

## Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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### **NOTES:**

***Attachment** is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969)*

Attachment is the strong affectionate tie we have with special people in our lives that leads us to feel pleasure when we interact with them and to be comforted by their nearness in times of stress. By the second half-year, infants have become attached to familiar people who have responded to their needs.

Consider how babies of this age single out their parents for special attention: When the parent enters the room, the baby breaks into a broad, friendly smile. When she picks him up, he pats her face, explores her hair, and snuggles against her. When he feels anxious or afraid, he crawls into her lap and clings closely.

Freud first suggested that the infant's emotional tie to the mother is the foundation for all later relationships. Contemporary research indicates that—

although the parent–infant bond is vitally important—later development is influenced not just by early attachment experiences but also by the continuing quality of the parent–child relationship.

Attachment has also been the subject of intense theoretical debate. Recall that the psychoanalytic perspective regards feeding as the central context in which caregivers and babies build this close emotional bond.

Behaviorism, too, emphasizes the importance of feeding, but for different reasons. According to a well-known behaviorist explanation, infants learn to prefer the mother’s soft caresses, warm smiles, and tender words because these events are paired with tension relief as she satisfies the baby’s hunger.

Although feeding is an important context for building a close relationship, attachment does not depend on hunger satisfaction. In the 1950s, a famous experiment showed that rhesus monkeys reared with terry-cloth and wire-mesh “surrogate mothers” clung to the soft terry-cloth substitute, even though the wire-mesh “mother” held the bottle and infants had to climb onto it to be fed (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959).

Human infants, too, become attached to family members who seldom feed them, including fathers, siblings, and grandparents. And toddlers in Western cultures who sleep alone and experience frequent daytime separations from their parents sometimes develop strong emotional ties to cuddly objects, such as blankets and teddy bears, that play no role in infant feeding!

### **Bowlby’s Ethological Theory**

Today, ethological theory of attachment, which recognizes the infant’s emotional tie to the caregiver as an evolved response that promotes survival, is the most widely accepted view. John

Bowlby (1969), who first applied this perspective to the infant–caregiver bond, retained the psychoanalytic idea that quality of attachment to the caregiver has profound implications for the child’s feelings of security and capacity to form trusting relationships.

At the same time, Bowlby was inspired by Konrad Lorenz's studies of imprinting (see Chapter 1). Bowlby believed that the human infant, like the young of other animal species, is endowed with a set of built-in behaviors that help keep the parent nearby to protect the infant from danger and to provide support for exploring and mastering the environment. Contact with the parent also ensures that the baby will be fed, but Bowlby pointed out that feeding is not the basis for attachment.

Rather, attachment can best be understood in an evolutionary context in which survival of the species—through ensuring both safety and competence—is of utmost importance.

According to Bowlby, the infant's relationship with the parent begins as a set of innate signals that call the adult to the baby's side. Over time, a true affectionate bond forms, supported by new cognitive and emotional capacities as well as by a history of warm, sensitive care. Attachment develops in four phases:

**1. Pre-attachment phase (birth to 6 weeks).**

Built-in signals—grasping, smiling, crying, and gazing into the adult's eyes—help bring newborn babies into close contact with other humans, who comfort them. Newborns prefer their own mother's smell, voice, and face (see Chapters 3 and 4) they are not yet attached to her, since they do not mind being left with an unfamiliar adult.

**2. "Attachment-in-the-making" phase (6 weeks to 6–8 months).**

During this phase, infants respond differently to a familiar caregiver than to a stranger. For example, at 4 months, Timmy smiled, laughed, and babbled more freely when interacting with his mother and quieted more quickly when she picked him up. As infants learn that their own actions affect the behavior of those around them, they begin to develop a sense of trust—the expectation that the caregiver will respond when signaled—but they still do not protest when separated from her.

**3. "Clear-cut" attachment phase (6–8 months to 18 months–2 years).**

Now attachment to the familiar caregiver is evident. Babies display separation anxiety, becoming upset when their trusted caregiver leaves. Like stranger anxiety, separation anxiety does not always occur; it depends on infant temperament and the current situation. But in many cultures, separation anxiety increases between 6 and 15 months.

Besides protesting the parent's departure, older infants and toddlers try hard to maintain her presence. They approach, follow, and climb on her in preference to others. And they use the familiar caregiver as a secure base from which to explore.

#### **4. Formation of a reciprocal relationship (18 months to 2 years and on).**

By the end of the second year, rapid growth in representation and language enables toddlers to understand some of the factors that influence the parent's coming and going and to predict her return. As a result, separation protest declines. Now children negotiate with the caregiver, using requests and persuasion to alter her goals.

For example, at age 2, Caitlin asked Carolyn and David to read her a story before leaving her with a babysitter. The extra time with her parents, along with a better understanding of where they were going ("to have dinner with Uncle Sean") and when they would be back ("right after you go to sleep"), helped Caitlin withstand her parents' absence.

According to Bowlby (1980), out of their experiences during these four phases, children construct an enduring affectionate tie to the caregiver that they can use as a secure base in the parents' absence. Consistent with these ideas, as early as the second year, toddlers seem to form attachment-related expectations about parental comfort and support.

#### *Measuring the Security of Attachment*

Although all family-reared babies become attached to a familiar caregiver by the second year, the quality of this relationship varies. Some infants appear relaxed

and secure in the presence of the caregiver; they know they can count on her for protection and support. Others seem anxious and uncertain.

A widely used laboratory procedure for assessing the quality of attachment between 1 and 2 years of age is the Strange Situation. In designing it, Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues reasoned that securely attached infants and toddlers should use the parent as a secure base from which to explore in an unfamiliar playroom.

In addition, when the parent leaves, an unfamiliar adult should be less comforting than the parent. The Strange Situation takes the baby through eight short episodes in which brief separations from and reunions with the parent occur (see Table 6.2 on page 198).

Observing infants' responses to these episodes, researchers

identified a secure attachment pattern and three patterns of insecurity; a few babies cannot be classified (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990; Thompson, 2013).

Although separation anxiety varies among the groups, the baby's reunion responses define attachment quality. From the description at the beginning of this chapter, which pattern do you think Grace displayed after adjusting to her adoptive family?

- Secure attachment. These infants use the parent as a secure base. When separated, they may or may not cry, but if they do, it is because the parent is absent and they prefer her to the stranger. When the parent returns, they convey clear pleasure—some expressing joy from a distance, others asking to be held until settling down to return to play—and crying is reduced immediately. About 60 percent of North American infants in middle-SES families show this pattern.

(In low-SES families, a smaller proportion of babies show the secure pattern, with higher proportions falling into the insecure patterns.)

- Insecure–avoidant attachment. These infants seem unresponsive to the parent when she is present. When she leaves, they usually are not distressed, and they

react to the stranger in much the same way as to the parent. During reunion, they avoid or are slow to greet the parent, and when picked up, they often fail to cling. About 15 percent of North American infants in middle-SES families show this pattern.

- Insecure–resistant attachment. Before separation, these infants seek closeness to the parent and often fail to explore. When the parent leaves, they are usually distressed, and on her return they combine clinginess with angry, resistive behaviour (struggling when held, hitting and pushing). Many continue to cry after being picked up and cannot be comforted easily. About 10 percent of North American infants in middle-SES families show this pattern.

- Disorganized/disoriented attachment.

This pattern reflects the greatest insecurity. At reunion, these infants show confused, contradictory behaviors—for example, looking away while the parent is holding them or approaching the parent with flat, depressed emotion. Most display a dazed facial expression, and a few cry out unexpectedly after having calmed down or display odd, frozen postures. About 15 percent of North American infants in middle-SES families show this pattern.

An alternative method, the Attachment Q-Sort, suitable for children between 1 and 5 years, depends on home observation (Waters et al., 1995). Either the parent or a highly trained observer sorts 90 behaviors—such as “Child greets mother with a big smile when she enters the room,” “If mother moves very far, child follows along,” and “Child uses mother’s facial expressions as a good source of information when something looks risky or threatening”—into nine categories ranging from “highly descriptive” to “not at all descriptive” of the child. Then a score, ranging from high to low in security, is computed.