

Parental relationship and attachment theory

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Abstract

The subject of the parental relationship is of utmost importance and a major help for both psychotherapists and clients.

The relationship with our parents begins from the intrauterine period and it is conspicuous in our everyday lives, whether we are aware of it or not. The child lives fusionally with his mother during the intrauterine period, and then enters into extrauterine life with his mother, being totally dependent on her at the beginning of his life in the first few months (Piontelli, 2006).

He/she perceives the world through her conscious and unconscious perceptions, and stores the feeling that the world is either a welcoming or a less agreeable land. These childhood grounds form and gain potency depending on how positive the mother is living with the newborn in her life or how hard she tolerates her child's dependence on her (Slade, 2000). It will also look at the child later on in the years to come, at various stages of life or events more or less important.

At maturity and not only, when feelings and thoughts such as: "life is hard"; "nothing is for sure"; "life is dangerous"; "people are tough and unfriendly", we can see a constellation of anxiety linked to the poor parental relationship (Wood, et al., 2003).

Keywords: *parental relationship, attachment, internalized model, emotional management, adult attachment schemas, and triangulation*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship with our parents begins from the intrauterine period and it is conspicuous in our everyday lives, whether we are aware of it or not. The child lives fusionally with his mother during the intrauterine period, and then enters into extrauterine life with his mother, being totally dependent on her at the beginning of his life in the first few months (Piontelli, 2006). He/she perceives the world through her conscious and unconscious perceptions, and stores the feeling that the world is either a welcoming or a less agreeable land. These childhood grounds form and gain potency depending on how positive the mother is living with the newborn in her life or how hard she tolerates her child's dependence on her (Slade, 2000).

It will also look at the child later on in the years to come, at various stages of life or events more or less important. At maturity and not only, when feelings and thoughts such as: “life is hard”; “nothing is for sure”; “life is dangerous”; “people are tough and unfriendly”, we can see a constellation of anxiety linked to the poor parental relationship (Wood, et al., 2003).

In the first months of the child's life, depending on the nourishing behavior of the mother, early emotional trauma is formed (Bowlby, 2008, 2012). Through what the mother of the child conveys, conscious by direct emotions or unconscious through her own emotional experiences, she mirrors him positively or negatively (Freud, 1952; DiPietro, et al., 2006).

In the case of a depressed mother, for example, where the child unconsciously experiences the mother's helplessness and fears, he will internalize an infant trauma and at the same time it will activate in the child's psyche an unconscious fear of bodily contact with his mother (Cassidy, & Mohr, 2001). The relationship of the child with the father develops throughout the first year of life, being a necessary balance in the relationship with the mother (Bögels, & Phares, 2008).

A part of the mother's relationship with the child will be directed to the father, and the child will experience the connection with the real father in the triangulation of the ego-mother-father, which will dominate the first childhood. This will support the child in finding the autonomous identity between the two parent poles (Volling, & Belsky, 1992; Target, & Fonagy, 2002). Child-mother-father triangulation is increasingly rare in contemporary society (Hedenbro, 2006). The father is about to become a luxury and his psychological corrosion is supported by concrete data (Samuels, 2016).

II. PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP ASPECTS

The parental relationship in the first childhood (0-3 years) determines the foundation the future adult will build his life on, in all its aspects (Bowlby, 2008).

In the first childhood, an essential element in the psychic evolution is the development of affectivity, as the main foundation for the other components of the personality (Kernberg, 1995). Of the two parents, the mother has the most important role in stimulating, developing emotional and affective communication, and the evolution of behaviors.

Immediately after birth and in the first few days after birth, the affectivity of the child is manifested by the presence of the spontaneous smile, also known as the neonatal smile.

Reactions associated with neonatal smile (surprise, discomfort, disgust, interest in noises, figures and / or objects) are the precursors of social smile, as well as emotions of surprise and sadness. The manifestation of these emotions is the first form of socialization of the child (Ganchrow, Steiner, & Daher, 1983). The child's crying, in response to pain, cold or fear is also a form of social communication. This happens during the first month of life when we witness the first form of social communication of the child. Afterwards, the first reactions to communication also occur with other people, but especially with the mother or the main caregiver. These are the people through whom the child has his main contact with the world.

In the 0-1 age period, the child is fused with the mother. The child is possessive with the mother or the caregiver and lives through her states of joy or anxiety (Weinraub, & Lewis, 1977).

By the age of 2-3, the child begins to become individualized by others and at this stage the first separation anxiety begins. In this process, the presence, explanation, affective and emotional support of an adult is always needed. The adults in the presence of the child are often the mother and father or the caregivers. They have the role of alleviating the feelings of potential loneliness and anxiety and of befriending the child - the future adult - with the surrounding world, preparing him for maturity with more or less anxiety (Fonagy, 2018). The child has the trust or anxiety that the adults around teach him to live, to differentiate things and to address issues. It is the age at which new feelings such as guilt, shame and contempt appear (Hutcherson, & Gross, 2011). A lot of specialized literature has been written about the feelings of guilt and shame that the child embodies at this stage of life, in the sense that these emotions with negative connotations, once internalized, can lead to anxiety and even forms of depression in the adult life (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Lazarus, 1991; Klerman, & Weissman, 1994; Gilbert, & Irons, 2009).

At this stage, the child begins to curiously explore the surrounding world with its potential dangers and threats. The caregivers have the role of guiding and assuring confidence in this exploration both in the actions per se and in their consequences.

When parents tell the child not to play on the street near the car lanes, not to talk to strangers, not to do drug etc., they teach him how to be cautious.

On the other hand, if they teach the child not to run in the park because he will get a cold, not to get into the water because he's going to get wet, not to walk on stones because he will hit

himself, the caregivers teach him the fear of exploring the real life. The child will acquire from these bans anxiety related to the joy of life and playing. Through these prohibitions, parents teach their children to fear the results or the consequences of their actions (Bittner, et al., 2007). Anxiety from the age of young childhood can evolve into adulthood in depression when life puts us in a position to explore choices, decisions, strong emotions, and important steps in personal development (Rapee, Schniering, & Hudson, 2009).

The adults around the child, the parental family and / or the extended family, have the role of smoothing the child's way to the outside world, to his autonomy and ultimately to an individualized sociable individual. With proper and sustained affection support, the child tolerates and integrates separation anxiety more easily from the parental environment (going to kindergarten, school, distance in any form of parents etc.). Therefore, the child will have fewer feelings of insecurity, fear, shame, anger and disappointment (Schore, & Schore, 2008).

III. JOHN BOWLBY'S ATTACHMENT THEORY

John Bowlby postulates that attachment is a class of social behaviors with a specific function that is essentially the ability to maintain proximity to another human being whom is considered to be able to offer protection of any kind. At the same time, attachment can be defined as a personalized affective link. The need for attachment is part of the basic needs of the human being, it is innate and its purpose has been the survival. Security can be defined through the provision of a space where the level of stress perceived by the child is minimal, and by allowing the child an interesting, stimulating exploration with positive stimuli in order to create a secure attachment (Compas, et al., 2001). Through repetitions and successful experiences, behavioral schemes are structured to ensure the formation of a coherent system that gives the child a certain type of attachment (Bowlby, 1981; Slade, 2000).

Physical absence of the person providing care or stimuli incoherence and inconsistency, stimuli oscillations of unpredictable intensity, sudden manipulation or absence of any touch creates chaos in the child's apprehension that leaves no required decoding and systematization (Howe, 1999). As a result, all of these factors lead to the formation of an uncertain or disorganized attachment matrix (Fosha, 2003).

An important detail in Bowlby's theory is that the development of attachment and its fluctuations required by definition an adult-child interaction (Bretherton, 1992). To create an attachment system, the adult-child dyad must actively participate in a way that they can easily understand each other. Affective interaction - at first mostly from the adult - requires sensory integration from both parts (communicative looks, touches, comfortable positions in close contact, mutual recognition by smells and tastes), which has the sense of emotional sharing

(Bowlby, & Ainsworth, 2013). Thus, the adult translates to the child the significance of the complex environment, giving the child the information that is often processed by non-verbal communication from one sensory system to another. An adult with a secure attachment system acquired in interaction with his or her own parents is all likely to convey the same type of attachment to the child.

Based on Bowlby's observations on children separated from the family for a long time, three attachment styles were depicted, representing the nature of the caregiver-child interaction:

1. Secure attachment, in which the protector is sensitive and responds to the child's needs;
2. Insecure avoidant attachment, where the protector is remote and unavailable;
3. Insecure ambivalent attachment, in which the protector has an inconsistency in his behavior or does not respond to the child's needs at all (Bowlby, 2012).

According to the internalized models of Bowlby's attachment, in the first year of life the child develops a mental representation of self and attachment figures that remain fairly stable over time through early experiences with caregivers.

Internalized models of self-representation and others aim to organize and process information about attachment and to plan future actions (Kernberg, 1982). In the next steps, representing the child's attachment becomes the foundation of his personality development.

The internalized model of representation of the mother-child attachment is only a first step, the human being orienting itself towards an individual system, characterized by an internal regulation of the self both at the cognitive and emotional level. Emotional management is a fundamental acquisition of the child's psychological development (Shipman, et al., 2005). Emotions play an important role in helping to assess the environment, the availability of attachment figures and, last but not least, maintain a sense of inner safety. These adjustment functions operate on two levels:

- At a basic level of emotions, such as fear and discomfort, the attachment system activates and communicates to the mother / caregiver the child's need for protection and comfort;
- At a higher level, emotions provide the child with feedback about his successful attempts to gain comfort and maintain a relationship with another person who is significant to himself (Damon, Lerner, & Eisenberg, 2006).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Bowlby initially considered that the attachment relationship which develops between the child and the mother is the affectional basis of later interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 2008). Subsequently, it surpasses the psychoanalytic influence and takes over a number of concepts in

biology. On one hand, attachment is an affective structure that develops to ensure child protection, and on the other hand attachment behavior is structured in the mother-infant relationship.

The subsequent analysis of these postulates has only validated the first one - attachment has a protective role. The second has turned out to be false because the infant feels protected by any other adult person who offers him love and stability.

As a result, Bowlby returned with three postulates justifying the universality of attachment feelings. The type of attachment of the child is dependent on the quality of the love he receives. The three basic postulates in the attachment theory are as follows:

- 1) If a person is confident that he is protected at all times (in the sense of the unconditional and constant existence of a protector in the immediate proximity), he will be less inclined to develop feelings of fear (in relations to others), will have more confidence to others and to oneself (Bowlby, 2010).
- 2) The development of trust builds up during childhood and adolescence and any expectation that develops in these years tends to persist relatively unchanged throughout their lives.
- 3) Adult attachment schemas are reflections of their own affective experiences from childhood (Bowlby, 2008).

Thus if the child does not feel secure about adult responses/reactions to the behaviors he develops during the first years of life, then he will structure an attachment type called anxious, which corresponds to a lack of trust (Cassidy, 1990; Wood et al., 2003).

It seems that if the child feels secure of adult responses/reactions to the behaviors he develops during the first years of life, then he will develop a structure, a type of secure attachment that corresponds to what Erickson calls trust (Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985).

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