“Children of the Sun”: 
A Natural Institutional Experiment That Was Doomed To Failure
What can be learned about the risk of normative children raised at night without their parents?

Avi Sagi-Schwartz
Ora Aviezer
Tirtsa Joels

Department of Children and Families and the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) 
State of Florida
Orlando, June 7, 2013

In cooperation with and support of the Casey Family Foundation, Community Based Care of Central Florida, and ChildNet
Plan for seminar

• Basic principles of attachment theory: Why and how we become attached

• Implications for group care
What can be learned about the risk of normative children raised at night without their parents?

What happens when child rearing practices go against the “law of nature”?
John Bowlby
26.2.1907-2.9.1990
Scientific Approach!!!

- The importance of real events and their impact on the development of psychopathology
- The importance of early attachment and its impact on later emotional development
- The meaning of separation and loss
“MOTHER LOVE IN INFANCY IS AS IMPORTANT FOR MENTAL HEALTH AS ARE VITAMINS AND PROTEINS FOR PHYSICAL HEALTH” (BOWLBY, 1951)
“To say of a child that he is attached to, or has an attachment to someone, means that he is strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure, and to do so in certain situations, notably when he is frightened, tired or ill”

(Bowlby, 1984, p.371)
Innate bias to become attached to a primary caregiver

Regardless of the specific cultural niche
Definition of Attachment

An enduring emotional tie to a special person, characterized by a tendency to seek and maintain closeness, especially during times of stress.
“All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s)”

(Bowlby, 1988, p.62)
Availability of Relationships → Attachment

Quality of Relationships → Quality of attachment

Lack of Availability of Relationships → Lack of attachment
Distortion in attachment
Children become attached to primary care givers

Sensitive parenting $\rightarrow$ Secure attachment relationships

Insensitive parenting $\rightarrow$ Insecure attachment relationships
CIRCLE OF SECURITY
CAREGIVER ATTENDING TO THE CHILD’S NEEDS

I need you to...

Support My Exploration

• Protect me
• Comfort me
• Delight in me
• Organize my feelings

Welcome My Coming To You

• Watch over me
• Help me
• Enjoy with me

Always: be BIGGER, STRONGER, WISER, and KIND.
Whenever possible: follow my child’s need.
Whenever necessary: take charge.

© 2000 Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin & Powell
Circle of security in close relationships

Better social relations

Fewer behavioral problems in different settings (including less aggression)
Mary D. Ainsworth
1.12.1913 – 21.3.1999
Caregiver Sensitivity

- Warmth
- Responsiveness
- Timing
- Flexibility
- Acceptance
- Coping with conflicts
Caregiver’s capacity to be aware to child’s signals
Capacity to respond in harmony with child’s signals
While conveying positive affect
While considering the child’s response to caregiver
and while considering the child involving his caregiver
Infant may or may not be upset when their mother leaves, but her return has a calming effect and they show minimal resistant and avoidant behavior.
Circle of Limited Security
Child Attending to the Parent’s Needs

Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin & Powell, 2000
Infants seek contact but at the same time resist the caregiver; some resistant infants are unable to settle within the duration of the 3-minute reunion episodes.
Frightened/Frightening parental behavior

Adult →→→→ Infant
The parent-child insecure interaction paradox

Parent
Source of safety

Parent
Source of Fear

Collapse of attachment strategies in the child
Absence of Support in the environment
(e.g., non functioning adults, schools & communities)

When children cannot depend on the caregiver’s trust and security, they may withdraw and show insecure disorganized behaviors

Main and Hesse (1990) has coined a vicious circle of “fright without solution”
I need you but you are so frightened or frightening that I have no one to turn to and I don’t know what to do.
Disorganized (D)

These infants show momentary absence of an organized strategy for dealing with their separation distress and mother's return.
Shark Music
When there is no “Shark Music”, mother can recognize the baby’s needs and read the baby’s cues.

Suddenly, mom starts paying attention to her Shark Music, and her baby’s needs and cues start to disappear from her view.
How Mother representations are mediated? **Maternal Sensitivity**

- Transmission of attachment across generations mediated by sensitivity

- Bidirectional effects but with stronger impact of parent

**Maternal Representation**  
**Maternal Sensitivity**  
**Child Attachment**

AAI  
Observation  
Strange Situation
Background
• Kibbutz = A Collective

• Kibbutzim (plural)

• 270 kibbutzim over the country

• 2% of the population

• Average size 400–600 people, including all generations

• Originally most kibbutzim: kids slept away from parents during the night (not any longer)

• Some kibbutzim: kids slept in parents’ homes (today all kibbutzim)
Children's Daily Routine

Sleeping away

Day care setting
Parental short visits (mostly mothers) = "Love Hour"

With the family

Family residence
Sleeping away

20:00 returning to the infant house
And putting the child to sleep

21:00 Children sleep in infant house
6 kids per house

With the family

20:00 Family residence

07:00 Transition to infant house

06:00 Parental morning visits
in infant house to prepare child for the day

08:00
Children House Code
The night

Anybody home?

Infant and children houses

2 unfamiliar watchwomen caring at night for all kibbutz children rotating on weekly basis (approximately 50 different adults per year)

Mom? Dad?

21:00 → 06:00
Intercom System
Where are the parents?
Kibbutz Amir

- Agricultural area
- Children's houses
- Regional high school
- Major kibbutz dining room
- Family residences
- Industrial and live stock area
Daily climate in children houses - The positive side
Play Yard
A crib in the bedroom (3 cribs)
Dressing and Washing
Circle time
What can be learned about the risk of normative children raised at night without their parents?

What happens when child rearing practices go against the “law of nature”?
Two sides to the

Who wins the game?
Main attachment data

- When no experiment at night takes place
- Sleeping with the parents at night - all is fine
No negative effects – like high quality day care

For “Children of the Sun” – A nightmare story
Collective Sleeping = More Insecure Attachment with mothers

World Distribution

- Communal I: 43% Insecure, 57% Secure
- Communal II: 52% Insecure, 48% Secure
- Family Sleep: 20% Insecure, 80% Secure
Ecological constraints on transmission of attachment
Maternal sensitivity **does not predict** attachment: Sleeping away from parents

Mean score maternal sensitivity

- Secure: 6.5
- Insecure: 6.6

$p = ns$
Maternal sensitivity predicts attachment: Family sleeping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mean score</th>
<th>maternal sensitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>secure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>insecure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p < .05$
Clearly, these children's nighttime experience was characterized by maternal inaccessibility and non-availability, combined with exposure to many unfamiliar adults.... who naturally were unable to respond promptly and sensitively to their needs.
SLEEPING AWAY FROM THE PARENTS AT NIGHT

- Limits the effectiveness of sensitive parenting skills
- Causes inconsistency in caring for different children
- Risks attachment security
Jackals howling
How to forget cries, looking for parents
A visit to Israeli kibbutzim in the early 1950s

**Prediction:**

This child-rearing context, though, clearly different from institutional care, might produce higher rates of attachment insecurity.
Spiro and Bettelheim

• Emotional insecurity

• interference with the development of emotional intimacy

• Less capacity to experience in full the emotional richness inherent to close relationships
I don't know how to love
No concept of parents

No memory of parents

No concept of family protection
Never used the word Mom
No kisses, No hugs
No memory of my parents
No Family Protection
# Semi-institutional versus institutional protective factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kibbutz collective sleep</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal surrounding</td>
<td>Abuse or neglecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent are around in everyday life (“love hour”)</td>
<td>Parent not involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other attachment figures like the METAPELET</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents bedtime rituals</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick children slept at home</td>
<td>Stay in group care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extended separations</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive parents</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Semi-institutional vs. institutional protective factors

Examples of bedtime rituals

- placing candy under the child’s pillow
- Promising that the parent will come and visit during the night
- Placing “loving and caring letters” on the walls

Institutions
- None
Protective rituals
If the voice of the “Children of the Sun” would have been heard, from their own point of view, they would most likely file a protest or complaint.
Child’s Protest/Complaint

It is your responsibility to provide me:

• **Stability** in my life
• **Predictability:** e.g., “When will my familiar caring person be back?”
• **A sensitive** adult who can help me regulate my stress and emotions
• **A trusted other** who can help me alleviate my fears when I feel threatened
Crying and upset children upon separation
If the voice of the **parents** would have been heard, they would most likely file a protest or complaint.
Parent’s Protest/Complaint

- I want my child next to me
- My child needs me, not others
- Don’t do experiments on my child on behalf of ideology
- I am committed to my child
- If I have difficulties, please give me good advice and support

I want to provide my child with:

- Stability in his life
- Predictability: e.g., “I want my child to know I am always there for her”
- Sensitive responses to help him regulate his stress and emotions
- A sense of trust in me that I can help her alleviate her fears when she feels threatened
Parents’ Protest/Complaint

The story regarding the “rise and fall” of communal sleeping on the kibbutz is not only a story regarding problematic child-rearing arrangements and developmental risk factors.

It is also a story regarding parents’ desire not to repeat painful aspects of their own childhood with their own children, their willingness to break from accepted ideologies and values, to actualize that desire, and their strong commitment to the protection and well-being of their children.
Cried when I had to separate from my child
Is it natural to leave like this a child?
Child with asthma, I want to cry
A System Doomed To Failure

- Collapse of the system
- Gradual change from the beginning
- A critical event Gulf War – Scuds attack
A System Doomed To Failure

- Collapse of the system
- Gradual change from the beginning
- A critical event Gulf War – Scuds attack
- Group care against nature – no optimal chance to establish bond
- “Law of Nature” – the winner
The concept of self - New language
Conclusions

Many can be drawn!!

But the main one:
If normative kids end up like this, no surprise we get worse outcomes with fully institutionalized children who come from extremely harmful backgrounds

“With the Face to the Community”
Marinus H. van IJzendoorn
Leiden University, The Netherlands
Thank you

Contact: sagi@psy.haifa.ac.il