

TYPES OF ATTACHMENT

Introduction

Ainsworth's very first studies of attachment had taken place in Uganda, where she studied 28 infants, who ranged in age from 15 weeks to 2 years. **Observations** took place in the family living room. The infants were observed every two weeks for two hours at a time, and the whole project lasted for nine months (making this a **longitudinal study**). Ainsworth devised a scale to measure **maternal sensitivity**, and also observed how much the mothers held their babies. She found that the infants could be classified into three groups: (1) the **securely attached**, (2) the **insecurely attached**, and (3) the **not-yet-attached**.

Which group an infant was placed in was strongly **correlated** with both maternal sensitivity and how much the mother held the baby. Ainsworth believed that attachment differences were **caused** by the mother's behaviour and sensitivity towards their infants, and she called the **caregiver sensitivity hypothesis**.

What is secure and insecure attachment?

In her first study using the "Strange Situation" (SS) Ainsworth looked at 26 mother-infant pairs. Using the SS, Ainsworth discovered that **three** distinct attachment types could be identified. The first is **secure attachment**, which is also called **Type B attachment**:

Characteristics associated with secure (Type B) attachment

- Explores the environment
- Shows distress on separation
- Greets mother positively when she returns
- Can be comforted by the stranger
- Is friendly with the stranger when the mother is present
- Shown by 66% of infants
- Mother is *sensitive* to the infant

Secure attachment leads to the development of a healthy internal working model, which manifests itself in positive ways in childhood and adulthood.

| Characteristics of Secure Attachment | |
|---|--|
| As Children: | As Adults: |
| 1. Able to separate from parent. | 1. Have trusting, lasting relationships. |
| 2. Seek comfort from parents when frightened. | 2. Tend to have good self-esteem. |
| 3. Return of parents is met with positive emotions. | 3. Comfortable sharing feelings with friends and partners. |
| 4. Prefers parents to strangers. | 4. Seek out social support. |

There are two types of **insecure attachment**. One is called **insecure avoidant attachment**, which is also known as **Type A attachment**:

Characteristics of insecure avoidant (Type A) attachment:

- Does not orientate to the mother when exploring the environment
- Does not show concern about mother's absence
- Most distressed when left alone
- Shows little interest in mother when she returns
- Treats mother and stranger in the same way
- 22% of infants
- Mother *ignores or rejects* the infant

Insecure avoidant attachment is associated with unhealthy characteristics in childhood and adulthood:

| Characteristics of Avoidant Attachment | |
|---|--|
| As Children: | As Adults: |
| 1. May avoid parents. | 1. May have problems with intimacy. |
| 2. Does not seek much comfort or contact from parents. | 2. Invest little emotion in social and romantic relationships. |
| 3. Shows little or no preference between parent and stranger. | 3. Unable or unwilling to share thoughts and feelings with others. |

The other type of insecure attachment is called **insecure resistant attachment**, which is also known as **Type C attachment** (and it is sometimes also called **ambivalent attachment**):

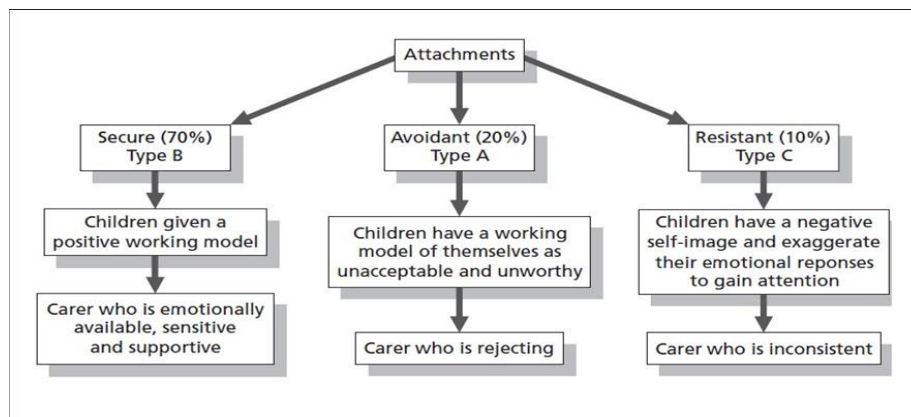
Characteristics of insecure resistant (Type C) attachment

- Appears to be fussy and wary in the environment
- Shows intense distress when the mother is absent
- Appears to want contact with mother on reunion, but resists contact and rejects her
- Actively resists the stranger's attempts at comfort
- 12% of infants
- Mother behaves *ambivalently (inconsistently)* towards the infant

Insecure resistant attachment is also associated with unhealthy characteristics in childhood and adulthood, but in different ways from insecure avoidant attachment:

| Characteristics of Ambivalent Attachment | |
|---|---|
| As Children: | As Adults: |
| 1. May be wary of strangers. | 1. Reluctant to become close to others. |
| 2. Become greatly distressed when the parent leaves. | 2. Worry that their partner does not love them. |
| 3. Do not appear to be comforted by the return of the parent. | 3. Become very distraught when a relationship ends. |

Ainsworth explained the different types of attachment in terms of **caregiver sensitivity hypothesis**, and believed that her results supported her view that maternal sensitivity causes attachment behaviour.



However, Ainsworth's findings have been criticised in many ways.

How can Ainsworth's findings be evaluated?

Ainsworth identified two forms of insecure attachment. However, **Main & Cassidy (1988)** believe that there is a third type, which they call **Type D**. It is also called **insecure disorganised/disoriented**. This refers to an infant that acts as if it is afraid of the attachment figure (as well as being afraid of the environment). Fear usually *increases* attachment behaviour, which includes seeking closer proximity to the attachment figure. However, since the attachment figure itself is a source of fear, the infant faces a conflict between seeking and avoiding closeness to the attachment figure.

| Characteristics of Disorganized Attachment | |
|--|--|
| At Age 1: | At Age 6: |
| 1. Show a mixture of avoidant and resistant behaviors. | 1. May take on a parental role. |
| 2. May seem dazed, confused, or apprehensive. | 2. Some children act as a caregiver toward the parent. |
| <small>-Adapted from Main & Cassidy, 1988</small> | |

Ainsworth's findings can also be criticised in terms of her use of the SS (see previous section).