

Theories of Attachment

Also by Carol Garhart Mooney

Reflections on Parenting (New England AEYC)

Theories of Childhood

Use Your Words

Theories of Attachment

An Introduction to
Bowlby, Ainsworth, Gerber,
Brazelton, Kennell,
and Klaus

Carol Garhart Mooney

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Managing Editors: Laurie Herrmann and Douglas Schmitz

Acquisition/Development Editor: Kyra Ostendorf

Creative Director: Jim Handrigan

Production Editor: Laura Maki

Production Assistant: Carla Valadez

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*Dedicated with love to my four children,
Sean, Brian, Tom, and Erin*



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We’re done!

Carol Garhart Mooney
Barnstead, New Hampshire
2009

Introduction



Social science doesn't exist in a vacuum. It doesn't spring from an absolute universe of "pure" inquiry and observation. Instead it tends to hew closely to social anxieties—what Kagan calls "historical nodes of worry." And these nodes of worry determine not only what social scientists study, but often enough, what results they find (because of the way their research is focused) and also, afterward, which of their findings are picked up by the media, and which ideas take hold and become popular with the public at large.

—Judith Warner, 2005

PERHAPS THERE IS NO SUBJECT that so perfectly qualifies for Jerome Kagan's notion of "historical nodes of worry" as attachment theory (Kagan 1998). Often couched in articles about maternal employment, parent-infant bonding, or the effects of child care programs on infants, the topic of what is best for babies and who should decide is one the public never tires of. It has been almost constantly in the public eye for over twenty-five years. In her 2005 *New York Times* best seller, *Perfect Madness*, Judith Warner talks at great length about attachment theory. Initially this was not her intent. Warner, a journalist—not an educator or a researcher of human development—sought to answer the question, "Why are mothers so full of ambivalence?"

The question for Warner was both personal and perplexing. She spent her earliest years of "mothering" in France, where support structures and services that make the job feel less overwhelming are available to all new parents. In the United States, on the contrary, mothers seem to carry huge burdens of guilt, anxiety, and ambivalence. Warner claims it wasn't long after she returned to this country before she found herself caught up in the same spin of emotions. She set out to determine what this was all about. Her questions and answers became *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age*

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of *Anxiety*. Her question, “Why are mothers so full of ambivalence?” definitely caught the interest and opinions of the general public. Maternal ambivalence is common in the news. Titles such as “Who’s Watching the Babies?” “The Mommy Wars,” or “Mother’s Dilemma: How Many Hours Away?” in the popular press always draw readers. People are interested in who is raising the children, how it should be accomplished, what the barriers are to doing it successfully, how the responsibility to the next generation should be fulfilled, who should be doing the care, and who should be paying for it. Separation and attachment persist in being newsworthy.

When I went to the bookstore to get a copy of Warner’s book, the young woman at the counter said, “I can never remember if that’s in Women’s Studies or Child and Family.” After reading the book, I understood her confusion. Maternal ambivalence certainly affects children and families, yet for many people, it remains a woman’s issue. This is, perhaps, because women are the ones who give birth and are, in most cases, the primary caregivers during the first days and weeks of life.

Attachment is a delicate issue. Over the years, much has been written about attachment, bonding, separation and stranger anxiety, primary caregivers, effects of child care on infants, and the impact on infant development of all of the above. Some of the research is dated. Sometimes the terms are confused with each other. Often information is put in print that can only add to the ambivalence and guilt with which many parents struggle during their child’s earliest weeks and months. Those of us doing the research should be asking ourselves, What is our responsibility? How much do we say, in full knowledge of parental anxiety, if we have no solutions to offer? Will infants be affected as adversely by their parents’ anxiety over work schedules and long absences as they will be by the absence itself? Is it our responsibility to discover infants’ needs, separated from the context of their families, neighborhoods, and government policies? How do we present our findings—and to whom?

Perhaps the best example of the confusion we all feel when approaching the study of attachment theory and infant caregiving is the work of Jay Belsky. His infant care research in 1985 calmed the anxieties of employed parents by finding no significant differences in development between home-reared infants and infants in quality

child care, and then, a decade later, raised them again by sharing information about the behavioral effects of long hours, at an early age, in other than family care. Belsky's change of perspective was newsworthy.

Belsky originally stated that studies of infants reared in quality child care showed no differences between those children and their parent-reared cohorts. The problem, of course, is that few parents are aware of the poor quality of child care that is the norm in the United States. As child care professionals, we flinch when the media splashes anti-child care sound bites at already struggling young families. Yet our own industry knows that true quality care is in short supply. The national supply of quality infant care is deplorable. Yet we also know that we need to be more flexible than we once were in our definitions of what constitutes quality care. It is fair to say that there are many variables affecting quality and that families have different preferences and priorities when they choose care for their babies. Most of this information was missing from the press coverage of Belsky's original research findings. The press heralded his findings as good news for working parents—which it was.

But the rest of the story had yet to unfold. A decade later, when Belsky courageously shared a more cautious perspective, warning signs had led early childhood educators to question the long hours in non-family care for very young babies. Again the press had much to say about the situation; newspapers and magazines carried articles with titles like "Day Care Dilemma . . . What to Do?" and "New Findings Send Working Moms Back Home!" As we entered the new century, such discussions were presented in more detail. The story, however, remained pretty much the same for America's working parents.

It's the same story Selma Fraiberg shared many years ago in *Every Child's Birthright* (1977): children tend to do just fine in quality infant care. But how does a parent or even an infant care provider know what constitutes quality? For a while, we were pretty sure we knew what quality care was. Later we realized we hadn't taken enough time to determine the impact of variables such as ethnicity, parents' education levels, poverty, illness, individual temperament, and social mores on the actual quality of care. But even in the seventies, when practitioners in this country thought we were closer to

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the answers, research indicated that not nearly enough quality care was available. So do we acknowledge the very well-documented information that infants thrive in quality care—without mentioning the rest of the story?

An in-depth study of attachment theory shows us that, as Robert Karen points out, “The resistance to seeing the pain of deprived, neglected, or abused children has a long history” (1998, 22). This is not to say that children today who spend long hours in care are abused or neglected. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that many unanswered questions contribute to general parental ambivalence and confusion about what is best for their young infants. It is difficult as parents and caregivers to acknowledge what Karen refers to as the “unwanted inheritance” we all bring to our family or professional work with infants and young children. That is the premise that the conditions of our own infancy affect how we view the total situation. This unwanted inheritance is not always conscious but is usually at play when parents struggle with work, child care schedules, and feelings about leaving their brand-new babies in the care of others. As both parents and professionals, we ask ourselves, “How much is too much when it comes to early separations between infants and their significant adults?”

To ponder solutions to these questions of parenthood and separations, we need to think first about our lack of preparation for such an important job. We live in a country where we require all high school graduates to take classes in government because they are future voters. I have no research data to back up my gut feeling that more high school graduates end up having children than end up voting. I know it feels wrong that graduating seniors are not required to look at life-span development (the study of how humans grow and change over a lifetime) and seriously consider what we know about marriage, family life, and child growth and development.

ABC's *Good Morning America* interviewed Jo Frost of the hit show *Supernanny* in 2008. She was asked if there was one prominent challenge she consistently encountered among young parents as they struggled in their parental roles. Frost responded immediately, “Parents want to know what is best for their kids, how to do it, and how to live with themselves when they know they’ve missed the mark.” Parents and caregivers want to feel and be confident

and competent when they approach their days with children. It is common for them to feel incompetent and lacking in confidence.

It doesn't have to be this way. Other countries (France, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, to name a few) back up young families because doing so is best for the life of their nation. National policies in these countries are based on the premise (found only on bumper stickers in the United States) that "it takes a village to raise a child."

It is my hope to add a voice to the discussion. As in my previous work *Theories of Childhood*, I attempt to bring the thoughts, theories, and research of prominent minds to bear on our everyday work with children and their families. Before providing the background information on the theories of attachment, I'd like to offer the reader an idea of what to expect from this book.

It is not my intent to be comprehensive and scholarly. Instead, I'll attempt to share small bites of some of the major pieces in the debate surrounding attachment theory and its impact on parenting and infant caregiving. References will be included to assist those seeking more in-depth knowledge of the subject. This text is intended to familiarize the novice with some of the issues at play.

After providing a variety of definitions on the theory, I'll share information (historic and contemporary) on the primary threads of the story, from the work of John Bowlby to today's headlines on working families and their struggles to know what is best for their young children.

Following this introduction, I will provide a more thorough discussion of the lives and works of some of the founding attachment theorists: John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, Magda Gerber, John Kennell and Marshall Klaus, and T. Berry Brazelton.

The second part outlines the many areas of impact for parents and providers of infant care that attachment theory calls us to examine. Included are bonding, infant care, feeding practices, separation anxiety, stranger anxiety, responses to infant crying, and finally, parental or provider confidence and its impact on babies.

Defining Attachment

In his comprehensive study, *Becoming Attached*, Robert Karen acknowledges that the name John Bowlby is considered synonymous with attachment theory by many writers. Karen quotes

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Bowlby's often-invoked words, "It is in our first relationship, usually with our mother, that much of our future well-being is determined" (1998, 5). Bowlby advanced our understanding of human development by focusing the discussion for the first time on the relationships and emotional bonds that are critical to healthy development in infants. Contemporary attachment theorists call on us to move beyond Bowlby's notion that unsatisfactory attachment bonds doom a child's opportunities to find fulfilling life experiences.

I follow the current understanding of attachment theory in believing that we are still in the process of learning about how babies and families connect with one another and what happens when that connection is disrupted. It is important for all of us who work with babies and their families to be schooled in the historic journey of attachment theory. It is also essential that we understand that our journey has just begun. As practitioners, we must study the past, observe the present, and plan for the future to assure that babies born in the twenty-first century receive the best care we can provide, based on our past and present knowledge of their critical needs.

Jean Mercer's outstanding book *Understanding Attachment: Parenting, Child Care, and Emotional Development* reminds us that Bowlby's work provides the foundation for studies of attachment but stresses that today's understanding of child development indicates "separation alone does not play as important a role in emotional development as Bowlby thought" (2006). It is our task to respond to new understandings of attachment and to propose further solutions for providing a strength-based understanding of how best to meet the needs of all babies and their families.

What do we mean when we talk about attachment in babies? The word *attachment* itself has several meanings. Even in professional discussion, it is often loosely substituted for bonding, relationships, or affection. Each of these can be considered a component of attachment, but for the purposes of this book, clarity of definition is essential.

Some of my preferred textbook definitions of *attachment* include:

- An enduring social tie of a child to a specific person, such as a mother or father (Mosher, Glover, Bruning 1987)

- An enduring emotional connection between people that produces a desire for continual contact as well as feelings of distress during separation (Berger 2001)
- A strong emotional bond between a baby or young child and a caring adult who is part of the child's everyday life—the child's attachment figure (Honig 2002)

Here are some traditional definitions framed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, two of the earliest theorists to study attachment:

- An affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one—a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time (Ainsworth 1967)
- “The dimension of the infant-caregiver relationship involving protection and security regulation. Within this theoretic framework, attachment is conceptualized as an intense and enduring affectional bond that the infant develops with the mother figure, a bond that is biologically rooted in the function of protection from danger” (Bowlby 1982).

If we look at all of these definitions of attachment theory, we can pull out some consistently used words. *Enduring* is one that predominates in both traditional and contemporary definitions. *Enduring* is a good place to begin. Everyone agrees that the effects of early relationships stay with us throughout our lifetime. Contemporary theories (Kagan 1998) caution us against the fatalistic view that poor early attachment triggers serious and irreversible challenges for children. Yet all agree that our earliest relationships tend to stay with us. Traditional definitions usually describe the mother-infant relationship, while later works use the words *mother*, *father*, or *significant adult*. One of the exciting changes to the discussion of infants, working parents, and attachment is that today it seems to include parents *and* other significant adults in a new baby's life. It is safe to say that although many variables affect life-span development, babies' first relationships are among the most important, and attachment is the reason for this.

The study of attachment theory has increasingly regained the interest of American parents, providers, and infant teachers in the past two decades as the number of parents who return to

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employment immediately after their child's birth has increased. Our questions are many: What is the best age for babies to enter group care? Does it make a difference how many hours a day an infant is in out-of-home care? What is the best approach for supporting babies and their parents while they make this painful transition? What is the impact of provider turnover on very young children? How much preparation are teachers receiving in college programs to attentively meet the needs of infants and their parents? Are teachers being educated to treat infant care as systemic—that is, within the context of family and culture? These questions offer just a few of the reasons for parents and practitioners to look at attachment theory. It is my hope that this practical volume will familiarize you with some of the basic literature on attachment, help you ponder the many issues affected by our understanding of attachment, and give you the motivation to explore with families and colleagues the ways we can all work together to provide the best possible outcomes for all babies while we learn how best to meet their varied needs.

Historic Perspectives

Those whose work has focused on attachment theory have often been misunderstood, criticized, and rejected by colleagues. Sometimes too much emphasis has been placed on one area of research while other significant areas are neglected. As a group of researchers, attachment theorists have contributed greatly to the general knowledge of psychology, sociology, and medical science. They have passionately asserted that infants need an enduring relationship with significant, caring adults who come to know them well. Each year we learn more about the complexity of human beings and their developmental patterns. We can thank the attachment theorists for focusing our attention on the relational and social aspects of human development that we now know are tied to significant people in an infant's life, not merely to hunger or comfort.

The impetus for early attachment studies came from observing institutionalized infants. Several studies were conducted with this population. Many made reference to the sterile conditions, the single goal of meeting physical needs, and the absence of relationships with caregivers. One of the early works on life for

institutionalized babies was René Spitz's sobering film, *Grief—A Peril in Infancy* (1947). Spitz documented the sadness and isolation of infants in institutional care and catalyzed the movement to determine the effects of maternal deprivation on new babies. Spitz went on to publish and lecture on this topic for many years. His work was hotly criticized, largely because it made people uncomfortable. His film was an exposé of the risks to unattached infants, yet it offered no plan to remedy the situation.

The response of many analysts to Spitz's film echoed Karen's statement about the long history of not wanting to look too closely at the pain of tiny babies separated from their families for many hours. Karen reports that a prominent New York analyst responded to Spitz's film by saying, "How could you do this to us?" (1998, 25). It is easy to think of young parents today responding to news flashes on "dangers of day care" with exactly the same words. It is heart wrenching to look at the tragedy of young, helpless infants and children. Sometimes we do want to look away.

(Weeks after writing the above paragraphs, I attended a New Hampshire/Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children [NH/VT AEYC] Administrators Conference where *Grief—A Peril in Infancy* was viewed as part of a seminar. Before the film had played for twenty minutes, attendees requested that the presenter move on with her session because the film was "too painful to watch.")

Many people in the United States believe children are best cared for in their own homes by family members. When providers of care to young infants are ambivalent about their work because they believe babies should be with their mothers in their early years, they find it difficult to provide optimal support to babies and their families. In 1977, Rita Warren referred to this dilemma as *child saving* and called it the number one occupational hazard for people who care for other people's children (Warren 1977, 8). Later, Janet Gonzalez-Mena echoed this notion, calling providers' attitude a *savior complex* in which they view themselves as saving children from their parents. Such attitudes can be redirected if teacher training programs spend time with students exploring the ways they can support rather than judge families.

When René Spitz filmed institutionalized babies, he hoped to raise the interest of those in the psychoanalytic community to the

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tragedy of not investigating parent-infant separation. The seeds sown by Spitz's work were fertilized by the young John Bowlby. Bowlby began his career in the study of medicine but was quickly drawn to what later would become the field of developmental psychology. He volunteered at schools where children with adjustment and behavioral struggles were living. Bowlby had a hunch that the detached nature of some of the children he worked with was connected to early separation from family members. Following this hunch became Bowlby's life work. Because the psychoanalytic tradition in the early twentieth century focused on interpretation of children's fantasy life, Bowlby's field observations were rejected by his colleagues and largely considered irrelevant by the psychoanalytic community. This did not deter his interest or passion in discovering the connection between behavior and early separation issues. John Bowlby brought the issue of attachment to the forefront of study for those interested in the causes and effects of early attachments on human behavior.

In the 1950s, Bowlby hired Mary Ainsworth to work with him on his research studies. Ainsworth was a brilliant and exacting researcher who was, like Bowlby, fascinated by babies, attachment, and separation. She is best known to the early childhood community for developing her Strange Situation assessment. Like Bowlby, she has often been criticized and ignored by the psychoanalytic community. Attachment theory and the lifetime effects of early relationships between babies and their primary caregivers were her life work. Sadly, she is often completely ignored by theorists writing about significant issues in infants' first year of life.

Contemporary Perspectives

I focus here on the primary theorists whose work shaped our current approach to attachment and infant care. In addition to these significant contributors, many contemporary researchers have shaped our practices today. Some of these will be briefly highlighted here.

Tension has always existed between those who believe that growth and development depend on heredity (nature) and those who believe in the primacy of the environment (nurture). In the early twentieth century, one area in which psychologists

(representing the nature half of the debate) and sociologists (representing the nurture half of the debate) agreed was the premise that babies loved their mothers because mothers were the source of sucking and hunger satisfaction. Usually at odds with each other's perspective, both agreed that mothers nurtured these natural needs, and that feeding and sucking were the primary force behind an infant's bond to the mother.

Bowlby, Spitz, and Ainsworth began discussions on the impact of relational factors as important parts of healthy development. Their work was furthered in 1958 by that of the psychologist Harry Harlow, now famous for his study of rhesus monkeys. Harlow questioned the psychoanalytic community's long-held belief that the reason babies loved their mothers was connected to feeding (1958). (I explain his experiments involving infant monkeys and their mothers in chapter 1.) Harlow's work opened the door to considering relationships in the early months and years of life.

Feeding practices, bonding, rooming in, and other attachment-related issues became hotly debated in professional circles and neighborhood parent groups as researchers, clinicians, and practitioners in the 1950s and 1960s spent more and more time focusing on the importance of early relationships. Contributions of people like John Kennell and Marshall Klaus in the United States and Dr. Frédérick Leboyer in France had powerful and positive effects on changes in birthing practices.

In the United States at the time, many practices in childbirth and infant care prioritized efficiency over the best interests of infants and families. New mothers were urged to bottle-feed their infants. Marketers went so far as to promote stuffed toy bottle props to free mothers from hours of holding and feeding their new infants. Automated swings and audio cassettes of lullabies were offered to replace long hours of rocking and singing. These "improvements" may have allowed the new parents to know the exact per ounce intake at a feeding, and the swings were definitely a blessing for busy moms who could not manage older children and a crying infant at the same time. However, these ideas did nothing to promote positive outcomes for babies. The renewed energy and focus on supportive practices for families and babies of the 1970s were an overdue improvement.

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Dr. Benjamin Spock is remembered for offering advice to generations of young parents. He observed changes in research and practice and adapted to new ways of thinking when new information became available. His classic *Baby and Child Care* was the only baby book offering new parents advice during the 1950s and 1960s. Spock is to be admired for bringing parents new information that reversed some of his earlier advice. For example, in the third edition of *Baby and Child Care*, he cited research and current knowledge to support picking up a crying infant in the early weeks and months of life after suggesting in earlier editions that the baby be left to “cry it out.”

Frédéric Leboyer was another voice in the 1970s to discuss the importance of the birth process for families. His *Birth without Violence* (1995) outlines an approach to childbirth that Leboyer had implemented during hundreds of deliveries in France. He spoke up about the fluorescent-lit, sterile delivery rooms in hospitals that he believed dehumanized the birth experience. Parents selecting his method of delivery could choose soft music, dim lights, and fresh air to welcome their infant to the world. Some families chose for the baby to be born underwater, allowing for a more gradual transition from the womb. Typically fathers or attending relatives would cut the cord, and infants went straight to the mother’s breast rather than to the nursery for height, weight, and other traditional tests. Although the popularity of giving birth underwater was short lived, in the United States, its impact changed policies in hospitals around the country.

In 1976, John Kennell and Marshall Klaus published a small volume, *Maternal-Infant Bonding*, which addressed the impact of early separation or loss on family development. The authors made their case for a particular window of opportunity for parents and infants to develop a bond. They considered this time frame a critical period with the power to direct the future relationship between parent and infant as well as the infant’s future relationships with others. Their research was cross-cultural and sought to determine what factors enhanced or decreased optimal conditions for making childbirth humane for all involved. The impact of their work has been felt across the United States in hospitals whose policies had excluded partners from the delivery room and prevented older

siblings access to their mothers throughout a hospital stay; today, most hospitals have started opening the doors to families.

While many positive outcomes have been affected by the push for more humane birthing, negative consequences remain for families unable to participate in some of these positive changes. The zeal with which practitioners and the general public embraced the new approaches to giving birth was sometimes extreme. I remember a student sharing her story of giving birth by Caesarian section and having several women in her Lamaze class tell her a C-section was outrageous and that she had not truly “given birth.” Similarly, parents whose children were rushed to larger hospitals for emergency care immediately after birth often experienced fear that they had not bonded with their child during the critical period. (These scenarios will be discussed at more length in chapter 2.) As the medical community experimented with more family-friendly policies and researchers continued to observe and study the first days and weeks of life, a greater sense of balance replaced some of the earlier zeal. In retrospect, we see that some of the theories were clearly overstated or not adequately founded. Nevertheless, the energy put into refining birthing processes, making them more sensitive to infant and family needs, has enhanced the birth experience in the United States for most families.

Magda Gerber is not as well-known to the general public as some of the other attachment theorists. Like the others, she devoted herself to developing policies in early care and education that supported infants and parents. She may be considered by some readers who are interested in early infancy as unlikely company for the other theorists included in the text. Her criteria differ from many contemporary policies and practices. She believed adults in Western countries had become too interested in doing everything to or for a baby rather than allowing the baby the personal freedom to find her own way (2003). She disliked commercial products that limited mobility or inquiry. She shared with other theorists a passionate desire to encourage practices that were supportive of children and families. Her lively and unique contributions give us all much to think about. Since a major theme of my book is developing tolerance for ambivalence and looking at the many ways of achieving the same goals, I believe including her work here has merit. Gerber

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believed in a different approach to achieving certain ends and would challenge us to question certain things we have been encouraged to take for granted.

Perhaps the most widely recognized parent-infant advocate in this country is pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton. He is a prolific writer whose work on families is appreciated by all those who take a serious interest in the rearing of the next generation. His interest in understanding the complexities of parent-child interaction and child growth and development is matched by his easy way of sharing significant information. Brazelton is a familiar face on Capitol Hill, where administrations for the past three decades have solicited his input on government policies for children and families. He sees his mission as fostering a sense of competence in parents that will lead to loving parenting. Brazelton has done much in his lifetime to ease the burdens and guilt of twentieth- and twenty-first century parents as they struggle with the demands of balancing family and work.

No discussion of attachment theory is complete without the voice of Harvard's Dr. Jerome Kagan. Kagan has long rejected some of attachment theory. He believes too much emphasis has been placed on the earliest days and weeks of life and that cross-cultural studies suggest children can thrive at later ages after difficult beginnings (1998). Like Brazelton, Kagan has spent his life studying the development of children from birth to adolescence. He has focused on temperament and environmental and genetic impacts on growing humans.

Attachment theory is complex, multifaceted, and ever changing. Kagan's repudiation of it does not lead us to ignore the theories on attachment that have grown and changed for decades. Kagan's work suggests that we proceed with caution, that we not overlook a child's ability to thrive even if her first relationship was not what we would like for all children. By studying the ideas and theories presented for the past several decades on parent-infant or infant-provider attachments, we can construct approaches to caregiving that support the needs of babies, parents, and providers as they engage in what all can agree are significant relationships that have a huge impact on children's future success.

Part 1

Major Theorists, Their Lives and Work

Chapter 1: John Bowlby



When a baby is born he cannot tell one person from another and indeed can hardly tell person from thing. Yet, by his first birthday he is likely to have become a connoisseur of people. Not only does he come quickly to distinguish familiars from strangers but amongst his familiars he chooses one or more favorites. They are greeted with delight; they are followed when they depart; and they are sought when absent. Their loss causes anxiety and distress; their recovery, relief and a sense of security. On this foundation, it seems, the rest of his emotional life is built—without this foundation there is risk for his future happiness and health.

—John Bowlby (1966)

JOHN BOWLBY WAS BORN in London in 1907. He was the fourth of six children in a traditional, upper-middle-class English family. As was the fashion for his class and time, Bowlby and his siblings were raised by nannies and had very little contact with their parents. Middle-class women at the time believed parental attention and affection resulted in lack of discipline. Children typically spent an hour a day at tea time with their mother. Bowlby had one nanny to whom he was quite attached. She left the family's employ when he was four years old. As an adult, Bowlby described this loss as similar to the loss of a mother. At seven, again typical for his social class, he was sent to boarding school. He remembered this as a terrible time in his life. Bowlby's lifework focused on the effects of early separation and loss on life-span development. It has been said that his own childhood experiences drove his professional interest and gave him tremendous sensitivity to the suffering of young children.

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Bowlby's father was a surgeon. He directed John to medical school. Bowlby was an excellent student and won prizes for outstanding intellectual achievement. He began his career at Trinity College, Cambridge. He took time after college to volunteer for children with serious emotional and behavioral challenges. From the beginning, Bowlby was interested in the connections between family life and children's mental health and behavior. Though this connection is commonplace to the study of child growth and development today, it was uncommon at the time.

A friend urged Bowlby to change the direction of his study from medicine to psychology. While still in medical school, he enrolled in the Institute for Psychoanalysis. Though qualified in both medicine and psychoanalysis, Bowlby's sustained interest was in the mental and emotional health of children. From his earliest studies, Bowlby was convinced that deviant or troubled behaviors in late childhood and adolescence had their origins in the family system. He believed the first relationships in infancy set the tone for all later love relationships. He believed that disruption to these first relationships or poor quality in these relationships accounted for trauma and troubling behaviors in adolescence and adult life.

His ideas were not well received in the psychoanalytic community. The prevailing thought at the time was that one needed to look inside the mind at dreams and fantasies to determine the source of neuroses or deviant behaviors. The analysis of troubled individuals was the foundation of psychoanalytic studies. Bowlby believed that observation would yield more information about an individual's reality. He believed the troubled youth he worked with experienced problems because of external causes rooted in their homes and in the earliest experiences that had occurred there or, conversely, in the situations that ideally should have occurred there but did not.

Bowlby's first professional papers presented the idea that two environmental factors early in life can introduce lifetime challenges for individuals. The first of these, which received much negative attention in his early career, is that separation from or the death of a mother results in lifelong struggles for the individual. The second, which today seems like an ordinary idea, is that the emotional attitude of a parent toward a child has life-shaping effects.

Bowlby proposed that often the attitude of a parent toward a child is deeply affected by unresolved issues from his or her own childhood. Today these ideas are accepted as commonplace by psychologists, educators, and sociologists and are part of the well-known foundations of development. When Bowlby first presented his ideas, they were not taken seriously by academicians in any discipline.

At the time, analysts tended to focus on problems around feeding, toileting, or exposure to parents' sexual intercourse. All of these issues and their interpretations tended to flow from Freud's theory and practice of psychoanalysis. So when Bowlby suggested that observations of parental behaviors in the home might provide a clue to a child's development, he was largely dismissed by the psychoanalytic community. At the time, analysts did not consider it part of their task to give any consideration at all to the real experiences of patients. "Almost by definition it was assumed that anyone interested in the external world could not be interested in the internal world, indeed was almost certainly running away from it" (Karen 1998, 38).

Bowlby was somewhat single-minded in his approach to his work. The fact that few found his work as fascinating as he did was not discouraging to him. He was certain he had discovered a key to unlocking the mysteries of deviant human behavior and distress. He spent his life trying to understand the effects of early relationships on mental health and stability in adulthood. It has often been said of Bowlby that he was shy and distant and that these characteristics, as well as his interest in early childhood, were based on his own unhappy childhood. Bowlby had tremendous insight into the lives of children. In his later years, he spoke passionately about the ways society should respond to the needs of young children. His criticism of patterns of child rearing that were isolating or harsh could be viewed as his indictment of his own childhood.

Throughout his career, Bowlby struggled with the fact that his fellow psychoanalysts did not acknowledge his findings. He was unable to provide a scientific explanation for what he knew to be true from his observations of children and families. His goals for establishing a more sensitive model of developmental psychology were challenged by the psychoanalytic community while he was

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researching attachment and loss. Bowlby felt certain his understanding was key to a more progressive model, but at the time, nearly all research was quantitative. Today qualitative research studies are met with respect that did not exist in Bowlby's time. The dilemma was in rating such qualities as abusiveness, unkindness, and mistreatment, even when these were acknowledged by the psychoanalytic community. Bowlby was sure that, beyond actual abuse or cruelty, unresponsive or manipulative parenting styles contributed to later mental health problems in individuals.

It was for these reasons that Bowlby is best known for his studies and theories of attachment based on early parent-child separation. It was not that attachment theory captured his interest more than other broad areas of early development, but parent-child separation could be easily documented and was less open to interpretation or misunderstanding than, for example, determining what constitutes unresponsive maternal behavior.

His interests were far-reaching and seem surprisingly contemporary. For example, the Perry Preschool Project has captured the interest of contemporary politicians and the media for its emphasis on addressing the problems of our youngest citizens before they are in need of remedial services or juvenile interventions because of crimes committed. Half a century ago, Bowlby advocated early intervention and worked tirelessly to change national policies in support of young children and their families.

Bowlby's work with troubled youths led him to believe that the critical questions to be asked are: What conditions in a child's

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rearing lead to stability and strength rather than deviance? How can we nurture such strengths? How can we help young children see that everyone has positive and negative thoughts and feelings about the people we love? How do we give serious attention to the costs of early separation from

family? What policies can be put in place to avert these situations? Bowlby fought to send the message that policies needed changing.

For example, Bowlby believed that families, especially poor families, needed greater assistance. He thought that more people

should be trained professionally in marriage and child guidance and in work with parents of the very young. He wanted the public to understand that the funds required to put supportive programs in place would be far less than the later costs of institutional care and delinquency (1951).

Bowlby has often been accused of being too hard on mothers, but much of this impression has come from words taken out of context or popularized by his opponents. He was actually a man of great empathy for motherhood. He knew mothering was the hardest and least appreciated job to be done, and he often criticized government and social agencies for not being more appreciative of or proactive in supporting young parents. He observed that comments about parenthood were often made glibly by those who had not experienced it and that people should be more cautious with their indictments.

Bowlby was sympathetic to the ordinary plight of children raised in an era in which adults gave little attention to the pressing needs and fears of children. He was a proponent of progressive education and believed that children needed attention, affection, and freedom to develop optimally (1940). None of these interests has become as much a part of Bowlby's legacy as his work on maternal deprivation.

Post-World War II England provided optimal conditions for Bowlby's work. Orphanages were full of infants abandoned or orphaned during the war. In addition to the film René Spitz was making on institutionalized infants, Harry Harlow's work at the University of Wisconsin gave the scientific community reason to reevaluate its position on nourishment as the basis for an infant's attachment to its mother. In Harlow's studies, rhesus monkeys were deprived of their mothers and then given either a terry cloth mother or a wire one. Harlow's studies dealt the first scientific blow to the belief that affectional ties were based on nursing: for rhesus monkeys, at least, cuddly contact proved far more important to attachment and survival (1958), an observation that brought great joy to the Bowlby camp. The fact that monkeys exposed to terry cloth mothers survived at a higher rate than those whose wire mothers offered nourishment but no comfort was a huge step forward for those engaged in attachment studies. (Later studies with the rhesus monkeys indicated that the early separation

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from biological parents left these monkeys vulnerable to poor peer relationships and diminished ability to raise their young.) There was no doubt that Harlow's studies confirmed the work of Bowlby and others who stated the case for relationships as significant to emotional health. Harlow proved that comfort is a need of the very young as well as a factor in infant feeding. Bowlby was grateful for Harlow's contributions to the discussion of attachment behaviors. The two men followed each other's work for years. "Together they were able to intertwine biology and psychology in a way previously unimagined" (Karen 1998).

Current understanding of growth and development and psychology forces us to acknowledge that Bowlby's work overstates the necessity of mother-child attachment. As part of his Ecological Systems Theory, Urie Bronfenbrenner stresses the importance of chronology to our study of growth and development (1979). Each historical era and its attending sociological conditions shape any body of research as well as the public's reaction to it. In *Understanding Attachment*, Jean Mercer echoes this concept in relation to research generally and Bowlby's work specifically. "Most theories develop gradually," she asserts, "but there comes a moment when they coalesce and are presented to the world in a nearly complete form. Bowlby's attachment theory reached this stage in the late 1950s, and it was published in several important papers. These papers drew together Bowlby's ideas about the reasons for children's emotional attachments to their mothers and caregivers, about the observable behaviors that indicate attachment and about the consequences of separation from a familiar attachment figure. Although Bowlby's ideas became further elaborated over the years, these papers are the true foundation of modern attachment theory" (2006, 37).

Most contemporary theorists assume that what does and doesn't happen during the earliest stages of life affect development for a lifetime in powerful ways. Unmet needs in infancy continue to haunt us until they are eventually reconciled. This assumption is called *infant determinism*. Jean Mercer points out that we rarely question this premise, even though the evidence to support it is not conclusive. She suggests that not enough research has been done to identify the ways in which later social experiences and