

Disorganized Attachment

Attachment is a term commonly found in journals, books, and articles. It is typically associated with emotional connection. However, attachment is first and foremost an innate biological system that evolved from survival instincts. Bowlby (1988) defined attachment behavior “that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world” (p. 27).

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) studied the behavior of children under two forms of stress: maternal separation and the presence of a stranger. Three patterns of the organization and quality of attachment relationship were found: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent.

- Infants of **secure attachment** confidently explored the laboratory playroom. These infants may or may not have cried during the absence of the caregiver. Upon the caregiver's return, they actively moved toward the caregiver to ease their stress.
- Infants of **avoidant attachment** did not go towards the caregiver when they were upset. Instead, they looked away from the caregiver and did not connect. They were unresponsive to the caregiver.
- Infants of **anxious-ambivalent** were less comfortable exploring the laboratory playroom. They tended to stay close to the caregiver. They showed a mixture of anger and connection when the caregiver attempted to comfort them.

Main, a student of Ainsworth, and Solomon identified a fourth relationship pattern: **disorganized attachment**. This classification is identified with contradictory movements and expressions of the child towards the caregiver. Disorganized attachment behavior is believed to be an outcome of a child experiencing the attachment figure as frightening. This may include physical or sexual abuse. It may also include a parent who is frightened of the child. A child's contradictory and mixed behavior towards a caregiver can be understood with the explanation of the paradoxical representation of a caregiver. The paradox is revealed in that the caregiver is a figure who is suppose to offer safety and protection, yet at the same time is a source of fear for the child.

Sources:

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