

B.A.S.E.®

Babywatching as a Potential for Research With Students of Psychotherapy Students

B.A.S.E.® -

Babywatching als Potenzial für die Forschung mit Studierenden der Psychotherapiewissenschaft

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Kurzzusammenfassung

Im Kontext des *B.A.S.E.® - Babywatching Programms* gibt dieser Artikel einen Überblick über die Geschichte und die Entwicklung der Bindungstheorien. Er geht auf die Bindungstypen und aktuelle Präventionsprogramme ein und fasst damit etablierte Bindungstheorien zusammen, die die Entwicklung von Feinfühligkeit und Empathie in verschiedenen Altersgruppen fördern.

Das *B.A.S.E.® - Babywatching Programm* als Präventionsprogramm wurde von Karl Heinz Brisch für die deutsche Kindergarten- und Schullandschaft weiterentwickelt, findet jedoch auch in anderen Kontexten Anwendung. Dieser Beitrag geht auf das Forschungspotenzial mit den Studierenden der Psychotherapiewissenschaft ein und beleuchtet Überlegungen zu einem Forschungsprojekt an der Sigmund Freud PrivatUniversität Wien.

Schlüsselwörter

Bindung, Empathie, B.A.S.E.® - Babywatching, Psychotherapie, Studierende der Psychotherapiewissenschaft

Abstract

Through the context of the *B.A.S.E.*® - *Babywatching program*, this article reviews the history and development of theories relating to attachment, addresses attachment types and current prevention programs, and summarizes established attachment theories and attachment types that aid the development of sensitivity and empathy in different age groups.

The *B.A.S.E.*® - *Babywatching program*, designed as a preventive program, was further developed by Karl-Heinz Brisch for the German kindergarten and school landscape, but it has also been used in other contexts. This paper addresses the potential for research with students of psychotherapy science and outlines the considerations for a research project on this topic at the Sigmund Freud University, Vienna.

keywords

attachment, empathy, *B.A.S.E.*® - *Babywatching*, psychotherapy, psychotherapy science students

1. Introduction

Attachment theory has its basis in psychology and evolutionary biology and focuses on understanding the relationship, interactions, and bonds between humans. Early stories and anecdotes have been part of history in relation to emotions and attachment. Attachment and related research have multiple focal points reaching from a more biological and developmental focal point to a psychoanalytic focal point. All the different theories, concepts, and models have the goal to understand the interaction, which is taking place between a mother and her infant or a father and his infant, respectively. A necessary framework for the infant to develop a secure attachment is to feel safe and secure, which includes the feeling of having been seen and known by the attachment figure. The infant has made the experience that the attachment figure supports the infant in feeling comfortable, soothed, and reassured, as well as feeling valued. The attachment figure must be able to give the child the feeling of support, which enables the child to explore the world that surrounds him/her. Additionally, the attachment theory explores how the caregiver understands the needs of the infant, especially in stressful situations, and furthers its social understanding through sensitive and responsive caring.

2. Historical Considerations and the Development of Theories Relating to Attachment

In the 20th century, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) developed psychoanalysis and with it, the drive theory. Within the drive theory, Freud postulated that the bond between a mother and her infant is based on an oral gratification based on Freud's stages of psycho-sexual development. The oral phase occurs from birth to the first year of life. The infant explores the surrounding environment by using their mouth. The infant is able to quickly understand that its needs are satisfied through the mouth. During the breastfeeding process, the child is hungry and the mother offers her breast as a way to satisfy the infant's needs. The use of the mouth brings gratification to the child and reduces stress for the infant. Freud postulates that it is during this first year of life, when the mother is the primary caregiver of the infant, that the primordial trust (*Urvertrauen*) is formed. If a bond is disturbed during this time, the infant does not learn about primordial trust. This can have consequences later in life.

In the 1930s, the Scottish psychiatrist Ian Dishart Suttie (1889-1935), whose work explored the taboos families dealt with in regard to expressing tenderness, argued that infants need affection from a primary caregiver. He pointed out that the bond is based not just on the infant's basic needs, such as hunger, but the experienced gratifications arising from it. He postulated that tenderness plays a larger role in the process between infant and caregiver than originally recognized (Gossling, 2020).

William Blatz (1895-1964) was a Canadian developmental psychologist who researched security and attachment for many years and rejected Freud's theories. The focus of his work was on the security that an individual needs to experience. His idea of security went beyond the physical security and also included the concept of an emotionally secure base. Furthermore, he investigated the ever-changing balance between constructs such as responsibility and freedom, or dependence and independence.

René Spitz (1887-1974) was an Austrian-American psychoanalyst focusing on the work on marasmus, a severe form of malnutrition, and the death of unmothered infants. He contributed extensive work

on hospitalism, the psychological and physiological effects of a prolonged or total separation of the infant from an attachment figure (Van der Horst, van Rosmalen, & van der Veer, 2019). This was influenced by the fact of him being the first person to directly observe the infant, which led to a large field of research based on watching the infant. In this research, the babies were watched, which later led to prevention programs based on observing the infant. His work was linked to that of James and Joyce Robertson who filmed the separation of mother and infant in their work. James Robertson (1911-1988) was a Scottish psychoanalyst and social worker at the Tavistock Clinic in London for nearly 30 years. He came from an working-class family in Glasgow and was educated over time to become an analyst with support from Anna Freud (1895-1982) and his wife Joyce. Robertson began his work as a caretaker in one of the children's homes and in the 1940s observed how children reacted to the separations (Alsop-Shields & Mohay, 2001). Encouraged by John Bowlby, Robertson began to document his observations and eventually made these the focus of his work. His documentary work remains relevant to the present day. He addressed the parent-child relationship in the hospital and subsequently the educative and preventative measures regarding hospitalism and rooming-in, a process whereby parents can stay with the child in the hospital (Leiber, Radke, & Müller, 2001).

The British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1907-1990) posited that a primary caregiver attending to the needs of an infant supports the infant's social and emotional well-being. This research originated in part from his own experiences. As a young child, he had limited contact with his parents, which was common at the time, and therefore received the necessary care from his nanny. Since the nanny was only responsible for him, she became his primary attachment figure during his early years. She left the family when John Bowlby was three years old, which was perceived as a formative experience. Later Bowlby explored the dependency that infants have and their ability to explore when a secure attachment has been experienced. In absence of such an experience, regression may occur. Early on, he worked with Melanie Klein (1882-1960), an Austrian-British psychoanalyst known for her work on the analysis of children. In her work, Melanie Klein looked at the internal conflicts occurring within a child, as well as their internal fantasies (Goddemeier, 2010). The events and circumstances that surrounded the child were less of a focus.

In 1940, John Bowlby wrote an article in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in which he articulated the various facets of the mother-child relationship (Bowlby, 1940). A few years later he published a study of his work with adolescent thieves and after the end of World War II he took charge of the parent-child unit at the Tavistock Clinic in London. The subject of his research was the separation of mother and child (Grossmann & Grossmann, 2012). James Robertson joined this research group at the Tavistock Clinic in 1948 and Mary Ainsworth in 1950.

In 1951 Bowlby wrote a monograph and prepared the report for the World Health Organization (WHO) *Mental Care and Mental Health* postulating the idea that an infant should have a close, satisfactory, and enjoyable relationship with the mother or a close attachment figure (Bowlby, 1986). At the time, this was considered to be a controversial opinion and there was no data or theory to support such a conclusion. A year later, Joyce and James Robertsons and John Bowlby showed the documentary "A Two-Year Old Goes to the Hospital" to express further understanding of what an infant or a child is subjected to. Following the publication of the monograph in 1951, Bowlby developed his theories while drawing on research from the fields of evolutionary biology, developmental psychology, and others.

Two Papers that originally dealt with the concept of attachment were *The Nature of the Child's Ties to his Mother* (1958) by John Bowlby and *The Nature of Love* (1958) by Harry Harlow. Following this work Bowlby published two more papers *Separation Anxiety* (1960) and *Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood* (1960). All these works, along with additional research, eventually led to the publication of his trilogy on Attachment and Loss in his three well-known works on attachment theory: *Attachment* (Bowlby, 1969), *Separation* (Bowlby, 1973), and *Loss*. (Bowlby, 1980; Brisch, 2009).

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) was an American-Canadian developmental psychologist who was born into an academic family and her parents placed great value on education. She received her Ph.D. in 1939 and William Blatz served as her doctoral advisor. After receiving her doctorate, she began a career in the Canadian Army. Thereafter, she returned to university to further her research, partly focused on the psychology of personality. She married in 1950 and moved with her husband to London, where she began a position in the research group at the Tavistock Clinic, which was headed by John Bowlby. She left this position in the 1960s to go to Uganda, Africa, and work on longitudinal field studies observing the mother-infant interaction, and the conduction of interviews. Ainsworth eventually published her work in "Infancy in Uganda" in 1967. Throughout her research, Mary Ainsworth addressed the facets of babies' sensitivity and communications with their attachment figures, as well as the "Strange Situation Test" (Ainsworth, 1977). Originally the "Strange Situation" took place in a room with a one-way mirror to observe the behaviour of the infant. The room contains toys for the children and within three minutes multiple steps are taken: the mother and the infant are alone in the room until a stranger enters. The mother leaves the infant alone with that stranger. The mother returns and thereafter the stranger leaves. Following that the mother leaves again, leaving the child to his/her own devices. The stranger returns to the scene. Finally, the mother returns and the stranger exits (MindOnly Pty Ltd, 2023).

Following John Bowlby's and Mary Ainsworth's death, research on attachment by the Tavistoc Clinic team continued, but some researchers wondered, if further research was even necessary or if the saturation point had been reached. Behrens, Hesse, and Main (2007) conducted a study in Japan that revealed that the global norms used by Main & Cassidy's adult attachment classification scoring system were accurate. Additionally, it looked into attachment through a cross-cultural perspective. Research and publications continued, but also focused on related topics. Peter Fonagy and Mary Target, both British psychoanalysts, published numerous papers and books on attachment, psychoanalysis and mentalization. Additionally, research on mentalization and Theory of Mind had been conducted. A noteworthy study regarding attachment was done by the English and Romanian Adoptees Study Team, which was led by Michael Rutter examining the adoption experience and attachment of adopted children until they were in their teens (Beckett et al., 2006; Mehta et al., 2009). In the English and Romanian Adoptees study, Kennedy et al. (2016) published their findings on deprivation-related ADHD and the potential association with early infant and childhood experiences. In Germany, Karl-Heinz Brisch, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and psychoanalyst published on ADHD, trauma, and attachment and the connections between them. Additionally, he also developed prevention programmes, such as S.A.F.E.® and B.A.S.E.® - Babywatching to help foster secure attachments (Brisch, 2010; Brisch, 2016).

3. Attachment and Attachment Types

Historical considerations underscore that the essential aspect and the centre point of attachment theory is the mother-child or father-child relationship. When an infant is born, it is looking for security and connection, which it should find in the relationship with its parents or other attachment figures, as Bowlby, Ainsworth and other theorists have described. However, when a child perceives a situation as dangerous, it is in need and looks for protection, safety, and reassurance in one of its attachment figures. In order to become and remain an attachment figure for a child, an intensive contact with the child must be maintained, as an infant cannot understand the concept of time. It is necessary for the attachment figures to sensitively perceive and co-regulate the child's emotions and behaviours. The co-regulation serves to relax the activated attachment system, which allows the exploration system to develop. If this process is possible, it indicates that the child has a secure attachment to their attachment figure. If the reactions of the infant is different, another type of attachment might be present.

Additionally, it is essential to keep in mind the child's developmental level. Rudolph Schaffer and Peggy Emerson researched the bond that is shared between infant and caregiver, and the process that it goes through over time, while keeping attachment theories and attachment styles in the forefront. In their work, *The Development of Social Attachments in Infancy* (1964), they developed a model of four stages as a result of their study: Once an infant is born, he/she goes through four different stages within the first year of life. For the first six weeks, an infant doesn't differentiate between the individuals in his/her life. During this **asocial phase (zero to six weeks)**, the infant tries to form an attachment with anyone the infant is surrounded with. Afterwards, during the **indiscriminate stage (six weeks to seven months)**, the infant and the caregiver form a bond that strengthens throughout their time spent together. This is where the process of differentiation starts and the infant begins to separate the individuals that he/she interacts with, however they do not yet fear strangers. This process begins after seven months in the **specific attachment stage (seven to nine months)**, when the infant becomes specific about the main caregiver and the adults that closely surround the infant. In this process of separation anxiety, the infant experiences distress when being surrounded by strangers with a close attachment figure nearby. After an additional period of three months, the **multiple attachment stage (ten to 18 months)** begins, during which the attachment that has been built daily between the infant and the attachment figure/primary caregiver grows stronger. A child begins to want to form bonds with others outside of the relationship with the primary caregiver (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Boldt, Goffin and Kochanska's (2020) research, *The Significance of Early Parent-Child Attachment for Emerging Regulation: A Longitudinal Investigation of Processes and Mechanisms From Toddler Age to Preadolescence* linked a child's early attachment to preadolescent abilities in regards to social regulation and adjustment. While the attachment security at the age of two served as a prognostic indicator of the child's ability to regulate socially in a group setting. Hence, if a child is able to regulate its own emotions earlier in life, it could influence a child's ability for social regulation in their early teens (Boldt, Goffin & Kochanska, 2020).

Within the framework of empirical research, it has been possible to operationalize and make tangible attachment behaviour using various tools. However, Mary Ainsworth's Ph.D. student Mary Main observed behaviour that did not fit into the categories of secure, insecure-avoidant, or insecure-

ambivalent attachment. Thus, a fourth category, labeled disorganized attachment was created. Main later focused on this type of attachment, which includes resistant and dismissive behaviours (MindOnly Pty Ltd, 2023).

Thus, according to Ainsworth and later Main, four types of attachment have been identified (Brisch, 2009):

- Secure attachment (B): The child experiences and expresses the stress and feelings he/she is experiencing.
- Anxious-avoidant attachment (A): The child feels stress and emotions, avoids them, and begins to develop and eventually use compensatory strategies, such as toys.
- Anxious-ambivalent attachment (C): The child feels stress and emotions but reacts in contradictory ways, such as wanting to be close while also wanting to get away.
- Disorganized attachment (D): The child feels stress and emotions and responds with bizarre behaviours such as freezing or rocking back and forth.

4. Prevention Programmes

Looking at the research on child development and the attachment types, researchers and professionals have thought about possible ways to support secure attachments for infants and children from an early age. In 1964, Caplan argued that there are three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Gaspar de Matos, Wainwright, Gaspar, Barletta, and Beatriz Neufeld (2019, p. 1) defined the three levels of prevention according to Caplan in an article as follows, "Primary prevention was meant to target the general populations in order to minimize the appearance of new cases; the secondary prevention involved interventions with populations that have a higher risk of developing a problem, and the tertiary prevention aimed to reduce the impact on the group of people whose are already suffering from the relevant condition." Longitudinal studies focusing on emotional abuse indicate that emotional abuse has negative effects on the child's psyche, their brain development, immune system and stress regulation. If the emotional abuse lasts a prolonged period of time, it can result in traumatic disorders and hinder the child's overall development. Based on this research, prevention has taken on a key role in supporting individuals at earlier stages in hopes of preventing them to fall into an emotionally abusive spiral (Brisch, 2017).

Current research, especially involving infants, is taking place in a number of fields closely related to psychotherapy, such as neuroscience. A study by Falck-Ytter et al. (2021) took place in Sweden, where they studied twins in a multi-method approach to understand the genetic and environmental factors that might influence the development and the brain of the infants. Hence, prevention programs for and relating to infants for a multitude of different aspects and age groups were created. To illustrate the diversity, a few of the many existing programs are named below:

Helmer, Thronberg and Mörelius (2021) published their work on a collaborative intervention for the parent-infant interaction during the neonatal period. Parents are supported in intervention sessions directly, as they perform everyday caregiving tasks and are able to adjust their behaviour and respond

to infant's cues immediately. This process sharpens the parent's awareness of their baby's cues and their interpretations from early on. Further studies are currently taking place (Helmer, Thronberg and Mörelius, 2021).

In the Cambridge University Press, Slade et al. (2020) published the results of the second phase of randomized controlled trials of Minding the Baby (MTB). MTB is an interdisciplinary intervention, in which a nurse or social worker, visits first-time mothers in underserved, underprivileged, urban communities. They support mothers from pregnancy until the child turns two years old. Mothers that participated in MTB were more likely to be securely attached when compared to the control group (Slade et al., 2020). The idea to support parents early in their journey of becoming and being parents, is also shared by Karl Heinz Brisch, who developed *SAFE*[®] - *Sichere Ausbildung für Eltern*, which supports parents from the end of the second trimester of their pregnancies through the first year of the child's life. In addition to individual appointments and a support hotline, the parents are part of a group that meets ten times within this process, with each meeting having a different focus. Research shows that *SAFE*[®] participants have an above average success establishing a secure relationship with their infant (Trost & Landers, 2017). Additionally, to the *SAFE*[®] programme, Karl Heinz Brisch also further developed the prevention programme *B.A.S.E.*[®] - Babywatching.

4.1 B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching: A Prevention Programme

B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching is a prevention programme developed by the American child psychiatrist and aggression researcher Henri Parens. It was further adapted for the German school landscape by the Munich-based attachment researcher and psychiatrist Karl Heinz Brisch. *B.A.S.E.*[®] - Babywatching stands for "**B**abywatching against **A**ggression and anxiety for **S**ensitivity and **E**mpathy". The concept of watching a baby has a rich history going back to René Spitz and the research into the significance and impact it can have on the child's psychological well-being. *B.A.S.E.*[®] - Babywatching takes place in the original concept during kindergarten or school time, depending on the age of the children. The children sit in a circle with a blanket in the centre. The mother comes in and interacts with her baby as she would in any other setting. The children observe and name what they see, while being guided by a group leader (Brisch, 2016). The group leader addresses four levels of observation for the mother and the baby: (1) behavioural level, (2) motivational level, (3) emotional level, (4a) identification level - action, and (4b) identification level - feelings.

A study was carried out in collaboration with the „Stadtschulamt Frankfurt am Main“ and the department „Pädiatrische Psychosomatik und Psychotherapie“ of the „Dr. von Haunerschen Kinderspitale, Klinikum der LMU München“ with Karl-Heinz Brisch. Over the course of a year, this setting takes place once a week for about 20-30 minutes (Brisch, 2016). In the pilot study, 40 day-care institutions in Frankfurt were invited to participate and four of those institutions took part in the longitudinal study. Due to the historical component, the interaction is usually described as a mother-infant-interaction, but it is important to mention that *B.A.S.E.*[®] - Babywatching can of course also be done with a father and a baby. The study shows that children taking part in guided *B.A.S.E.*[®] Babywatching groups show a positive development in terms of empathy in the intervention group. In the Child Behavior Checklist, an assessment completed by the parents, showed a significant reduction

in internalised and externalised behaviours. Additionally, it was found that the emotional vocabulary and specific vocabulary present in mother-infant interactions, as well as their emotions, developed positively. These trends were shared and appeared to be consistent with the field report of the B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching group leaders (Hollerbach, 2017).

Furthermore, multiple theses were written focusing on empathy and emotional development, and some also focused directly on B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching. Andrea Haneder's master's thesis was conducted on the topic of B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching in 2011 and took place at five Tyrolean primary school. (Haneder, 2011). Additionally, Kathrin Schnedl conducted a pilot study as part of her master's thesis to investigate the empathy and sensitivity of a single focus child from a kindergarten B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching course (Schnedl, 2015). Both hypotheses were based on Karl Heinz Brisch's study.

In Paris Lodron University in Salzburg, Austria, a larger research project took place in 2020 and 2021. As a result, several master's theses were produced including those of Dietl (2020), Freimuth (2020), Pross (2020), Kosztolányi (2020), Knape (2021), and Mick (2021). In Salzburg, within a research project, B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching was offered as part of a seminar alongside a course on the topic of attachment. Psychology students were trained in different aspects of the course including empathy, Theory of Mind, Adult Attachment Projective Picture System (AAP) and emotion regulation. The test procedures of the theses from 2020 appear to differ slightly from those of 2021; while the design remained similar, the instruments have changed. As each thesis focused on different aspects of the research project, the findings differ accordingly. Mick (2021) describes in her master's thesis that the sample consisted of 54 psychology students who attended a lecture on the analysis of parent-child interaction. Fifteen students from this class participated in the practical exercise "B.A.S.E.[®]-Babywatching" and eleven students in the practical exercise "Nonviolent Communication", leaving 28 students in the control group. A pre- and post-comparison of the already documented instruments took place, which showed that there was a significant increase in Theory of Mind through B.A.S.E.[®]-Babywatching and a marginally significant increase in emotion regulation through Nonviolent Communication. A positive training effect is evident; however, due to methodological limitations, further research is necessary.

4.2 B.A.S.E.[®] - Babywatching: Potential for Research with Students of Psychotherapy Science

The understanding of the existing research in psychology studies raises the question of how this could be developed to further transfer the knowledge that took place in the research projects into research with psychotherapy students. Sensitivity and empathy are competences that are desirable and necessary for the profession of a psychotherapist. This would allow future therapists to experience and reflect on the interaction between mother and child, as well as the milestones of infant development. In addition, this could serve as a self-awareness component, as students can also be confronted with their own experiences and feelings.

The question now arises as to what happens when students of psychotherapy science participate in an observation of mother-infant interaction lead by a B.A.S.E.[®] group leader?

A proposal for this research has been developed in order to understand the question above and to further delve into this research. The programme is designed to take place over the course of four months with a total of 14 appointments, of which twelve will be for the observation. A maximum of 15 psychotherapy students who are advanced in their training would participate in the initial appointments. At the first appointment, the participating students would be informed about the study, their rights, their consent, the completion of multiple questionnaires and an introduction to the project. For the next twelve sessions, a mother and her infant would attend for 20-30 minutes, following the original design by Karl Heinz Brisch. It is imperative to support the mothers so that she may not be offended by the student naming their thoughts and feelings. Thereafter, students have time to complete their participation observational protocols and at the end of the session a taped, joined reflection process takes place. Interpretations can be documented by students on their observation log. The last appointment is for second completion of the questionnaires and a final reflection group in which the students can let the process sink in and reflect on the intervention itself.

5 Summary

In this article, the B.A.S.E.[®]- Babywatching programme was put into context by reviewing the history and the development of attachment theories and types of attachment. Some of the existing prevention programmes were addressed to provide further background and allow to focus on the B.A.S.E.[®]- Babywatching programme, which was developed with the then current attachment theories and attachment types in mind. The B.A.S.E.[®]- Babywatching programme, as further developed by Karl-Heinz Brisch, was discussed in detail, including its possible context and applications. Furthermore, the essence of existing research was reviewed. The potential for research with students of psychotherapy science was highlighted, and considerations for a research project related to this topic at the Sigmund Freud University, Vienna, were outlined. Acknowledging the need for extended research to better understand the potential benefits of the B.A.S.E.[®]- Babywatching programme for students of psychotherapy science would require the implementation of the proposed research project.

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