

Attachment and Temperament

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## 2-2 Attachment and Temperament

Attachment theory, established by John Bowlby and further elaborated by Mary Ainsworth, suggests that early interactions with caregivers form the basis of attachment styles that persist throughout life, influencing personality and interpersonal relationships. In considering Helen's scenario, we investigate how her temperament and caregivers' responsiveness likely influenced her attachment style.

### **Analysis of Helen's Temperament**

Helen's temperament can be described as "easy." It is characterized by regular sleeping and eating habits, mild-moderate intensity of emotional expression, and a generally positive mood. She demonstrates adaptability to new situations and manages well with changes in her environment. Such temperamental traits usually facilitate positive interactions with caregivers, as they are typically easier to soothe and elicit more consistent caregiving responses (Davila & Levy, 2006).

### **Sensitivity of Caregivers**

Helen's primary caregivers display varying degrees of sensitivity. Although her mother provides for her basic needs, she does not consistently respond to her signals, especially when Helen cries due to hunger more frequently than expected. The lack of responsiveness might not nurture an optimal emotional connection. Conversely, Helen's father, initially absent, later engages with her primarily through play, which can be a positive interaction but may not fully compensate for his earlier detachment or the emotional nurturing typically associated with consistent caregiving. Helen's aunt, who cares for her during the day, seems to provide a high level of responsiveness and emotional engagement, including playing, singing, and comforting, which are critical for secure attachment development.

### **Caregivers' Attachment Histories**

The caregivers' own attachment histories can significantly influence their interactions with Helen. For instance, if Helen's mother experienced an avoidant attachment style as a child, she might unconsciously replicate this by being less responsive to Helen's needs. Research suggests that parents' unresolved attachment disorders or histories of emotional neglect can lead to less sensitive and more detached parenting practices (Davila & Levy, 2006).

### **Predicting Helen's Attachment Style**

Given Helen's generally easy temperament, she has the potential to develop a secure attachment style, mainly due to her interactions with her aunt, who provides her with consistent, sensitive, and responsive care. However, her parents' varied responsiveness, particularly her father's initial emotional unavailability, and her mother's inconsistent responses, might complicate this outcome. Helen may thus develop an attachment style that leans towards ambivalence, where she shows vital attachment behaviors but remains uncertain about the reliability of her caregivers.

### **Factors Influencing Attachment Styles**

The development of attachment styles is profoundly influenced by the interplay between a child's temperament and caregiver responsiveness. An easy temperament like Helen's typically evokes positive responses from caregivers, promoting a secure attachment style. However, the consistency of these responses is crucial. Helen's experiences illustrate how mixed responses from multiple caregivers can influence attachment style outcomes (Feldman, 2022, Chapter 7). The sensitive caregiving from her aunt may buffer against her parents' less optimal caregiving responses, highlighting how multiple caregivers can contribute differently to attachment outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, while Helen's easy temperament generally predisposes her to a secure attachment style, the mixed levels of sensitivity and responsiveness from her caregivers could lead to an ambivalent attachment style. Caregivers need to understand how their attachment histories and current emotional availability affect their interactions with children. For Helen, consistent and emotionally responsive caregiving from her aunt provides a foundation for secure attachment, potentially mitigating less responsive care from her parents. The scenario underscores the complexity of attachment development, influenced by a dynamic interaction between child temperament, caregiver behavior, and the broader caregiving environment.

Supporting this analysis, the research underscores the importance of early attachment experiences in shaping social and emotional development, advocating for interventions that enhance caregiver responsiveness to foster secure attachment styles in children.

## References

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