Siblings : parent-child attachments, perceptions, interacion and family dynamics

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

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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 that 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 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, & Wall (1978)[1] were able to identify

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[1]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 & 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 & 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 & 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).

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 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 & 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, & 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 & 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 & Zaouche Gaudron, 2011; Euillet, Spencer, Troupel-Cremel, Fresno & Zaouche Gaudron, 2008).

Many studies have pointed out the stability of I.W.M. over time in the absence of critical life events (Egeland & Farber, 1984; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985; Grossmann, Grossmann & Zimmerman, 1999; Bernier, Larose & 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 or 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 children-insecure parents), and, as pointed out by K.E. Grossmann and K. Grossmann (1998, 56), "this hope hides a paradox, for it presupposes a determinism which would deny the benefits of subsequent or current care relationships."

1.2 Various attachment figures

1.2.1 The father as attachment figure

The fact that the child becomes attached to the child's father at nearly the same moment as the construction of the mother-child attachment is a reality which has brought about drastic change in this area of research. Lamb's emblematic studies from the 1970s showed that, from eight months of age, young children demonstrate an attachment bond with both the father and the mother, and display even more distal affiliative behaviors towards their father (such as smiling, vocalizing and watching) (Lamb, 1977). However, when a strange person is introduced, these children tend to exhibit more attachment behaviors towards their mother. Throughout their second year, these children show a preference for their father, with more frequent attachment behaviors in his presence, especially in boys. A dozen years later, another observation emerges, with several studies supporting the hypothesis that the father represents a different social context from the mother. For example, Main and Weston (1982) pointed out in particular that some children can end up feeling secure with their mother yet insecure with their father, and vice versa. Miljkovitch (2011) reaffirmed this result two decades later. In the 1990s, Kromelow et al. Co (1990) confirmed the existence of a different social context: the paternal presence stimulates the sociability of the young child towards an unfamiliar person, which could be interpreted as evidence of novelty and openness towards the outside world, especially for little boys. These precious studies suggest that the mother-child and father-child attachment bonds cannot be thought of as redundant relationships, and that they are based on particular styles of interaction.

1.2.2. Fraternal attachment

If the father figure is the object of diverse research both from the theoretical standpoint (to go beyond the maternal monotropy), taking into account the age and gender of the children, and in terms of the methodological register (modification of the initial protocol of the strange situation, for example), the fraternal question has been a bit neglected, even in Anglo-Saxon countries. Some studies have stated that as early as 3 years of age, a brother is capable of

reassuring, caring for and making his younger sibling feel safe (Howe & Ross, 1990; Stewart 1983; Stewart & Marvin, 1984), while another study reports that a brother is capable of stimulating a younger sibling so as to explore the external world (Samuels, 1980). Troupel-Cremel (2006), in a recent study on a population of 40 French siblings with the youngest between the ages of 3 and 4 ($M = 3.56$) and the oldest between the ages of 4 and 9 ($M = 6.44$) living in the same household since birth with both their biological parents, used an adaptation of the story completion task procedure (Troupel & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2004). The main results indicated that the majority of youngest children are attached to their siblings, and that oldest children are able to act as a secure base for youngest children so that they can develop increased autonomy and explore the external world. It should be noted, however, that the oldest child can serve as an attachment figure in everyday moments of minimal stress but would be less dependable in the case of a more serious situation. Still, if the oldest children who are perspective-takers turn out to be capable of reassuring their younger siblings, those oldest children who cannot do so because of their lacking maturity could represent an insecure type of attachment figure. Furthermore, sibling attachment is influenced by the representation of the quality of sibling relationships and by certain sibling characteristics such as gender, age and age gap. In conclusion, Troupel-Cremel (2006) puts forward the hypothesis that a sibling can serve as a competent attachment figure with the ability to take over should the principal attachment figure be unavailable, and that this is more effective with regard to exploration than to reassurance. Seen from this angle, the sibling would be a "step-in attachment figure" and the attachment relationship which is established between the child and the child's sibling could be qualified as an "exploratory relationship of proximity".

We will now present the family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974), which developed alongside attachment theory.

2. FAMILY AS A SYSTEM

Studies of systems and their increasingly precise definition have been of great use to therapists, enabling them to apply the results to the family and its members, considered to be an interacting set of elements bringing together the properties of the said system. No longer considered the sum of the individuals within it, the family itself becomes a different "whole".

2.1 Definition and family system make-up

A system can be defined as a "set of elements in interaction such that the modification of one of them brings about a modification in all the others" (Van Bertalanffy, 1973). These elements are linked to each other by relationships, with the term "interaction" signifying that the behavior of one of the elements in one of these relationships can be different in another relationship of the same system. The system is organized in accordance with both its environment and its purpose, evolving over time (Ausloos, 1995). It presents a structure composed of a limit separating the system from its environment, together with elements having certain properties and linked by a network of communication permitting the circulation of energy, matter and information between elements (Marc & Picar, 2000).

The family, as a child's first life space and place of socialization, constitutes a veritable relational environment with all the qualities of a system (Cox & Paley, 1997). This family system is an organized whole, with interdependent components and a hierarchical structure. The child must adapt to the family, the elements of which vary in number and complexity, influencing the child both directly, through their interactions with the child, and indirectly, through their interactions with each other (Lewis, 2005).

The four principals of the General System Theory (Van Bertalanffy, 1973) can therefore be applied to the family (Cox & Paley, 1997). The principle of totality and order refers to the idea that "a whole is not the same as the sum of its parts" and has properties that cannot simply be understood as the combined characteristics of each part. If we are to fully

understand the group dynamic, it is at this level that we must situate ourselves, and not at the level of the individual (Marc & Picard, 2000). The principle of a hierarchical structure implies that systems are composed of subsystems alone. The subsystems are defined by family ties. In order for the family to function harmoniously, these ties must remain clear and flexible.

In other words, while the family members must be able to function within these subsystems without an interface with the other members, they must also be able to access the resources of the family unit (Minuchin, 1974). Within the family, several subsystems exist: the parental subsystem (transgenerational), the spouse subsystem (intragenerational), the coparental subsystem (intergenerational), and the sibling subsystem (intragenerational). The adaptive self-stabilization principle refers to the systems' homeostasis which compensates for changing environmental conditions by making coordinated changes in their own operating models. One of the most important tasks of the family system is to regulate the transactions with the environment and, at the same time, preserve the integrity of the family ties (Broderick, 1993). Finally, the adaptive self-organization principle, complementary to the notion of self-stabilization, is related to the openness of the living system which is the family, and its ability to adapt to changes or to defy the existing system.

The two final points—stability and family organization—reflect the adaptability of the family system, and its flexibility.

According to Van Bertalanffy (1973), it is necessary to understand not only the elements within a system, but most importantly, their interrelations.

2.2 Various subsystems (intergenerational, marital, coparental, parent-child and sibling)

The family system is composed of numerous subsystems, each of which can be considered both autonomous and dependent of the other subsystems in its presence. The fact

that the family system is part of a larger context leads to interactions of the family with its environment. We will remain at a micro-systemic level here and consider the first subsystem as being intergenerational. It is composed of the relationships between the parents and their own parents. Each person has a personal history and the parental influence which they each have on the personal development of the children, and later on the adults that they become, cannot be refuted. We will address these influences in the chapter regarding the systemic approach to attachment.

At the marital level, the couple consisting of the parents constitutes a second subsystem. The couple's relationships are dyadic, only concerning the father and the mother, without any ties to their child(ren).

Then there is the coparental subsystem. The term coparental relationship arose in the United States at the end of the 1970s when numerous Americans were beginning to raise their children in families of divorce or separation. The behavioral difficulties exhibited by some of these children made it possible to better understand the importance of continuity in the parental relationship even after a divorce or separation. This subsystem is characterized by a group dynamic including the father, the mother and the child. It is through this relationship that the parents negotiate their roles, their responsibilities and their respective contributions towards each child (Margolin, Gordis & John, 2001). The term parental alliance was proposed by Weissman and Cohen (1985) and refers to the degree to which parents cooperate in their parental roles, a degree ranging from unwavering support (positive or supporting parental alliance) to the systematic destruction of the partner's initiative and the destabilizing of the partner (negative or denigrating parental alliance). According to the authors, the coparental relationship is situated either at the dyadic level (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004), or the triadic level, or even the polyadic level, depending on the number of children in the family, as long as the relationship continues to concern one or more children for which the caregiving parents

share the responsibility (McConnell, Lauretti, Khazan & McHale, 2003). It is often impossible to qualify the parental alliance as either cooperative or competitive without referring back to which one of the children is "coparented".

The following subsystem is the parent-child subsystem. It is intergenerational and takes into consideration the relationships of each of the parents with each of the children, independently of the others. Relationship examples would include the father-oldest child relationship or mother-oldest child relationship or the father-youngest child or mother-youngest child, no matter the gender of the child.

Finally, emphasis should be put on the sibling subsystem, which has, to date, been only sparsely represented in the research literature. First perceived as a subordinate of the marital couple due to the rivalry engendered by the intrusion of the youngest child in the experience of the oedipal complex of the oldest child, it has now clearly been accepted as a subsystem that is both autonomous, with specific relationships developing among siblings, and interdependent of the other subsystems (cf. for example the studies establishing a link between marital conflict and sibling opposition, Margolin, 1981).

We have seen that the family, due to the interactions that occur within it, can be defined as a system made up of several subsystems. We will now consider how the entirety of these relationships together influence the original dyadic relationship upon which the parent-child attachment theorists have concentrated up until now.

3. ATTACHMENT WITHIN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

Most studies have examined the impact of the relational quality of one or two participants on one relationship and few studies have examined the impact of combined relationships (O'Connor, Deater-Deckard, Fulker, Rutter, & Plomin, 1998). To begin, we will present the main results of the so-called analytical studies, after which we will examine the systemic

approach to attachment itself. We feel it important to specify here that our understanding of analytic is not "the investigation of the unconscious" but rather the approach which takes into consideration interactions and psychological processes in an isolated manner, focusing on each of the different elements of which they are composed.

3.1. <u>Main findings of past analytical research</u>

3.1.1 Attachment and the transgenerational subsystem

Having both come from their own family systems, the parents have created a representation of attachment, an internal working model, of their relationships with their own parents during their childhood. Earlier, we saw that Main et al. (1985) made possible the operationalizing of these representations at the adult stage through the Adult Attachment Interview (A.A.I.). Research concerning attachment representations has suggested that not only is this transmitted from mother to child, but also has an impact on a person's behavioral choices.

The attachment representation, therefore, has a strong effect on the quality of a child's attachment. This transmission mechanism could be explained—at least partially—by the influence of the parent's attachment models on their sensitivity towards the child. This sensitivity could influence the quality of the interactions and encourage, or not encourage, the child's feeling of security. In general, studies have revealed that parents who have an insecure I.W.M. are more susceptible to interacting in a non-supportive and negative manner with their own children and, in return, to having children who react in the same ways (Cohn, Cowan, Cowan & Pearson, 1992; Grusec & Mammone, 1995). Steele, Steele & Fonagy (1996) spoke of a "primary effect of maternal attachment" and showed that this intergenerational transmission is linked to the mother (Miljkovitch, Pierrehumbert, Bretherton & Halfon, 2004) and not to the father or to the two parents. The father-child attachment, according to these

authors, is influenced by the attachment representation of the mother, but the influence of the father on the child's attachment categorization is instead at the semantic level, principally through language. Where these authors are concerned, however, it must be noted that the possibility exists of a bias: the instruments used to measure the parental and parent-child attachment were apparently more sensitive to feminine characteristics, and the requests were made, for the most part, from thoughts and feelings regarding relationships which could be seen as being more familiar to women (Van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2004).

Beyond this intergenerational transmission, an association between the adult attachment style and marital satisfaction has, moreover, been clearly established (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Secure spouses report a better regulation of their emotions and are more satisfied with their marital relationship. Crowell, Treboux, Gao, Fyffe, Pan and Waters (2002) found that spouses with a secure operating model are less rejecting and more supportive with their partner. It is therefore possible that couples containing one secure partner might protect an insecure partner from the negative effects of an insecure attachment (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan & Pearson, 1992; Feeney, 2002).

Studies have also looked into the influence of the adult attachment representation on the parental sphere through the childrearing styles which are used as well as the link with parental depression and the perception of child's temperament thereafter. The parenting experience highlights the quality of the parenting which has been received, with parents often running the risk of behaving with their own children according to the representation of themselves which they experienced as children (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Adam, Gunnar and Tanaka (2004) found, for example, that "preoccupied" mothers are significantly more intrusive—hindering their children's autonomy more than the "detached" and "autonomous" mothers. The "autonomous" parents are also more sensitive to their relationships to their children than insecure parents (Ward & Carlson, 1995). The attachment representation of

insecure parents brings with it less sensitive and less coherent parenting than for secure parents (Cohn & *al*., 1992; Slade, Belsky, Aber & Phelps, 2002). Cohn & al. (1992) pointed out that an attachment representation is not linked to the warmth of the mother, but that insecure mothers provide significantly less structure than do secure mothers to their preschool-age children.

Furthermore, Pesonen, Räikkönen, Strandberg, Keltikangas-Järvinen and Järvenpää (2004) showed that the insecure attachment style of mothers or fathers and the symptoms of depression were linked to the perceptions of the infant as having a positive or negative temperament. Multivarite analyses of symptoms of depression and attachment styles with the perceived temperament suggested that symptoms of depression and the perceived temperament remain strongly linked, while the associations between attachment style and perceived temperament were, in most cases, reduced to nearly nothing. The work of Adam et al. (2004) concluded however that a link exists between "detached" mothers and feelings of sadness, fatigue, disinterest and disengagement. Other research has established a link between these "detached" representations and a high level of anxiety and depression (Dozier, Stovall, & Albus, 1999).

The representations of attachment held by parents, therefore, play a direct role in the quality of attachment forged with a child, but also an indirect role through the style of parenting that is adopted or, further still, the perception of the child's temperament which these representations arouse in the parents, in particular those which present a psychopathology of depression.

We will now examine both the links between the marital subsystem and attachment but also other family subsystems.

3.1.2 Attachment and marital subsystem

In the same way as for the subsystem which was just presented, the marital subsystem presents numerous connections, both with parent-child attachment and also with other family subsystems.

Martial satisfaction is an element which not only plays a role in predicting the attachment quality but is also linked to attachment representation, coparental relationships, parent-child relationships, and parental characteristics themselves, and to sibling relationships.

Indeed, Lundy (2002) found that marital satisfaction predicts the quality of father-child attachment, but not that of mother-child attachment. For this author, this synchrony acts as a mediator between marital satisfaction and father-child attachment and between a mother's symptoms of depression and mother-child attachment.

In a general sense, marital distress is positively linked to hostile and competitive coparenting and negatively linked to warm and cooperative coparenting (McHale, 1995).

Furthermore, regarding the link between marital satisfaction and parent-child relationships, a large consensus exists within the literature supporting the idea whether or not marital relationships are satisfying has an influence on parental relationships and thereby on parent-child attachment (Shaver & Hazan, 1987). Davies and Cummings (1994) suggest that a child's emotional security stems from the quality of the marital relationship. This then predicts the quality of the emotional relationships between the parents and the children (acceptance, emotional availability and security of attachment). The parents' ability to furnish the regulation that the child demands seems also to be conditioned by the support which the marital relationship provides (Cox, Owen, Lewis & Henderson, 1989). When the two parents have an intimate, trusting relationship, mothers are warmer and more sensitive with their children, while fathers, on the other hand, have more positive attitudes towards their children

and their roles as parents (Abidin & Brunner, 1995). The quality of the marital relationship both before and after the birth of the child, is highly linked to the child's functioning—especially to the child's model of attachment and sociability (Howes & Markman, 1989). According to Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004), "couples in which mothers engage in triadic play interactions simultaneously with fathers exhibited more positive marital behaviors, suggesting a style of *mutuality* that crossed the "boundaries" between the coparenting and marital constructs" (op. cit., 177). In the same way, a decrease in marital satisfaction can have repercussions on parenting style (Rollins & Galligan, 1978) and, as a result, on the quality of attachment bond as well.

3.1.3 Attachment and the coparental subsystem

Although the coparental subsystem is one of the least-explored family subsystems, results have been reached concerning not only the link between coparental relationships and parent-child attachment, but also between coparental relationships and the other marital, parent-child and sibling relationships. The individual characteristics of the children on the one hand (gender, temperament) and of the parents (depression, level of education, etc.) have also been investigated from this angle.

As far as attachment is concerned, a significant link has been found between problematic family alliances during the first year of life and insecure mother-child attachment and a clinical symptomology at the preschool age (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999; McHale, Lauretti, Talbot & Pouquette, 2002). Caldera and Lindsey (2006) emphasized that competitive coparenting is associated with the father's and mother's perception of having a less secure parent-child attachment relationship (the attachment was assessed using the attachment Q-sort of Waters and Deane, 1985), even through the support of the father and mother was associated to a more secure mother-child attachment relationship.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the close bond that exists within marital and coparental relationships (Abidin & Brunner, 1995; Floyd & Zmich, 1991; Katz & Gottman, 1996; Kerig, 1995; Lewis, 1989; Lindahl, Clements & Markman, 1997; McHale, 1995, 1997; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Lauretti, & Rasmussen, 2000). Couples who succeed in coparenting evolve together as a "team", supporting each other in their interactions with the child. They do not contradict the instructions given to the child by the other parent, and do not enter into competition for the love or attention of the child. It is therefore not surprising that the quality of marital relationships is positively linked to the quality of coparenting (Floyd, Gilliom & Costigan, 1998). Unhappiness within marital relationships predicts a hostile and competitive coparenting and, inversely, happy marital relationships predict a cooperative and warm coparenting in the family interactions with the children (McHale, 1995). According to Margolin et al. (2001), the coparental relationship mediates the relationship between the marital conflicts and the parenting. Hence, a supporting and respectful coparental relationship could serve to reduce the indirect effects of marital conflicts on the quality of the parent-child relationship and thereby guarantee a secure attachment even in the case of marital discord (Abidin & Brunner, 1995). Such a relationship could also mediate the impact of economic difficulties on the parenting quality (Simons, Lorenz, Wu & Conger, 1993) and could have a protecting effect in particular for mothers whose depression did not affect the parenting quality. The gender of the child also plays a role: Indeed, Stevens (2002) showed that positive coparenting protects boys from the negative effects of marital conflict while the protective effects are more nuanced for girls.

The coparental relationship is also more strongly linked to the marital satisfaction of father and mothers, with fathers finding themselves more attached to their child if they feel supported by their spouse in their role as father (Abidin & Brunner, 1995; Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991). Fathers who are not satisfied in their marriage are

more likely than satisfied fathers to reject the critiques of their spouses, as they are more sensitive to this criticism and less confident in their parental abilities (Floyd & al., 1998).

In a general sense, we can say that the parents' agreement on the way in which to raise their child, in other words, the coparental subsystem, constitutes an important link between the marital subsystem and the parent-child subsystem (Jouriles, Murphy, Farris, Smith, Ritchers & Waters, 1991). Moreover, it would seem that a greater independence exists for mothers than for fathers between, on the one hand, their relationships with their child and their marital relationships, and, on the other hand, their relationships with their child and their coparental relationships.

As for the link between coparental relationships and parent-child relationships, Abidin and Brunner (1995) found a positive correlation, both for the mother and for the father, between a warm coparenting relationship and an "authoritative" (or democratic) parenting style on the part of the parents.

Coparental relationships are also linked to characteristics of the child. For example, it would appear that the period of development plays a role in the degree of parental cooperation (but not in the degree of coparental conflict), with a higher level of parental cooperation during the preschool age than with children between the ages of 8 and 11 (Margolin & al., 2001). Mothers of boys seem to be more susceptible to forming a coalition against the father, with their son, than mothers of girls, even though this distinction does not appear to be the case for fathers (Margolin & al., 2001). Parents of boys who are having marital difficulties are more susceptible to be engaged in hostile and competitive coparenting interactions, while parents of girls, in the same marital situations, have different levels of parental involvement (the mother is more involved) (McHale, 1995).

As far as temperament is concerned, Stright and Bales (2003) hypothesized, yet were unable to demonstrate it due to an insufficient sample size, that there were two distinct possibilities: Either more solidarity was present in the coparenting of a child with a difficult temperament, or the stress created by the difficult temperament rubbed off on the coparental relationship, bringing with it hostility and competitiveness. In the first case, more positive coparenting was the result, as if the situation put into place a kind of compensation and that the parents created a unified front with regard to the child. Gable, Crnic and Belsky (1994) showed that the expression of negative emotions during the strange situation procedure at 12 and 13 months of age predicted a more supportive coparenting throughout family interactions at home at 15, 21, 27, and 33 months of age.

The links between the coparental subsystem and the sibling subsystem reveal that the repeated observation of solidarity in coparenting can transmit to the child a set of prosocial norms which can then be used to handle the child's behavior towards the child's siblings (Brody, Stoneman, Smith & Gibson, 1999).

Finally, among the links that have not been established, due to our being unaware of any available research on this subject, we find the link between coparental relationships and differential parental treatment on the one hand, and coparental relationships and depression in one or both of the parents. Where the first one is concerned, one could hypothesize that a hostile or competitive parental relationship could favor differential parental treatment.

To summarize, the coparental subsystem is, in fact, the least-studied family subsystem. In those studies which have chosen to examine it, coparental relationships clearly play both a direct and an indirect role in the quality of parent-child attachment: directly through the support or hostility exhibited by the parents with regard to each of their children, and indirectly by the numerous ramifications on the entire set of family subsystems. It embodies

an important link between the marital subsystem and the parent-child subsystem, although different for the father and the mother.

3.1.4 Attachment and the parent-child subsystem

The parent-child subsystem is the only intergenerational subsystem of the family. Many components come into play here. Indeed, the personal history of each parent, as well as each parent's individual characteristics, shapes their interaction with their child. Each parent has a personal parenting style which stems from the values they have inherited together with the values they have developed throughout their lives. The child's characteristics, just as the child's gender and temperament, end up intervening in this interaction and, depending on the manner in which the parent "receives" these characteristics, the interaction will end up being influenced in one way or another, which explains the differential parental treatment of children.

With regard to parent-child attachment, in their study of 59 mother-child dyads in which the child was between 3 and 6 years of age, Nair and Murray (2005) showed that parenting style has a direct effect (independent) on attachment (assessed with the Q-sort, Waters, 1995) and that it is a better mediator between the psychological health of the mother (stress, depression, conflict) and the security of the attachment. Karavasilis, Doyle and Markiewicz (2003) found a positive association, in their study of 202 children between 0 and 11 years of age and 212 children between 10 and 14 years of age, between an "authoritative" parenting style and a secure attachment whereas a permissive style predicted an avoidant attachment. Parental involvement, the guarantee of psychological autonomy, and the child's behavioral control are associated with the child's security of attachment during the school years and pre-adolescence (Doyle, Moretti, Brendgen & Bukowski, 2004). The most toxic kind of relationship upon a child's attachment system (assessed using the Kerns Security

Scale, Klepac and Cole, 1996) is extreme autonomy, or lack of interest, on the part of the father and parenting style accounts for 56% of the variance in attachment for boys and 48% for girls (1.019 children between the ages of 8 and 12; Richaud de Minzi, 2006).

As far as the link with coparental relationships is concerned, families in which the mother is strict and the parents have a competitive coparental relationship are less susceptible to having father and mother who have similar representations of the quality of the parent-child attachment (Caldera & Lindsey, 2006).

Brody & al. (1999) found an indirect link between family relationships and parental practices on the one hand, and the quality of sibling relationships on the other hand, through the child's self-regulation, i.e., the child's ability to organize his or her behavior and deal with his or her emotions. In their study of preschool-age twins, Lemery and Goldsmith (2002) found that negative parenting was a bigger predictor of conflict between children, even when controlling for the effects of their difficult temperament. Yu and Gamble (2008) confirmed that a direct, bi-directional link between parenting style and the quality of sibling relationships of preschool children (n = 130; youngest: M= 4.6 years old, oldest: M= 7.6 years old) measured using the PEPC-SRQ (Kramer & Baron, 1995). The same results were found by Cui, Conger, Bryant and Elder (2002) within an adolescent population.

Aside from parenting style, studies focusing on differential parenting treatment, i.e., the fact that parents consciously or unconsciously treat their children differently, also revealed an influence on the quality of parent-child attachment. A study carried out by Rauer and Volling (2007) on 200 young adults mentioned that the individuals who had received "equal" affection from their parents had more secure attachment styles in comparison to their siblings, thereby giving rise to a reciprocal jealousy between their siblings and them. In the same way, Ferring, Boll and Sigrun-Heide (2003) emphasizing that children who feel "disadvantaged"

compared to their siblings say that they are less attached and less close to their parents than those who feel they are treated fairly or "favored".

In terms of the coparental subsystem, it has been shown that in the case of marital conflict, the coparental alliance is disrupted to the point that the parents give less support to the parenting efforts of the other parent (Gable, Belsky, & Crnic, 1992). Several studies have lent support to the hypothesis that differential parenting treatment increases in parallel to marital conflict (Deal, 1996; McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Updegraff, 2001; Volling & Elins, 1998). In order to satisfy his or her emotional needs in a conflictual marriage, the parent can create an alliance with a specific child, thereby excluding the other members of the family.

In addition to revealing this influence on coparental relationships, the literature notes that a more frequent differential parental treatment is associated with more detached and more hostile parent-child relationships (Kowal, Krull, & Kramer, 2004).

Specific characteristics of the parents, such as the stress they are experiencing, can also come into play to explain the quality of attachment. The relationship between parental stress and less satisfying parenting has, indeed, been well established (Wahler & Dumas, 1989). The link existing between parental stress and the increase in differential parental treatment of children has been highlighted by Henderson, Hetherington, Mekos and Reiss (1996): "Parents have a specific amount of resources in terms of time, attention, patience and support to give to their children. In families confronted with economic stress, depression and marital conflict, parents may become less attentive and intentionally less fair, behaving more in accordance to their preferences, or to the characteristics of their children, in their attempts to parent their children" (op. cit., 47).

Finally, a child's temperament is known to play a role in the quality of the parent-child relationship. The more the child exhibits negative emotionality, the more the child receives

less-than-adequate parenting (Pike, McGuire, Hetherington, Reiss & Plomin, 1996; Jenkins & al., 2003).

It is important to note that it is the perception, even more than the actual differential parenting treatment itself, and its legitimacy as seen by the children, which gives rise to certain repercussions. In their study of 135 children (M= 14.64 years of age—oldest children—and M= 11.74 years of age—youngest children) Kowall, Kramer, Krull, & Crick (2002) found that 38% of the children perceived the affection and control of their parents as differential. In this study, 78% of the children who perceived differential affection towards their sibling found it justified and 45% of them also found the differential control which they received justified. This "justified" perception is more linked to socio-emotional well-being than to the extent of the differential parental treatment itself.

Where the individual characteristics of the parents are concerned, most studies focus upon the mother's characteristics and, in particular, those which might directly or indirectly affect maternal sensitivity. For example, it is interesting to note the role played by the age of the parents, certain personality traits (sociability, empathy, expressive behaviors, cf. Izard, Haynes, Chisholm & Baak, 1991), psychopathology (especially depressive, cf. Murray, Halligan, Adams, Patterson & Goodyer, 2006), level of education (Chen & Luster, 2002), the mother's work (Payne, 2001), socio-economic level (Zaouche-Gaudron, Devault & Troupel, 2005), stress (Wahler & Sumas, 1989) and consistency, or lack thereof, on the quality of the parent-child attachment bond (Zaouche-Gaudron, 2005).

Beyond the individual characteristics of the parents, those of the child are also important. Along with the developmental period, the influence of two of the child's individual characteristics on the quality of the parent-child attachment bond is emphasized in scientific literature: the child's temperament and gender. The individual differences in temperament and

emotivity contribute significantly to the development of the attachment bond (Frodi & Thompson, 1985; Izard & al., 1991). The child's temperament can perturb other subsystems, such as, for example, the marital couple, exacerbated by the child's irritability.

As for the child's gender, without going into the details of its implications on each of the subsystems, it should be noted that gender is clearly associated with the security of the paternal attachment bond (a greater number of secure father-son attachment bonds than father-daughter), while this is not the case with the maternal attachment bond (the father-child attachment bond was assessed using the strange situation procedure when the child was 12 months old) (Schoppe-Sullivan, Diener, Mangelsdorf, Brown, McHale & Frosch, 2006).

3.1.5 Attachment and the sibling subsystem

The sibling subsystem is comprised of all the siblings, with their own individual characteristics (age, gender, temperament, etc.) and their interrelations.

> "Even though it is true that relationships between children are closely dependant on the role that the adults, consciously or not, want each of the siblings to play, others are created on the fringe of these roles, even in opposition to them. And the fact that particular sibling affinities are encouraged or forbidden by the adults is in fact the strength of these links between children. This is why it is important to remove siblings from under the shadow of the adults, under which they are too often confined. Parents deal to own children the cards of their own sibling relationships. But the children will heal the parental wounds, transform this inheritance and co-construct among themselves a new story" (Scelles, 2006, 6).

The defining factors of sibling relationships include the degree of complicity and rivalry—components which we have already mentioned—as well as marital conflict, parenting style, the attachment bond of each of the parents with each of their children, and differential

parental treatment. All of these, therefore, have the potential of influencing the emotional security of children. According to Whelan (2003), for example, depending on whether siblings show support for each other, they can contribute to the security of their environment. Volling, McElwain, and Miller (2002) found that a positive marital relationship is associated with the ability of the siblings to regulate their jealousy in the triadic mother-siblings interaction. Conversely, marital dissatisfaction is associated to hostile and rivalrous sibling relationships (Brody & al., 1992; Jenkins, 1992; McKinnon, 1989; Stocker, Ahmed & Stall, 1997). Stocker and Youngblade (1999), in their study of 136 sibling groups of two children between 7 and 10 years of age, found a significant link between marital conflict and problematic sibling relationships, i.e., with a predominance of conflict and rivalry. The explanation set forth by the authors is that children are able to imitate the hostile relational style of their parents in their sibling interactions. In addition, coercive and caustic parent-child relationships are often linked to aggressive and conflictual sibling relationships (Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992). The children of "authoritative" parents behave in a more sociable manner with other children (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992) as well as with their siblings (Volling & Belsky, 1992). Several studies have been carried out on the link existing between parent-child attachment and the quality of sibling relationships (Bosso, 1985; Coutu, Provost & Pelletier, 1995; Pinel-Jacquemin, Zaouche-Gaudron & Troupel-Cremel, 2009; Teti & Ablard, 1989; Volling et al., 1992): Children with a secure attachment have significantly better sibling relationships.

In this paragraph we have built upon the "analytic" studies which have dealt with the links between the family subsystems and the quality of attachment. We have seen that different subsystems (intergenerational, marital, coparental, parent-child and sibling) are all linked among themselves, without ever having proposed a joint study of them. However, the need to "recontextualize" the dyadic "attachment figure-child" in the family context where it

was born, is now unanimous among researchers in developmental psychology (Byng-Hall & Stevenson-Hinde, 1991; Cowan, 1997; Kozlowska & Hanney, 2002; Stevenson-Hinde, 1990). Some authors have suggested the notion of "family security" (Byng-Hall, 1995; 1999) in which the family acts, for the individual, as a secure base to which the individual can find the protection he or she is searching. But at the current time, this author has remained at a conceptual level and, in reality, no one knows how this family security connects to individual security. We have also undertaken a verification of our hypothesis according to which the entirety of the family components, considered to be a system, influence the quality of the parent-child attachment bond. In the following chapter we will present the main results of this study.

3.2. Systemic approach to attachment

By proposing a systemic approach to attachment, we have a triple objective: First, the goal is to widen the focus which, up until now, has been upon the attachment figure-child dyad with the complete set of interfamily relationships in which this dyad is intertwined so as to examine the combined influence. The second goal is to verify, within the family, that each person's perception of attachment can be different depending on the person and that person's place in the family, thereby providing an answer to the question of interindividual differences in the perception of attachment. The third objective aims to introduce the notion of family security and examine its link with perceived security on the individual level. We will now present the population that we addressed, the tools we used and the main results we obtained (Pinel-Jacquemin, 2009).

3.2.1 Population

Our inclusion criteria dealt with families of French nationality with two children between the ages of 6 and 12, in which the four members lived under the same roof. The choice of the number of siblings was made with the goal of limiting the number of interactions which could potentially influence our independent variables (Camdessus, 1998). The developmental period was situated between 6 and 12 years, i.e., between childhood and adolescence. Before 6 years of age, attachment models are relatively unstable and permeable to environmental changes, and their stability is not yet fully in place (Bowlby, 1973). As for adolescence, it is a period of both strong sentimental ambivalence and of greater independence from parents, thereby making it worthy of an entire study in of its own. The parents in our study were married or unmarried heterosexuals who had been together for an average of 15 years. They were geographically limited to mainland France, as French overseas departments and territories, as well as other French-speaking countries, possess cultural variations would could have an influence on family practices (Rothbaum & Morelli, 2005).

In total, 108 families with two children agreed to fill out our questionnaires. On average, the oldest child was 10.13 years old (SD = 1.56) and the youngest child was 7.55 years old (SD = 1.45). The age gap between the two children was on average 2.6 years (SD = 1.06. Out of the total population, 35.2% of the dyads were "girl-girl" gender configurations, 22.2% were "boy-boy" gender configurations and 42.6% were mixed (18.5% of the dyads were older girl-younger boy and 24.1% of the dyads were older boy-younger girl). The families came from a somewhat privileged socio-economic level (59.3% of the men and 29.6% of the women fit into the French socio-demographic category of "executive, intellectual professionals"; INSEE, 2003).

3.2.2 Measures

The data was collected by means of inviting families through schools or acquaintances. Each member of the family (father, mother, older child, younger child) received a packet of questionnaires which they were to fill in on their own, without any outside help. The following variables were examined: attachment representation of each of the parents with their own parents, marital satisfaction, marital conflict perceived by the children, coparental alliance, parenting style and differential parenting treatment perceived by the children, children's temperament as perceived by their parents, quality of sibling relationships, and parent-child attachment bonds. These variables were evaluated from three different perspectives: that of the parents, the children and the spouses. Finally, a "global" variable was added, concerning family security, i.e., the way in which the family can serve as a secure base for each of its members.

These questionnaires were standardized and scientifically validated.

Table 1: Summary of measured variables and the corresponding measurement tools

SUBSYSTEMS	VARIABLES	TOOLS
Transgenerational	**Parents' attachment representations**	**P-AASQ** **Parent-Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire** (Behrens & Lopez, 1998)
Marital	**Marital satisfaction**	**Dyadic Adjustment Scale** (Spanier, 1976)
	Children's representation of interparental conflit	**Children Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale + Y-CPIC** (Grych, 2000)
Coparental	**Parents' parenting alliance**	**Parenting Alliance Inventory** (Abidin & Brunner, 1995)
Parent-child	**Parenting style**	**Parenting Styles Perceived by Children PEPPE** (Fortin, Cyr & Chénier, 1997)
	Parent-child attachment bonds (Perspectives of parents, children and spouses)	**CPAS-C & P** **Child-Parent Attachment Security** (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002)
	Representation of children's temperament	**EAS-P** **Emotionality, Activity, Sociability** (Gasman, Purper-Ouakil, Michel, Mouren-Siméoni, Bouvard, Perez-Diaz, & Jouvent, 2002)
Sibling	**Representation of differential parental treatment**	**SIDE – Parental Treatment** (Daniels & Plomin, 1985)

SUBSYSTEMS	VARIABLES	TOOLS
	Sibling interaction	**SIDE – Sibling Interaction** (Daniels & Plomin, 1985)
Family	**Family = secure base**	**SIFS Security in the Family System** (Forman & Davies, 2005)

3.2.3 Results

Our research dealt with the systemic dynamic of the family, as it is perceived in terms of the representations of the interactions between each of its members, and its influence on the quality of the father-child and mother-child attachment bond. It should be noted, however, that this was an exploratory study, based on a small population, and is in no way representative of the French population as a whole, and that the results presented here will first need to be confirmed by other studies before the results can be generalized.

The results were obtained based on structural equations (Pinel-Jacquemin & Zaouche Gaudron, 2012). Two main issues are to be discussed:

1. First, the variability of the components of the family system—those likely to influence the attachment quality—depending on the perspectives under examination (point of view of the parents, children, spouses).

Indeed, we noted that differences in the variables which were likely to influence the quality of attachment depending on the members being questioned: parents are more sensitive to transgenerational (attachment representations), marital (marital satisfaction) and coparental (coparental alliances) variables. However, their children's perception of their attachment bonds can be explained more by the individual characteristics of the mother (depression) and the parenting (parenting style), although coparental alliance is also present. In sum, the factors which predict the attachment perception of the spouses are, on the one hand, the

aforementioned components for the parents and the individual characteristics of the children (age, gender and temperament) and of the mother (working hours).

The mother's perceptions of her attachment bonds to her older and younger children differ greatly from each other. The mother-younger child attachment bond, in contrast to the mother-older child attachment bond, is more independent from the rest of the family. In this case, the marital and coparental components are absent. It would seem that the mother somehow uses the father in her implementation of her attachment bond to her older child, but that she does not need it for her attachment to her younger child. One could also see a parental evolution here, in that this separation can turn out to be difficult for the mother to have a first child, but that she become more at ease as her family grows in size. For the father, the set of relationships between the family members influences the quality of his attachment to his children; this emphasizes, in a general sense, the just how sensitive the father is within the emotional context of the family (Schermerhorn, Cummings & Davies, 2008).

Both the older and the younger child are very sensitive to the other child's quality of attachment with the parents, especially with the mother. Some variables, however, such as the paternal parenting style, have an influence on the older child's attachment perception, but not on that of the younger child. Another major difference exists between the older and the younger child: The older child's perceived attachment to the mother predicts the attachment to the father (and not the opposite) while for the younger child, the bond is reciprocal. Herein can be seen a growing implication of the father, who is more confident in his parental abilities with his second child. These results help to answer the question of why two children from the same family can have different attachment bonds to the same parent.

Finally, with regard to the spouses' perception of their respective attachment bonds, the influence of parental alliance was noted for the father: The more he feels supported by the

mother in his parenting role towards each child—but in particular for the older child—the more he will perceive the children's attachment bond to their mother as secure. In this case, the characteristics of the children (age, gender, temperament) do not play a role for him. For the mother, her own personal characteristics (depression, working hours) and those of the older child (age and gender) are what have a greater influence upon her perception of the attachment that her children have to her spouse. The older the first child is, the more the mother perceives the child's attachment to the father as insecure. It is possible that the child's autonomy grows in parallel to a decreasing involvement on the part of the father, who is likely to think that the older child needs him less, therefore offering the child less support and protection.

2. The second major result concerns the importance of the subsystems on the different dyads in this family dynamic.

As we see it, only two components of the family system play a particularly important role and can be found no matter what perspective is considered (seen by the parents, the children or the spouses): First the parental alliance, and in particular that which the father perceives with regard to the older child, and the family security of each of the family members.

Where the first component is concerned, our results support the theory of family functioning which emphasizes the important of a shared and supportive behavior by the parental dyad in order to achieve optimal functioning. When parents work together as "a team", family competence is greater and children perceive a greater feeling of predictability, of confidence and of security (Beavers & Hampson, 1990, 2000). They also align themselves with the theory of parental weight determining the emotional climate of the family, as developed by Cohn & al. (1992). A supportive parental alliance increases marital satisfaction for each of the parents (Abidin & Brunner, 1995; Floyd & al., 1998; McHale & al., 2000); this

positive climate favors paternal involvement with the child, and this behavior is in turn more responsible for the improved emotional context (Dubeau, Coutu & Lavigueur, 2007). In a recent study, Fosco (2009) revealed similar results in a population of 8 to 12-year-old children, when he demonstrated that supportive parenting in an emotionally positive family climate is associated with improved emotional regulation.

As to the second component, the original contribution of this study is the proposal to add a family-level variable to the other variables within the explanatory models. The discovery was made that, conversely to what might have been expected, family security was discovered not to result from the quality of the parent-child attachment bond, but it makes a significant contribution to it, no matter which explanatory model is considered. The family security felt by each of the parents plays a role in the perceptions of attachment (theirs and those of their spouses), while for their children, the family security felt by all the members of the family is what predicts their perceptions of attachment.

It would not be possible to speak of the weight of the different components in the quality of the parent-child attachment bond without mentioning the absence of variables, some at best unexpected, in the three models. Therefore, and inconsistent with much of the existing scientific literature, the stress perceived by parents (Allen & al., 2000), parent-child adaptation (Scher, 2001), marital conflict as perceived by the children (Frosch, Mangelsdorf, & McHale, 2000; Owen & Cox, 1997), differential parental treatment of the younger child (Sheehan & Noller, 2002; Volling & Belsky, 1992), and sibling relationships (Whelan, 2003) do not constitute explanatory factors for the perceptions of attachment presented here.

CONCLUSION

Since its development in 1969, attachment theory has been the object of numerous research studies. First centered on the mother-child dyad, it was widened to include other

members of the family who were likely to represent an attachment figure for the child. However, particularly in order to explain how two brothers and sisters from the same sibling group could have a different attachment bond to the same figure, it appears necessary to go beyond this dyad. By offering a systemic approach which simultaneously takes into account the manner in which the entire set of factors within a family influence the quality of the parent-child attachment bond, we have made a step toward understanding family dynamics and the attachment bond (Pinel-Jacquemin & Kettani, 2011). These factors, listed within scientific literature, are the attachment representations of both parents, marital satisfaction, marital conflict, coparental alliance, parenting style, parent-child attachment bonds, temperament of the children, the legitimacy of differential parental treatment and sibling interaction. Our study thus shows that each member of the family perceives things differently, thereby emphasizing that which explains the differences in attachment quality of a child to the child's two parents or of two children to the same parent. Indeed, our study reveals that, on the one hand, the variables which act to explain these attachment bonds are different depending on the family members being questioned (father, mother, older child, younger child), that some variables (coparental alliance and family security) however have a "transversal" weight as they are in common with the entire set of perspectives questioned (parents, children, spouses) and, finally, that certain variables for which an influence on attachment quality had already be established within existing research do not appear when the family is considered as a whole. Furthermore, it seems that family security as perceived by each of the family members is not the result of perceived security by each of them on an individual level, but, to the contrary, is a contributor to it.

This study, carried out on a population of French school-age children remains however exploratory and will need to be extended to more extensive populations, while keeping in mind the developmental periods of the children. It will be important to consider the gender of

the children and to take particular interest in the process at work in the family leading to its homeostasis, the desired balance sought after by all systems.

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