

It has been said of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth that they “revolutionized the way in which we think and observe young children and their parents” (Goldberg, 2000) Discuss the contributions of these two individuals to our understanding of the early parent-child relationship.

Attachment describes “an infant's tendency to seek closeness to particular people and to feel more secure in their presence”(Atkinson et al, 2000). There are two major perspectives that deal with parental/child attachment theory. The behaviorist view is that infants become attached to their mother because she is a source of food and she removes the tension of hunger. The Psychoanalytical view is that infants are driven by sexual drives and the mother provides gratification to the child. Several pieces of evidence showing that both of these theories are not entirely correct have been found. Take ducklings for instance. They feed themselves from birth yet they still follow their mother around and always like to be in their presence. Therefore, the comfort they get from their mother cannot be based upon feeding. Harlow & Harlow (1962) researched attachment amongst Rhesus monkeys. The monkeys were taken from their mother from birth and reared using two artificial monkeys. One made of wire that dispensed milk and the other covered in terry cloth. Although the terry cloth monkey did not provide milk, the babies clung to it most of the time and reached over to the wire monkey for feeding. This concludes that a mother is not there solely for food but is a source of comfort too.

Bowlby (1969) combined the Psychoanalytical approach with the ethological theory to produce his theory of attachment. He thought that a person's personality and ability to form later relationships depends on their attachment in early life. He noted that if a child experienced disruption in family life during early infancy then

it would lead to problems, such as crime, in adolescence. Bowlby suggests that, attachment is a relationship with a caregiver consisting of affection from both sides and a need to be close to one-another. Rutter (1981) criticized Bowlby's idea that an infant needs only one caregiver in order to develop healthily, as infants often possess attachments with both parents, for example.

Bowlby's theory states that infants are not born with the ability of attachment but they develop it, through several phases, over the first year of life. The first phase occurs within the first twelve weeks of life. The infant attracts the attention of many people through the act of smiling, cooing or following movement. By the time the infant is six months old, their attention lies with the caregiver and they spend less time trying to attract strangers. By eighteen months, the child maintains proximity with the caregiver by crawling. This leads to the notion of "separation" and "stranger anxiety". Crying when the caregiver leaves the room or when faced by a stranger shows this. In pre-school years, the child develops language skills and an understanding of the nature of relationships. Mitzukami et al (1990), however, used telethermography to show that infants show evidence of attachment in infants as young as four months old. He found that skin temperature lowers slightly as the infant's caregiver leaves and a stranger appears. This shows that attachment develops earlier than Bowlby suggests.

In order to recognize whether or not an infant has a "secure" relationship with their caregiver, Bowlby introduced the "Internal Working Model". This consists of two sub models, the "self" and "other". It suggests that when a child has a "secure" attachment with their caregiver, it sees itself as worthy of attention and love. The infant also sees the caregiver as someone who meets his or her needs. Whereas, If an infant has an "insecure" attachment, it would see themselves as not

worthy of attention, and the caregiver as unreliable in meeting their needs.

Ainsworth et al (1978), a student of Bowlby's, carried out a study to discover how the above models can be detected in infants. The study is known as the "strange situation" where a child is observed through a series of episodes. A child and mother enter a room full of toys, after a while, a stranger joins them. The mother then leaves the room while the stranger tries to comfort the infant. After a while the mother returns. The child's reactions to the episodes are recorded, for example, if the child becomes distressed or tries to follow their mother when they exit and the child's reaction to the stranger's attempts of comforting. The outcome of this study categorized infants into three groups. The first, the "secure group" was for those who showed confidence to explore in the presence of their mother and stops exploration when she leaves. They then show distress until their mother returns. When the child ignores their mother whilst exploring, shows little distress on her exit and ignores her on return, they would be put into the "anxious avoidant group". The third group is the "Anxious resistant" group. Here, children show signs of reluctance to explore in the presence of the mother but shows distress when she leaves. They also seek the closeness of their mother on her return but reject her attempts to comfort them. Main & Solomon (1986), on replication of the study, found that some children show characteristics of two groups and so created the "Disorganized Attachment" group. This group is for those children who show "odd" behavior such as following the stranger.

There have been some major criticisms of the "Strange Situation" observation for example, during the study; the child is put in distress, which can be seen, as unethical. Also, the study is not set in a natural setting for the infant and as a result, the child may act differently towards the situation, although the laboratory

setting can give the researchers maximum control over the conditions. A problem with observing different children is that the children will be reared in different social contexts so some of the infants may be used to being around strangers (Belsky, 1984).

Ainsworth pursued her theory to discover why attachments differ. She suggests that the quality of the attachment determine the differences. She discovered that if caregivers were secure in their responses to the child then they would develop a secure attachment. The avoidant attachment occurs when the mother rejects the infant. If the caregiver is inconsistent with responses to the child, they will have a resistant attachment and the disorganized attachment is a result of parental depression or abuse to the child. Belsky (1999) puts forward the idea that the attachment the caregiver had with their caregiver often reflects the attachment they hold with their child.

Therefore, the theory of attachment has developed immensely through the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth. They have helped us to understand how parent/child attachments develop and they provide us with a reason why children may develop in different ways. Although there are some criticisms of their theories, they give us a solid base as to why attachment is important in the development of infants.

So, the idea that Bowlby and Ainsworth have “revolutionized the way in which we think and observe young children and their parents” is supported by their theories.

They give us a structure to advance on and maybe produce a clearer, more accurate way of researching attachment in infancy.

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