Attachment-Informed Questioning

Drawing upon the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

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Attachment-informed Questioning: The AAI

- Drawing on Questions from the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI, Main et al., 1985)
- AAI Interview is structured to bring into relief individual differences in:
  - The focus and regulation of affect and attention
  - Attentional flexibility vs inflexibility
  - Coherence
  - Conversational collaboration
- All while discussing intimate details of attachment related experiences
- Focus is on patterns of attentional shifts in discourse



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Attachment-informed Questioning: The AAI

- Training in the AAI is extensive if one wishes to:
  - Administer the full interview to generate a valid assessment of attachment mental states
  - To score and interpret the transcript of the interview



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The AAI Structure/Content

Comprises 15-20 questions. Speakers are asked to

A. Describe:

1. Their early attachment related experiences with both parents
2. What happened when they were hurt, ill or upset in childhood
3. Whether and how either parent was ever threatening in any way
4. Why in their view parents behaved as they did
5. How the speaker reacted to the death of important people
6. Any changes in their relationships with either parent since childhood

- Emphasis is on coherence and quality of support given for each description

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The AAI Structure/Content

B. Evaluate

1. How these losses might have affected them
2. Any experiences they regard as a set back in their development
3. The influences of these experiences on who they are now

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The AAI Structure/Content

C. Describe/Speculate

1. How they felt/might feel on being separated from their own children (one day), and
2. What they would wish for their own children at 20 years

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AAI Questions

- "I'd like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents as a young child if you could start from as far back as you can remember?"
- "Now I'd like to ask you to choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood--as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine…"
  - "I know this may take a bit of time, so go ahead and think for a minute…then I'd like to ask you why you chose them. I'll write each one down as you give them to me."
- [Question for 1st adjective] "Okay, now let me go through some more questions about your description of your childhood relationship with your mother. You say your relationships with her was (you used the phrase) Are there any memories or incidents that come to mind with respect to (word)"
- [Question for 2nd adjective] "You described your childhood relationship with your mother as (or, `your second adjective was", or "the second word you used was"). Can you think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate why you chose to describe the relationship?"
- And so on for all 5 adjectives…
- Now I wonder if you could tell me, to which parent did you feel the closest, and why? Why isn't there this with the other parent?

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