# Longitudinal Studies of At-Risk and Community Populations

## A Illustrative Sampling of Research Findings





1. The cross-generational transmission of attachment security: From maternal experience through sensitive interaction to a secure relationship

*(Developmental Psychology, 1998)*

2. So, too, with Disorganized attachment: From traumatic childhood to anomalous parenting to Disorganization

*(Developmental Psychology, 2006; Attachment & Human Development, 2006)*

3. A simple intervention can make a difference --- but not for some mothers: The enduring impact of trauma in childhood

*(Infant Mental Health Journal, 2005)*



4. Disorganized relationships become organized with change in maternal interaction

*(Child Development, 2007)*

5. Attachment experiences in early childhood can promote cognitive processes that increase risk of later depression

*(Clinical Psychology Review, in press)*



# Our Current Projects

1. *Over Time, Across Generations and Within the Family: Continuity and Change in Early Social Development* (Social Sciences and Humanities research Council of Canada)
2. *The Trans-Generational Transmission of Trauma* (Private donor supported)
3. *Transactional Processes in the Development of Emotional-Behavioural Regulations: Individuals in Contexts - The Kids, Families and Places Project* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Co-Investigator; Jenny Jenkins, U of Toronto, and Michael Connor, McMaster U. - P.I.)
4. *Bridging the Gap Between Infant Mental Health and Infant Health: Bringing Attachment Theory into the Infant Acute Pain Context* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Co-Investigator; Rebecca Pillai-Riddell, York U, P.I.)



## With more than a little assistance from...

- **David Pederson** (my academic better half)
- **Sandi Bento**, Research Coordinator
- **Heidi Neufeld Bailey** (U of Guelph)
- Carey Anne DeOliveira (CPRI, London)
- Jen Phillips
- Karin Gleeson
- Ann Krupka
- Ann Robson
- Erinn Hawkins
- Sheri Madigan
- Lindsey Forbes
- Elspeth Evans
- Acia Blank
- Anneli Sepa
- Mari Fransson
- Ya Xue
- Kathleen O'Connor
- Tara Morley
- Celia Hsiao
- Caitlin Best
- Numerous undergraduates
- Deanne Pederson, Mary Semotiuk, and many other RAs
- and others, including *countless London area mothers and their babies*



*Generous funding from:  
SSHRC, Health Canada,  
OMHF and Private Donations*



**For additional information:**

**The Pederson-Moran Research Group  
at the University of Western Ontario**

*<http://works.bepress.com/gregmoran/>*



*“Just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so are parents, especially their mothers, dependent on a greater society for economic provision. If a community values its children it must cherish their parents.”*

John Bowlby, 1951, p.84, WHO Report  
Cited by Inge Bretherton,  
*Developmental Psychology*, 1992



*I thank you...*

