
LEARNING GUIDE

MARY AINSWORTH:
ATTACHMENT AND THE GROWTH OF LOVE

Consultant and Narrator

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(40 Minutes)



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INTRODUCTION

MARY AINSWORTH
1913-1999

“I think there are fundamental similarities of attachment at various ages, maintaining a degree of proximity to attachment figures is one that goes the whole way through, from infancy to old age. I think the secure base phenomenon is something that is focal to the concept of attachment relationships.”

INFLUENCES

- Personally sought secure attachment relationships
- **John Bowlby, M.D.**
British psychiatrist who questioned classical psychoanalytic theory
Studied the effects of separation of children from their parents
- **Ethology:** *The science of animal behavior based on Darwin’s theory of evolution*

Konrad Lorenz, an early ethologist- famous for his study of geese

Harry Harlow’s experiments with rhesus monkeys with surrogate mothers

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Filmed observation: James Robertson’s films on children in natural situation. You see a cut from his “A TWO YEAR OLD GOES TO HOSPITAL”

Direct observation: in Uganda of 28 mother-child dyads for nine months

From these Ainsworth discovered:

1. There are specific attachment behaviors
2. Babies go through a number of phases in developing attachment
3. Some patterns of parenting lead to secure attachments; others to insecure

Direct observation: in four hour visits in Baltimore of 26 mother-child dyads over a year

Recorded episodes of

1. Crying and maternal responsiveness to it
 2. Close body contact
 3. Face to face encounters
 4. Separation and reunion behaviors
 5. Infant cooperation or disobedience
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PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT AND THE STRANGE SITUATION

From analyzing her data Ainsworth discovered that

1. Babies of mothers who responded quickly and sensitively to cries during first six months cried less as one year olds, were more compliant, explored more and developed cognitive skills earlier
2. Sensitivity of caregiver was key to establishing secure attachments
Caregiver ideally acts as both:
 - Haven of safety** in situations that seem unsafe or overwhelming
 - Secure Base** from which to explore and develop new competencies

The Strange Situation - normally a 21 minute experience done behind a two way mirror and is filmed for analysis

1. Caregiver and child enter and child is given opportunity to explore
2. Strange adult enters, chats with caregiver and interacts with child
3. Caregiver leaves, leaving child with the stranger
4. Caregiver returns, stranger leaves
5. Caregiver leaves, child is alone
6. Stranger enters and interacts with child
7. Caregiver returns

IMPORTANCE OF REUNION BEHAVIORS

Securely attached babies

- Cried less at home, more in Strange Situation
- Went to their mothers to be picked up upon reunion
- Easily soothed and returned to exploration
- 66% of Baltimore babies in this category

INSECURE ATTACHMENTS

Avoidant

- Less obviously upset at separation and slow to make contact upon reunion
- 21 % of Baltimore dyads

Ambivalent-resistant

- Less initial exploration, difficult to sooth upon reunion
- 13% of Baltimore dyads

Disordered attachment

- Identified by Mary Main and Judith Solomon;
- Some seemed to flee from parents, others approached and retreated with dazed expressions;
- Most apt to be at risk for emotional and social problems

IMPLICATIONS

Circle of Security- Haven of Safety

Securely attached babies enjoy a balance of the Secure Base and the Haven of Safety

Insecure-Avoidant attachment: Too much emphasis on independence (Secure Base) but not enough support in stressful times

Ambivalent-resistant Overemphasis on Haven of Safety issues and not enough support for independent exploration

Disorganized attachment pattern have no organized strategy with which to deal with stress

Internal working model: Term Bowlby created to express the framework of thoughts, feelings, plans and goals with which we organize our relationships with others. These expectations are the product of millions of experiences.

Subsequent studies

- Assessments of attachment relationships at various ages
- Adult Attachment Interview developed by Mary Main
- People with secure infant attachments generally have better subsequent relationships
- But developmental pathways are complex and life offers opportunities to improve situations or conversely, traumas can change the life course.

AINSWORTH'S LEGACY

- Ainsworth supported further research
- Ainsworth acknowledged that young children have healthy attachments to people other than their mothers if the relationship is continuing and uninterrupted
- Operationalized love in terms of behaviors that can be reliably measured
- Secure attachments offer both safety and encouragement for competence

RELATED FILMS

Also available from Davidson Films

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