

THE IMPACTS OF SECURE AND INSECURE ATTACHMENTS THROUGHOUT LIFE

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ABSTRACT : The relationship between an infant and his/her mother has always been a central point in psychology. Accordingly, John Bowlby developed the attachment theory along with his first student then colleague Mary D. Salter Ainsworth. Bowlby's hypothesis is that during the evolution of the humans, babies who had a close relationship with their mothers were better at surviving Bowlby suggests that a child forms only on attachment at the beginning and that the person attached acts as a secure base in the exploration of the world. The attachment relationship is same kind of prototype for all future social relationships therefore the disruption of this attachment can have serious results. In the light of this statement this paper will attempt to discuss the effects of secure and insecure attachments on the psychological development of children and the importance of these attachments in their adult relationships by using Bowlby's and Ainsworth studies as well as the articles written by Ainsworth herself, Sroufe & Waters, and Fonagy.

KEYWORDS: Attachments Styles, Children, Psychological Development, Relationships

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between an infant and his/her mother has always been a central point in psychology. Psychologists, especially Freud, focused on the patients' childhood and their relationship with their mother to find the roots of their psychological issues. However, one of these psychoanalysts, John Bowlby took another direction by developing the attachment theory along with his student and later colleague Mary Salter Ainsworth. Bowlby's hypothesis is that during the evolution of humans, babies who had close relationship with their mothers were better at surviving. According to Bowlby's evolutionary theory of attachment, babies are born with a biological program to create bonds (attachments) with others in order to survive, Bowlby believed that attachment behaviors come from instincts and they will become out when the child is face to face with a threat-like separation, insecurity and fear- to his/her closeness to his/her mother. What shapes this attachment is not food but care and responsiveness. Bowlby suggest that a child forms only one attachment at the beginning and that the person attached acts as a secure base in the exploration of the world. The attachment relationship is some kind of prototype for a future social relationship. Therefore, the disruption of these attachment can have serious results. In the light of this statement, this paper will attempt to discuss the effect of secure and insecure attachments on the psychological development of children and the prominence of such attachments in their adult relationships by using Bowlby's and Ainsworth's studies as well as the articles written by Ainsworth herself, Sroufe and their colleagues.

II. METHODS:

Bowlby and Ainsworth based their attachment theory on an experiment. In this experiment, babies from 12 to 18 months old were first left alone for a short period of time. Then, they were reunited with their caregiver (mostly, their mother). Researchers observed the reactions of the babies at the time they were reunited with their caregiver. They found three types of attachment: secure, ambivalent/insecure and avoidant/ insecure attachments. Later, Fonagy et al. based their article on a similar research conducted by Anna Freud Centre – University College London Parent-Child Project to find out the harmony between the security of the parent and the security of the infant's with that parent. In the context of that study, Fonagy et al. focused on measuring the parent's capacity of understanding the mental states of their baby. This measurement is called *Reflective Self-Function*. It is based on *The Adult Attachment Interview* transcripts introduced by Mary Main and closely related to infant security classification based on *Strange Situation assessments*. Sroufe et al., on the other hand, focuses on the organizational conceptualization of attachment and use Bowlby's (1969) *conceptualization* as a starting

point for an organizational view of attachment. By approaching to attachment as behavior and to attachment classifications as behavioral categories, they adopt the organizational view to analyze interactive behavior and the bonding process.

Recently, Mary Main and her associates have devised an *Adult Attachment Inventory*. This inventory is used as a tool to look into the attachment relationships in adults. In fact, this interview/inventory mainly concentrates on past and present relationships with parents. However, Main suggests that in this interview they assess the interviewee's "representational model of relationships". The source of this model is the representations of the person's "early attachment figures".

III. FINDINGS:

Bowlby's most significant conclusion, which was based on the empirical evidence, was that to be a mentally healthy grown-up, "the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment" (Bowlby, 1951, p. 13).

On the other hand, according to Ainsworth, it was clear that a baby loves his mother because she fulfills his/her needs. Based on her researches with Bowlby, Ainsworth classified three basic relationship patterns in school-age children who were away from their parents because they were in a sanatorium and returned to their parents after a long time: 1) children who had strong positive feelings for their mothers; 2) children who had remarkable ambivalent relationships; 3) children who had "non-expressive, indifferent, or hostile relationships with mother." (Bowlby, Ainsworth, Boston, & Rosenbluth, 1956).

Here are main characteristics of the three types of attachments according the researches conducted by Bowlby and Ainsworth:

Secure Attachment: Securely attached children are stressed distress when they are separated from their caregivers and are happy when their caregiver returns. These children feel secure and they can depend on their adult caregivers. Although the child can be upset because he/she is left by the adult, he/she has a feeling of security because he/she believes that the caregiver will come back. Securely attached children want to be comforted by the caregiver when they are scared. These children are aware of the fact that when they need, the caregiver will give them comfort and the feeling of security.

Ambivalent Attachment: Ambivalently attached children are generally very stressed when the caregiver leaves. This attachment style is not very common. Research shows that ambivalent attachment is caused by the frequent absence of the mother. As a result, these children cannot rely that their mother (or caregiver) will be present when they need her.

Avoidant Attachment: Children who have avoidant attachment usually ignore their parents or caregivers. These children do not prefer their mother over a stranger. Research suggests that this attachment style may be the result of abusive or neglectful caregivers. If children are punished when they rely on their caregiver, they will learn not to ask for help in the future. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/loveandattraction/a/attachment01.htm>)

The interview designed by Mary Main and her associates in order to determine the types of attachments, however, is partially structured with probes for descriptions of relationships specific supportive memories, contradictory memories, assessments of relationships". The categories of attachment patterns obtained at the interview do not consider the content as it is. Instead, the interviewer pays attention to how much the interviewee fails to remember of early childhood discrepancies and incoherency. In short, the researchers found three main patterns of attachment: 1) autonomous, 2) detached, and 3) "enmeshed-together with a number of sub-patterns".

To prove the validity of these patterns, Main compared the parental pattern and the pattern of the infant's attachment, Main also reported together with her associates, a six-year follow-up study of the parent's pattern with his child's pattern. "The security of the mother's representational model of attachment was found to be strongly correlated with the security of the child's attachment to her ($r=0.62$). The comparable correlation for fathers was weaker but nonetheless significant ($r=0.37$)" (Ainsworth 1984).

IV. DISCUSSION:

The notion of "understanding of mental states has several important implications for the psychoanalytic theory of normal development, parenting, and the vicissitudes of the infant-caregiver relationship" (Fonagy et al., 1991). This means that while the capacity to observe the other as a being those functions psychologically, the inner perception of "primary objects" can be assumed to go through a significant change. Only after this change occurs that the "mental representation of the other and all the things that is not part of the "experiential simple self" will start thinking, feeling, desiring, wishing and believing. The object, in this case the mother, will simply "act, behave, or do". The representation of this as to interact "with the self in a physical world of temperatures, textures, movements, visual patterns, sounds, and so on." The mother of the young infant may witness to her own harmony with the infant by means of her own actions. However, the baby has limited understanding of his/her mother's actions. He/she only perceives the pleasure gained through the momentary experience. "The

internal representation cannot include the mental states of lovingness or concern, only its manifestation: a sense of warmth and safety (Sandler, 1960).

As to the organizational view of the infant-adult attachment relationship, it is safe to say that it is somewhat consistent with the study of normative patterns of attachment behavior, as well as social learning and cognitive approaches. From the perspective of organizational view, interactive behaviors and the bonding process need to be thoroughly analyzed. Likewise, it is important to understand the cognitive structures that back up "the development of the affective bond" and organize the attachment behavior regarding "internal and external inputs." (Sroufe & Waters, 1977) It would be wise to say that individual differences need to be considered while adopting the organizational view to understand the importance of infant-caregiver bonding.

The research of Roger Kobak shows that autonomous children, in other words, children who are securely attached to parents, make the best social adjustment when they find new friends and new people at college. The results are based on some self-report inventories and also on the Block adjustment Q-set, which are independent ratings filled by the newly-met people. When students who were securely attached children are compared with insecure students, the former is rated as more insightful, self-confident, less vulnerable and they have got less negative affect and more social presence; whereas the latter and the enmeshed group are identified as insecure. The children with enmeshed attachment pattern to parents see themselves as less social, and were rated by people around them as less insightful, socially less related, and they were reported to have more negative affect and to be less self-confident and more vulnerable.

However, something interesting came up with detached students: their answers to the self-report inventories were similar to those of the secure students but they reported less support from family. Although their reports stated that they did not have a problem in social adjustment, the ratings from their fellow students suggested otherwise. Their fellow students rated them as much less well-adjusted socially and emphasized that they had less insight and more negative affect. The results of the detailed findings clearly show that "detached defense makes them less socially perceptive and responsive and generally more cut-off from positive relations with their peers." (Ainsworth, 1984).

Kobak's findings with young adults are similar to those of Cassidy: avoidant six-year-old children report in a defensive manner that they do not have any flows. The findings of Julia Green are also alike. She states that the mothers of avoidant one-year-old babies reported that they are mildly stressed (according to Abidin's Parenting Stress Index. On the other hand, the mothers of securely attached babies generally reported that they were moderately stressed. These studies indicate how defensive people with avoidant or detached patterns of attachment are. This shows that when people report that they feel secure, self-confident, stress-free or socially capable, there is more reason to believe that they are more prone to be insecure, have lower self-esteem, and feel incompetent and stressed (Ainsworth, 1984).

V. CONCLUSION

When the research and studies conducted by prominent psychologists like Bowlby, Ainsworth, Sroufe, Waters, Fonagy and others, it is clear that the type of relationship developed between a baby and his/her mother has a notable impact on the baby's future relationships. For instance, a baby who develops a secure attachment in his/her childhood generally has high self-esteem, solid romantic relationships and is able to open himself/herself up to others. These children become adults who usually have healthy, happy and permanent relationships. As to children who do not develop secure attachments with their caregiver, researchers suggest that their failure to develop secure attachments when they are little results in ill behaviors in childhood and throughout their life. The children suffering from oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), usually show attachment problems. It is likely that these problems occur because of the abusive behaviors, negligence or trauma that they had experienced as a baby. Although attachment styles shown in adulthood may not necessarily be the same as those shown in infancy, several researches suggest that attachment formed as an infant may have a serious impact on later relationships. It is important to note that the individual's report on his/her current self-esteem, social adjustment, stress level and so on does not indicate whether the psychological problems experienced as an adult are the result of an unhealthy attachment as a baby because individuals with insecure or ambivalent attachment with their mother as an infant fail to remember this and overestimate their current situation.

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