

ATTACHMENT, GREED and GENEROSITY

Feeding ourselves and others

*Linda Cundy
February 2022*



ATTACHMENT: SURVIVING or THRIVING



- Cupboard love?
- The early feeding relationship: RIGS
- Relational opportunities
- 'Mother's' resources
- The relationship ingested as an internal resource

THE FEEDING 'MOTHER'

- 'Mother' relates to the baby with her own attachment style - secure, anxious, avoidant or disorganised
- Expressed through:
 - the sensitivity of her responses to infant's communications about hunger and satiation
 - her ability to manage his levels of arousal and distress
 - opportunities she creates and allows for communication, intimacy and dependency
- What messages are taken in with the feed?





EATING AND BELONGING

- Weaning
- Food as a portal into the wider world
- *"Sitting and eating together as a family or group and learning culturally appropriate table manners prepare us for making our own way in the world"* (Visser, 2017: 285)
- Food mediates relationships
- Developing and nurturing community



FOOD AND IDENTITY

- Cultural background
- Historical context
- Epigenetic factors
- Social class, relative wealth or poverty
- Religion
- Gender?
- Identifications, choices, aspirations, values
- What we reject
- Social concerns: environment, animal rights, social policy*

RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD TELLS US ABOUT...

- Relationship with ourselves
 - What kind of food
 - How we feed ourselves
 - Or deny ourselves...
- Relationship with others: couple relationships, friendship groups etc
 - What kind of food
 - Food preparation
 - Accommodating needs and preferences
 - How, when, where
 - Socialising

MAN WITH TOURETTE'S

"I can only eat out at top restaurants because they are too polite to notice my tics. Everywhere else they are an embarrassment - I am an embarrassment."

'ATTACHMENT TO FOOD'

Broadly:

- 'Secure' / healthy
- Preoccupied
- Avoidant
- Disorganised ('disordered eating -> eating disorders')

ATTACHMENT, FOOD AND ACEs

- *"I suggest that those ... involved in succouring human well-being, whether professionals, survivors, or community enablers, now gather under the growing banner of the ACEs movement [that] reiterates the progressive intentions of Bowlby and his colleagues."* (Partridge, 2021, xi)
- Obesity: Felitti and Kaiser Permanente research
- *"There is a strong systemic relationship between obesity and deprivation"*
- With *"a significant increase in obesity in the most deprived communities in England in recent years"* (Holmes, 2021 for The King's Fund)
- Disproportionately affects people from some minority ethnic groups

ACES AND...

- Eating disorders / disordered eating
- Diabetes*
- Heart disease
- Cancers
- Addictions
- Poverty
- Low academic achievement
- = Depression, hopelessness
- = Poor quality food... ->->->

ATTACHMENT AND SOCIAL VALUES

- ‘Political’ dimension to Attachment Theory
- Aim: increase security through the generations
- Many approaches, opportunities to intervene
- Social policies, environment etc
- If there is the will...
- Attachment, security and food

WHY SHARE?

- Social species
- To evade potential conflict
- Mutual benefit: ‘gift exchange systems’
- Status
- Traditions of hospitality: shame
- To bind a community
- “You can’t underestimate the power of doing the right thing” (Deep Kaur, Guru Maneyo Granth Gurdwara)
- “We are not at table merely to eat, but in order to enjoy each other’s company” (Visser, 2017 p.285)



ALTRUISM

- Altruism / concern
- Experiments by Warneken show that 18-month olds are pro-social: “They simply want to help, even when it costs them. They will give up their own food to an experimenter if [his or her] bowl is empty.” (Wrangham, 2019: 204)
- Development in children
- Impulse control
- Altruism implies internal resources – not depleted by acts of generosity
- Beginnings of true empathy



- “An infant’s innate altruism needs certain conditions in his relational environment in order to develop into this more mature compassion for other people
- If children feel safe, loved, understood, respected and protected by their caregivers, their internal resources flourish
- Feeling well-resourced internally, they are not depleted by acts of generosity toward others
- Being “secure” is not equated with being financially comfortable: many compassionate, generous individuals and peoples are poor - their ‘wealth’ is of a different nature
- Whatever they have, a little or plenty, they are happy to share...”

WHY WE DON'T SHARE

- *“There is always a balancing act between the basic urge for individual survival and the more sophisticated ability to maintain social connections to survive in a complex human society”* (Gerhardt, 2011:24)
- Sibling rivalry
- “Not enough to go round” – ‘maternal deprivation’
- Internal resources
- Limbic system: threat -> activation of primitive survival strategies



‘GENEROSITY’, GREED AND DEPRIVATION

- Where consistent, reliable, nourishing internal object is missing
- Food is not the nourishment that is needed
- Fast food – limited capacity for self-care
- The body as communication
- Or reproach...
- *“The striking and frankly annoying conflict between our ability quickly and safely to reduce a person's weight and what patients appeared capable of tolerating emotionally led us to detailed exploration of the life histories of 286 of our patients. Here, we unexpectedly discovered that histories of childhood sexual abuse were common, as were histories of growing up in markedly dysfunctional households. It became evident that traumatic life experiences during childhood and adolescence were far more common in an obese population than was comfortably recognized.”* (Felitti et al, 2010)

GENEROSITY, GREED, SELFISHNESS

- How we share the world’s resources
- ‘First world’ and ‘developing world’
- Our own internal resources
- Food banks
- COVID lockdowns
- UK aid budget
- Treatment of refugees
- *“SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 7, 1971—The United States aid mission in South Vietnam has quietly suspended a significant part of the Food for Peace program after Federal investigators uncovered widespread abuses, including the sale of war victims’ food aid as pig feed.”* (NY Times)



SELF DENIAL

- Battle with own “greed”
- Dieting
- Fasting
- “Giving up” ... meat, sugar, dairy, non- organic etc
- ‘Moral’ justifications
- Anorexia mirabilis: ‘holy anorexia’ - *“a long-standing relation between self-starvation and religious asceticism”* (Davis & Ngoyen, 2014)
- 1 in 5 women with anorexia in the UK are autistic (Dr Will Mandy, UCL research)



THE AIM OF ATTACHMENT-BASED THERAPY...

Earned security

SOME INGREDIENTS OF SECURE ATTACHMENT

- Healthy affect regulation
- Intergenerational narrative – “storied self”
- Mourning losses
- One component of secure attachment is capacity to mentalise and...
- *“The success of an ethic of care depends on people being able to ‘mentalise’”* (Gerhardt, 2011:16)
- To see others as individuals, people with their own unique histories
- AND to fill internal store cupboard with resources

STORIES FROM THERAPY

- Gifts of food:
 - The garden party
 - Diwali sweets
- Gifts to the therapist
 - What is the true gift?
- The fantasy of tea and cake
- The tea and cake dilemma

