

## **Reflections on the reception of attachment theory by psychoanalysts. A review of publications**

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## **REFLECTIONS ON THE RECEPTION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY PSYCHOANALYSTS. A REVIEW OF PUBLICATIONS**

### **Abstract**

This article explores the reception and response of the psychoanalytic community to attachment theory by reviewing articles, with 'attachment' as a keyword, published up until December 2020 in the top seven (according to impact factor) English-language psychoanalysis journals in the ISI Web of Knowledge. A category system was designed and applied to classify the articles which met the inclusion criteria.

Since 1996, there has been a significant increase in publications that compare attachment theory and psychoanalysis, explore avenues of integration, analyse different theoretical and technical aspects, or make eclectic use of concepts from both models. Overall, however, few articles referring to attachment (246, representing 1.8% of the sample) have been published in the analysed journals, and of those, many hardly make any mention of psychoanalysis.

Contributions by the attachment theory pioneer, John Bowlby, emerged from psychoanalytic practice, with attachment theory reinforcing the more relational approaches of psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, a main conclusion of our study is that attachment and psychoanalysis follow parallel or divergent paths.

## Resumen

El presente artículo reflexiona sobre la receptividad y la respuesta del psicoanálisis a la teoría del apego. Para ello, se han revisado los artículos con la palabra clave “apego” publicados hasta diciembre de 2020 en las siete revistas psicoanalíticas en lengua inglesa con mayor factor de impacto en la ISI Web of Knowledge. Se ha diseñado y aplicado un sistema de categorías para clasificar los artículos que cumplen el criterio de inclusión.

A partir de 1996 se observa un incremento significativo de publicaciones que comparan apego y psicoanálisis, exploran vías de integración o hacen un uso ecléctico de conceptos de ambos modelos para estudiar diferentes aspectos teórico-técnicos. Sin embargo, hay que destacar que son escasos (246, 1.8%) los artículos sobre apego publicados en las revistas psicoanalíticas analizadas, y que buena parte de ellos son trabajos centrados exclusivamente en el apego, sin apenas referencias al psicoanálisis.

Las aportaciones de Bowlby surgen de la práctica psicoanalítica, y la teoría del apego ha reforzado los enfoques más relacionales del psicoanálisis. Pero una de las conclusiones a que apunta nuestro estudio, es que apego y psicoanálisis siguen caminos paralelos o divergentes.

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE RECEPTION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY PSYCHOANALYSTS. A REVIEW OF PUBLICATIONS**

This article explores the reception and response of the psychoanalytic community to attachment theory. As is well known, attachment theory arose within the framework of psychoanalysis. It was created by a psychoanalyst, John Bowlby, who was critical of the psychoanalytic clinical research method and the disregard for environmental factors which he said was prevalent in psychoanalysis in the 1950s and 1960s, especially within the Kleinian school. Bowlby's critique of drive theory and his overemphasis on fantasy, as well as his proposal for a new research method, elicited a critical response and caused tensions to arise among the psychoanalytic community. This initial response gradually evolved into an increasing appreciation for and influence of attachment theory within the psychoanalytic community. Based on a review of the most influential psychoanalytic scientific publications in the English language, the following is a reflection on these developments. This subject connects with the increasing theoretical and practical diversity of psychoanalysis, as well as with the dialogue and mutual influence between different psychoanalytic theories, and their tendency to converge (Kernberg 1993).

### **The beginnings: a problematic relationship**

Bowlby initially proposed his theory as a contribution to psychoanalysis, in particular as a variant of object relations theory, although he was critical of the word “object”, which he felt was "dehumanising" and as such inadequate in reference to human relationships (Bowlby et al. 1986). His initial ideas were clearly related to those of other psychoanalysts who were members of the independent group of the British Society, all of whom were critical of the prevailing drive theory

of the time (Fonagy 2001). The concept of *attachment* itself, for example, is similar to Balint's (1979) concept of *primary love* or Fairbairn's (1952) *object seeking*. The thinking of the independent group psychoanalysts is highly compatible with attachment theory, as is that of Winnicott (1965). Of the five basic characteristics of psychoanalysis cited by Rapaport and Gill (1959), Bowlby adopts the genetic, structural and adaptive points of view, discarding the economic and dynamic aspects (Fonagy 2001). Bowlby was to add new approaches to object relations, such his ethological theory of attachment, which was more focused on relations than on drives. He also developed a new methodology of empirical research, to the detriment of the clinical research prevalent in a psychoanalytic community at the time, which was "pretty remote from data..." (Bowlby et al. 1986, 54).

However, Bowlby (1958, 1960) also departs from Anna Freud and Melanie Klein in distinguishing between attachment and dependency. In his view attachment is a primary drive, whereas dependency is secondary, associated as it is with oral needs. Hence, Bowlby's early publications were criticised for their "mechanistic, non-dynamic" character, and he was accused of misunderstanding psychoanalytic theory (A. Freud 1960; Schur 1960; Spitz 1960). Bowlby noted a great deal of hostility in the Kleinian group (Bowlby et al. 1986) and became a relatively isolated figure within the psychoanalytic community (Fonagy 2001). This isolation became more acute in the 1970s, when he was criticised by those who considered his thinking had become far removed from psychoanalysis, as he had renounced drive theory and the Oedipus complex. He was later also criticised for oversimplifying the richness and complexity of psychoanalysis, especially with regard to the stages of psychosexual and ego development, as well as the variability of emotional and relational life. According to these criticisms, Bowlby focused on the sense of safety and security provided by the caregiver, ignoring traumatic experiences other than physical separation. He was also criticised for his emphasis on behavioural observation without

providing adequate interpretations of these observations. In summary, the main criticisms the psychoanalytic community had of attachment theory centred on the reductionist and simplifying nature of the approach (Fonagy 1999; Target 2005; Zepz 2006; Zeuthen, et al. 2010):

- Attachment theory simplifies the motivational system underlying behaviour, undervaluing the unconscious motivations, drives and conflicts associated with the id-ego-superego structural model.
- It does not take sufficient account of the inner world (conscious and unconscious fantasies, dreams, etc.) as a generator of a relational framework.
- It pays too little regard to the role of emotional conflict in psychic life: the range of human affects is drastically reduced to a mere handful, principally safety and danger, without taking other affects or the experience of bodily pleasure into account.
- It ignores the biological and socio-environmental vulnerabilities from which some children may suffer and which are not directly associated with caregiver behaviour.
- It overestimates the actual care received by the child as a driver of development, without taking into account that parent-child relationships can be affected by aspects other than neglect or separation (projective mechanisms, internalisers, etc.).
- It overemphasises the importance of survival, to the detriment of other very relevant skills in modern societies.
- It does not consider the development of the self beyond infancy, nor does it propose a developmental theory or a metapsychology.
- In comparison with psychoanalysis, and due to the need to operationalise concepts in order to facilitate research, it reduces its explanatory depth, simplifying the object of study to that which can be directly observed.

Zeuthen et al. (2010) conclude their critique by stating that attachment and psychoanalysis

are radically different paradigms composed of qualitatively differing elements, thus questioning the possibility of assimilating concepts or integrating the two theories. In the same vein, Zepf (2006) considers that the value of psychoanalysis would be reduced if attachment theory were to be integrated into it. Thus, while Bowlby questioned psychoanalysts for ignoring environmental factors, psychoanalysts questioned an approach which ignored the way these factors were signified and internalised by the child (Gullestad 2001). The fact that there was increasing interest in attachment theory from other theoretical orientations (cognitive, systemic) contributed to the developing tendency to consider attachment theory as a separate discipline from psychoanalysis (Target 2005).

Attachment theory underwent marked development from the 1990s onwards, and this development also increasingly distanced it from the psychoanalysis of the time. Main (2000) differentiates three stages in the development of attachment theory: a) Bowlby's original proposals (the late 1950s and 1960s), b) the introduction of the *Strange Situation* by Ainsworth (Ainsworth 1967; Ainsworth et al. 1978), and c) the concept of the "internal working model", at which point attachment begins to take internal representations into account (mid-1980s). Ultimately, it is a process which starts with the observation of attachment behaviours and ends with the study of how the attachment bond affects representations, finding that prolonged separations leave after-effects on the children who suffer them.

At first, attachment theory focused on research, distancing itself from psychoanalysis both clinically and epistemologically, with an emphasis on actual lived experiences in the family, observation and research (Bowlby et al. 1986). As Gullestad (2001) points out, Bowlby's early contributions contradicted three basic assumptions of psychoanalytic theory: the concept of the human being, the theory of motivation and the aetiology of disorders. Fonagy, in the foreword to his important work of 2001, talks about the family relationship and kinship between

psychoanalysis and attachment. In this vein, the initial response of the psychoanalytical world to attachment approaches suggests the metaphor of the prodigal son, or of a foreign substance that generates antibodies because the antigen is not recognised as coming from within.

### **Attachment: an enhancing theory for psychoanalysis with shared foundations**

Despite the initial antagonism and the fact that attachment theory and psychoanalysis followed different developmental paths, in the 1990s a new field of connection and convergence with psychoanalytical ideas also emerged, one which focused mainly on the internalisation of experiences and the formation of the inner world. As Marrone (1998) points out, psychoanalysts did not use to read much of Bowlby's output, and simplified his ideas. However, by the end of the last century psychoanalysis increasingly began to view attachment theory as enriching to psychoanalysis, in particular valuing the contribution attachment research methodology could make to the empirical validation of the discipline (Gullestad 2001).

Bowlby's early work was rooted in psychoanalytic theory and practice, so supported this connection and convergence, providing the common ground that was to later facilitate a progressive approach (Fonagy 2001):

- There was a shared recognition of the intrinsic motivation to form connections and relate with other people.
- The central role of early life, early relationships and caregiver qualities (parental sensitivity) in the development of psychological functioning. Consequently, both psychoanalytic and attachment theory emphasise the importance of the therapeutic relationship.
- Relevance of mental states that are not sufficiently conscious or remain unconscious.
- Assessment of internal representations of interpersonal relationships, which may distort



their perception. Emphasis is placed on the cognitive basis of emotional development.

- Both assume there are psychic defence mechanisms against anxiety.

However, the existence of commonalities, affinities and overlaps between attachment theory and other psychoanalytic theories would not necessarily facilitate their acceptance by psychoanalysts. Affinities, for example, could also make acceptance difficult, as long as psychoanalysts argued that attachment theory contributed nothing new or improved. The fact that attachment theory did not use the clinical research of psychoanalysis, instead introducing a new empirical research methodology, created significant resistance, which had to be overcome in order to bring about convergence. The final impetus for the convergence of the two theories came with the increasing importance given to the relational and intersubjective dimension in both psychoanalysis and attachment theory. In the course of Bowlby's work, there is an evolution from an initial emphasis on physical proximity (Bowlby 1969) to a later emphasis on the importance of the availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure (Bowlby 1973). In addition, the behavioural attachment system was underpinned by cognitive-affective mechanisms, the *internal working models*, which include fantasies and emotional states that facilitate or hinder affect regulation (Bretherton and Munholland 1999). There has thus been an evolution in attachment theory towards greater attention to internal factors (emotional states, fantasies). These approaches, which approximated object relations theory (which Bowlby, as a psychoanalyst, was in fact trained in), facilitated the dialogue between attachment and psychoanalysis (Fonagy 2001; Mitchell 1999).

Another common thread is the concept of the therapeutic relationship. Eagle (2017) posits that the “secure base” and “safe haven” of attachment are prerequisites for the patient to be able to venture into exploring painful issues, and form the basis from which *internal working models* can then be modified. Various psychoanalytic concepts posit the change in internal working

models: the "corrective emotional experience" (Alexander and French 1946), "optimal frustration", "transmuting internalisation" (Kohut 1971, 1977), softening of the harshness of the superego through identification with a non-judgmental and accepting therapist (Strachey 1934), or the disconfirming of unconscious pathogenic beliefs (Silberschatz et al. 1991). In our view, however, the role of the therapist goes beyond facilitating such a "secure base-safe haven". We run the risk of overvaluing self-exploration and undervaluing the therapist's ability to contribute understanding, knowledge and thus relationships. The patient-therapist relationship cannot be divorced from understanding, from the search for meaning and significance (Coderch 2012; Holmes 2010).

### **Developments in psychoanalysis that facilitate convergence with attachment theory.**

#### **Psychoanalytic attachment theorists**

In addition to the above-mentioned common core between attachment and psychoanalysis, attachment theory has reinforced various theoretical-technical trends which arose out of psychoanalysis:

- The hegemony of object-relation models, insofar as it converges, as mentioned above, with the concept of *internal working models*.
- The growing interest in the study of child development, especially the impact of inadequate parenting, maltreatment and trauma on mental health.
- The confluence between the psychoanalytic concept of the *development of internal representations* and the *mentalising-narrative coherence* that attachment theory proposes is an indicator of psychic integration.
- The extension of psychoanalytic motivational theory, which has become independent of drive theory.
- The importance of a close therapeutic relationship, which is in line with the concept of a

"secure base".

Attachment theory has also influenced psychoanalysis by conveying its empirical approach and by developing qualitative assessment instruments such as the *Adult Attachment Interview* (George et al. 1984), which are consistent with and respect psychoanalytic understanding. The greater theoretical plurality in psychoanalysis and the need to validate psychotherapeutic treatments have also played a role in this regard (Fonagy 2001; Target 2005). De Bei and Dazzi (2014) add that attachment can serve as a biological foundation for relational psychoanalysis, replacing the concept of "drive". This would be an example of integration, in which a model from the psychoanalytic tradition (relational psychoanalysis) optimises its base by incorporating a concept from attachment theory. In fact, these authors propose a mutual enhancement, as attachment theory could also be enhanced by psychoanalytic clinical observations.

As a result, many psychoanalysts have understood attachment theory to be a "powerful explanatory model of early psychic and social development, which could be tested" and which had "some strong clinical implications" (Target 2005, 168). However, other authors limit the importance of the influence of attachment on psychoanalysis, restricting it, as we have seen, to the reinforcement of aspects that were already present, such as the emotional availability of the therapist towards the patient or the concept of a "secure base" (Gullestad 2001).

From the 1990 onwards, a group of psychoanalysts with an interest in attachment (Fonagy, Lyons-Ruth, Eagle, Holmes, Slade, Lieberman, Marrone) built bridges and made efforts to reconcile attachment and psychoanalysis. As a result of the work of these "attachment psychoanalysts", as Fonagy (2001) calls them, important figures such as G. O. Gabbard and S. A. Mitchell recognised the value of attachment theory for psychoanalysis (Gabbard 2002). For Marrone (1998), attachment forms part of psychoanalysis, although Fonagy proposes the theory

of mentalisation as a model with psychoanalytic roots but with its own distinct entity, the product of a synthesis between different disciplines (among them, psychoanalysis, attachment theory and socio-cognitive approaches) (Fonagy and Target 1997; Fonagy et al. 2002).

The above paragraphs are a summary of the relationship between attachment and psychoanalysis from a historical perspective. In this paper, we reflect on the receptivity of psychoanalysts to attachment theory, taking as a reference the articles published in some of the most relevant psychoanalytic journals. The issue thus refers us to the dialogue and integration between different theories and techniques, and to the capacity of psychoanalysis to absorb new knowledge and to develop (Kernberg 1993). Although we follow the format of empirical articles to present the bibliometric analysis, it is important to note that we are not seeking to arrive at conclusions in the way that an empirical study or systematic review would, but rather to provide data that stimulate and support a reflection on the receptivity of psychoanalysis to attachment theory.

## Method

We reviewed seven psychoanalytic journals published in English that are included in the "Psychology, Psychoanalysis" subsection of the ISI Web of Knowledge, with the highest impact factor occurring in December 2020: *Psychoanal Psychol*, *Bulletin of Menninger Clinic*, *J Am Psychoanal Assoc*, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, *Psychoanal Dialogues* and *Psychoanal Inq*. We searched the PsycInfo database for all articles containing the keyword "attachment" that were published in the aforementioned psychoanalytic journals up until 31 December 2020. We eliminated from the initial results of this search conference abstracts, book reviews and commentaries, replies, forewords to journal monographs, interviews and articles which use the term "attachment" as a synonym for "bonding" in a way that

attachment theory does not (e.g. papers on "attachment to place").

A comprehensive system of categories was devised to describe the type of content of each article. The categories were initially based on the main subject of each article, and then the categories most frequently applicable to the same article were merged: for example, "assimilation" and "integration" were initially separate categories but when a high degree of overlap was found, they were merged into a single category. Specifically, the categories proposed are as follows:

1. History of the psychoanalysis-attachment relationship: articles which focus on or have as their main subject the historical description of the relationship between attachment theory and psychoanalysis or that refer to psychoanalytic articles which are precursors to attachment theory (e.g: Orbach 1999; Van Haute 2005).

2. Criticism of attachment theory: articles reflecting negative receptivity, criticising or polemicising attachment theory (e.g. as "reductionist" or "oversimplifying"), or questioning whether it could contribute to psychoanalysis (e.g. Tronick 2003; Zamanian 2011).

3. Critique of psychoanalysis: Articles based on attachment theory that criticise and/or propose corrections to the theory and/or technique of psychoanalysis, proposing changes or alternatives (e.g. Lyons-Ruth 1991, 2003).

4. Comparison and search for commonalities: articles which compare and build bridges between elements of attachment and psychoanalysis, that look for commonalities and draw parallels that may point towards, but do not propose, convergence and integration of the two models. Also included in this category are articles which seek conceptual clarification in an attempt to differentiate between attachment and psychoanalysis. In the papers classified in this category, psychoanalysis and attachment are considered to be closely related but clearly distinct models. Both theories illuminate and validate each other (convergent validity), posing

interrelationships or similarities (e.g. Cortina and Liotti 2010; Sandler 2003).

5. Integration: articles which propose to add or incorporate some theoretical and/or technical element of attachment theory to psychoanalysis, with the aim of improving its conceptual precision, enhancing it or optimising it. It is proposed that this new element be assimilated, adding to psychoanalytical developments, or that it be integrated, redefining or modifying theoretical or technical aspects. Also included in this category are articles which propose the convergence between attachment and psychoanalysis, deepen the understanding of certain psychoanalytic concepts from the perspective of attachment, or underline the importance of something that was already present in psychoanalysis, without proposing the development of an eclectic concept (e.g. Eagle 2003; Holmes 2011).

6. Eclecticism: articles which deal with a topic (psychopathological categories, cultural or anthropological issues) or study a case by blending or combining psychoanalytic and attachment concepts or tools. This includes articles which study psychoanalytic concepts from the theory or methodology of attachment research. There is no intention to assimilate or integrate the two models, nor to reflect on the relationship between them (e.g. Attia 2011; Fossati et al. 2015).

7. Attachment: articles presenting research, theoretical reflections or illustrations of concepts, assessment tools, clinical cases, commentaries on works of art, etc., from the perspective of attachment theory, without establishing links to or bridges with psychoanalysis, often without referring to it (e.g. Keller 2011; Meehan et al. 2009).

8. Mentalisation: articles presenting research, theoretical reflections or illustrations of concepts, assessment tools, clinical cases, commentaries on works of art, etc., based on "mentalisation" theory (Fonagy et al. 2002; Fonagy and Target 1997). These are articles which do not establish any links or bridges to psychoanalysis, often without referring to it at all (e.g. Gagliardini and Colli 2019; Pedersen et al. 2015).

## Procedure

Each article was categorised by both authors, and discrepancies and borderline cases were discussed until a consensus was reached. In those cases where the article fell into more than one category, the article was classified in the category into which the majority of the content fell.

## Results

Of the 13,311 articles published in the journals analysed, 246 (1.8%) met the inclusion criterion: "attachment" as a keyword. Table 1 shows the percentages broken down by journal and by 5-year periods. The data refer to 1991-2020, the period in which all the journals analysed were published.

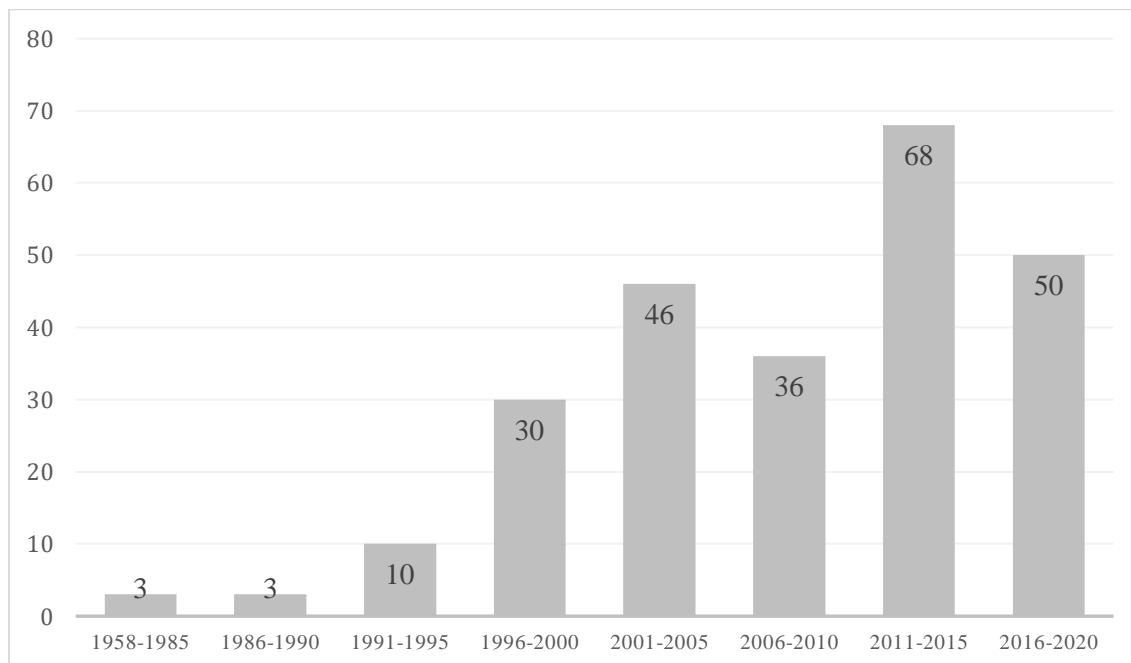
**Table 1.** Percentage of articles containing the keyword "attachment", with respect to the total number of articles published in each journal in the period 1991-2020.

	<b>1991- 95</b>	<b>1996- 2000</b>	<b>2001- 05</b>	<b>2006- 10</b>	<b>2011- 15</b>	<b>2016- 20</b>	<b>Total</b>
Psychoan. Psychology <sup>a</sup>	1.7	1.4	2.2	3.5	12.6	7.6	<b>4.7</b>
Bull. of the Menninger Clinic <sup>b</sup>	1.8	3.4	7.7	5.9	6.4	6.3	<b>5.3</b>
J. American Psycho. Assoc. <sup>c</sup>	0.5	2.2	2.2	3.3	2.6	1.9	<b>2.3</b>
Int. J. of Psycho-Analysis <sup>d</sup>	0.2	0	1.2	1.1	1.6	0.6	<b>0.9</b>
Psychoanalytic Quarterly <sup>e</sup>	0	1.6	2	1.6	0.9	0	<b>1.2</b>
<i>Psychoanal Dialogues</i> <sup>f</sup>	0	2.5	3.1	3	5.7	2.1	<b>3</b>
<i>Psychoanal Inq</i> <sup>g</sup>	1.3	5.4	7.1	4	2.3	2.8	<b>3.7</b>
<b>Total per five-year period</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> *Psychoanal Psychol*; <sup>b</sup> *Bull Menninger Clin*; <sup>c</sup> *J Am Psychoanal Assoc*; <sup>d</sup> *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*; <sup>e</sup> *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*; <sup>f</sup> *Psychoanal Dialogues*; <sup>g</sup> *Psychoanal Inq*.

The 2011-15 period is the one with the highest rate of publications with the keyword "attachment", the most prominent of which is *Psychoanal Psychol* (12.6%). Overall, *Bull Menninger Clin* has published the most articles (5.3%) and the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* the least (0.9%). With the exception of *Psychoanal Inq*, all journals show a decline in publications in the last five-year period analysed (2016-20).

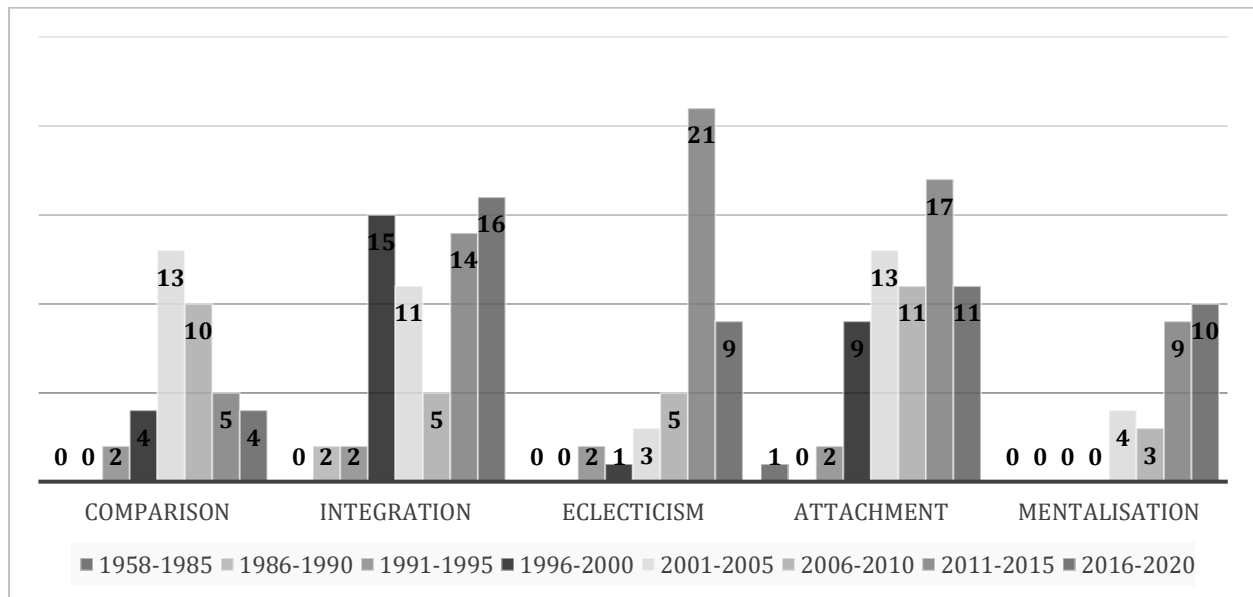
In fig. 1 shows the evolution of the total number of articles published between 1958 and 2020. This would seem to confirm the rise of attachment articles from 1996-2000, which reached a peak in the period 2011-15, and a decline in the period 2016-20.



**Fig. 1.** Total number of articles containing the KW "attachment" published in the analysed journals (1958-2020).



Fig. 2 shows the distribution of articles by category and five-year period. Due to their low frequency, information on the categories "History" (only 2 articles published in the period 1958-2020, 0.81%), "Critique of attachment" (6 articles, 2.44%) and "Critique of Psychoanalysis" (4 articles; 1.63%) has been removed. The highest number of articles published in the period 1958-2020 is from the category "Integration" (65, 26.42%) followed by "Attachment" (64, 26.02%), "Eclecticism" (41, 16.67%), "Comparison" (38, 15.45%) and "Mentalisation" (26, 10.57%). The increase in the number of articles from 1996 onwards particularly corresponds to the categories "Integration" and "Attachment". "Comparison" clearly declines after 2001-05 and "Mentalisation" increases from 2011-15, while "Integration" and "Attachment" remain fairly stable.



**Fig. 2.** Total number of articles published in the analysed journals containing the KW "attachment" (1958-2020). Due to their low frequency, the categories "History", "Critique of attachment" and "Critique of psychoanalysis" are excluded.

## Discussion

Attachment theory, although developed by Bowlby (1958) from psychoanalysis, was received critically by the psychoanalytic community. Over the years, it has developed largely independently from psychoanalysis, although it has exerted an undeniable influence on the latter. In order to reflect on this influence and the receptivity to it on the part of the psychoanalytic community, articles published in the psychoanalytic journals with the highest impact factor in the Web of Science were reviewed for the period up until December 2020: *Psychoanal Psychol*, *Bull Menninger Clin*, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, *J Am Psychoanal Assoc*, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, *Psychoanal Dialogues* and *Psychoanal Inq*. Articles containing "attachment" as a keyword were classified into seven categories, based on their main content: "History", "Critique of Attachment", "Critique of Psychoanalysis", "Comparison", "Integration", "Eclecticism", "Attachment" and "Mentalisation".

The temporal evolution of the publications studied shows that there have been two decisive periods in the attachment-psychoanalysis relationship:

a) From 1996 onwards, there was an "explosion" of interest in attachment in which it was compared with psychoanalysis (especially until 2010), ways to integrate it were explored, and works were published which were based exclusively on attachment theory, without any reference to psychoanalytic authors or concepts. From the period 1996-2010, attention should be drawn to the work of the "attachment psychoanalysts" (Fonagy 2001). Some of these contributions which focus on the comparison between psychoanalysis and attachment (Blatt and Levy 2003; Fonagy and Target 2007; Slade 2000) and on integration proposals (Bateman and Fonagy 2003; Fonagy 1998; Fonagy 2000; Fonagy et al. 2003; Lyons-Ruth 1999, 2003; Parish and Eagle 2003; Schore 2002), have been widely cited in subsequent articles. The fruit of this effort of assimilation-integration and comparative interest may have facilitated an awareness of the topic in the psychoanalytic community, stimulating interest in attachment theory, which was to result in a

significant increase in the publication of papers focusing solely on attachment in the following decade.

b) From 2011 onwards, articles on attachment and attachment-psychoanalysis integration continue to be published, and an eclectic approach strongly emerges: attachment theory is used to account for certain phenomena (e.g. specific psychopathologies), without strictly modifying psychoanalytic theory. As the number of publications with eclectic and integrative proposals increases, comparison declines. This is a logical process, since assimilating something new implies comparing it with what came before, however once assimilation-integration has taken place, it is no longer meaningful to make comparisons. During this 2011-2020 period, there begins to be a greater presence of publications on mentalisation. Although inspired by psychoanalysis, attachment theory and cognitive neuroscience, mentalisation theory has become highly relevant and established as a subject in its own right. As such, references to both psychoanalysis and attachment no longer appear in these works (Allen and Fonagy 2006). Although the data from our study do not allow us to give a definitive answer on this issue, it can be hypothesised that the increase in publications focussing on mentalisation reflects the interest of psychoanalysts in a concept that has a very clear and direct clinical application, and which is postulated as a common factor in the various psychotherapies (Fonagy and Allison, 2014). Mentalisation theory, moreover, departs from attachment in that attachment bonding can occur in a variety of animal species, whereas mentalisation emphasises the role of communication between humans (Jurist, 2018). It also moves away from psychoanalysis towards developmental psychopathology, and becomes more interdisciplinary (Duschinsky and Foster, 2021; Fonagy and Campbell, 2015). Although, as mentioned above, mentalisation is becoming a subject in its own right, we should not lose sight of the fact that it stems from attachment theory. Its presence in psychoanalytic publications can thus be interpreted as a sign of the influence of attachment

theory on psychoanalysis and, at the same time, as a possible source of motivation for psychoanalysts to deepen their understanding of attachment theory.

It should also be noted that in the last five-year period analysed (2015-20), the total number of articles published decreased, especially in the "eclecticism" and "attachment" categories.

There are very few articles which focus on critiquing and questioning one theory according to the tenets of the other: by our count, six articles critique attachment theory from the point of view of psychoanalysis, and four critique psychoanalysis from an attachment perspective. As mentioned above, Bowlby initially confronted his model with the drive theory that predominated in the Psychoanalytic Society at the time, and was criticised for this (Bowlby et al. 1986; A. Freud 1960; Schur 1960; Spitz 1960). It should be borne in mind that these criticisms were not voiced in a context of systematic exposition and critical discussion that would facilitate reflection and elucidation of the issues at stake. They were mostly disparaging remarks questioning the psychoanalytic nature of his theory. In turn, Bowlby also responded with disqualifications and derogatory remarks, creating a polarising dynamic and making dialogue difficult. All this helps to understand why, after these initial criticisms, publications on attachment virtually disappeared from mainstream psychoanalytic journals until the mid-1990s. This silence lasted more than three decades. By the time the psychoanalytic journals analysed in this paper returned to the subject of attachment, the tension and confrontation were already a thing of the past. The reasons for this are both the common core shared by attachment and psychoanalysis (Eagle 2017; Fonagy 2001; Mitchell 1999) and the fact that as the two models developed, they were converging (Gullestad 2001; Marrone 1998). The goal of critiques on psychoanalysis is to contribute arguments for integrating aspects of attachment into psychoanalytic theory and technique (Lyons-Ruth 1991, 2003). Be that as it may, it should be

borne in mind that, despite the conflicts and disagreements, Bowlby still considered himself to be a psychoanalyst and never rescinded his membership of the British Psychoanalytical Society (Bowlby et al. 1986).

Articles which are exclusively about "attachment" and hardly make any reference to psychoanalysis would seem to indicate that many psychoanalysts consider attachment theory to form part of the psychoanalytic tradition. However, the reverse may also be true: a significant part of the psychoanalytic community has perhaps never taken an interest in Bowlby's work and its subsequent development, considering attachment theory to be qualitatively different from psychoanalysis and having little to contribute (Zeuthen et al. 2010). This hypothesis would appear to gain weight in view of the fact that, on the whole, few articles on attachment have been published in the psychoanalytic journals analysed: the *Bull Menninger Clin* is the only publication to exceed a rate of 5%, while the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* does not reach 1%. It is interesting to note that the first *Textbook of Psychoanalyses* (Person et al. 2005) devotes a chapter to attachment theory, however the second one does not (Gabbard et al. 2012).

The relevance of the category "eclecticism" implies that concepts and approaches from attachment theory are being used, blended with psychoanalytic concepts and approaches. Attachment theory is accepted as a complimentary contribution, something which does not have to be integrated or assimilated as such, but rather used for the psychoanalytic understanding of certain phenomena or problems. This is particularly noticeable in the five-year period from 2011 to 2015, and results in psychoanalytic publications referring to "attachment relationship", "attachment system", "attachment types", or using concepts such as "secure base-safe haven", "internal operating models", "narrative coherence-mentalisation". With the passing of time, some psychoanalysts (perhaps a minority, as mentioned above) have come to consider attachment theory to be an additional asset when analysing cases, developing concepts, etc. The progressive

decline in comparative work from 2001-05 onwards may reflect this incorporation of attachment into routine use on the part of the psychoanalytic community, especially those sections interested in research. The *Adult Attachment Interview* (AAI) is a clear example of a research method that is enriching for psychoanalysis, and which can be easily assimilated (Gullestad, 2003).

The contribution of attachment-based interventions (ABI) can also be considered a complement (Lecannelier 2018). There is no specific therapeutic model of attachment as such, except for the treatment of child-parent interaction (Eagle 2017). However, attachment theory allows for a better understanding of the caregiving system and thus underlines and reinforces important elements of psychoanalytic intervention. As for the patient-psychoanalyst relationship, attachment theory has contributed to fostering a type of therapeutic bond in which warmth, proximity and the idea of a "secure base" have converged with approaches along these lines developed by psychoanalysts themselves (Kohut, Ferenczi...), especially relational psychoanalysis.

As mentioned above, there are few critical articles overall between attachment and psychoanalysis, in addition to numerous eclectic works or those which propose integration: on the whole, the tendency of the publications seems to indicate less interest in clarifying and delimiting concepts - a task which, in our opinion, is always necessary. Attachment and emotional bonding, for example, are not identical concepts. Attachment refers to the development of psychobiological, representational and relational strategies to regulate stressful life experiences, and such strategies can only develop in the emotional bond with another caregiver (Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1980). However, attachment bond and affective bond are two distinct concepts which are neither comparable nor interchangeable (Cowan and Cowan 2007; Lecannelier 2018). Attachment theory is a fundamental contribution to psychoanalytic attachment theory, however cannot be reduced to it. The possibilities for integration are limited.

Freud (1923, 235) said that "Psycho-analysis is the name (1) of a procedure for the investigation of mental processes which are almost inaccessible in any other way, (2) of a method (based upon that investigation) for the treatment of neurotic disorders and (3) of a collection of psychological information obtained along those lines, which is gradually being accumulated into a new scientific discipline". These three elements, which have defined psychoanalysis for decades, were intimately interrelated and co-dependent. Thus, research was carried out during treatment and treatment was carried out by investigating. The research method was put to use to build the theory, and the theory was put to use during treatment. Changing one of these elements (the research method) meant changing the other two. And as Giovanni Vassalli (2001) and Robert Caper (2009) have pointed out, it is significant that Freud gave primacy to the research method in his writings. This raised the question of whether Bowlby was developing psychoanalysis or distorting it. The fact that attachment theory used a different research methodology in large part led to it evolving independently of psychoanalysis: it has a specific theoretical development and some treatment modalities that are distinct from psychoanalytic ones.

However, insofar as it grew out of Bowlby's psychoanalytic clinical practice and, as we have seen, shares common foundations, there are reasons to consider it to be of psychoanalytic heritage. The psychoanalytic community has placed particular value on the contributions of attachment theory in research methodology (*Strange Situation*, *Adult Attachment Interview*), which is considered a relevant and valid complement to the research method itself (Target, 2005).

In relation to psychoanalytic theory and technique, attachment theory has provided support and a foundation for approaches that were already present, especially in the more relational approaches of psychoanalysis (the concept of a secure base, for example, or mentalisation). Attachment theory has also fostered plurality and openness in psychoanalytic schools (Fonagy and Campbell, 2015). A large proportion of psychoanalysts have gradually

become interested in attachment theory, and the psychoanalytic journals studied reflected this, albeit in a quantitatively discrete way. Perhaps Bowlby would be less disappointed today by "the very slow progress that attachment theory has made in the official psychoanalytic world", as he said in an interview more than three decades ago (Bowlby et al. 1986, 55).

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