

LAB EXERCISE # 5

ATTACHMENT ISSUES IN CHILDHOOD

Attachment is an important issue in a child's development. Attachment refers to that sense of belonging that a child develops in the earliest months and years of life. The popular press term for attachment is "bonding." Generally we talk about attachment in terms of mothers and fathers but infants and young toddlers can form attachments to any caregiver who is present consistently.

Attachment is a concept studied by Dr. Mary Ainsworth who developed a scale for measuring the degree and type of attachment that a child develops. A securely attached child knows that there are adults in the world who love and care for him/her and that these adults will always take care of him/her. Thus when a securely attached child's parents leave, the child is comfortable. This does not mean that a securely attached child will never cry when parents leave but generally the securely attached child is able to stay with other caregivers.

Attachment also relates to Erik Erikson's first stage of development, trust v. mistrust. In the first months of life, a child need to develop a sense of basic trust in the world (i.e. become attached to some adult). Without this sense of trust or security, a child may difficulty forming relationships. After all, an infant needs to "know" that someone will always be there, will feed the child when he/she is hungry, change the diaper, cuddle and take care.

When there is none of this care given in the early months, then a sense of mistrust develops. Current research has looked at the problems children encounter in later childhood and even adulthood when this sense of trust and attachment is missing or is not strongly developed. Thus, attachment becomes a critical issue for children's development.

In this lab, you will be examining some of the outward behaviors that we assume indicate level of attachment. Since we are not able to observe a great deal of child/parent interaction, we will be looking at some other indicators. Recognize that we are only looking at a small set of behaviors and drawing some conclusions from those behaviors. Our analysis CAN be wrong. SO, be cautious about your conclusions and make certain that you maintain confidentiality in this lab. Do NOT share your feelings with anyone other than me (your instructor!)

There are two options for this activity. One involves watching children as their parents either leave them or pick them up. If you can be at the center at one of these time blocks, choose the first option. (For this activity only, you may want to change your time of observation.) If you cannot be at the center in the early morning or late afternoon, choose the second option.

Option One:

Using first names only, indicate name and age of child on the chart. Record what you observe as the parents either leave the child in the morning or retrieve the child in the afternoon. If you are there in the morning, record how the child and parents behave. What do they do upon entering the center? If it is afternoon, what are the children doing when it is time to go home? When the parents arrive at the center? Again, record only what you see. This may be difficult since there is a natural tendency to make some assessments of what the behavior means. Record only what you see and hear. Do this with at least 7 children. Try to get a range of genders and ages.

Sample:

Mac	Age 3	Mac was playing in the sandbox area when his father arrived. His father called Mac's name. Mac stood up and ran to the door. He raised his arms. His father bent and picked up the child.
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Option Two:

- a) With permission of the Center director and parents, choose two children with whom you are not too familiar. In a space somewhat away from the general population, spend some time with each child playing and interacting. Describe the children with whom you interact. Describe what you do and say to each child. Try to choose children of different genders and ages.

- b) Spend some time observing these two children as they interact with the other adults in the center. How well do they interact? Ask the staff to describe how the children typically respond when being dropped off and picked up.

Option One

Name	Age	Description
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#1

#2

#3

#4

Name

Age

Description

#5

#6

#7

LAB REPORT PART B QUESTIONS

1. Using the Ainsworth scale from the text (and recognizing that this is based on a very small sample of behavior) classify each child's attachment. Justify your classification.
2. Create an experiment which would better measure a child's attachment.
3. What activities would you suggest to parents and caregivers that would increase and enhance attachment? Why would they enhance the attachment level?