

Sarah Lawrence College

DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence

Child Development Theses

Child Development Graduate Program

5-2023

The Bonds of Play: A Case Study of Attachments in a Parent-Toddler Play Group for Latin American Immigrant Families in New York City

Adriana Bass
Sarah Lawrence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.slc.edu/child_development_etd



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bass, Adriana, "The Bonds of Play: A Case Study of Attachments in a Parent-Toddler Play Group for Latin American Immigrant Families in New York City" (2023). *Child Development Theses*. 51.
https://digitalcommons.slc.edu/child_development_etd/51

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Child Development Graduate Program at DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Child Development Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence. For more information, please contact afreitas@sarahlawrence.edu.

THE BONDS OF PLAY:
A CASE STUDY OF ATTACHMENTS IN A PARENT-TODDLER PLAY GROUP FOR
LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN NEW YORK CITY

Adriana Bass

May 2023

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Child Development
Sarah Lawrence College

ABSTRACT

A child's relationship to their caregivers is one of the most influential factors in their lifelong development. Early caregiving patterns form scripts that shape how a child understands and interacts with the world around them. These early attachment patterns inform parenting behaviors across generations, as individuals often parent their offspring in ways shaped by their own early experiences. Central to forming parent-child relationships is the concept of play. Play has value in supporting parent-child attachments as well as revealing existing relational patterns and caregiving behaviors. The current study examines the attachment relationships of families in a parent-toddler play group in New York City. The families in the play group were from Latin American immigrant backgrounds, demonstrating intergenerational and cultural differences in play experiences from the typically studied WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) populations. The current study examines the use of play-based attachment work as a culturally sensitive intervention, demonstrating the value of using play to strengthen parent-child bonds.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude:

To Barbara Schecter, who has been a meaningful encouragement to me in the Child Development Program. Thank you for your support and contagious love of learning.

To Emma Forrester, my thesis advisor, for taking my big picture ideas and helping me make them concrete. I learned so much from your insights.

To Cindy Puccio, my second reader, for inspiring and deepening my love for the world of play.

To my supervisors, Gisselle and Astrid, and my Let's Play co-facilitator, Amanda. I cannot express how special this internship experience was for me.

To Caroline, I don't know how I would have made it through these grad school years without you.

To my church community, friends, and family. Your prayers and encouragement were evident to me many times.

To my parents, for all the ways you've always supported me and believed in me. I am here because of the great efforts and sacrifices you have made. You were my earliest bonds and have shaped me deeply. Los quiero mucho.

And finally, to my husband, who has now become well-acquainted with the languages of play and attachment after countless hours of listening to me. Thank you for being my best friend and most playful companion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
Introduction: The Intergenerational Transmission of Play.....	page 5
Chapter 1: Literature Review	
Attachment Theory as a Foundation for Practice.....	page 8
The Relationship between Play and Attachment.....	page 22
Chapter 2: Methods: Case Study of a Play Group with Latin American Immigrant Parents and Their Toddlers.....	page 28
Chapter 3: Results.....	page 32
Chapter 4: Discussion.....	page 42
Conclusion.....	page 52
References.....	page 54

INTRODUCTION

THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF PLAY

“Children’s attachment experiences are likely to influence the way they treat their own children. If they were treated with empathy, they are likely to respond to their own children with empathy. If they grew up in a family environment where there was a good capacity for reflective dialogue, they are likely to promote reflective dialogue with their own children. Conversely, if they were maltreated or neglected in their early life, they run the risk of maltreating their own children. Through generations, patterns of parent-child relationships can be repeated and become organizing themes or scripts in relationships.” (Marrone, 2014, p. 47)

A child’s earliest and most intimate relationships are largely influential throughout the course of their lifespan (Marrone, 2014). The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) explains that caregiving relationships in early infancy create patterns of attachment that influence the ways those children relate to others and the world around them.

These early attachments not only impact later relationships with others (Çağlayan & Körük, 2022), but they also influence an individual’s caregiving behaviors towards the next generation (Fraiberg et al., 1975). The Marrone (2014) quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates the intergenerational effect of early caregiving experiences. Marrone, a psychoanalyst clinically supervised by attachment theorist John Bowlby, writes of attachment experiences such as empathy, reflective dialogue, and neglect. He describes the cyclical nature to parenting, as one’s childhood experiences can be vastly influential, even subconsciously, of the ways a child grows to parent their own offspring.

A phenomenon central to early childhood is play. Play is the sphere in which children can explore the world around and within themselves; central to a child's holistic development. It not only promotes a child's cognitive, physical, and socioemotional gains, but the relational centrality of play also supports the development of parent-child bonds (Jernberg, 1984; Yogman et al., 2018; Alexander, 2021). Play transcends the lines of language through the use of pre- and non-verbal communication, kindles interconnectedness through back-and-forth interactions, and fosters emotions such as joy and glee (Alexander, 2021).

Recognizing the cyclical nature of parenting and the relational benefits of play in supporting parent-child attachments, a question naturally arises as an addendum to Marrone (2014)'s work:

If children grew up in a family environment where they were played with, will they be likely to play with their own children?

This question became central to my work as a social work intern that was tasked with facilitating a play group for families at an agency in New York City. The agency's mission was to support babies in the first three years of life through a range of holistic services. Families were supported through supportive case management, bi-monthly food and baby supply distributions, parent coaching and a series of parenting groups. One of the main theoretical foundations for the agency's interventions is found in attachment theory—leading to a relationship-based program where parents are supported dyadically with their children in skills such as consistent care, empathetic parenting, and following the child's lead.

When the opportunity arose for me to facilitate a group centered on the topic of play, I was looking forward to engaging with families about its importance. It is the world where children communicate, explore, and grow, after all. Yet as I began preparations to lead the play

group for caregivers and their toddlers, I was instructed to not only communicate the value of play to families, but to model how to play with the children, in recognition that many of the parents may not be comfortable nor familiar with the concept of playing jointly with their child. The majority of parents were immigrants, and all the families were from Latin or South American Indigenous backgrounds. A supervisor had expressed that many of the clients have their own sets of cultural norms surrounding parenting, hence being “silly” and “playful” could be roles that families would feel uncomfortable in.

These circumstances led me to consider the significance of culture and parental attachments on one’s own comfort playing with their children. It is possible that some of the parent participants were not played with as children or were raised in a context in which playing with their children was not the norm. Since play yields several developmental benefits, including the furthering of relational bonds, I wanted to thoughtfully consider the barriers that could arise. In order to create a clinically meaningful play group, I considered the challenges and benefits that arose through using the vehicle of play with Latin American families.

This thesis examines the use of play to reveal and support parent-child attachments with the aforementioned populations and discusses my observations from leading the play group in New York City. I discuss the concepts of both attachment and play in order to critically evaluate their use with Latin American families and further discuss the relevance of using a play-based intervention to support attachments. Let’s play!

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

ATTACHMENT THEORY AS A FOUNDATION FOR PRACTICE

What is attachment theory?

Attachment theory has become one of the most widespread theoretical foundations in the realm of developmental psychology. Its influence continues expanding into clinical work with individuals and families, adult relationships, and even court custody cases and policy decisions (Thompson, 2000; Thompson, Simpson, & Berlin, 2021). Attachment finds its roots in the field of child development, where the theory was developed to describe the neurobiological and behavioral process in which humans form patterns for relating to others (Reese, 2018). These relational patterns are developed in infancy and form the groundwork for how a child grows to interact with others and the world around them.

A child's most influential early relationships are those they have with their caregivers (Ainsworth, 1979). Caregivers play the role of providing care and connection—and the child in turn feels cared for and understood. It is within the safety of such relationships that a child can explore the world, cope with distress, and relate to others in a way that likewise yields connection. Van der Kolk (2014) calls these relational patterns the “inner maps” which chart the course for relationships throughout the lifespan (p. 124). Instead of placing an emphasis on a child's innate qualities, attachment prioritizes the formative influence of relationships.

Arietta Slade (2021) mentions that “children survive through relationships” (0:17:30). The primary caregiving relationships are considered so highly that they are claimed to yield developmental outcomes in several areas. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) lists the following benefits:

“Self-confidence and sound mental health, motivation to learn, achievement in school and later in life, the ability to control aggressive impulses and resolve conflicts in non-violent ways, knowing the difference between right and wrong, having the capacity to develop and sustain casual friendships and intimate relationships, and ultimately to be a successful parent oneself.” (p.1)

Early attachments have a permeating influence on the life of a child and present a worthwhile area to explore in the scope of child development. Throughout this section, the history of attachment theory will be examined, as it is a concept that has grown in prevalence throughout the years and continues to be adapted to a variety of contexts.

John Bowlby, nicknamed the “father of attachment theory”, (Slade, 2021, 0:19:54) developed the construct based on the central idea that infants seek safety as necessary for their survival. In situations where safety is compromised, proximity-seeking behaviors are activated within the child (Marrone, 2014). In Bowlby’s (1969) paper “A Child’s Tie to His Mother”, he explains that the theory he proposes is different from the psychoanalytic ideas about infant development which held prominence at the time. Previous theories had focused on inner drives, such as for food and warmth, which influenced infants to seek out their mothers. Bowlby’s new theory focused on behavioral systems, instead. He examined the propensity for children to seek proximity to their mothers when they felt unsafe. He coined these systems “attachment behaviors” (Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby’s contributions to the field were inspired through discussions with thinkers like Konrad Lorenz and Harry Harlow, leading him to become interested in the value of ethology (Marrone, 2014). In Bowlby’s work looking at non-human primates, he found that children and animals alike engage in proximity-seeking behaviors when prompted by an experience of

separation or fear. In other words, a perceived lack of safety elicited behaviors in which the young sought out physical closeness to their mothers or mother-figures. These behaviors were most prominent in the second year of life, a time when infants typically gain mobility and can wander further away from their caregivers. Bowlby observed that around this time in the infant's life, the behavioral systems become activated in which the child seeks proximity to its primary caregiver in order to feel safe and ultimately, survive. Bowlby's focus on attachments and the ability of early relationships to provide safety for children opened the door into a world of meaningful parent-infant work that was to come.

If Bowlby was the father, Mary Ainsworth could be seen as the mother of attachment literature. Her contributions to the field are of central importance. Ainsworth studied infant and caregiving relationships and worked with William Blatz, who studied the "human sense of security" and the effects of security on exploration (Marrone, 2014, p. 58). Ainsworth eventually joined Bowlby in studying the effects of separations in the parent-child relationship, and it was the joining of these ideas which contributed to the attachment classifications which Ainsworth would develop in her work.

Ainsworth built upon the idea that when an infant experiences distress, they respond by seeking the proximity and security of their caregiver (Ainsworth, 1979). The caregiver responds in a certain manner to these security-seeking behaviors, forming patterns of responsiveness in their infant. The way in which offspring grow to depend on and relate to their caregivers depends on the caregiver's sensitivity and availability to be used for safety, or as a "secure base" (Ainsworth, 1979).

After some time studying mother-infant pairs in a village near Kampala, Uganda, Ainsworth moved to Boston and created a study with middle-class mothers in the area. She

began to classify infants as either securely or insecurely attached (Marrone, 2014) through a research tool she created called the Strange Situation. In the Strange Situation Procedure, mother-infant pairs are studied in a lab setting through a series of episodes (Marrone, 2014). During the procedure, a mother and child are asked to enter a strange room, the mother is asked to leave the room and the child is left with a stranger, and then the child is reunified with their mother. The goal of the tool is to observe the child's reaction to the separation from their mother as well as their behavior upon reunification.

Ainsworth developed three classifications of the attachment styles observed (Jugovac et al., 2022). Some children responded to the situation with distress upon separation but were quickly able to calm down and explore the room playfully upon reunification, being classified as securely attached. Other children responded to the separation with pronounced distress and continued to show distress upon reunification, leading towards a classification of insecurely attached, anxious type. The third classification of attachment seen through the procedure was demonstrated when children seemed unbothered by the mother's absence and by her return; these children were classified as insecurely attached, avoidant type.

Attachment classifications

The attachment classifications demonstrate the relational patterns that exist within the parent-child dyad. These patterns are created through repeated caregiving experiences in which the child learns how to interact with their caregiver, influencing how they grow to relate to others later in life.

In secure attachments, a caregiver's consistent availability creates a sense of security for the child, and the child can learn to *expect* the caregiver's care and responsiveness (Ainsworth, 1979). This is demonstrated by the child feeling safe enough to explore once their distress is

resolved. Security lends the child the ability to grow in exploration and autonomy since they can rely on the consistency of their caregiver to be available when they return. Anxious attachments can develop when a caregiver provides inconsistent responses to the child, and the child has learned that they must anxiously attend to their caregiver's cues. The child with this type of attachment is unsure of the caregiver's reliability and not easily consoled after the distress of being separated from their caregiver (Ainsworth, 1979; Jugovac et al., 2022). This may lead to a child who does not demonstrate as much exploration but is more focused on their relationship to the caregiver. Children with avoidant attachments can have caregivers who do not provide support in times of distress, leading the infant to look to other sources for soothing. In these cases, the infant learns not to see their caregivers as a source of comfort but must learn to cope in other ways (Jugovac et al., 2022). The avoidant child may be preoccupied with exploration but does not use their caregiver as a reference point nor as a secure base.

A fourth attachment classification, known as a 'disorganized' attachment, was later developed by Mary Main and researchers (Main & Solomon, 1990). This type of attachment is prevalent in cases where the source of the caregiving is frightening to the child. In cases of trauma or abuse where the child's source of security has become the source of distress, the child responds with a chronic state of arousal (Jugovac et al., 2022; Slade, 2021, 0:31:10). A child that has a disorganized attachment seeks out their caregiver yet is also frightened by them, demonstrating confusion (Marrone, 2014). The disorganized child responds to their caregiver's frightening or inconsistent behaviors with an inconsistency of their own.

A child's attachment pattern informs their ability to explore the world, either with curious exploration, reckless abandon, or not very much at all. Further, when circumstances are distressing, children's attachment relationships indicate whether the child can rely on the security

provided by their caregiver to make them feel safe again. It is important to note that these attachment classifications are not syndromes (Allen, 2023) and should not be overly pathologized, yet they provide indicators of development that can be explored for a deeper understanding of a child's relational patterns.

Intergenerational effects of attachment

Early caregiving is important because it forms an internal pattern for how a child relates to others. Bowlby called these patterns an "internal working model". The attachment patterns can persist beyond childhood and throughout the lifespan, ultimately influencing the ways that a child grows to parent their offspring. Caregiving influences persist throughout generations.

Fraiberg et al. (1975) demonstrated how unresolved trauma from one's childhood can find its expression in parenting. An abandoned child may grow up, have children, and unintentionally repeat maladaptive patterns, spending little time with their own child without recognizing the distressing effect on their offspring. It is through a thoughtful analysis of one's own childhood that parents can begin to recognize the patterns that influence their caregiving, taking part in more reflective parenting. Patterns of caregiving are influential yet can go unrecognized, as both positive and negative experiences are passed on intergenerationally—ghosts and angels alike (Fraiberg et al., 1975; Lieberman, et al., 2005).

Attachment interventions

Ainsworth (1979) describes the role of caregivers by stating the following: "attachment figures are one's most trusted companions" (p. 20). These relationships are central to a child's lifelong development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004), and therefore have become the focus of various interventions aimed at addressing infant and early childhood mental health.

While an infant's trusted companions are a source of safety in a world full of fear, pain, and unexpected occurrences, there are situations in which a caregiver's ability to provide a secure base for their child is compromised, and intervention is needed. Attachment theory has been used as a foundation for several interventions targeting caregiving patterns and the relationship between a parent and their child (Jugovac et al., 2022). Several of these interventions aim to improve secure attachments through parental behaviors such as caregiver sensitivity and reflective functioning.

Caregiver sensitivity refers to the parent's ability to be aware of and responsive to their child's needs (Jugovac et al., 2022). A sensitive caregiver notices when their child is distressed, recognizing cues of hunger, discomfort, or boredom and responding accordingly. This parental behavior is closely aligned with the concept of attunement, in which a parent and child can be said to be "in sync" with one another. If a child is met with sensitive caregiving, their caregiver can understand their needs and quickly respond. This allows for smooth communication between parent and child, in which the child knows that her messages will be received and the caregiver knows how to read them.

The other parental behavior addressed in attachment interventions is reflective functioning. This describes the process of being able to think about another person's mental and emotional states (Jugovac et al., 2022). Fonagy (2014) describes the psychological process of "mentalization", which underlies the ability to demonstrate reflective functioning. For parents, this entails thinking about what their child may be feeling or thinking and reflecting on the child's behaviors through the lens of their internal states.

A few of the most prominent clinical interventions founded on attachment theory are the following: attachment and biobehavioral catch-up (ABC), video playback interventions,

child-parent psychotherapy (CPP), minding the baby (MTB), and circle of security (COS) (Thompson et al., 2021). There are also other interventions with similar foundations, as the field of attachment continues to expand. A common factor for these interventions is that they are relational in nature, focusing on the child's development through addressing the parent's relationship with the child. These interventions have demonstrated positive effects in increasing secure attachments and improving child outcomes.

Attachment as a culturally responsive theory

While attachment theory is the basis for many evidence-based practice interventions, it is necessary to consider the contexts in which the theory was developed and those in which it is currently applied. There are cultural psychologists and anthropologists who have posited that the theory is not overarchingly applicable to all cultures nor a universal metric for a child's healthy development (Ganz, 2018; Strand, 2020).

Attachment theory was developed within the scope of Westernized contexts (Ganz, 2018; Quinn & Mageo, 2013; Thompson et al, 2021); yet, despite these origins, the theory holds a pre-eminence that implies universality (Ganz, 2018; Keller, 2021). This stands in contrast to the wide variety of cultural norms that exist in parenting—and more generally in contrast to the fact that most of the world is neither Western nor industrialized.

Each society has a set of norms, customs, and values which guide humans in understanding the world. These values extend into the act of child-rearing, and parents commonly raise their children in alignment with their culture. Since various cultures differ from one another, the goals of child-rearing also diverge. Quinn & Mageo (2013) write about Levine & Norman's (2001) "cultural model of virtue" which describes this process. They write that cultural models guide parents and influence their caregiving. The concept is similar to the

concept described by Harkness et al. (2009) detailing parental ethnotheories– the underlying cultural beliefs about child development and rearing. Such beliefs can often influence what parents feel is the “right” way to parent (Harkness et al., 2009). Ultimately, caregiving preferences are variable and depend upon the cultural context.

A prominent value in Western societies is that of autonomy. It is, in fact, the outcome of a secure attachment- the development of an autonomous and explorative child. In comparison with this, collectivist societies hold the value of harmony above independence, a cultural value which translates into different parenting behaviors. Attachment theory prizes autonomy as “successful” development, yet this does not equally apply to all societies (Strand, 2020).

It is fitting to consider the ways in which a cultural value for a specific characteristic would naturally guide parents within that culture to develop such an attribute within their child. Upon honest consideration of the attachment classifications, it is not difficult to see that there is a higher value attributed to secure attachments. Quinn and Mageo (2013) posit that “attachment categories have a value system built in that is culturally biased” (p. 38). They propose abandoning categories and instead seeing attachment behaviors as existing along the continuum of autonomy/exploration to connectedness/comfort.

Culturally sensitive research

Although Ainsworth began her attachment work studying infants in Uganda, it was her research with urban middle-class mothers in Boston that led to her development of the Strange Situation Procedure, an assessment tool that is still widely used today. The limited scope of researched populations has continued into present times, as most attachment studies are conducted in “Western industrialized societies” and economically privileged populations

(Thompson et al., 2021; Ganz, 2018). Such populations are often characterized as WEIRD- Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.

Although there has historically been a lack of cross-cultural attachment research (Rothbaum et al., 2000), more studies are being conducted in diverse cultural contexts. An exploration of Efe forager children's relationships done by Morelli and Lu (2021) is one such example. In their study, Morelli and Lu (2021) noted the diversity and universalities in infant care experiences in the Efe community in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They examined the population's norms of living in camps with several extended families in open, communal areas. As foragers, the Efe deal with food and social uncertainty. Infants in the community are often cared for by a network of attachment figures, often interacting with several social partners each day (14-20 social partners in a 2-hour period) (p. 240). The several attachment figures serve the purpose of developing social adaptation; this is a beneficial quality in a society where relationships typically change due to the merging or separation of camps, long trips to visit family, or death due to sickness. Additionally, the multiple social partners allow for children to receive food and nutrition from various caregivers- aiding infants in receiving necessary nutrition.

Morelli and Lu noted the ways in which caregiving patterns set up their infants for developing in a way that was most beneficial to their cultural context. Their study examines community norms and how caregiving patterns align with those norms. Instead of classifying infants from the point of view of a Western model, they examine and describe infant relationships from an indigenous approach. Although their study does examine the Efe community in a culturally sensitive manner, it is important to note that the researchers themselves come from a Western context.

Judi Mesman, a psychologist and contributor to a number of attachment volumes, asks the question: “how inclusive is attachment research?” (Mesman, 2022). She points to the importance of critically questioning the theory’s claims of cross-cultural validity, especially in light of the biased research base which most often publishes works that originate from the West or are co-authored by Western researchers.

Research conducted cross-culturally can often include measures and classifications developed in Western contexts (Rothbaum et al., 2000). For example, Quinn and Mageo (2013) note that the Strange Situation tool has been used in cross-cultural settings, even though societies differ regarding the normative levels of separation children experience from mothers. Takahashi (1990) describes the ways Japanese families responded to the Strange Situation Procedure study, which found that the babies displayed such a pronounced stress reaction to the separation that the amount of time mothers were away had to be reduced. The infants’ strong reactions led to the classification of the most of the infants in this study as insecurely attached. Takahashi’s findings were interpreted within the context of the cultural norms of Japanese parenting, in which parental separations from their children were uncommon.

There are further objections to changes in the theoretical construct of attachment from naturalistic observations in environments to clinically isolated and lab-isolated individual characteristics. The Strange Situation conditions are rigid in their application, leading to specific results that demonstrate an infant’s response to distress (brought on by the specific circumstance of separation), response to a stranger, and reunification with their caregiver. For caregiver-child dyads who do not often experience separation, the experience can be quite different than for a pair in which the caregiver is regularly away for scheduled periods of time, such as working outside of the home. Additionally, in a population in which children are cared for by multiple

members of their community and not often exposed to individuals outside of that community, the presence of a stranger might be especially distressing to that child.

Critical evaluation of attachment theory

There are two points to consider when critically assessing the use of attachment-theory based practice with families. To begin, social workers are bound by a code of ethics which encourages a consideration of the effects of culture on society and the importance of self-determination (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Secondly, there is a benefit to critically questioning widespread paradigms. In an application of these two points, working with immigrant populations necessitates a deeper level of self-reflection and critical questioning of the assumptions that may be held by the clinicians providing services.

The Code of Ethics lists the following:

1.05(a) “Social workers should demonstrate understanding of culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures” (para. 17) and

1.05(c) “Social workers should demonstrate awareness and cultural humility by engaging in critical self-reflection (understanding their own bias and engaging in self-correction), recognizing clients as experts of their own culture, committing to lifelong learning, and holding institutions accountable for advancing cultural humility” (para. 19)

Social workers are then responsible for considering the role of culture and the strengths within all cultures. If there is a value attached to certain styles of attachment, and if these styles could be linked to overarching cultural trends that are reinforced through parenting practices, then social workers are responsible for recognizing the strengths of the different ways attachment is manifested.

There is a value assigned to the different types of attachment styles- secure *vs* insecure, and this presents a conflict for the social work professional. Attachment categories have clinical interpretations associated with them, such as the association between disorganized attachments and abuse or maltreatment (Quinn & Mageo, 2013; Jugovac, 2022; Slade, 2021). While this assumption is sufficiently evidenced in the research, the interpretation may not be true in other cultural settings (Quinn & Mageo, 2013).

According to standard 1.05c, social workers also have the responsibility of engaging in cultural humility and critical self-reflection. Such critical self-reflection necessitates the ability to critically question the paradigms functioned within. There is a tension within the field of attachment between those within the research and those who pose criticisms (Thompson et al., 2021), but it is important to examine cultural biases or assumptions that may exist from within the field. The attachment research can be self-confirming, not studying *if* the construct exists but *how*. Questioning, however, does not weaken the theory, but rather strengthens it. As researchers, professionals, and humans, we should allow for open-minded exploration of the assumptions we hold. We cannot completely abandon insights, but neither ignore the lived experience that has afforded clients a unique insight that clinicians cannot bring to the work. The work should be cooperative and client centered.

This critical self-reflection about assumptions and cultural bias is especially important when working with immigrant populations. Attachment work done within the immigrant community applies the constructs from the overarching culture into families from another, and this may lead to practices that do not make space for cultural sensitivity.

The literature regarding cross-cultural critiques on attachment theory has examined the sweeping applications of the theory's ethnocentric assumptions into other cultures and

communities, yet it does not often comment on its application with the myriad of cultures that exist within the United States. The United States does not consist of a homogenous society with distinctly defined cultural norms. Often referred to as a melting pot, there are often communities of individuals from several cultures living within the same neighborhood. It is important to evaluate cross cultural work *within* America, critically examining any underlying assumptions that may be held in working with immigrants. Latin American families are the focus of the current thesis, a population that is generally less represented in the literature, which often centers on a “Western perspective of relationships and families” (Ganz, 2018, p. 263).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAY AND ATTACHMENT

What is play?

The definition of play is difficult to capture. It has been called the language of the child (Ray & Landreth, 2015) and is the child's natural mode of self-expression (Axline, 1969). Play is the form in which children interact with and explore the world, starting from infancy and continuing as they build their social and cultural identities (Yogman et al., 2018). It has even been called the "work" of the child by psychologists Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori, as it plays a necessary role in holistic human development.

In general, play consists of behaviors that lead to exploration, expression, and joy. It is not frivolous (Yogman et al., 2018), but instead serves a deeper developmental purpose. Play can be self-directed and unstructured, or exist within a more guided setting, yet most forms of play involve an element of pleasure. Through playing, children develop increased problem-solving skills, socialization, self-control, and overall mental well-being (Gray, 2011).

While play is not limited to childhood, it makes up a considerable portion of a child's life. Before children develop the capacity to express themselves through complex verbal means, play serves the role of being the child's language. It presents an opportunity for children to process their inner thoughts and feelings through symbolic mechanisms. A child can play out their fears, challenges, and desires in a controlled environment, seeking to achieve a sense of mastery over them. Just as adults talk about their experiences to process them, a child speaks through play to represent and ultimately work through their inner worlds (Axline, 1969).

Play serves the developmental function of allowing children to learn about and interact with their social realities, as it presents the opportunity to practice prosocial skills and engage with their cultural formation (Yogman et al., 2018). It is an important relational activity where

children can engage in back-and-forth interactions with peers, themselves, and caregivers. Play promotes cognitive and social gains (Rathunde & Isabella, 2020) through activities such as rough and tumble play (ex. tickling and play fighting) which involves the complex use of social cues and bolsters communication (Neale, 2020). Additionally, dramatic play allows children to act out the roles of older members of their community, transmitting elements of the culture into their exploration.

There are several types of play that children can engage in. Yogman et al. (2018) lists the following: object play, physical play, outdoor play, and pretend play (p. 3). When play is child-led and imaginative it is linked with the development of skills such as executive functioning and theory of mind (Neale, 2020). It not only benefits a child's psychological development, but serves roles in promoting social, physical, and cognitive gains. It is holistically beneficial to the development of the child.

Play serves an array of developmental functions; most notably for this paper, however, it supports the relationships that caregivers have with their children. Yogman et al. (2018) writes that “play supports the formation of the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with all caregivers that children need to thrive” (p. 1).

Play to build attachments

Play is relevant to the discussion on attachment because it functions as both a mechanism for developing bonds with attachment figures and as a form of expression for the type of attachments that already exist. Play is a means of connection between children and their caregivers, and through the act of playing together a caregiver is able to enter into the child's world and grow in interpersonal closeness. Yogman et al. (2018) writes that play “promotes the

dyadic reciprocal interactions between children and parents, which is a crucial element of healthy relationships” (p. 7).

Play is the natural form of communication for the child and serves as an appropriate vehicle for encouraging the development of caregiving behaviors in parents. As previously mentioned, several attachment-based interventions focus on increasing caregiver sensitivity and reflective functioning (Jugovac, 2022), and such behaviors are naturally expressed through dyadic parent-child play interactions. Jernberg (1984) writes about the “attachment-enhancing behaviors” that arise through play, such as eye contact and empathic engagement (p. 39). When parents play with their children they are able to engage in activities which deepen their understanding of their child, participate in serve and return communication, and share in joyful experiences together (Yogman et al, 2018).

Mothers that play with their infants have higher levels of oxytocin in their systems, a biological effect of bonding (Alexander, 2021) Acts such as laughter, eye contact, and joy are glue that build the attachments between both parent and child. The biological effects of joy on the relationship are motivation enough to encourage play within families. Alexander (2021) writes about the connection between attachment and joyful experiences:

The way that young children learn to understand their identity in relation to the outside world is through attachment to their primary caregivers. In this way, attachment is a particularly salient issue to consider when thinking about how to help families learn to cultivate a predisposition toward delight and happiness in their children. (p. 3)

Play to examine attachments

Play is also beneficial in the analysis of existing attachments. Attachment theory highlights the relationship between security and exploration. When children feel safe and secure,

they demonstrate a higher capacity for exploration. Slade (2021) explains that a secure, joy-filled relationship between a child and their caregiver supports the development of play and symbolization. An explorative child that can rely on their trusted companions in moments of distress demonstrates a secure relationship with those caregivers. The interplay between exploration and connectedness reveals the interactional patterns that are present within the parent-child relationship, showing how play can be an indicator of attachment. Play therefore provides the space to examine existing attachments and to build upon them.

The universality of play

Play is an act that is “universal, natural, and pleasurable” (Drewes, 2005, p. 26). The occurrence of children playing is a common thread across cultures; however, the frequency and manner in which they play varies depending on the context. Play serves the function of transmitting culture between generations, passing on norms and values through creative modes such as games, music, and storytelling (Drewes 2005). It can be seen as a form of socialization for young children within a society (Lopez, 2018). It also serves as an expression of culture, as children express themselves and their social influences through their play. Roopnarine & Johnson (1994) call play both “a cause and an effect of culture” (p. 5).

Lopez (2018) discusses the play differences that occur in rural societies: “play activities...are mostly non-guided and non structured activities due to the fact that adults are busy attending to their daily chores, so they have little time to play with the children” (p. 403). The types of play that children engage in prepare them to fully integrate as members of their society. Norms are reinforced through parental scaffolding of play activities. Yogman et al. (2018) describes the encouragement that parents in the United States give for their children to play with toys and objects by themselves, emphasizing independence, while parents in Japan

encourage peer play with dolls, emphasizing the value of interdependence. Norms within a culture determine the view of play held within that community. This leads to variation in the amount of time that children have for play, who they play with, and what they play (Drewes, 2005).

Play in toddlers

Children between the ages of 18-24 months demonstrate a range of play behaviors. At this stage children start to realize and practice their autonomy, recognizing that they are separate from others (Creekpaum, 2019). This autonomy lends towards greater exploration of the environment. The development of physical abilities to move around along with symbolic representation offers children new worlds of exploration and play (Marrone, 2014). Bowlby (1969) notes that children between the ages of one and two are content to play in a familiar environment while using their mothers as a secure base.

In this stage, children's play typically begins to include imitation, pretend play, and solitary play with toys (Creekpaum, 2019). Imaginative play and creativity are enhanced through inexpensive toys such as household objects, kitchen spoons, and boxes, although Western culture is inclined to offer a multitude of products marketed to support the child's development (Yogman et al., 2018). to their children. Although parents may feel pressured to provide many toys for their children as they begin to interact and play more with their environments, "It is parents' and caregivers' presence and attention that enrich children, not elaborate electronic gadgets" (Yogman et al., 2018, p. 9). Therefore, in this time toddlers enjoy increased autonomy and exploration while gaining skills in imaginative and pretend play.

The Present Study

The present study builds upon the theory of attachment in order to examine the role of play on attachment bonds in a Latin American immigrant population in New York City. Because of the limited nature of attachment research with non-Westernized populations, I embarked upon a study of the play group through a culturally humble approach of questioning existing paradigms and hearing from the families' own experiences.

The observations are drawn from a short, 6-week play group in which parents would bring their toddlers and engage in material about the value of play. Case material is presented through a model which was first demonstrated by Fish and McCollum (1997) who similarly presented case study observations from a parent-infant play group. In their study, they first presented rich case descriptions of each dyad in the group, including relevant examples and demonstrations of typical behaviors and caregiving patterns. Secondly, they analyzed the case descriptions through the lens of attachment. In the current paper, I will likewise provide case descriptions, analyze them through the lens of attachment, and elaborate on general themes that arose throughout the play group.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

**CASE STUDY OF A PLAY GROUP WITH LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT
PARENTS AND THEIR TODDLERS**

Setting

The current study was conducted in the context of a dyadic play group for parents and their toddlers called “Let’s Play”, or “Vamos a Jugar”. Two sessions were offered to families, each on a different day of the week. The groups were closed once families enrolled, meaning that families could not switch their meeting time. This was done to encourage consistent participation and group cohesion. Eight to ten families enrolled in each session. I co-facilitated the groups with a colleague, another social work intern at the agency. We co-authored and implemented an original play curriculum focused on engaging families in a variety of play activities. Together, we led groups in Spanish since the clients were primarily Spanish-speaking. Let’s Play lasted 6 weeks and met once a week for 1.5 to 2 hours at a time. The toddlers in the group were typically accompanied by their mothers, although other caregivers were welcome and occasionally joined as well.

Families participated in the group as a part of their enrollment in a parenting program that seeks to support children aged 0-3 years old. The program offers families the opportunity to engage in parenting groups, supportive case management, food and baby supply distributions, and connections to community resources in mental health and immigration. The work at the agency is strengths-based, trauma-informed and client-centered, as social workers partner with families in meeting their goals and supporting the relationship they have with their child. Parents and children are supported dyadically, with foundations in attachment theory. These foundations are demonstrated in a relationship-based program where parents are supported in skills such as

consistent care, empathetic parenting, and following the child's lead. The relational focus serves to better the bond between parent and child, helping children to develop secure attachments with their caregivers (Reese, 2018). The development of secure attachments is a source of security for children, especially in the case of toxic stress or trauma, which many of the families in the program had experienced because of immigration and/or financial insecurity and related stressors.

Procedures

Data were collected through documented observations from the play group. As a social work intern, I observed the group from within, acting as both a co-facilitator and an active participant in conversations and interactions with the families. Observations were recorded throughout the 6-week period through notes written after each group had ended. I recorded salient moments from the group, with as much detail and accuracy as possible. The interactions chosen for this study demonstrated the relational patterns between parents and their children as they played together.

The current study was exempt from IRB review; however, I chose to notify participants that material from the play group would be used in a thesis project. Names and other identifiable information are omitted from the research in order to protect the confidentiality of the families.

Participants

The group was composed of families living in New York City, many of whom were immigrants from various countries in Latin America. The most common countries of origin were Mexico and Ecuador, although some of the group members were Dominican. Levels of acculturation differed between families, as some group members had been in the states longer than others. Many of the group members, however, had commonalities based on their

experiences as immigrants and Latin Americans. All the families involved in the parenting program demonstrated substantial economic disadvantage.

Children in the group ranged from 18-24 months, and they differed in their demonstrated developmental abilities. Some children had started to speak, for example, while others were still communicating through gestures or non-verbally. The children's differing abilities were often brought to light within the group, as parents would ask one another about how their child was developing.

Parents in the group also differed in how many other children they had in the household. For some of the group members, the child in the group was their first and only child, while for other families the child was their fourth. Because of this, different levels of experience were present and parents with older children naturally became the "experts" of the group, balancing the theoretical information shared by group facilitators with the lived experience of participants.

Let's play

The goal of the group was to engage families with the topic of play as an avenue for supporting overall parent-child attachments. This was done through a 6-week curriculum in which facilitators communicated the value of play and engaged in play activities during group meetings. Weekly themes included the following topics: play with open-ended materials, imaginative/pretend play, sensory play, engaging in play in other environments, and music and dance.

Each group session would begin with a time for settling in and getting comfortable within the space. During this "warm-up" time toddlers would finish up their morning tortillas, be carried sleepily into the room, or run in ready to play and explore the space. After families had the chance to get settled and sign in, we would sit in a circle on the floor and sing a welcome song

together with child-sized instruments. Handing out the same maracas and Dora the Explorer themed tambourines each week became a welcomed ritual, as it notified the children (and adults) that the group was starting. After singing “the more we get together”, we would engage in a short conversation about the theme for the day. A question was typically posed to families, such as: “What music and songs did you sing as a child?”, and each group member had the opportunity to share with the rest of the group. Group participants engaged in conversations about their own play memories to help them connect to their inner child at the start of each group session. This was done to gauge interest and parent’s perspectives on the topic of play.

After engaging in conversation, the play topic for the day was explained more specifically and the group would engage in 1-2 play activities together. During these times, families got the chance to play with and alongside their toddlers. The play time was followed by snack time, a moment for families to come together and converse before concluding the group session.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Let's Play was offered on two days of the week, and each group was conducted by the same group facilitators implementing identical 6-week curriculums. Data were collected from both groups, and the dyads ultimately chosen for analysis were drawn from both sessions. This was done in order to account for differing group dynamics and norms. Of each group's total participants, 4-5 families attended the group on any given week.

For the purposes of this study, observations are illustrated from four different parent-child dyads instead of focusing on one dyad throughout the length of the group. This is due to the short nature of the group, in which I did not expect to record changes in attachments due to any interventions but rather sought to observe and support existing attachments through play interactions. Four dyads were selected for discussion in this paper because of the rich demonstrations of attachment in their interactions as well as for their consistent group attendance.

Case material will be presented in two sections, modeled after Fish and McCollum's (1997) work examining case study data from a parent-infant play group. In their study, researchers observed dyads over the course of a play group, analyzing the parent-child behaviors through the lens of attachment. Their data analysis was presented in two sections: "case descriptions" and "functions of attachment in the play group" (Fish & McCollum, 1997, p. 161). Likewise, I will first describe the dyads that appear within the current study with illustrations and examples of their interactions in Let's Play. Then, I will analyze the functions of attachment within the group.

Case descriptions

Dyad A

A was 2 years old at the start of our group. She was a curious and active child in the playgroup, happily arriving at each meeting with a breakfast tortilla in hand and intelligent eyes peeking out of the stroller. She was always accompanied by her mother, a woman from Mexico who was in her early 20s. A's mother was married, and A was their only child. A's mother was not very talkative, but she was a regular attendee in our group, consistently attentive and kind. She and A demonstrated connectedness and attunement as A's mother would pick up cues such as when she wanted to get out of her chair to play and when she was done eating.

A would typically stay near her mother in the beginning of our group sessions. After she had taken some time to warm up to her surroundings, she would begin to wander further outside of her mother's physical proximity to play with other children or toys. A ultimately became one of the more outgoing and playful children in the group as she gained familiarity with the space and other families.

While A played, she would often reconnect with her mother in times of uncertainty or conflict. A's mother would typically be present yet not overly involved with her daughter's play. At times, she would join in on a playful moment, but she would also leave room for A's exploration. A's playfulness and her mother's shy yet consistent availability can be seen in the following interaction.

One week's session was centered on the theme of sensory play. For the activity, pop-up play tunnels were opened, and families were encouraged to play and engage with their children. A quickly dove into the colorful tunnels while her mom waited on the other end and smiled at her. They giggled at each other, and both demonstrated glee as A crawled through to meet her mother at the end of the tunnel. They engaged in this back and forth play repeatedly, interacting with smiles and making frequent eye contact. A's mother sat on the floor and occasionally moved

around as A explored different tunnels and began to crawl through with other children. In the beginning of the activity, A's mother was more active in her interactions with her child, but as the activity went on, she stayed connected yet withdrew into conversation with other adults as A increasingly played with other children inside the tunnels. A's playfulness was often observed by her mother from a distance. Even though A's mother was typically quiet during group discussions, she was attuned to her daughter and would light up as she engaged with her through smiling, making much eye contact, and making her daughter laugh. Her mother's responsiveness seemed to give A a sense of security from which to further explore and play.

Dyad B

B was almost 18 months old at the beginning of Let's Play. He was brought to group sessions by his mother, an outgoing and friendly woman from Mexico. B's mother was in her late 30's and had 3 children, of whom B was the youngest. B was also the youngest child in the play group and had not yet started speaking. Although he was not communicating verbally, he engaged readily with the other children and adults through play. He enjoyed running around and giggling during chasing games or hiding in empty cubbies with other children when he wasn't sitting with his mother. B's mother was social and engaging, often taking on the role of a teacher or mentor during our groups. B would often stay near her and be breastfed as his mother engaged actively in conversation with other caregivers during circle time.

During one weekly session, the theme centered on playing with blocks and stacking instruments. The group facilitators talked about not only the physical value of playing with blocks- such as helping with gross and fine motor skills- but also the imaginative skills that are being developed as children play with open ended materials. In a group discussion in which parents were asked, "what did play look like when you were a child?" B's mother shared

memories of playing creatively with natural materials when she was little. She described using the mud behind her house to make “food”, using her imagination to play. Group facilitators gave families examples such as: blocks being stacked for a tower, used to create a home, church, or even a castle. Families were encouraged to take part in these play activities with their children in order to encourage their imaginative play abilities.

On this occasion, B’s mother took a leading role in creating the narrative for her son. B endeavored to build a tower with the blocks while his mother constructed her own storyline next to him. She flipped a large box over and, rather creatively, made it a tunnel for cars (the blocks) to drive through. She enthusiastically called for B’s attention and encouraged him to “drive” blocks through her tunnel. In this moment, B attended briefly to his mother then turned and continued to stack blocks in his own play. She did not follow her child’s lead in the play, but kept trying to engage him in an advanced narrative that he did not express much interest in.

This play scenario was characteristic of the directive role B’s mother could take in playing with her son. She was very attentive to him and actively cared for him in many ways throughout our group, such as through breastfeeding, running over to him if he got hurt or upset, and engaging in activities together; however, she was not always attuned to B’s play or inclined to follow his lead. This mother’s approach was more hands-on in her parenting and in the play, demonstrating responsiveness to his physical needs while at times showing misattunement to his developmental needs.

Dyad C

C was 22 months old at the start of Let’s Play and attended groups with his mother. He was an active young boy, intent on exploration. Upon first entering the playgroup he explored the whole space, walking around the circumference of the large room and seeking to look on top of

and behind cabinets. C was very interested in toys and objects but did not seem to notice people very much. C's mother was a kind woman from Ecuador in her late 30s who had two children, of whom C was the youngest. Since C's mother worked, another primary caregiver had previously brought him to other groups at the agency; however, the times offered for the current group aligned with her schedule and she was able to join. Let's Play was the mother's first time attending an in-person group with her child.

C would not seek to remain proximal to his mother as he explored his environment, and in these moments his mother would allow him to wander. When he was near her, he would engage with her by "crashing" into her body, throwing himself on top of her and laughing. This activity seemed to be enjoyable for both of them, as his mother would smile back at him during the interactions.

On the first day of the group, C's mother calls him an "earthquake" in reference to his high levels of activity. During circle time, C would go around the room, pulling toys out of shelves, and trying to climb on cabinets. When the child was playing she would remain with other adults and expressed that she did not always know how to respond to him. In moments of peer play, other children would try to play with the same toys as him, but C would sometimes respond with distress and yelling.

One occurrence with this dyad is noteworthy. During the interaction, C's mother stepped out of the room for a quick moment. Before leaving, she noticed that C was immersed in a toy and had not noticed her imminent departure. C's mother called his name, waved, and let him know that she was leaving. C responded by running after her and crying with great distress in the few minutes that she was out of the room. A group facilitator intervened and sought to comfort him, telling him that his mother would return shortly; but he was inconsolable until he saw her

again. When she walked back into the room, C's mother laughed and picked him up. He calmed down but continued crying quietly and looked away from his mother while he continued clinging to her.

On another occasion, the families engaged in a sensory play activity. Various sensory bins filled with rice and beans were distributed along the floor, and the children sat with their caregivers as they played in them. Some children dove right into the sensory bins, while others were more tentative to engage with the materials. C was tentative at first, but once he stuck his hands into the rice bin, he was captivated by the activity. He would bury his hands and grab rice, dropping it back into the bin, repeating this sequence for several minutes. His mother commented on his calm nature during the activity and was attuned to the ways the activity was making her child feel in that moment: happy, calm, and regulated.

Dyad D

D was 19 months old at the start of our play group. She had a calm and quiet temperament, demonstrating playfulness once she grew more comfortable within the space. D enjoyed engaging in quiet pretend play, drawn to a baby doll in the corner of the room. D, along with two other children in the group would put the baby doll to "sleep" and play with it once it was "awake". They took turns placing the doll in different locations around the room, shushing any adults who were too loud around the "sleeping baby". D's mother was a woman from Mexico in her mid 30s. She had 4 children, of whom D was the youngest. Although she was slow to warm up, D's mother connected more readily with other group members as the weeks went on. As she opened up to other group members, this mother would often share her experiences and struggles as a mother with children in a school system that was difficult to

navigate. She voiced experiences of racism, anxiety, and the need for self-advocacy as a mom and a Latina.

This dyad also had a noteworthy interaction during the pop-up tunnel activity discussed earlier. Upon opening the colorful tunnels, D was interested yet tentative to approach them. She observed the other children playing as her mother stood next to her and verbally encouraged her daughter to get into the tunnel. One of the group facilitators poked her head into the other side of the tunnel that D was looking into and encouraged D's mother to do the same, noting that it would encourage D if she saw her mother at the other end. D's mother tried this a few times, and D would tentatively stick her head, an arm, or her upper body into the tunnel but then backpedal out and shake her head. Eventually D ran to stand next to her mother, while her mother again encouraged her verbally to crawl through the tunnel. The other parents in the group began encouraging D to crawl through, and D eventually explored more of the tunnel without fully climbing through. One of the facilitators commented on D's bravery to explore the activity even though it was fearful for her, yet D's mother did not respond to the comment.

In that interaction, D's mother was very verbal in her approach towards D, but not very playful. She directed her daughter through phrases such as "get in the tunnel" or "go in", communicating in an instructive way. The group facilitators modeled silly behaviors such as putting themselves within the tunnel, manipulating the shape, and popping their heads out to smile at D. While D's mother observed the interactions, she did not seem to feel comfortable immersing herself in the play.

After the tunnel activity, D stayed nearby the group and lay down on the floor on her mother as she drank from a bottle. She would make eye contact with the other caregivers and the group facilitators, seeming happy and emotionally connected although she chose not to play

while she drank her milk. The previous activity had been an overwhelming one for D, and she had worked to expand her exploration and played at the limits of her feelings of security. She seemed to seek the time of nurture (drinking from her bottle, physical proximity to her mother) and the calming down of her nervous system (laying on the floor) after she had been developmentally pushed in the first activity. After a while of drinking milk, D seemed to get refueled and came into the play with new zeal and joy, sitting on her mother's lap. D's mother provided her with the milk to comfort her, as well as remained physically connected with her daughter.

Functions of attachment in the play group

The case illustrations demonstrate typical dyadic interactions from everyday moments within the play group. Fish and McCollum (1997) explore the functions of attachment on a child's exploration and play in their study of a play group, and this study will seek to do the same.

A, B, C, and D showed varying levels of exploratory behaviors within the group. The child who could be seen as the most explorative, C, engaged very freely with his environment; however, his actions could be seen as quite disjointed from his caregiver, as he would run off without her and not look back to his mother very often. There were a few occasions in which C engaged in an activity that could have been dangerous, such as trying to pull heavy containers off a tall cabinet, and other adults or his mother would intervene. In comparison, A was also quite explorative of the room and engaged readily with toys, yet she often looked to her mother for reinforcement. In the pop-up tunnel activity, she freely explored the tunnels while referencing back to her mother, who acted as a secure base. A would judge her mother's facial expressions through the tunnel, responding enthusiastically to her mother's smiles and giggles with further

play and exploration. B showed less exploratory behaviors, often staying near his mother in the group. In moments when he did wander out to play, his mother would quickly jump in. B's mother would often intervene before he demonstrated any security-seeking related to distress, as she was always very quick to respond. D was the least explorative child, staying more connected to her mother than other children in the group. In contrast to A, D did not readily leave her mother's proximity during the pop-up tunnel activity. D's lack of exploration was demonstrated in her lack of comfortability engaging in new or uncomfortable play situations. While she did enjoy playing in general, D was often physically connected to her mother and seemed most at ease during these times.

The children in this study presented with varying temperaments, and these characteristics had various effects on parenting behaviors. For example, C was often immersed in his own inner world, and his mother's parenting behaviors also demonstrated a degree of distance from him, such as not following him physically or visually. The child's sensory needs seemed to affect his social connectedness. His mother was attuned to these needs, although perhaps not always knowing how to engage him. C's hyperfixation on toys could make it difficult to get his attention and engage with him in joyful, attuned interactions. In the illustration where C's mother left the room, she made a point to draw his attention to her own departure without offering a reassuring sentiment about her quick return. Her actions could have been seen as playful, but her child reacted with pronounced distress instead, demonstrating misattunement. C's upset stirred up an atypical behavior in him- he noticed his mother and sought out her presence. His mother's departure could be seen as a parenting behavior that served the (perhaps underlying) purpose of drawing out the child's desire for his mother, revealing a connectedness that he did not often demonstrate within the play group.

On the other end of the spectrum of exploration to connectedness, D was not very explorative with her environment but was instead very connected to her caregiver. D herself was very timid in nature, and her quiet temperament could have contributed to her lack of exploratory behaviors. Her mother demonstrated a similarly timid personality. These characteristics could have been an influence in how connected D needed to feel in order to feel safe. This dyad was often physically proximal to one another, and in moments where D ventured out to play, she would seek re-connection as a means of refueling her sense of security in the group.

A and B could be seen as both playful and connected with their caregivers. Both children demonstrated social and joyful temperaments and enjoyed participating in play with other children in the group. Their love of play drove them into moments where they were away from their mothers, all the while knowing that their mothers were nearby in case of any distress.

Additional themes

Several themes were observed across dyads. One major thematic element was the difference in intergenerational play experiences between caregivers and their children. Parents reported their own play experiences and memories of childhood in our group discussions during circle time at the beginning of each group session. The sharing of memories was foundational to engaging caregivers with the play curriculum, as it encouraged a reflective stance within which parents were able to examine their own childhoods in relation to their current child's experiences. Group participants also discussed aspects of their lives relating to being a Latin American immigrant mother, finding mutual aid and support in the group. The following themes emerged from our discussions: creative engagement with nature, lack of resources, and peer play.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

As toddlers, humans are developing capabilities for pretend play (Lillard, 2007), exploring the world (Fish & McCollum, 1997), and reconciling these growing proficiencies with their existing relationships to their caregivers (Mahler, 1975). As children develop these new capacities, caregivers act as a secure base from which the child can draw a sense of safety. The child is free to further explore their world when they know that they can securely rely on their most trusted companions in moments of distress (Ainsworth, 1979). Mahler (1975) finds that children in this stage benefit from a mother's emotional availability. She describes that as symbolic capabilities and psychological separation develops in toddlers, so does the capacity for play.

Play is an act of exploration. When children play, therefore, they are demonstrating attachment behaviors. Within the play group, parent-toddler dyads had the opportunity to engage in several play moments together, demonstrating the functions of attachment and engaging in meaning-making together. The toddlers in the current group demonstrated a set of behaviors ranging from exploration to interconnectedness, and their play experiences often provided a lens through which the relationship between dyads could be analyzed. Instead of describing their attachment behaviors through the typical classifications of securely and insecurely attached, I chose to describe children's behaviors along the spectrum of autonomy and exploration to connectedness and comfort proposed by Quinn and Mageo (2013). Some children in the current study demonstrated a strong interconnectedness with their caregivers, such as child D, while others exhibited a strong inclination towards exploration and autonomy, such as C. Most of the dyads exhibited behaviors within the continuum, as children demonstrated moments of both exploratory play and connectedness with their caregivers.

Play experiences revealed patterns of attachment between parents and their children. At the beginning of this thesis, the question was posed: *If children grew up in a family environment where they were played with, will they be likely to play with their own children?* Let's Play offered insights into that question, demonstrating the intergenerational influence of parental play. Parents shared their own childhood memories alongside their present-day interactions playing with their children in the play group. Several themes arose from the parents' recollections of play in their native Latin American countries that are influential to their children's current experiences.

Creative engagement with nature

When parents in the play group shared memories about their own play experiences, strong themes of nature arose. When the question "what did play look like for you when you were a child?" was asked in one group discussion, B's parent shared her experience using the mud outside her house to make "food." Several caregivers contributed to the discussion of using natural materials for imaginative play. One mother recounted playing outside in vast open fields and in a river near her home. Another caregiver shared that her house did not have wide open fields, but instead had many trees that she would play in—her forest. Many of the parents resonated with the idea of running freely and having an abundance of space in their childhood homes. One group member recounted playing with old rotten tomatoes as a child. She shared that she would dig them out of her mother's trash and use them as meat for "tortillas". The round paper wrapper inside of the tomato box became the tortilla shell for her pretend meals.

There is a dichotomy between parents' play memories and the play experiences their children currently have. The conversation on abundant outdoor space stood in stark contrast to the reality of small apartments which characterize New York City life. Imagery of trees, fields,

and rivers were juxtaposed with the industrial, urban cityscape that all of the families were experiencing. Instead of playing with natural materials, children in the current group often played with toys sold as such and marketed towards parents for their benefits to “child development”. Screens commonly become a tool used to entertain children without access to rich outdoor play due to the limitations of urban life. Such toys do not promote the same levels of imagination as the raw materials that parents described from their own childhoods.

Children do not freely run and play outdoors in the city of New York. While parks exist as a valid option for families seeking green space, such access can be socially inequitable and more difficult for low-income families to attain (Sefcik et al., 2019). Gray (2011) describes a general decline in play, specifically outdoor play, in recent years as a result of increasing safety concerns, rises in television viewing and computer play, and increased time schooling. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate of social isolation that resulted has led to further decreases in play experiences for children (Lourenço et al., 2021).

These contexts are extremely relevant to the population of children studied in the current thesis: children born in New York City in the midst of a global pandemic. A lack of suitable outdoor space, fears of sickness, and a changing social world are all factors which contributed to an even wider gap between parents’ childhood play experiences and that of their children– in addition to the already present adjustment of raising their children in a country different than their own. While parents fondly expressed memories of creatively engaging with nature in their childhoods, they noted the differences for their own children who often had less opportunity for imaginative play, more screen time, and less time in nature.

Lack of resources

The group participants' recollections of pretend play surrounding cooking food and playing in nature create a picture of the creative abilities in a child who did not have abundant economic resources. Several of the group participants shared that their experiences in their native countries were characterized by “bajos recursos”, translating to low income or low resources. They spoke of not having many toys to play with, yet they used their imaginations and the materials around them to create vivid play worlds. They were rich in creativity. Although the families in the play group had less financial resources, the group members demonstrated through their illustrations that the value of play lies beyond material goods.

One goal of the Let's Play group was to engage families in play activities that did not necessitate buying new materials. For example, the theme of sensory play included play in pop-up tunnels, however, there was an additional activity that could have been easily replicated by families. Medium containers were filled with white rice or beans in order to create sensory bins for the children to engage with. Rice and beans are materials that several of the families had access to, and facilitators instructed families that they could reuse the sensory bins and not have to throw out the materials after one use. Several children in the group enjoyed the activity, such as child C, who demonstrated calm and regulated behavior during the sensory play. Additionally, small cardboard boxes were used in a different week to create “blocks” for the children to play with. It was these old boxes which child B stacked together in his play, creating a tower. Parents in the group were encouraged to consider recreating low-cost activities from Let's Play that stood out to them at home.

Peer play

Throughout the playgroup, there were several moments in which the children played together while their parents sat conversing at a table in the playroom. After the group's snack

time, parents would often remain at a table in the middle of the room while their children began to play with each other. Although the caregivers were focused on their conversations in these times, they were simultaneously attentive to their children. Parents would regularly comfort a distressed child or intervene to meet their child's needs. As children played with their peers, adults talked together while maintaining parent-child dyadic attunement.

The caregivers would often talk with one another about relevant topics to their own lives, providing mutual support to one another through their shared experiences. Their discussions included narratives about navigating systems as mothers, Latinas, and immigrants. Even the more introverted group participants shared their experiences with other parents, finding a space to express themselves. The adult conversations, while separate from the play experiences their children were having, served the purpose of creating a sense of community for these parents, allowing them to voice their struggles and support one another. Many of the group members led busy lives taking care of their households and children, and the time to converse provided a space for parents to socialize with other adults, decompress, and find mutual aid. During these conversations, the children were aware that their parents were in the room and often interacted with their caregivers when they had a need or wanted to reconnect. The parents likewise remained available to their toddlers amidst their conversations.

While some could see the parents' divided attention as evidence of misattunement between the parent-child dyads, it showed a depth of connection that the parents maintained with their children. Parents were proximal enough that their children could freely play and explore, and demonstrated a dual awareness of both their adult conversations and what was happening with their child. Children often approached their parents in times of need or when they wanted a

break, and in this way they used them as a secure-base from which to refuel before again engaging with their environment through exploration and play.

While adults conversed, the children were often running around and chasing each other or engaging in pretend caretaking play with a stuffed baby doll in the corner of the room. The peer play time yielded developmental benefits for the children, as they navigated playing with each other. As the children played amongst each other, they experienced several moments of parallel and even joint play. Creeksaun (2019) details the developmentally appropriate play skills demonstrated by children of the same age range as they transition from playing alone to playing with others,

Up until children are about 2 years old, they tend to play alone. They initially examine the sensory and motor aspects of toys and then begin to engage in early play, such as pushing cars and drinking from cups, but this play tends to be solitary. Children then move to engaging in parallel play around the ages of 2 to 3. During this phase of development, children play beside others, usually with the same toys, but not interacting. For example, they see another child playing with cars, they sit down to also play with the cars but do not talk to or play with the other child. (p. 14)

Most of the children studied in the current thesis were under two years old, yet many of them demonstrated advanced peer play skills. Parallel play was a common occurrence, as children would play with blocks next to one another; and additionally, the children's play intertwined as the group evolved. Joint play was demonstrated by several toddlers engaging in pretend caretaking with a baby doll and in running games where they would all start running at the same time from one end of the room to the other. Moments of peer play provided opportunity for the children to navigate social situations such as sharing toys, engaging in tasks together, and

handling frustrations. Many times, children would have to work out amongst themselves if there was a toy that more than one toddler wanted to play with (although the parents would intervene if they saw their child was going to hit another child). The child space thus allowed the children in the playgroup to work through necessary peer skills that exceeded developmental expectations.

Children playing amongst other children is a theme with intergenerational significance. When parents recounted their own childhood experiences, the play partners they mentioned were siblings or other children that were a part of their community. In parents' recollections about their childhoods, no group participant shared memories of playing with their own parents. This stands in contrast to the focus of the current play group, in which parents were supported in playing with their children dyadically. As the families in this study were immigrants from Latin America, the cultural contexts surrounding parenting are instrumental to the findings.

Families' play memories indicated that parent-child play was unlikely a common occurrence for individuals in the current study. When considering the context of communities in Latin-America, caregivers often have duties to attend to in their own adult sphere, such as taking care of their families and working. In a study implementing a play intervention with Latin American parents in New York city, Dutch et al. (2019) describe how some of the play skills used in their intervention were new to parents. Several of the participants discussed the novelty of seeing parents as play partners.

In communities where parents have several children, it is common for parents to devote less time to each individual child since they have more children to care for. This differs from many Western families, who often have less children in the household and can devote more time to each individual child. In a sample of Gusii mothers from Kenya in which mothers had many

children and a high workload, caregivers focused on other duties while older siblings cared for younger siblings (LeVine, 1990). While this could be an argument against secure parent-child attachments in that environment, researchers argue that Gusii mothers demonstrate attachment behaviors such as maternal sensitivity through different modes, such as physical proximity rather than through eye contact or verbal interaction, still lending towards a strong parent-child attachment relationship (Mesman et al., 2018).

Several of the children in the present study had older siblings, sometimes being the youngest of 3 or 4 in the household. Sibling relationships are long-lasting and influential (Jensen et al., 2015). Guzman et al. (2022) explains that younger siblings may experience higher degrees of attachment security because of the network of siblings and parents that can be relied on as attachment figures. One child from the current play group had three older siblings who would sometimes be present before or after the meeting. On one occasion, the toddler's sibling was in the room playing with her before the group began. Once it was time for her brother to leave, the toddler demonstrated distress at his departure. Her mother attempted to soothe her, eventually distracting the toddler from her brother's absence to participate in the play group. The child's distress upon separating from her brother indicated a depth to their relationship. When working with families that have multiple children, and especially from cultural contexts in which multiple attachments are the norm, an assessment of the network of attachments is beneficial to consider.

The intergenerational transmission of play

Through discussions with caregivers and observations of the children's play experiences, it became apparent that parents' own childhood experiences were relevant to the current context of the playgroup. Although several of the themes that emerged highlighted differences between

the intergenerational play experiences, such differences provided an insight into the parental understandings of play.

For parents with childhood play experiences characterized by free exploration and interaction with nature and other children in their communities, the context of playing with their children dyadically in an urban landscape and in the midst of a global pandemic was likely foreign. The urban setting held many differences from parents' recollections of playing in nature. Additionally, the lack of manufactured toys in parents' experiences created a significant difference in the play experience between caregivers and their children. The abundance of toys, including digital entertainment, differed from parents' recollections of using their creativity and the materials present as a vehicle for play.

Additionally, the culturally normative experience of parents not playing with their children was challenged for the participants in this study. Group conversations indicated that the encompassing nature of being a parent, homemaker, worker, and a partner did not often leave room for the caregivers in the group to engage in much self-care, much less play with their children. While the group sought to engage caregivers in conversations about the value of play for their children, the facilitators also recognized that play can be a privilege. Caregivers benefited from space to unwind with other adults, and during these times were still able to provide a secure base from which their children could explore the world. Because of the compounded cultural and contextual factors which made it difficult for families to play with their own children, the current group served as a space for mothers to find emotional support alongside their engagement in joyful play experiences that they would hopefully continue outside of the play group.

Strengths and limitations

The general themes of creative engagement with nature, lack of resources, and peer play illustrated in the current study present a beneficial addition to the sparse literature surrounding Latin American immigrant family experiences with play and attachment. It also provides rich case descriptions that display the value of using play interactions as a form of evaluating attachment relationships. The constructs of play and attachment are not often explicitly interwoven; however, they are interconnected, as play builds attachments and attachments are revealed through play.

There are also a few limitations to consider. When working with individuals that lie outside of the typically researched WEIRD populations, it is necessary to avoid overgeneralizing findings and the creation of stereotypes. The current sample of Latin American mothers had several cultural similarities, but experiences within Latin America differ, and there exists a wide degree of diversity between and even within countries. When working with immigrant populations it is also beneficial to assess one's own underlying assumptions. The current study sought to steer away from value laden attachment language that furthers the Western ideal, yet I acknowledge that my own identity as a Westerner limits the possibility of carrying out work completely without bias. Additionally, the current study is a multiple case study of four parent-child dyads, and is therefore not generalizable to wider populations. The experiences discussed in this study are unique to the participants, and while similar cultural themes may emerge, the findings are limited to the current play group.

CONCLUSION

The play group in this study provided insights into the functions of attachment within the parent-child dyads studied. Play created an opportunity for both exploratory and security-seeking behaviors, in which the relationships between dyads could be observed and more deeply understood. Through the play group, caregiving behaviors could be observed over the scope of several weeks and in multiple different play contexts.

Additionally, the play group not only provided insights into the functions of attachment that were already present, but it further presented the opportunity to support families' existing attachments. Play created an opportunity for parents to grow in skills such as parental sensitivity and reflective functioning, elements essential for the building of secure attachments. Caregivers were given the opportunity to play dyadically with their children through semi-structured play activities and were often encouraged to use those opportunities for joyful engagement with their child. Those actions, developed in the context of play, served the role of furthering the parents' capabilities to understand their children's cues, building their sensitivity to their child. Furthermore, play activities often elicited emotional responses from the toddlers- such as fear in the face of pop-up play tunnels. Such moments offered caregivers and group facilitators the opportunity to engage in conversation about the inner thoughts and feelings in their children, lending towards a deeper reflective functioning for the parents.

In a book called *Attachment: The Essential Questions*, the word play only has one appearance listed in the index. Fearon and Shuengel (2021) write,

“many other domains exist within relationships that may influence the attachment domain and can shape the overall structure or quality of the relationship. Play, for

example, can affect attachment, attachment can affect play, attachment can affect feeding, and so on.” (p. 25)

Although it is true that play can influence the overall relationship between a parent and child, it is more than a domain which can affect attachment. It can be one of the main modes by which attachments are formed. Play, at its most basic level, is entering into the world of the child. Entering a child’s exploration, symbolic representation, and communicating on a level that transcends even language is a form of attunement that can deepen the parent’s understanding of the child and the child’s understanding of herself. Engaging in play through making faces across a pop-up tunnel or stacking blocks together creates fertile ground for connection— a world in which a child shares joy and bonds with their caregiver.

In a playgroup in which caregivers and their toddlers entered into the world of play together, their interactions told as many stories as their words. Rich discussions were held about the differences in raising children in the United States in comparison to their native countries, and the adjustment that the caregivers had faced as immigrants raising children in New York City in the midst of the pandemic were significant. Vivid portrayals of the parent-child relationships were seen in the ways parents giggled at their children, breastfed them on command, and ran to pick them up when they fell. The families in the program were forming new scripts for relating to their children that hold significant influence for future generations. The caregivers in this study showed a depth of care for and attunement to their children, and while the concept of playing with their toddlers was culturally new, it was a task they adapted to with strength and joy.

References

- Ainsworth, M.D., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1979). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Psychology Press.
- Alexander, V. (2021). In pursuit of happiness: Teaching parents to play with their children. *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavioral Letter*, 37(1), 1-4.
- Allen, B. (2023). Attachment and clinical practice with infants and young children. *The science and clinical practice of attachment theory: A guide from infancy to adulthood*. American Psychological Association.
- Axline, V.M. (1969). *Play therapy*. Ballantine Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). The child's tie to his mother: Attachment behavior. *The International Psycho-analytical Library*, 79, 177-209.
- Çağlayan, Z., & Körük, S. (2022). The predictive role of self-esteem, attachment styles, and family of origin functions in explaining conflict resolution in romantic relationships. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 9(3), 557-568.
- Creekpaum, S. (2019). Child development through play. In M. Charles & J. Bellinson (Eds.) *The importance of play in early childhood education: Psychoanalytic, attachment, and developmental perspectives* (pp. 11-18). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Drewes, A.A. (2005). Play in selected cultures: Diversity and universality. In E. Gil & A.A. Drewes (Eds.), *Cultural issues in play therapy* (pp. 26-71). The Guilford Press.
- Fearon, R.P., & Shuengel, C. (2021). What kinds of relationships count as attachment relationships?. In R.A. Thompson, J.A. Simpson, & L.J. Berlin (Eds.) *Attachment: The fundamental questions* (pp. 24-30). The Guilford Press.

- Fish, B., & McCollum, J.A. (1997). Building a clinically relevant picture of attachment from case study observations in a parent-infant play group. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 14(3), 153-170.
- Fonagy, P., & Allison, E. (2014). The role of mentalizing and epistemic trust in the therapeutic relationship. *Psychotherapy*, 51(3), 372-380.
- Fraiberg, S., Adelson, E., & Shapiro, V. (1975). Ghosts in the nursery: A psychoanalytic approach to the problems of impaired infant-mother relationships. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 14(3), 387-421.
- Ganz, Z. (2018). Attachment theory's universality hypothesis: Clinical implications for culturally responsive assessment. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 88(4), 262-281.
- Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463.
- Guzmán, M.O., Sommantico, M., Romero, C.P., Rosa, B.D., & Parrello, S. (2022). Psychometric properties of the sibling attachment inventory in Mexican young adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(8570), 1-13.
<http://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19148570>
- Harkness, S., Super, C.M., Bermúdez, M.R., Moscardino, U., Rha, J., Mavridis, C.J., Bonichini, S., Huitrón, B., Welles-Nyström, B., Palacios, J., Hyun, O., Soriano, G., & Zylicz, P.O. (2009). Parental ethnotheories of children's learning. In D.F. Lancy, J.C. Bock, & S. Gaskins (Eds.), *The anthropology of learning in childhood* (pp. 65-81). AltaMira Press.
- Jensen, A.C., Pond, A.M., & Padilla-Walker, L.M. (2015). Why can't I be more like my brother?: The role and correlates of sibling social comparison orientation. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 44, 2067-2078. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0327-8>

- Jernberg, A. (1984). Theraplay: Child therapy for attachment fostering. *Psychotherapy* 21(1), 39-47.
- Jugovac, S., O’Kearney, R., Hawes, D.J., & Pasalich, D.S. (2022). Attachment-and emotion-focused parenting interventions for child and adolescent externalizing and internalizing behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 25, 754-773.
- Keller, H. (2021). Attachment theory: Fact or fancy?. In R.A. Thompson & J.A. Simpson & L.J. Berlin (Eds.) *Attachment: The fundamental questions* (pp. 229-236). The Guilford Press.
- LeVine, R. A. (1990). Infant environments in psychoanalysis: A cross-cultural view. In J.W. Stigler, R.A. Shweder & G. Herdt (Eds.), *Cultural Psychology* (pp 454-473). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173728.017>
- Lieberman, A. F., Padrón, E., Van Horn, P., & Harris, W. W. (2005). Angels in the nursery: The intergenerational transmission of benevolent parental influences. *Infant mental health journal*, 26(6), 504–520. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20071>
- Lillard, A. (2007). Pretend play in toddlers. In C.A. Brownell & C.B. Kopp (Eds.), *Socioemotional development in the toddler years: Transitions and transformations* (pp. 149-176). Guilford Publications.
- Lopez, K.J. (2018). Situating culturally embodied play ecologies of preschool children: Lost in translation. *Journal of Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 52, 401-408.
- Lourenço, A., Martins, F., Pereira, B., & Mendes, R. (2021). Children are back in school, but is play still in lockdown?: Play experiences, social interactions, and children’s quality of life in primary education in the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(12454), 1-15.

- Mahler, M.S. (1975). The third subphase: Rapprochement. In M.S. Mahler & F. Pine & A. Bergman (Eds.) *The psychological birth of the human infant: Symbiosis and individuation* (pp. 76-108). Basic Books, Inc.
- Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1990). Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. In M. T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in the preschool years: Theory, research, and intervention* (pp. 121–160). The University of Chicago Press.
- Marrone, M. (2014). *Attachment and interaction: From Bowlby to current clinical theory and practice*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mesman, J. (2023, January 11). *A culturally inclusive and decolonial perspective on attachment theory* [Virtual session]. ANCT, No One Eats Alone, Zoom.
- Mesman, J., Basweti, N., & Misati, J. (2021). Sensitive infant caregiving among the rural Gusii in Kenya. *Attachment & Human Development*, 23(2), 124-133.
- Morelli, G., & Lu, L. (2021) Pluralities and commonalities in children’s relationships: care of efer forager infants as a case study. In R.A. Thompson & J.A. Simpson & L.J. Berlin (Eds.) *Attachment: The fundamental questions* (pp. 237-244). The Guilford Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *Code of Ethics*.
<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-ofEthics-English>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships: Working paper 1*. Retrieved from
<http://www.developingchild.net>
- Neale, D. (2020). The importance of play in early childhood. *International Journal of Birth and Parent Education*, 7(4), 10-12.

- Quinn, N. & Mageo, J.M. (2013). Attachment and culture: An introduction. In Quinn, N. & Mageo, J.M. (Eds.) *Attachment reconsidered: Cultural perspectives on a western theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rathunde, K., & Isabella, R. (2020). Engaging parents about the importance of play: The impact of a brief, arts-informed community presentation. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science, 69*, 351-364.
- Ray, D.C., & Landreth, G.L. (2015). Child-centered play therapy. In D.A. Crenshaw & A.L. Stewart (Eds.), *Play therapy: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice* (pp. 3-16). The Guilford Press.
- Reese, C. (2018). The history of attachment. In *Attachment: 60 trauma-informed assessment and treatment interventions across the lifespan* (pp. 1-12). PESI Publishing.
- Roopnarine, J.L., & Johnson, J.E. (1994). The need to look at play in diverse cultural settings. In J.L. Roopnarine, J.E. Johnson & F.H. Hooper (Eds.), *Children's play in diverse cultures* (pp. 1-8). State University of New York.
- Rothbaum, F., Weisz, J., Pott, M., Miyake, K., & Morelli, G. (2000). Attachment and culture: Security in the United States and Japan. *American Psychologist, 55*(10), 1093-1104.
<http://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066X.55.10.1093>
- Sefcik, J.S., Kondo, M.C., Klusaritz, H., Sarantschin, E., Solomon, S., Roepke, A., South, E.C., & Jacoby, S.F. (2019). Perceptions of nature and access to green space in four urban neighborhoods. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16*(2313), 1-13.

- Slade, A. (2021). *The relational Foundations of reflection: Supporting the development of attachment and symbolization in young children and their caregivers* [Virtual lecture]. CDI Longfellow Lecture, Zoom.
- Strand, P.S. (2020). The security-seeking impulse and the unification of attachment and culture. *Psychological review*, 127(5), 778-791.
- Takahashi, K. (1990). Are the key assumptions of the "Strange Situation" procedure universal? A view from Japanese research. *Human Development*, 33(1), 23–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1159/000276500>
- Thompson, R.A. (2000). The legacy of early attachments. *Child Development*, 71(1), 145-152.
- Thompson, R.A., Simpson, J.A., & Berlin, L.J. (2021). Attachment theory in the 21st century. In R.A. Thompson, J.A. Simpson, & L.J. Berlin (Eds.), *Attachment: The fundamental questions* (pp. 3-13). The Guilford Press.
- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Books.
- Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R.M. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 142(3), 1-16.