Narrative Assessment of Adolescent Attachment Representations:

The Scoring of Secure Base Script Content

Harriet Salatas Waters

State University of New York at Stony Brook
I. Definition of a Secure Base Script

Bowlby and Ainsworth describe the infant (child)-mother relationship in terms of a balance between proximity seeking and exploration. This balance can be summarized in terms of a prototypic secure base script. This script describes a sequence of events in which the caregiver (1) supports the child’s exploration, (2) remains available and responsive and serves as a resource as necessary; (3) the child encounters an obstacle or threat and becomes distressed; (4) either the child retreats to the caregiver or the caregiver goes to the child; (5) the difficulty is resolved or removed; (6) proximity and/or contact with the caregiver effectively comforts the child; (7) the child (possibly with the caregiver’s assistance) returns to constructive play (or ends play comfortably and makes a transition to another activity). Bowlby hypothesized that familiarity with and access to this script plays an important organizing role in the attachment-exploration balance during infancy and early childhood and is the foundation for attachment “working models” that emerge later.

II. Secure Base Script Content (Adolescent attachment narratives)

In the present study, eight attachment prompt word outlines were developed to guide story production about attachment relevant scenarios. Two involved the adolescent and her mother (Acne, The Party), two the adolescent and her father (The Tennis Match, Studying for an Exam), two the adolescent’s mother and father, and finally two involving a hypothetical boyfriend/girlfriend (School Play, Ski Accident). Included in the study were two additional stories from the Waters and Rodrigues (2001) adult attachment battery involving hypothetical adult/adult scenarios (Camping Trip, Accident). We broadly define a prototypic secure script as one in which the secure base (mom/dad/partner) helps the individual (character in story) deal with some distress and helps to get things back to normal. Stories organized around a secure base script will have:

1) the secure base helping to select and implement strategies for getting things back to normal and defusing the emotional distress, when that is possible, or providing comfort when that is not
possible, and providing explanatory frameworks to help understand the situation (for the adolescent)

2) the secure base reconfiguring the person's representation to focus on more positive aspects, thereby diffusing the negative emotion. This often involves pointing out the “bright” side of a situation, e.g., there will be other tennis matches, other plays for which to try out.

3) an interpersonal focus, that is, a sensitivity to and awareness of the other person’s psychological/emotional state. In the parent/child scenarios it is often the parent who approaches the adolescent child sensing that there is some distress and offers their assistance. In more equal relationships (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend) there is more of a give-and-take, with each partner making their own contribution to the situation, activity, but often working together “as a team.” There is also emotional give-and-take with an expressed emotion in one leading to an emotional response in the other.

III. Scriptedness Scoring System

Highest ranked stories are those with extensive secure base content and a strong interpersonal framework. Stories lower in rankings would have less and less of the secure base content. Instead they will focus on the events occurred giving a more matter of fact rendition of the events in the story line. At some point lower ranked stories would begin to contain “odd” content, i.e., content inconsistent with a secure base script. There would also begin to be breaks in the coherence of story events, with emotional content just there, with no follow-up or reaction from the secure base character. In order to capture the full range of secure base scriptedness in the stories, a seven point scriptedness scale developed by Waters and Rodrigues (2001, SRCD) is used to score each attachment narrative (scale presented below).

7. These are the very best examples of secure base content in the narrative. There is a rich interplay between the two principle characters. There is a great deal of attention to the psychological state of the other, and the “secure base” is very responsive to that psychological state. Important to the secure base script is the resolution of the problem/distress with a return to normalcy.
6. These narratives fall short of the richness of secure base content that is evidenced in stories ranked “7”. Nonetheless, these stories to contain a reasonable amount of secure base content.

5. These narratives have a medium amount of secure base content, but not as much elaboration as those that are ranked “7” or “6”.

4. These narratives have some secure base content, but not very much. Thus, they are weak on secure base content, but there is no odd content contained in the story either.

3. These narratives seem mostly event-related stories, in which what is happening is presented, with very little commentary on the give and take between with the characters, or on the psychological content of the story.

2. These are event-related as well, but so brief as to seem disjointed. Also included in this category are narratives that contain some odd content that is inconsistent with a secure base script. The intrusion of this content however is not as consistent or pervasive as the narratives that are scored “1.”

1. These narratives are theme-based variations that come across as quite peculiar interpretations of the implied story line. Not only is the secure base script not recognized, but a quite different script is in its place. The narratives can be quite detailed, with content generated consistent with the odd interpretation of the story line. These are not that common.

Narratives that have significant “odd” content, but fall short of a complete theme-based variation also receive a “1.”

The following pages contain descriptions of how the secure base script is instantiated for each attachment scenario along with sample adolescent narratives that span the complete scale range from good secure base content to the absence of such content to the redirection of the story line away from the implied attachment scenario. The original study involved female adolescents, but the word prompt outlines have been used with adolescent males as well. The same word prompts have been used successfully with both genders; only one modified for use with male adolescents (the “Mom and I” story about “Acne” was changed to “Haircut” for males).
“Mom and I” Attachment Narratives

Acne

Sunday    Mom    laugh
mirror    talk    bathroom
acne    herself    experiment
embarrassed    acne    make-up

The secure base script in this narrative involves the child seeking help once she realizes she has a problem or the parent notices that there is something wrong. At this point, there are a number of constructive strategies that the parent can adopt to diffuse the distress: 1) she can relate her own experiences with acne, suggesting this is commonplace and manageable, 2) in relating some experiences, she can introduce humor and change the child’s mood for the better, 3) she can provide some remedies that might help, actively experimenting with different options, or 4) she can recast the situation in terms that enable the child to gain some perspective and therefore diffuse the situation, e.g., “It doesn’t matter what you look like, its who you are as a person.” In the end the child is back on track and feeling better, with the problem addressed, either because “it wasn’t that bad,” the child is no longer so concerned, and/or it was successfully managed with make-up/medication.
Acne

It was Sunday before the first day of school in eighth grade, and I looked in the mirror and was trying to decide what to wear. I was trying on all these outfits, and I discovered that I had a lot of pimples on my face. And I had always had pimples, but it just was more than the day before or the day before that. So I started to think that maybe I would be embarrassed the next day when I went to school, and maybe people would make fun of me. So I went down to talk to my mom, and she said that it’s not that big of a deal. She had that problem and my father had that problem too. Acne is very common in teenagers. So she told me some stories about herself and problems that she had and she made me laugh, and she made me feel like it was OK. Then she said: “Why don’t we go into the bathroom, and we’ll try something, kinda like a little experiment.” So I sat down and she asked me to close my eyes. And then she put makeup all on my face, but my eyes were still closed, so I didn’t know what I looked like. Then she told me to open my eyes, and I looked and you could hardly see anything, and I was really happy. And I wasn’t embarrassed or nervous to go to school the next day.

Script Score: 7 This story contains a rich secure base script. The daughter goes downstairs to discuss her acne with her mom, who explains that it is not that big of a deal. Mom elaborates by telling stories of how she and Dad had that problem, and that this is typical of adolescence, providing some perspective for her daughter. While Mom did succeed in making her daughter feel better, she nonetheless takes the next step to deal with the problem constructively. They experiment with make-up and cover up the problem. The daughter is happy and goes to school without feeling embarrassed or nervous.
Acne

It’s a Sunday night, and it’s the day before school. And usually I like to start Mondays off on a good note. But I look in the mirror and I see horrible acne on my face and just pimples, and it’s disgusting. And I feel so embarrassed that I’m going to have to walk into school the next day like that. And I’m standing there obsessing over myself in the mirror, and my mom walks in noticing my dilemma. And she starts talking about when she was my age and she also suffered from adolescent acne, and she remembers when she had to deal with it. And she laughed because it brings her back to when she was really young. And then she says that’s it’s really ridiculous that I’m stopping myself from enjoying my life over a stupid thing like that. And she thinks it’s just stupid and I should enjoy things just the way they are. And she takes me into the bathroom and opens that third door, and shows me her stash of makeup, and shows me ways to cover up whatever’s making me feel really bad about myself, and just shows me ways to feel more confident about myself.

Script Score: 6.25  This story contains good secure base content. The daughter is standing in front of a mirror worried about her acne. Mom walks in and notices that her daughter is distressed. She talks about her own experiences with acne and encourages her daughter to take this in stride and just enjoy things as they are. Mom does take the next step by going into the bathroom and showing her daughter how to use make-up to cover up the acne. This is good script content, but there is a bit less elaboration that a “7.” For example the ending does not include a resolution in which the daughter goes off to school (church, etc.) no longer concerned about her acne problem. Also, “7” stories include the daughter actually seeking out Mom in the beginning.
Acne

I was looking forward to Sunday all week. I had a great date coming up that evening. At about 4:00 I came into the bathroom, and looked in the mirror to make sure I looked all right. When all of a sudden, I stopped. I screamed. Acne! I would be so embarrassed if I went to my date looking like this. I looked awful! I ran to the stairs and called down, “Mom!” She came running up the stairs. “What is it? What is it?” She said. “Acne!” I said. “Talk to me, hon. What are you going to do?” “I don’t know. I can’t go out like this.” She then began to tell me a story about herself. It turns out that she had acne when she was younger also. I began to laugh. Then she said, “I know something to help you.” She brought me back to the bathroom, and told me to experiment with some make-up that she had. I put it on and I looked fine, and I had a great date.

Script Score: 5.5 This story contains a solid secure base script. The basic components of the script (daughter calling to Mom, Mom relating stories about herself, Mom helping her daughter with some make-up, and finally the daughter ready to face the world) are all there, but the elaboration is less than that of a “7” or a “6.”
Acne

The Sunday before my Senior picture, I got up and looked in the mirror and saw that I had a pimple on my face. I was really embarrassed and so I went crying to my mom. She told me a story about how when she was younger, she had a big date and she found a huge pimple, so she tried covering it up with make-up, but it didn’t work. So we laughed over that. And then she brought me into the bathroom to experiment with a bunch of weird medicine stuff and putting on make-up even though I never wore it. The next morning, I woke up and my pimple was gone.

Script Score:  4  This story receives credit for some evidence of a secure base script because the daughter goes to her mom when she becomes upset. Mom tells a story that brings laughter which also can be counted as helping to diffuse the distress. Finally, there is also the fact that the next day the pimple is gone, presumably because of the medicine that Mom tried out on her daughter. Nonetheless the story is very matter-of-fact, following the word prompts closely with relatively little elaboration on how the daughter comes to feel better after Mom’s intervention.
Acne

It’s a Sunday morning and I wake up and look in the mirror, and I’ve had a breakout of acne. I’m kind of embarrassed because I know that I’ll have to go to school tomorrow, and I don’t want to have a lot of acne on my face. So I go downstairs and talk to my mom, and I tell her about the breakout and everything. So she asks me what I want to do about it, and I’ve had breakouts before, so we both just go up to the bathroom. We experiment with the different stuff I have and my mom has. She usually says it’s best just to wash my face and leave it, so that’s what I do, and if it doesn’t work then I’ll just wear makeup the next morning.

Script Score: 3.5  This story is very event-focused and very much matter-of-fact in tone. Yet the daughter does go downstairs in order to speak to Mom. Perhaps there is a hint of the secure base script, so the score is “3.5” instead of a “3” which is reserved for event-focused stories.
Acne

It’s Sunday and I look in the mirror and I realize that I have a really bad case of acne. Blech.
So Mom walks in and she starts making comments which causes me to be pretty embarrassed.
So Mom starts to talk about things that you can do to get rid of acne. Pretty soon we end up
laughing because she wants me to experiment with makeup, but I hate makeup.

Script Score: 2 (abbreviated) This story is event-focused, staying close to the word
prompts. Its also short and has a bit of disjointed presentation of events. As a consequence it
receives a “2.”
Acne

On Sunday morning I woke up for church and I looked in the mirror. I noticed that I had broken out all over my face. And so I ran to my mom and said that I really didn’t want to go to church because I was really embarrassed about how it looked. She told me to wash my face and to just cover it up with makeup. So I went to the bathroom, and so I decided to experiment with a cleaner that my sister had told me about. I experimented with it and I walked down to my room, my mom saw me and she laughed at me and said how funny I looked with the stuff on my face. I said that I really wanted to get rid of the acne on my face, so she said that she would talk about it later on with a doctor, and maybe I could go see a doctor about it to help it go away.

**Script Score: 2 (some odd content)** This story contains some unusual interactions between daughter and Mom. When first approached by her daughter, Mom is not supportive and in fact tells her daughter to just wash her face and cover up the acne. The daughter is left to fend for herself and is even laughed at when she comes down with some cleaner on her face. This story is definitely in the odd content range, but doesn’t receive a “1” because there is some support at the end at least there is the offer of seeking a doctor’s advice. The story is more of a mixed bag with regard to odd content.
Acne

On Sunday morning I woke up to go to church. The first thing I do is go into the bathroom so I can take a shower and get ready. I looked in the mirror before I got in the shower, and I saw that I had broken out in acne over night. I was so embarrassed and did not want to go out. My mom came in and told my to hurry up, that we had to go, but I did not want to leave the house. My sister came in and she started laughing at me because I was so upset. I talked to her and she said that it would be ok, but you have to leave the bathroom. I was so upset because I had never had acne before. I decided to experiment with some makeup to try and cover it up. It didn’t work too well. It took me about 2 hours to come out of the bathroom. I went to church that morning and to my surprise no one even noticed, it wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be.

Script Score: 1  This story provides a very different type of interaction between mom and daughter. At no point in the story line does the daughter seek help from her mother, nor does Mom recognize the problem or offer any help at any point in the story. This is very unusual and merits a “1.”
“Mom and I” Attachment Narratives

Haircut (male version of the Acne story)

| weekend    | Mom     | clippers |
| barber     | talk    | experiment |
| bad haircut | we laugh | fix |
| embarrassed | bathroom | hug |

The secure base script in this narrative begins with the son’s embarrassment over a bad haircut. He and his mother talk about the problem, and mom tries to fix the problem. The mother’s success is primarily in terms of lightening up the mood, with the two of them often laughing about the situation. Usually the situation is improved to some degree after they experiment with clippers, but the child is mostly happy that mom tried to help. The story ends with a hug and the son feeling better. He’s back on track and ready to face the world.
“Mom and I” Attachment Narratives

The Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friday night</th>
<th>sulk</th>
<th>Blockbuster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>party</td>
<td>couch</td>
<td>movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uninvited</td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>popcorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miserable</td>
<td>talk</td>
<td>smile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this narrative the secure base script involves the mother noticing that her daughter is upset and asks about how she is feeling. Mom sits down and speaks with her daughter, consoling her and offering various kinds of support. The discussion often involves providing some type of perspective, e.g., everyone is disappointed sometimes in their life, or depending on the particulars of the story, perhaps there is an understandable reason for what happened (even if the result is disappointing). Mom goes further though and suggests/arranges a night together, helping change her daughter’s mood and making her feel better. By the end of the story, the daughter is not only feeling better, but appreciative about Mom’s company and/or insight.
The Party

It was Friday during school, and I found out about a party that was going to happen Friday night that I was not invited to. This made me very upset, and I honestly felt really miserable about it. All of my friends were going to the party, all the girls from the track team were going to the party, and I was not invited. I went home that day after school after having a really bad day, and cried about how I wasn’t invited to the party and about the bad day at school. I was sulking on the couch when my mom came home and she came over to talk to me and asked me why I was so upset. I told her that there was a party tonight and I wasn’t invited, and all my friends were going and it kinda made me feel upset. My mom and I talked for awhile about how in life you’re gonna feel left out from time to time, and you just have to deal with it. And it ended up that after the talk I had with my mom, I felt a lot better. And instead of making my life miserable and instead of sulking on the couch for the rest of the night, my mom and I decided to spend the party time together. So we went to Blockbuster and rented one of our favorite movies, “Sweet November,” and brought it back to the house. We talked, ate popcorn, ate candy, and she made me smile a lot. Talking to my mom made me feel a lot better and spending the night with her wasn’t that bad after all. Even though I didn’t go to the party, I still had a good night and I knew if the situation ever happened again, I wouldn’t be that sad in the future.

Script Score: 7  This story has a rich secure base script. Mom notices that her daughter is upset and asks her what is wrong. Mom provides a perspective on the situation and the daughter feels better. They decide to spend the night together and Mom succeeds in making her daughter smile, enjoy the evening, and go away thinking that she’ll be able to handle these sorts of situations well in the future.
The Party

It was a Friday night after finals week had ended, and I was really excited hoping to go out with my friends. And then I called my two best friends, and one of them said that she wasn’t sure what she was doing, and the other one said that she was going out to a party. So not hearing about the party, I called another one of my friends, and she had already left. So I realized that I probably wasn’t invited to this party, so I began to get very upset. After sitting on the couch for awhile and feeling miserable about myself, I decided to talk to my mom. She made me feel better and she said that it probably wouldn’t be a place that I wanted to be away. If I wasn’t invited, then maybe it was for the best. She made me feel better and she told me that we can go to Blockbuster and rent a movie, and so we did. We rented my favorite movie, “Save the Last Dance,” and we got some popcorn, and she made me smile. And it felt good just to sit with my mom and talk to her.

Script Score: 6  This story has a good secure base script. The daughter seeks out Mom because she is upset and Mom succeeds in making her daughter feel better. They rent a movie, enjoy the evening, talk, and the daughter feels good about just sitting and talking with Mom. The story didn’t receive a “7” because there is less detail about the give-and-take between mom and daughter.
The Party

It’s a Friday night, and the night when everybody’s out having fun. And there’s a party that I had known about and I thought I was going to be invited to, but it turns out I was never given the invitation and all my friends were. And I’m miserable, and I hate feeling sorry for myself, but in this situation I can’t help it because I’m alone and I just hate being alone on Friday night. So I’m sitting on the couch and I’m sulking, and watching TV, and drowning my sorrows. And my mom, who always notices when I’m unhappy, walks up and says “I rented this really good movie from Blockbuster. It’s a period drama. Would you like to watch it with me tonight?” And usually I would consider it pretty stupid to hang out with your mom on a Friday night when you have friends, but in this instance I just said ok. And we had popcorn, and watched it, and smiled. It was fun.

Script Score: 5.25 This story has an adequate secure base script, but not the richness of a “7” or “6.” Mom does notice that her daughter is unhappy, and offers a fun activity to lighten her mood, a movie from Blockbuster. They watch the movie, the daughter smiles and thinks it was fun. But there is no discussion about the daughter’s problem about the party.
The Party

It was Friday night, and I was sitting home by myself because there was a party that I had not been invited to. I felt really bad and it was my friend that was having a party. I was sulking in the kitchen when my mom came in. She started talking to me, but I was being pretty snotty to her. But I could tell that she felt bad for me, so she asked me if I wanted to go rent a movie. So I went with her to Blockbuster and we rented a movie and bought some popcorn, and we sat on the couch and watched the movie and talked a little, and she made me feel a lot better. So by the end of the night, I was smiling.

Script Score: 4  This story has a somewhat weak secure base script. Mom does start talking to her daughter but the interaction is uneven. Also there is no open discussion of what ails the daughter, or a clear indication that mom has noticed her poor mood when she starts talking to the daughter. But Mom does ask if her daughter wants to watch a movie, and the daughter does feel better at the end.
The Party

All Friday in school, everybody had been talking about this great party. I was so excited, even though I hadn’t been invited yet. Then, Friday night came, and I realized that I wasn’t invited to the party. I was miserable. It was the worst night. I was sulking around, just sitting on the couch, eating ice cream, complaining. And my mom walked in and said to me, “You know what? If you’re not invited to a party, it’s no big deal.” So we decided to go out to Blockbuster, get some movies, sit on the couch, eat popcorn, and just have a good time. It was a fun night, and my mom and I both laughed all night long.

Script Score: 3.25  This story an event-focused narrative. There is no give-an-take. Mom simply announces that its not a big deal if you’re not invited to a party. But the more usual recognition of her daughter’s mood, asking what the problem is, etc., is missing. The daughter ends up having a fun night, but the word prompt “smile” may account for that. There is no statement that “mom made me feel better.” One of the scorers did “see” a hint of that, that is why the averaged score is 3.25. But there is nothing more than a hint. The other scorer gave the story a straight “3.”
The Party

It was Friday night and the party that was going on that night, I was not invited to. I was miserable. I was sulking on the couch when my mom walked in. She talked about going to Blockbuster and renting a movie and buying popcorn. I left Blockbuster smiling and knowing that I’d have fun that night.

Script Score: 2 (abbreviated)  This story is a brief and event-focused narrative. There is no secure base content.
The Party

On Friday night, I had asked my parents if I could go out to a friends house. There was a planned party at the house but my friend had never called me and so I decided that I was going to sit at home and I was very upset that I wasn’t invited. So I got really upset. So my mom decided to go rent a movie. So we went out and got a movie and ice cream and went home and watched the movie. And in the middle of the movie, my friend had called me and said that she had gotten in a fight with her mom and she was sorry that she didn’t call me to give me a ride to the party. But by then my parents didn’t want me going, and so I couldn’t go to the party. But the next night my parents let me go and I was really happy that I was able to go to the party and I was invited because I didn’t think I was.

Script Score: 2.25 (some odd content)  This story is an event-focused narrative with some odd content vis-à-vis the mom-daughter interaction. The daughter is very upset, but Mom does not talk with her daughter, just decides to go get a movie. When things seem to get straightened out (no intervention by Mom) and the daughter wants to go to the party, Mom and Dad simply say “no.” There doesn’t seem to be any sensitivity to daughter’s needs or state of mind.
The Party

It was Friday night, and I really didn’t have anybody to hang out with because all my friends were at a party. I was invited to it because I wasn’t really friends with the person who was holding it. I guess I was just acting pretty miserable and sulking on the couch. Just being generally unpleasant. My mom came in and was talking to me like, “What are you doing? Go do something. Go write an essay for college or go do some homework. Or find something better to do than just sit here and sulk on the couch.” I got angry at her and stormed off. So, my dad came in and asked if I wanted to go to Blockbuster to go get a movie or something. So that’s what I was gonna do. Alright, so we went. We got a comedy, so that it would cheer me up. When we got home my mom made some popcorn for us. Wesmiled and it was all better again.

Script Score: 1.5 This story has some odd content with respect to the mom-daughter interaction and an unusual twist in the story line with Dad entering the picture to solve a problem Mom failed to handle effectively. The odd content here is more significant than a “2” implies. Add in the unusual twist in the story line with Dad’s involvement, this story is closer to a “1.” Please note that Mom offers several unpleasant alternatives to sulking, and as a consequence, the daughter storms out angry with Mom. The ending, with things getting better, seems out of place given the earlier sections of the story.
"Dad and I" Attachment Narratives

The Tennis Match

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>championship</th>
<th>opponent</th>
<th>losing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nervous</td>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>strategy</td>
<td>Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask</td>
<td>game begins</td>
<td>thumbs-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The secure base script associated with this narrative is one in which Dad both offers support and gives his daughter confidence in what is going to be a difficult match, and also provides strategic support. This can begin with either the daughter expressing some distress and seeking help from Dad, or the Dad noticing her distress and asking about how his daughter is doing. He continues to be supportive by his presence at the match. In many stories the father emphasizes that it doesn’t really matter whether you win or lose, but that you did your best and feel good about yourself in the end.
The Tennis Match

I had been playing tennis for about two years and there was a championship game that was coming up next week. I was very, very nervous about it, and I had been practicing pretty much about every day, but I really, really want to win this match. I was so nervous about it, I decided to ask my dad who had also played tennis for many years if he had any advice that he could give me. Well, my dad and I sat down for about an hour at the kitchen table and talked about strategy and discussed game mind, and after that for the next 3 or 4 days, we also went down to the courts and practiced, and practiced, and practiced. He taught me a new move and just said: “Practice makes perfect.” So finally after a week of hard work and thinking about strategy, the game was about to begin. It started off, I was very nervous, but after the game started, I started to relax a little bit. For the beginning of the game I was losing, and it really upset me. But then I looked up into the stands and saw my dad. He gave me a thumbs-up sign and that gave me a new confidence. After I saw that thumbs-up sign from my dad, I felt that I had extra confidence and I actually could win this game. So I became more confident, thought about the strategies we discussed, put on my game mind, and I ended up winning the game. After the game, I thanked my dad for all his help and couldn’t wait until I could play another match so I could have this good experience again.

Script Score: 7 This story has a very rich secure base script. The daughter realizes that she’s nervous and seeks out help from Dad. He speaks to her at length, gives her very good advice and then practices with her. When the game starts and she becomes upset because she’s losing, she checks up in the stands where Dad is. He gives her a thumbs-up and that gives her confidence. With that new confidence, she focuses on the game and wins. At the end, the daughter thanks Dad acknowledging his help in making this very good experience happen. Both Dad and daughter work very well together to the benefit of the daughter.
The Tennis Match

I play tennis and there’s a championship coming up. And I’m really nervous about it because it’s really, really, important to me and I really want to do well. My whole family is going and especially my dad because he plays tennis too, so he was all excited about it; that I was sort of following in his footsteps with this. And he’s been asking me: “Oh, do you want my help? Do you want practice?” So and I’m like: “Yeah, yeah that’s good.” So we spend a lot of time. He’s helping me a lot getting ready for the championship and then we talk a lot about strategy and he’s giving me a lot of advice and he’s really helpful because when he was younger, he was a really good tennis player. So we were talking a lot about stuff involving tennis and finally it was the day of the championship. And the game begins and it’s not going very well. And I’m losing which, in the middle of the game, it really starts to get to me. I’m like: “Oh my God, I’m losing.” I looked at my dad and he has confidence in me. He thinks that I can win and he gives me a thumbs-up. And that really encourages me, so I just give it everything I have, and sure enough I win.

Script Score: 6  This story has a very good secure base script, but it falls short of a “7.” Here as well the Dad is attentive to the daughter’s circumstances and gives her a great deal of help. There is advice and discussion about strategies. When the game begins and she is losing, she looks up to Dad. He gives her a thumbs up and she is encouraged by his confidence in her. And so she wins. Once again this is a good secure base script, just a bit less on some of the components of the script. Dad does offer his help, but its not directly tied to a request of help or apparent nervousness on the daugher’s side. The daughter does win, but there is no end of the story reunion, or thank you.
The Tennis Match

It was my senior year, and it was my last tennis match that I would be playing at Ward Melville High School, and I was really nervous. It was the championships and it was all up to me. My opponents seemed like they were pretty good and I had never lost to them in the past year, so I was really nervous. And I had asked my parents to come, but only my dad could come. I looked up at him before I swung that ball up, and brought back my racket, and he gave me a huge thumbs-up. And the game began. I didn’t really have a strategy, I just wanted to win and I didn’t really want to lose at all. And I kept on looking up at my dad, I was really nervous, and I struck that ball as hard as I could, and my opponent struck it back at me. And I went to dive for it and I missed and I was devastated. And it didn’t look like I was going to win the championships. But in actuality, I didn’t feel that bad about it, because I knew that my dad was there and he was cheering me on. And I knew that I had tried my hardest, and I was going away to college anyway to play tennis and hopefully be successful. So losing wasn’t that bad after all, and I was really glad to have my dad there, and it helped me feel better about my loss.

Script Score: 5.5  This story has a good secure base script, but involves less direct interaction between Dad and daughter. In this version of the script, Dad’s presence buffers the loss and helps the daughter keep this loss in perspective. She does ask her parents to attend, wanting her secure bases near by. When the game goes badly she looks to Dad and appreciates that Dad is cheering her on. That gives her confidence that she did her best, and having Dad there helps make her feel better about the loss.
The Tennis Match

I woke up on the day of the championship tennis match and I was really really nervous. I tried really hard, and I’d been practicing a lot, and no matter what happened, it was possible that I could lose that day. And I know that that would let my dad down. So, I got ready for the game, and headed to the court. And I asked my dad if he had any advice, if we could discuss, maybe, a strategy. And he told me that it didn’t matter how my opponent played, as long as I went out there, and I played my best. And so the game began, and I actually played well. And Dad looked at me from the stands, and gave me a big thumbs-up. Even though I didn’t win the game that day, my dad was still proud.

Script Score: 4  This story received a “4” because there was some interaction between Dad and daughter, but not much beyond what might be prompted by the words of the outline. She does ask for some advice, a strategy for game, but “discuss” and “strategy” are part of the word prompts. There is some secure base content in Dad’s response that she should do her best. That provides some perspective that can buffer her if she loses. Dad seems supportive in giving a thumbs-up and was still proud even though she lost. But it should be noted that she did not look up to the stands for her Dad. In the end there is some indication of a secure base script, but not that much.
I play tennis for Ward Melville High School, and it was the day of our championship match. My partner’s name is Katie Doyle, and we were very nervous about our match. My mom and my dad decided to come to try and cheer us on, give us thumbs-up as we were playing. Our opponents were from Smithtown, and before the game Katie and I discussed our strategy. During the first set, we were losing four games to six, and I was looking around and all of our other teammates were winning. That put a lot of stress on us, but we decided that we had to win this game because it was the championship and we wanted the trophy. We took some time to regroup and we came back out on the court, and we lost the first set, but we came back and won the next two sets to win the championship.

Script Score: 3  This story is entirely event-focused. Both Mom and Dad come along to cheer on their daughter and her tennis partner, but that’s all they do. In fact, the daughter doesn’t ask for their support. That’s their decision. Their presence is just part of the descriptive account of events.
The Tennis Match

Well, I’ve never exactly been the type to win the tennis championship, so I wasn’t exactly nervous because I knew that if I lost it wouldn’t be a big deal. My dad didn’t seem to agree though. He kept asking me these questions about who was my opponent, he kept wanted me to discuss strategy, but I knew that I wouldn’t and then it wasn’t so good, the end. So the game began and sure enough, I was losing. But even in the end, when I was pretty much out of everything, I looked over to my dad who’d wanted me to win and threw me a thumbs-up.

Script Score: 2 (some odd content) The interaction between daughter and Dad is unusual in that Dad wants to focus on the game and strategy, but his daughter is not that interested in the game. It seems that Dad wants her to win because of his own needs/desires. This unusual character in the interaction places the story in the “2” range. There is not enough odd content in order for this story to receive a “1.” The ending is pretty innocuous. She looks to Dad and he gives her a thumbs-up, although once again its because he wants her to win.
The Tennis Match

It was the club championship, and I’m very nervous. I ask my dad to tell me about my opponent. We discuss strategy, and soon the game begins. At first I am losing. Then I look at my dad and he gives me the thumbs-up and I know that I will eventually win.

Script Score: 2 (brief) This story receives a “2” because of its brevity. There is no elaboration whatsoever.
The Tennis Match

So the big tennis championship was coming up, and in order for me to get, I need to perform in the regionals first. And they were coming up soon. I was very nervous. And my dad considers himself to be pretty good tennis player. I don’t know if he is, so, well I asked him about wht we should do. And he gave me suggestions. We discussed my strategy, but just hearing it discussed doesn’t help much. I actually have to get there and play. So my dad played a few rounds, and he thinks that if he just lets me win all the time, its going to raise my self-esteem, and make me feel better. But I always know that he’s just going really easy so I would feel better. So we do that. Then the game begins with my opponent in the actual regionals. And I’m losing, and I’m blaming my dad for not going as good as he should when he played against me. And I looked at him, and he’s there. And he’s giving me the thumbs-up sign. And that isn’t helping either. And I think, well, next time I’m going to practice with someone who I know won’t just try to make me feel better.

Script Score: 1 This story receives a “1” because of its theme-based alternative script. Instead of a secure base script organizing the interaction between Dad and daughter, we have a Dad who tries to fool his daughter into thinking she’s good at tennis. The daughter, for her part, resents her father’s efforts and blames him for her failure. This is the opposite of the helpful, supportive Dad and the appreciative daughter that we find in secure base story lines.
“Dad and I” Attachment Narratives

**Studying for an Exam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>studying</th>
<th>Dad</th>
<th>tutor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>exam</td>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td>discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>look up</td>
<td>smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worried</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The secure base script in this narrative either begins with the daughter seeking help from her father because she is having difficulty studying or the father noticing that his daughter is distressed. Dad offers some type of help such as organizing the studying more effectively and making his daughter feel better and more comfortable/confident about the impeding test. In the best stories dad has gone out of his way to help out, actually studying with his daughter, clearly taking time out of his day/activities in order to be there for his daughter. In the end the daughter expresses some appreciation for Dad’s concern and help.
Studying for an Exam

My AP American Exam was coming up, and I was pretty worried. Even though American History is roughly 200-somthing years, it’s still a lot of information to cover and understand. And it’s a pretty difficult class, and I was just very stressed out. So one night, I was studying. It was a few days before the exam. I knew I still had time, but I’m not the kind of person that can cram everything in, so I was trying to space my time out. And my dad could definitely tell that I was worried and nervous for this test, but he decided to give me my space and let me figure things out on my own because he trusts my judgement and my work habits, because obviously I’ve been successful in the past. So he’s reading the newspaper, and he was glancing up, noticing me pacing around my room and making little comments—little idiosyncratic sort of stressed-out flash card type moments—and he decided to offer me help just as an offering: “Do you want help? Do you want me to quiz you on the presidents, or is there anything I can do for you?” And I told him: “You know, I appreciate it, but I’m OK.” He’s not exactly the greatest tutor, but he is really good about discussing philosophical concepts because my father is not the “American History Textbook” kinda person, he’s more like Howards’ People’s History of the United States. So we’d probably end up debating over Supreme Court cases rather than actually studying. Regardless, I appreciated the help, so I smiled and told him to go to sleep and I stayed up most of the night reviewing my notes and flashcards, and I felt pretty well prepared after a few days of this sort of activity.

Script Score:  7  This story has a rich secure base script in which Dad monitors his daughter’s state and steps in when he thinks he can be of some help. In this case the daughter feels that she can handle the situation but she does discuss some aspects of the work. She appreciates her father’s interest, but is also confident in her own ability. Its worth noting that early on Dad does notice that she’s nervous, but lets her figure things out because he trusts his daughter’s judgement. One has the sense that her own confidence in her ability comes in part from her father’s confidence in her ability.
Studying for an Exam

I had a Physics exam a week from this Thursday and I knew I was going to be a very difficult one. Physics was my worst subject, and I knew I was going to need help. I started studying very early in advance, about an hour each night, figuring if I study each night, I would be able to ace this exam. Although after studying, I found that the material is very difficult and I really was not getting a good grip on the information. So one night after dinner, I went downstairs to my dad. He was sitting at the kitchen table and I talked to him about this exam. My dad said he couldn’t really help me out in Physics too much, but he could hire a tutor to come and help me. So my dad went to call the guidance department the next day at Ward Melville, and talked to my guidance counselor, who gave him a list of tutor’s names. So that day at work, my dad called up the tutor and made an arrangement for him to come over the next night for an hour to go over some Physics material. My dad came home that day and told me about the tutor. I was very excited about having a tutor to help me get a good grade on this exam because I really needed a good grade. I was thankful for my dad going through all that work just to get a tutor, and I was waiting for the tutor to come around five o’clock. My tutor finally came. He came to the dining room table and sat for an hour, we went through all the material and I found that it helped me a lot. After the tutor left, I felt that I was prepared for the exam and I tried my hardest, and there was nothing else I could really do but just to get a good night’s sleep. So I went to bed pretty early and woke up the next morning feeling very prepared. And after taking to exam, I actually did get a good grade—a 94—and I was very thankful that I had the tutor and very glad that I spend all my time studying for the exam.

Script Score: 6 This story receives a “6” because it has a very good secure base script but it is a bit weak on the daughter expressing her appreciation for Dad’s effort. It is fine that Dad’s offer of help is to find a good tutor. Dad takes the extra time to talk to the guidance counselor, calls up a tutor, and makes the arrangements in time to tell his daughter when he comes home. She does say that she’s thankful that Dad did all of this, but as she studies and prepares for the exam, Dad fades into the background.
Studying for an Exam

I was up late one night studying for a very difficult, very big AP Bio exam and I was having a really hard time trying to figure out this one part in the book and I was very worried that I was going to fail the next day. So I was getting all stressed out so my mom was sleeping and I went and found my dad, he was in the den reading a newspaper. And I was like, “Dad, I’m gonna fail, you need to help me” and he put down his newspaper and we went over the material together and we explained that ATP was part of the kreb cycle and all this other stuff and I finally understood and I thanked him for helping me and gave him a hug and a kiss and I got ready for bed and went to sleep.

Script Score: 5  This story contains a solid secure base script but not that much elaboration. The daughter seeks out Dad for help, and he does put down his newspaper in order to work with her on the material. She thanks him and goes to bed. There is much less on how she feels and on Dad’s sensitivity to her situation. But all the pieces of the script are there.
Studying for an Exam

One day I got home from school and was really upset, because I realized that I had a really big history test the next day and was unprepared. So I sat down and started studying. The exam was coming closer because it was getting later in the night, and I realized how difficult it was. I was getting really worried, because it was a really hard topic and I was really unprepared. My Dad saw how stressed out I was getting, so he looked up from his newspaper and decided he would help me. He said that if I needed more help than what he was giving me, we could get a professional tutor. So we discussed the problem a little while, went over the history, and everything was all right. That night I was able to sleep well and wake up the next morning, ready for my test. I did just fine.

Script Score: 4 This story has some secure base content, but not that much. Dad does notice that his daughter is worried and offers some help. However there is no explicit acknowledgement of how useful it was to have Dad’s help. The content elaboration is actually very close to the word prompts that the student is asked to use to generate the story.
Studying for an Exam

For really hard math course, 12X, I was studying for a final exam and I was very, very worried about it because this was the hardest test of the whole year—very difficult. I talked to my dad about it, and he decided that if I thought that I needed help, he would try to find someone. So he looked up in the newspaper some tutors to see which ones, if any, were cheap enough that they could just help me out for a little bit. So I got together with one, and we discussed all the subjects that would be on the test and the tutor really helped me. And so this way, I could study with her and then I could get some sleep by myself. So I took the test and came out with a smile because the tutor really helped me out.

Script Score: 3 This story is event-focused. Although Dad does look up tutors for his daughter after she asks for help, this is very much matter-of-fact and is following the word prompts. The tutor’s help is acknowledged, the Dad’s contribution is not.
Studying for an Exam

I was studying for my writing SAT II exam and I was very worried. I hadn’t been studying enough. I did not feel prepared and it was the morning of the exam. I went into the kitchen and began reading the newspaper as a form of procrastination. Eventually I looked up and my dad was there. He was not happy that I had not been studying. He wanted to help and he tried to be supportive, smiling, saying that maybe I should try to take a nap before the exam because I did not have enough sleep. Eventually the exam came. It was not as difficult as I expected. Later I went home, discussed it with my parents, and they suggested that maybe I should get a tutor before the next exam that I would have to take.

Script Score: 2.5 (some odd content) This story is event-focused, but there is also some unusual content in the interaction between daughter and Dad. The daughter does not ask for help from Dad, but when she eventually looks up from the newspaper, Dad does react. Dad’s initial reaction however is to be unhappy that his daughter has not studied. He does follow up with some suggestions and there is a subsequent discussion about a tutor after the exam.
Studying for an Exam

Me and my dad were studying for an exam. I was worried because I knew that the exam was going to be difficult. So I asked my dad to look in the newspaper for a tutor so I could get some help. We discussed the topic of a tutor with my mom, and she said yes. But it was too late to call the tutor now, so we all went to sleep.

Script Score: 2 (abbreviated)  This story is event-focused. It is also relatively brief with little elaboration, staying very close to the word prompts.
Studying For an Exam

It’s Tuesday night and I’m studying for a test for the next day. It’s difficult – it’s stuff I don’t really get. I’m sitting over my desk. It’s well lighted. I’ve organized it as a method of procrastination. I have all my pencils lying out, sharpened. I have my books set out in front of me. I have my cup of tea next to me. But all I’m doing is sitting with my elbows on the desk, my head in my hands, worried about the test. It’s late Tuesday night, I have the week ahead of me, and I don’t know how I’m gonna prepare for the exam. I look over to where my dad is sitting on the couch reading his newspaper. I look over, I wonder if he’s gonna look up. I wonder if he’s gonna help me. But I still study for a couple hours more. Staring at the book, not really getting it. Finally, before it’s time for my dad to go to bed I ask him if he could just help me with one question. He smiles at me; so there’s no problem. We discuss the problems and finally I decide to go to sleep, even though I’m not really ready for the exam. All of a sudden, I’m not really worried anymore. I feel like it doesn’t matter anymore.

Script Score: 1.5  This story is organized around a very different theme than that of a secure base script. The daughter very much needs some help but is unable to seek her father’s help. She looks over to Dad and wonders if he will help, but does not ask for help until its quite late. He is apparently in the room but does not notice his daughter’s distress. Although she does manage to ask for some help late in the evening and he does help her, it is only help with just one question. As the story comes to a close, she is not ready for the exam. In fact she has decided that it doesn’t matter anymore.
The secure base script in this narrative is one in which Mom and Dad have open lines of communication and work together to find a solution. Dad usually calls Mom and then comes home to continue the discussion about the problems at work. There is a great deal of back and forth, Mom and Dad may have different angles on a solution, but arrive at a conclusion after working through the options together. Often the children are brought into the discussion (they are older), but Mom and Dad may also want to keep them calm until a solution is agreed upon. Mom is supportive, she may even provide some concrete assistance. The tone of the story is that “things will work out, we’re a good team (family).
“Mom and Dad” Attachment Narratives

Weekend Getaway

Mom & Dad  Mom sick  drive
anniversary  pull over  destination
bed & breakfast  relax  smile
tavel  hold  sleep

The secure base script in this narrative begins with a special plan that Mom and Dad have come up with to enjoy their anniversary. Mom becomes ill during the trip, Dad shows some sensitivity. He pulls over, comforts Mom, maybe gives her some water, holds her hand, etc. The trip continues and Mom and Dad end up enjoying their trip. The story can end with some type of affirmation about how much they love each other, or describes some fun things they managed to do after Mom got better.
In this narrative the secure base script involves the boyfriend providing support for Julie as she tries out of an important play. In the best stories he is there as she tries out as well as being there when the school posts the selections for the play. When Julie is disappointed by the outcome, the boyfriend comforts her, providing her with some reassurance that there will be other opportunities, or helps place the disappointment in perspective to defuse the distress. If there is good news, she seeks him out to share the good news.
BoyFriend/Girlfriend Narratives

Ski Accident

Jason & Amanda hurt hospital
skiing Amanda cast
ice help signature
Jason falls hold heart

The secure base script in the narrative is one in which the girlfriend acts quickly to help her boyfriend, and accompanies him to the hospital, showing concern and helping him out. During the ordeal, Amanda makes an effort to reassure Jason that he will be alright and at the end tries to make him feel better, e.g., by placing a heart on his cast. In some cases, Jason also expresses his appreciation that Amanda was there for him as well.
**Adult/Adult Narratives**

**Camping Trip**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jane</th>
<th>tent</th>
<th>campfire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>wind</td>
<td>shadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bags</td>
<td>collapse</td>
<td>sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hurry</td>
<td>upset</td>
<td>hug</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The story usually begins with an negotiation between Jane and Bob as they settle on their trip. This is scored as secure base content because of the sensitivity to the other’s needs and because it involves give-an-take between the two partners. As the story continues there are additional difficulties in which one partner becomes upset, i.e., the tent collapses, the weather turns bad, and there are strange sounds at night. Each of these difficulties is an opportunity to score secure base content, i.e., sensitivity to the other’s psychological state. An important component of the secure base content in these exchanges is an effort by one partner to recast the experience in a more positive light and to try to diffuse the negative affect.
Adult/Adult Narratives

The Accident

Sue wait home
road Mike dinner
accident tears bed
hospital doctor hug

In this attachment narrative, the crisis situation involves an accident and a trip to the hospital. Secure base content is scored when there is some substance to the reunion, with the partner expressing concern about the well-being of the injured party, and trying to make them feel better about what has happened. As Mike and Sue go home there is an additional opportunity to score secure base content vis-a-vis the partner’s efforts at getting things back to normal. Thinking of ways to make the injured person comfortable, helping them settle into bed, etc. would all be scored positively. Narratives that follow a secure base script provide many more details about the partner’s efforts, in effect emphasizing the importance of helping to get things back to normal.