SECURE ATTACHMENTS AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

The Effects of Secure Mother-Child Attachments on Peer Relationships in Pre-School

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July 9, 2003

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Attachment theory takes the position that the relationship or emotional bond children develop with their caregivers affects their social-emotional development and the relationships they will form with other people later on in life. While attachment theory attempts to explain how all relationships throughout the lifespan are affected by caregiver relationships, the following thesis will focus on the specific relationship between mother-child attachments and child peer relationships in pre-school.

Attachment theory asserts that it is the security offered by the mother that creates the attachment between mothers and their children. The security offered by the mother, or other primary caregiver, as well as the proximity between the mother and her child, gives the child a safe and secure environment in which the child is able to explore (Prager, 1995). When infants are first born, they are completely helpless and dependent upon their mothers, or other primary caregivers, to have all of their basic needs met and to feel safe and secure. "Throughout evolution, attachment has served to protect the helpless infant from predators by assuring that the caregiver will be in close physical proximity when danger arises" (McAdams, 1989, p. 140). The infant feels a sense of security and comfort if his/her needs are met in a timely manner. If the needs of the infant are not met at all, are inconsistently met, or are met in an untimely manner, the infant will not be comforted by the mother and will not feel secure.

The present thesis will examine the scientific literature on the topic of attachment that focuses on the relationship between mothers and their children and peer relationships in pre-school. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the specific maternal and child behaviors that are associated with secure attachment relationships and are also associated with positive peer relationships among children in pre-school. Pre-school relationships are the focus of this thesis

primarily to narrow the topic of the thesis, and also because pre-school is one of the first opportunities children have to form relationships with peers.

This thesis will be divided into four sections. The first section will be attachment theory itself consisting of the history, measurement of attachment, and an alternative to attachment theory. Attachment theory is only one of many theories that exist today that attempts to explain human behavior. Only one alternative (genetics theory) is briefly mentioned in the present thesis primarily because it poses the biggest threat to attachment theory.

The second section of the present thesis will focus on maternal behaviors that are present in secure attachment relationships and are associated with positive peer relationships among children. The third section will focus on the behaviors exhibited by children among peers that seem to be affected by secure attachment relationships. In the fourth and final section of this thesis, I will attempt to summarize my observations and offer some general conclusions.

This thesis is significant in that it will hopefully present information that will be valuable to parents as well as educators, researchers and child care professionals. Attachment theory may provide a base for examining problems in children that appear to have different causes. One example is school phobia. Attachment theory takes the position that this problem may originate out of the child's fear of what will happen if he/she leaves the house, not what will happen at school. The child may have been threatened with removal of love or even abandonment as a form of discipline in the past. A problem that exists is that many parents do not look at the negative aspects of their relationships with their children for various reasons (fear of criticism, distrust of others, or because they do not believe it is relevant). "Frequently, parents of insecurely attached children fail to connect their behaviour to the problems the child is

exhibiting, either placing the blame on the child or outside cause, for example poor teacher, and are unduly sensitive to criticism" (Williams, O'Callaghan, & Cowie, 1995, p. 51).

The purpose of this thesis is simply to present a literature review. Attachment theory is relatively new to the field of Psychology. Due to this fact (and other factors as well), there seems to be a lack of consensus among researchers as to which maternal behaviors are essential for forming a secure attachment relationship with children. Researchers also do not seem to agree on which behaviors exhibited by children that promote positive peer relationships are caused by secure attachment relationships with mothers. The purpose of this thesis is **not** to present an argument to support or criticize attachment theory; this issue will not be addressed at all. This thesis will only focus on the scientific material that is currently available regarding specific maternal behaviors and child behaviors associated with secure attachment relationships and positive peer relationships in pre-school.

General Overview of Attachment Theory

History

Attachment theory was primarily developed by John Bowlby, however, the research of Mary Ainsworth contributed significantly to help support and more fully evolve the theory. Each of them was interested in personality development and how that was affected by the early interactions between parents and their children. Bowlby's interest in this subject came about from some volunteer work he had done in a residential school for maladjusted children. Ainsworth's interest came from studying under William E. Blatz. She based her graduate dissertation on Blatz's theory of security as an approach to understanding personality development, and integrated aspects of security theory into attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991, p. 334).

Ainsworth and Bowlby were each looking for an explanation of children's responses to separation from their mother and the reunion of the children with their mothers following separation. Bowlby and Ainsworth were also interested in how the tie between a child and his/her mother develops. They eventually combined their efforts to create one common theory of attachment after Ainsworth joined Bowlby's research team. They kept in contact to exchange information about their own research. The information gained by Ainsworth's research in Uganda with Ganda babies and their mothers proved to be very useful to attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

The bond, or attachment, between a mother and her child had been theorized about before. Freud felt the bond between a mother and child came from the oral satisfaction that the child received from the feedings provided by the mother. The behaviorists also shared the view that it was the feedings that produced the bond between the mother and the child. Every time the child would eat, the mother would be there. The child received satisfaction from eating, and would eventually associate the satisfaction he/she felt with the mother. Bowlby dismissed this idea; he felt that the attachment was caused by the physical proximity between the mother and the child and the sense of security provided by the mother. Bowlby's ideas were supported by Harlow's research with monkeys (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Harlow found that infant monkeys preferred a terrycloth surrogate mother to a wire surrogate mother. These results were the same even when the wire surrogate mother provided food and the terrycloth surrogate mother did not. It was assumed that the infant monkeys preferred the physical proximity and sense of security to receiving food. This was supported by the fact that the monkeys went to the terrycloth surrogate mother when they were scared. When new items were introduced to the

monkeys, they would gradually venture out to explore, and would return to the terrycloth

surrogate mother before exploring any more (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1958).

Harlow and his researchers also found that monkeys who had been deprived of real

relationships with their real mothers did not develop healthy social habits. When these monkeys

matured, they had difficulty forming normal social and sexual relationships with other monkeys.

When the female monkeys who had grown up with the surrogate mothers became mothers

themselves, they did not do well. They were either indifferent or unresponsive to their babies or

were very brutal toward them physically (Harlow, 1965).

Measurement of Attachment

Depending on how well the mother, or other primary caregiver, is able to provide the

child with a sense of safety and security, one of three different attachment styles may arise

between the mother and the child. Attachment styles are assessed by examining the responses of

the child to the mother when the mother comes back (reunification) after being away from the

child for a period of time. A child with a secure attachment style will want to be physically close

to the mother when she returns, or will greet her with a smile or a wave from a distance. A child

with an avoidant attachment style will avoid the mother when she returns; he/she will not want to

be with her. A child with a resistant/ambivalent attachment style will either passively resist the

mother when she returns, or the child will actively resist the mother and show hostility toward

her when she returns. Usually in the literature, researchers will lump avoidant attachment with

resistant/ambivalent attachment and simply refer to both attachment styles as unsecure

attachment or unattached.

Attachment styles are typically assessed by using a procedure known as the Strange

Situation. The Strange Situation was developed by Ainsworth and contains eight steps or

episodes. The first episode consists of the mother and child being introduced to the experimental room, where the mother and child will be observed by researchers (either through a two-way mirror or by a videotape). The second episode consists of the mother and child being left alone. The child is allowed to explore the room, while the mother lets the child explore independently. In the third episode, a stranger enters the room and talks with the mother. The stranger then approaches the child and the mother leaves the room. In the fourth episode, the stranger focuses his/her attention on the child. In the fifth episode, the mother enters the room, greets the child, and then leaves again. The sixth episode consists of the stranger leaving the room, and the child being left alone. The seventh episode consists of the stranger coming back into the room and focusing his/her attention on the child. In the eighth and final episode, the mother enters the room, greets and picks up the child, while the stranger leaves the room. It is the child's reaction to the mother upon the final reunification that researchers use to determine the child's attachment style.

Attachment styles may also be assessed using a procedure called the Attachment Q-Sort. In this procedure, the primary caregiver is given 100 cards to sort into nine different piles. Written on the cards are statements about the relationship between the child and the primary caregiver. The caregiver sorts the cards into three piles according to how characteristic each statement is about the relationship, from least characteristic to most characteristic. Those three piles are then subdivided to create the total of nine piles. A score is then determined by the researcher by assigning different values to each pile of cards. The scores range from −1 to +1. The higher the score is, the more secure the attachment is between the child and the caregiver. This method has been shown to be valid and reliable when the caregiver is carefully instructed and supervised while sorting the cards. The Attachment Q-Sort is being used more often than

the Strange Situation in current research, possibly because it provides scores on security, sociability, and dependency toward each parent (LaFreniere, Provost, & Dubeau, 1992).

Alternative to Attachment Theory

Attachment theory offers only one of many views of how children's relationships with others are formed and affected. One alternative view to attachment theory is genetics theory. Genetics theory takes the position that genes are responsible for much of human behavior as well as physical characteristics. Behavioral genetics looks at how much heredity contributes to human behavior. For some things, such as personality and intelligence, genes determine quite a bit. For other things, it is an interaction between genes and the environment that determine behavior. "For example, a pregnant woman may be genetically inclined to drink too much alcohol or to abuse drugs, thereby affecting what kind of child will be born. Or a child who, for genetic reasons, is difficult may create so much of a fuss that his parents will spend a lot of time scolding him. Genes help create environments" (Wilson, 1999, p. 136).

In the example of the pregnant woman, her genes helped influence her behavior to do drugs or drink alcohol while she was pregnant, which, in turn, created a certain type of environment that will likely negatively affect the child's development. In the example of the difficult child, the child is difficult because of a genetic predisposition. That genetic predisposition creates an environment that causes the parents to scold the child.

It is difficult to discern what is determined by genetics and what is determined by environment. To help solve this issue, two different types of studies are used – adoption studies and twin studies. Adoption studies use children that have been adopted and compare them to children that were born to the adoptive parents. All children live in the same house, but have nothing in common genetically. If the children score alike on a test that measures a certain trait,

the environment plays a bigger role in determining that trait. If the children score differently on a test that measures a certain trait, genetics plays a bigger role in determining that trait.

In twin studies, both fraternal and identical twins are used. Identical twins are genetically the same, while fraternal twins have only half of their genes in common. "Scholars give to large numbers of both identical and fraternal twins various test of intelligence and personality to see how similar the two kinds of twins are. If identical twins always score the same and fraternal twins score the same half the time, then we can say that the trait being measured is entirely inherited" (Wilson, 1999, p. 136). If the identical twins do not score the same, the environment has some influence on the trait. More research needs to be done in this area to determine just how genetics influences behavior and how genetics combined with the environment influence behavior.

Genetics theory may pose a threat to attachment theory. It is possible that genetics determine how mothers and children interact with each other. In the case of a depressed mother, it is the mother's chemical imbalance that causes her to avoid interactions with her child. It is then possible that the child has inherited that same chemical imbalance which causes the child to avoid interactions with peers in pre-school. The attachment between the mother and the child may not have an effect, or may only have a minimal effect, on peer interactions. In this example, genetics is the main factor in determining the child's behavior. It is unclear just how genetics determines behavior and influences the environment. Future research in this area may either support attachment theory or may discredit attachment theory.

Maternal Behaviors and Pre-School Peer Relationships

A summary of the resources used in this thesis is presented in Table 1. The sources used in this thesis and identified in the table were chosen because they focused on the relationship

between attachment and peer relationships, the focus of this thesis. The sources were located

using PsychInfo. Table 1 identifies the authors, or editors, of the sources used (Source column),

the maternal behaviors that are present in secure attachment relationships that promote positive

relationships with peers in pre-school (Mother column), and the child behaviors that are

exhibited in secure attachment relationships and that promote positive relationships with peers in

pre-school (Children column).

Table 1

Summary of Maternal and Child Behaviors Present in Secure Attachment Relationships that

Promote Positive Peer Interactions in Pre-School

SOURCE	MOTHER	CHILDREN
Prager	Prompt responses to facial expressions Equally responsive to all types of affect Attentive Scaffolding Authoritative style of parenting Ensure child's access to other children	Eye contact Tolerates frustration Persistent in difficult tasks Sociable Empathic
Kerns, et. al 2000	Available Accessible Sensitive Openly communicates feelings	Identify emotions in others accurately
McAdams	Smiles Eye contact Alert Greets child when entering room Responds to crying child	Smiles Eye contact Explores environment independently and enthusiastically
Ainsworth & Bowlby	Consistent Responds to crying child Sensitive	Does not cry often Explores environment Cries when mother leaves room
Kerns, et. al 1998	Encourages contact with peers Lets child spend time with peers when child asks	Initiates peer contacts
Murray, et. al	Communicates with child Acknowledges child autonomy Shows no hostility toward child	Positively responds to peer interactions Seeks comfort from mother
Rose-Krasnor, et. al	Available Responsive Accepting	Confident in new settings

SOURCE	MOTHER	CHILDREN
Colman & Thompson	Attentive to child's needs	Enthusiastic
	Encourages child to solve difficult tasks	Asks for help only when needed
		Persistent
		Cooperative
LaFreniere, et. al	Available	Enthusiastic
	Supportive	Curious
		Open to new things
		Autonomous
		Anxiety free
		Self-controlled
Kerns & Barth	Sensitive	Initiate contact with others
	Comforts child	Positively respond to suggestions
Pianta, et. al	Warm	Keep track of other people
	Scaffolding	Attuned to facial expressions
	Openly expresses emotions	Able to handle frustration

Children learn many things by observing their mothers. It is the behaviors exhibited by the mothers that determine how the child will respond to the mother. Table 1 lists maternal behaviors that are present in secure attachment relationships and that also promote positive peer relationships. The first four sources listed in Table 1 (Prager, Kerns, et. Al 2000, McAdams, and Ainsworth & Bowlby) are reviews; they are summarizing the results of other researchers' work. The rest of the sources listed in Table 1 are experimental studies; both maternal and child behaviors listed in Table 1 were noted by the researchers during their own research. These experimental studies focus mostly on the behaviors of the children and therefore will be examined more completely in the next section of this thesis. The maternal behaviors present in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions are only briefly mentioned in the experimental studies, but are examined more in the reviews.

According to attachment theory, it is the attachment style between the child and the mother that determines how the child will act. A secure child will explore a new environment enthusiastically and independently, and will check in with his/her mother every once in a while.

An avoidant child or a resistant/ambivalent child may not be interested in exploring a new environment at all (McAdams, 1989). Children who have secure attachments have developed trusting relationships with other people. That relationship impacts children in a way that leaves them full of trust and hope, and optimistic about matters of the heart. Children who have insecure attachments have developed relationships with other people that are full of anxiety and frustration. Insecure attachments alter children's expectations about relationships and intimacy by darkening them (McAdams, 1989).

It is believed that children carry with them important aspects of the attachment with their mothers throughout the rest of their lives. The communication that takes place between mothers and their children is important to the development of the children. It is through this communication that children learn how to regulate their own emotions, how to trust other people, and how to read others' emotions. This communication has been referred to as a type of "dance" between children and their mothers because of how they respond to each other.

Early social play between babies and their caregivers typically involves intricate patterns of smiling, eye contact, and vocalization. Babies and their caregivers engage in a kind of "dance" writes infant psychiatrist Daniel Stern. When the mother, father, and other caregivers feed the baby or change the baby's diaper, they are likely to evoke and respond to complex patterns of smiling, cooing, looking, laughing, approaching, withdrawing, and so on – both partners responding in a mutual and rhythmic way, gliding together across a dance floor of emotional experiences, back and forth, up and down, over and under, to the exquisite delight of both. The baby and the caregiver "tune" the interaction with subtle verbal and nonverbal behaviors, turning up the excitement with a glance or a smile, turning it down when things get a bit too intense by looking away or

backing off . . . Through the dance, babies learn how to take turns, how to lead and to follow, how to express and receive, how to modulate their own internal states and monitor the innermost of the other (McAdams, 1989, p. 141).

Through this type of interaction with the mother, or other primary caregiver, the child is seeing first-hand how his/her actions are being responded to by the mother. The child is also able to respond to the parent. The child learns how to read emotions, and the parent is also able to read the emotions of the child. It has been shown that mothers of secure children are able to effectively read the emotions of their children, and respond appropriately. They also act promptly to comfort the child when the child is distressed; the child knows that he/she is able to depend on the mother for security and comfort. Mothers of securely attached children also encourage their children to be open and flexible in their expressions of both positive and negative emotions. They are also comfortable and open about their own feelings, especially negative feelings (Kerns, Contreras, & Neal-Barnett, 2000).

Securely attached children are able to regulate their own emotions because of the interactions they have with their mothers. Their mothers have been able to effectively read their emotions, so they have been able to comfort their children when they have been distressed, and they have also been able to keep their children happy when they were happy to begin with. These mothers have also been able to talk with their children about expressing their emotions, and also how to deal with emotions. Children also learn how to regulate their emotions by observing how their mothers respond to certain situations (Kerns, Contreras, & Neal-Barnett, 2000).

Children learn more from their mothers than just how to regulate their emotions; they also learn that they are capable and competent individuals. Children with a secure attachment

have had a secure base from which to confidently explore new environments. They were able to do so because they knew that their mothers would be there if anything went wrong. The ability to explore new environments confidently leads children to develop working models, or internal representations, of themselves as capable and competent. These children are also less dependent upon their mothers, because they know from experience that their mothers will be there if needed. This also leads children to become more autonomous.

The quality of children's intimate interactions with parents may enhance their ability to function autonomously. Specifically, there is evidence that the security of toddlers' attachment to their parents, particularly to their mothers, predicts the persistence and affective quality of their independent play and exploration. Securely attached 18-month-old children show more tolerance for frustration, more persistence in a difficult task, and more effective use of their mothers for assistance than insecurely attached children (Prager, 1995, p. 88).

Kerns, Cole & Andrews (1998) found that mothers who encouraged contact with peers and let their children spend time with their peers when the children asked, had children who were securely attached and who had positive peer relationships. Murray, et. al (1999) found that mothers who communicated with their children, acknowledged their children's autonomy, and showed no hostility toward their children, had children who were securely attached and who had positive interactions with peers. Rose-Krasnor, et. al (1996) found that mothers who were available, responsive, and accepting of their children had children who were securely attached and who had positive peer relationships.

Colman & Thompson (2002) found that mothers who were attentive to their children's needs and who encouraged their children to solve difficult tasks had children who were securely

attached and who had positive peer relationships. LaFreniere, Provost, & Dubeau (1992) found that mothers who were available and supportive of their children had children who were securely attached and who had positive interactions with peers. Kerns & Barth found that mothers who were sensitive and who comforted their children when their children were upset had children who were securely attached and who had positive interactions with peers. Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett (1997) found that mothers who were warm, exhibited scaffolding behaviors, and openly expressed their emotions had children who were securely attached and who had positive peer relationships.

It seems that researchers are unable to completely agree upon which maternal behaviors are present in every secure attachment relationship. There does seem, however, to be a set of core behaviors that seem to be mentioned in many different sources. These core behaviors are that mothers are available, attentive, and sensitive. Aside from these few core behaviors, researchers are unable to agree on which behaviors are present in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions among children.

Child Behaviors and Pre-School Relationships

Kerns, Cole, & Andrews (1998) found that children in secure attachment relationships initiate peer contacts. They conducted a study to look for associations between parent peer management (how parents manage their children's contact with other children), attachment, and children's peer networks. It was hypothesized by the researchers that children who have a secure attachment would be more willing than children with insecure attachments to explore the world of peers and actually initiate contact with peers.

The researchers found that securely attached girls initiated more peer contacts than nonsecurely attached girls. One possible explanation offered were that girls may be more

socially mature than boys and are more interested in developing peer relationships than boys. Another explanation was that parents might involve girls in peer contacts more because they see girls as skilled and interested in peers.

The researchers in this study also found that children had more frequent peer contacts when the parents initiated more contacts, but when the children initiated a higher proportion of their own contacts than the parents. They found that it was important for parents to assist children in initiating contacts with peers, but taking over the role as sole initiator did not help children. Past studies have found that secure attachment is linked to motivation, cognitive competence, self-esteem, and peer relationships. These may not be caused by attachment itself, but by the parenting practices associated with attachment.

Murray, et. al (1999) found that children in secure attachment relationships positively respond to peer interactions and seek comfort from their mothers when they are distressed. These researchers provided evidence that depression in mothers affects children. People who are depressed have difficulty interacting with other people. Past studies have shown that postpartum depression occurs in about 10-15% of mothers within the first three months after giving birth (Murray, et. al, 1999, p. 1259). In the first three months of life, infants are maximally dependent on others to get their basic needs met. They are also highly sensitive to the quality of communication that they receive from their parents.

Mothers who suffer from depression show marked impairments in interactions with their children. They are often withdrawn, hostile, show disengaged behavior, and also show intrusive communication styles. The infants of these mothers show avoidance and distress to their mothers. The purpose of this study was to look for interactions between the attachment styles of children at 18 months old, depression in the mother, and social/behavioral adjustment in the child

when he/she turned five years old. The association between attachment style at 18 months old and the child's behavior with the mother at five years old was significant. Children who were insecure at 18 months old were less responsively engaged with the mother at five years old than children who were secure. In this study, the depressed mothers were not available or responsive to their children, thus creating a relationship that did not promote a secure base for the children to explore from, which would, in turn, allow the children to be more comfortable in social settings. This study shows that the interactions a parent has with a child in the first couple years of life affect the quality of interactions the child will have in the future.

Rose-Krasnor, et. al (1996) found children in secure attachment relationships are confident in new settings. These researchers conducted a study which provided evidence that the security of attachment in pre-school aged children was positively correlated with social engagement. This means that children who are securely attached have positive expectations for interactions with others, and also have the confidence to explore unfamiliar social environments. This results from the attachment relationship with the mother, or other primary caregiver. A parent that has been available and responsive to a child creates an environment that enables the child to feel secure and confident in new settings, including social settings (such as pre-school). The confidence in new settings also leads to an active exploration of the settings, which may also lead to interacting or playing with peers. The purpose of this study was to prove that attachment style does affect social competence, which was defined as "the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while maintaining positive relationships with others, over time and across situations" (Rose-Krasnor, et. al, 1996, p. 310).

Colman & Thompson (2002) found that children in secure attachment relationships are enthusiastic, ask for help only when help is needed, are persistent, and are cooperative. These

researchers conducted a study in which 36 pre-school aged children and their mothers were used to determine if securely attached children would be able to handle a difficult task better than insecurely attached children. There were two separate tasks that each child completed: a manageable task and a difficult task. In the manageable task, there were two jigsaw puzzles to choose from; the child had to choose one to put together. Both of the puzzles were considered to be within the children's general skill level. The pieces of the puzzles were colorful, large, easy-to-handle, uniquely shaped, and all of the same figures were the same colors (all dinosaurs were the same color, etc.). On the base of the puzzle was an outline of the pieces.

In the difficult task, there were also two puzzles to choose from; the child had to choose one to put together. The puzzles each contained 35 pieces and were meant for children eight years or older. In this task, the child had to create an image that was different from the image shown on the base of the puzzle. For example, on puzzle showed an airplane parked at an airport terminal when the puzzle was completed, but the puzzle base showed what the inside of the plane and the terminal looked like.

All of the children in the study were presented with the manageable task first. Before the two tasks were conducted, attachment styles were determined according to the Attachment Q-Sort, which the mothers completed. Colman & Thompson (2002) discovered that children with secure attachment styles were less likely to display negative affect while engaged in each task and waited longer to ask for help in the manageable task than children with insecure attachment styles. Children with secure attachment styles also tended to only ask for help when it was needed. Children with lower security scores on the Q-Sort were more likely to have a greater percentage of their total help seeking bids classified as unnecessary (asking for help before trying a solution on their own or when the task demands were within their ability) than children with

higher security scores and were also more likely to make inability statements, by saying that the task was too hard for them or they just couldn't do it. Children with lower security scores were also significantly more likely to display frustration, anger, and/or unhappiness during the tasks.

This study has shown that children with secure attachment styles fare better than children with insecure attachment styles when it comes to trying to complete a difficult task. Secure children show confidence when they are approaching tasks that require problem-solving skills, and have more patience to complete those tasks than insecure children. These results are relevant to peer relationships as well because secure children have more patience and tolerate their frustration better than insecure children. Insecure children also exhibit anger, or other negative emotions, more easily than secure children, and would have more difficulty dealing with other children in situations where conflict arose. The role of the mother is very important in difficult situations. Encouraging children to solve the problems on their own seems to be important in secure attachment relationships; it promotes autonomy.

LaFreniere, Provost, & Dubeau (1992) found that children in secure attachment relationships are enthusiastic, curious, open to new things, autonomous, are anxiety free, and are self-controlled. These researchers looked at the behaviors of securely and insecurely attached children in pre-school. In this study, 83 children and their parents were used as the subjects. Parents and teachers filled out questionnaires regarding certain aspects of each child's behaviors. Researchers used three internalizing measures: anxiety, dependency, and solitary activity. Researchers also used three competence measures: prosocial behavior, social competence, and interactive play. Attachment styles were determined using the Attachment Q-Sort (one for parents, and another one modified for teachers).

LaFreniere, Provost, & Dubeau (1992) found that boys who had an over dependent

relationship with their mothers were more likely than other boys to show anxiety in pre-school,

withdrawal from peer interaction, and an overdependence on the their teachers. Researchers also

found that competent children in pre-school were seen by their parents as affectively responsive,

actively engaged in social affairs, autonomous, self-controlled, and free of tension or anxiety.

These characteristics of children were consistent with results of the Colman & Thompson study

(2002) in that children who were seen as more competent were enthusiastic and able to keep their

emotions under control. Although the results of this experiment did not show results that

completely support the hypothesis that secure children are more involved in peer interactions, the

results did show that boys who are overly dependent upon their mothers are at a disadvantage to

other children and also withdraw from interacting with peers. Boys who were not overdependent

on their mothers did not withdraw from interacting with peers. It is also interesting to note that

the qualities of competent children in this study are some of the same qualities found in securely

attached children.

Kerns & Barth (1995) found that children in secure attachment relationships initiate

contact with others and positively respond to suggestions made by other people. They conducted

a study in which 54 children and their parents were used to determine if attachment, play, and

peer competence are all related to one another. Both parents were used to determine if the

attachment between fathers and children would be significant.

The researchers in this study found that children with a secure attachment to the mother

maintained play for longer periods of time in a laboratory setting than children with insecure

attachments. They also found that children with a secure attachment to the father issued more

directives about what to play during play, made more suggestions about what activities to play,

helping a child with a task while also verbally helping and encouraging the child to figure it out for him/herself. Encouraging the child to figure it out for him/herself increases the child's feeling of competency, and allows the child to learn how to solve problems on his/her own. Helping the child also alleviates the child's feeling of frustration when he/she cannot complete the task.

Researchers seem unable to agree on which child behaviors are evident in secure attachment relationships and that also promote positive peer interactions in pre-school. Out of the 11 sources listed in Table 1, only three researchers agree that being enthusiastic is important in promoting positive peer interactions among securely attached children. That is the only characteristic that is mentioned by more than two researchers. Unlike maternal behaviors that are evident in secure attachment relationships, there does not seem to be a core set of behaviors among children of secure attachment relationships. The child behaviors mentioned by researchers do not seem to have much in common on the surface. Perhaps future research will help establish a clearer pattern of children's behaviors in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions in pre-school.

Summary and Conclusions

The studies reviewed here have shown that children with secure attachments are more popular among peers than children with insecure attachments. The characteristics of children listed in Table 1 appear to be helpful in creating and maintaining relationships with other people, especially peers in pre-school. Children with secure attachments may have learned from their mothers how to read facial expressions and how to attune to other people's emotions. They may have also learned through experience that it is okay to trust people. It is the behaviors exhibited

by the mother toward the child that may help develop the child's secure attachment and willingness to engage in behaviors that promote interactions with peers.

The behaviors that mothers exhibit in secure attachments are important in providing a safe and secure environment for the child to grow up in and explore (these behaviors are listed in Table 1). These behaviors exhibited by mothers of children with secure attachments are genuine. It should be noted that mothers of secure children do not engage in these behaviors simply to create a secure attachment with their children. These behaviors have been correlated with secure attachment; in secure attachments these behaviors are present. In insecure attachments, these behaviors are not present.

In my research for this thesis, I was looking for two different things – **maternal behaviors** are present in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions among children and **child behaviors** are present in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions in pre-school. The area of attachment theory is fairly new to the field of psychology, but has been widely researched; the wealth of information available is overwhelming. However, researchers are finding mixed results and different patterns of behaviors in their research.

As in all new areas of research, more research needs to be done in the area of attachment theory in order to find a pattern in what child behaviors are present in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions. More research may also provide a pattern of what maternal behaviors are evident in secure attachment relationships that promote positive peer interactions among children. There does seem to be a core set of behaviors consisting of sensitive, attentive, and available, but beyond those three behaviors, there seems to be no consensus among researchers as of yet.

Perhaps the problem is that the number of subjects used in the experiments is too small, or perhaps researchers are using too many variables in their experiments and are confounding their own results. These are merely my own observations and opinions about why there is so little consensus among researchers regarding maternal and child behaviors in secure attachment relationships. Researchers have been able, however, to come up with their own results of which maternal behaviors and which child behaviors are important in creating secure attachment relationships. Researchers are also not lacking in being able to provide specific behaviors that promote positive peer interactions among children in pre-school. Perhaps it is the focus of current research that needs to shift in order to support or discredit attachment theory.

The specific maternal behaviors that are exhibited by mothers are of particular interest to me. It would be interesting to see if the behaviors listed in certain research (such as scaffolding behaviors and initiating peer contacts for children) can be correlated with other behaviors (such as sensitive, attentive, and available). One question that could be answered by future research is whether specific behaviors can be taught by mothers to their children that would enhance peer relationships in pre-school without the existence of a secure attachment relationship. Can mothers be taught to teach their children skills that would promote positive peer relationships? Perhaps research in this area would help to establish a consensus among researchers as to what maternal behaviors are essential for helping children to establish positive peer relationships and also what child behaviors are essential for creating positive peer relationships.

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