

## Parents

Biological role is just the start. Parenting is a long term commitment; nurturing infant -> child -> adolescent -> adult. Different roles for mothers & fathers; considered to be complementary. Variation between countries/cultures in how these roles play out - and also in different periods of history.

Parent = cultural, social, historic set of expectations.

Psychologically, parents are primary agents, who constrain, organise & structure children's personalities and experiences.

Behaviourist - reward contingencies shape  
Social behaviourists - imitation of parents key  
Social constructivist - scaffolding

Parents can 'pass on' their problems through intergenerational transmission - public policy sees early intervention as a way of countering. Assumption is that poor parenting leads to children who will in turn be poor parents.

## Animal Studies

Humans unique - long period of dependency on caregivers (what purpose does this fulfil?) Absolute at first.

**Lorenz** - ethologist perspective - studies of imprinting of greylag geese on himself. **Bowlby** later made the link between this and a biological basis for human bonding - attachment.

**Harlow** - wire mother / cloth mother studies. Concept of 'contact comfort' - as important as nourishment to young macaque monkeys. But still not in itself enough for adaptive success - cloth mothered monkeys had difficulties in relating to other macaques.

## Book 2 Chapter 1 - Parenting & Attachment

*Five linking questions from animals to humans:*

- *How early does the mother-infant bond form - is it a form of imprinting?*
- *Is there a critical period in which they form?*
- *Can it be anyone, or just their mother?*
- *What parenting features are important to attachment?*
- *Does early parenting affect later outcomes?*

## Attachment Theory

Ethologists & attachment theorists both believe something special happens early in life where specific objects come to assume a particular relevance.

'Comfort blanket' - **Winnicott** - 'transitional objects'. Attachment to a physical object and mother - significant in that they are attachments to **single objects**.

Internal working models (**Bowlby; Bretherton**) have three aspects:

Model of self ←-----→ Model of other  
Model of relationship

How an infant's IWM develops will depend on the quality, availability, consistency of care. Crucially, the **IWM persists into childhood and beyond**. This is the central belief underpinning **Bowlby's** attachment theory.

**Bowlby** claimed:

- Healthy infant attachment requires long term stable relationships with carers, **and not** that a single attachment to a mother was the best/only way
- Attachment to father can support attachment to mother, plus other attachments in the infant's world.

- Biological parents are not necessarily essential, and a variety of attachment objects help the development of the IWM
- IWM's are shaped in infancy, but are not unalterably fixed - contact with a variety of people helps, and argues against that an infant **only** needs a strong bond with their mother.

**Winnicott** - 'good enough' mothering rather than the 'perfect mother' is better - encouragement of tolerance and waiting for fulfilment leads to a healthy sense of self and independence.

**Robertsons** - argued that **separations** indicate how securely attached a child is to the caregiver - 'separation anxiety'. Behaviour emerges at about 6m.o.

**Ainsworth - Strange Situation** - it is the **reunions** (2 off) during this procedure that indicates attachment security and type. Theory argues secure attachments mean that an infant's IWM have representations of available parent figures.

**vanIjzendoorn & Kroonenberg** provided evidence that this was so in around 65% of infants, with variation within and between countries present. Classified as Type B by the SST.

Type C - Insecure-ambivalent - account for another 15%. Type A - Insecure-avoidant - 20%.

Later research (**Main & Solomon**) argues there is a Type D - Disorganised - often (but not always) associated with pathological parenting / abuse.

Each type of attachment is associated with a different IWM. Disorganised lack a coherent IWM. IWM/attachment type is predictive of how a child will approach forming new relationships.

### *Influences on Attachment*

General support for the idea that sensitive parenting leads to Type B (secure) attachments. Type A (avoidant) and Type C (ambivalent) associated with over or under stimulating parenting respectively. (Belsky; de Wolff & vanIjzendoorn)

**Vondra et al** - 95 mothers & 1y.o. infants. Lab setting, video recording infants in 3 activities followed by an SST. In first activity, mother completes a Q while infant in high chair at other end of room; interactions coded. Second activity, mother completes a Q but infant free to roam. Activities 1&2 coded for appropriate, insufficient, intrusive maternal behaviour. Third activity was some teaching tasks. Sensitivity/insensitivity - cooperation/independence coding scales used. Scales then combined to produce a rating of the mother as sensitive, controlling or unresponsive.

Result: Infants SST predictable from mothers group classifications.

- Sensitive mother = SST Type B
- Controlling mother = SST Type A
- Unresponsive mother = SST Type C

Attachment security linked to expression of emotion and emotional responses by parents & children.

**Goldberg et al** - 30 video recording of SSTs; 10 secure, 10 avoidant, 10 ambivalent chosen. Three groups also matched for infant age, gender; parent age, occupation & education.

- Insecure-ambivalent infants - highest frequencies of emotional events, then secure, then avoidant.
- Significant difference in proportions of types of events - secure SST => equal proportions of +ve, neutral and -ve events; avoidant infants few -ve; ambivalent infants many -ve.
- Mothers of secure infants responded most; then ambivalent; then avoidant.

Secure infants show a full range of emotions & their mothers respond appropriately => they learn that all emotions are 'valid' in a relationship.

Avoidant infants don't show -ve emotions => they learn that emotionality in general and particularly -ve feelings need to be suppressed

Ambivalent infants learn -ve emotions get them attention - therefore that these are the most 'valid' emotions in a relationship.

**Fagot & Kavanagh** - mothers and fathers prefer interacting with secure, rather than insecurely attached infants; had fewer interactions with insecurely attached infants, particularly boys - may explain the greater likelihood of behavioural problems in boys.

**Lamb et al** - predictive ability of SST in subsequent behaviour is only true if there is stability in care-giving arrangements and family circumstances.

Suggests ***stability in attachment is a consequence of stable parent-child relationships*** - evidence for this found by **Belsky and Fearon, 2002**.

**Meins et al** - study of 71 mothers & infants. At 6m.o., maternal sensitivity assessed using Ainsworth's scale and mother's utterances coded for those that made reference to what the infant was thinking. At 12m.o., SST conducted.

Type B - mothers made more mental state references at 6m.o. test. Mother's sensitivity predicts attachment security, but ***mental state references (communication style) were an even better predictor***.

### *Baumrind's models of parenting styles*

Four types of parenting distinguished:

- ***Authoritarian***
- ***Authoritative***
- ***Permissive***
- ***Nonconformist***

**Baumrind** argues that children of authoritative parents become socially responsible as they place realistic demands on their offspring while providing moderate amounts of tension.

**Russell et al** - 305 Aus pre-school children; mothers more likely to identify with authoritative style; fathers as authoritarian or permissive. Sons generate more authoritarian identifiers.

### *Parent-child r'ships & later child development*

#### *Infant attachment and adult attachment links*

If IWMs show persistence, then SST types ought to predict AAI. **Main and others** developed the AAI to assess ability to come to terms with early relationships with parents and form them into general working models of relationships. Three AA styles proposed:

- ***Dismissing***
- ***Autonomous***
- ***Preoccupied/Enmeshed***

Prediction is that:

- Dismissing = Type A (avoidant)
- Autonomous = Type B (secure)
- Enmeshed = Type C (ambivalent)

Could test by a longitudinal study. **Bielefeld** (children of 49 German families). 44 children assessed on SST at 12-18mo; AAI at 16 y.o. Information on life events also collected. ***Found SST was not a good predictor of AAI***

**Hamilton** - 30 Californians - found otherwise.

Life event data also connected - careful analysis showed that SST only predicted AAI if family circumstances had remained stable. Changes of attachment style (in any direction) found where major changes in environment had occurred.

Conclusion - some support for SST predicting AAI; but life event are a very potent factor in determining adult attachment.

#### Adult attachment's influence of infant attachment

Three consistent research findings:

- Mother's AAI predicts infant's SST, especially for secure attachment.
- AAI predicts how mothers behave towards their children - secure mothers are sensitive.
- Sensitive parenting is predictive of infant attachment.

#### Adolescence

**Kobak & Sceery** - adolescents who rate as secure/autonomous are seen by their peers are more resilient, less anxious, less hostile. These adolescents are less distressed and say they have high levels of social support. Pre-occupied/enmeshed adolescents rated as less resilient and more anxious by peers. They report higher personal distress and require more family support.

Western research suggests that adolescents shift their primary attachments from parents, to peers of the same sex and then peers of the opposite sex (**Grotevant**)

**Baumrind** - development progress is held back by directive, officious or unengaged practices; facilitated by reciprocal, balanced interaction by authoritative parenting. Authoritarian parents may stop drug use, but do not promote positive competence.

#### **Diversity in family patterns & relationships**

Beware ethnocentricity - much of the research on socio-emotional development of children is of white, middle class North Americans and Europeans.

**Parke & Buriel** provide evidence that economic and cultural factors have a large effect on outcomes concerning socialisation.

Socio-cultural factors are evident in research on disciplinary styles (**Steinberg & Darling**)

Authoritative parenting works better for European American and Hispanic American youths; but Authoritarian styles work better for Asian Americans.

**Kroger** found American, NZ, UK adolescents had similar attitudes to parental authority. **Feldman** found that HK Chinese adults reported more misbehaviour and expected autonomy later on than Aus and American youngsters.

Tim Holyoake 2009, <http://www.tenpencepiece.net/>