

Mary ainsworth: attachment theory



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John Bowlby was the original founder of attachment theory this began after World War II where he found many children became orphans at a very young age and concluded that attachment was crucial for development (Miler, 2011). In his studies he proposed that attachment came from the knowledge that infants needed protection and biologically infants know that separation could cause a child horrendous consequences without protection of the elements, therefore their instinct is to attract the mothers attention for protection (Miler, 2011). Ainsworth who was one of Bowlby's colleagues began to look at attachment, as a mother as a "secure base" for their ability to explore, instinctively that the mother is a place to come back for reassurance and safety. After leaving Bowlby she began to study in Uganda when her husband had an opportunity to teach there, this gave Ainsworth an opportunity to research mothers and infants where she developed the theory of "strange situation". After Uganda Ainsworth had the opportunity to teach at John Hopkins University (Miler, 2011).

Ainsworth defines attachment as an affectionate bond between two individuals that cannot be interchanged and that endures through time. Each attachment is defined differently between each other and one cannot interchange with each other and have the same affect (Ainsworth, 1989). When it comes to the survival of infants they have been imbedded with certain behaviours as a way to grab the attention of their caretaker to get what is needed for survival. The behaviours such as crying are a way to tell the caretaker to come to the child and attend to whatever is needed at the time (Ainsworth, 1989). Mother's attachment behaviors can be increased in

the time the environment may be dangerous or if the child is being removed from the caretaker (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970) .

Mirecki and Chou (2012) argue that attachment behaviors may be interpreted differently depending on the culture which the child is raised in; leaving what some families see as acceptable behavior where others may mistake it for not caring or showing emotion. Caretakers of different cultures interpret different styles of compassion as their way to determine when comfort and protection are needed. This leads to difficulties for families moving from one culture to another where parental behaviors may be significantly differently (Mirecki & Chou, 2013).

Ainsworth (1989) states that babies are able to distinguish individuals and behave differently depending on who is present. Initially the infant will most likely attach first to the mother as the voice is the one that is the most familiar and the need for survival with nourishment will become the initial focus. As the infant gets older he/she begins to distinguish between individuals and is able to distinguish what behaviors and needs are given depending on each individual (Ainsworth, 1989).

Behavior Interaction

In Ainsworth 1963 study her initial reason for this research was to examine the strength and quality of the attachment to the mother. This was done with 28 babies born in Uganda and all were breast fed but one. While researching the topic of strength and quality of attachment she then led her study to find what criteria are needed to establish what is stated as attachment (Ainsworth, 1963). Ainsworth stated that these children were more advanced

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into their attachment than possibly other children due to the breastfeeding which was not as noticed in the United States at the time of the study (Ainsworth, 1963). In this study there were patterns of attachment behaviour that were evaluated as specific behaviors. An infant may exhibit differently when around someone besides the mother which included crying, smiling and vocalization each one of these behaviors were seen as being different for anyone else other than the mother. Next category of behavior patterns were the idea that the infant looked for the location of their mother these behaviors would be visual-motor orientation towards the mother, crying when the mother leaves, and following or scrambling so that the child has the opportunity to cling to the mother. By the time the infant has turned one they have completed four different stages of behavior, this is done in a smooth fashion without any specific timeline as one behavior starts and another one ends. They were as follows indiscriminating responsiveness to people, then discrimination to the mother (8-12 weeks), following the mother (6-7 months), then sharp preference to a guardian. These types of behaviors become an active part in both the infant and the mother's interaction and that it is initiated by the infant, and that physical contact is not needed but that attachment behaviors can be maintained through interaction such as facial expression, gestures and vocalization (Ainsworth, 1963).

Strange Behavior

As stated by Ainsworth (1963) the idea of verbal interaction needed more than physical contact is disagreed by Ainsworth (1981). This study divides into three different behavior stages as follows: Category A which is anxious/resistance where the child is extremely upset when the parent

leaves the room, will be very clingy to the parent and explore less but will seem resistant to any type of affection given by the mother. Category B where the child is secure the behaviors seen was, the child is upset when the mother leaves, happy when the mother returns and uses the mother as a safe base when exploring. Category C where the child is not upset if the parent leaves, and is fine when a stranger picks them up, and is not excited when the mother comes back into the room (Ainsworth, 1970). In the study of maternal affectionate behavior Ainsworth looked at how each mother expressed affection to their child (Ainsworth & Tracy, 1981). Finding were that mothers of children of pattern A kissed their infants more than the other two pattern but that they would not demonstrate as much physical contact such as hugging, cuddling as the other two classes. It was noted that mothers would have an aversion to close body contact. This was not to say that the mother did not feel affection to the child but on many occasions the mother would be more rejecting to the child and on occasions would feel more irritated and sometimes anger to the child when the child showed behaviors that would demonstrate a need of protection or affection. Where group B mothers hugged and cuddled their children the most, but hugging was the most significant. Group C the mother would display the least amount of affection but when she did it would signify more hugging and cuddling than kissing and would cuddle the baby when it needed soothing. She would find that cuddling was an easier way to sooth the child than just a kiss. Categories B are shown more affection than the other two groups (Ainsworth & Tracy, 1981). A fourth group, group D was found and is classified as anxious resistant/ambivalent infant (O’Gorman, 2012). This type of child finds that the mother or caregiver may be unpredictable in their response of

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affection. This can be due to lack of accessibility, or that the parent has a difficulty managing the correct behavior, this can be due to maternal mental disorders, or financial or personal challenges. Many of these children are more likely to be diagnosed later on having a disorder or challenged (O’Gorman, 2012).

Ainsworth (1989) discovered that mothers who are able to hold their child immediately after giving birth to their child have more maternal instinct than mothers who hold their child later (Ainsworth, 1989). Which can be a way the mother and child attach, and now today hospitals under most circumstances they ensure this happens (Ainsworth, 1989). But it does not prove that if attachment does not happen immediately it cannot happen. Though as time span divides the period that they are separated the capacity of the attachment will decrease and cannot be restored (Ainsworth, 1989). As a child grows their primitive nature of survival becomes less substantial and their affective behaviour is brought about more on their environment by the time they have their first birthday. At this time a child has learned how to mold a parent’s reaction to certain needs and is beginning to communicate. The child themselves has an ability to move which gives them the opportunity to get what they want without needing an adult for all of their needs which demonstrates that the attachment at this time begins to change and continues to change as the child grows (Connor, Matias, Futh, & Scott, 2014).

Following Infancy

As an infant begins to mature into a child and continue on to adulthood.

Matais et al (2014), states that not only how affection was presented to the child affected how the infant behaves, but that the quality of the interaction would be a prediction on how the child social learning is presented including emotional development (G. Connor, Matias, Futh, & Scott, 2014).

Ainsworth (1989) states attachment carries through a lifetime but changes as the environment changes, such as age and as life distinguishes its influences. This can be seen as parents get older and the role of parent and child switches and the parents becomes unable to care for themselves, so the child takes on this role. Also romantic attachment also is seen as sexual pair bonds. This type of bond is not merely for the reproduction of children but as the relationship continues the caregiving as one of the couple may be in need of that nurturing role where one of the couple may take on that role, for others the role is more of a friendship where they have many interests and typically enjoy spending time together (Ainsworth, 1989). In many families, siblings play an influential role on the caregiving of the children, as it is expected for them to take care of their siblings. This attachment can give the child a secure base when beginning to explore unfamiliar areas and a trust is seen in the same way infants and mothers have. For a younger child to watch and become familiar with others who are the older sibling's gives the child a bases on areas to explore and play by viewing what they are doing as acceptable behaviours (Ainsworth, 1989).

In conclusion attachment is different between each individual but brings together the need for connection and affection. For the first year, maternal attachment leads to developmental growth and social learning. For children

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who have a secure attachment this behavior is traveled with them through life, as it is seen in social situations and relationships as they grow older. Maternal attachment may not become the most significant as the child grows and becomes an adult but still demonstrates as a basis for other types of attachments thought out a lifespan. (Ainsworth & Tracy, 1981).

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