



Bacciagaluppi_M_1994a

The relevance of attachment research to psychoanalysis and analytic social psychology

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„The relevance of attachment research to psychoanalysis and analytic social psychology,“
in: Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 22 (No. 3, 1994), pp. 465-479.

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In order not to lose touch with progress in other scientific areas, psychoanalysis needs to change its frame of reference—what in psychoanalytic terms, is called its metapsychology. As an alternative framework I have suggested Bowlby's attachment theory (Bacciagaluppi, 1989), which could place psychoanalysis onto a firm evolutionary basis and link it to the extensive research on child development that has been generated by attachment theory.

Bowlby's theory, in turn, developed within an alternative approach to psychoanalysis that was started in Hungary by Sandor Ferenczi and then took two directions: one in Britain, which led to the establishment of what is now known as the British Independent Group, to which Bowlby himself belonged; the other in the USA, which, through Sullivan, Fromm, and Clara Thompson, led to an alternative approach that is characterized by the importance accorded to parental love in normal infantile development, and by the re-evaluation of real-life traumatic events (separation, rejection, loss, role reversal, physical and sexual abuse) in the development of psychopathology, in contrast to Freud's rejection of the seduction theory in 1897.

Since Bowlby's original work, attachment theory has generated an enormous amount of empirical research. I hope this review is useful in providing some updating of my original suggestion. After describing the foundation of attachment theory, I shall discuss transgenerational transmission, internal working models, cross-cultural studies, and longitudinal studies. Finally, I shall discuss the [466] relevance of this research both to clinical psychoanalysis and to what Fromm called analytic social psychology.

Attachment Theory and Ainsworth's Contribution

Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980), states that the child's tie to the mother is primary, not secondary to need satisfaction as claimed by Freudian psychoanalysis, and that it was selected in the course of evolution because of its survival value.

Bowlby developed attachment theory starting from the observation of the responses of infants and small children to *major* separations from the mother due to clear-cut events such as hospitalization. The child's response goes through three stages: protest, despair and detachment —what Main (Main et al., 1985, p. 71) terms a



„progressive malignant reorganization“ of the relationship.

The extensive empirical research generated by attachment theory has been reported in many articles and several collective volumes (Parkes and Stevenson-Hinde, 1982; Bretherton and Waters, 1985; Belsky and Nezworski, 1988; Cicchetti, 1989; Cicchetti and Toth, 1991a; Parkes et al., 1991). Researchers have been using an experimental tool devised by Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978), the Strange Situation, which consists in standardized *minor* separations. Ainsworth's original sample consisted of 26 mother-infant pairs from the Baltimore area. In the Strange Situation (SS) the baby is observed in an unfamiliar setting in various combinations: with the mother, with a stranger, alone, and when the mother returns. Three groups of infants were distinguished in this standardized situation at 12 months of age: (1) group B, the largest (57%), was characterized by secure attachment: the baby responds to reunion by trying to be close to mother; (2) group C (17%), defined as ambivalent: the seeking of contact is mixed with angry resistance; (3) group A (26%), defined as avoidant, avoids the mother upon reunion. In the A group, no anger toward the mother is shown in the SS, but it is shown in other situations. Both the second and the third group are defined as anxiously or insecurely attached.

The SS is staged at 12 months of age because only by that time are two relevant innate behavioral systems fully developed in the [467] child: attachment and fear of strangers. At a few weeks, an infant does not discriminate between strangers and familiars. Later, it smiles at strangers. At around eight months, as Spitz has described, fear of strangers is fully developed (Bowlby, 1969, pp. 324-325). Following Freud, and not Spitz, Bowlby considers these two behaviors as distinct: the child moves away from something strange because of fear, and moves toward an attachment figure because of separation anxiety (Bowlby, 1969, p. 330). This seems to be the ontogeny of two of the three basic patterns described by Karen Horney (moving toward, against, away from) (Homey, 1945). On the other hand, as Bretherton and Ainsworth (1984) have observed on 1-year olds encountering a stranger, fear is mixed with sociable behavior — presumably analogous to what Harlow and Harlow (1965) termed the peer-peer affectional system in rhesus monkeys.

Home observations were also conducted by Ainsworth during the first year of life, prior to observations in the SS. Correlations were established between behaviors observed at home and those observed in the SS. The mothers of secure infants showed far greater sensitivity to the signals and communications of the infant. Mothers of group C infants were found to be insensitive to signals. Mothers of group A infants were found to be rejecting as well as insensitive. In particular, Main and Weston (1982) found that infant avoidance was correlated with the mother's aversion to physical contact, the mother's angry behavior and the mother's inexpressiveness. Therefore, in these cases, the child's reactions to minor separations in the SS are due not to previous major separations, but to events previously experienced in interaction.

Mary Main, working in Berkeley, later observed a fourth group, D, characterized by disorganized behavior. This behavior appeared linked to inappropriate role reversal in the relationship with the parent (Main et al., 1985). Later work (Ainsworth and Eichberg, 1991) revealed that D behavior is specially connected with an unresolved loss, or other traumatic experience, of the mother.

Main discusses in particular the implications of avoidant behavior (Main and Weston, 1982). Avoidance of a rejecting mother requires explanation, because, from an ethological point of view, threats of separation from the mother should activate the at-



tachment system. Ethological explanations suggest that avoidance may function paradoxically in the service of proximity by reducing the likelihood of aggressive behavior in the performer or in the other [468] animal. Main instead considers avoidance in humans as real avoidance of a conflictual situation, in order to maintain control over behavior and avoid disorganization (Main and Weston, 1982).

One constant finding in these studies is that infants' patterns of attachment with their fathers were independent of those with their mothers. Therefore, at this stage, the patterns are a property of the relationship and not of the infant itself.

Thus, Bowlby's original work should direct the attention of clinicians to the consequences of major separations, but later research should also direct attention to the consequences of covert events such as the mother's emotional unavailability.

Transgenerational Transmission

The mothers' behavior has been related in various research projects (reviewed by Ricks, 1985) to the mother's childhood memories, thus leading to the empirical investigation of the *transgenerational transmission* of these patterns. Main's Adult Attachment Interview (Main and Goldwyn, in press) has become the major research instrument in this connection. Four patterns have been described (Main, 1991): adults judged Secure in the AAI have infants judged secure in the SS; adults judged Dismissing of attachment have avoidant children; adults judged Preoccupied by past attachments have ambivalent infants; finally, as mentioned above, adults judged Unresolved with respect to past traumatic events have disorganized infants.

The AAI has revealed, for instance, that the parents of many insecurely attached children have an idealized image of their parents, in contrast with painful episodes in their actual interaction with them. Instead of acknowledging this discrepancy, they tend to reproduce the painful episodes with their own children (Liotti, 1991).

Through this instrument, attachment research, which is basically prospective, is being integrated with retrospective data, similar to those observed by psychoanalysis. As Main (1991) points out, because specific behavioral observations (in the SS) are predicted to be tied to specific interview results, *retrospective accounts can be falsified*, that is, *have become accessible to scientific investigation*. [469]

Internal Working Models

Mary Main has also stressed that reunion responses to parents are indicative of what Bowlby calls *internal working models* of the relationship, based on previous experience (Main et al., 1985). These models then guide behavior in other settings. The study of working models moves beyond the behavioral level to patterns of language and structures of mind (Main et al., 1985). In Main's research, early patterns of attachment are compared to both the child's and the adult's mental representations of attachment 5 years later. Because the representation of a relationship can best be estimated in the absence of the partner (Main et al., 1985), children were observed responding to the presentation of a photograph of the parents during the parents' absence. Reunion behavior was observed, but the verbal level was also addressed, by conducting interviews on the subject of separation. The characteristics of discourse (fluidity, balance, focus) between parent and child on reunion were also observed. Insecure children were characterized by restrictions in their mental activity. One important finding was that there was an active dyadic cooperation in the maintenance of the relationship



structures.

Main stresses that internal working models are not merely passive introjections of the objects of past experience. They are active constructions and can be restructured. Such restructuring, however, is difficult, because these models tend to operate outside conscious awareness and are actively self-perpetuating.

These models are organized schematically rather than categorically (Main et al., 1985), namely, they are based on actions and action outcomes —on the history of the parents' responses —rather than on an abstract concept of the parent. It is presumed that such event-based models are present at a very early age.

There is an obvious similarity between the concept of internal working models and that of self and object representations in the psychoanalytic literature. In particular, as Main points out (Main et al., 1985), the internal working model is close to Fairbairn's view of the internal world as largely independent of need fulfillment and as influenced by real events.

Knobloch (Knobloch and Knobloch, 1979), prior to Bowlby, has introduced the concept of „group schema“ (Knobloch, 1963), namely the internalization of a small social group, including peers and subordinates in addition to self and superordinates. Knobloch notes the similarity of his concept to that of Bowlby's working [470] model. He cautions, however, that a distinction between physical and phenomenal space is essential, otherwise these new concepts would merely be a repetition of old ones such as „inner objects,“ based on the erroneous dichotomy of interpersonal and intrapsychic.

Cross-Cultural Studies

The cross-cultural approach is to be found at the very beginning of attachment research, with Ainsworth's studies in Uganda (Ainsworth, 1967). These studies have been replicated in different countries, and particularly in Germany by the Grossmanns, thus allowing cross-cultural comparisons.

The Grossmanns (Grossmann et al., 1985) carried out their research at first in North Germany, at Bielefeld, later in South Germany, in Regensburg. These authors also attempted to assess the infant's contribution to the relationship by applying Brazelton's neonatal test.

The distribution of the patterns of attachment in North Germany was strikingly different from that in the US:

Instead, the distribution of these patterns in Regensburg is more similar to that in the US.

	A	B	C
	avoidant (%)	secure (%)	resistant (%)
Baltimore	26	57	17
Bielefeld	49	33	12

Instead, the distribution of these patterns in Regensburg is more similar to that in the US.

If the ethological foundation of attachment theory is valid, the differences in distribution should be due to cultural practices. Let us take a closer look at the German results. To observations at home and in the SS, the German authors added the role of



the infant's contribution and the role of cultural demands.

As regards the infant's contribution, it was shown that orienting ability at birth and maternal sensitivity make independent contributions to the prediction of attachment classifications. This confirms the importance of constitutional components stressed by Fromm (1991).

As regards cultural factors, home observations showed that at [471] 10 months the quality of holding differed in Bielefeld as compared to Baltimore: the Bielefeld mothers were generally less tender and affectionate. This correlates with the much higher percentage of avoidant children in the SS. The authors explain these linkages with the cultural demand for premature self-reliance: mobile infants are discouraged from staying too close to mother. These demands for self-reliance were not linked to other forms of maternal rejection. „The ideal is an independent, nonclinging infant who does not make demands on the parents but rather unquestioningly obeys their commands“ (Grossmann et al., 1985, p. 253). One comment to this description is that self-reliance and submission to authority are two distinct, if not actually contradictory, concepts.

The British ethologist Robert Hinde (1982) has discussed some implications of these findings. He points out that Ainsworth considers B babies the norm, „to be what nature intended“; she regards infants as „pre-adapted“ to sensitive mothers. Hinde, however, points out that also animal groups are complex. There is no such thing as one optimal strategy, but rather, several „conditional strategies.“ „Natural selection would act to favor individuals with a range of potential styles from which they select appropriately“ (p. 71). In the human case, also learning intervenes to produce socialization in a given culture. Hinde also adds that natural selection would favor not only protective mothers, but also mothers who promote their infant's independence (p. 74). In other words, in principle, the high percentage of A babies in North Germany is not necessarily pathological. On the other hand, there still may be an optimal strategy, and second-hand strategies with higher costs to the individual (Main and Weston, 1981).

Other replications of Ainsworth's studies were carried out in Israel and in Japan. In Israel (Sagi et al., 1985), a high proportion of C attachments (one third of the sample) was observed in kibbutz infants, but not in city infants. Also in Japan (Miyake et al., 1985), more group C classifications were obtained than in the US. In both researches the SS was considered to be too stressful, due to the infants' inexperience with strangers. In Japan, separation had to be shortened for two thirds of the children. In Israel, nearly one-third of the sessions had to be terminated prematurely.

One factor affecting insecurity in Israeli children may be the fact that, in traditional kibbutzim, at night children stay in communal sleeping quarters and are attended by unfamiliar women (Sagi et al., 1985).

Also the Japanese study, like the German one, showed an [472] influence of neonatal temperament on future classification: there was a clear relationship between early irritability and subsequent C classification. The infant's temperament interacts with maternal behavior in determining the outcome: the more the mother was intrusive, the more an irritable baby was likely to be classified later in the C group (Miyake et al., 1985). Finally, as regards cultural influences, the authors point out that mother-child relationships in Japan are characterized by close physical contact, with very few separations (Miyake et al., 1985). Japanese mothers thus seem to be situated at the opposite extreme from North German mothers, with American mothers somewhere in between.



Longitudinal Studies

One answer to these questions may come from longitudinal studies, which show the developmental consequence of these patterns and have led to the emerging field of developmental psycho-pathology (Sroufe, 1988).

The theoretical basis of these studies is Chapter 22, titled „Pathways for the Growth of Personality“, of Bowlby’s second volume (Bowlby, 1973). In the classical psychoanalytic model, personality development is regarded as a single-track railway, along which stops can occur. Bowlby’s alternative model, derived from the biologist C. H. Waddington, includes a range of alternative developmental pathways. The model is epigenetic: at every stage, the pathway chosen depends on the position previously reached (Bowlby, 1973). There are pressures both from the environment and from the organism to keep a developing personality on whatever pathway it is already on.

Longitudinal studies generally show a stability of attachment classifications. For example, Main and Cassidy (1988) found that, at 6 years, 80% of children responded to reunion with the parent in manners consistent with the original attachment pattern.

In their own longitudinal analyses, Grossmann and his co-workers (Grossmann, 1988) —in addition to studying the relationship between the child and its attachment figure — also studied the individual in the absence of attachment figures, in which case the child’s behavior is presumably governed by the internal working models based on the earlier relationship. At 5 years of age, the Regensburg children, belonging to a non-risk group, were observed in preschool. The differences in, for example, behavior patterns [473] such as isolation or hostility, between children previously classified as secure and insecure were present but statistically not very significant. Sroufe and his group, working in Minnesota (Erickson et al., 1985), found a clearer differentiation between the two groups in a high-risk sample. Presumably, high-risk children are less able to compensate for an insecure attachment relationship with the mother by a secure one with an alternative attachment figure.

As Greenberg and Speltz (1988) point out, the linkages between infant attachment and later behavior may be complex: there may be multiple pathways leading from early attachment patterns to later conduct disorders. An important intermediate variable is that of peer relationships. As Cicchetti and Toth (1991b) point out, both externalizing (hostility) and internalizing (depression, withdrawal) disorders in children lead to rejection on the part of peers, and this, in turn, leads to later disorders.

Different types of isolation may be arrived at via different developmental pathways. Rubin et al. (1991) have described two model pathways. In pathway 1, maternal rejection —as already described above —gives rise to an avoidant attachment relationship. In preschool, A babies tend to direct aggression to their peers. This leads to isolation *by* peers, namely to social rejection through a *negative* peer relationship. This, in turn, tends to give rise to externalizing disorders (further aggression, delinquent behavior). In pathway 2, maternal nonresponsivity, as we have seen, gives rise to resistant attachment. The C baby clings to the parent and avoids exploration. Its withdrawal leads to isolation *from* peers. Here, isolation is due to an *insufficient* peer relationship. This may later be followed by isolation *by* peers. The outcome may be an internalizing disorder (anxiety, depression).

Many other longitudinal studies have been carried out, for example, on families with depression (Radke-Yarrow, 1991) and families with maltreatment (Schneider-Rosen et al., 1985).



Wider Applications

Studies have also been carried out on attachment between adults (Weiss, 1991) and, more generally, across the life cycle (Ainsworth, 1991), in family interactions (Bynne-Hall, 1991) and in social organizations (Marris, 1991). Family interactions from the point of view of attachment theory are discussed in a collective [474] volume specifically devoted to this subject (Hinde and Stevenson-Hinde, 1988).

Discussion And Conclusions

Relevance to Psychoanalysis

At the end of a recent review of attachment theory, Inge Bretherton (1991, p. 27) states: „The time has come when the psychoanalytic origins of attachment theory are coming into sharper focus. Thus attachment theory can now more clearly be seen as a theory of interpersonal relationships in the lineage of object relations theory.“ In particular, I wish to stress the relevance of attachment theory and research to the alternative psychoanalytic approach initiated by Ferenczi.

The influence of the psychoanalytic origins of attachment theory are evident, for example, in a recent paper on agoraphobia by Liotti (1991), who is by training a behavioral therapist, but who, after „graded self-exposure“ to the feared situations (Bretherton, 1991, p. 221), regards as the subsequent therapeutic aim the „reconstruction of the past experience“ (Bretherton, 1991, p. 222) and also makes use of the transference, when he says (Liotti, 1991): „The therapeutic relationship, once shaped according to the idea of the ‘secure base,’ is likely to bring about the activation of the patient’s attachment system. ... Thanks to this direct assessment, the disowned emotions of attachment may be more easily acknowledged by patients.“

The psychoanalytic origins of attachment theory, of course, are quite explicit in Bowlby. He was analyzed by Joan Riviere, supervised by Melanie Klein and was a lifelong member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, although in 1985 he told me he seldom went to their meetings (Bowlby, 1985, personal communication). In particular, he considered himself a member of the Middle Group (what is now known as the Independent Group) (Bowlby et al., 1986), and traced the origins of his thinking to the Hungarian school. In his Foreword to the recent reprint of Ian Suttie’s prewar book, *The Origin of Love and Hate* (Suttie, 1988), Bowlby (1935/1988) discussed two fundamental contributions of Ferenczi. One was the critique of Freud’s model of „human beings as isolates wrestling with their instincts. ... That was the model that both Suttie in London and Sandor Ferenczi, with Imre Hermann, and Alice and Michael Balint in Budapest, were criticizing. [475] ... All of them saw the infant as striving from the first to relate to his mother.“ The other contribution was the role of real-life events. „That opinion was first voiced clearly by Ferenczi, and is one for which he and others have suffered. ... Influenced in varying degrees by the initiative of the Hungarian analysts,“ in addition to Melanie Klein, was „a number of native-born Britons given to independent thinking ... and I count myself yet another“ (Bowlby, 1935/1988).

Here are the major points emerging from attachment theory and research that I consider relevant to psychoanalysis in general and to the Ferenczian approach in particular.

1. As already mentioned above, both Bowlby’s original work and later attachment research have provided empirical validation of Ferenczi’s re-evaluation of real-life



- traumatic experience: not only of clear-cut events such as separation or loss, but also of such covert situations as the mother's emotional unavailability.
2. In one of Bowlby's most important writings, Chapter 4 (titled „An Information Processing Approach to Defence“) of *Loss* (Bowlby, 1980), he points out that information can be stored in two different forms, *episodic* and *semantic storage*. Episodic storage reflects preverbal experience, semantic storage occurs after the development of language and is influenced by the parents' communications, such as the denial of trauma. Control systems may not be unified, so that, while one such system might have ready access to information held in one type of storage, another might have access to complementary information. „*It would be the self that has the readier access to images from episodic storage that the subject would experience as his real self*“ (Bowlby, 1980, p. 64; italics added). This is relevant to Ferenczi's descriptions, in his last published papers and especially in the *Clinical Diary* (Ferenczi, 1932), of personality splits after childhood trauma and the aggravation of trauma due to its denial by adults.
 3. As regards therapy, with a quote from Guntrip in *The Making and Breaking of Affective Bonds* (Bowlby, 1979), Bowlby pursues the Ferenczian aim of establishing contact with the traumatized and repressed child within the adult.
 4. Work on transgenerational transmission not only provides empirical confirmation of this clinical phenomenon already stressed by family therapists, but, as mentioned above, in principle makes retrospective data accessible to scientific investigation.
 5. As already discussed in the section on longitudinal studies, attachment theory has replaced classical psychoanalytic [476] developmental models with a model of multiple alternative developmental pathways.

Relevance to Analytic Social Psychology

The relevance of this abundant research to social psychology must still be worked out. The cross-cultural and longitudinal studies may throw light on the formation of character traits and, in particular, of those dominant character traits in a given society, which Fromm (1941) calls the social character. The Grossmanns discussed this relevance at the beginning of their studies, but did not pursue the matter further. It is possible that in the avoidant Bielefeld children we see the early ontogeny of the authoritarian character: because of premature training to obedience (rather than self-reliance), tender feelings are repressed, and anger is not expressed toward the authority figure, but tends to be displaced onto other objects. As Hinde suggests, children may be preadapted to this alternative strategy, which, through the process that Fromm calls „social selection“ (Fromm and Maccoby, 1970), may be encouraged in an authoritarian society.

Summary

The extensive empirical research generated by attachment theory is briefly reviewed, with special reference to transgenerational transmission of attachment patterns, internal working models, cross-cultural, and longitudinal studies. It is claimed that attachment theory and research support the alternative psychoanalytic approach initiated by Ferenczi, especially as regards the re-evaluation of real-life traumatic events, the occurrence of personality splits after childhood trauma, and the aggravation of trauma due to its denial by adults. The concepts of transgenerational transmission and of alternative developmental pathways are further contributions to an alternative psycho-



analytic framework. Finally, attention is called to the relevance of the cross-cultural studies to Fromm's analytic social psychology.

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