SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION THEORY AND ATTACHMENT THEORY

Separation-individuation and attachment theories are compared and assessed in the context of psychoanalytic developmental theory and their application to clinical work. As introduced by Margaret Mahler and John Bowlby, respectively, both theories were initially regarded as diverging from traditional views. Separation-individuation theory, though it has had to be corrected in important respects, and attachment theory, despite certain limitations, have nonetheless enriched psychoanalytic thought. Without attachment an infant would die, and with severely insecure attachment is at greater risk for serious disorders. Development depends on continued attachment to a responsive and responsible caregiver. Continued attachment to the primary object was regarded by Mahler as intrinsic to the process of separation-individuation. Attachment theory does not account for the essential development of separateness, and separation-individuation is important for the promotion of autonomy, independence, and identity. Salient historical and theoretical issues are addressed, including the renewed interest in attachment theory and the related decline of interest in separation-individuation theory.

Margaret S. Mahler and John Bowlby both had personal motivations for their research into the relatively unexplored problems of separation and attachment. Both had experienced maternal insensitivity and rejection. While Mahler’s work was acceptable in most quarters and was frequently referred to in the psychoanalytic literature of her day, in some psychoanalytic institutes she was regarded as quite controversial. Some analysts were skeptical about the validity or value of her conceptualization of separation-individuation. Nevertheless, during Mahler’s lifetime separation-individuation theory gained a prominent.

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place in psychoanalytic teaching, research, and practice. Despite in-
nuendos that she was a dissident, Mahler remained loyal to classical
Freudian formulations and regarded her contributions not as a digression
from, but rather as an addition to, traditional theory. For Mahler, separa-
tion-individuation theory was complementary to libido theory, not a sub-
stitute for it (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975). Separation-individuation
was regarded by Mahler as entirely compatible with the prevailing ego
psychology paradigm. Her work was encouraged by burgeoning psycho-
analytic research in direct infant observation and by the contributions
of such analysts as René Spitz and Edith Jacobson.

By contrast, Bowlby dissented from Freud and Klein, even while
he sought the acceptance and approval of British psychoanalysts and
the integration of his theories into psychoanalytic thought. Bowlby’s
attachment propositions were independent of traditional biological
instinct theory, psychoanalytic instinctual drive theory, and nutritional
hunger. British analysts of every group were then united in their dis-
missive responses. His ideas were devalued, and prominent psycho-
analysts objected to his views (A. Freud 1960; Schur 1960). Though
Bowlby was trained as a Kleinian, his work took no account of the
inner world of fantasy. When the now famous film he made with
James Robertson was first shown, depicting on screen the distress
of a two-year-old in the hospital separated from her parents, Kleinians
in the audience gave an interpretation of the girl’s distress very differ-
ent from Bowlby’s. For many Kleinians, the girl’s anxiety was regarded
as due more to her unconscious destructive fantasies toward her pregnant
mother and sibling in utero than to the separation from her parents.
Robertson had trained at the Anna Freud Centre, and his collabora-
tion with Bowlby regrettably did not become a model for conjoint psycho-
analytic research by adherents of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein.

Bowlby had lost his warm nanny at eighteen months, his gov-
erness at age four, and was sent to boarding school at eleven, facts that
contributed to his later interest in problems of attachment, separation,
and loss. Servants and teachers may well have been more important
as primary caregivers than his physically and psychologically distant
mother or his busy surgeon father. The loss of a surrogate mother may
lead to low self-esteem, but also to guilt over loving her more than the
real mother. As a properly reared English child, he lived in children’s
quarters in the attic, separated from the rest of the house (van Dijken
1998). Parent loss during childhood can lead to developmental fixations
at the time of the loss and to relatively enduring character change. Bowlby was impressed with the effects of separation in children moved to the physical safety of the country during the London Blitz of World War II. Impressed also by ethology and primate research, he inferred the etiological importance of maternal separation and loss in his work, as did Aichhorn with delinquents. Supervised by Melanie Klein, Bowlby was distressed by what he regarded as her dismissal of the significance of maternal anxiety and depression. He observed that she attached little significance to the child's real relationship with the actual mother. Bowlby's interest in the child's real experience and behavior was reinforced by his reaction to what he considered Klein's almost exclusive interest in the child's inner fantasy life. In retrospect, his formulations appear compatible with the early psychoanalytic concept of ego instincts, and with the later ego psychological focus on adaptation to external reality.

Bowlby's work on separation and maternal deprivation (1988) inspired much further research, which would promote attachment theory despite its isolation from psychoanalytic thought. Whereas Mahler attempted to include the ideas of later oedipal conflict and the drives in her delineation of separation-individuation, Bowlby substituted his own theory of instincts—sucking, crying, clinging, and following—thereby departing from both classical psychoanalytic drive theory and biological instinct theory. He in large measure disregarded intra-psychic considerations, including fantasy, in favor of external tangible behavior and real experience (Brody 1981).

Bowlby's focus on separation problems also diverged from the traditional paradigms of the oedipus complex, which further alienated traditional analysts. Attachment was conceptualized as independent of hunger and the oral drive. The infant needed proximity to the mother for survival, and as a secure base for exploration of the external world. Bowlby and Mahler were both object relations theorists, without being recognized as such either by themselves or by many others.

Mahler's concept of separation-individuation had many sources, notably Jacobson's formulations of the self and object world (1964). Though Mahler was influenced by her work on the psychopathology of the "symbiotic psychoses" of children, her formal research centered on close observational studies of relatively normal mothers and infants. However, what is not generally known is the exacerbating influence of the separation conflicts of the Holocaust on her research. She revealed in a private talk with me that her mother had been murdered at
Auschwitz, an act she could neither forgive nor forget. Yet her mourning the loss of her murdered mother was painfully impeded. Feeling unloved by her mother, who had very much favored her younger sister, Mahler was thus highly ambivalent toward her own mother yet immensely curious concerning mothers and their infants more generally. Identified with both partners in the dyad, Mahler was angry and guilty toward the mother whose love she had continued to seek. When Helene Deutsch, Mahler’s analyst, seemed to favor another analysand, a girlfriend of Mahler’s, it repeated for her the rejection, rage, and frustrated love of her childhood. Mahler remained hypersensitive, with inner motives to surpass her mother and sister, and to justify her own survival with sublimated and superior mothering in her brilliant contributions.

Mahler evolved her own formulations of the process of separation-individuation, largely on the basis of the interplay of object relations and ego development. Each subphase bridges and overlaps with the succeeding phase. There was traditional attention to the drives, but an object relations focus was evident in the issues Mahler singled out as of particular developmental significance at each subphase. For example, it was the social smile, and not sucking, that ushered in the emergence of symbiosis after she had initially postulated (and later relinquished) an autistic phase in earliest infancy. Mahler’s ideas were influenced by the formulations of Spitz (1965) on the infant’s smile and maternal response. The “dialogue” of mother and infant he described was based on and contributed to the primary object relationship. Erikson’s concept of basic trust (1968) is also related to Mahlerian theory, as it is to attachment theory. Basic trust developed from the primary object relationship as a result of the experience of the caretaker person as a coherent being who recognizes and reciprocates the infant’s physical and emotional needs, and whose face is recognized. Basic trust requires maternal sensitivity and is clearly related to both secure attachment and the later achievement of self- and object constancy.

During symbiosis, affect mirroring was regarded as of critical importance, and an attuned parent would display empathic responses through eye contact, facial and vocal expression, touch, holding, movement, etc. The attuned mother or caregiver established and maintained an appropriate affectomotor dialogue with the infant. This amounts to a dyadic biofeedback model of affectomotor cognitive signals that contribute to the infant’s internalization of affect modulation and regulation. The social smile, dialogue, basic trust, mirroring, maternal hold-
ing, and containing, though not specifically related to the drives, were yet object-related experiences that received their place as primary agents in both attachment and separation-individuation. Minimally discussed by either Bowlby or Mahler, affects are now considered important in the internalization of self- and object representations, and as components of both those representations (Kernberg 1995; Blum 2000), and of interpersonal relationships.

Play also has a special role in human development and is evident in the cooing, gaze, gaze aversion, reciprocal smiling, and overall playful interactions that occur between the dyadic partners. A signal system develops. By four months of age the infant reacts to the still face of the caregiver and appeals to regain the caregiver's responsiveness (Tronick et al. 1978). This will later be superseded, though never entirely replaced by verbal language. Maternal empathy and attunement to an infant are important in infant development. In my opinion, maternal attunement is not simply a function of merging or primary identification; rather, it is achieved through regressive identification in the service of the infant, through archaic modes of communication and response, and through more objective assessment, usually unconscious, of the infant's state or the shared dyadic state. This is close to Stern's differentiation (1985) of state sharing and state complementing. Maternal attunement is also related to attachment and to the parental functions, which are evaluated in the Adult Attachment Interview. Maternal mirroring was emphasized by Winnicott (1965) and later by Kohut (1977) as occurring around the same time as the symbiotic developmental phase described by Mahler.

"The precursor of the mirror is the mother's face" (Winnicott 1965, p. 112), in which the baby sees him- or herself. The mother's smile and responsiveness reflects back to the infant his or her own aliveness and the mother's approving presence. A reflective mutuality is encouraged in the affectomotor dialogue, which facilitates both attachment and differentiation. Conversely, the frozen face and rigid holding of an inappropriate mother will adversely affect the infant, as both dyadic partners learn to read each other's cues, communications, and moods. Lacan (1953) anticipated the importance of the mirror image, but, unlike Winnicott and Mahler, stressed the mother-other as falsely reflective, implying an inevitable alienation from both self and other. Mahler related the child's external appearance and behavior to inner subjectivity, and to the development of psychic structure in relation to and identification with
the mother. Separation-individuation did not infer a true or false self or an unattached self, but rather an unlimited spectrum of self- and object representations and their interrelated affects.

Twenty-five years after publication of The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975), some of Mahler’s formulations require modification. Proposed changes involve the autistic and symbiotic phases and separation-individuation, with particular attention to differentiation and rapprochement. During Mahler’s lifetime she had relinquished the concept of an autistic phase based on primary narcissism and a stimulus barrier. The concept of symbiosis has become controversial, since the neonate appears to function as a separate organism. The neonate is in fact preadapted to differentiate self from non-self, and shows emergent functional capacities for perception, cognition, and affectomotor communication. I once suggested the concept of “stimulus filter” rather than stimulus barrier to Mahler, and she was aware of mutual cueing as early as two or three months. Since the developmental evidence (Stern 1985) does not confirm an undifferentiated phase, it follows that the infant is not “hatched” from a boundless symbiosis. Mahler postulated that during symbiosis the sensorium was inner-directed and that only gradually, with “hatching” at approximately five months, does the infant undergo a biogenetic evolution toward a permanently alert and externally oriented sensorium. Upon entering the phase of differentiation, the infant relinquishes its safe anchor in the symbiotic dual unity.

These propositions are not supported by developmental research on infant contingency and discrimination. A symbiotic phase is not the same as symbiotic moments (Pine 1986) or a later fantasy of symbiosis and should no longer be considered tenable. I do not regard the four-to-five-month-old as having a common boundary between two psychically fused individuals, but prefer Mahler’s “feeling of oneness.” Her concept of “dual unity,” with emphasis on the dyad or couple, is more in conformity with current evidence than is a notion of fused symbiosis. The infant is preadapted to differentiate itself from its caregiver before the emergence of representational thought and the concepts of self and object. Symbiotic psychosis did not prove an appropriate model for normal development. Further, the metaphor of “psychological birth” or “hatching” of the human infant can be misleading if taken to signify an event rather than a process. In fact, the differentiation of self from non-self proceeds throughout infancy. Neonatal dif-
differentiation precedes the emergence of intrapsychic self- and object representations, which occurs during the process of separation-individuation. The human infant is preadapted to enter a process of reciprocal communication, interaction, and regulation that begins with initial nurturing and proceeds to a dialogue replete with feedback loops. Spitz (1965) noted that this dialogue was absent in both primate-manikin and infant-mother interaction. Harlow's monkey experiments showed the importance of the overall tactile relationship as compared to oral gratification alone. Despite these findings, which require that we relinquish the idea of sequential autistic and symbiotic developmental phases, the existence of a subsequent process of separation-individuation is not invalidated.

The rapprochement "crisis" is another unfortunate term, because toddlers do not regularly demonstrate a crisis situation. While it may well be that such a crisis is likely to appear with insecurely attached toddlers, it is not a necessary precondition (Gergely 2000). Some toddlers show great equanimity, while others are embroiled in the escalating tensions of the "terrible twos." War between mother and toddler, toddler and world, may be transient or protracted, infrequent or common. A great many variables are involved, and the understanding, patience, and tolerance of the caregiver is crucial. The love object must survive the omnipotent aggressive infantile assaults (Winnicott 1965) and, as Mahler noted, retain her love for the toddler. To my mind, the "challenge" of rapprochement more aptly expresses the conflicts and problems to be negotiated and resolved at this stage than does the more narrowly applicable "crisis."

Various responses by the mother or primary caregiver complement the mutual cueing that evolves between the dyadic partners. In Mahler's formulation, the infant selectively responds to cues for which the mother has shown a preference. The negative or mirror image of this positive preferential response is the infant's need to invoke defense, creating a particular kind of insecure attachment matched to the mother's inappropriate or pathological relatedness to her infant. The normal infant's differentiation can be characterized as a "customs inspection" whereby the baby compares and checks features of the mother and not-mother experiences. By the time of self-object differentiation, the infant is also increasingly differentiating object from object (e.g., other members of the family from strangers). A variety of infant responses to strangers other than anxiety can be observed, including curiosity,
indifference, promiscuity, and wariness. The infant distinguishes between the mother and unfamiliar others, but the mother-infant relationship is influenced by the mother’s and the infant’s relations with other objects. The mother is a nonsymbiotic adult (normally) with her own personality, self-interest, and relationships. Her so-called primary maternal preoccupation is an idealization. Her relationship with her infant is not at all times primary and is certainly not symbiotic (except in instances of pathology). An overemphasis on the infant’s singular attachment to the mother has tended to obscure relationships with the father and siblings, and interest in significant others.

More than any other psychoanalytic theorist, Mahler recognized the importance of walking, of human locomotion, a maturational achievement that ushers in the practicing subphase of separation-individuation. If upright locomotion was crucially important in the evolution of homo sapiens, Mahler discerned that it is no less so in the development of the human infant. Beginning with the infant’s moving away through crawling, upright locomotion permits separation and an exploration of the surround, paving the way for intrapsychic separateness and, eventually, individuation, identity, and autonomy. During the practicing subphase, the child develops what has been called a love affair with the world. The infant walks and the world expands, with new levels of mutual regulation.

The mother begins to be intermittently relegated to the psychological and spatial periphery. The infant seems to enjoy adventurous exploration, provided that the mother is available in the background for “emotional refueling.” The infant’s pleasurable exploration and emotional refueling during the practicing subphase is similar to what Bowlby formulated as exploratory activity from the infant’s secure attachment. The mother tacitly takes pride in the child’s locomotive adventures and is able to supervise the infant without unnecessary interference or restriction. The infant can now understand and respond to simple commands. But the infant’s adventurous exploration can also be a source of conflict with the mother. The mother has to be able to let go while remaining available so that the child does not go too far too soon. The practicing infant with great pioneering spirit may find he or she is not yet ready for such independence. Play, optimal distance, expanding transitional space (Winnicott 1965), toys, and other possessions are significant developmental issues and investments in the practicing and rapprochement subphases. While Mahler and her associ-
ates have been criticized for overstating the significance of separation and separateness, Mahler’s research and formulations always assumed the mother-infant relationship, the dyad. The emergence of separateness was seen to occur in parallel with new levels of reciprocity and mutuality. The pointing of the practicing subphase infant was presented as an advanced nonverbal communication presupposing shared attention and interest. But mutuality is not possible without recognition of the mother as a separate person, a distinct personality with a mind of her own, a recognition made possible by the achievement of mentalization in the rapprochement subphase. Its achievement requires a mother who regards and responds to her infant as a sentient being who wants to communicate, understand, and be understood (Fonagy 2000). The mutuality experienced with the mother extends gradually to mutuality with the other, and is a bridge to the more complex relations, affects, and regulatory systems of childhood.

The subphase of rapprochement is of great theoretical and clinical importance. This period in the second year, from approximately fifteen to twenty-four months, is associated with cognitive and affective development sufficient for the formation of persisting fantasy and basic language skills. The latter will not develop without a communicating, comprehending, and caring primary object; indeed, the infant learns the “mother tongue.” Language permits the achievement of higher levels of communication regarding objects, events, and possibilities beyond the field of vision. Language and symbolic thought free the toddler from the immediate present, and permit trial action, judgment, and higher levels of learning, information processing, communication, and affect regulation. Affects are modulated and transformed in language, and parent and toddler can better convey how each makes the other feel. Between the ages of one and two years, the infant’s vocabulary has grown from some two words to two hundred fifty. The babbling of the first year is replaced by single words, then two-word phrases, and, in the second half of the second year, by phrases and primitive sentences. The toddler can play with variations of subject, object, and predicate while testing the effect on the listening caregiver, who can reciprocally feed back more complex cognitive and affective messages to the toddler. The achievement of language, so quintessentially important for what makes us human and thus for higher levels of personality development, was scarcely noted by Mahler and her associates. In my opinion, the rapprochement subphase cannot be
understood without taking into account the parallel evolution of linguistic communication (Blum 2003). Language in its various forms (including sign language) facilitates ego development and object relations; without some form of language, serious developmental and social problems must ensue. Language and associated symbolic processes are necessary to the persistence of intrapsychic conflict and fantasy, as well as to the solution of internal and external conflict. Language also brings the potential for new forms of confusion, misunderstanding, and mixed messages. The parent may at times assume the toddler can communicate or understand beyond his or her actual capacity.

Mahler and her associates observed in the rapprochement sub-phase the child’s tendency to shadow the mother and dart away from her, as well as a vehement defense of personal attitudes toward feeding, clothing, and toys. Bergman (1999) has vividly described the toddler’s “ours, yours, and mine,” with the underlying developmental challenges and intrapsychic conflicts associated with this new level of I and You, and I versus You. Mahler drew extraordinary inferences from this phase regarding the toddler’s negativism and fear of passive surrender, the depressed basic mood, and the toddler’s tendency to cling to and coerce the mother. The toddler attempts to treat the mother as a narcissistic extension of self. Appeal and coercion alternate and are coupled with wishes to give and share pleasure with the mother. Despite the ambivalence, the toddler wants to do things that make the mother happy or at least do not displease her. Higher levels of empathy are observed as the child identifies with the mother’s caregiving and regulating activities. This is seen in behavior with the mother or mother substitute, as well as in the pretend play of this period. The toddler has become aware of separateness and helplessness as his or her sense of reality and capacity for reality testing have increased, and infantile omnipotence has been deflated. Whereas Bowlby delineated the impact of actual separation from the mother, Mahler conceptualized separateness in the presence of the mother, and later object constancy in her absence.

The toddler wishes to regain the relatively symbiotic form of intimacy previously enjoyed with the mother, but fears the personal loss of identity and independence that would ensue with such reengulfment. This is the intrapsychic conflict behind the toddler’s behavioral ambivalence. The mother’s affectionate presence, her empathic yet supervisory availability in the throes of this ambivalent struggle of dis-
tance and closeness, is crucial to the resolution of what Mahler termed the rapprochement crisis. I and you, me and mine, you and yours, become important linguistic symbols that denote separation and individuation in external language, but also in terms of cohesive self- and object representations. The road to object constancy is paved with language, which facilitates the integration of disparate thoughts and feelings, and separateness with contact maintained through symbolic communication. What is shared between mother and child as “ours” recedes when the child has to struggle vigorously with feeling alone, or with wishes for reunion, or when feeling engulfed and having to defend hard-won independence and autonomy. Given the ambivalence characteristic of rapprochement, the toddler in crisis may split the representational world into an all-good and an all-bad object. As the toddler moves on the road toward object constancy, affectionate and persecutory object representations are integrated into a constant object representation with a predominately affectionate tone.

During rapprochement, the waning of infantile omnipotence is compensated by selective identifications with the competent, tolerant, affectionate mother. Selective identifications replace more grossly imitative ones. Such selective identifications are essential to resolution of the ambivalence so prominent in rapprochement conflicts. The rapprochement toddler may become a coercive tyrant, engaging in power struggles in defense of autonomy and identity even as the realization dawns of how little power he or she truly has. The toddler can identify with parental authority and regulation and come to a fuller understanding of the separate experience of self and mother (Blum and Blum 1990); can become both the comforter and the crying child in distress; can further empathize by transiently sharing the other’s experience, becoming more aware of the caregiver’s separate mind and the other’s interests and intentions. The capacity for reflection about the other’s mind, or mentalization, requires a mother or caregiver who can coherently reflect about her infant, fostering meaningful communication between them (Fonagy 2000). The other’s distress begins to be complemented by an empathic capacity for concern that is related to maternal empathy. The mother’s positive internal representation of her child and her attunement to her child’s developmental challenges promote her child’s higher levels of empathy.

The path to object constancy is the final subphase of separation-individuation. It is dependent on the internalization and integration
of maternal functions, a process potentiated by the child's increasing facility with language. The achievement of object constancy (and self-constancy) is a major developmental milestone. The toddler now has the intrapsychic resources of internalized maternal benevolence and regulatory functions. Separations are far more readily tolerated, and the relationship with the crucial maternal object is not severed or disinvested because of separation, frustration, or disappointment. This object constancy, I believe, is the psychological foundation for marital fidelity, in which love is to be maintained in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer—in short, through all sorts of circumstances. The failure to develop object constancy, or its regressive loss, is associated with the serious psychopathology found in addiction, polymorphous perversion, borderline and narcissistic personality disorders, paranoia, and so on. Awareness of the other's mind was referred to also by Mahler, who noted that the child becomes aware during the rapprochement subphase of the mother's having her own independent interests and initiatives.

The concept of object constancy and Mahler's general formulation of the process of separation-individuation are not diminished by the importance more recently accorded attachment theory. This attention to attachment is essentially balanced by Mahler's emphasis on autonomy and individuation. Secure attachment in later life and object constancy are the two sides of a complementary development. Object constancy indeed permits separateness, autonomy, and independence. Along with self-constancy, it allows for individuation and the uniqueness of personal identity. Attachment alone, without separateness and the formation of self-and object representations, if at all conceivable would lead to developmental arrest. Attachment is necessary but not sufficient for the achievement of individuation and identity. Distortions of ego development or object relations may occur with disturbances of either attachment or separation-individuation. A disturbance of primary attachment may lead to lifelong insecurity and deviant object relations, but similar psychopathology can be found with disturbed separation-individuation. While it appears that the secure child learns that it has a mind of its own through the communications of the primary attachment figure, holding the other in mind requires a reciprocal object relationship. During the process of separation-individuation, selective cueing and identification promote the child's adaptation to the mother's preferences. This would seem analogous to the infant's developing an attachment pattern, which, even if distorted and insecure, is a pattern adapted to the primary attachment figure.
The evaluation of attachment relies much less on clinical inference than on directly observable behavior. Attachment refers to the affective bond between infant and caregiver. Its evaluation is based on a behavioral system regarded as universal, yet allowing for highly significant individual differences along a continuum from secure to insecure attachment. Aspects of attachment behavior have been studied with mother and infant together, separated, and reunited. Paradoxically, a "fussy" or disorganized infant may elicit caregiver hostility and rejection. Contributing to the renewed interest in attachment theory is the reliability, replicability, and predictive value of its findings.

A standard experimental situation has been established for both the Strange Situation procedure (Ainsworth et al. 1972) and for the Adult Attachment Interview (Main 2000). Because both the infant in the strange situation and the mother in the attachment interview can be rated by several observers, the results can be "objectively" validated. This scientific appearance has given attachment theory its popular appeal.

Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues described attachment patterns in infants that proved remarkably stable, enduring, and predictive of later psychopathology. Childless but child-centered, like Margaret Mahler and Anna Freud, Ainsworth was able to do this by creating a twenty-one-minute standardized procedure, the Strange Situation, that brilliantly categorized normal and deviant attachment. Going beyond previous studies of separation reactions, Ainsworth designed innovative studies of one-year-old infants reuniting with their mothers after a brief separation. Instead of the pleasure of reunion anticipated and found in normal infants, unfavorable reunion responses were observed in a minority of infants. These infants had not suffered abandonment by their mothers—had not even experienced a protracted separation—a finding that took attachment theory far beyond Bowlby's original studies of separation trauma. Ainsworth's method has become an internationally recognized standardized procedure for evaluating the infant-mother relationship in terms of attachment. The original study identified two distinct attachment patterns, secure and anxious/insecure, the latter further classified as avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized. Distress was inferred from the overall infant-mother relationship rather than from a specific traumatic experience. Bowlby had noted that readjustment after permanent object loss was related to the quality of earlier attachments. Extremely insecure attachment has since been correlated with developmental disorder, borderline personality,
impaired object relations, and chronic depression with suicidal tendencies. The insecure avoidant infant may be predisposed to narcissistic personality disorder as an adult. Secure attachment is associated with resilience and mastery of later trauma, with a greater capacity to persevere and compensate for loss. Extending Bowlby’s ideas and approaching those of Mahler, Ainsworth noted the significance of the infant’s attachment-exploration balance. It is difficult, she found, for some infants to form secure attachments to more than one caregiver; for others, there may be a hierarchy of attachment figures.

Mary Main, who studied with Ainsworth, went on to develop the Adult Attachment Interview. She discovered that adults’ attachment styles are highly predictive of their infants’ attachment styles. This remarkable finding has been cross-culturally validated, predictions proving accurate even when made before the birth of a first child. The adult attachment styles were classified as secure, dismissive, preoccupied, and unresolved. These styles could be identified according to the coherence and consistency of the parents’ narratives about their own parents and childhoods, traumatic or not. The work of Main and her colleagues has extended the reach of attachment theory and suggested the importance of the mother’s ego strengths for her infant’s development. Perhaps other measures of the mother’s stability, consistency, empathy, and capacity to cohesively reflect about her child and her own childhood would yield comparable findings.

But attachment theory, despite its developmental foundation and great applicability to clinical classification and prediction, has its limitations. It is devoid of reference to the mother’s unconscious conflicts and fantasies (Brody 1981). Thus, the infant’s interpersonal behavior in the Strange Situation does not tap into intrapsychic processes, except quite indirectly. Attachment theory is limited to studies of separation, and does not consider numerous other aspects of the infant’s relationships that may be predictive of adult development: mother-infant feeding, play, affect exchange in gaze and facial expression, frequency and duration of crying, maternal response to crying, etc. A mother’s description of an ideal infant compared to her description of her own infant also has powerful predictive implications. Broussard (1970) asked mothers to classify their one-month-old infants as better than average or not better than average. Infants whose mothers rated them worse than average showed three times as many psychological problems at age four and this increased level of disturbance was still evident
at age ten. This suggests not so much a mother's capacity to accurately predict her child's development as that a mother's unconscious fantasy can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another limitation of attachment theory is that it does not take developmental overdetermination into account. A mother changes with different developmental phases, and so does her baby. Moreover, the influence of other objects, such as fathers, grandparents, and siblings, must be considered. How can marked differences between siblings in ego development and object relations be explained if attachment can be reliably predicted by the mother's Adult Attachment Interview even before they are born? In addition to a mother's being more or less adequate at different phases of development, maternal functions are subject to progression and regression. The security of the mother will be influenced by her relationship with the child's father, and by the state of her marriage and home. Such stresses as a multiple birth, having many children, being impoverished or physically impaired, or being a single parent or a teenage mother will impinge on the quality of attachment. For many people, parenthood has a developmental potential, with adult achievement stemming from the working through of repressed conflicts of their own childhood. Motherhood also has its regressive dimension, with the revival of infantile conflicts, particularly concerning nurturance and dependency. These conflicts are often at the psychological core of postpartum anxiety and depression. A mother's postpartum depression may be limited to one particular baby and time of her life. The depressed mother is fearful of her own destructiveness, and of the revival of her own relationship with her mother, father, or siblings in the relationship with her child. An infant may be unconsciously regarded as a threat if it is of a specific gender or ordinal position. A child may become parentified in a reversal of roles. A pseudo-precocious child may try to enliven a depressed mother through affectionate interplay. Such a mother may reject the child or cling to it in order to comfort herself. These variations are not reflected in attachment theory. Under favorable circumstances, new mothers and fathers identify as parents with their own parents, and with ideal parent figures in the culture.

With regard to culture, Ainsworth's initial research (1967) was conducted with infants in a natural setting in rural Uganda, and has been replicated in widely different sociocultural settings. However, culture can influence the quality of attachment. For example, emotionally impoverished or violent subcultures have their own impact on
children's later patterns of attachment. The original attachment pattern may be altered by a major and protracted environmental change; attachment patterns are not necessarily fixed or rigidly determined.

Attachment theory also does not account for competition, and confusion among caregivers may occur between mother and grandmother, or mother and nanny. The child's caregivers may have different parenting styles, different cultural attitudes about child rearing, and even different primary languages. This kind of problem may be seen in Freud's patient, the Wolf-Man, whose nursemaid, mother, and bipolar father were Russian, but whose governess was English. These experiences may have contributed to the Wolf-Man's psychopathology. Similar problems may arise in present daycare arrangements, in which the young child is separated from the parents during working hours and exposed to surrogate parenting and a peer group other than siblings. (For the adaptive and creative child this may be a stimulus to new integration, learning, and the development of social skills.)

Nor does attachment theory encompass the myriad constitutional and maturational factors that influence the developing personality. For example, an infant's temperament or activity type may deeply influence a particular mother who might be better prepared to deal with, say, a very passive than a very active infant. How is the prenatal prediction of the child's quality of attachment based on the mother's Adult Attachment Interview to be reconciled with the postnatal influence of such constitutional and experiential factors on the mother-infant relationship?

Overall, it would seem that attachment theory, though it illuminates the infant's relationship with the primary attachment figure, insufficiently addresses issues of overdetermination, developmental change, and complexity. Attachment theory seems closely related to object relations theory, which stresses the internalization of object relations, especially of the mother-infant relationship. Internalized self- and object representations and their affective interrelationships are influenced by innate ego functions, as well as by drives, defenses, affect regulation, identifications, and life experience.

There is a reciprocal relation between ego development and object relations, but neither the actual mother nor the internalized mother can entirely explain developmental complexity. Attachment theory has evolved beyond its early focus on behavioral patterns to issues of psychic representation. The infant forms an internal working model of the relationship with the primary attachment figure, but such a model cannot
encompass the vicissitudes of unconscious conflict, fantasy, and experience. Attachment theory is inconsistent with psychoanalytic developmental theory in proposing that presymbolic internal working models of the infant’s expectations can be generalized and extrapolated to later developmental phases, with no consideration of developmental transformations. Nor do these attachment models account for primary process features in unconscious transference fantasy and symptom formation.

Both attachment theory and separation-individuation theory include the real mother and infant, as well as the concepts of internalization and internal representation. Separation-individuation theory, in particular, correlates analytically informed observation with intrapsychic developmental transformations. The intrapsychic changes can include a shift in ego boundaries, the differentiation of self- and object representations, the cohesion or splitting of these representations, and the achievement of self- and object constancy. Both dyadic partners have to be considered, starting with their observed interactions, so graphically demonstrated in studies of normal and deviant attachment and separation-individuation. Neither body of theory addresses infant development in relation to objects other than the primary caregiver. The impact of the mother’s unconscious fantasies on the infant, as well as the infant’s influence on the mother during different developmental phases, must also be considered. The twin processes of attachment and separation-individuation may also be studied in twins. The attachment of twins to each other, as well as to their parents, and the relationship of both caregivers to each twin are reciprocal influences. In summary, attachment theory and separation-individuation theory are in some respects complementary, but they are also quite different frames of reference. Attachment theory disregards the dynamic unconscious, while separation-individuation theory was developed within psychoanalytic structural theory. The infant’s continuing attachment to the mother during separation-individuation was assumed essential to the mastery of separation anxiety, and to the attainment of separateness. Separateness is a necessary complement to attachment. The concept of separation-individuation, though currently marginalized by attachment and other object relations theories, remains an important contribution to our map of the preoedipal period. Attachment theory and separation-individuation theory need to be further compared and contrasted, in the context of psychoanalytic developmental theory and its clinical applications.
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