

Parent-Child Attachment: Developmental Foundations & Lasting Impacts

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What is attachment?

- Social / emotional bond between individuals
 - Most significant attachment relationship in development is between child and caregiver
 - Is malleable, constantly being updated based on experiences with the significant other



Freud

- Attachment is...
 - Based on the infant fulfilling biological drives and needs
 - Hunger
 - Warmth
 - One becomes attached to persons fulfilling these basic needs



John Bowlby

- Fundamentally an ethologist
- Motivated by observations by Freud, Spitz, and others studying children separated from their parent/caregiver in post-WWII England, particularly in orphanages and foundling homes

3 phases of separation:

– Protest

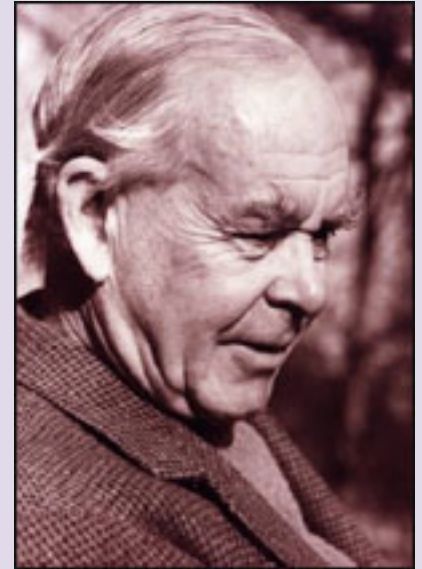
- Distress, crying, attempt to regain figure, unsoothed to other figures

– Despair

- Hopelessness, mourning, depressed behavior

– Detachment

- Engages with adults, but no indication of close relationship with mother; lack of interest.



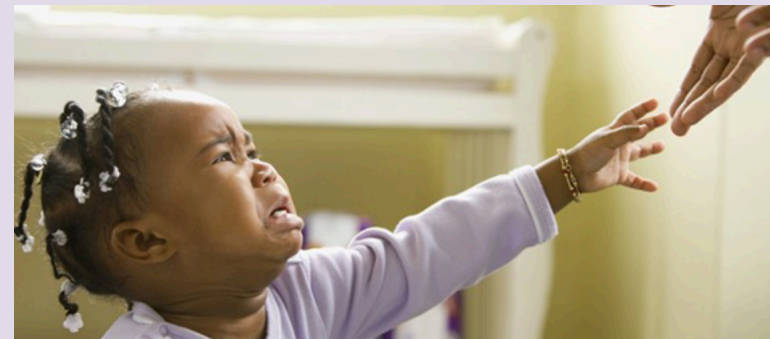
Elements of Attachment

- Secure Base: individual who provides the infant security and allow for safe exploration
- Separation Anxiety: distress by the infant when a significant other is unavailable
- Internal Working Model:
 - Use existing data
 - Extrapolates to future potential/actual realities
 - Continuously tested for internal consistency



Attachment

- Affective bond, psychological tether
- **Flexibly** manifested in behavior:
 - Using parent as secure base for exploration
 - Going to parent when distressed
 - Checking in with parent
 - Hearing parent
 - Smiling to parent
 - Etc.



The Strange Situation



1. After a mother and infant have settled, a stranger enters and sits quietly on the free chair.



2. After an interval, the stranger starts talking with the mother and, after a while, starts to play with the child.



3. Then a little later, the mother gets up and leaves the room.



4. The stranger stays and tries to interact with the child.



5. After a period, the mother then re-enters. The stranger leaves.



6. After a further interval, the mother leaves again, leaving the child alone.



7. After a period, the stranger enters, offers comfort to the child if necessary, and tries to play with the child.



8. The mother returns, the stranger leaves, and the mother and child remain in the room for a few more minutes.



Mary Ainsworth

***Crucial part is how infant responds
when caregiver returns.***

Classifications of Attachment

- **Secure Attachment**
(65% of infants)
- **Insecure Avoidant Attachment**
(20% of infants)
- **Insecure Ambivalent/resistant Attachment**
(15% of infants)
- **Disorganized Attachment**

Classifications of Attachment

Secure Attachment

- Explores environment while referencing caregiver
- Upset when caregiver leaves
- Somewhat consoled by stranger, but no substitute
- Seek out caregiver upon return, quickly calm down and resume play



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QquZxJhuSg8>

Classifications of Attachment

Insecure Avoidant Attachment

- Appear indifferent (though HR changes)
- Stranger appears just as good
- Ignore caregiver upon return



Classifications of Attachment

Insecure Ambivalent Attachment (resistant)

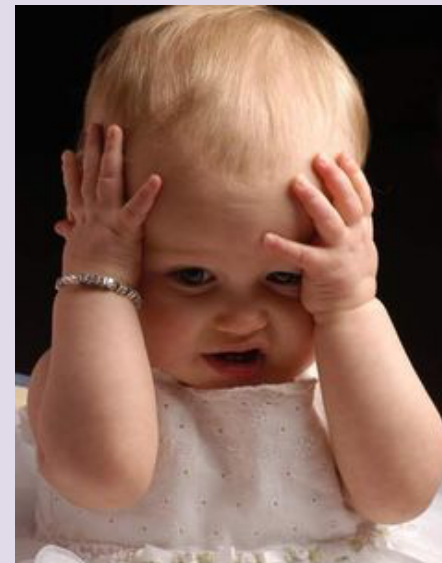
- Hyper vigilant
- Low amount of exploration
- Very distressed when parent leaves; inconsolable
- Seek out caregiver upon return, but also resistant and may lash out



Classifications of Attachment

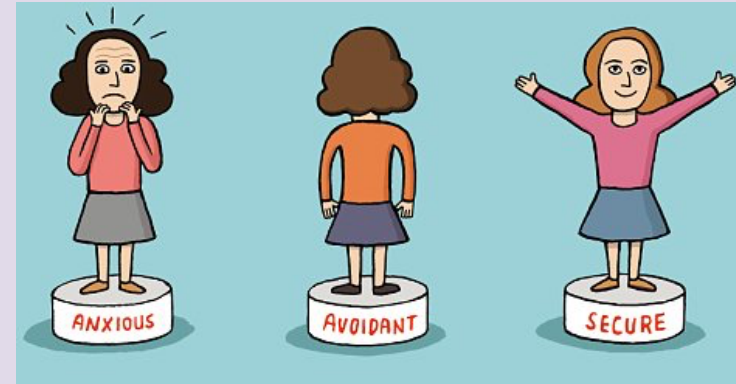
Disorganized Attachment

- No organized response pattern
- Seem confused/dazed; may move from intense distress to indifference



So, which is best?

- Secure?
- Insecure Avoidant?
- Insecure Ambivalent/Resistant?



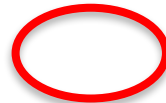
Not so fast...

“Only within its environment of adaptedness can it be expected that a system will work efficiently.”

(pp. 47, Bowlby, 1967)

Cultural variability of attachment

	Percentage of each attachment type		
Country (number of studies)	Secure	Avoidant	Resistant
USA (18)	65	21	14



Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg (1988)

- Differences in parenting practices
- Differences in cultural values of behavior and personality

Contributing factors to attachment

- Parental sensitivity
 - **Consistent & responsive parenting**
- Socioeconomic Status (SES)
 - Not money, per se, but the consistency and resources that money affords
- Infant temperament
 - Parent style and infant disposition/temperament that results in a patterning of behavior predictive of attachment style (Mangelsdorf et al., 1990; Susman-Stillman et al., 1996).
- Out-of-home care
 - High-quality daycare is equal to the child staying at home (and in some cases, it's even better)

Attachment-related Outcomes

- Teacher ratings (Sroufe et al., 2005a)
 - Secure
 - more self-confident
 - higher self-esteem
 - more ego resilient
 - more curious and exploring
 - hold up better under stress



- Playground Observations (Erez, 1987; Sroufe et al., 1984; Sroufe et al., 2005a)
 - Secure
 - more positive affect in peer interactions
 - use of positive affect to sustain peer interactions
 - Rated as having more fun
 - Persistent and flexible coping
 - Less whining, frustration
 - Contextually appropriate affect



Attachment-related Outcomes

- Situational novelty/stress/challenge

- Ambivalent:

- less exploration
 - less initiation of interaction
 - closer to adult
 - likely to leave challenging situation



- Avoidant:

- difficulty with close physical/emotional proximity
 - long-term peer relations
 - more isolated and insulated

Social Competence

- **Secure**
 - Observed to be more empathic (preschool, childhood)
 - Increased mutual relationships (preschool, childhood)
 - More frequently had close friendships (childhood)
 - Improved friendship maintenance (childhood)
 - Improved mixed-gender peer groups (adolescence)
 - Improved leadership qualities (adolescence)
- **Ambivalent**
 - Oriented toward peers, but ineffective
 - Immature, easily frustrated with peers
 - Poor friendship maintenance
- **Avoidant**
 - Less peer involvement
 - Less peer initiation



Dependency

– Secure

- sought positive adult attention
- increased peer interaction

– Ambivalent

- solicited more adult attention
- particularly when minimally challenged
- hovered near adults
- rated as more needy

– Avoidant

- did not seek adult when upset/disappointed, but during quiet times
- rated as dependent



(Sroufe, 1983; Urban et al., 1991)

Psychopathology

- Attachment style can be associated with later issues...
 - Insecure attachment moderately related to depression.
 - Avoidant attachment linked to externalizing problems.
 - Ambivalent attachment correlated with anxiety disturbance at 17.5 years.
 - Disorganized attachment = lots of problematic outcomes

Long-term Effects

Long-term Stability

Pinquart, Feubner, & Lieselotte (2013)

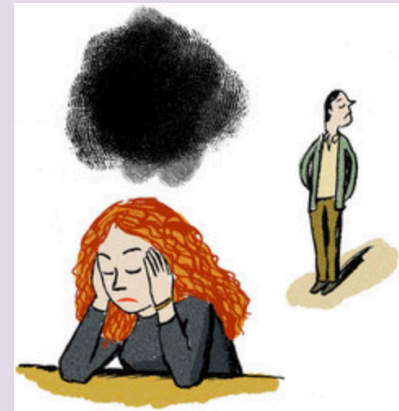
- Higher stability for securely attached individuals, particularly in low-risk samples.
- Social risk factors increase chance of shifting from secure to insecure attachment style.
- Attachment stability weakens past 5 years, and considerably past 15 years.

Long-term Relationships

- Securely attached:
 - More likely to experience satisfaction and report high levels of commitment in romantic relationships (e.g., Frei & Shaver, 2002).
 - Relationships have less conflict (e.g., Campell et al., 2005) and less likely to divorce (Davila & Bradbury, 2001).
 - Higher quality friendships are related to more secure attachment styles (but this is correlation, not causation)

Collins & Feeney (2000)

- Avoidant:
 - Less effective support seeking from partner
- Ambivalent/Anxious:
 - Poorer caregiving when partner is in need



Multiple Attachment Relationships

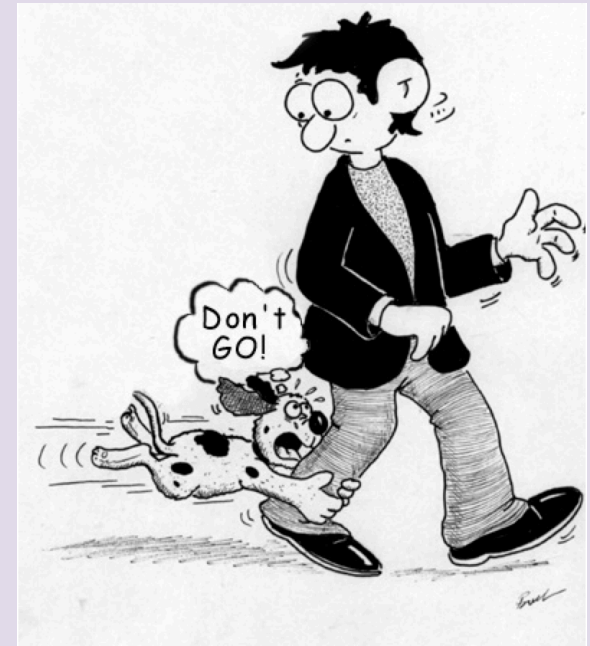
Trinke & Bartholomew (1997)

- College students reported having an average of 5.38 attachment figures.
- Attachment figures were arranged in hierarchies.

TABLE 1
Mean rankings of various relationships

	Overall (SD, <i>n</i>)	Participants in relationships (SD, <i>n</i>)	Participants not in relationships (SD, <i>n</i>)
Partner	2.1 (1.35, 107)	2.1 (1.35, 107)	Missing
Mother	2.4 (1.03, 206)	2.5 (1.03, 98)	2.2 (1.03, 98)
Father	3.2 (1.24, 182)	3.6 (1.27, 94)	2.8 (1.07, 84)
Sibling	3.7 (1.53, 188)	4.1 (1.54, 96)	3.4 (1.46, 89)
Best friend	3.9 (1.84, 215)	4.4 (1.72, 105)	3.5 (1.87, 106)

Note. Lower numbers reflect a greater tendency to use these people as attachment figures.



What does it all mean for the future?

- Secure attachment associated with many positive developmental outcomes
 - More curious
 - Successful cooperative play
 - More positive peer and teacher relationships
- Infant attachment is likely to carry over to adulthood (72% adults have same classification)

**However, everything is dependent on the
*internal working model***

SORRY WE'RE LATE. SHE WAS A BIT CLINGY AND CRIED IN THE PARKING LOT.

MY BAAABY!



Thank you.

Questions?

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



FIRST DAY OF COLLEGE



Empirical Question...

Do infants prefer:

Caregivers who fulfill basic needs (Freud)?

OR

Caregivers who are nurturing and provide security (Bowlby)?

Enter Harry Harlow

Baby monkeys separated from mother at birth



When startled, which “mother” would the monkeys seek out for security???

Harlow & Harlow (1959)

- Conclusion:

When threatened, infants seek out those who provide comfort over those who fulfill basic needs



Harlow & Harlow (1959)

Harlow's Studies of Infant Monkeys

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