

Example of mary ainsworth dissertation chapter

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Biography and Contribution to the Attachment Theory

Mary Dinsmore Salter Ainsworth (1913-1999)

There is no doubt that Mary Ainsworth was born an intellectual judging from her contributions and discoveries in psychology and other academic fields. Perhaps, Mary Ainsworth is best known for contributions in the development of the attachment theory and as well, her works in developing of the strange situation (Bretherton, 1992). Her professional career was hugely shaped by Bowlby's research unit.

Early Life

Mary Dinsmore Ainsworth (nee Salter), the eldest in a family of four sisters, was born to Mary and Charles Salter, Dickinson College graduates, in Glendale , Ohio, in 1913 (Bretherton, 2000). Her parents placed considerable importance on education, a feat that they passed on to their children by encouraging weekly library sessions. Ainsworth's father was a Master's degree (History) graduate while her mother trained as a nurse. Ainsworth's father transferred to Canada after securing employment position at a manufacturing firm and relocated with the entire family (Bretherton, 2000). At the time of relocation to Canada, Ainsworth was aged five.

Education Life

Her desire to pursue a career in psychology begun was inspired when she read the Character and the Conduct of Life: Practical Psychology for Every Man written by McDougall's William (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth graduated from high school destined to undertake a degree in Psychology at the

University (Bretherton, 2000). In 1929, she enrolled for an honors program at Toronto University and graduated in 1935 with a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology). A year later, she earned her Master's degree and her Doctorate in developmental psychology 1939, both from University of Toronto (Bretherton, 2000: Ainsworth, and Marvin, 1995).

Professional Life

Mary Ainsworth was a developmental psychologist by profession. She taught at the University of Toronto until 1942 when she was enlisted in the Women's Army Corp of Canada and rose to the rank of Major in 1945. After the end of the Second World War, she resumed her teaching career in Toronto. It is through teaching that she was able to establish a solid career at the University of Virginia until her retirement.

Mary Slater married Leonard Ainsworth in 1950 and accompanied him to London, England where Leonard was set to finish her doctorate studies. Little did Ainsworth know that her visit to London was destined to shape her professional career and the beginning of a longstanding relationship with John Bowlby (Ainsworth and Marvin, 1995: Ainsworth, 1967). From an advert in the London Times, Ainsworth learnt about a research project conducted by Psychiatrist and Psychologist, John Bowlby. Ainsworth got a chance to participate in the research directed by John Bowlby at Tavistock Clinic. The research was aimed at investigating the resultant effects when the bond or attachment between a mother and a child is interfered. Findings from the research study revealed that a child was at risk of suffering from developmental challenges when this bond is broken. According to Ainsworth

and Bowlby, studying the quality of relationship between the parent and the child is the key to understanding the unfortunate consequences resulting from premature parent-child separation (Bretherton, 1992). Simply put, understanding the typical assists in understanding the atypical.

Ainsworth could not let off a research opportunity that presented itself in 1954 whereby, together with her colleagues, Ainsworth went to Africa pursue the exploration on the importance of the parent-child bond (Ainsworth, 1967). Her husband had been offered a postdoctoral spot in Kampala, Uganda at the East African Institute for Social Research. While in Uganda where multilevel mothering existed, she conducted a naturalistic, longitudinal study on parent-infant relationships. She was later to contribute immensely to psychology through her diverse works as exhibited in the strange situation, and secure attachment.

Divorce

In 1958, Ainsworth secured a professorship position at Johns Hopkins University in development psychology, and she divorced Leonard in 1960. This divorce caused Ainsworth to undergo long-term psychoanalytic therapy and as well, suffer depression (Bretherton, 1992).

Death

Mary Ainsworth died in Charlottesville, Virginia on March 21 1999 at the age of 86 after suffering a massive stroke.

Her contributions to the Attachment theory

The attachment theory involves the study of the emotional bond existing between a child and the parent or caregiver. The tie of the infant to the caregiver is referred to as the attachment while the tie of the caregiver to the child is known as the caregiving bond. These bonds inspired Ainsworth to develop interest in the study of parent-child relationship. According to Ainsworth and Marvin (1995), John Bowlby was the founder of the attachment theory after describing attachment as a long-lasting psychological connection between humans. Bowlby argued that bonds developed between an infant and the caregiver has a tremendous effect on the lifetime of the individual (Bretherton, 1992). He further argued that attachment keeps the child attached to parent thereby increasing the chances of survival. The principal theme of the attachment theory is that present and response mothers instill a sense of security to their infants. On the other hand, the child understands the mother is responsible thereby creating a stable base for the child to grow.

Ainsworth interests in the attachment theory can be attributed to the chance offered by John Bowlby at a clinic at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations in London (Bretherton, 1992). During this period, Bowlby collaborated with James Robertson in an observational research aimed at investigating the devastating effects caused by long separation between children hospitalized/living in residential nurseries and their caregivers. In this study, Robertson's observational methods impressed Ainsworth and later provided inspiration for naturalistic studies that she conducted later. Additionally, Bowlby's novel ideas on mother-infant attachment caught her

interests and inspired her ethological interests. At Bowlby's research unit, Mary Ainsworth was the responsibility of analyzing James Robertson's data and was tremendously impressed with Robertson's records of children's behavior (Bretherton, 1992). This led her to decide to emulate Robertson's naturalistic methods in her own studies. Mary Ainsworth reviewed chapters in Bowlby's report, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, published in 1965 by Penguin Books (Bretherton, 1992).

Mary Ainsworth is generally referred to as the refiner of the attachment theory after nuancing Bowlby's theory. While in Uganda, Ainsworth conducted several observational studies on multilevel mothering and concluded that different styles exist in the development of relationships between and infant and her mother (Bretherton, 1992). She found out that familial security is present in the early stages of child development. This type of security was independent and formed the foundation with which infants can develop gradual progress while acquiring new interests and skills in other fields (Ainsworth, 1963). These observational studies intrigued insights that compelled Ainsworth to conduct further studies on correlation existing between the child and the mother (Blehar, Ainsworth, and Lieberman, 1977).

Ainsworth's Contribution to Psychology

Ainsworth's research findings in Uganda opened a new way to conduct more research experiments. She was determined to gather more evidence to support her new theories in addition to identifying a tool for measuring the level of security existing between the parent-child relationships. Before

beginning her study, she sought for empirical validations of Bowlby's ethological notions. The Ganda project involved conducting research on 26 families with unweaned infants (aged 1-24 months). Ainsworth conducted naturalistic observation every 2 weeks for 2 hours per visit for 9 months (Ainsworth, 1963). The main idea was to determine the beginning of proximity-promoting behaviors and signals with particular interest in time the signals were directed towards the mother. Ainsworth presented her initial findings from the project to Bowlby's team at Tavistock Study Group.

After returning from Uganda in 1955, Ainsworth secured a teaching position at Johns Hopkins where she was responsible for supervision and offering clinical instructions. During her private time in Baltimore, Ainsworth launched the Baltimore Project at the same time she was pondering on what to do with the data collected from the Ganda study (Ainsworth, 1963; Bretherton, 1992). The Baltimore project involved a laboratory procedure conducted on infant-mother re-unions and separations. The procedure was devised by Barbara Wittig and became popularly known as the Strange Situation (Bretherton, 1992). Note that Ainsworth continued to work closely with John Bowlby on experiments relating to the attachment theory.

The Strange Situation

The Baltimore project involved an observational experiment conducted to study 26 families in their homes. 18 home visits were conducted immediately infants were born and ended when infants were aged 54 weeks (Bretherton, 1992). Each visit lasted 4 hours to allow mothers to be comfortable with their routines and detailed records were made as narrative

reports, jotted down in personal shorthand, and recorded for later transcription (Bretherton, 1992). The strange situation begun as soon as the infant hit one year, and it involved a laboratory procedure on infants and their mothers. Observations were made on infants aged 12-18 months in response to a strange situation involving an alternation of brief re-union and separation between infants and their mothers. It combined laboratory situation and the naturalist observation in the home environment. The strange situation procedure was conducted as follows:

Observations made involved examining the level of stress felt by children with the engagement and reactions of the child before and after the departure of the caregiver. Findings from this situation revealed that different patterns of attachment exist between parents and their infants (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). As such, three different styles of attachment were identified during the experiment and both of this attachment styles related to the level of security of the infant. These attachment styles included the secure attachment, avoidant-insecure attachment, and ambivalent-insecure attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Ainsworth, 1997). Many research studies conducted after the Strange Situation have supported Ainsworth's conclusions in addition to providing further insights that learning these attachments is significant in identifying future behaviors of infants. For instance, Solomon and Main (1986) added a fourth attachment style titled disorganized-insecure attachment (Main, 1999).

Secure Attachment argues that securely attached infants tends to be happy when with parents and exhibits agony when separated from the caregiver. Exploration and engagement with others is high in the presence of the mother but becomes agitated and stops engagement with anyone when the parent leaves. Although the infant might be upset when the parent leaves, it assured that the parent would ultimately come back. Equally, the child tends to seek comfort from the parent when frightened. Anxious-Ambivalent attachment occurs when separation leads to increased distressed levels on the child. Even in the presence of the parent, the child displays elevated anxiety when a stranger comes to the room. In times of need, children are unable to depend on their caregivers. The infant becomes unreceptive and resentful to any interactions initiated by the parent after a period of separation. The anxious-avoidant attachment is exhibited when a child tends to avoid caregivers with little preference shown on the caregiver or total strangers. On the other hand, the disoriented/disorganized attachment argues that a child appearing in this category exhibits secure attachment after a period of separation and re-union but exhibits additional behaviors thereafter. For instance, the child displays other repetitive behaviors such as rocking or hitting once the mother approaches.

Ainsworth's Contributions to the Academic Field

Ainsworth's has taught at various positions in her career as a developmental psychologist. She taught at University of Toronto, John Hopkins University, and the University of Virginia. Her involvement in Bowlby's attachment theory increased interests from graduate students who undertook further research on the attachment theory. Many of Ainsworth graduate students

expanded on Ainsworth ideas and begun publishing their own findings (Bell, Silvia and Ainsworth, 1972). For instance, Mary Main (1973) was interested in child development and went ahead to publish a study on insecure and secure toddlers capacity to be engaged in problem solving and play activities (Main, 1999). Another student, Silvia Bell (1970) undertook a study on the relationship between object attachment and permanence while Mary Blehar (1974) studied non-maternal care and attachment (Bell, Silvia and Ainsworth, 1972). Other undergraduate students who were involved in helping her to analyze data collected from the Baltimore project wrote dissertations related to various topics on attachment. Researchers spent time testing the predictive validity of Ainsworth findings from the strange situation while others sought advice from her regarding the analytic procedure and classification system that was used to analyze the data (Thomas, Marcus, and Sanders-Reio, 2009).

Other than contributing to the attachment theory, she contributed immensely in developmental psychology, a feat that enabled her to receive several academic rewards. Ainsworth also wrote and/or reviewed several articles and books that included *Infancy in Uganda: Infant Care and the Growth of Love* (1967), *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1965), and her biography in the *Patterns of Attachment* (1978). She served in different professional associations that included the Virginia Psychological Association, Eastern Psychological Association, and the British Psychological Association. Ainsworth also served as the President of the Society for Research in Child Development. Summing up her contributions in the academics was the bestowment of the highest honor in Psychology when American

Psychological Association (APA) awarded her the Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement. Other academic achievements and awards from APA included;

G. Stanley Hall Award for her contributions in developmental psychology (1984)

Distinguished Professional Contribution to Knowledge from APA (1987)

Distinguished Scientific Contribution in 1989, and the Gold Medal for Scientific Contributions in 1998

Ainsworth's contributions to clinical practice (psychoanalysis)

One of the great sorrows in Ainsworth's life is her failed marriage coupled with the aspect of not producing children. The tremendous unhappiness that accompanied Ainsworth divorce brought her into psychoanalysis. Although saddening, this period led Ainsworth to develop interest in psychoanalysis. Stayton, Hogan, and Ainsworth (1971) argue that Joe Lichtenberg recommended her to psychoanalysis. In fact, Ainsworth blamed herself for her marital problems, but Joe identified several things to be changed during her marriage analysis. For instance, Joe Lichtenberg blamed her dressing mode and severe hairdo, factors that responsible for making Ainsworth look old (Main, 1999). Main (1999) further argues that Ainsworth's image changed after this post-marriage analysis after she adopted a younger feminine look.

Ainsworth developed an instantaneous response to analysis and was fascinated by the entire process. Psychoanalysis enabled her to feel energized in her own work thereby increasing her levels of enthusiasm. With this new feeling, Ainsworth was able to wave aside all forms of trouble that could have impeded work. Based on her response to psychoanalysis,

Ainsworth developed the sensitive attachment, particularly in safe play and exploration. By the time Ainsworth left psychoanalysis, she had developed a feeling that her own troubles had little interests and significance to her as they had earlier seemed even though her happiness were not near perfect. However, she took psychoanalysis as a part of her own experience and became a huge fan of analytic thinking.

Ainsworth focused on the Oedipus complex because she believed that an unresolved oedipal complex was the cause of her own troubles (Main, 1999). Citing her affection with her father and the extent to which he influenced her later life, Ainsworth developed much pleasure from such memories.

Alternatively, Ainsworth remembered constant jealousy, dominance, and interference from her mother during her analysis and identified these factors as things that irritated her most (Main, 1999). According to Ainsworth (1967, pp. 447-448), attachment supports development but does not interfere with the growth of self-reliance and the level of competence. It is from this experience that Ainsworth was able to develop the behavior pattern in the strange situation. Ainsworth used the mother as a secure base for measuring the close attachment and independence between the child and the caregiver. In the strange situation, Ainsworth discovered that an insecure child clings to her caregiver and refuses to let go off her while a secure child can move away from the but remains attached to the mother as shown by the desire to keep track of the mother's whereabouts (Main, 1999).

Her greatest admiration were attributed to John Bowlby, whose prodigy in the attachment theory changed her career direction to the better in addition

to providing immeasurable insights in understanding human psychology.

Note that Ainsworth begun doing extraordinary things at a later stage in life and maybe she had little time to investigate other topics that might have generated considerable interest.

In summing up her contributions to psychoanalysis, Ainsworth was able to proof that any individual with insufficient and rigid modes of attachment relations is more likely to inappropriately impose these relations modes on his/her interactions with the therapist (Bretherton, 1992). This phenomenon has come to be referred as transference. Ainsworth's interaction with her therapist enabled her to identify the origins of her internal working, and this was helpful in enabling her to explore and rework her inner working models.

Undeniably, her empirical research findings and contributions in developmental psychology coupled with her refinement of the attachment theory did revolutionize psychological thinking patterns concerning close-human relationships and caregiver-infant attachment.

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