
DISCUSSION TOPICS

MARY AINSWORTH:
ATTACHMENT AND THE GROWTH OF LOVE

Consultant and Narrator

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MARY D. AINSWORTH CHILD-PARENT ATTACHMENT CLINIC

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

(40 Minutes)



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We hope that you will send us topics for discussion that we may share with other instructors. Some of the topics can be used as essay questions, others as leads to discussion in class and still others are musings by the producer about what did not get into the videos. PLEASE email us reactions and suggestions so we can make them more useful. Our email is dfi@davidsonfilms.com.

Resources:

The best on-line, one-stop shopping resource for Ainsworth's contribution to attachment theory is Everett Waters and Judith Crowell's SUNY, Stony Brook website, located at: www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/index.html

The most accessible book on attachment theory and its historical development by Robert Karen, and entitled BECOMING ATTACHED. Published by the Oxford Press in 1994.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Attachment is not a phenomenon that is just about infancy, although that was the emphasis of Mary Ainsworth's work. Your students might be encouraged to speculate on their own attachments and what they mean. In our film in Dr. Ainsworth's first on-camera appearance she states that attachment is a life time phenomenon, that proximity is always a factor in attachment as well and the attachment figure(s) provide a secure base from which to take on new competencies.

Dr. Ainsworth credited her major undergraduate and graduate professor, **William E. Blatz** of the University of Toronto for the secure base concept. Dr. Blatz constructed a personality theory around the basis of security. His book was called HUMAN SECURITY and was published in 1966.

2. Dr. Ainsworth's war work was administrative, working in the personnel section of the Canadian Army who assessed recruits and assigned them to various branches of duty. When she left the army she returned to teaching at the university and became involved in projective assessment techniques. She eventually was a co-author of a volume on the **Rorschach** (DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RORSCHACH TECHNIQUE, Volume 1 with B. Klopfer, W.F. Klopfer and RR Holt.)
3. Mary Ainsworth's time in London at the Tavistock Clinic from 1950 through 1953 was crucial for introducing her to the work of **John Bowlby (1907-1990)**. John Bowlby, trained as a psychiatrist.

When Bowlby was trained as child psychiatrist there were two competing versions of child psychoanalysis in England. Anna Freud carried on her father's work although she worked more directly with children than he had. **Melanie Klein** broke with the Freudian tradition and created her own version of psychoanalytic theory and it was under her supervision that John Bowlby was trained. As Bowlby states in the video, he rejected the theoretical bases of both traditions of psychoanalysis and found greater support in the work of the ethologists.

John Bowlby's best-known books are, ATTACHMENT, SEPARATION, and LOSS. His last book was a biography of Charles Darwin, looking at the developmental psychology of that crucial thinker.

John Bowlby was the younger son of one of King George V's personal physicians and his father was given a hereditary barony for his work as a famous surgeon. John Bowlby's son, **Sir Richard Bowlby**, has inherited the title from his uncle. Sir Richard has become very much involved in his father's work in recent years and has recently produced a film on attachment theory. He comes to the United States periodically from his London home for conferences on attachment issues

4. **Konrad Lorenz** (1903-1989) was Austrian. He won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1973. He generally worked with geese. He was a co-discoverer of the concept of imprinting.
5. We use the illustrations of the rhesus monkey studies of **Harry Harlow** (1906-1981). Bowlby did visit Harlow's lab at the University of Wisconsin, Madison but was more involved in the work of the British ethologist, **Robert Hinde** who also studied rhesus monkeys.

A primatologist at the University of Chicago, **Dario Maestri** recently (July 7, 2005, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*) reported that rhesus mothers who were raised by natural or adoptive abusive mothers frequently abuse their babies. On the other hand, females whose mothers were abusive became caring parents when they were raised by non-abusive adoptive mothers. Thus, primate studies have demonstrated that it is experience, rather than genetics that cause abusive cycles in families, at least in monkeys. How much this matches human experience is controversial according to the report in Science News, July 2, 2005.

6. Dr Ainsworth felt the most important part of her work were her observational studies in Uganda and Baltimore although the Strange Situation is for what she is best known. She strongly believed developmental psychology should have its basis in the documentation of real life interactions. She wrote of her Uganda studies, "I learned so much new that was not covered by my initial notions (hypotheses) that ever since I have tried to avoid deciding in advance what the relevant variables must be and how I am going to analyze my data. I let the raw observational data suggest to me what the relevant variables are. In exploratory studies post hoc variables may well be the most valuable." Ainsworth autobiography in *MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT: REFLECTIONS OF EMINENT WOMEN IN PSYCHOLOGY*. (1983), A. N. O'Connell and N. F. Russo, eds., New York, Columbia University Press.
7. Mary Ainsworth and the women's movement: She was not a militant feminist but did face salary discrimination during her first years at Johns Hopkins, receiving less than male colleagues. It was she, too, who integrated the John Hopkins Club, where the male faculty lunched in the main dining room and females were in a smaller, separate one. One day, she dressed in her best, pinned on a corsage and took a table in the middle of the male-only room and waited until eventually she was waited upon. The restrictions on women dining in this room were not lifted until late in 1968.

Her emphasis on the importance of mothers to infants raised some concern among feminists who saw her research as a justification for limiting women's options in terms of balancing home and work. Ainsworth wrote that had she had the children she had so wanted, she was sure she would have worked out some manner of raising them while maintaining a career but acknowledged that such solutions were not simple.

8. The **Strange Situation** assessments were originally photographed with a wind-up 16mm camera. That is the reason the episodes are about three minutes long as the film had to be replaced frequently. They are still filmed, usually as is the case in our film, through a two-way mirror. You can hear the researcher tapping on the glass to signal the mother to leave or for the stranger to sit down.

In our film, we do not use the short hand labels that are often used to identify attachment patterns. “A” are for insecure-avoidant, “B” for secure, “C” for insecure-ambivalent/resistant and “D” for disordered.

The Strange Situation is a well-used tool in developmental psychology these days. Robert Marvin, the narrator of this video, is part of a therapeutic team that uses a video workshop format to help the parents of at-risk children improve their attachment strategies. More information on this work is available at www.circleofsecurity.org.

Byron Egeland’s, L.Alan Sroufe’s and W. Andrew Collins’ longitudinal study of at-risk children at the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota has followed, into adulthood, a cohort since 1975. The Strange Situation was used to assess their attachment patterns in infancy and subsequent measures have looked at the commonalities and changes in children who were found to have different patterns of attachment. A good description of the findings of the project is at www.zerotothree.org/vol20-2.html. The website for the project is located at this URL: <http://education.umn.edu/ICD/Parent-Child/PCPInvest.html#egeland>.

9. Cross-cultural findings from the Strange Situation have generally followed the patterns Ainsworth found in her Baltimore study. However Klaus and Karin Grossmann found more insecure-avoidant attachments in Northern Germany than in Southern Germany where the patterns were more like those in the US. Other researchers have found more insecure-ambivalent/resistant attachments in Japanese dyads than would be expected. These studies have opened discussion of what are the cultural implications of child rearing practices.
10. The disorganized category of attachment relationships is, of course, the most predictive of pathology in later years. At UCLA, **Allan Schore** has linked traumatic attachment to disorders in the development of the right brain and sees this as producing a proclivity to developing a borderline personality disorder. (www.trauma-pages.com/schore-2001b.htm) He suggests that early abuse affects future affect regulation and stress modulation.
11. **Mary Main’s Adult Attachment Interview** is widely used in the field of attachment. Dr. Main studied linguistics before becoming a developmental psychologist and the assessment of the AAI involves much more than just examining what the subject says, but it more deeply investigates how the subject expressed him/herself. There is a high correlation between what the AAI finds as attachment history in an adult and how what that adult’s attachment pattern is with his or her child. The short-hand alphabetical progression continues:

People with:

- “B” secure infant attachments tend to become “F” autonomous adults
- “A” avoidant infant attachments tend to become “Ds” dismissing adults
- “C” ambivalent/resistant attachments tend to become “E” preoccupied
- “D” disordered attachments tend to become “U/d” disoriented adults

There is however the “earned security” category where people who have had insecure or traumatic attachment histories in their childhoods overcome their early difficulties through psychotherapy or subsequent positive relationships and are able to offer their off-spring secure attachments.

12. The issue of attachments to figures other than mothers has engendered much research and discussion. It has led to discussion of childcare practices during infancy. **Jay Belsky** has been at the center of the storm on this issue. We are sure your students will have a lot to say about this controversy. He is now at the University of London, heading the Institute for the Study of Children, Families & Social Issues. www.iscfsi.bbk.ac.uk/
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