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Counseling as a Pathway to Earned-Secure Attachment Status

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Counseling as a Pathway to Earned-Secure Attachment Status

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Attachment Theory

- Developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth
- Links quality of care one receives in early life with formation of working model of attachment
- Has been applied to adult interpersonal relationships
- Insecure attachment status linked to deficits in emotion regulation, marital functioning, coping flexibility, etc.

Can Attachment Status Change?

- Construct of earned security (Pearson et al.)
- Prototype vs. revisionist-contextual perspectives on change
- Schematic nature of attachment patterns may support longevity
- Interpersonal experiences (dissolution of romantic relationships, birth of a child) may shift attachment status

Fostering Earned Security

- Earned-secure women reported higher levels of emotional support from an alternative support figure than insecure women
- Counseling may help reframe adversity and integrate early trauma
- Very little literature on the topic exists

Fostering Earned Security



coherence

Process may involve exploring early trauma and integrating conflicting or confusing feelings

collaboration

Counseling is by nature collaborative and may provide a corrective emotional experience

reflective
functioning

Supports the revision of working models and provides scaffolding for sensitivity and self-awareness





Directions for Future Research

- Much pertaining to earned security remains to be understood
- Research Question: Can 6 months of weekly counseling bring about shifts from insecure to earned-secure attachment status as measured by the AAI?
- Research Question: Will individuals retain their earned-secure attachment status after the precipitating relationship ends?
- Hypothesis: Moderate stability of attachment status with a subset of individuals moving from insecure to earned security; long-term outcomes are not expected to support enduring shifts.