

Attachment Parenting (AP)

Fundamentals of Developmental Psychology (M1063)

This seminar paper covers Attachment Parenting. AP is a popular, but controversial parenting trend.

Jean Liedloff American anthropologist after studying tribes in jungles of South America concluded that babies have an innate set of expectations to remain physically close to their parents and their needs are met immediately. She argued that western parenting, with its cots, bottle-feeding and controlled crying leaves these expectations unanswered and they create psychological problems. For these reasons AP promotes baby-wearing, bed shearing, long-term breastfeeding and constantly fulfilling infant's needs. Attachment theory is also core of AP (Henry, 2012).

Attachment Theory

Bowlby theorised that the earliest relationship is very important between mother and child. This idea has roots in psychoanalytic theories. Bowlby also added evolutionary concepts, because an attachment relationship ensures the infants will get nurturance. Mutual responding is key for development of attachment (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991, cited in Bee and Boyd, 2013, p. 266).

Ainsworth and Bell (1970) categorised attachment types into secure attachment and insecure attachment (cited in Bee and Boyd, 2013, p. 273).

Longitudinal studies are the most appropriate for the study of child development over a period of time.

Dozens of different longitudinal studies showed that secure attachment has a lot of positive long-term effects on children, adolescents and adults. For example adolescents who were rated positively attached in infancy are more socially skilled, have higher self-esteem and better grades (Kobak, Zajac and Smith, 2009, Bee and Boyd, 2013, p.277).

Other factors that affect attachment and child development

Cross cultural studies found that cultural differences are related to attachment behaviour (Sagi et al., 1991, cited in Eysenck, 2009, p.379).

Individual differences in infant temperament may also be related to secure attachment (Zeanah and Fox, 2004, cited in Bee and Boyd, 2013, p. 276).

Monozygotic twin studies indicated that human development depends on the interaction between genes and environment (Fraga et al., 2005).

Parenting Styles

Children's social and emotional development depends in part on their parents' child rearing practices. Maccoby and Martin's (1983) made a two-dimensional typology of parental styles. The Authoritative Type parenting has the most consistently positive outcomes. Parents are high in both control and warmth.

In reflection, AP is high in responsiveness, but the control could be low. So parents favouring this trend may become indulgent or permissive parents. Children growing in such a family do slightly less at school, likely to be aggressive, immature and less independent (cited in Bee and Boyd, 2013, pp. 325-326).

Critics

Sociologist Frank Furedi argues that parents often underestimate the resilience of children. If children are always with parents, they can grow up lacking independence and normal development (Furedi, 2002 cited in Faircloth, 2013, pp. 22-23).

Attachment theories do not mention baby-wearing, bed shearing and breastfeeding. How children grow, they need change. They need to explore without being over-protected. A research published in Springer's Journal of Child and Family Studies found that overprotected children lack the support for the development of responsibility and self-regulation. Also they have higher depression and anxiety levels (BPS, 2013).

Is AP useful?

I think baby-wearing, bed shearing, long-term breastfeeding could be practical for everyday life, but it is not enough.

Emotional availability is also important for secure attachment (Biringen, 2000, cited in Bee and Boyd, p.274).

We can question for how long AP can go. Nevertheless, Kromer et al longitudinal study found that prolonged and exclusive breastfeeding improves children's cognitive development (Archives of General Psychiatry, 2008).

I believe, following children's needs are more important than following trends.

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