

Transition to Adult Attachment Interview

The *Transition to Adulthood Attachment Interview* (TAAI, Crittenden, 2005) is a procedure for assessing older adolescents' and young adults' strategies for identifying, preventing, and protecting the self from perceived dangers, particularly dangers tied to intimate relationships. The assessment uses a modified version of the Adult Attachment Interview (*AAI*, George, Kaplan & Main, 1984). The modification is designed to address the competencies and salient issues of young adults during the transition to adulthood (~16-25 years). Specifically, it assumes that young adults still turn, in part, to their childhood figures for protection, psychological comfort, and/or financial support while concurrently developing financial independence and attachment relationships with peer partners. Further, it assumes that cortical maturation is still in progress, but that it permits abstract thought, particularly about relationships in the present.

Assessment. Like the *Adult Attachment Interview* the TAAI consists of a series of questions that ask the speaker to consider their childhood experience and how this might affect their thoughts and behavior in the present, especially as parents. Importantly, the TAAI assesses the same information in multiple ways; this permits exploration of conflicting ideas that could motivate incompatible behaviors. Individuals with less integration of thought and feeling, i.e., with varied and incompatible answers to the same question, are more likely to behave in unexpected and unacceptable ways than individuals with greater awareness of how the past motivates their current behavior. In addition, the *TAAI* explores possible past traumas that could trigger extreme behavior.

The TAAI is recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Information is gained by attending both to the individual's speech and to their relationship with the interviewer. The TAAI is analysed using a system of discourse analysis in which the content of the interview (what happened) is less important than how the speaker thinks about their childhood, as an adult. The rudiments of the method of discourse analysis are in Crittenden & Landini (2011), but are adapted for younger adults who are not yet parents.

Validity. The AAI, upon which the TAAI is based, has been validated in a number of empirical studies focussing on clinical issues: at risk populations (Crittenden, Robson, Tooby, & Flemming, 2017), anxiety disorders (Hughes, Hardy & Kendrick, 2000); ADHD (Crittenden & Kulbotton, 2007), avoidant personality disorder (Rindal, 2000); borderline personality disorder (Crittenden & Newman, 2010); domestic violence (Worley, Walsh, & Lewis, 2004), foster parents (Gogarty, 2002), parents of children with psychiatric disorders (Landini, Crittenden, & Landi, 2016), eating disorders (Ringer, & Crittenden, 2007; Zachrisson & Kulbotten, 2006); factitious illness by proxy (Kozłowska, Foley, & Crittenden, 2006); maltreating mothers (Seefeldt, 1997); PTSD (Crittenden, & Heller, 2017); sexual abuse (Haapasalo, Puupponen & Crittenden, 1999), at-risk young mothers (Strathearn, Fonagy, Amico, Montague, 2009), and treatment outcomes (Gullestad, 2003).

Outcomes. The TAAI yields 6 types of information:

- An attachment strategy, i.e., the way the speaker uses information to organize their behavior when they feel endangered or believe their children to be endangered;
- A possible set of unresolved traumatic experiences that distort the person's behavior

without their being aware of it.

- An over-riding distortion of the strategy such as depression;
- A pattern of information processing.
- An interpreted developmental history of the speaker. This history combines information provided directly by the speaker with information derived from the pattern of errors (i.e., dysfluency) in the discourse. The interview cannot directly establish what actually happened to the speaker, but its interpretation can assist in understanding why the speaker thinks and behaves as he or she does.
- A Level of Self Reasoning (LSR), i.e., how the young adult thinks about his or her own development and functioning, particularly as it involves selecting a partner and raising children. The levels range from inarticulate to simplistic to complex interpersonal decision-making. The LSR suggests the flexibility and sensitivity with which the parent will be able to interpret and respond to the child's behavior.

Limitations. The TAAI provides a complex analysis of both how speakers think about attachment relationships and also the impact of different kinds of danger (loss, neglect, abuse and so forth on behavior). However, sophistication and subtlety come with a price in that training is expensive and time consuming and reliability in the method is rarely achieved in less than two years. In addition, good validity studies using the TAAI are needed.

References

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