

What's Love Got to Do with It?
Insecurity and Anger in Attachment Relationships

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Abstract

In this article⁴ we provide a brief overview of attachment theory, describe the major forms of insecure attachment, explain how the theory has been extended to the domain of couple relationships, and describe how it sheds light on emotions and emotion regulation. We summarize studies of attachment-related emotions that play a role in adults' and children's experience of divorce. We show how attachment theory and research can inform social policy related to domestic violence, divorce, child custody, child maltreatment, foster care, incarceration of parents whose children are placed in foster care, and rehabilitation of delinquent adolescents and adult criminals.

⁴ This article is based on a presentation given at the Center for Children, Families, and the Law September 2008 Conference at the University of Virginia School of Law.

One of the most important and highly developed psychological theories dealing with human emotions and their origins and functions in social life, including love, is attachment theory. The theory was created by a British psychiatrist, John Bowlby,⁵ and developed empirically by his American collaborator, Mary Ainsworth,⁶ a professor at the University of Virginia. Of special interest here, Bowlby's original concern and first publication focused on a legal issue, juvenile delinquency. In a 1944 article, "44 Juvenile Thieves," Bowlby⁷ used a combination of statistics and clinical case notes to show that juvenile delinquents often come from backgrounds that include loss of mothers, repeated separations from mothers, or being passed from one foster mother to another. He summarized these conditions with the term "maternal deprivation," which he might have called "deprivation of maternal love." Bowlby went on to rewrite psychoanalytic theory, which had focused on primitive sexual and aggressive "drives," centering the theory much more on early experiences in the family that lead to a secure or insecure, threatened, and hostile personality.

Beginning from these early roots, attachment theory has grown into one of the leading scientific approaches to understanding the psychological and behavioral effects of early parent-child relationships. The theory links clinical, developmental, and social psychology and has been extended to apply to all kinds of close relationships, not only in

⁵ JOHN BOWLBY, *ATTACHMENT AND LOSS: VOL. 1. ATTACHMENT* (2nd ed. 1982).

⁶ Mary D.S. Ainsworth, *Attachment and Other Affectional Bonds Across the Life Cycle*, in *ATTACHMENT ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE* 33 (Routledge 1991).

⁷ John Bowlby, *Forty-four Juvenile Thieves: Their Characters and Home Life*, 25, *INT'L J. OF PSYCHOANALYSIS* 19 (1944).

childhood and the family, but across the lifespan. It is now the leading approach to studying adolescent and adult romantic and marital relationships.⁸

In this article we provide a brief overview of attachment theory, describe the major forms of insecure attachment, explain how the theory has been extended to the domain of couple relationships, and describe how it sheds light on emotions and emotion regulation. We summarize studies of attachment-related emotions that play a role in adults' and children's experience of divorce. We show how attachment theory and research can inform social policy related to domestic violence, divorce, child custody, child maltreatment, foster care, incarceration of parents whose children are placed in foster care, and rehabilitation of delinquent adolescents and adult criminals.

An Overview of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory views human behavior in terms of a few key motivational or behavioral systems, such as the neurological systems underlying a person seeking and relying on relationships with others, interest in and courage to explore the world, and inclination to empathize with and take care of others.⁹ The neurological and hormonal core of each of these behavioral systems is largely unconscious and deeply ingrained, because it is based on a long history of evolutionary development. The function of the first of these systems to show itself in the development of a human infant, the attachment system,¹⁰ is to keep a child close to its primary caregivers (called "attachment figures" in the theory). This tendency to remain near a trusted adult provides protection and helps a

⁸ MARIO MIKULINER & PHILLIP R. SHAVER, ATTACHMENT IN ADULTHOOD: STRUCTURE, DYNAMICS, AND CHANGE (Guilford Press 2007).

⁹ See generally BOWLBY *supra* note 5.

¹⁰ See generally *id.*

child to learn to regulate negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and distress.¹¹ It also helps a child to understand the physical and social world, and develop important physical and social skills. These skills provide a foundation for peer relationships and school activities. When a child is upset, in pain, tired, hungry, frustrated by a task, or frightened, he or she is naturally inclined to signal a caregiver (often a parent) for help, protection, reassurance, and encouragement. Anyone who has been a parent or childcare provider knows about these signals: calling, crying, signaling nonverbally to be picked up, and then clinging, cuddling, calming down, and eventually smiling when reassurance or a comforting embrace has been provided. These signals, which we generally take for granted, are part of each human being's biologically evolved survival equipment.¹²

Extensive research, including several twenty-year longitudinal studies spanning the period from birth to young adulthood,¹³ has shown that a child's secure and healthy development depends on having one or more sensitive and responsive attachment figures who can correctly read signals for help, provide comforting support and useful assistance, and help the child learn to understand, appropriately express, and regulate emotions; understand social situations; and acquire important life skills. Most children have mental representations of one or more such people prioritized in what Bowlby¹⁴ called a "hierarchy of attachment figures." Children develop well if these representations, based on actual experience, portray caregivers as generally available, sensitive, and responsive to needs. In attachment theory, these valuable social provisions are called to provide a

¹¹ Ainsworth, *supra* note 6, at 33.

¹² *See generally* BOWLBY, *supra* note 5.

¹³ KLAUS E. GROSSMANN ET AL., ATTACHMENT FROM INFANCY TO ADULTHOOD: THE MAJOR LONGITUDINAL STUDIES (Guilford Press 2005).

¹⁴ *See generally* BOWLBY, *supra* note 5.

“safe haven” (a safe place to go in times of need) and a “secure base” (a place from which to move out, in small steps at first, to explore the world; a place to come back to when refueling or reassurance is wanted). Unfortunately, if child’s caregivers are unavailable, removed from a child’s reach (e.g., by death, divorce, prolonged illness, military service, or imprisonment), or only unreliably available, insensitive, abusive, or poorly attuned in their parenting responses, the child is likely to develop in a distorted fashion and have poorer than usual behavioral and mental health outcomes. Among these poor outcomes are antisocial behaviors such as delinquency, crime, and violence.¹⁵

Attachment researchers noticed that there are different observable patterns of attachment that can be identified as early as twelve-to-eighteen months of age and that tend to persist thereafter.¹⁶ These patterns do not seem to be primarily determined by genes.¹⁷ Instead, they are predictable from parents’ or other primary caregivers’ psychological and behavioral characteristics.¹⁸ For present purposes, these patterns can be simply labeled *secure*, *anxious*, *avoidant*, and *disorganized*. In our own research on adolescent and adult attachment, similar patterns are measured using questionnaires tapping two dimensions: anxious and avoidant attachment.¹⁹

Secure attachment, which is the most common pattern in normal families, is marked by good communication between a child and attachment figures, a general absence of anxiety and frustration, and normal development of physical, academic, and

¹⁵ See generally GROSSMANN ET AL., *supra* note 13.

¹⁶ See generally *id.*

¹⁷ Brian E. Vaughn et al., *Attachment and Temperament: Additive and Interactive Influences on Behavior, Affect, and Cognition During Infancy and Childhood*, in HANDBOOK OF ATTACHMENT 192 (2nd ed., 2008).

¹⁸ Erik Hesse, *The Adult Attachment Interview: Protocol, Method of Analysis, and Empirical Studies*, in HANDBOOK OF ATTACHMENT 552 (2nd ed., 2008).

¹⁹ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

social skills.²⁰ In adolescence and adulthood, secure attachment (indicated by low scores on anxious and avoidant attachment) is associated with healthy expression of emotions, easy and accurate access to memories of emotional experiences, appropriate self-disclosure, confident and optimistic appraisal of potentially threatening events, and use of effective problem-solving strategies for coping such events. Research indicates that secure individuals have more and longer periods of positive mood and are less likely to suffer from mood disorders and other forms of psychopathology such as eating disorders, substance abuse, and antisocial conduct disorders.²¹ Secure individuals have more stable romantic and marital relationships, greater intimacy, higher relationship satisfaction, and stronger commitment to their partners and families. They are also more curious and creative, more willing to explore new activities and environments, less dogmatic and more tolerant of people with different values, preferences or identities, more empathic and compassionate toward others, and more likely to volunteer for charitable and community causes.²²

The other three attachment patterns are forms of *insecurity* and are associated with later behavioral problems, poorer mental health, and, in some cases, delinquency, criminal behavior, and incarceration. Anxious attachment, as the name implies, is marked by insecurity, anxiety, and fearful, angry, or resistant behavior, including frequent crying and “temper tantrums.” It has been shown to arise in relationships with attachment figures who are themselves anxious, unreliable, combative, and sometimes so preoccupied with their own negative emotions that they lose track of their children’s

²⁰ See Ross A. Thompson, *Early Attachment and Later Development: Familiar Questions, New Answers*, in *HANDBOOK OF ATTACHMENT* 348 (2nd ed., 2008).

²¹ See generally a comprehensive review of findings in MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

²² See generally *id.*

needs.²³ If not remedied early in child development, attachment anxiety inclines a person toward hurt feelings, angry jealousy, poor decisions about close relationships, including poor judgment in sexual situations when the person becomes sexually active, intrusiveness, and anxious parenting.²⁴ At the extreme it can lead to domestic violence when a spouse or mate seems intent on leaving a relationship.²⁵ Part of the anxious person's uncertainty and anger stems from viewing other people as "not reliably there for them" when they need support, affection, or assistance.²⁶ They have learned to demand more attention, support, and assurance, even to the point of being emotionally or behaviorally histrionic and coercive, and this can easily damage and sometimes destroy their close relationships.

Avoidant attachment, on the other hand, is marked by not trusting or relying on relationship partners, suppressing needs and emotions, being angry and vengeful but denying it, and having low awareness of and responsiveness to others' needs. This attachment pattern is predictable from parental behavior of the same kinds: insensitivity and lack of empathy, suppression of emotions, low emotional sensitivity to others, unresponsiveness to requests for comfort and support, discomfort with closeness, poor communication of needs and feelings, and insistence on self-reliance.²⁷ Part of the avoidant person's uncertainty and anger stems from viewing other people as not competent, not reliable, or not interested, making it preferable to rely only on oneself.²⁸

²³ See generally Ainsworth, *supra* note 6.

²⁴ See generally MIKULINER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

²⁵ See generally DONALD G. DUTTON, *THE ABUSIVE PERSONALITY: VIOLENCE AND CONTROL IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS* (2nd ed., 2007).

²⁶ See generally MIKULINER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

²⁷ See generally Hesse, *supra* note 18.

²⁸ See generally MIKULINER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

The fourth attachment pattern, and the most extremely insecure, is called “disorganized” or “disoriented” attachment because it is marked by a failure to develop any of the other three organized and understandable strategies for dealing with attachment figures, beginning with one’s parents. This pattern, which we will call “disorganized” for short, is detectable by trained observers when a child is as young as twelve months of age, and it predicts clinically diagnosable dissociative disorders, anxiety disorders, and serious antisocial behavior problems as much as twenty years later.²⁹ Disorganized attachment arises when an infant’s primary attachment figure is observably “frightened” or “frightening” when the infant needs assurance or comforting. Research indicates that this frightened or frightening behavior (also called “helpless” or “hostile”) is a result of severe, unresolved losses or traumatic abuse in the attachment figure’s own history. This pattern is more common in troubled, poor, and overly stressed families.³⁰

According to attachment theory and research, the stability of each of the four attachment patterns (secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized) across childhood and into adulthood is attributable to “states of mind with respect to attachment”³¹ or “internal working models of self, attachment figures, and attachment relationships.”³² These “states of mind” or “working models” include “scripts” and expectations about how

²⁹ Elizabeth A. Carlson, *A Prospective Longitudinal Study of Attachment Disorganization/Disorientation*, 69 *CHILD DEVELOPMENT* 1107 (1998).

³⁰ See generally Karlen Lyons-Ruth & Deborah Jacobvits, *Attachment Disorganization: Genetic Factors, Parenting Contexts, and Developmental Transformation From Infancy to Adulthood*, in *HANDBOOK OF ATTACHMENT* 666 (2nd ed., 2008).

³¹ See generally Mary Main, *The Adult Attachment Interview: Fear, Attention, Safety, and Discourse Processes*, 48 *J. OF THE AM. PSYCHOANALYTICAL ASS’N* 1055 (2000).

³² See generally BOWLBY, *supra* note 5.

particular social relationships and scenarios are likely to unfold.³³ Secure individuals, for example, tend to believe, both consciously and unconsciously, that when they are confronted with difficulties, stresses, or severe challenges, they can rely on other people for help, solve or cope with the problems, and then get back on track effectively with their lives. Insecure individuals have much less optimistic beliefs and expectations, and are therefore more likely to be suspicious, uneasy, or worried, and more likely to behave irrationally, destructively, or unproductively, sometimes resulting in illegal or violent behavior.

Attachment, Emotions, and Emotion Regulation

In this section, we review research dealing with emotions and emotion regulation in adult couple relationships, focusing especially on findings relevant to law and emotions. These findings indicate that attachment patterns in adolescence and adulthood affect the experience and regulation of anger, jealousy, and hurt feelings that contribute to relationship conflict and sometimes lead to domestic violence.

Experiencing and Managing Anger

Adult attachment researchers have studied the experience and management of anger. In Bowlby's³⁴ analysis of infants' emotional reactions to separation from an attachment figure, he viewed anger as often being a sensible and functional reaction to separation because it sometimes motivated the attachment figure to pay more attention and provide more reliable care. In general, especially for adults, anger is functional to the degree that is meant to communicate a reaction to unjust or undeserved treatment, not to

³³ Harriet S. Waters & Everett Waters, *The Attachment Working Models Concept: Among Other Things, We Build Script-like Representations of Secure Base Experiences*, 8 ATTACHMENT & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT 185, 187-88 (2006).

³⁴ See generally 2 JOHN BOWLBY, ATTACHMENT AND LOSS: SEPARATION: ANXIETY AND ANGER (Basic Books 1973).

damage or destroy a relationship partner. Bowlby³⁵ called this the “anger of hope,” because it looked toward a better future state of a relationship. He also mentioned, however, that anger can become so intense that it alienates or injures a partner, in which case it becomes highly destructive to a relationship. In some cases it even results in violence or death. He called this the “anger of despair.”

Functional anger is typical of secure individuals. For example, Mikulincer³⁶ found that, when secure adults were hurt or frustrated by a relationship partner’s behavior, they were optimistic about their partner’s willingness to apologize and ‘reform’. Barrett and Holmes³⁷ found that greater security in one’s relationships with parents or romantic partners was associated with more constructive, less aggressive responses to anger-eliciting provocations. The generally constructive nature of secure adolescents’ anger was also demonstrated in a study by Zimmermann, Maier, Winter, and Grossmann.³⁸ Adolescents performed a difficult, frustrating problem-solving task with the help of a friend, and the researchers assessed disappointment and anger during the task and negative behavior toward the friend (e.g., rejecting the friend’s suggestions without discussion). Disappointment and anger were associated with more aggressive behavior only in the case of insecure adolescents.

Avoidant individuals tend to suppress anger while still being observably hostile in certain situations. For example, Mikulincer³⁹ found that avoidant adults did *not report*

³⁵ See generally *id.*

³⁶ Mario Mikulincer, *Adult Attachment Style and Individual Differences in Functional Versus Dysfunctional Experiences of Anger*, 74 J. OF PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 513, 521 (1998).

³⁷ Paula M. Barrett & Jane Holmes, *Attachment Relationships as Predictors of Cognitive Interpretation and Response Bias in Late Adolescence*, 10 J. OF CHILD & FAMILY STUDIES 51, 61 (2001).

³⁸ Peter Zimmermann, Markus A. Maier, Monika Winter, & Klaus E. Grossmann, *Attachment and Adolescents’ Emotion Regulation During a Joint Problem-solving Task with a Friend*, 25 INT’L J. OF BEHAVIORAL DEV. 331, 340 (2001).

³⁹ Mikulincer, *supra* note 36, at 522.

intense anger in response to another person's anger-provoking behavior, but they displayed intense physiological arousal and attributed hostile intent to the irksome interaction partner even when there were clear indications, provided by the experimenter, that the partner's behavior was unintentional and not motivated by hostility. Of special relevance to the present article, Hudson and Ward⁴⁰ reported an association between avoidant attachment and self-reported anger suppression in a sample of violent incarcerated men, whose previous behavior indicated that they were subject to intense anger and aggression. In a laboratory study of support-seeking in dating couples, Rholes, Simpson, and Orina⁴¹ told the female partners that they were about to engage in an anxiety-arousing task but could wait for five minutes with their male partner before it began. Women's avoidant attachment scores, measured by a questionnaire, were associated with observable hostility, coded from video-recordings, when the women were worried about the upcoming task. Thus, although avoidant individuals are rarely comfortable describing themselves as either needy or angry, they seem quite inclined toward hostile reactions, including projecting their own angry feelings onto other people.

Anxiously attached individuals are more likely to experience and express anger and other negative emotions directly. A great deal of research shows that they are angry, hostile, and aggressive.⁴² Anxiously attached individuals tend to ruminate on relationship threats and slights, sustaining prolonged anger and resentment. Because they lack self-confidence and self-esteem, however, they may sometimes harbor these negative feelings without discussing them with their partner. As a result, their reactions to hurt feelings

⁴⁰ See generally Stephen M. Hudson & Tony Ward, *Intimacy, Loneliness, and Attachment Style in Sexual Offenders*, 12 J. OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 323 (1997).

⁴¹ See generally William S. Rholes et al., *Attachment and Anger in an Anxiety-Provoking Situation*, 76 J. OF PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 940 (1999).

⁴² See generally MIKULINER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

may include a complex mixture of resentment, hostility, self-criticism, fear, and sadness. In general, as documented with many different research methods, they tend to be highly emotional, ambivalent, and unstable.⁴³

In an interesting psychophysiological study, Diamond and Hicks⁴⁴ presented men with two anger-provoking tasks (performing serial subtraction while being criticized by an experimenter; recalling a recent anger-provoking experience) and measured anxiety and anger during and after the tasks. The researchers recorded the men's respiration-related variability in heart rate, a physiological index of down-regulation of negative emotion called "vagal tone." They found that attachment anxiety was associated with lower vagal tone—a sign that the anxious men's nervous systems responded less quickly and flexibly to the stressful tasks and recovered poorly from frustration and anger. Attachment anxiety was associated with self-reported distress and anger during and after the tasks, and vagal tone tracked the link between attachment anxiety and anger.

Couple Conflicts and Domestic Violence

Conflicts are unavoidable in relationships because no two partners' interests, attitudes, and actions are in perfect harmony at all times. Eventually, everyone is bound to feel frustrated, offended, disappointed, or betrayed. The most common reactions to such offenses are to withdraw, confront, seek revenge, or discuss the matter and, if conditions warrant, forgive the partner.

Attachment researchers have found, in many different kinds of studies, that attachment security is associated with two constructive approaches to conflict resolution:

⁴³ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

⁴⁴ See generally Lisa Diamond & Angela M. Hicks, *Attachment Style, Current Relationship Security, and Negative Emotions: The Mediating Role of Physiological Regulation*, 22 J. OF SOC. & PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 499 (2005).

(a) active discussion aimed at solving the problem and (b) understanding the temporary nature of a partner's transgression and the likelihood of apologies and improvement.⁴⁵

Attachment insecurity both anxiety and avoidance, is associated with two destructive reactions: (a) revenge or angrily breaking up and (b) withdrawing, ignoring the partner, or refusing to discuss the problem.⁴⁶

This kind of insecurity makes forgiveness more difficult and less likely. In one of our studies⁴⁷ we found that avoidant individuals were less inclined to forgive following a transgression and more likely to withdraw or seek revenge. They felt more vulnerable and humiliated, viewed their relationship as damaged, and had little empathy for and understanding of their partner. Attachment anxiety was not significantly associated with dispositions to forgive, withdraw, or seek revenge, but anxiously attached individuals reported stronger feelings of vulnerability and humiliation associated with trying to forgive a wayward partner.⁴⁸ In a daily-diary study of forgiveness in marital relationships, we⁴⁹ found that both attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted less forgiveness over a twenty-one day period. Secure husbands and wives were more inclined to forgive their partner on days when they perceived the partner to be available, attentive, and supportive. Insecure spouses tended not to forgive their partners even when the partners behaved accommodatingly.

Attachment insecurity is also related to jealousy—an important emotion in couple relationships. Anxiously attached individuals generally report high levels of jealousy,

⁴⁵ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

⁴⁶ See generally *id.*

⁴⁷ Mario Mikulincer et al., *Attachment, Mental Representations of Others, and Gratitude and Forgiveness in Romantic Relationships*, in *DYNAMICS OF ROMANTIC LOVE: ATTACHMENT, CAREGIVING, AND SEX* 190 (Guilford Press 2006).

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*

suspicion, and anxiety about their partner's potential disloyalty. They tend to experience a range of negative reactions to a partner's interest in members of the opposite sex: fear, guilt, shame, sadness, inferiority, and anger. This induces them to increase their efforts to keep track of their partner in all situations, leading to overly vigilant, suspicious, and intrusive behavior—at the extreme, including stalking.⁵⁰ Avoidant individuals rarely admit being jealous or worried about their partner's loyalty, but in some studies they were bothered but unwilling to discuss the issue with their partner.⁵¹

Negative emotions and the conflicts associated with them often call for the exercise of conflict management skills. In our review of adult attachment research,⁵² we summarized many of the studies that have examined attachment-related differences in approaches to managing conflict. Both anxious and avoidant individuals tend to appraise conflicts in threatening terms, feel poorly equipped to deal with conflicts, and find conflicts highly distressing. They have poor conflict-management skills, find it difficult to compromise or find integrative solutions to problems, and are prone to escalating conflicts or leaving them unresolved. Anxiously attached individuals are especially concerned with closeness and the threat of separation during conflicts. These patterns have been found in studies using a variety of methods, from questionnaires and interviews to behavioral observations.

There is also evidence linking attachment insecurities with physiological changes during couple conflicts. In a study by Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, and Sayer,⁵³ for

⁵⁰ See generally MIKULINER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

⁵¹ See generally *id.*

⁵² See generally *id.*

⁵³ See generally Sally I. Powers et al., *Dating Couples' Attachment Styles and Patterns of Cortisol Reactivity and Recovery in Response to a Relationship Conflict*, 90 J. OF PERSONALITY AND SOC. PSYCHOL. 613 (2006).

example, couples were asked to spend fifteen minutes discussing an unresolved conflict and attempt to resolve it. Salivary cortisol, an index of stress, was assessed before, during, and after the conflict resolution task. Attachment insecurity was associated with greater cortisol production, indicating that the distress with which it is associated is not just a matter of self-reported experience or observed communication patterns; it reaches all the way down to the physiological level.

Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips⁵⁴ found that anxiously attached people reported stronger declines than secure people in love and commitment after discussing a relationship problem with their partner. This finding was replicated and extended in a daily-diary study of couple conflicts.⁵⁵ More anxious participants reported more conflicts during the two week study and reacted to conflicts with a sharper decline in relationship satisfaction and a more pessimistic view of the relationship's future. Interestingly, although their partners did not necessarily report correspondingly negative reactions to the conflicts, anxious individuals *thought* their partners were less satisfied and less optimistic about the future of the relationship following a conflict.

Viewed from an attachment perspective, domestic violence is an exaggerated form of responding to partners' transgressions and serious conflicts.⁵⁶ Aggression in these cases is precipitated by a partner's behavior or perceived intentions and is intended to discourage or restrain a partner from withdrawing or breaking off the relationship. Given the other research we have described, it is easy to understand why anxious adults,

⁵⁴ Jeffrey A. Simpson et al., *Conflict in Close Relationships: An Attachment Perspective*, 71 J. OF PERSONALITY AND SOC. PSYCHOL. 899, 910 (1996).

⁵⁵ See generally Lorne Campbell et al., *Perceptions of Conflict and Support in Romantic Relationships: The Role of Attachment Anxiety*, 88 J. OF PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 510 (2005).

⁵⁶ Kim Bartholomew & Colleen J. Allison, *An Attachment Perspective on Abusive Dynamics in Intimate Relationships*. in DYNAMICS OF ROMANTIC LOVE: ATTACHMENT, CAREGIVING, AND SEX 102, 105 (Guilford Press 2006).

who are chronically afraid of rejection and abandonment and sometimes pessimistic about the future of their relationships, are inclined to engage in domestic violence.

Some attachment researchers have suggested that avoidant individuals might withdraw from conflict rather than become so emotional that they attack a relationship partner.⁵⁷ Bartholomew and Allison⁵⁸ found, however, that avoidant people sometimes became violent when involved in an escalating series of conflicts, especially with an anxiously attached partner who demanded their involvement. They provided a harrowing example from a study in which a husband withdrew and refused to keep arguing with his wife after they had been up most of the night battling (he wanted to calm down by reading a newspaper before leaving for work). His anxious wife came up behind him and stabbed him in the back with a kitchen knife.

Anxiously attached people's proneness to couple violence has been noted in three kinds of studies.⁵⁹ First, partners who engage in domestic violence are more anxiously attached, on average, than partners who do not resort to violence. Second, abusive men who score higher on attachment anxiety report more severe and frequent acts of coercion and partner abuse during couple conflicts. Third, questionnaire studies of adolescents and young adults have found strong correlations between attachment anxiety and couple violence that cannot be explained by relationship length or other personality variables.

With regard to avoidant attachment, Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, and Hutchinson⁶⁰ found that it was associated with wife battering; and Rankin, Saunders, and

⁵⁷ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

⁵⁸ See generally Bartholomew & Allison, *supra* note 56.

⁵⁹ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

⁶⁰ Amy Holtzworth-Munroe et al., *Violent Versus Nonviolent Husbands: Differences in Attachment Patterns, Dependency, and Jealousy*, 11 J. FAM. PSYCHOL. 314 (1997).

Williams⁶¹ found that avoidance was associated with more frequent and severe acts of domestic violence in a sample of African American men who had been arrested for partner abuse. The association between avoidance and reports of violence has been found even in prospective studies of large samples of adolescents and adults. For example, Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard⁶² reported that avoidance measured during adolescence predicted relationship violence six years later.

Interestingly, *victims* of partner abuse have also been found to suffer from attachment insecurities, with some studies finding elevations in attachment anxiety and some finding elevations in avoidance as well.⁶³ Because of the cross-sectional nature of the studies, however, the findings could indicate either that attachment insecurity puts people at risk for being treated abusively or that abuse increases attachment insecurity, or both. Also, because violence in relationships is often reciprocal, many of the victims are also perpetrators. Logically, therefore, the same variables tend to predict both perpetration and victimization.

Another issue related to being a victim of abuse is that anxiously attached victims can have problems separating from an abusive partner. Longitudinal studies indicate, for example, that anxiously attached women had trouble overcoming the distress associated with separation from an abusive partner even six months after a breakup. They were even

⁶¹ Larry B. Rankin et al., *Mediators of Attachment Style, Social Support, and Sense of Belonging in Predicting Woman Abuse by African American Men*, 15 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 1060, 1066, 1069-1071 (2000).

⁶² Nancy L. Collins et al., *Psychosocial Vulnerability from Adolescence to Adulthood: A Prospective Study of Attachment Style Differences in Relationship Functioning and Partner Choice*, 70 J. PERSONALITY 965, 997-98 (2002).

⁶³ See generally MIKULINER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

more likely than less anxiously attached women to become emotionally and sexually involved with their abusive partner after separation.⁶⁴

Attachment and Divorce

Attachment theory and research are relevant to another domain that concerns the law: divorce and the complex aftermath of divorce. In this section, we review the attachment-related emotional problems that divorce can create for the adults who are separating and for any children they share.

The Adult Partners

Divorce often arouses intense, conflicting, and confusing emotions in both partners—emotions including anger, contempt, regret, resentment, longing, affection, wish for reconciliation, guilt, anxiety, panic, sadness, and loneliness – regardless of what led to the divorce.⁶⁵ Attachment researchers attribute this mixture of positive and negative emotions to the persistence of attachment bonds even after a relationship is disrupted. Studies have shown that many men and women continue to have attachment-related feelings toward their ex-spouses. These continued feelings of attachment for an ex-spouse have been considered (in both the clinical and basic scientific literature) to be a primary cause of the emotional and adjustment problems that follow separation, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, anger, and lack of self-confidence.⁶⁶ They may also help to explain why intense disagreement and conflict occur in the months following marital separation; why many women continue to suffer physical and verbal abuse after

⁶⁴ See generally *id.*

⁶⁵ Brooke C. Feeney & Joan K. Monin, *Attachment and Divorce*, in *HANDBOOK OF ATTACHMENT: THEORY, RESEARCH, AND CLINICAL APPLICATIONS* 939 (Guilford Press 2008).

⁶⁶ ROBERT E. EMERY, *RENEGOTIATING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: DIVORCE, CHILD CUSTODY, AND MEDIATION* 216 (Guilford Press 1994).

separation and divorce, typically by men who do not want the relationship to end;⁶⁷ and why many relationships without a history of violence become violent when separation or divorce is impending.⁶⁸

The many challenges associated with divorce (e.g., beginning a new life, taking on new responsibilities, becoming a single parent, changing social networks) are stressors that are likely to activate a person's attachment system and create a desire for proximity to a primary attachment figure (who may have been the spouse prior to the divorce). The separation process is likely to be more difficult than either spouse anticipated because attachment bonds are partly unconscious and masked by conscious feelings of dissatisfaction with the spouse. This idea is consistent with research indicating that partners are often unaware of their emotional investment in their relationship until it ends⁶⁹ and this may explain why forty-two percent of couples headed for divorce separate and then reconcile at least once before finally breaking up.⁷⁰ It may also explain why some ex-spouses end up having sex and sleeping together overnight when they were intending only to transfer control of their children for a few days⁷¹ and why a few years after divorce a majority of remarried men say they regret having divorced their former wives.⁷²

⁶⁷ Glenda Kaufman Kantor & Jana L. Jasinski, *Dynamics and Risk Factors in Partner Violence*, in *PARTNER VIOLENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF 20 YEARS OF RESEARCH* 1, 33 (Jana L. Jasinski & Linda M. Williams eds., Sage Publications, 1998).

⁶⁸ Michelle L. Toews et al., *Male-Initiated Partner Abuse During Marital Separation Prior to Divorce*, 18 *VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS* 387, 387, 398 (2003).

⁶⁹ Elaine Berscheid, *Emotions in Close Relationships*, in *PSYCHOLOGY OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS* 110 (Freeman 1983).

⁷⁰ Gay C. Kitson & Helen J. Raschke, *Divorce Research: What We Know: What We Need to Know*, J. *DIVORCE*, Spring 1981, at 4.

⁷¹ Deborah Davis et al., *Physical, Emotional, and Behavioral Reactions to Breaking Up: The Roles of Gender, Age, Emotional Involvement, and Attachment Style*, 29 *PERSONALITY SOC. PSYCHO. BULL.* 871 (2003).

⁷² See generally JANET REIBSTEIN & ROGER BAMBER, *THE FAMILY THROUGH DIVORCE: HOW YOU CAN LIMIT THE DAMAGE* (Thorsons 1997).

Both clinicians and researchers have reported that continued relations with a former spouse can be difficult and that post-divorce harmony is rare, particularly when children are involved. Half of divorced women and a third of divorced men continue to be intensely angry at their former spouses, even ten years after the breakup.⁷³ Few relationships offer as many opportunities for anger and violence as the ones between former spouses.⁷⁴ Remarriages may also contribute to poor post-divorce relations because a close relationship with a former spouse may bother a new spouse and create conflicts in the new marriage.⁷⁵

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Reibstein⁷⁶ argues that, given the strength of attachment bonds, divorced couples need protection from each other during and after divorce, which can be accomplished with a limited and rule-bound contact (i.e., agreed upon rules of engagement and civility to set limits on dysfunctional behavior). Divorced couples need to redefine their relationship in a way that is mutually satisfactory without compromising adjustment.⁷⁷

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Such a redefinition process is likely to affect the functioning of the family after divorce.⁷⁸

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Among divorcing spouses, the more secure ones are at an advantage because their good communication skills, constructive coping strategies, ability to regulate and integrate emotions, and ability to solve conflicts cooperatively and constructively generally help them to reorganize their lives and, if they share children, to keep their

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⁷³ JUDITH S. WALLERSTEIN & SANDRA BLAKESLEE, *SECOND CHANCES: MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN A DECADE AFTER DIVORCE* 29 (Ticknor & Fields 1989).

⁷⁴ Feeney & Monin, *supra* note 65, at 942.

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ Janet Reibstein, *Attachment, Pain, and Detachment for the Adults in Divorce*, 13 *SEXUAL AND RELATIONSHIP THERAPY* 351, 355 (1998).

⁷⁷ Feeney & Monin, *supra* note 65, at 943.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

children's best interests in mind.⁷⁹ The anxiously attached individuals are at the greatest disadvantage, because they are the most bothered by separation and the most inclined to continue even a traumatic attachment.⁸⁰ Interventions may assist in the adjustment process. For example, Vareschi and Bursik⁸¹ found that parenting workshops dramatically increased positive parental interactions and decreased negative parental interactions for insecure participants, suggesting that interventions can provide insecure individuals with previously unused or unfamiliar tools and strategies for diffusing conflict and facilitating cohesion and support in shared parenting.

Children of Divorce

Divorce presents serious attachment-related challenges for children, which are likely to be aggravated by the parents' emotional reactions that interfere with the parents' ability to respond to their children's heightened needs for safety and security.⁸² Divorce reduces children's confidence in who and where their attachment figures are and their confidence that their parents care about them, which is likely to undermine their sense of attachment security.⁸³

Investigators have identified several factors that moderate the association between divorce and attachment security in young children. For example, as predicted by attachment theory, quality of parenting moderates the link. In addition, father visitation patterns influence mother-infant attachment. Repeated overnight separation from a primary caregiver, usually the mother, is associated with disruption in mother-infant

⁷⁹ Orna Cohen & Ricky Finzi-Dottan, *Parent-Child Relationships During the Divorce Process: From Attachment Theory and Intergenerational Perspective*, 27 CONTEMP. FAM. THERAPY 81, 84 (2005).

⁸⁰ Davis et al., *supra* note 71, at 877.

⁸¹ Courtney G. Vareschi & Krisanne Bursik, *Attachment Style Differences in the Parental Interactions and Adaptation Patterns of Divorcing Parents*, 42 J. DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE 15, 28-29 (2005).

⁸² Feeney & Monin, *supra* note 65, at 943.

⁸³ *Id.*

attachment when the conditions of visitation are poor (e.g., when parents are unable to provide adequate psychological support to the child).⁸⁴ However, mothers who function as a secure base for their children promote attachment security despite separations due to overnight visits with fathers.⁸⁵ Furthermore, mothers who provide psychological protection to their children in the context of father visitation (e.g., by being sensitively responsive to the child during the father's visitation) also promote secure attachment to the father.⁸⁶

In studies of older children of divorce, including adolescents and young adults, it is consistently found that these older offspring of divorced parents are more likely than their peers from intact families to be insecurely attached. For example, Beckwith, Cohen, and Hamilton⁸⁷ found that adverse life events through age of twelve, particularly parental divorce, increased the likelihood of having an anxious attachment orientation at eighteen years of age. Other studies indicate that adolescents and college students from divorced families are likely to score higher on both anxious and avoidant attachment.⁸⁸

Many factors seem to moderate the association between parental divorce and offsprings' attachment insecurity. First, Brennan and Shaver⁸⁹ found that having either a mother or both parents remarry is associated with the best attachment outcome for young adults. Second, researchers have shown that individuals who come from divorced families do not differ from those who come from unhappy-and-intact families in their

⁸⁴ Judith Solomon & Carol George, *The Development of Attachment in Separated and Divorced Families: Effects of Overnight Visitation, Parent and Couple Variables*, 1 ATTACHMENT & HUMAN DEV. 2, 2 (1999).

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 25.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ Leila Beckwith, Sarale E. Cohen, & Claire E. Hamilton, *Maternal Sensitivity During Infancy and Subsequent Life Events Relate to Attachment Representation at Early Adulthood*, 35 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHO. 693, 693 (1999).

⁸⁸ Feeney & Monin, *supra* note 65, at 945.

⁸⁹ Kelly A. Brennan & Phillip R. Shaver, *Attachment Styles and Parental Divorce*, 21 J. DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE 161, 172 (1993).

attachment security, indicating that the quality of the parents' relationship is important.⁹⁰ Third, perceptions of the reasons for divorce are important. For example, young people who felt that they were not involved in their parents' decision to divorce scored higher on measures of attachment security than those who felt that they were involved or responsible.⁹¹

Offsprings' Own Romantic Relationships

Research has revealed that young adults from divorced families are likely to hold less positive attitudes toward marriage and relationships, be less trusting, have problems with dependency and control, be less optimistic, and believe that disagreement between partners is destructive.⁹² Moreover, parental divorce increases the risk of conflict in offsprings' romantic relationships and of marital instability and divorce. The Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage indicated that both marital conflict and divorce in the family of origin contribute to couple instability in offspring.⁹³

However, not all children from divorced families have the same risks for troubled romantic relationships in adulthood. Closeness to parents and positive appraisals of parental divorce have been identified as protective factors, whereas parental conflict associated with divorce has a particularly negative effect on children's later relationships. The significant differences between those from intact and post-divorce families are often due to dysfunctional family dynamics and not to the divorce per se.⁹⁴ In support of this

⁹⁰ See Susan Sprecher et al., *Parental Divorce and Young Adults' Beliefs About Love*, 28 J. DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE 107, 118-119 (1998).

⁹¹ Tavi R. Walker & Marion F. Ehrenberg, *An Exploratory Study of Young Persons' Attachment Styles and Perceived Reasons for Parental Divorce*, 13 J. ADOLESCENT RESEARCH 320, 337 (1998).

⁹² See generally Feeney & Monin, *supra* note 65.

⁹³ E. Mavis Hetherington, *Intimate Pathways: Changing Patterns in Close Personal Relationships Across Time*, 52 FAMILY RELATIONS 318, 326 (2003).

⁹⁴ Sprecher et al., *supra* note 90, at 119.

conclusion, Hayashi and Strickland⁹⁵ found that college students who experienced protracted inter-parental conflict, parental rejection, or overprotective parents were more likely to report jealousy and fears of abandonment in their love relationships regardless of whether their parents divorced.

Attachment theory offers a particularly comprehensive explanation for why children from divorced families grow up to have more problems with relationships than children from intact families.⁹⁶ Because the process of divorce is so taxing for the separating parents (who are the primary, and perhaps only, attachment figures for their children), it is likely to have a large impact on the extent to which they provide a safe haven and secure base for their children. This problem is likely to be greatly amplified when the parents have insecure attachment histories themselves.

Implications of Attachment Theory and Research for Social Policy and the Law

Having briefly explained attachment theory and reviewed some of the research it has inspired, we are prepared to consider some further implications of this large body of work for the legal system. We have already mentioned, or implied, that attachment insecurity is related to poor parenting, couple violence, and emotional problems of both parents and children in divorce situations. Here we wish to consider three additional issues. The first issue that interested Bowlby⁹⁷ from the beginning, is the contribution of insecure attachment to antisocial criminal behavior. The second is the attachment-related consequences of incarcerating parents and, in the process, separating them from their

⁹⁵ Gina M. Hayashi & Bonnie R. Strickland, *Long-Term Effect of Parental Divorce on Love Relationships Divorce as Attachment Disruption*, 15 J. SOCIAL & PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 23, 34-35 (1998).

⁹⁶ See generally Brennan & Shaver, *supra* note 89.

⁹⁷ See generally BOWLBY, *supra* note 5.

children and often forcing them into foster care. The third is the nature of foster care and the possibility of improving it through attachment-focused interventions.

Insecure Attachment, Criminal Behavior, and Rehabilitation

Adult attachment researchers have examined connections between attachment insecurities and conduct disorders and problems in social adjustment such as delinquency, alcoholism, and drug abuse.⁹⁸ Anxiously attached individuals sometimes engage in delinquent or criminal behavior as a way of crying out for attention and care or expressing anger and resentment. Avoidant individuals may engage in antisocial behavior to distance themselves from others, including parents. They may also be attempting to demonstrate their lack of care for others and social norms by violating rules and laws. Both avoidant and anxious individuals are prone to substance abuse—the avoidant ones to block out painful feelings of vulnerability, self-awareness, boredom, and loneliness; the anxious ones to reduce worry, rumination, fears of abandonment, and painful memories.⁹⁹

Levinson and Fonagy¹⁰⁰ compared the attachment orientations of twenty-two imprisoned delinquents, twenty-two personality disorder patients without a criminal history, and twenty-two healthy controls. They noted a greater prevalence of avoidant attachment in the delinquent group than in the other groups. Moreover, delinquents who had committed violent offenses (e.g., murder, malicious wounding) exhibited the inability or unwillingness to talk coherently about emotions and emotional experiences shown in

⁹⁸ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

⁹⁹ See generally *id.*

¹⁰⁰ See generally Alice Levinson & Peter Fonagy, *Offending and Attachment: The Relationship Between Interpersonal Awareness and Offending in a Prison Population with Psychiatric Disorder*, 12 CANADIAN J. OF PSYCHOANALYSIS 225 (2004).

other studies to be characteristic of insecure attachment. These findings were replicated in other studies of incarcerated psychopaths.¹⁰¹

The association between anxious attachment and deviant behavior seems to depend on other personal and relational factors. For example, Rosenstein and Horowitz¹⁰² found that anxious attachment was particularly common among substance abusers with diagnosed depression. Other studies found that attachment anxiety was associated with delinquent behavior in adolescence mainly when mothers were not sensitive and responsive to their children's needs for help and guidance.¹⁰³

If incarcerated individuals with troubled attachment histories are to be rehabilitated, they will need help with their attachment issues, not simply being locked up or denied drugs and alcohol. Even treatment for drug and alcohol is likely to be ineffective after a person is released from prison if it fails to change the attachment-related issues that are likely to be responsible for it.

There is good evidence in studies of residential treatment programs for troubled and delinquent adolescents that forming and maintaining a secure attachment relationship with staff members can improve well-being.¹⁰⁴ For example, adolescents residing in a treatment center in Israel who formed secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower rates of anger, depression, and behavioral problems and more positive emotional experiences during the year.¹⁰⁵ Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members changed in the direction of security on measures of attachment

¹⁰¹ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

¹⁰² Diana S. Rosenstein & Harvey A. Horowitz, *Adolescent Attachment and Psychopathology* 64 J. CONSULTING & CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY 244 (1996).

¹⁰³ See generally MIKULINCER & SHAVER, *supra* note 8.

¹⁰⁴ See generally *id.*

¹⁰⁵ See generally *id.*

orientation. This kind of research suggests that establishing security enhancing relationships should receive top priority in rehabilitation programs.

Incarceration and Enforced Separation from One's Children

Many incarcerated Americans are parents of one or more children under the age of eighteen, which means that one to two million American children have a parent in prison.¹⁰⁶ When the parent is the mother, her incarceration often robs her children of their primary attachment figure and requires that the children be cared for by someone else. Moreover, approximately five to ten percent of women convicted of a crime are pregnant when they enter prison, which means their babies have to be delivered in or near a prison and then cared for in a prison nursery, handed over to an adult relative (often the incarcerated woman's mother), or placed in foster care. This makes the baby's attachment to the incarcerated mother impossible, and it presents problems when she is eventually released from prison and wishes to reclaim parental rights and responsibilities. The fact that her mother, who was involved in creating the incarcerated woman's attachment-related difficulties, is viewed as a likely source of "kin foster care" means that the grandchildren will be subjected to some of the same insecurity-producing parenting behaviors.

In recent years, researchers have begun to study children whose parents are incarcerated or were incarcerated at some point during the children's development. Murray and Farrington¹⁰⁷ recently reviewed the literature on this topic, summarizing

¹⁰⁶ NANCY LA VINGE, EDWARD DAVIES, & DANIEL BRAZZELL, URBAN INSTITUTE, BROKEN BONDS: UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS 2 (2008), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411616_incarcerated_parents.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ See generally Joseph Murray & David P. Farrington, *Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children*, 37 CRIME & JUST. 93 (2008).

scores of studies addressing several questions, including: Is parental imprisonment associated with negative outcomes for children? And does parental imprisonment *cause* children's negative outcomes? The answer to the first question is clearly yes. Children with an incarcerated parent are three to four times more likely than children without an incarcerated parent to eventually exhibit antisocial and delinquent behavior.¹⁰⁸ Children with an incarcerated parent are also two and a half times more likely to have a serious mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression. Later in life, they are also more likely to have substance abuse problems and, after age eighteen, to be unemployed.¹⁰⁹

The answer to second question—Is parental incarceration a *cause* of adverse outcomes for children?—also seems to be yes. Even when other variables are taken into account, parental incarceration is associated with negative behavioral and mental health outcomes for children.¹¹⁰ Murray and Farrington¹¹¹ reviewed studies showing that, after controlling for child demographics (ethnicity, socioeconomic status, neighborhood), maternal demographics, maternal smoking during pregnancy, maternal delinquency, maternal absence for reasons other than imprisonment, parental supervision, home environment, and peer pressure, maternal imprisonment *still* significantly predicted later criminal behavior in their children.

The facts suggest that American society is inadvertently increasing the problem of crime and antisocial behavior in future generations, because while attempting to deal with the current generation of law breakers, a significant number of parent-child relationships are being disrupted. To break the intergenerational cycle of crime, it would seem to be

¹⁰⁸ *Id.* at 186-87.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 186-87.

¹¹⁰ *See id.* at 186.

¹¹¹ *See generally id.* at 178-87.

important to intervene to improve parents' mental health while also improving their relationships with their children. Such an intervention might also decrease parents' recidivism rates by improving their levels of emotional control and self-awareness, while increasing their commitment to their children's well-being.

Fortunately, many promising attachment-focused interventions are already being developed and evaluated in samples of high-risk parents, including some who are incarcerated.¹¹² These interventions measurably increase parents' self-understanding, accurate perception of their children's needs, and ability to relate effectively to their children. The interventions also measurably increase the children's attachment security, self-esteem, social skills, and ability to regulate negative emotions and cope with personal challenges. These psychological and social resources make it less likely that the children will engage in antisocial or criminal behavior.

Attachment Issues in Foster Care

Since children who are removed from abusive or neglectful homes often end up in foster care, as do many children of incarcerated parents, it is worthwhile to consider how attachment processes play out in foster care situations. Recent research has shown that a foster mother's attachment orientation (measured in an hour-long interview) predicts in advance whether a troubled foster child in her care will become more or less secure and mentally healthy over time.¹¹³ Thus, if the children who are separated from their parents

¹¹² See generally CLINICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW (Howard Steele & Miriam Steele eds., 2008).

¹¹³ See generally Mary Dozier & Michael Rutter, *Challenges to the Development of Attachment Relationships Faced by Young Children in Foster and Adoptive Care*, in HANDBOOK OF ATTACHMENT: THEORY, RESEARCH, AND CLINICAL APPLICATIONS 698 (Jude Cassidy & Phillip R. Shaver eds., 2d ed. 2008).

are handed over to relatives or foster parents with insecurity-generating mental and behavioral patterns, the children may well be damaged rather than helped.

Dozier and her colleagues have designed an “Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up” (ABC) intervention program for foster parents and their foster infants or young children.¹¹⁴ This ten-week intervention, involving a one-hour home visit each week, is designed mainly to help foster parents’ regulate and reduce their foster children’s negative emotions, partly by becoming more aware of the fact that the children need tender support and affection even if they have learned in previous settings not to seek it directly. Interveners also help foster parents learn to recognize their own defensive responses to children that may be based on the foster parents’ own histories of deficient parenting and insecure attachment, not on the children’s behavior.

Two randomized clinical studies offer promising evidence for the ABC programs efficacy.¹¹⁵ One study focused on attachment security in eighty-six children who were placed in foster care between birth and eighteen months of age. Compared to control foster infants, ABC infants were significantly more likely to be securely attached to their foster mothers. Moreover, in the ABC group, sixty percent of the children were securely attached at eighteen months of age, a rate typically observed only in lower risk families. A second study focused on cortisol, the previously mentioned stress hormone, which is often high in samples of abused or traumatized children. This second study involved sixty foster children between the ages of three months and three years of age. Compared to control foster children, the ABC children had more normal morning and evening

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

cortisol levels (which did not differ from those of a comparison group of a hundred and four children who had never been in foster care).

Conclusion

Attachment theory, which began with Bowlby's comments on the frequency of "maternal deprivation" in the lives of delinquent adolescents, has inspired thousands of empirical studies. These studies focused initially on infants and young children, but in recent years attachment research has been extended to the study of adolescent and adult close relationships. The theory explains why close relationships are so important in human development. Good relationships provide a foundation for a life-long sense of security and a set of emotion-regulation skills that serve a person well in many situations. Unfortunately, when key attachment relationships are absent, unreliable, neglectful, or abusive, a person is forced to develop defenses and distorted models of relationships with others that can interfere with emotion regulation in all subsequent relationships.

This insecure developmental trajectory causes many people to come into contact with the legal profession and the criminal justice system. The consequences of insecure attachment are evident in the child protective services field, in custody disputes between divorcing parents, in cases of domestic violence and anger-fueled murders of current or former mates, in the prison system, and when placing children in foster care. There is now an enormous body of reliable evidence concerning the causes and consequences of insecure attachment that could be usefully applied in all of these settings. Such applications are just beginning, and although the initial results are encouraging, it will take time and careful evaluation research to assess and improve the outcomes.