

# How Do I Become More Secure?

A Grounded Theory of Earning Secure Attachment

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# Research Problem

## WHY STUDY ATTACHMENT CHANGE?

Research shows insecure attachment is costly financially and relationally.

But secure attachment is associated with a variety of benefits including:

- Fewer healthcare costs
- More satisfying friendships and relationships
- Increased likelihood to survive major health conditions like cancer!

So... Understanding how people shift from insecure to secure, otherwise known as earning security is important!

# Purpose of Study

BETTER UNDERSTAND PROCESS OF EARNING SECURITY AND DEVELOP A THEORY EXPLAINING THE PROCESSES AND BEHAVIORS INVOLVED

Grand Tour Question: How do adults with a history of insecure attachment earn security?

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Sub-questions:

- What specific conditions make earning security possible?
- What role does therapy play in attachment change?
- How do participants' close relationships influence their processes of earning security?

# Related Literature

## ON ATTACHMENT CHANGE

### HOW CHANGE OCCURS

- Negative life experiences
- New information/interactions with intimate partners in the presents
- Corrective emotional experiences

### DEVELOPMENT OF ATTACHMENT STYLES

- Lived experiences with caregivers in infancy, esp. during times of distress
- Availability + Responsiveness of caregiver

### A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

Stability vs. Change

### FACTORS RELATED TO POSITIVE CHANGE

- Flexible original models of self and other
- Alternative support figures

# Data Collection & Analysis

## STEPS AND ACTION ITEMS

### PARADIGM

Constructivist Grounded Theory  
(Charmaz, 2014)

### DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews,  
process-focused

Most virtual, some in-person

### DATA ANALYSIS

Recursive data collection and  
analysis

Open coding, focused coding,  
axial coding, theoretical  
coding, memoing

# Participants

## SUBJECTS OF THIS STUDY

**5 Men, 15 Women**

**16 European American, 2 Latinx, 1 Native American, 1 Iranian**

**Majority (11) were age 24-35, and 7 were between 36-55**

**95% had a Bachelor's degree or higher (50% had a masters degree)**

**25% made \$21k-40k/year; 25% made \$61k-80k/year; and 30% made \$81k or higher**

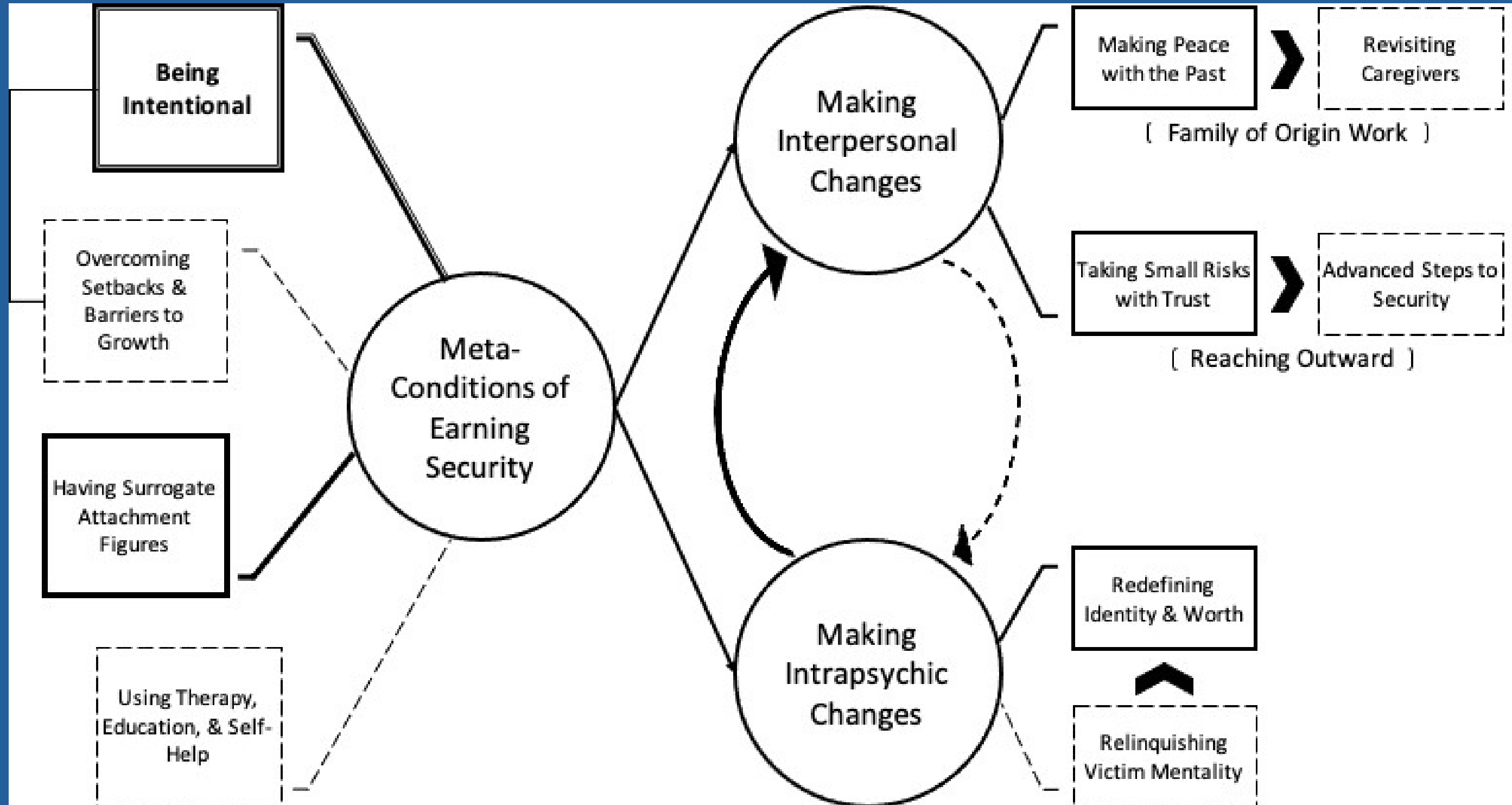
**Range of religious preferences including Catholic, Protestant, jewish, Muslim, Agnostic, Spiritual, and non-religious**

**Only 25% of sample had no professional therapy/counseling training**

# Primary Findings

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

- **META-CONDITIONS OF EARNING SECURITY**
  - Having surrogate attachment figure
  - Being Intentional
  - Overcoming setbacks & barriers to growth
  - Using therapy, education, & self-help
- **INTRA-PSYCHIC CHANGE**
  - Relinquishing victim mentality
  - Redefining identity and worth
- **INTERPERSONAL CHANGE**
  - Family of Origin Work
    - Making peace with the past > Revisiting Caregivers
  - Reaching Outward
    - Taking small risks with trust > Advanced steps to security



## Significant discoveries

There are more avenues for earning security that research previously captured!

Shifting from stubbornness to resolve was a game-changing move and surprising finding.

Participants could not make interpersonal changes before experiencing transformation of their identity and worth.

## Study highlights

As expected, the role of a surrogate attachment figure was key in the earning security process.

Change is a multi-layered, multi-phase process with barriers to continued growth that must be conquered.

Imperative to relinquish a victim mentality for growth to be possible.

## Interpretation of findings

Earning security is possible, even if not easy.

Earning security can happen outside of romantic relationships in adulthood.



# Implications of the Research

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND ADVICE

### ● PERSONAL

- Decide who you want to be and commit to the process of pursuing that goal
  - Allow your stubbornness to transform into resolve
- Find a secure mentor or friend to model for you more secure ways of being
- Seek out therapy to heal any unresolved trauma or relationship wounds.

### ● COMMUNITY

- Pass along what you learn - Advocate for others!
- Be a surrogate attachment figure for at-risk youth in your community
- Invest in your friendships and prioritize relationships that are mutually edifying
- Mentor younger and marginalized colleagues

### ● FUTURE RESEARCH

- Investigate this process in depth for racial minorities, people with lower education levels and income, and continue investigation for men

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