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ATTACHMENT IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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CHAPTER 1

Ontogeny of Attachment
in Middle Childhood*Conceptualization of Normative Changes*

OFRA MAYSELESS

Until quite recently middle childhood has been a relatively neglected period in attachment research. For example, though infancy, the preschool years, adolescence, and adulthood are all largely covered by several chapters in the recent *Handbook of Attachment* (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999), this handbook does not include any chapter that specifically refers to middle childhood. Even Marvin and Britner (1999), in their elaboration on the ontogeny of attachment theory, devote most of the chapter to infancy and the preschool years and only two pages to changes in attachment behavior beyond the preschool years. As Waters and Cummings (2000) have pointed out, this lacuna may be related to Bowlby's focus on the four developmental phases of the attachment behavioral system, which end at the goal-corrected partnership phase at age 3 or 4. Bowlby (1977, 1988) suggested that at this age the intensity of attachment behavior is much reduced, but he did not specify what happens next and only briefly elaborated on the changes expected during adolescence and young adulthood. In the words of Waters and Cummings (2000, p. 166):

Traditionally, attachment theory has been a theory of infancy and of adult relationships, with a great deal of what lies in between left to the imagination. Completing this picture is essential to understanding the effects of early experience, the mechanisms underlying stability and change, and the relevance of ordinary socialization processes in attachment development.

Nevertheless, in recent years quite a large number of researchers (as evident in this volume) have become interested in the interplay of attachment in middle childhood and have examined, in particular, the sequelae of attachment security and insecurity in middle childhood. Most of these stimulating approaches have looked at individual differences in middle childhood and examined their longitudinal stability or various outcomes associated with them. In this chapter I pursue a different direction. In following some of the ideas set forth by Bowlby regarding the ontogeny of the attachment behavioral system and suggestions and insights by others (Crittenden, 1992; Main, 1990, 1991; Marvin & Britner, 1999; Thompson & Raikes, 2003; Waters & Cummings, 2000), I draw attention to several ontogenetic processes that might be expected to occur in middle childhood. The following analysis is not intended as a conservative approach to theory building but as a somewhat exploratory and hopefully challenging proposal that includes various suggestions for empirical testing.

In doing so I rely on close reading of Bowlby's original works and on conceptualizations offered by Ainsworth (e.g., 1989, 1991) and others (e.g., Cassidy, 1999; Kobak, 1999; Thompson & Raikes, 2003; Waters & Cummings, 2000). In line with these conceptualizations, the attachment behavioral system is seen as a "safety regulating system." Namely, its main function is conceptualized as promoting safety, both physically and psychologically, in the context of close relationships (Crittenden, 2000). In general, two major classes of events will activate it: the presence of potential danger or stress (internal or external) and threat to the accessibility and/or availability of the attachment figure. Termination of its activity will result when the situation is experienced as resulting in feeling comforted (not stressed) and secure by the actions or the presence of an attachment figure. These are considered the set goals of the system.

In this sense affect regulation of felt security may be described as a set goal. However, this similarity is based on the assumption of close correspondence between actual protection and safety and felt security. If a mismatch occurs, the person may be at evolutionary risk to be injured or to lose his or her life. Furthermore, as outlined by Kobak (1999) and by Waters and Cummings (2000), because people may derive a sense of security from various sources (e.g., good health, religious values) the set goal of the attachment behavioral system cannot be conceived as felt security

in general but should probably be conceived as *felt security in the context of availability of protection in a relationship*. Thus, when the fear system becomes activated in times of perceived threat or danger, gaining access to others may be conceived as the set goal of attachment (the safe-haven function). In addition, attachment processes may be manifested when individuals are faced with challenges that only moderately activate their fear system. In such situations children and adults would use their relationships with other people who provide them with a sense of availability of support and protection as a secure base from which to explore the environment.

The operation of these attachment processes (the safe-haven and the secure-base functions) should not be equated with the existence of an attachment *relationship*. Safe-haven and secure-base behavior may be manifested even within relationships that do not qualify as attachment bonds (i.e., they are not enduring emotional ties). For example, children may feel safer and better able to explore the academic and social challenges at school because their favorite teacher or friend is there, even though these people do not serve as their attachment figures. Finally, in line with the depiction of these motivational processes as based on a behavioral system (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), the specific actions utilized to achieve the set goals are not central, and they may vary considerably depending on age, experience, culture, context, and so forth.

According to Bowlby (1969/1982), the ontogeny of instinctive behavior follows three major principles: (1) restriction of range of effective stimuli (e.g., turning to mother for comfort rather than to every adult); (2) elaboration of primitive behavioral systems and their supersession by sophisticated systems; and (3) integration of behavioral systems into functional wholes. Bowlby articulated four stages in the progression of attachment relationships whereby these principles are revealed. For example, the last phase, *formation of goal-corrected partnership*, which characterizes children mostly around the age of 3, involves the child's capacity to conceive of the attachment figure as having her own goals and interests and to take them into account (Bowlby, 1969/1982), thus demonstrating a high level of sophistication and integration. Though Bowlby himself did not suggest specific further developmental phases, several researchers discussed some of the subsequent characteristic changes in attachment organization. For example, Waters and Cummings (2000, p. 166) suggested that middle childhood is marked by "formulating and consolidating representations of secure-base experience, expectations, and skills." Similarly, Marvin and Britner (1999, p. 62) suggested that attachment at that age becomes "more sophisticated, more abstract, and less dependent on proximity and contact." In the following analysis, five different developmental

processes are noted and discussed in an attempt to articulate some of the expected normative, ontogenetic changes of the attachment behavioral system in middle childhood.

THE ATTACHMENT BEHAVIORAL SYSTEM BECOMES MORE SOPHISTICATED AND GOVERNED BY COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE INTERNALIZATIONS

Although goal-corrected partnership that includes the capacity to take into account the partners' plans and preferences evolves in the preschool years, the limited cognitive capacity at that age precludes the child from forming elaborate and sophisticated plans or symbolic internalizations. However, in middle childhood children evince growing ability (1) to reason in terms of abstract representations of objects and events, (2) to employ planned behavior that includes "adopting goals for their activities, subordinating knowledge and actions in the service of a superordinate plan, and monitoring one's activities and mental processes" (Collins, Madsen, & Susman-Stillman, 2002, p. 75), and (3) to acquire new information and use it in reasoning and problem solving. These capacities are employed also in the service of attachment processes. Thus children in middle childhood are better able than younger ones to understand their own point of view, as well as that of their caregiver; are better able to regulate their emotions and communicate about them; are more sophisticated in the plans they employ; and can better articulate and organize these plans (Thompson & Raikes, 2003). Consequently, their behavioral systems operate more smoothly as goal-corrected systems and become highly regulated by cognitive-affective internalizations, conscious as well as unconscious. Specifically, behavior becomes organized in terms of set goals and plans and includes subordinate plans and alternative ways to achieve a desired set goal, including the capacity to change the set goal. The child develops elaborate plan hierarchies and becomes increasingly aware of the set goals he or she has adopted.

This capacity for top-down processing is manifested in a more proactive approach in the child's negotiations with the caregiver and in a better capability to mesh his or her plans with those of the caregiver. These plans and the cognitive-affective internalizations are also more elaborate and flexible. Children in middle childhood find it easier to change their plans when required and are better able to implement different behaviors with different people in different circumstances, depending among other things on contextual expectations (i.e., crying or misbehaving at home but not in school). Part of this sophistication is also apparent in the verbal fluency with which children in middle childhood are able to

articulate their wishes and plans regarding themselves and their attachment figures. Finally, as part of this process of sophistication in middle childhood, semantic memory becomes more multifaceted and differentiated from episodic and procedural memory. It is therefore also more susceptible to defensive manipulation.

One of the consequences of this new elaborate level of organization and operation is that individual differences in attachment security or insecurity may be construed, even more than in earlier periods, as differences in strategies whose goal is the attainment of protection from another person (e.g., Crittenden, 1992; Waters & Cummings, 2000). This position is similar to yet distinct from the statement that individual differences reflect strategies of affect regulation (e.g., Cassidy, 1994). Affect regulation (e.g., minimizing affective display) is only one of the actions that could be employed in the service of each strategy. These strategies could include different classes of behaviors, such as physical distancing, reasoning, not communicating, crying, withdrawing, clinging, and so forth. In terms of individual differences, it is not the specific behaviors that matter but which strategy they serve: The same behavior may serve different strategies. For example, withdrawal may serve a distancing strategy whose main purpose is an effort not to overtax an attachment figure with demands that she may not be able to meet in an attempt to preserve her limited protection instead of alienating her completely. Alternatively, withdrawal may serve as an elicitor of pursuit by the attachment figure. In this case it serves a coercive strategy in which different actions are employed to coerce an unresponsive attachment figure to remain available (Crittenden, 1992, 2000). Though such elaborate strategies are already displayed in the preschool years, they become more organized, sophisticated, and smoothly activated in middle childhood. Thus, when examining individual differences in middle childhood, the meaning of behavior and the purpose it serves should be the main focus rather than the overt action itself (e.g., Granot & Maysseless, 2001).

THE ATTACHMENT BEHAVIORAL SYSTEM BECOMES MORE INTEGRATED AND GENERALIZED

One of the most intriguing processes in the ontogeny of attachment is the process of integration. As the child matures, attachment behaviors become integrated first into a strategy that encompasses various moments and experiences with one caregiver. Later attachment behaviors also become integrated into a general strategy that reflects contributions from relationships with various figures. In adolescence and adulthood, most assessment methods of individual differences identify one major attach-

ment style, pattern, or state of mind (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999). Thompson and Raikes (2003) discuss this presumed process and point out that as children mature attachment security or insecurity becomes increasingly an attribute of the person rather than of a specific relationship. However, they also point out that this effect may be also related to the specific measures employed in adolescence and adulthood to examine individual differences in attachment strategies or organization (i.e., the Adult Attachment Interview [AAI] and the attachment style questionnaires). Indeed, it was demonstrated (Mayseless, Sharabany, & Sagi, 1997; Ross & Spinner, 2001; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997) that when researchers employ measures that do not require the respondent to choose one overarching attachment style, a diversity of styles with different figures can be identified. Nevertheless, a large body of research in adulthood has demonstrated that a person's generalized attachment style is associated in predictable ways with a host of relevant outcomes assessed using self-reports, reports by others, observations, and even physiological indicators (see a recent review by Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Thus clearly some form of integration and generalization across different attachment relationships occurs (Bretherton & Mumholland, 1999).

As discussed in detail by Thompson and Raikes (2003) and by Kobak, Rosenthal, and Serwik (Chapter 4, this volume), several important questions remain unanswered. For example, how does this integration take place? What determines the relative importance of the different relationships? Do relationships with one dominant figure become the prototype, or is there a tendency to prefer secure relationships? Is there a weighing of input by each relationship depending on its significance? Are generalized models later organized in some sort of hierarchy, as suggested by Collins and Read (1994), in which there is an overarching style but also different modules depending on the type of the relationship (with parents, friends, romantic partners)? Are these modules activated as a function of key triggers depending on the context or the personality of the other person? When does this integration happen?

Preliminary findings (Kerns, Schlegelmilch, Morgan, & Abraham, Chapter 3, this volume) suggest that middle childhood may be the period in which such a process begins. However, very little is currently known about it. Thus middle childhood may be an especially fertile period in which to examine this process, preferably with the employment of a longitudinal design and assessments of attachment relationships with different figures at each point in time, along with concurrent observations of the relationships with these figures. (See Kobak, Rosenthal, & Serwik, Chapter 4, and Steele and Steele, Chapter 7, in this volume.) The significance of this process is discussed later.

THE ATTACHMENT BEHAVIORAL SYSTEM BECOMES MORE DIFFERENTIATED AND DIVERSIFIED

Several researchers noted that during middle childhood several processes of differentiation and diversification can be identified. First, as noted by Ainsworth (1989, 1991), Weiss (1982, 1991) and others (e.g., Cassidy, 1999; Collins et al., 2002) children at that age form close affectional bonds with several additional figures besides their primary caregivers. These may include other adults, such as teachers, coaches, or members of the extended family, as well as peers and siblings. One of the intriguing lines of research facing attachment researchers is related to the questions: Are these other people attachment figures? Are these relationships attachment relationships? Can we apply attachment notions to relationships that only partially fulfill these functions? Several researchers—in particular Weiss (1991) and Ainsworth (1989, 1991; see also Cassidy, 1999)—suggested definitions of an attachment relationship as contrasted with the larger category of affectional bonds. Attachment relationships are viewed as involving a relatively long-enduring tie, in which the partner is not interchangeable with another person and in which there is a desire to maintain closeness and to reestablish proximity if it is threatened, thus regulating a sense of security. This is a relationship in which inexplicable separation tends to cause distress and permanent loss causes grief. In particular, the safe-haven and the secure-base functions are conceived as the hallmark of attachment relationships (e.g., Waters & Cummings, 2000).

In some of the relationships formed in middle childhood with other people besides the primary caregivers, attachment-related dynamics might be apparent. For example, children may derive a sense of security from being in proximity to these people (secure-base function) and may turn to them for comfort and reassurance (safe-haven function) when distressed or alarmed. For example, children in middle childhood may feel more secure and bold in their exploration if a close friend or a favorite teacher is nearby (the secure-base function). Similarly they may choose to confide in their friends regarding various upsetting situations and derive comfort and a sense of security from the friend's support (the safe-haven function). They may even become distressed if a threat of separation is perceived and protest if they become separated, for example, when a close friend moves to a different city. Though in most of these relationships only some of these elements are apparent, and though they may not be construed as attachment relationships, they are clearly relationships in which *attachment-related dynamics* operate.

In fact, as suggested by Bowlby (1969/1982) and discussed by others (e.g., Ainsworth, 1991; Waters & Cummings, 2000), even social groups

may become sources of security and protection, and some attachment-related dynamics may apply even to them (see also Smith, Murphy, & Coats, 1999). In the words of Bowlby (1969/1982, p. 207):

During adolescence and adult life a measure of attachment behavior is commonly directed not only towards persons outside the family but also towards groups and institutions other than the family. A school or college, a work group, a religious group or a political group can come to constitute for many people a subordinate attachment-“figure,” and for some people a principal attachment-“figure.”

Thus attachment-related processes seem to become applied and to generalize to other relationships besides those with the primary caregivers. Several important questions are related to these processes. For example, how do these relationships interact with each other? Which relationship will become a full-blown attachment relationship and which will not, and why? When do these relationships become attachment relationships? What is the impact of the relationships that do not become full-blown attachment relationships but that still provide some attachment-related functions? Are attachment figures just added, or do they replace parents in that capacity? Or do they only exchange places in a hierarchy? Because middle childhood marks the first period in which children highly invest in other relationships besides those with their primary caregivers, these questions become salient at this period. Consequently, the investigation of these relationships could shed light on these highly important normative developmental processes.

In general it seems that this process of forming affectional bonds with several additional figures takes the form of diversification: namely, a child may rely on one of the figures (e.g., a friend) to help her with one type of distress (e.g., a problem at school) and yet rely on another figure (e.g., an older sibling) for a different type of distress (e.g., problems with her dad). Whereas in infancy and probably also in the preschool years children tend to turn to one dominant figure in most of the conditions that activate the attachment behavioral system (termed “monotropy” by Bowlby), in middle childhood we may witness a diversification of “investment” in that different eliciting or activating conditions may lead the child to look for reassurance and help from different figures. Thus diversification is observed (1) with regard to the existence of a diverse group of individuals who serve attachment-related functions and (2) the tendency to regulate the request for protection and support depending on a diverse set of conditions that differentially affect who will be called. The sophistication of the cognitive-affective internalizations of middle childhood may aid in this process.

A third way in which diversification in the attachment behavioral system might be manifested involves changes in the range of possible attachment strategies. In infancy and the preschool years, four major attachment patterns have been identified. Though subtypes exist, very few researchers have ever employed this subclassification for research purposes, and in most cases researchers would collapse the subtypes into one major category. However, as noted by Crittenden (1992, 2000), close observations of preschool children, especially in non-normative samples, can expose a larger pool of individual differences. In addition, the identification of the disorganized group and the observation that these children exhibit two very different patterns as 4- and 6-year-olds (Cicchetti, Cummings, Greenberg, & Marvin, 1990; Lyons-Ruth, Bronfman, & Atwood, 1999) opened the way to the consideration of more alternatives to the usual three- or four-style classification system identified in infancy (for an observation of the sequelae of disorganization in middle childhood, see Moss, St-Laurent, Dubois-Comtois, & Cyr, Chapter 9, this volume). Similarly, in adulthood, researchers have noted the richness and diversity of styles identified in the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), in particular with less normative samples (e.g., Turton, McGauley, Marin, & Hughes, 2001).

As underscored by Thompson and Raikes (2003), we might expect developmental changes in middle childhood to be manifested in a “broadening array of behavioral strategies reflecting more differentiated variations in security and insecurity.” Taking this suggestion seriously, attachment researchers in middle childhood may need to retain open minds in terms of identification of patterns and strategies during this period and to try to refrain from imposing the three- or four-pattern format on their observations. In fact, given the expanded experience of middle childhood, the larger array of figures with whom attachment-related dynamics are activated, and the growing cognitive capacities, it might be quite naive to assume that the same three- or four-style categorization that was identified in infancy will be documented. One of the realms in which diversification in terms of strategies may occur is related to gender differences.

Although in infancy no gender differences were found in the Strange Situation classifications, several reports regarding attachment security and, in particular, patterns of insecurity in middle childhood and adolescence underscore that beginning in middle childhood we might witness some gender differences. For example, girls were found to be more secure than boys, and boys tended to show higher avoidance than girls (Granot & Maysless, 2001; Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier, & Contreras, 2000). Not surprisingly, these differences start emerging following the internalization of stable gender identity and the enhanced operation of gender role socialization by the end of the preschool years. Do these differences reflect cul-

tural norms or "true" differences? For example, are girls "really" more secure and boys "really" more avoidant? Or are these differences reflective of a behavioral style and not internal dynamics and attachment strategy? Do these differences reflect different cultural expectations for boys and girls? Or are these differences an issue of different ontogenetic normative routes for boys and girls? I believe that these questions need to be examined carefully with an open eye to the possibility of "real" gender differences. Currently, in following infancy research and the results of the Strange Situation procedure as a gold standard, researchers who find gender differences tend to minimize this finding or to refer to it as a possible caveat in their research. A careful delineation of normative changes in activating and terminating conditions in middle childhood, keeping an open mind to the possibility of observing deviations from expectations that are based on infancy research or cultural biases, is needed.

The idea that the attachment behavioral system becomes more differentiated over time looks, at first glance, contrary to the claim discussed previously that it becomes more integrated. On the one hand, middle childhood is seen as involving the beginning of a consolidation of representational models into a general one (Kerns, Schlegelmilch, Morgan, & Abraham, Chapter 3, this volume; Steele & Steele, Chapter 7, this volume; Waters & Cummings, 2000), and yet on the other hand it is assumed to involve diversification in terms of people or social groups to whom one can turn (Waters & Cummings, 2000), in terms of types of distress (e.g., pain, fear, hurt feelings) and in terms of strategies. These seeming contradictions are discussed later.

SHIFT IN RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN CHILD AND PARENT FOR MONITORING AND MAINTAINING THE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF THE CAREGIVER

Though in the preschool years parents keep a close eye on children's whereabouts and often may feel utterly exhausted at the end of the day (Edwards & Liu, 2002), parents of children in middle childhood let them play in the park unsupervised, go to friends' houses without being escorted, and even stay home without the supervision of an adult for long hours (Collins et al., 2002). Thus at this stage parents do not have to constantly monitor the children, who are able to call the caregivers when in need or to tackle by themselves many of the challenges inherent in what previously constituted alarming situations. As Bowlby (1969/1982, p. 243) suggested: "During the course of infancy and childhood in all higher primate species responsibility for maintaining proximity between mother and young shifts progressively from the mother to the young." This shift

relies on the children's better knowledge of the world and alarming situations, their better capacity to represent time and space, their better employment of various alternative plans of actions, including plans of communication, and their better capacity to take care of themselves by themselves.

The negotiation of this shift may take place smoothly or abruptly, depending on the quality of the relationship and on circumstances (e.g., the parents suddenly need to work long hours and leave the child unattended after school). In the more gradual case, the parents adjust their monitoring as they observe the child's growing capacities to correctly identify dangers and threats and to act sensibly in these situations, either by tackling them on his or her own or by summoning help. In this process the parent is seen as reacting to the child's growing capacities, and it is the child who is leading the change. Alternatively, the parent may be the one to purposefully teach the child to assume responsibility for his or her well-being; namely, the parent may be seen as leading this process of shifting responsibility. Of course, both processes may be operating in different degrees. In other, less gradual situations, the child may be pulling strongly for more responsibility, which the parent is unwilling to give, or the parent may be giving the child more freedom and responsibility than warranted by his or her capacities. Empirical examinations of this normative shift and deviations from it, as well as of the way parents and children negotiate this process, are called for. This shift in responsibility is closely tied to one of the most noted characteristics of middle childhood—the decrease in the intensity of attachment behavior, which is discussed in the next section.

DECREASE IN INTENSITY OF ATTACHMENT BEHAVIOR

Compared with earlier periods, in middle childhood attachment behaviors are displayed less urgently and less frequently. In the words of Bowlby (1969/1982, p. 179): "Until about the time a child reaches his third birthday the systems continue to be very readily activated. Thenceforward in most children they become less readily activated and they also undergo other changes that make proximity to mother less urgent." Bowlby even termed this process "waning of attachment behavior." Interestingly, Freud deemed this a latency period—namely, a period in which drives are quiet and few libidinal processes occur; he too noted the less urgent nature of motivational forces in middle childhood.

In general, as the child grows older we might expect changes in two major domains (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p. 373): (1) the conditions that elicit/activate the system—namely, what constitutes potential danger or

stress and what constitutes threat to the accessibility (availability) of the attachment figure; (2) the conditions that terminate the operation of the behavioral system.

With regard to activating conditions, we might expect two interrelated and opposing processes. On the one hand, many conditions that tended to arouse fear and a sense of threat in infancy and the preschool years may no longer pose a threat to children in middle childhood—in particular, strange people and strange places, as well as moderate levels of pain or hunger. Similarly, changes occur in what constitutes a threat to a caregiver's availability or accessibility. With the growing cognitive and executive capacities of middle childhood, long duration of separations and large distances may no longer be perceived as a threat to the accessibility of the attachment figure. This might be related to the restriction in the range of stimuli noted by Bowlby as characterizing the ontogenetic progression of behavioral systems (see the preceding discussion). On the other hand, new conditions that elicit fear or distress in older children, but not in younger ones, emerge. Many of these conditions involve self-related threats, such as hurt pride, shame, guilt, inability to measure up to expectations, and being rejected by peers. Thus it is not clear that in the final count we should expect a decrease in the number and prevalence of cases or conditions that could potentially activate the attachment behavioral system. Similarly, these changes do not imply that the intensity of the distress (and hence the intensity of the attachment behavior) should decrease. A rejection by peers may cause as much distress as a hurt knee.

A related change in the conditions that terminate the operation of the behavioral system occurs. In general, in middle childhood a larger range of conditions is available (not just touch and proximity). These new conditions are in most cases less intense (a reassuring glance instead of picking up the child), and some are even symbolic (letters, e-mail messages). Yet, again, in and of themselves these changes do not necessitate the decrease in intensity. For example, a child using phone calls instead of visibility or actual touch to assure accessibility may still engage in this behavior many times a day. Thus, though the decrease in intensity and frequency of activation of attachment behavior was clearly noted by Bowlby and others (Marvin & Britner, 1999; Thompson & Raikes, 2003), the changes described in activating and terminating conditions do not automatically imply such a drop, which still remains unexplained.

Interestingly, there has been little attempt to note and describe this normative process. Observational studies in naturalistic settings and survey studies (asking children and caregivers to report on their experience) are needed to help elucidate what constitutes normative activation of attachment behavior during this period. For example, would we consider it ontogenetically normative if a 10-year-old cried upon hurting her knee af-

ter falling and from that time on wanted to stay close to her mom? Would we consider it ontogenetically normative if a 12-year-old missed his dad so much after several days in a camp that he terminated the stay in the camp and came home a week earlier than planned? This question is highly important for descriptive purposes and for policy making. For example, should we observe that at this age separations longer than a week are perceived by most children as stressing and as a threat to the accessibility of their attachment figures, we might want to caution institutions and parents against devising a 4-week summer camp with no visitation.

Research on attachment in infancy needed several studies and films by the Robertson couple (Robertson & Robertson, 1972, 1989) and careful natural observations by researchers such as Mary Ainsworth (1967) in naturalistic settings in order to present descriptions of normative activation of attachment behavior—observations that refuted some of the strongly held beliefs of that time. Nothing like that has been done in research on middle childhood. This is not a trivial task. Similar arguments regarding the need to examine normative manifestations of attachment in different age groups have been raised by Fonagy (2001). The lacunae in descriptions of normative changes in activating and terminating conditions have been especially apparent during the construction of assessment tools of individual differences in attachment security in middle childhood. Most researchers who have attempted to develop measures to assess individual differences in attachment in middle childhood had to struggle with this question. For example, when employing a narrative approach, should we have a departure story stem with one night separation, two nights, or a whole week (e.g., Granot & Mayseless, 2001)? Should a child who says he does not need his mom to stay with him in the mall be considered avoidant or secure (see Yunger, Corby, & Perry, Chapter 5, this volume)? In addition, what is normative may also differ across cultures.

As indicated by Bowlby and others (e.g., Thompson & Raikes, 2003), the changes in the intensity of attachment behaviors are a direct result of experience (e.g., much of what was strange is now familiar), learned capacities (e.g., major advances in children's capacity to take care of themselves in many daily yet possibly dangerous situations), cognitive changes that allow a better grasp of time and place and representations of various situations, and last but not least biological changes in the central nervous system and its related endocrine system. It is my contention that the presumed drop in arousal of the attachment behavioral system cannot be ascribed only to learning processes that are gradual and ongoing. Thus the current point of view assumes a central role for maturational processes that are biological in their nature. This is also related to the fact that, despite marked individual differences in attachment relationships and experiences, the very large majority of children in middle childhood are

able to tolerate much longer separations than toddlers are, and this ability is not related only to changes in their cognitive capacity in representing time, space, and the caregiver. For example, cognitive capacity cannot easily account for the fact that most 10-year-olds will probably find 1 week of separation tolerable but 3 weeks too much to bear (Bowlby, 1973). Thus attachment research might need to consider biological changes and try to incorporate these aspects as well into research designs. The works by Insel (1997) and others regarding the neurobiological basis of attachment behavior could be illuminating in this respect.

EVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS: MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AS A PHASE OF "LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR REFOCUSING AND REORIENTING ATTACHMENT INVESTMENT FROM PRIMARY CAREGIVERS TO OTHERS"

Besides the need to describe the normative drop in the intensity of display of attachment behavior, one of the exciting challenges is an attempt to explain *why* all this occurs. Interestingly, though Bowlby (1969/1982) noted this process and briefly described some of the other normative changes elucidated previously (e.g., diversification), he did not explain *why*, in his opinion, these changes take place or what is *the evolutionary significance of this presumably universal process*. Nevertheless, he suggested several proximal causes: mother's rebuff of attachment behavior, child's growing curiosity and exploration, growing cognitive capacity and hormonal changes. Yet the ultimate cause was not fully explicated. In general I suggest that this decrease in the intensity of attachment behavior, which characterizes the move to middle childhood, marks the phase in which *preparations for refocusing and reorienting the investment in affectional attachment bond between children and their parents or primary caregivers* occurs.

For most of human evolutionary history, children during middle childhood were already considered little adults in terms of response abilities and expectations. In a chapter addressing parenting in middle childhood, Collins, Madsen, and Susman-Stillman summarize this as follows (2002, p. 74):

In diverse cultures, early-middle childhood historically has marked a major shift in children's relationships with adults. The age of 6 or 7 years was the time at which children were absorbed into the world of adults, helping to shoulder family responsibilities and working alongside their elders. Well into the 18th century in Western nations, many children left home by the age of 6 or 7 years to work as servants in other households (Aries, 1965). If children remained at home, their parents became more like supervisors or overseers.

Though in today's industrialized nations most children are no longer "absorbed into the world of adults," they nevertheless leave their parents for long hours to start their compulsory schooling and to play and socialize with peers, preparing for eventual responsibilities. The noted decline in intensity of attachment behavior, which probably rests on evolutionary origins, might therefore be the basis enabling this normative change toward greater investment in exploration and learning.

Applying an evolutionary rationale, it might be expected that once children secure a moderate level of protection and safety, they need: (1) to learn to be *self-sustaining and autonomous*—to fend for themselves and eventually to protect themselves and their progeny (Caporael, 2001); (2) to learn to live in a group and *get along with peers their own age* so that they will be better able to protect themselves, find food, and survive (Ainsworth, 1989; Smith, Coats & Murphy, 2001); and eventually (3) to *find a mate who does not share their gene pool* (Caporael, 2001; Simpson, 1999; Smith et al., 2001). To be better able to accomplish most of these tasks, children need eventually to partially withdraw behaviorally and emotionally from their investment in the close relationships with their parents or primary caregivers. Freud referred to this process as *decathexis* of primary objects (Rycroft, 1995). "Cathexis" represents the conscious or unconscious attachment or binding of emotional feeling and significance (psychic energy) to an idea or a person. The withdrawal of cathexis, or "decathexis," refers to detachment of interest, attention, emotional involvement, or energy (libido) from one person or problem so that it can be reinvested in oneself or in another area. Though Freud's terminology is based on a different model of human motivation and human development than the model adopted by attachment theory, I suggest that a process reminiscent of decathexis starts to occur in middle childhood. This process involves some form of preliminary withdrawal of investment, which includes change in focus and reorientation of the affectional attachment bond between children and their parents or primary caregivers toward peers or non-family members.

Current research clearly demonstrates (e.g., Zarit & Eggebeen, 2002) that the withdrawal of investment is only partial and that, in most human societies, some form of affectional bond, sometimes quite strong, continues to be present between children and their parents throughout adulthood. Yet the affectional focus changes, and in adulthood individuals primarily focus on peers and romantic partners (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). This process of partial withdrawal of investment is evolutionary expected because children who do not develop relationships with a group ofagemates but instead continue to rely on their parents for protection may eventually find themselves unprotected when their parents age, lose their capacity to help their children, and

eventually die. Similarly, in our evolutionary history, if children did not transfer their emotional investment from parents to a sexual mate and then to their own children, they had lower chances of ever finding a mate and much lower chances of ever having their own children grow up to be adults themselves. Hence their genes may have not survived human evolutionary history.

Employing an evolutionary adaptability rationale, this phase is considered highly important as a preparatory phase for adolescence. By early adolescence, when puberty begins, children's rising sexual motivation should be directed outside their gene pool—namely, not toward the family or toward primary caregivers. Indeed, most researchers of adolescence noted the drop in quality of relationships with parents around puberty (see a summary in Steinberg & Silk, 2002), and psychoanalytically oriented researchers (e.g., Blos, 1979) suggested that this drop serves to distance the young adolescent from the possibility of directing sexual desires toward primary caregivers. Combining these psychoanalytic and evolutionary points of view with tenets of attachment theory (e.g., Allen & Land, 1999), it seems that to be able to feel secure and protected even during this phase (puberty) adolescents may need to have *already* secured other sources of attachment security besides their relationships with their primary caregivers.

In other words, it is here suggested that humans have an evolutionary-based developmental tendency to partially withdraw from their investment in close relationships with their parents or primary caregivers (to refocus and reorient their investment) and to invest instead in (1) building their autonomous capacities, (2) getting along with their peer group and securing their cooperation and protection, and (3) finding a sexual mate and raising their own progeny. It is further proposed that this process starts to be evident during middle childhood, when children start laying the foundation for the possibility of partial transfer later on.

The various normative developmental processes of attachment in middle childhood described here may be viewed as reflecting the general evolutionary process that prepares the child for this partial transfer in investment. This is reflected in four different ways. First, the intensity of attachment behavior decreases and the behavioral system is activated less often, thus allowing more time and energy to be invested in other domains. Second, the shift in responsibility between child and parent for monitoring and maintaining the availability and accessibility of the caregiver may also be seen as serving the same function. Namely, by allowing the child more autonomy in the decision of when to summon the attachment figure and by reducing the frequency of such calls, this change leaves the child more freedom to explore the inanimate world, as well as other relationships. Much of the knowledge about the world that humans

need to acquire to become autonomous, to reach adulthood unharmed, and to raise their own progeny is not prewired but is learned by engaging in explorations and negotiations with the inanimate world, as well as with the peer group. A strong internal (evolutionary-based) motivation to learn these capacities in these contexts (e.g., the sociable or affiliative behavioral system, Cassidy, 1999; the exploratory behavioral system or effectance motivation, White, 1959) might be one of the main driving forces in middle childhood and might be more of a concern at this age than protection and safety, which are the most apparent concerns in infancy and even the preschool years.

Third, the process by which the attachment behavioral system becomes more sophisticated and governed by cognitive-affective internalizations opens the door for the consolidation of attachment representations from different figures to an overarching generalized internal model, though the unique contributions of the different figures may still exert their influence. This process leads eventually to a situation in which attachment security becomes more an attribute of the person, part of the individual's personality, than a characteristic of a specific relationship. This allows some independence from the actual relationship with the specific figure and the possibility of transfer of emotional investment to other figures.

Fourth, while holding on to the attachment relationship with the primary caregiver (in which attachment behaviors are nevertheless activated less intensely), children in middle childhood are able to explore close relationships with others. Primary caregivers still remain the main anchor, and if a serious threat arises children are most likely to use their primary caregivers as a safe haven and a secure base. Nevertheless, the partial withdrawal of investment and its refocusing is reflected in the tendency to turn also to others in times of distress or when upset. Furthermore, in some situations children may even *prefer* to rely on peers for support rather than on primary caregivers (e.g., disclosing a secret about wrongdoing).

Bowlby coined the term "monotropy" to refer to the tendency of infants to prefer a principal attachment figure. Some researchers contend that even in adulthood an individual tends to prefer a principal attachment figure (e.g., Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). Nevertheless, preliminary results (e.g., Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997) highlight that in many cases adults form several close relationships in which attachment-related dynamics are evident, and, in addition, for different activating conditions they may have a different preferred figure. As described previously, similar tendencies are evident in middle childhood. Though at that age primary caregivers still constitute the principal attachment figures, children tend to invest in several close relationships in which attachment-related dynamics can be manifested and show a somewhat lower tendency to fo-

cus on one principal substitute figure. These new close relationships evince only components of the attachment-related dynamics, and in any event the investment is diversified (different people may be relied on for different functions or in different activating conditions). This process of differentiation and diversification serves well the evolutionary-based developmental process of refocusing as the child gradually and cautiously examines the possibility of transfer and does not take the risk of being unprotected either by performing a quick transfer or by relying on only one substitute figure.

These analyses may mistakenly be taken to imply that by middle childhood children no longer have attachment relationships with their parents. As indicated herein, this is clearly not the case. Children in middle childhood continue to use their parents as attachment figures even if they display attachment behaviors less often and less intensely and even when they explore other relationships as potential attachment-related sources. In the words of Bowlby (1969/1982, pp. 206-207):

Thus, although most children after their third birthday show attachment behavior less urgently and frequently than before, it nonetheless still constitutes a major part of behavior. Furthermore, though becoming attenuated, attachment behavior of a kind not very different from that seen in four-year-olds persists throughout the early school years. . . . Thus, throughout the latency of an ordinary child, attachment behavior continues as a dominant strand in his life.

It is only in adolescence, Bowlby assumes, that the attachment relationships with the parents, not just their manifestations, actually change (Bowlby (1969/1982, p. 207): "During adolescence a child's attachment to his parents changes. Other adults may come to assume an importance equal to or greater than that of the parents, and sexual attraction to age-mates begins to extend the picture."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Together, these processes—(1) the decrease in intensity of attachment behavior, (2) the shift in responsibility between child and parent, (3) the regulation of attachment behaviors by cognitive-affective internalizations and their consolidation and integration, and (4) the processes of differentiation and diversification—are viewed as serving the general evolutionary process of partial withdrawal from the strong emotional and instrumental investment in primary caregivers and of refocusing and reorienting these

investments to allow the development of autonomous capacities, the formation of close relations with peers, finding a sexual mate, and raising children.

Following Ainsworth (1989, 1991) and Hinde (1979), Cassidy (1999, p. 13) discusses this process by employing the concept of "penetration." She suggests that, as the child matures, the bond with primary caregivers does not become weaker; however, the relationships may "penetrate fewer aspects of the growing child's life as he or she comes to spend more time away from the parents and to develop new relationships." Similarly Ammaniti, van IJzendoorn, Speranza, and Tambelli (2000) discuss the possibility that by early adolescence children partly withdraw from their relationships with their parents and distance themselves from them by evincing more dismissive tendencies. Thus attachment theorists acknowledge that some form of withdrawal or distancing occurs, yet they are unclear about the whole process—how it starts, what drives it, and for what purpose. The approach presented in this chapter is more radical. In some respects it echoes the psychoanalytic literature, which refers to the need of the maturing child to relinquish dependency needs and libidinal investments in primary caregivers, and the term employed by Freud and others to describe the process of disengagement from parental internalized objects—"decathexis." As discussed, unlike earlier psychoanalytic writers, I do not at all contend that a renunciation of parental relationships occurs. However, middle childhood is seen as involving the preparatory phase for refocusing and reorienting the investment in primary caregivers by laying the groundwork for nonsexual and sexual peer relationships that involve attachment-related dynamics and that develop more fully in adolescence. Still, it seems that in the efforts of attachment theory to counter psychoanalytic notions regarding the need of adolescents to sever their emotional ties with their parents (e.g., Blos, 1979), attachment theory has played down the importance of the normative (evolutionary-based) process of withdrawal of emotional and behavioral investment in primary caregivers.

Recently several researchers within the attachment paradigm (e.g., Fonagy, 2001; Steele & Steele, 1998) called for an attempt at a conceptual "reunion" between the two paradigms—attachment and psychoanalysis. In fact, several such attempts were recently published (e.g., Diamond, Blatt, & Lichtenberg, 2003; Sandler, 2003). However, these attempts mostly looked at infancy or the therapeutic relationships (but see Ammaniti & Sergi, 2003). The current approach, which is heavily based on an evolutionary approach and involves an attempt to apply insights from psychoanalytic conceptualizations to attachment processes in middle childhood, follows suit.

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