

Attachment and Reciprocity in Family Life

Relationships among generations have been considered within two conceptual frameworks, attachment and reciprocity. "Attachment" refers to the close emotional bond that family members typically use. "Reciprocity" describes the efforts family members make, to balance their giving and taking across the course of their lives. I recently read Joan E. Norris and Joseph A. Tindale's book titled "Among Generations," in which various theories and opinions are being analyzed in an attempt to estimate the level of support exchange inside multigenerational families and the changes that take place among the family's members.

What amazed me the most was the fact that the attachment a family member feels with other members of his or her family, is actually a concept relevant to all relationships, across the life span, not just those between parents and children. The authors suggest that it is likely secure attachments early in life set the stage for successful peer interactions in adulthood. In fact, evidence suggests that adults continue to look for relationships that provide the four characteristics one experiences through attachment in childhood; the need for proximity in times of stress, comfort when together, unease or anxiety when the significant person is not accessible, and a sense of permanence. Moreover, one could support that the perspective on social exchange adopted in this book is based on global reciprocity. This concept fits well within a life-span view of individual and family development, because it considers the biological, social, psychological, and historical context of social support.

The specific book was structured to engage the reader in the story of a maturing couple. The examination begins with the process whereby two individuals make the decision to become a couple. Then the implications that follow from their decision to become parents is being considered, as well as the intergenerational relations that result from that decision. Throughout this process the variable circumstances in which such family processes may be experienced are examined. The analysis conducted by the authors supports the view that parents' offers to help their adult children should not be considered as isolated incidents or unusual events. Rather, they are a part of an ongoing, mutual give-and-take relationship that occurs throughout the family's life-cycle and is revealed by the attachment bonds of love and respect a family experiences.

As the book unfolds a couple's journey through varying and changing relationships, it focuses on this life-span perspective, and presents married couples who stay together long enough to experience parenthood and grand-parenthood, to collect longtime friends and to experience lengthy relationships with extended kin. Furthermore, the differing experiences of single parents and reconstituted families are discussed.

Nevertheless, there are some family forms, such as lesbian parents, for which there was no reference in this book. In addition the cultural, religious and ethnic variations were not discussed to a satisfactory level, since the researched group was formed by well-educated, white, middle-class North Americans. Minorities that reflect diverse ethnic and racial groups have not been considered in this study. Thus, I am afraid to admit that the subject covered remains limited, thereby precluding comprehensive analysis.

Despite this limitation, the conceptual framework employed in this book is likely to have explanatory power across varying family types and situations. Attachment in childhood has been conceptualized as having a strong biological component. Recently, other researchers have argued that adult love is a mature form of attachment that still maintains its evolutionary roots. If this is the case, attachment feelings between spouses, children, and the other significant people in our lives should occur across situations and cultures, although their expression may differ. Clearly, future study should be directed toward such possible differences.

It is also likely that the need and the desire to exchange inter-familial support transcended cultures and situations. Some researchers have noted that, regardless of ethnic group, older people prefer "intimacy at a distance"-having close and supportive interactions with their children and extended family but still living independently-as a strategy for managing intergenerational relationships. Whether these patterns reflect differences in norms of helping and reciprocity across ethnic and cultural groups is not at all clear. Perhaps practical concerns are more important. Parents' trying to come to grips with adult children refilling the nest is a recurrent theme in popular press. Many other subjects and subcategories may have to be researched and analyzed, before a global or multidimensional outcome could be concluded.

We should keep in mind, after the completion of this analysis, the power and dynamics a family has and transfers to society. All begin and end from within, philosophers have mentioned. Since usually the family environment is the first social interaction a person has, its contribution and influence on the mind and behavior that one creates is of great importance and future research should be directed toward this field.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Jonathon Hardcastle writes articles for <http://forcouplesake.com/> - In addition, Jonathon also writes articles for <http://recreationsource.net/> and

