

SIBLINGS

Social Adjustments,
Interaction and
Family Dynamics



Maison Dupont
Jean-Pierre Renaud
Editors

CHILDREN'S IS

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CHILDREN'S ISSUES, LAWS AND PROGRAMS

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SOCIAL ADJUSTMENTS,
INTERACTION AND FAMILY
DYNAMICS

MAISON DUPONT
AND
JEAN-PIERRE RENAUD
EDITORS



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PREFACE

This book provides a look at the social adjustments, interaction and family dynamics of siblings. The authors present current research including parent-child attachments; the influence of familial factors on child trauma symptoms in children exposed to intimate partner violence; sibling interactions and pro-social skills and antisocial behaviors during different stages of child development; birth order and risk preferences; twin and higher order multiple pregnancies in medically assisted reproduction; support for siblings of children with intellectual disabilities; and communicative functions of emotions in sibling relationships.

Chapter 1 - Ever since its development by the British psychiatrist John Bowlby in 1973, the theory of parent-child attachment has elicited a great deal of research. According to this theory, a child is born with a behavioral system which enables the child, when in a situation of distress, to seek protection with an attachment figure, typically the mother. For nearly forty years, Bowlby's theory has attempted to define the role and the characteristics of both the child and the attachment figure, while also showing that children who are secure in their relationship with a parent spend more time exploring their environment and demonstrate better social adjustment than children considered insecure. Research has also shown that, in addition to the mother, other people, especially within the family, can serve as attachment figures for children. Parallel to this, the family system theory has developed. This theory introduces the idea that the family, with all its different members, functions as a system comprised of multiple sub-systems (intergenerational, marital, coparental, parent-child and sibling) which are both autonomous and interdependent. In the study, authors chose to associate these two theories so as to reveal, for each member of the family (father, mother, oldest and youngest children), the

perception of the different types of parent-child attachment existing within the family (mother-oldest child attachment, mother-youngest child attachment and father-oldest child attachment, father-youngest child attachment). This is a novel approach in that it makes it possible to demonstrate that perceptions vary from person to person and that certain variables carry more weight than others in family dynamics. This approach also helps to explain why a brother and sister from the same sibling group may each have a different type of attachment to the same caregiver and why a child may have a different type of attachment to each parent.

Chapter 2 - The purpose of the present chapter was to investigate the influence of familial factors on child trauma symptoms in children exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV). Building upon past research, the trauma symptoms of siblings were compared, and the role of these symptoms, maternal stress and the quality of mother-child interactions in relation to children's trauma symptoms was explored. Results indicated sibling trauma symptoms were significantly related, and that older siblings demonstrated significantly more trauma symptoms than younger siblings. Sibling trauma symptoms, maternal stress and the quality of mother-child interactions accounted for a significant amount of variance in trauma symptoms for both older and younger siblings. An exploration of maternal differential treatment indicated mothers directed significantly more positive behaviours towards older than younger siblings. Findings indicate that sibling trauma symptoms are mutually influential, and that some mothers may compensate for stressful life circumstances with positive parent-child interactions.

Chapter 3 - Research indicates that sibling relationships have important implications in the acquisition of pro-social skills and the development of antisocial behavior from early to middle childhood. Although most sibling conflict is normal, prolonged aggressive sibling conflict has been related to behavior problems, may be an indicator of coercive family processes, and may escalate into sibling abuse. Additionally, research has demonstrated a relation between sibling aggression and subsequent conduct problems, even when prior conduct problems and punitive parenting are controlled. Because aggressive children experience fewer positive peer interactions and have limited opportunity to learn social skills, siblings play an important role in their social development.

Successful approaches to reducing sibling conflict have used techniques such as timeout, reinforcement for inhibiting aggression and, social skills training. Furthermore, research has indicated a relationship between negative parenting, sibling conflict, and behavior problems. In addition, Olson and

Roberts (1987) showed that discipline was more effective than social skills training for sibling conflict and advocated for a discipline component in interventions to reduce sibling aggression. Taken together, these results argue for a parent-training approach to decreasing sibling conflict.

Some parent training approaches that target behavior problems have demonstrated generalization of treatment gains to untreated siblings. These gains include decreased sibling conflict and behavior problems, increased compliance, and improved parenting. One such intervention that may be useful with this population is Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). PCIT is an empirically supported parent training program for preschoolers with behavior problems. It consists of two phases: Child Directed Interaction that is focused on skills to improve the parent-child relationship, and Parent Directed Interaction that teaches the parent consistent discipline. PCIT entails the use of immediate feedback in the form of coaching and criteria for mastery to determine progression through treatment. PCIT has been related to decreased parenting stress and maintenance of treatment gains. It also has demonstrated efficacy with populations such as physically abusive parents, children with separation anxiety, and children with autism spectrum disorders.

Prior research has demonstrated that PCIT generalizes to untreated siblings. During CDI sessions in the clinic, parents are coached while interacting with the referred child only. However, parents are strongly encouraged to practice positive skills with all young siblings in the home. During PDI, siblings are brought into the clinic and parents are coached in discipline strategies for handling sibling conflict. Parents are encouraged to implement PDI skills consistently with all siblings at home. When children present with poor social skills, social skills may be incorporated in coaching during sibling interactions. In addition, additional treatment strategies may be incorporated to increase cooperative sibling behaviors and decrease conflict. A case example of the use of PCIT to improve sibling interactions in young children will be described.

Chapter 4 - Analyzes risk preferences across various domains among more than 2,200 individuals. Focus especially on the relationship between risk preferences and birth order. The most pronounced result is that middle-borns consistently seem to be less risk-averse than others, while there is no such persistent pattern for any other birth-order category. Thus, this study shows that birth order actually seems to partly explain risk preferences, shedding some new light on why some people tend to be consistently more risk-seeking than others. Also investigated is time preferences, and analysis again shows

that middle-borns stand out; they are more likely to be less patient than all other birth-order categories.

Chapter 5 - Multiple pregnancies are the most frequent complication of medically assisted reproduction (MAR) and present a serious perinatal risk for mother and child. Half of all babies born after MAR are the result of multiple pregnancies. High multiple pregnancy rates were acceptable in the past since satisfactory success rates have been achieved only after transferring three or four early cleavage stage embryos. By improving the culture conditions, developing extended embryo cultivation media and introducing blastocyst culture, the reduction of the number of embryos for transfer was enabled. Moreover, it has been proved in many studies that the transfer of only one blastocyst in a group of patients with the highest probability for conception can result in similar pregnancy rates as the transfer of two blastocysts, but the proportion of multiple pregnancies is significantly reduced. In the last decade, selected countries have implemented regulations that stimulate elective single embryo transfer (eSET). In Slovenia, eSET favorizing policy was accepted in 2008. It widened the rights of patients by reimbursing them for two additional MAR cycles. However, only one top quality embryo must be transferred in the first or second MAR attempt in women younger than 36 years.

Single-centre analysis of 2,072 consecutive IVF/ICSI embryo transfer cycles undergoing extended, blastocyst stage embryo cultivation was performed. Only couples eligible for eSET were included in the study. Single (SBT) or double blastocyst transfer (DBT) was performed after the consultation with the patients. Clinical outcomes were compared between the groups of Slovenian patients that were under the influence of implemented eSET stimulating reimbursement policy and the self-funding group of cross-border patients.

In spite of equal approach to patient consultation about the number of embryos for transfer, cross-border patients opted for DBT more frequently than domestic patients. The imposition of insurance policy contributed to additional plummeting of twin rate deliveries in domestic patients to 7-8 %, while the rate remained high in cross-border patients. In spite of this, clinical pregnancy and delivery rates were comparable in both groups of patients.

Chapter 6 - This short paper reports on an ongoing field study (2006-2009) into young and adolescent siblings of people with intellectual disabilities (ID). By developing support strategies for siblings, the project aims to improve the quality of life of the sibling and his/her family as a whole. Growing up in a family with a brother or sister with ID is something unique. The influence siblings with a disability have on their family members

is difficult to describe and is characterized by its variable, dynamic and complex nature. Each family is unique, which also means that each typically evolving sibling in each family has a different story to tell.

Chapter 7 - Intrapersonal functions ascribed to emotions are varied. Arguments and evidence abound showing that individual differences in emotionality at the behavioral level of analysis, correlates at the cognitive and physiological levels of analysis not only form defining features of manifest pathology but also constitute risk factors to psychopathology. However, interpersonal functions of emotions remain under-examined, although most emotion theorists would agree that emotions carry signal value and must therefore serve communicative functions during social interactions, and despite the central role emotions play in many theoretical frameworks that seek to understand relationships. The only exception to this trend is research on marital interaction. This body work has relied on sequential analytic methods to examine the communicative functions of emotions and have linked those patters to long-term relationship outcomes such as divorce. In the current study, authors applied this methodology to the verbal content and nonverbal affective tone of young children's interactions with their siblings at home in a free play context. As a first step, permission obtained in order to identify lawful communication chains using only children's non-affective verbal behavioral exchanges, amidst apparently random streams of transactions and conversational turns characteristic of young children's play. Second step, asked whether young children utilized the information in their siblings' nonverbal affective tone over and above the information contained in the verbal-behavioral channel to alter their subsequent responses in free-flowing interactions. Findings supported the hypothesis that young children do utilize the emotional, affective tone of their siblings' verbal messages and that those emotional expressions play a key role in the regulation of sibling conflict.

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Chapter 1

SIBLINGS: PARENT-CHILD ATTACHMENTS, PERCEPTIONS, INTERACTION AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

S. Pinel-Jacquemin and C. Zaouche Gaudron¹

Université de Toulouse II-Le Mirail, Université de Toulouse, France

ABSTRACT

Ever since its development by the British psychiatrist John Bowlby in 1973, the theory of parent-child attachment has elicited a great deal of research. According to this theory, a child is born with a behavioral system which enables the child, when in a situation of distress, to seek protection with an attachment figure, typically the mother. For nearly forty years, Bowlby's theory has attempted to define the role and the characteristics of both the child and the attachment figure, while also showing that children who are secure in their relationship with a parent spend more time exploring their environment and demonstrate better social adjustment than children considered insecure. Research has also shown that, in addition to the mother, other people, especially within the family, can serve as attachment figures for children. Parallel to this, the family system theory has developed. This theory introduces the idea that the family, with all its different members, functions as a system comprised of multiple sub-systems (intergenerational, marital, coparental, parent-child and sibling) which are both autonomous and interdependent.

¹ Translation from French to English: Martha R. Randy.

In our study, we chose to associate these two theories so as to reveal, for each member of the family (father, mother, oldest and youngest children), the perception of the different types of parent-child attachment existing within the family (mother-oldest child attachment, mother-youngest child attachment and father-oldest child attachment, father-youngest child attachment). This is a novel approach in that it makes it possible to demonstrate that perceptions vary from person to person and that certain variables carry more weight than others in family dynamics. This approach also helps to explain why a brother and sister from the same sibling group may each have a different type of attachment to the same caregiver and why a child may have a different type of attachment to each parent.

INTRODUCTION

Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as a system of in-born behaviors in a child, which, by aiming to ensure the child's bond with a key person in times of need, ensures the child's protection. This key person, also called an attachment figure, typically belongs to the child's nuclear family—mother, father, grandparent, etc.—and regularly cares for the child. Therefore, children progressively internalize their relationships with others based on this primary relationship. If the primary relationship is secure, the child knows that other people can make themselves available and provide help for the child if necessary. Should the primary relationship be insecure, the child could think that other people cannot be counted upon (ambivalence) or that it is unnecessary to call upon a third party in case of need (avoidance).

Whether in developmental psychology or clinical psychology, researchers have spent a great deal of time focusing on the child-attachment figure dyad. After having studied the type of attachment (secure vs. insecure), they defined the principal characteristics of the protagonists. At this stage, however, it had to be acknowledged that two siblings from the same family could not have the same type of attachment to the same parent. Today, in order to explain this, it would appear indispensable to place this dyadic relationship in a larger context: the family. Indeed, the perceptions held by each person of relationships within a family could explain these differences in attachment to the same figure. While the existing research has taken interest in the influence of certain family relationships (marital, parent-child, etc.) on the quality of the attachment bond, it has not yet focused on these relationships' combined influence.

Moreover, we will review the broad outline as well as the importance of attachment theory and define the family as a system of interacting elements. We will then be able to see how family relationships can indeed, due to the perceptions of each member of the family, have different influences on the quality of the existing link between a parent and child.

1. ATTACHMENT THEORY

1.1. Definition

1.1.1. Two Complementary and Interdependent Systems

One important element which should be immediately highlighted is the correlative dimension of the security/protection with the exploration/autonomy of a child. Bowlby (1969) developed the idea that attachment and exploratory behavior were two functionally different developmental systems which were put in a dynamic balance: attachment behaviors guarantee a close mother-child bond and therefore protection, while exploratory behaviors ensure an understanding of the environment and the ability to adapt to its variations. Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton (1972) clearly showed that attachment also provides a secure base for exploration, confirming the role played by the "security/insecurity" dimension in this dynamic. It is important to remember that, thanks to the famous "strange situation" experimental paradigm, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978)² were able to identify eight behavior patterns from which they described three main typologies. At the very beginning of his hypotheses, Bowlby (1969) stressed a child's ability to

² The experimental protocol of the "strange situation" was conceived by Ainsworth (1968; 1974) and enabled the definition of three typologies of children: Group B represents the secure group of children, in other words those who react positively to separation, accept to be separated for a time and react positively upon being reunited with their attachment figure (2/3 of them, according to Ainsworth and al., 1978). Group A is called the "anxious-avoidant" group: These children do not seem to be affected by separation and tend to avoid or complete ignore their mother —instead of wanting to be with her—upon being reunited (22% according to Ainsworth and al., 1978). Group C is called the "anxious-resistant or ambivalent" group: Upon their mother's return, these children want to be near her even though they are angry with her, and partially resent her, for having left, (12% according to Ainsworth and al., 1978). Finally, group D, the last group, was given the name "disorganized-disoriented" by Main and Salomon (1986) and was attributed to babies considered "impossible to categorize": These children displayed category B or C behavior by calling for their mother when she was absent or trying to open the door but who, when their mother returned, became silent and avoided or ignored her (behavior typical of category A).

explore the environment, to play and to participate in a variety of activities with other children. Since then, numerous studies have mentioned that a secure attachment is necessary in order for children to be free to explore the world around them. These conclusions are differentiated by the gender variable. The security/exploration balance varies across the situations that children experience (with regard to stress, and to its intensity, duration and frequency) and depending on the child's age. If the exploratory system becomes more broadly active as the child matures (especially starting at age 3) the attachment system can be activated as soon as the ideal conditions present themselves (Guedeney and Guedeney, 2010).

The socialization and exploration systems each have their own adaptative objectives to ensure the survival of the species (cf. the Darwinian perspective upheld by Bowlby).

1.1.2. Internal Working Models

"From the very first months of life, a baby begins to create models representing the world around him and himself as an agent in this world" (Bowlby, 1974, 207) and seeks to ensure, through these Internal Working Models (I.W.M., Bowlby, 1973), closeness with one (or more) people. On the one hand, Bowlby's perspective on these I.W.M. stressed the mental representation of the other, of the self, but also of the "self-other" relationship as defined by Sroufe (1988).

The operationalism of the internal working model which has been carried out over the past twenty or so years has undoubtedly brought about one of the most important steps forward in the development of our knowledge. Indeed, from a methodological standpoint, real progress has been achieved thanks to the "story completion" task developed by Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum, Emde, and The MacArthur Narrative Group in the 1990s. In addition, three other tools have specifically aimed to operationalize the internal working model notion by basing themselves on attachment narratives produced by children. Since then, these procedures have elicited a great deal of research, proving helpful both in developmental psychology and in the clinical field (Zaouche Gaudron and Pierrehumbert, 2008). Together, these tools have made it possible to access the mental representations of attachment which have been built by young children, and from them, to analyze the creation and internalization of attachment relationships across a variety of life contexts (Euillet, 2007; Spencer, 2006, Fresno, 2007; Zaouche Gaudron, 2005; Savard and Zaouche Gaudron, 2011; Euillet, Spencer, Troupel-Cremel, Fresno and Zaouche Gaudron, 2008).

Many studies have pointed out the stability of I.W.M. over time in the absence of critical life events (Egeland and Farber, 1984; Main, Kaplan and Cassidy, 1985; Grossmann, Grossmann and Zimmerman, 1999; Bernier, Larose and Boivin, 2000). However, if an attachment behavior is considered to be the reflection of an I.W.M. which was constructed during a specific relationship with a caregiver (Sroufe, 1985), these I.W.M. will certainly change and/or multiply in accordance with new relationships.

1.1.3. Transmission and Predictability

From a transgenerational perspective, Main (1998) created the “Adult Attachment Interview” (A.A.I.) in order to study the question of the transmission of the mother’s psyche to the child. This procedure enables the evaluation of the individual’s ability to elaborate a collaborative and coherent discourse about the individual’s childhood relationships and their possible influence. Four main classifications (called “attachment states of mind”) were identified and have been correlated with corresponding types of child behavior in the strange situation. Pierrehumbert (1998, 7) thus showed that “a 70% correspondence exists between the maternal categories and those of the child out of the 661 mother-child dyads studies”. Gauthier (2011) refers to the study carried out by Benoit and Parker in 1994 in which “the transmission of attachment patterns can even lead all the way back to the grandmother” (op. cit., 292). Recently, the work of Hautamäki, Neuvonen and Maliniemi-Piispanen (2010) reached the same conclusions with slightly weaker correspondences that those obtained by the tri-generational study which preceded it. Gauthier (2011) also mentioned the four major studies published in 2005 which made it possible to highlight the appearance of externalized disorders, anxiety issues in adolescents and young adults, as well as serious issues such as dissociative disorders following a case of disorganization during childhood. More recently, a study carried out by Zayas, Mischel, Shoda and Aber (2011) indicated that the quality of early maternal care is a predictor of the adult attachment dynamic with peers and other partners; Dubois-Comtois and Moss (2011) go even further, saying that attachment behaviors mediated by mother-child conversations are predictive of the representations of attachment held by school age children. The same point of view is shared by Apetroiaia (2010) who concluded that a transgenerational transmission of secure scripts throughout the mother-child dialog acts as an important mediator in the intergenerational transmission of attachment representations.

However, this transgenerational perspective could lead to a reductive scheme coming dangerously close to deterministic aspects (such as insecure