

Aspects of Individual Development

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Attachment in Relation to Social and Emotional Development



What is attachment? Attachment is the term used to describe an individual's emotional connection and bond with another person, such as a parent, sibling, or carer. This bond and connection will develop throughout time as a result of our interactions and behaviours with one another. It is described as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p.194). From the very earliest stages of childhood through maturity, the influence of attachment and the formation of connections that eventually turn into relationships contribute to and promote social, emotional, and cognitive development. It may affect our capacity to develop wholesome connections over the course of our lives. Here we will discuss the different forms of attachment and the impact it can have on ourselves as well as our relationships with others.

Stages of attachment can be identified as pre-attachment, indiscriminate, discriminate and multiple attachments. Pre-attachment examines the first six weeks of life, starting at birth. Case studies demonstrate that at this age, there are no indicators of attachment to their caregiver however, Goldberg (2014) explains these first few weeks are crucial for laying a solid relationship foundation. caretakers' nurturing manner and a healthy atmosphere are crucial. Between the ages of six weeks and seven to eight months is when the second stage of attachment occurs. The indiscriminate period is when you could start to notice that the child prefers a particular person to take care of their requirements. The discriminating stage is defined as ages six to eight months through to 18 months and two years. This is when attachments are visible and strong to one specific person. The final stage is multiple. Here, the child will develop stronger ties with several of their caregivers and will become more independent.



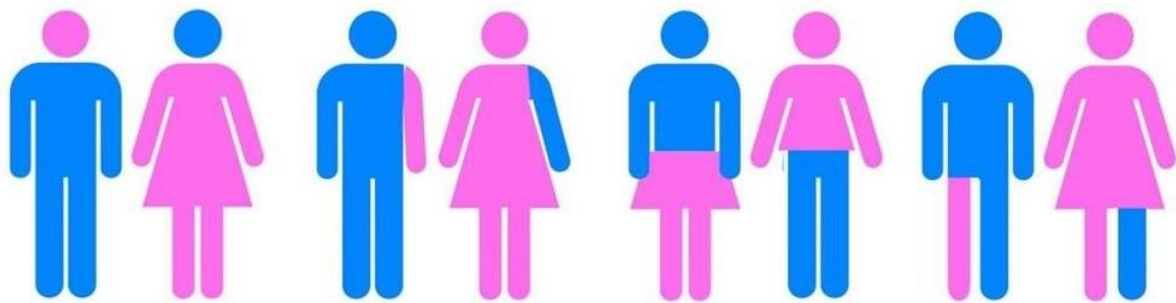
1 - Psychologist Mary Ainsworth conducted a study and experiment in 1978 on a small group of infants. The goal was to identify various patterns in the infants and categorise the various attachment stages and styles. In the experiment, an infant was placed in an unknown setting with their primary carer and allowed to explore freely. Later, a stranger was brought into the room, slowly starting to interact with the infant. It is at this point the primary caregiver is asked to leave the room, leaving the infant alone with the stranger, and later reintroducing the primary caregiver. Observations of Ainsworth's experiment focused on how the infant would react to their primary caregiver leaving and later returning. Also monitored was the way in which the infant would react to the presence of the stranger, and their interactions with one another. After examination, infants were placed into groups of different attachment styles. Their aim is to dictate and predict from early stages how someone will interact with others and their abilities to form strong, good relationships. NSPCC (2021) describes these attachment group styles as secure, ambivalent or anxious, avoidant and disorganised also known as fearful.

The first infant was placed under 'secure attachment' after being observed and presenting signs of anguish when their primary carer left the room and excitement and happiness upon their return. When left alone, this infant similarly approached the stranger to seek comfort. Rees (2007) discusses how this demonstrates evidence of confidence, being direct and receptive, and having the capacity to build close connections with others. According to Salter et al. (2015), this is the most common style seen among infants. The second infant was placed under 'ambivalent attachment'. They became extremely unhappy after their primary caregiver had exited the room and only the stranger was present. This infant would be sensitive, anxious and lack unconfident. This often shows signs that the infant's needs are not taken care of effectively due to a lack of responsiveness from their caregivers. The third infant did not display any signs of discomfort upon separation and was content to engage with the stranger in a similar way they would with their primary caregiver. Cherry (2022) relates this to them showing characteristics of self-resilience, avoidance and distance within relationships in addition to potentially having abusive or neglectful relationships. This infant showed signs of 'avoidant attachment' behaviours. The Final style 'fearful attachment' was introduced by Main and Solomon in 1986. It was curated as due to behavioural problems, not all infants could be placed under the three existing attachment styles. Mcleod (2017) expresses how these infants would feel fear from their parents but also search for comfort from them, embedding a lack of trust and confusion in their relationship. These types of attachment styles provide us with a better idea of how attachment affects social and emotional growth throughout infancy and into adulthood. Their capacity to establish and sustain connections, how they behave in social settings, and how they interact with others are just a few examples of how their social and emotional development may be impacted. Another effect might be that they lack moral responsibility, having difficulty understanding and managing their own emotions, thus making it difficult for them to empathise

with others. According to Salter et al. (2015), delinquent behaviour and low motivation, whether in daily life or in a work or educational environment, can both be caused by attachment.

To summarise, parents' attachment behaviours have a big influence on how their children form attachments. Children's relationships with their parents and other individuals have an impact on their physical, psychological, behavioural, and developmental well-being. Children are attached, but how they are attached and whether they appreciate, trust, and feel safe in their connections are the real questions (Rees, 2007). Any child or young person can experience attachment issues, but they are more prevalent in children whose parents are less able to provide safe and secure care due to their own trauma. According to Bowlby (1969), it is our experience of attachment in the early years of our lives that promotes how we are as adults socially and emotionally, and our idea of how relationships should be. This is known as the continuity hypothesis.

Gender Development in Relation to Gender Identity



Gender in today's society is more than just being either male or female. It is a much more complex subject. Someone may identify as the opposite sex, also known as cisgender or transgender. They may choose to not identify as either male or female and are gender fluid, or finally non-binary meaning they fall somewhere between male and female. The diverse meanings of sex, gender, and gender identity are discussed by Tolland and Evans (2019). A person's biological anatomy is referred to as their sex. You are either a male or female at birth. The behaviours and characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity are referred to as "gender," a social construction. On the other hand, gender identity refers to a person's perspective of themselves. It is a matter of internal perspective and is not necessarily related to the sex with which they were born. It is important for parents, caregivers or professionals to understand each individual's identity. Here we will discuss gender development in relation to gender identity.

What then is a social construct in reality? It alludes to the concepts and viewpoints that the majority of individuals in society have established and accepted. For instance, the notion that boys should play football and girls shouldn't is an example of a gender-social construct. Another example might be that women should stay in while men go out and work, or that particular roles and jobs are more appropriate for either men or women. Even if a lot has changed over the years, it is evident that discrimination and gender inequality still exist today (World Health Organisation, 2019). So what can this mean for gender development? There are many factors that can influence gender development and identity. It is known that children have the tendency to copy and model those around them.

Coleman (2022) mentions Kohlberg's theory of cognitive development in relation to gender identity. Kohlberg's theory explains how between the age of two and three, children are able to identify the difference between a male and female and understand their own anatomy. It is between the ages of three and four that there is stability in the gender they identify with and from the age of five and onwards, complete consistency in this field can be seen. The question is, what influences gender identity in those early years of a child's life?

Referring back to a child's tendency to model and social constructs, Nickerson (2021) explains how these are key factors that contribute to individuals understanding gender and their own gender identity. Children experience social constructs and gender roles being conveyed by family members or an authoritative figure and be able to identify personally with them. As explained by Planned Parenthood (2023), gender roles are how society expects us to behave, dress, communicate and present ourselves according to our sex. It is these gender roles and stereotypes that contribute to a child's gender development. The response and reaction to how a child may want to dress or cut their hair can also influence and impact gender development. According to Rafferty (2018), social and emotional development can be compromised should a child not feel accepted by their family or society, with the gender they identify with.

To conclude, gender is not as simple as having just male and female. Some people may be brought into the world of one sex and later identify as another. It is the responsibility of parents and caregivers to promote healthy gender development in children. We must remember and understand that children like to model those around them. Influences on gender development can come from how someone acts, the clothes they wear, or even the things they like. According to Rafferty (2018), gender development is a typical process for all children. Some kids will display variations, just like in many facets of human behaviour and health. All children nevertheless require love, support, and care from their families, schools, and society in order to develop into happy, healthy individuals. Issues relating to gender discrimination as well as other factors can play a part and affect gender development as well as other development areas such as social and emotional development.

Impacts on Physical Growth and Development



Early childhood development of a child's physical growth and motor abilities is regarded as a portion of that child's physical growth as a baby or toddler. One component of development deals with changes, growth, and skill development relating to the body, and involves the development of the brain and senses. Boys and girls grow in height and weight typically at the same rate up until adolescence, with few to no distinct differences (Macguire, 2022). A child's growth is said to have distinct behavioural or physical moments called milestones. These are the fundamental abilities that infants and toddlers should possess by a certain age (Pathways, 2019). Psychologist Arnold Gesell was the first to come up with the concept and theory of milestones in early childhood. Here we will discuss physical development in relation to physical growth and the maturational developmental theory, and influences that may affect a child's development.

For children to govern motions in their hands, fingers, lips, tongue and eyes, tiny muscles must cooperate with the brain and neurological system. These are defined as fine-motor skills. The movement and control of smaller muscles. According to Boyd and Beed (2014), these crucial abilities will support a child's growth and independence in all areas of learning. The development and refinement of fine motor skills aids and support children in everyday tasks such as eating food, holding a cup or cutlery, holding a pen or pencil to write or draw and dressing themselves. These qualities progressively appear as a result of exposure and experience from parents or caregivers. For example, a parent may encourage their child to choose their clothing and dress themselves for a particular day, supporting their choices and supporting if required. As parents, family members, or carers, we may also support this process by encouraging children to play, explore, and interact with a range of things in the world around them. Gross motor skills go hand in hand with fine motor skills. The term gross motor skills refers to activities that demand movement of the entire body and making use of the body's powerful, larger muscles to assist in everyday movements such as standing, walking, running, jumping and sitting up straight. Development of these skills can help assist in activities later in life such as dancing or sporting activities such as football, athletics or gymnastics. According to Pathways (2019), the typical progression of fine motor skills follows the

sequence of rolling over, sitting up, crawling, walking and later running. Progression of gross motor skills follows the sequence of reaching, later transferring, the pincer grasp, pointing, stacking and scribbling. It is thought that these skills alongside others are reached in stages and theoretical milestones.



2 - Arnold Gesell was one of the first psychologists to methodically outline children's developmental milestones in the first five years of their life, including their physical, social, and emotional development. Gesell's theory is known as the "maturational-developmental theory". Today, psychologists and doctors still utilise the developmental norms created by Gesell. Gesell observed and documented patterns in children's development from the very first few months of a child's life up until adolescence. These recorded patterns were later defined as motor, cognitive, language, emotional and social development. According to Crain (2015), while each child experiences these patterns at their own rate and speed, helping to represent individual development, on average all children go through comparable and predictable sequences.

However, this theory was and still is controversial and undermined by several internal and external issues. Valsiner (2017) explains elements including physical and mental development, learning preferences, learning styles and genetics. Other factors that may affect or influence a child's development is the environment they are raised in and surrounded by, family history in regards to the presence of both parents or violence, cultural influences such as religion or parenting techniques, health issues such as premature birth, and early interactions they have with other children and adults. These factors could play a part in each child's physical, social or emotional development and reaching these theoretical milestones. We are aware that our experiences and upbringing affects our understanding of how and in what environments children thrive and develop best. It is important that we as parents, family, caregivers or teachers all play our part in ensuring every child has the best start in life receiving the correct care and support to develop. Crain (2015) supports this stating our understanding of growth and development is influenced by what we are exposed to and our experiences in regard to the values and beliefs that our family, culture, and society embed within us and uphold.

An example of environmental influences on a child's development is the climate and geography in which they live. The kind of foods that people can obtain, grow and consume, which in turn can have an impact on their physical growth and health. Doherty and Hughes (2009) add a cultural influence that may affect a child's development is that in the country of Paraguay, some children are discouraged from crawling which may affect their development in motor skills and children of Paraguay may not reach certain milestones in comparison to some European countries however, they may be considered to have more advanced skills by the time they've reached adolescence from their way of life. Crain (2015) describes how many different influences shape many parts of an infant and toddler's development, we must understand the practices, beliefs, and values of the families we may support. Without this understanding, it's difficult to interpret the infant's or toddler's behaviours and development. This is vital for practitioners in order to cater to every child's individual needs and development.

To conclude, although many children will physically develop along Gesell's maturational theory, it is hard to ignore that not all aspects were considered. In order to truly understand a child's physical development we must look at what influences may cause an impact on their development. As we are aware we live in a world full of different religions and cultures, and many of us will grow and experience different environments. It is our job as parents, family members, professionals and

caregivers to ensure that we cater to every child's needs individually ensuring they reach milestones and their full potential.

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