

Attachment in infancy and its effects in adulthood

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The bond we form to our parents during our earliest days is the bond that stays with us throughout life and reflects on our future connection. In psychological circles, this bond is officially referred to as attachment. Attachment is defined as the need to establish a close emotional bond between the infant and its primary caregiver. The purpose of such relationship is to provide protection from potential threats and harm as well as to regulate negative emotions (Attachment theory, 2017). The quality of attachment in infancy significantly reflects on future interpersonal relationships, social competence and cognitive schemes, thus it is of great value to ensure secure attachment in infancy. As biological mechanisms play an important role in establishing the attachment, there is a considerable difference between forming the attachment to biological parents, and that formed to adoptive parents. Therefore, there should be certain regulations in regards to child abandonment in order to increase the chances of infants to form a secure attachment pattern that will reflect positively on various aspects of their adult life. Additional changes in the process of institutionalization and adoption are required in order to provide every child with a fair opportunity of establishing a secure attachment pattern. Furthermore, if such attempts fail, there needs to be a support system providing substantial help to those who experience draw backs of insecure attachment.

In broader terms, attachment is considered as the close emotional relationship between two people that allows them to remain united through time and space (Ainsworth, 1979). However, in more specific terms of developmental psychology that will be used for the purposes of this essay, attachment is defined as a close emotional relationship between the infant or the young child and its primary caregiver (Bjorklund & Hernandez Biasi, 2012). The attachment theory was first proposed John Bowlby highlighting four defining features: proximity

maintenance, separation distress, safe haven and secure base (Attachment styles, 2004). Mary Ainsworth (1979) then additionally developed the theory and proposed the Strange Situation procedure to determine the type of attachment the infant developed towards the caregiver. There is only one type of secure attachment, whereas insecure attachment can be categorized into three different sections: resistant, avoidant and disorganized. Secure attachment is considered favorable to insecure attachment as it has a better effect on a child's overall well-being and development.

The attachment formed in infancy can have numerous impacts on many different components of life in adulthood. Attachment can be reflected on the future goals in life, social competence, interpersonal relationships, social competence, cognitive schemes and the attachment formed to a romantic partner (Attachment theory, 2017). The relationship established to the primary caregiver creates a template for all the further relationships in life as the responsiveness of the caregiver to the infant's needs is generalized to the other people that the infant comes across with. Childhood attachment is used as default; thus the type of attachment established is very likely to be the same as the type of attachment one resorts to throughout the life. Adults that are categorized as securely attached experience low attachment anxiety and avoidance, they are comfortable with intimacy in relationships to other people and are willing to rely on others for support. Such adults usually experience confidence about themselves and feel that they are being valued by others. Secure attachment creates a positive image about one's own worth as well as about other people and their intention (Attachment styles, 2004). Therefore, as the attachment can affect so many different factors in adult life, it is of great value to establish a secure pattern in order to enjoy all its positive outcomes.

Knowing the extent of the effect attachment can have on one's development and well-being, it is important to identify certain factors that can influence the establishment of secure attachment in infancy. Biological mechanisms play a major role in forming and maintaining certain attachment patterns between the infant and their parent. Firstly, attachment is a powerful biological instinct for the majority of people and it comes almost instinctively for both the mother and the child. Parents are biologically primed to react to the needs of their infant appropriately. As the infants usually communicate their needs through crying, mothers are capable of recognizing the cry of their own baby amongst the other babies. The brain activity of the mother is found to be higher when she is exposed to the cry of her own infant, rather than another child (Swain et al., 2014). Such findings imply that the response of a woman to an infant is not generalized, but rather specific to the child of her own. Thus, it can be argued that the responses of adoptive mothers are not as strong as the responses of biological mothers to their children which may suggest they are better equipped for establishing the secure attachment patterns. However, it is yet undetermined whether such responses are exclusively reserved for interactions between the mother and her biological child, or the mother simply has the capacity to develop such mechanisms throughout the upbringing of a child, regardless of whether there is a genetic connection between her and an infant.

Additionally, oxytocin is a powerful neurotransmitter and hormone that has a significant role in establishing mother-infant attachment (Swain et al., 2014). This hormone is highly secreted during pregnancy and labor in order to ensure that the mother feels connected to the child and therefore provide appropriate care for the offspring. Higher levels of this hormone in a child also reduce stress levels and provide the feeling of trust and comfort. Establishing the proper secretion of oxytocin in infancy can enhance oxytocin levels in adulthood, which

contributes to more secure attachment to romantic partners and close friends in adulthood.

Breastfeeding is another action that is related to oxytocin secretion and is found to increase the probability of forming secure attachment (Swain et al., 2014). Such activity strengthens the bond between the mother and the child and amplifies feelings of security and comfort. Taking into consideration all of the biological factors that may affect the attachment style formed between the mother and the infant, it appears that the biological mother of a child has many different biological mechanisms available to create a secure pattern. In contrast, such mechanisms only partially apply to adoptive mothers or do not apply at all, thus contributing to the chance of forming insecure attachment. As an adoptive mother does not go through the process of pregnancy, labor and breastfeeding, the oxytocin secretion in both mother and the child is lower, thus potentially negatively affecting the attachment. Numerous biological factors that impact the type of attachment and are not as present in adoptive parents as they are in biological parents of the child strongly suggests that biological parents have an advantage and are more likely to raise a securely attached infant. Such findings and claims do not intend to diminish the value and importance of adoptive parenting, but simply aim to highlight that certain biological mechanisms established between the parents and their biological child contribute to the better ability of biological parents to establish the secure attachment pattern with their infant.

Being aware of the role of biological components in attachment leads to the assumption that attachment to biological parents is more favorable than the one established with adoptive parents. Research data and statistical parameters available only seem to support such an assumption. Overall, when considering the attachment to biological parents, 60% of children tend to form the secure attachment type, whereas 40% of children form one of the insecure attachment types. On the contrary, when the attachment of children to their adoptive parents is

observed, the data reports 54% of secure attachment and 46% of insecure attachment (Groza & Muntean, 2016). Therefore, there is a significant difference in the likelihood of being securely attached, favoring biological over adoptive parents. In addition, there is a higher rate of disorganized attachment found in adoptive children (Garica Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2016). Disorganized attachment in childhood can result in high need for intimacy. Such a need is contrasted with high anxiety and avoidance due to the fear of rejection (Attachment styles, 2004). Additionally, disorganized adults tend to think of themselves as less valuable and unworthy of attention as well as consider other unreliable and not trustworthy. Such attachment has highly negative consequences on interpersonal relationships and the overall well-being. Higher rates of disorganized attachment in adopted children as well as the higher rate of insecure attachment in general therefore suggest that adopted children are less likely to form the secure attachment. Even though such data may lead one to assume that the adoptive parents are not as successful in their role as biological parents, it may not be the case. Numerous factors prior to the process of adoption can contribute to the child being insecurely attached. It is crucial to state that adopted children have to experience the alternative care before adoption. In the institutions that provide such care, there are few caregivers and many children; thus it is immensely difficult for the child's needs to be completely fulfilled for it to be securely attached. Additionally, an adopted child needs to perpetuate and change the previous patterns established between the biological parent that abandoned the child as well as the one to the temporary caregiver to be able to form attachment to the adopted parents (Garica Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2016). Having to diminish prior attachments in order to establish a new one highly decreases the chances of newly formed attachment being secure. Therefore, even though it may not be the fault of the adoptive parents, children that undergo the process of adoption are significantly less likely

to be securely attached. Consequently, improving adoption institutions and practices may contribute to minimizing risks and difficulties of establishing insecure attachments in preadoption process, in order to provide a child with a fair opportunity to form a secure bond with the adoptive parents.

Forming a secure attachment in infancy is of high value for one's future development, interpersonal relationships, cognitive schemes and overall well-being. Thus, increasing the likelihood of a child forming a secure attachment will have extended positive impact on a child's life. As child abandonment has a profound negative effect on the attachment styles, certain regulations should be imposed in order to protect the children from abandonment and provide them with a fair chance to develop a secure and favorable attachment. As a child has no means of controlling whether or not it is going to be abandoned, there should be some legal regulation protecting the child from abandonment. Parents who are physically and financially able to raise a child should not be allowed to abandon it or give it for adoption. There should be laws regulating the circumstances when one is and is not allowed to abandon the child. In the cases of rape, poverty or physical inability to raise a child, giving it away for adoption should still be allowed. However, abandoning a child under less serious circumstances should be prohibited, with the aim of minimizing the effect of abandonment on a child's attachment and therefore the child's overall well-being. As young children are not capable of speaking and fighting for themselves, the law should ensure that the right of the child to forming secure attachment should be preserved. As controversial as this proposition may appear, every child deserves a chance at forming a secure attachment which will have numerous positive consequences in adulthood and preventing abandonment can ensure that. Therefore, forbidding the child abandonment under certain

circumstances can result in more children having a chance for a happy childhood as well as successful adulthood.

Overall, the attachment in infancy can have long-lasting consequences on the goals, social competence and interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Biological factors have a major impact on forming secure attachment and mechanisms involved tend to favor biological parents over adoptive parents. Furthermore, research suggests that the likelihood of forming a secure attachment to biological parents is higher than the likelihood of forming a secure attachment to adoptive parents. The process of alternative care and adoption increases the chance of children being insecurely attached and thus can have negative consequences on children's development and adulthood. Therefore, it seems reasonable to propose certain legal regulations on child abandonment in order to decrease the likelihood of insecure attachment and ensure the positive influence of secure attachment throughout the child's life. Furthermore, children that are already institutionalized and in the adoption process should be give better chances to establish the secure attachment, by significantly improving institutional care and the efficiency of adoption process. As there are many children whose situation requires adoption, that easily fall through the cracks in the system and do are not even offered a chance to have family, reforms in the system must to ensure that those in need of adoption are actually available for the process (Rulli, 2013). Institutional reforms should be introduced in order to provide the children in the adoption process to ensure better quality care prior to adoption (Rulli, 2013) and thus be more likely to form a secure and healthy attachment to their adoptive parents. The more securely attached children there are, the more likely they are to grow into successful, socially competent and happy individuals, thus positively impacting the entire community.

Throughout, the process of growing up and engaging in various interpersonal relationships, an infant faces numerous opportunities to establish attachment to an individual that is not the parent or a family member. Adulthood is characterized with forming multiple attachments with friends and romantic partners that are being added as attachment figures (Keren & Mayseless, 2013). In his original theory, Bowlby proposed internal working models that are established based on the relationship with the primary caregiver and early attachment in infancy. An infant tends to internalize the experience with the primary attachment figure and use it as a prototype for upcoming relationships formed with other individuals (Morrison, Goodlin-Jones & Uguiza, 1997). The main distinction between the attachment in infancy and adulthood is that an adult individual is allowed to choose the attachment figure in a romantic or a friendly relationship, whereas an infant is faced with no choice. It is very common that a romantic partner subsides the parent as the main attachment figure in adulthood. Having such choice allows one to preserve the positive aspects from the relationship with the primary caregiver as well as to acquire the relationship qualities that were lacking in infancy. According to the Attachment Security Hypothesis, regardless of the infancy attachment style, one should demonstrate a preference for secure attachment and choose partners that offer the best opportunities for doing so. Such preferences can even be observed in the process of attraction, as characteristics that reflect secure attachment such as care, attentiveness, confidence, openness and dependability are rated the most attractive and important in a partner (Keren & Mayseless, 2013). Those who have established secured attachment in infancy and have the characteristics that reflect such security are more likely to be perceived as attractive and be a desirable partner to others. Thus, one may infer that even evolution favors secure attachment, as the characteristics of such attachment in one are found extremely attractive and increase one's chances of establishing a stable

relationship and successful reproduction. Securely attached parents are more likely to form a secure attachment with their infant, thus extending the evolutionary desirable pattern of secure attachment and its positive consequences.

Even though attachment representations do have a relationship-specific component, the influence of generalized-attachment representation can be observed in adult relationships, especially those involving romantic partners and close friends. The pattern of infancy attachment can strongly determine one self-perception as well the perception of others. The Model of Adult Attachment consists of two dimensions: perception of self and perception of others rated regarding their positivity/negativity. If both self-perception and the perception are rated as positive, the attachment is considered secure and reflects in being intimate as well as with being autonomous. When the self-perception is negative while the perception of others is positive, the attachment is regarded as preoccupied/ambivalent and is focused on being occupied with the relationship. A negative image of others combined with the positive perception of self-creates a dismissing/avoidant attachment characterized by avoidance of intimacy and counter-dependence. Finally, when both image of self and the others are negative, one is considered to have a fearful attachment expressed through the fear of closeness and intimacy as well as through social avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). These attachment styles are established based on the expectations of an infant in regards to caregiver's responsiveness and dependability and are reflected in numerous characteristics in regards to the individual himself/herself as well as the romantic partner (Keren & Mayseless, 2013).

Securely attached adults tend to feel like they are worthy of love while also having little or no fear of abandonment. Such individuals tend to look for comfort in others when experiencing distress (Keren & Mayseless, 2013). Additionally, secure attachment reflects in

perceiving romantic relationships as generally emotionally secure and positive (Morriso, Goodlin-Jones & Uguza, 1997). In contrast, insecure attachment types include a more negative view of self and the others as well as the romantic relationship itself. Avoiding attachment in individuals is expressed through high self-reliance that is derived from their positive perception of self. However, avoidant attachment creates difficulties in achieving closeness and intimacy and prevents one from investing too much emotion in the relationship. There are two types of avoidant attachment: dismissing and fearful. On the one hand, those with the dismissing type tend to deny their own psychological distress and feel comfort with the absence of close relationships. On the other hand, fearfully attached individuals usually acknowledge distress, but experience high discomfort with the absence of close relationships (Keren & Mayseless, 2013). High self-reliance, lack of intimacy and fear of close connections experienced in avoidant attachment are linked to underactivation of the attachment mechanisms due to lack of responsiveness and dependability of the caregiver during the formation of infant attachment. Adults with the characteristics of avoidant attachment seem to be very negatively self-critical. They tend to describe themselves as well as their relationship partner as more likely to be having attacking and protesting patterns against each other. Additionally, those with avoidant attachment tend to perceive both themselves and their partners as less likely to be submissive and more likely to assert their separateness. Such individuals rate their relationship as more disengaged and low in affection (Morrison, Goodlin-Jones & Uguza, 1997). Finally, ambivalent/preoccupied attachment in adulthood is expressed through a relatively negative self-image and the positive perception of others. Individuals with such an attachment pattern tend to require a high level of intimacy, constant approval and responsiveness of others and also exhibit great emotional expressiveness, worry and impulsiveness (Keren & Mayseless, 2013). Ambivalent attachment

also reflects in characterizing interactions by attack and protest patterns. Unlike in avoidant attachment, ambivalently attached adults experience the greatest rate of negative self-criticism and perceive their partner as less attacking. The avoidant attachment, its patterns and perception of self and others can be linked to hyperactivation of the attachment system in infancy, due to inconsistent responsiveness and lack of dependability of the primary caregiver (Morrison, Goodlin-Jones & Urganza, 1997). Therefore, the connection between the attachment patterns in infancy and adulthood appear to be strong and the relationship with the primary caregiver seems to be highly reflected in the relationship with a romantic partner. The formation of attachment in infancy does not only affect interpersonal relationships in adulthood, but also highly determines self-perception, causing the pattern to have the extensive influence on one's adult life.

In conclusion, attachment to another human being is an innate human need that is established in early infancy and is expressed throughout the lifetime. Securely attached children are more likely to grow into securely attached adults that have high levels of confidence, positive self-image and positive perception of others. Such individuals tend to have greater emotional stability and report higher quality of interpersonal relationships. All of us have the basic need for high intimacy and security that is the best fulfilled in the relationship characterized by secure attachment which involves trust, intimacy and support. Therefore, in order to have a harmonic and progressive community, a rate of securely attached individuals needs to be raised. Increasing the chances of children forming the secure attachment in infancy regardless of whether they are raised in their biological or adoptive family is of high importance. Similarly, providing a support system for insecurely attached adults that would help them overcome the drawbacks of their attachment style can have a great impact on the entire society. It is of great value to provide proper resources and mechanisms that would ensure the security of attachment in infancy and

adulthood, in order to be able to enjoy all of the positive impacts of such attachment in terms of personal growth and influence as well as in interpersonal relationships.

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