

# *A New Look at Attachment Theory & Adult “Attachment” Behavior*

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The original work on attachment theory occurred during the period of time when behaviorology and psychology shared their history as two incommensurable disciplines under the initial disciplinary label, psychology (see Ledoux, 1997/2002, for an overview of this situation; see Fraley & Ledoux, 1997/2002, for details). Since then, most of the efforts to apply attachment theory have occurred well within the traditional psychology field where scientific progress is constrained by unending commitments to mystical, untestable, redundant agential origins of people’s activities (Fraley, 2008). This paper considers that if scientific progress can or is to be made with attachment theory, that progress will more likely occur by reexamination through behaviorological analysis and research.

## **Introduction**

Attachment theory has many proponents. Its simplicity makes it attractive to social, developmental, and clinical behaviorologists and psychologists. Over the past 20 years, attempts have been made to extend the premises of attachment theory into adult relationships of all kinds including, for example, workplace behaviors. Much has been written about early attachment and its role in psychopathology in children and adults. This paper examines some of the strengths and weaknesses of attachment theory and suggests that it could be made better by abandoning internal working models.

“Attachment theory is the joint work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth” (Bretherton, 1992). Bowlby began his studies of attachment when he researched the earliest developmental origins of childhood and psychopathology at London’s Tavistock Clinic (Berman & Sperling, 1994, p. 3). Mary Ainsworth’s contributions, including her *Strange Situation* research methodology and child development orientation, propelled attachment theory into the mainstream of child development and social psychologies. The roots of their work on, and thinking about, attachment

theory can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s, but formal presentations of their research and hypotheses started in 1957 and extended through the 1980s. In the 50 years since Bowlby and Ainsworth’s initial work in attachment theory, its basic premises have become well recognized and largely accepted into mainstream psychology and into popular culture as well. More recent theoretical and research interests have been directed toward “the relationship between parent–child attachment and adult relationships and psychopathology” (Berman & Sperling, 1994, pp. 3–4; for other examples, see Bretherton, 2003; Hazen & Shaver, 1990; Simonelli, Ray, & Pincus, 2004).

If anyone doubts the impact attachment theory has had on psychology during the past fifty years, one has only to go to the World Wide Web to discover the volume of books, journal articles, and essays currently available. For example, a Google search of “attachment theory” produced 1,590,000 hits. The same search at Academic Search Premier yielded 4,667 hits of articles currently in the data base; 3,809 of those were published within the last ten years. Also, the Barnes and Noble website ([www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)) lists 193 book titles related to attachment theory. Attachment theory is covered routinely in current textbooks in social, child, adult, and life–span development psychologies. In fact, Simonelli, Ray, and Pincus (2004) write, “Attachment theory has become the dominant approach in understanding interpersonal relationships.”

Several authors suggest that there is clinical utility in employing the framework of attachment theory to the diagnosis and treatment of psychological problems in teens and adults. (For some examples, see Adam, 1994, who discusses suicide and attachment; Parker, 1994, who discusses depression and attachment; West & Keller, 1994, who discuss attachment and personality disorders; Sperling & Lyons, 1994, who discuss attachment theory representations in psychotherapeutic change; and Rholes & Simpson, 2004, who discuss such things as the influences of attachment on cognitive functioning, implications for the ways individuals experience intimacy and conflict in adult relationships, and how attachment theory can inform the clinician’s understanding of such significant clinical problems as depression and post traumatic stress disorder.)

Since attachment theory and, more recently, its applicability to adult relational behavior have been so generally accepted, it seems important for students of behavior to look carefully at the objective scientific evidence that supports or questions the premises of attachment theory, and also to look at possible alternative explanations for the findings reported in attachment literature.

## Discussion

### *Attachment Theory: John Bowlby's Contributions*

John Bowlby's (1907–1990) work on the earliest developmental origins of childhood and adult psychopathology provided the foundation for the study and conceptualization of attachment theory (Bretherton, 1992). The titles of his early works reveal his developing interest in attachment and separation and their effects on child development and psychopathology (for example, a 1953 article entitled “Some pathological processes set in train by early mother–child separation” [Bowlby, 1953]). By 1940, Bowlby was already expressing the ideas that were to become attachment theory (Bowlby, 1940, as cited in Bowlby's Biography, n.d.). Bowlby believed that psychoanalysis was putting too little emphasis on actual events in the lives of children and too much emphasis on their fantasy lives. He is quoted as saying, “psychoanalysts like the nurserymen should study intensively, rigorously, and at first hand, the nature of the organism, the properties of the soil and the interaction of the two” (Bowlby's Biography, n.d.). In this regard, Bowlby seems to have been influenced by the behaviorists and natural scientists of his day who believed that human behavior could be better understood by naturalistic analyses rather than by symbolic explorations of introspectively derived psychodynamic operations (see Ledoux, 1997/2002).

During his early years at the Tavistock Clinic (Bowlby became head of the children's department there in 1945), Bowlby was disappointed that much of the clinical work being done with disturbed children was based on Kleinian psychoanalysis which regarded actual family interactions as completely irrelevant to children's behavior. He was deeply interested in discovering the actual family interaction patterns involved in both normal and pathological childhood development (Bowlby's Biography, n.d.).

Bowlby focused his research efforts on mother–child separation because the separation event is well–defined and clear–cut, and either happens or does not (Bowlby's Biography, n.d.). As such, Bowlby introduced scientifically objective environmental observations into a previously subjective world where “research” was largely done by case studies based of symbolic introspections and psychoanalytically based interpretations of interactions between analyst and patient. Interestingly, however, Bowlby's colleague James Robertson “had obtained his training in observation while working (as a boilerman [Bretherton, 1992]) at Anna Freud's residential nursery for evacuated children where all members of the staff, no matter what their job description, were required to write their obser-

vations on cards to be used in subsequent discussion of the children's development” (Bretherton, 2003).

Bowlby's first presentation of formal attachment theory occurred before the British Psychoanalytic Society in 1957. He presented a theory heavily influenced by ethology, especially Konrad Lorenz's studies of imprinting (Bretherton, 2003) and Harry Harlow's studies of monkeys with surrogate “wire and cloth” mothers (Garelli, n.d.), and heavily critical of the psychoanalytic doctrine regarding the nature of a child's libidinal ties to the mother. The psychoanalytic explanations for the supposed libidinal ties to the mother, including theories of secondary drive, primary object sucking, primary object clinging, and a primary craving to return to the womb, made little sense in light of Bowlby's observations and ethological viewpoint. Needless to say, Bowlby's theory was not well received in psychoanalytic circles, being, as they were, still heavily influenced by Freud (Bowlby's Biography, n.d.).

By 1959, Bowlby and his colleague James Robertson had identified three phases of the separation response: (1) Protest (related to separation anxiety), (2) Despair (related to grief and mourning for the lost mother), and (3) Detachment or denial (related to defense). These proved the crucial point in Bowlby's attachment theory: “separation anxiety is experienced when attachment behavior is activated and cannot be terminated unless reunion is restored” (Bowlby's Biography, n.d.). Bowlby came to believe that separation anxiety was caused by adverse family experiences.

At the time, psychoanalysts believed children did not experience grief because of childhood narcissism. Anna Freud's view was that children were unable to mourn due to insufficient ego development and so experienced nothing more than brief periods of separation anxiety which abated whenever a satisfactory substitute caregiver became available. Melanie Klien believed that the loss of the breast was the most meaningful loss suffered during infancy. In direct opposition to the psychoanalysts of the day, Bowlby believed that childhood grief and mourning occurred whenever attachment behaviors were activated and the mother continued to be unavailable (Bowlby's Biography, n.d.).

Bowlby's rejection of mainstream psychoanalytic theory and insistence on objective environmental observations of family interactions are significant positive attributes of early attachment theory.

### *Attachment Theory: Mary Ainsworth's Contributions*

Mary Ainsworth (1913–1999) is the other key figure in the foundation of attachment theory. In fact, Ainsworth's Uganda study—“the first developmental study viewing infant–mother attachment from an evolutionary perspec-

tive” (Bretherton, 2003)—which was begun in 1953, predated Bowlby’s presentation of his formal account of attachment theory to the British Psychoanalytic Society by four years.

However, Ainsworth’s work in Uganda was clearly influenced by her previous affiliation with Bowlby at the Tavistock Clinic. There, “Ainsworth became intrigued with Bowlby’s quest to find a more compelling explanation for young children’s distress in response to enduring separation from parents than the current view. This view, shared by psychoanalysts and learning theorists alike, was that babies became attached to their mothers because they (mothers) feed them and fulfill the babies’ other basic needs” (Bretherton, 2003). When she went to Uganda, Ainsworth was interested in studying the Ugandan tradition of sending infants away from the mother for a few days at weaning so that the infants will “forget the breast.” However, she quickly learned that most Ugandans had given up the tradition, so she began to carefully document the normative development and individual differences in infant–mother interactions (Bretherton, 2003).

Ainsworth finally presented findings from the Uganda study to Bowlby’s Mother–Infant Interaction Study Group in 1961. Even though her work was heavily influenced by Bowlby’s, her reception by the Study Group was lukewarm at best (Bretherton, 2003). It is clear that her thinking had been heavily influenced by William Emet Blatz, her doctoral mentor, founder of the Institute of Child Study at the University of Toronto, and the “Dr. Spock” of Canada. Blatz had proposed *security theory* in which “*secure dependence* on parents enables infants and young children to muster the courage to explore the unfamiliar, and thus to develop towards *independent security* (or self-reliance)” (Bretherton, 2003). Much of Ainsworth’s later thinking about primary caregivers as a *secure base* for exploration, and the ways in which some children mature into independent security while other do not, can be found in Blatz’s security theory.

Ainsworth’s most famous work, the Baltimore Study, was conducted at Johns Hopkins University and reported in several journal articles and book chapters, and in a book titled *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978, as cited in Bretherton, 2003) where Ainsworth summarized her findings and thinking about attachment (Bretherton, 2003).

For the Baltimore study, Ainsworth and her colleagues recruited 26 families through their pediatricians. They visited each family once a month for a year with each visit lasting four hours. Observers noted interactions between infants and their mothers in shorthand during their observations and dictated a detailed narrative into a tape recorder immediately after each session. The recorded narratives became the basis for data analysis. Data

collection was completed in 1966. “Analyses of mother–infant interaction sequences during feeding, close body contact, face-to-face play, and crying yielded clear evidence that when a mother responded to her infant with sensitive responsiveness during the first three months of life, the pair had a more harmonious relationship during the last quarter of the first year” (Bretherton, 2003).

In an article discussing the findings of the Baltimore Study, Bell and Ainsworth (1972, as cited in Bretherton, 2003) reported that a mother’s prompt and sensitive response to crying during an infant’s early months of life resulted in less crying later in the first year. This finding seemed to contradict the learning theories of the day; what are usually observed to be reinforcing (i.e., rate-increasing) consequences of crying seemed instead to be resulting in less crying rather than more. However, the status of the studied crying as respondent behavior or operant behavior received inadequate attention perhaps because the differences between respondent behavior and operant behavior, including crying behavior, were not yet well analyzed, although these have been more recently clarified (see Fraley, 2008). In any case, later researchers (for example, Hart & Risely, 1990, 1995; Flora, 2004) again reliably demonstrated that crying is reinforced by immediate parental responsiveness, and that responsive parents quickly shape communicative crying into more socially desirable behaviors—short communicative cries, communication, and talking.

It was near the end of the Baltimore Study that Ainsworth developed the *Strange Situation* which, if not her most important contribution to attachment theory, is probably her most famous. She was likely inspired by Harry Harlow’s experiments with infant rhesus monkeys in which he demonstrated that infant monkeys explored more when they were with a cloth mother than they did when with a wire mother. Ainsworth devised a controlled laboratory situation analogous to both Harlow’s monkey setup and real-life examples of human infant separation and attachment.

The Strange Situation as conceptualized by Ainsworth is essentially a 20 minute mini-drama with eight episodes. The infant and its mother are introduced to a laboratory playroom. Later they are joined by an unfamiliar woman. The strange woman plays with the infant and the mother leaves the room and then returns. A second separation occurs when the mother leaves the child alone in the room then returns with the stranger (Bretherton, 1992).

Ainsworth found that most one-year-old children explored the toys in the room, cried when their mothers left the room, sought brief interaction and settled upon the mother’s return, and then returned to room exploration. However, not all children followed the expected pattern. Some children appeared to snub the mother when she returned from her brief absence. They essentially ignored

her by looking away and refusing to interact even when the mother made attempts to interact with the child. A third and smaller group of children protested loudly when their mothers left the room, but appeared angry when she returned, even though they often attempted to make contact with their mothers. Ainsworth labeled the three groups as securely attached, avoidantly attached, and ambivalently attached, respectively (Bretherton, 2003).

It is important to note here that despite the plethora of research on attachment theory that has gone on since, much of what modern attachment theorists believe to be true about mother–infant attachments and their effects are based on Ainsworth’s single study of 26 Baltimore families. And much of what is believed about the purported effects of attachment on infant development is based on Ainsworth’s conclusions based on a single twenty minute Strange Situation conducted with each mother–infant pair at the end of the Baltimore study. It’s not that Ainsworth didn’t recognize the shortcomings of her single study and small sample size. She did, and in fact she intended to replicate her study, but was denied funding by a federal review panel which, “while respectful of her research capabilities, replied that there was no point in replicating something of so little value” (Karen, 1994, p. 172, as cited in Bretherton, 2003).

### ***Attachment Theory: The Theory***

Attachment theory “rests on the concept of an ‘attachment behavioral system’—a homeostatic process that regulates infant proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behaviors with specific individuals to provide physical or psychological safety and security” (Berman & Sperling, 1994, p. 5). In general, behavioral systems are thought to be evolved, cybernetically-controlled systems that provide a clear adaptive benefit to individuals and species (Bretherton, 1992). As evolved systems, behavioral systems are likely to be expressed differently in different members of a species with some members displaying “more” and some “less.” They are also influenced by environmental factors so that their onset and offset may occur in response to specific environmental events, and they may change over time in response to environmental consequences, in both the species and in particular individuals (Bretherton, 1992; Garelli, n.d.).

Development of the putative attachment behavior system coincides with the development of locomotion and object permanence in infant humans (Berman & Sperling, 1994, p. 6). Onset, or activation, occurs whenever the infant is separated from the primary caregiver, and offset, or deactivation, occurs when the two are reunited. However, and importantly, the attachment behavior system is said to exist in opposition to an “exploration behavior system” that develops at around the same time and drives infants to explore the world.

The exploration behavior system is activated only when the infant is secure enough to explore safely. Onset of attachment produces offset of exploration, and offset of attachment allows onset of exploration.

Bretherton (1992) writes, “Complex behavior systems can work with foresight in organisms that have evolved the ability to construct internal working models of the environment and of their own actions in it.” Here, Bretherton presents a fundamental assumption of attachment theory—“in order to activate and deactivate the attachment system efficiently, the child must develop ‘internal working models’ of the attachment figure and of the self in interaction with the attachment figure” (Bowlby, 1988, as cited in Berman & Sperling, 1994, p. 6).

At this point a brief summary seems in order. Attachment theory says that humans evolved an attachment behavior system because it offers those who have it an evolutionary advantage, that is, infants who seek the closeness and security of their mothers (or other primary caregiver) are more likely to survive, and mothers who are responsive to their infant’s needs and provide security are more likely to have their infants survive, thereby passing on their genes. The attachment behavior system becomes active through the course of normal development at about the same time as the exploration behavior system which also provides evolutionary advantage for the developing infant by, for example, encouraging learning about the environment, muscle development, and the beginning stages of the separation that occurs when the child may leave mother and family to establish a family of his or her own. Both systems become active because of developmental changes in the infant such as locomotion and object permanence which facilitate the necessary behaviors within each system. However, the systems require a counterbalancing of opposing forces. As the infant engages in attachment behaviors with the caregiver, the infant experiences either responsiveness, rejection, or some combination of both. Eventually, the infant learns to predict caregiver responses based on actual experience. Those infants who most often experience responsiveness become securely attached; those infants who most often experience rejection become avoidant; and those infants who experience an unpredictable combination of both responsiveness and rejection become anxious and ambivalent. These experiences become transformed into the child’s internal working model of relational expectations. The internal working model carries the person’s expectations for all attachment relationships on into the future, and remains generally stable unless altered by significant new experiences.

### ***Attachment Theory: Some Criticisms***

Most theories have their proponents and detractors. Certainly that is the case with attachment theory. How-

ever, in many cases proponents become incautious apologists. That seems to be the case in attachment theory when proponents suggest, fairly commonly, that critics of attachment theory don't really understand the theory and its supporting evidence (for example, Bretherton, 1992, 2003; Sperling & Berman, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1990). At this point in the history of attachment theory, it would be nearly impossible to read every published article and book on the subject, so I concede that some critics, including this one, may remain unaware of all the research that's been reported. However, this does little to detract from the major criticisms of attachment theory which are based on what may be fundamental flaws in some major premises of attachment theory. In addition, these same proponents often point out attachment theory's utter simplicity, and recommend that as one of their theory's strengths (for example, Sperling & Berman, 1994, Bretherton, 1992). If the theory really is so simple (and it is certainly and admittedly more complex than the brief presentation made here), it seems unlikely that all of the theory's critics misunderstand the fundamentals of attachment theory. Perhaps some understand it too well.

Attachment theory may have some strengths. One strength may be its common sense appeal. In addition, many early studies in attachment followed the model provided by ethologists as they attempted to make objective observations of organisms as they behaved in their natural environments.

Bowlby may be credited with almost single-handedly changing the way the modern world looks at parenting roles (Bowlby's *Biography*, n.d.). He wrote, "The infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment" (Bowlby, 1951, p. 13, as cited in Bretherton, 1992). And equally impactfully, "Just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so in all but the most primitive communities, are parents, especially mothers, dependent on the greater society for economic provision. If a community values its children it must cherish their parents" (Bowlby, 1951, p. 84, as cited in Bretherton, 1992). Statements like these were in direct opposition to the thinking and recommendations being made by most commentators of the day who often recommended distant and minimally responsive behavior on the part of parents. But as we can see, society has hardly heeded Bowlby's words (Bretherton, 1992).

"Mary Ainsworth contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world. In addition, she formulated the concept of maternal sensitivity to infant signals and its role in the development of infant-mother attachment patterns" (Bretherton, 1992). Researchers far removed from attachment theory have reaffirmed Bowlby and Ainsworth's

findings. For example, Hart and Risley (1995, 1999) studied 42 families over 2.5 years and found that the number and quality of social interactions between parents and their children showed a strong positive relationship to later behavioral and developmental accomplishments, social behavior, and language abilities. In effect, they found that positive parenting behaviors produce much more than secure attachment (see Latham, 1994, 1991, 2010; Ledoux, 2000).

Harvard psychologist Jerome Kagan (1996) writes, "the concept of attachment has a noncontroversial, factual basis... it is reasonable to regard Bowlby's concept of the attachment bond, representing the product of the thousand or more hours of nurturing interactions between adults and infants during their first year, as a useful construct." Bowlby and Ainsworth were rigorous in their observations, data collection, and pursuit of objective measures. They based their theorizing on well documented facts from ethology, sociobiology, psychobiology, cybernetics, and general behavior theory (Garelli, n.d., Bretherton, 1992) as well as what they believed to be true from psychoanalysis and the modern approach to structural cognitive development theory (Garelli, n.d.). However, Bowlby and Ainsworth strayed from a natural science approach, and their followers have strayed further still.

Jerome Kagan, in his article "Three Pleasing Ideas" (Kagan, 1996) describes three attractive yet scientifically unsupported premises common in psychological theorizing. The first of these is what he calls the "unencumbered power of early experience" (the other two being "abstract processes" and "sensory pleasure as a primary motivator of behavior"—we will deal with the first of these later). Kagan (1996) writes that psychologists commonly believe "that the experiences of infants can create schemata, habits, and emotions that are enduring, perhaps indefinitely." This belief is seen clearly in the works of psychodynamic giants like Freud and Erikson, attachment theorists, early behaviorists, and nearly every other school of psychology. For example, Kagan (1996) cites Fogel (1991, p. 421) writing about attachment theory: "Individuals acquire particular expectations from their early social relationships that they then carry over to other relationships. Because internal working models are relatively stable and only get changed very slowly, they may account for the long term consistencies in attachment across time." The same belief is expressed here by Berman and Sperling (1994, p. 8):

Adult attachment is the stable tendency of an individual to make substantial efforts to seek and maintain proximity to and contact with one or a few specific individuals who provide the subjective potential for physical and/or psychological safety and security. The stable tendency is

regulated by internal working models of attachment, which are cognitive–affective–motivational schemata built from the individual’s experience in his or her interpersonal world.

Fogel and Berman and Sperling describe the foundational belief on which adult attachment is built—that internal working models are created early in life and affect behavior later in life. But the scientific evidence does not support that belief. Kagan (1996) writes, “Infant temperaments, based in part on inherited physiology, make a modest contribution to future behavior (Kagan, 1994), including reactions that are most often used to evaluate infant’s security of attachment (Seifer, Schiller, Sameroff, Resnick, & Riordan, 1996).”

Even when adult attachment theorists admit that attachment styles don’t always remain stable into and through adulthood, they promptly ignore that fact and go on about their business of describing how attachment styles developed during the first year of life affect adult relationships (for example, Simonelli, Ray, & Pincus, 2004; Bretherton, 2003; Sperling & Berman, 1994; Hazen & Shaver, 1990). It is particularly unclear what effects early attachment interactions might have on relationships in older adults who are likely to have experienced a variety of types and levels of relationships with others.

In Bowlby’s *Biography* (n.d.) we find:

...scholars are currently almost exclusively working on instruments, such as questionnaires and interviews with adults; they have given up direct observations of children, and most important they have given up one of the most important tenets of Attachment Theory: that of replacing introspection by objective observation. As things stand right now, psychology as enhanced by Bowlby has backtracked to Freudian times, even Pre-Freudian times.

The extension of objectively derived data to adults, especially when backtracked from effects in adulthood to causes in childhood, is a decidedly unscientific pursuit depending on introspection and memory of vaguely defined experiences. And researchers know that no autobiographical memory for these early experiences exists since the most formative experiences in attachment are purported to have occurred during the first year of life.

Kagan (1996) points out another belief commonly held by psychologists but not supported by scientific evidence, the almost casual acceptance of abstract processes. He writes:

A second favorite premise is the positing of highly abstract psychological processes, such as attention, learning, regulation,

memory, and fear, that fail to specify the species or the type of person being studied, the context of observation, and the evidence used to infer the process... Scientific theories must posit constructs that stand for presumed commonalities among related events. But scholars must not assume, unless the evidence is strong, that these invented constructs, most of which are impermanent, apply to agents and contexts that were not part of the original empirical foundation for the idea. (Kagan, 1996)

Furthermore, the continued allegiance to putative internal agents, agents that supposedly self-initiate behavior by telling the behaving body what to do, even further removes the topic from the context of natural science, since natural science by definition excludes all such mystical notions (Ledoux, 2002).

Attachment theorists simply accept/presume that internal working models exist, and from there assume that internal working models have a causal relationship with behavior. This is an example of the “transformation paradigm” (Fralely & Ledoux, 1997/2002). In the transformation paradigm, inputs (in the case of attachment theory, inputs would include parenting responses during the first few months of life) are somehow transformed into stored “internal working models,” (an example of Kagan’s first and second attractive ideas) somewhere in the “mind.” These transformed entities are later transformed yet again into behavior. However, since this processes responsible for these transformations cannot be objectively defined, measured, or quantified, and because the structures in which such transformed entities reside are purely hypothetical, the adherence to the transformation paradigm (and other concerns) prevents psychology from being a natural science. It therefore remains largely a philosophical (some commentators prefer superstitious; see Fralely, 2008) endeavor.

However, attachment theory does not require the transformation paradigm to be useful. As demonstrated by Ainsworth in her Baltimore study, inputs and outputs can be observed and measured objectively. Hart and Risley (1995, 1999) conducted many hours of observations, recorded and interpreted data, and published their results and conclusions which sound surprisingly like the conclusions reached by Bowlby and Ainsworth, yet they never resorted to abstractions and transformations to explain their results. That behavior is controlled by its environment is a well established fact in learning theory and behaviorology (Skinner, 1953; Fralely, 2008). No transformations are required to explain how parental interactions with their children affect their children’s behavior. Had Bowlby and Ainsworth not been so taken with psycho-

analysis, they may have been able to separate their scientific findings from their pseudoscientific beliefs and presented a theory devoid of mysticism and nonscientific premises. Had their successors been more attracted to scientific rather than mystical explanations of behavior, they may have avoided backtracking to pre-Freudian times.

## Summary

Social critic Jane Jacobs, in her book *Dark Age Ahead* (2004) describes the problems societies face when they abandon science in favor of pseudoscientific and postmodernist thinking. She demonstrates how societies that have abandoned science have spiraled downward into dark ages and dissolution. Jacobs also describes how pockets of societies or even single professions have abandoned science and spiraled downward into irrelevance. She provides illuminating examples of the neglect of scientific principles in traffic engineering, community disease control, and economics. In each case she shows how professionals, while purporting to be scientists, ignored available scientific evidence and acting on unsubstantiated belief, made huge blunders that affected thousands of people, resulting in needless suffering and death. Jacobs provides a modern day cautionary tale revealing how postmodernist thinkers purport to be experts but practice something quite different from science. If psychology is to have any enduring relevance, it must certainly heed Jacob's warning instead of holding as it does to its mystical roots and promoting essential postmodernism by considering the discipline as an *eclectic aggregate* where nearly anything goes.

In science, good theories survive, poor theories are discarded. Some theories prove themselves to be better than others because of their ability to explain and predict and control phenomena. But more than this, good theories must be consistent with other scientific theories and follow basic laws of the universe.

Attachment theory may have its strengths, but its modern proponents have lost their way. As they try to make attachment related to everything that comes after, and a major component of psychopathology, they ignore much of the scientific evidence.

Perhaps, as Bowlby's contemporaries asserted (Bretherton, 1992); attachment theory really is too simple to explain adult relationships and psychopathology. Perhaps we should look to the many millions of interactions between children and their environments, including their interactions with their caregivers, to explain security and attachment, along with all of the rest of their development and behavior (Novak, 1996).✻

## Endnotes

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What is attachment theory? Plus, how to find out your attachment style, how it affects relationships, and how to change your attachment type. There are four main adult attachment styles: secure, anxious, avoidant, and fearful-avoidant. (The latter three are all considered forms of insecure attachment.) Graphic by mbg Creative / Contributor. Advertisement. The four attachment styles: 1. Secure attachment. Secure attachment style refers to the ability to form secure, loving relationships with others. The attachment behavior system is an important concept in attachment theory because it provides the conceptual linkage between ethological models of human development and modern theories on emotion regulation and personality. According to Bowlby, the attachment system essentially "asks" the following fundamental question: Is the attachment figure nearby, accessible, and attentive? If, however, the child perceives the answer to this question to be "no," the child experiences anxiety and, behaviorally, is likely to exhibit attachment behaviors ranging from simple visual searching on the low extreme to active following and vocal signaling on the other (see Figure 1). These behaviors continue until either the child is able to reestablish a desirable level of physical or. Attachment theory was the product of British psychoanalyst John Bowlby's research. Bowlby was looking at the distress experienced by infants who had been separated from their parents. The resulting theory was later on extrapolated to adults, to account for the various ways we form relationships with others – friends and romantic partners. This is useful stuff, if you want to understand why you behave the way you do in romantic relationships. Our attachment style is predictable as it is based on that early model. The nature of our attachment to our parents or primary caretakers, and how well it's fostered and cared for, determines what our dominant style will be. Other factors, such as significant adult relationships and even genetics, can change your dominant type. More on that below. While the behavioral theories of attachment suggested that attachment was a learned process, Bowlby and others proposed that children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with caregivers. Throughout history, children who maintained proximity to an attachment figure were more likely to receive comfort and protection, and therefore more likely to survive to adulthood. Through the process of natural selection, a motivational system designed to regulate attachment emerged. So what determines successful attachment? Behaviorists suggest that it was food that led to forming this attachment behavior, but Bowlby and others demonstrated that nurturance and responsiveness were the primary determinants of attachment. The Theme of Attachment Theory.