



Early Attachment Relationships

DR JUDITH MARSHALL



Bowlby (1953)

‘What is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute – one person who steadily mothers him) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.’

Development of an ‘internal working model’

‘Mother’

Ethological Foundation

- Konrad Lorenz 1935/52
- Imprinting in ducklings and goslings

‘Critical period’





Bowlby: Kindertransport

Traumatised children: often silent and passive

Characteristic sequence:

- Protesting - able to be comforted
- Despairing and inconsolable
- Denial and detachment





Basis for Bowlby's theory

Critical period for attachment (6 months to 3 years)

Evidence?

Short-term stays in hospital / institution

Evidence for the characteristic sequence:

- Protesting - able to be comforted
- Despairing and inconsolable
- Denial and detachment

Research evidence?

Long-term institutional care = retardation (e.g. Goldfarb, 1947)

- social, language, cognitive

Adverse effects of long-term maternal separation on rhesus monkeys
(Harlow and Harlow, 1958, 1969)

Link to delinquency/behaviour problems in adolescence
(Allen et al, 2002)

How might we question this evidence?



Five phases of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969)

1. No discrimination
2. One or more discriminated person - around 5-7 months
 - smiling, comforted
3. Proximity maintenance - locomotion and signals - around 7 – 9 months
 - fear of strangers
4. Goal-corrected partnership
5. Lessening of child- mother attachment
 - characteristic of school-age child



'The Strange Situation' (Ainsworth, 1967, 1973)

1. Mother and infant in room together, infant explores room for 3 minutes.
2. Stranger enters, sits for 1 minute, talks to mum for 1 minute, and gets down on the floor to play with the infant for 1 minute.
3. Mum leaves the room, and stranger plays with infant then withdraws if possible, up to 3 minutes.
4. Mum returns and stranger leaves unobtrusively. Mum settles infant and then sits down for 3 minutes.
5. Mum leaves, and infant is alone for up to 3 minutes.
6. Stranger comes in and attempts to settle infant then withdraw if possible, up to 3 minutes.
7. Mum returns and stranger again leaves unobtrusively. Mum settles infant and sits down.

Ainsworth's three styles

Type A Anxious/Avoidant

Conspicuous avoidance of proximity to, or interaction with the mother in the reunion episodes.

Either: ignores mother on return – casual greeting if any
mingles welcome with avoidance responses

During separation, baby is not distressed, or is distressed at being left alone

Type B Secure

Actively seeking and maintaining proximity/contact/interaction with mother

(esp. during reunion)

Any distress is related to mother's absence

Type C Anxious/Resistant (Ambivalent)

Conspicuous contact-resisting/interaction-resisting behaviour during reunion

Ignoring combined with some seeking of proximity and contact - ambivalent

Attachment and Development

Secure attachment at 12 months correlated with:

- Quality and sensitivity of mother-infant face-to-face interaction at 6-15 weeks
- Curiosity and problem-solving at age 2
- Social confidence at nursery school at age 3.5
- Lack of behaviour problems (in boys) at age 6 (e.g. *Lewis et al, 1984*)
- Adolescents:
 - Healthy, secure attachments as children - develop intrinsic trust in others and relate warmly to them (*Waters and Cummings, 2000; Waters, 2019*)



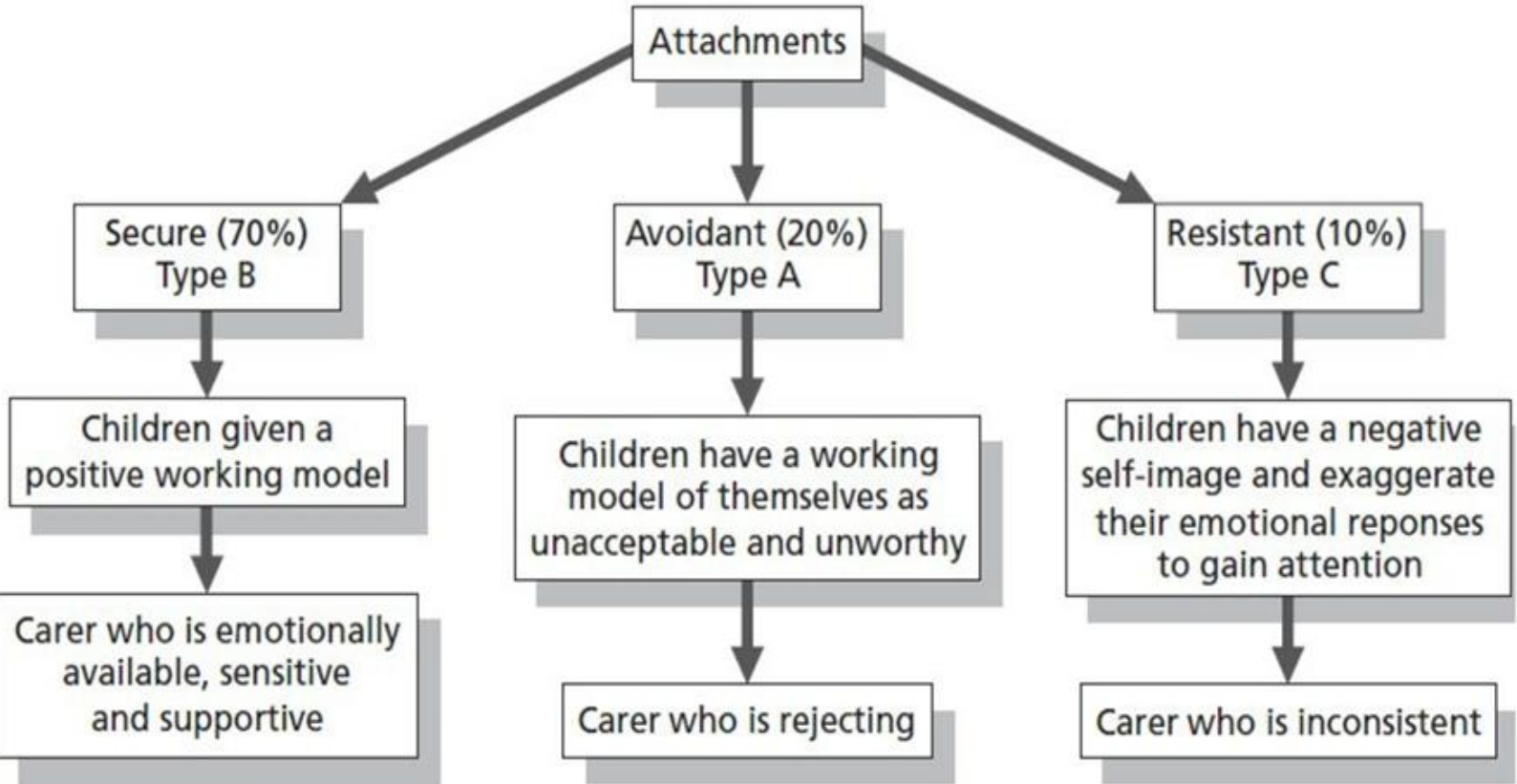
Contrast with e.g.

Anxious/resistant attachment - likelihood of infant maltreatment/abuse

Impulsive, tense, helpless, fearful

Changes in attachment type - related to changes in the life events of mother
(Bretherton and Waters, 1985)

+ Ainsworth - added emotions and relationships to behaviourism and cognitivism



U.S. studies:

- 62% Secure (type B)
- 23% Anxious/avoidant (type A)
- 15% Anxious/resistant (type C)
- (e.g. Campos et al, 1983)



Cultural differences

Germany - 45 – 50% of infants type A (Avoidant)
(Grossman et al, 1981)

Japan - 35% type C (Ambivalent) (Miyake al, 1985)

Research issue:

Japanese infants excessively distressed by the infant alone episode

Normally never left alone at 12 months of age
(Takahashi, 1990)

Critique of Bowlby's hypothesis

+ Stimulated new research

- Ethological concepts – human behaviour
– vague

? Ethological evidence for critical periods
- arguments for 'sensitive periods'

? Fear of strangers – overemphasised?

? Single attachment figure – incorrect

? Early work - effects of institutional
rearing – privation

? Monkey research – confounding
variables

? Various interpretations of retrospective
evidence

Critique of the Attachment Construct

- Loose definition of attachment behaviours
- Unnatural behaviour of stranger
(e.g. Rheingold and Eckerman, 1973)
- 'Wariness of strangers' (Sroufe and Waters, 1977)
- It WAS a strange situation – validity?
- Attachment typing resulting from 'strange situation' procedure (Lamb et al, 1984)

Is Type B attachment the norm?



- Mother-infant relationships
- Father-infant attachment?

Adult outcomes

The background of the slide features a romantic sunset scene. Two figures are silhouetted against a sky filled with warm, orange, and yellow clouds. They are standing close together, holding hands, and looking out over a body of water where gentle waves are visible. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

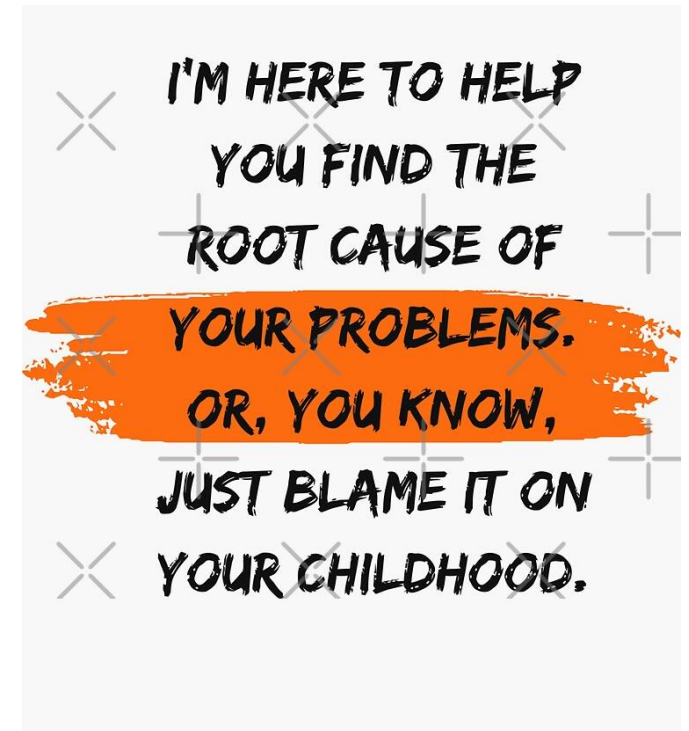
Attachment and Later Life

Attachment styles have been linked to various social, emotional and cognitive outcomes.

Including:

- Depression (Morley and Moran, 2011)
- Borderline personality disorder (Fonagy et al, 2003)
- Cognitive outcomes (Dubois-Comtois et al, 2017)
- Psychotherapy treatment outcomes (Levy et al, 2018)
- Resilience (Darling Rasmussen et al, 2019)
- Romantic attachments (Warren et al, 2021)

And the list goes on...



Ainsworth's Type A

AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

As Children

- Avoidant of contact with parents who may be emotionally unavailable to children
- Does not seek closeness with parents
- Prefers to seek own company
- Shows little preference for parents over strangers

As Adults

- Avoidant of contact with loved ones
- Emotionally unavailable to own children
- Does not seek closeness with loved ones
- Withdraws from confrontation
- Shows little preference for company
- Difficulty expressing emotions

Ainsworth's Type C

AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT

As Children

- Separation anxiety and emotional distress when parent leaves
- Not easily consoled by return of parent
- Dysregulated emotions and confused thoughts
- Lack of boundaries in close relationships
- Tendency towards sudden tantrums and rages when cannot get own way

As Adults

- Fear of abandonment by loved ones
- Needy and clingy with partner
- Swinging between idealising and devaluing loved ones
- Mood swings and difficulty regulating emotions
- Experiences intense anxiety in relationships
- Inappropriate sense of emotional and physical boundaries

Ainsworth's Type B

SECURE ATTACHMENT

As Children

- Little or no separation anxiety or emotional distress when parent leaves
- Seeks proximity on return of parent
- Self-regulates emotions and thoughts
- Appropriate boundaries in relationships with parents
- Easily expresses emotion to parents

As Adults

- Relaxed and comfortable in company with loved ones
- Relaxed and comfortable in alone or in company with loved ones
- Easily expresses emotion to love ones
- Appropriate boundaries in close relationships
- Seeks social support and shares feelings with others

Main & Solomon

DISORGANISED ATTACHMENT

As Children

- Fears close proximity to parents who can be physically or emotionally abusive
- Mixture of avoidant and resistant or aggressive behaviours in proximity to parent
- Little or no sense of safety in relationships
- Complete inability to self-regulate emotion
- Seems dazed, dissociated or confused

As Adults

- Fears close proximity or intimacy in relationships
- Fears showing vulnerability
- Extreme rage or anger response to confrontation or threat
- Expresses little or no empathy with others
- Little or no understanding or personal boundaries

- Poor emotional regulation
- Seeking extreme closeness or extreme distance with no in-between
- Highly suspicious of others' intentions
- Inconsistency with their own romantic relationships
- Fear of abandonment
- Fear of getting emotionally intimate
- Low self-esteem
- Resistance to form secure attachments due to trust issues

Signs of Disorganised Attachment in Adults

References

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- Morley, T. E., & Moran, G. (2011). The origins of cognitive vulnerability in early childhood: Mechanisms linking early attachment to later depression. *Clinical psychology review*, 31(7), 1071-1082.
- Nelson III, C. A., Zeanah, C. H., & Fox, N. A. (2019). How early experience shapes human development: The case of psychosocial deprivation. *Neural plasticity*, 2019(1), 1676285.
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- Yip, J., Ehrhardt, K., Black, H., & Walker, D. O. (2018). Attachment theory at work: A review and directions for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 39(2), 185-198.

Reading: This is required for the seminar activity

Groh, A. M., Fearon, R. P., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & Roisman, G. I. (2017). Attachment in the early life course: Meta-analytic evidence for its role in socioemotional development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(1), 70-76.

1. Video: **Play and Friendship**

Attachment and Relationships

2. Class Task: Discuss the Groh et al (2017) paper.

3. Group task:

Group One: Read ONE journal paper relating to attachment styles and relationships in adulthood. Discuss this with the class.

Group Two: Read ONE journal paper relating to attachment styles and relationships across cultures. Discuss this with the class.

3. Discussion: Introduction to **Ethical and Methodological issues** within Developmental Psychology and Individual Differences research.