

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

### What words cannot say: the telling story of video in attachment-based interventions

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In this Introduction to the Special Issue *The Use of Video in Attachment-Based Interventions*, we describe how film and video made their entry in attachment theory and research and ultimately in attachment-based interventions. The role of film in helping to *understand attachment* had its roots several decades ago with the Robertsons' footage as a memorable example, while the role of video in helping to *support attachment* in the context of intervention started later but quickly increased with the rapid growth of smaller video cameras. Today the use of video and video feedback in attachment-based interventions is common, with applications in home-visiting programs, clinical treatment and therapy, and training modalities for parent coaches. In this Special Issue we highlight current work in this field, including illustrative case studies, clinical descriptions and process evaluations as well as rigorous randomized controlled trials.

**Keywords:** attachment-based interventions; filmed observations; video; video feedback; speaking-for-the-child technique

In this Introduction to the Special Issue *The Use of Video in Attachment-Based Interventions*, we describe how film and video made their entry in attachment theory and research and ultimately in attachment-based interventions. In the Subject Index of John Bowlby's book *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory* (1988), the words "video", "video feedback" or "video review" are not to be found. Also, the construct of "attachment-based intervention" was unknown at the time that Bowlby's book was published. Yet, Bowlby who was deeply concerned about helping troubled families was hopeful when he referred to the pioneering home-visiting program "Home Start" in terms that would fit many attachment-based interventions using video feedback to date: "Every effort is made to encourage the parents' strengths and to reassure them that difficulties in caring for children are not unusual, and also that it is possible for family life to be enjoyable" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 96). Since the formulation of attachment theory by John Bowlby (1973, 1982) and later confirmed by the detailed behavioral observations of Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), many intervention programs aimed at improving sensitive parenting and children's attachment security have been developed and tested in clinical and non-clinical populations. In this Special Issue we focus on the use of video in attachment-based interventions.

The role of visual material like photos and films in helping to *understand attachment* had its roots in the development of attachment theory several decades ago, with the

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remarkable black-and-white films of the Robertsons as a memorable landmark. The role of video in helping to *support attachment* in the context of intervention started later but quickly increased simultaneously with the rapid growth of small and affordable video cameras (along with large and affordable television sets). Today the use of video in attachment-based interventions is common and widely accepted, with applications in home-visiting programs, clinical treatment and therapy, and training modalities for parent coaches. In this Special Issue we highlight some of the current work in this field. The contributions in this issue have in common that they are based on attachment theory and that they use video, while they can be differentiated in the type of work they present: from single case studies, clinical descriptions and process evaluations to rigorous randomized controlled trials. At the end of this Introduction we briefly elaborate on each specific contribution in this Special Issue. Before that, we go back in time to understand how video became connected with attachment research and ultimately with attachment interventions.

### **Understanding attachment: naturalistic observations captured in photos and film**

Careful observations of young children and their parents are at the heart of attachment theory. Bowlby cites and so we can presume was influenced by the work of one of the earliest “baby watchers”, psychoanalyst René Spitz who made his mark by studying and writing about the effects of institutional care on the emotional development of young infants. Spitz (1945), struck by the terrible statistics on infant mortality rates among institutionalized infants, some as high as 70%, undertook a long-term study of 164 infants residing in low socioeconomic status homes with their mothers, a “penal nursery” where infants resided with their mothers, and a “foundling home”, most reminiscent of orphanage/institutional care. Aside from the large sample he recruited, and the structured assessments of development he administered, Spitz was ahead of his time by including a total of 31,500 feet of film of abandoned children living in institutional settings or foundling homes.

Bowlby (1973, 1982) as well as Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978) based their theoretical constructs on extensive observations of the behavior of young children and their parents. Often their arguments were supported by photographs and films of young children or young animals and their reactions to the whereabouts and behavior of their parents. The photos of Mary Ainsworth’s (1967) work in Uganda are famous and supported her naturalistic, direct observations of the development of attachment in 28 young Ganda children. According to Van der Horst (2011, p. 139) who studied the historical origins of attachment theory, it was in Uganda that Ainsworth was for the first time able to ascertain the crucial role of maternal sensitivity for the development of children’s attachment security.

In the case of Bowlby, observations of young animals in the field of ethology, particularly drawn from the momentous work on geese by Konrad Lorenz, stimulated him to reflect on the principle of imprinting as a possible process underlying the formation of mother–infant bonds (Van der Horst, 2011, p. 76). The film fragments illustrating Lorenz’s work were excellent. Even to date, new students in the field of psychology and family studies are impressed by the black-and-white film footage on imprinting showing young goslings following not their mother but a human substitute immediately after hatching. Bowlby’s adoption of an evolutionary approach as underpinning of attachment theory was not only inspired by Lorenz’s ethological findings but also by the related work of Harry Harlow. Harlow’s (1958) seminal work *The Nature of Love* convincingly showed

that infant rhesus monkeys separated from their mother preferred close physical contact with a substitute iron mother with a soft cloth over a substitute iron mother offering food but without the more comforting feel of a cloth-covered wire mother. Again, the black-and-white film footage and pictures of the Harlow experiments are famous to this day, and probably are partly responsible for the enormous impact of this work.

Bowlby was convinced of the importance of animal research to understand human parent-child interactions and relationships, because understanding of biological processes would facilitate the understanding of psychological processes in humans (Van der Horst, 2011, pp. 115-116). One huge step to extrapolate the innovative ideas from animal studies to human research was made when the groundbreaking films of the Robertsons became available. During World War II, James Robertson had worked as a boilerman in Anna Freud's residential nursery for children orphaned or separated from their parents. Anna Freud required all members of the staff, including the cooks, the custodial staff, and the child analysts in training, to record their observations of the children's behavior. Developing the skill to observe young children in context and to discuss the meaning of their behavior could be seen to lay the foundation for James Robertson and his wife Joyce Robertson who went on to study young children's reactions when separated from their mothers and left at the care of a hospital or nursery in the 1950s and 1960s. They decided not only to write down detailed and extensive observations of the children's behavior but also to film the children in a systematic way during the days of the separation. In their book *Separation and the Very Young* (Robertson & Robertson, 1989) they describe how they came to think of filming as a way of presenting their evidence to colleagues and professionals. James Robertson wrote:

How was I to find the correct words with which to describe objectively the shifts of behavior in a young patient in distress on the first day, the third day? How to choose adjectives that would convey the subtleties without distortions? (...) The answer came by chance. I read somewhere that visual communication pierces defenses as the spoken word cannot do. It allows what is shown to be examined and re-examined. That was the answer. I decided to attempt a film record of a young child throughout a short stay in hospital (...). (Robertson & Robertson, 1989, p. 23)

The rest of the story is history. The Robertsons succeeded in making deeply moving and highly convincing films of which at least two are in our collective memory: *A Two-year-old Goes to Hospital* (Laura, 29 months old, from the project Young Children in Hospital), and *John, Aged Seventeen Months, for Nine Days in a Residential Nursery* (from the project Young Children in Brief Separation). Starting with filming in the early 1950s, the costs and efforts of finding and handling suitable cameras were considerable. Supported by a fund, James Robertson bought a Bell and Howell spring-wound 16mm cine camera with three lenses and a hand-held light meter but without through-the-lens viewing or a tripod. Although he had never handled a cine camera, after studying a handbook over a weekend and practicing on his own family, he just began the project, according to James Robertson himself (Robertson & Robertson, 1989, p. 24). The results were black-and-white silent films, showing intimate, detailed and rich observations of young children's behavior in the course of a separation from their mother. The silent but highly visible distress of Laura and John offered exactly what the Robertsons had in mind about what words cannot say but films can show. In terms of the advantages of films above text alone, the Robertsons stated:



The dangers of early separation had long been known intellectually. (...) But it had not been known with appropriate affect. A story that could be told in twenty lines of textbook without causing comment, in its visual form struck deep and provoked emotional turmoil in most viewers. (Robertson & Robertson, 1989, p. 91)

Interestingly, when looking back at the Robertsons' work there is another feature of their films worth mentioning. From the perspective of attachment-based interventions, the film footage was not only influential because of its visual strengths but also because the scenes filmed by James Robertson were accompanied by the extensive written observations by Joyce Robertson, put into words by a Voice Over. The Voice Over's commentary not only pointed to descriptions of the children's actual behavior but also paid attention to their affective states as shown in facial expressions and body language. In a way, this could be considered a first attempt to practice "*Speaking for the Child*" – giving words to children's emotional expressions, a technique regularly used in attachment-based interventions.

### **Supporting attachment: from silent films to digital camcorders**

The silent films of the Robertsons not only greatly contributed to the understanding of attachment, they also shed light on how attachment might be supported in children. Especially their films of children going to hospital accompanied by their mother or receiving nurturing foster care during a separation can be seen as efforts to prevent the ill effects of drastic, abrupt separations and to relieve the distress of the children involved. In the decades thereafter, with the growing acceptance of attachment theory, many efforts and initiatives were devoted to the further translation of attachment theory into practice. Perhaps it is not surprising, given the impact of the existing footage on goslings, infant rhesus monkeys, and young human infants, that filming continued to play a role in attachment research and attachment interventions.

In contrast to James Robertson who had to deal with extremely large, expensive and hard-to-handle cameras meant for professional cinema filming, the next generation of attachment researchers were blessed with the fast development of small video cameras starting in the 1980s. In an advertisement in the *New Scientist* (28 November 1985, pp. 36–37) Sony's Video 8 Camcorder – or Handycam – was introduced as "the smallest, lightest and most easy to use camcorder in the world". "No bigger than a paperback and weighs a puny 1 KG with batteries and tape inside", according to the advertisement. Indeed, in those days the availability of such video cameras meant a revolution, offering innovative and thus far unknown opportunities for attachment-based interventions. And these developments continue, as we all know, with even smaller digital camcorders (with contemporary camcorders weighing less than 100 grams).

Combined with the common availability of affordable television sets to watch and review videos in almost every home and the general availability of smaller, affordable digital camcorders, to date the need for filming equipment is hardly a limitation to using video in attachment interventions. Indeed, many intervention programs aimed at improving sensitive parenting and children's attachment security have been developed and tested in clinical and non-clinical populations, and many of them are using video in their intervention methods. Often the technique of video feedback is used: filming parent-child interaction and at a later time showing and reviewing the videotape with the parent.

In a series of meta-analytic studies (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003), the effectiveness of attachment-based interventions has been examined and the



authors found that short-term, interaction-focused interventions were successful in enhancing sensitive parenting and promoting children's attachment security. The meta-analyses also showed that interventions with video feedback were more effective in improving sensitive parenting than interventions without this method. Thus, the use of video in attachment-based interventions was recognized as an effective component to support parents to respond to their children's needs and distress in a sensitive way.

Why would video footage offer such a rich tool for attachment-based interventions? There are several key features of video that might explain the effectiveness, suitability and popularity of this medium for clinical therapy and intervention in the area of parent-child attachment relationships (see also Steele et al., 2014, this issue). First, as evidenced by the films discussed before, it is clear that – in Robertson's words (1989, p. 23) – video “allows what is shown to be examined and re-examined”, thus enabling elaborate and indisputable observations of even subtle behaviors of children and parents. As an illustration, Erickson and Kurz-Riemer (1999) named the video-feedback component of their attachment-based program *Seeing is Believing*. Second, as stated before, by showing video fragments of the child's facial expressions and body language, an intervener or therapist can apply “*Speaking for the Child*” by providing “subtitles” to the child's emotions and behavior shown on the film (Carter, Osofsky, & Hann, 1991; Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2008). By doing so, parents are stimulated to include and consider the child's perspective in their thinking, and as a result the accuracy of their observational skills may improve, which is an essential element of Ainsworth's (Ainsworth et al., 1978) construct of sensitivity (Juffer et al., 2008). Third, video can show and expand positive moments of parent-child interaction – by stilling the videotape and repeating important episodes. Video feedback offers opportunities to reinforce these moments, thus empowering the parent to use (more) sensitive and adequate parenting skills in their daily interactions with their children (Juffer et al., 2008). Sometimes, parents may keep a memory of a stilled video moment in their mind, as one parent commented after the intervention: “(...) like a photograph that I carry about in my head” (Woolley, Hertzmann, & Stein, 2008, p. 127). Fourth, watching videos of themselves during daily interactions with their child may encourage and stimulate parents to reflect on their parenting behavior (see also Steele et al., 2014, this issue). For example, in a video-feedback intervention project with eating-disordered mothers and their babies, the video stills and the (repeated) watching of particular episodes proved to be turning points in the reframing of the mothers' perceptions of themselves as having a potential positive influence on their child (Woolley et al., 2008).

Our list of arguments why video is such a helpful tool in attachment-based interventions is not meant to be exhaustive or complete. Based on the many attachment-based interventions that have been developed and tested to date, more could be added to what is now known about the features and effects of video. But it is also important to see what insights new studies can offer. Therefore, within the scope of this Special Issue, we focus on several current intervention studies, all using video, and we hope that the outcomes and experiences reported in the pertinent contributions will broaden our knowledge of the use of video in attachment-based interventions.

### **Avenues to evidence-based practice: experimental research and case studies**

To date, there is a strong emphasis on what is called evidence-based practice. It is recommended more and more that parent coaches, clinicians and therapists make use of interventions with proven effectiveness. Likewise, it has been widely recognized that the



process of developing an attachment-based intervention should be followed by procedures to test the program in a randomized controlled trial. However, this should not be the end of the process. To encourage implementation of an effective intervention, detailed case studies and process evaluations provided to prospective users of the program could support their understanding of the intervention and their willingness to start using it. In a recent study, Allen and Armstrong (2014) found that case studies were a most preferred form of evidence for clinicians, independent of their (positive or negative) attitude toward evidence-based practices. According to these authors, detailed descriptions of case studies from clinical trials should be published more often to prompt wider dissemination of interventions and thus promote evidence-based practice (Allen & Armstrong, 2014).

The contributions in this Special Issue present the whole array of possible outlets: descriptions of the development of an intervention for a specific (clinical) population, process evaluations and tools to facilitate training, case studies and vignettes, and randomized controlled trials. The interventions have in common that they all use video feedback. Moss et al. (2011) found in a randomized controlled trial positive effects of a video-feedback intervention program with maltreating parents and their children, and currently Moss et al. (2014, this issue) present details of the program implementation and a case study of this intervention. Another perspective is offered by Meade, Dozier, and Bernard (2014, this issue) who use video feedback as a tool in training parent coaches implementing the evidence-based Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC; Bernard et al., 2012; Dozier, Zeanah, & Bernard, 2013) parenting program. The authors describe how parent coaches learn to code their own interventions from video with the aim to improve the quality of their intervention.

Two research groups describe how they adapted the evidence-based program Video-feedback to promote Positive Parenting and Sensitive Discipline (VIPP-SD; Juffer et al., 2008) for the use in two specific types of families at risk: parents with intellectual disabilities (Hodes, Meppelder, Schuengel, & Kef, 2014, this issue) and parents of children with autism (Poslawsky et al., 2014, this issue). In the study by Hodes and colleagues, home visitors rated the intervention process during the intervention sessions, resulting in a process evaluation, followed by a case example. Poslawsky et al. illustrate the use of video-feedback by providing vignettes of consecutive sessions of the intervention in their sample of parents of children with autism. Further, in two randomized controlled trials the effectiveness of two other adaptations of the VIPP-SD was tested in a poverty sample and in an ethnic minority sample, respectively. Negrão, Pereira, Soares, and Mesman (2014, this issue) tested the VIPP-SD in low socioeconomic status families of toddlers screened for professionals' concerns about the child's caregiving environment. Yagmur, Mesman, Malda, Bakermans-Kranenburg, and Ekmekci (2014, this issue) adapted the VIPP-SD for Turkish minority families and tested the effectiveness of this intervention in these minority families with children presenting high levels of externalizing behavior problems. Finally, in their contribution Steele et al. (2014, this issue) close the Special Issue by reflecting on the multiple potential benefits of video film as a powerful addition to our clinical toolbox. As an illustration the authors present their work on Group Attachment Based Intervention (GABI), a new intensive program developed for vulnerable families.

Attachment research and visual communication media like photographs, films and videos have been intertwined right from the start. Since clinical implications for practice were identified in attachment theory, numerous attachment-based interventions have been designed and tested. This development has always been accompanied by the use of films and videos, first to better understand attachment in children and then to support



attachment security in children. While the older attachment studies had to cope with many impediments such as expensive and heavy cameras, today it is easy and perfectly common to use video in an intervention. The studies presented in this Special Issue bear witness to the modern use of video in attachment-based interventions through case studies, vignettes and clinical trials. The studies all clearly demonstrate the merits of video for parent support in attachment-based interventions. After more than 60 years, video has proven to be a useful “looking glass” through which parents can see their child and their own behavior with “new” eyes and relive shared positive moments.

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