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**Does attachment theory provide a sound basis for advice on how to bring up children?**

**Essay Plan:**

Introduction

1. Explain what attachment is.
2. State what is going to be talked about in essay.

Body:

1. Discuss Bowlby's attachment theory – maternal deprivation.
2. Explain Ainsworth theory
3. Critically analyse.
4. State implications on bring up children in relation to childcare, hospitalisation, and institutionalisation. Include Rutter.

Conclusion.

1. Belsky
2. Summary.

Attachment is a strong emotional bond that develops between infant and caregiver, providing the infant with emotional security. By the second half of the first year, infants become attached to familiar people who have responded to their need for physical care and stimulation. How this attachment's develops and whether attachment theory provides a sound basis for advice on how to raise children have been intense topics of theoretical debate. This essay will be looking in particular at John Bowlby's Attachment theory and the implications this has had on hospitalisation, institutionalisation and day-care in relation to raising children.

In 1949, the World Health Organisation became concerned about the number of homeless children, or children who were growing up in institutions as a result of the war years. They commissioned Bowlby to look into this matter, and to report to them whether these children were likely to be suffering from their experiences, and what the best kind of upbringing for such children was. John Bowlby (1907 – 1990, as cited in Cowie, 1994) was a child psychoanalyst whose main interest was in the relationship between caregiver and child. Bowlby concluded after his investigation that a warm, intimate and continuing relationship with a mother figure is an essential precondition for mental health. Maternal deprivation or a disturbed emotional attachment between mother and child was said to cause irreparable damage, not only to the child but also to society as a whole.

Bowlby's report to the WHO had a great deal of influence among health care workers, social workers and parents. But the conclusions he came to were very controversial and caused arguments right from the beginning. According to Holmes (1993) Bowlby's theory of attachment appeared to him as a flash of insight: 'Freud's views of importance of maternal care could be combined with the ethological concept of imprinting to produce a new theory.' (Eynsenk and Flanagan, 2000, page 74) This theory has had a profound effect on the way psychologists think about attachment and infant development.

Bowlby (1951) argued that attachment is innate, adaptive and reciprocal. The primary attachment relationship (Monotropy) creates proximity seeking behaviour, provides an internal working model for all later relationships and offers a secure base for exploration. Social releasers are a fundamental part of this process. A lot of Bowlby's theories have been investigated by using particular environments such as institutionalisation, hospitalisation and different types of day care.

Each aspect of Bowlby's theory is going to be looked at separately providing empirical evidence for and against his proposals. Bowlby's main investigation was conducted in 1946. Bowlby looked at the life histories of 88 children who had been referred to his psychiatric clinic, half of whom had a criminal record for theft. Fourteen of the 'thieves' displayed 'affectionless' character, that is, a lack of normal affection, shame or sense of responsibility. Almost all of these affectionless children (86%) had suffered 'early and prolonged separations from their mothers.' In practice, this meant that, at least before the age of two, these children had continually or repeatedly been in foster homes or hospitals, often not visited by their families. Of the remaining 74 children who were not affectionless, only 7 (1%) had been separated. This appears to be strong evidence in support of Bowlby's hypothesis, but the data was retrospective and more importantly, correlational. It cannot be assumed whether the maladjustment was caused by the separations themselves or if there was a third factor responsible for both maladjustments and separations, for example general family discord could be the cause of both.

Bowlby believed that attachment is an innate adaptive process, for both parent and infant and believed that an infant was born with a set of behavioural systems that are ready to be activated, for e.g. crying and clinging which are known as social releasers and an ability to respond to the stimuli that commonly emanate from a human being e.g. sounds and touches etc. The means by which the early attachment relationship influences emotional development is via an internal working model about relationships. This model or schema represents the infant's knowledge about his/ her relationship with the primary caregiver. The model generates expectations about other relationships so that whatever the child's primary relationship was like will lead the child to have expectations about other relationships. Bowlby's concept would lead us to expect a correlation between early attachment experiences and later relationships. There is evidence to support this expectation for example Grossmann and Grossmann (1991, as cited by Eysenck and Flanagan, 2000) found that children who were securely attached to their mothers as infants enjoyed close friendships later in childhood, whereas those who were avoidant or anxious reported either having no or few friends. The research evidence suggests that early attachments form a basis for later relationships because they act as a model for these relationships. However, there are many other factors that will also influence how an individual copes with later relationships, for example of divorce during childhood. Harris (1998, as cited by Cowie, 1994) suggested that the concept of one internal working model is just wrong. She claimed that 'the infant is well aware that the model is only of use with a particular person and will not function with, for example, an indifferent babysitter or a playful peer.

Bowlby (1951, as cited by Cowie, 1994) also proposed the concept of Monotropy, that is the need for one central caregiver, usually the mother, but alternatively the father or another person. There has been considerable debate about whether infants become attached to one person or to many people. To some extent the debate stems from the claim made by Bowlby (1953) that infants have a hierarchy of attachments, at the top of which is one central caregiver. Bowlby stated that the importance of Monotropy did not lie with only the mother even though many people mistakenly thought that Bowlby suggested this. The disagreement is not about multiple attachments but is about the relative importance of these attachments. Some psychologists feel that healthy psychological development is not best served by having one primary attachment. If separated from their primary caregiver the children would exhibit characteristics of protest, despair, denial and attachment. Goldfarb's work demonstrated that such mothering is almost useless if delayed until after the age of two years and six months. (Cowie, 1994, page 8)

The next aspect of Bowlby's attachment theory was that there was a critical period in the formation of attachments between 6 months and three years. 'During that time, he argued, the child needs continuous love and care.' (Cowie, 1994, page 6) He believed that children who experience maternal deprivation below the age of three would suffer permanent damage, emotionally and socially. Bowlby was inspired by Lorenze's (1952, as cited by Cowie, 1994) study of imprinting in baby geese. During pre - natal development, there are short periods when an individual is especially vulnerable. These times are called 'critical periods', and the effect is an imprint. Imprinting is an example of an instinct, an inherited behaviour pattern that predisposes an individual to certain forms of learning at critical times in development. Bowlby suggested that attachment behaviour is a kind of imprinting and is irreversible. However, in more recent studies of adopted children, Tizard (1977, as cited by Cowie, 1994) have found that older children can form satisfactory new relationships with adults despite the lack

of earlier attachment. Another line of evidence comes from Harlow's work with rhesus monkeys (1959), an experiment was devised where a monkey was provided with two 'mothers', one a wire cylinder with a monkey-like face and a feeding bottle attached, the other with no feeding bottle but wrapped in a cloth.

The position taken by behaviourists and Freudians would be that the monkeys should become attached to the 'mother' that offered food rather than comfort. In fact, the monkey's spent most of their time with the cloth mother, visiting the other one only for food and when they were frightened they would always go to the cloth mother. In later life, the monkey's raised without a responsive mother became socially maladjusted and had difficulty with mating and parenting. When considering Harlow's research, it could be argued that making generalisations from animal to human behaviour is not always appropriate. Harlow's research has also been criticised in terms of ethics, allowing animals to be manipulated in this way. Due to this reason you cannot do the same experiment with babies therefore it is hard to predict the outcome with certainty. He believed that the human baby, like the young of most animal species, is equipped with a set of built in behaviours that helps keep the parent nearby, increasing the chances that the infant will be protected from danger.

Ainsworth extended Bowlby's theory by focusing on the nature of the attachment relationship by emphasising the quality of the carer - child relationship. Ainsworth believes 'that the behaviour of the caregiver in the early years of the infant's life can predict the type of relationship that this caregiver - child dyad will have later on.' (Cowie, 1994, page 14) Ainsworth devised a way of measuring the quality of an infant's attachment to its caregiver known as the 'Strange situation'. By using this method Ainsworth stated that mothers who are emotionally available, sensitive and supportive during their child's first year are likely to have a child who develops a secure attachment. A caregiver who is rejecting is likely to have a child who develops an avoidant attachment and a carer who is inconsistent is likely to have a child who develops a resistant attachment. Like Bowlby, Ainsworth claimed that attachment between infant and one or more specific caregivers was universal and had biological roots and the main emphasis is on the quality of care. However, this evidence did not have support cross culturally.

A critic of the maternal deprivation hypothesis was put forward by Rutter (1972, as cited by Eysenck and Flanagan, 2000), who pointed out that Bowlby had assumed that all experiences of deprivation were the same whereas in fact there are some quite key differences. Many of Bowlby's juvenile delinquents had experienced several changes of home and of principle caregiver during their early childhood. 'Rutter (1981) argued that it was important to distinguish between different constellations of early experience because they are associated with different outcomes.' (Cowie, 1994, page 12) His main criticism of Bowlby was that he had muddled together various kinds of separation and the fact that Bowlby stated that deprivation was the cause of long-term difficulties. Rutter (1981) suggested that it might simply appear to be deprivation that was causing later difficulties, whereas in fact the difficulties were due to factors associated with the deprivation e.g. divorce. To test this hypothesis, Rutter conducted The 'Isle of Wight study' in which he looked at relationships between separation and delinquency and found that it was mostly family discord, rather than separation as such, that caused difficulties and maladjustment in children. Rutter also made a distinction between the disruption of relationship and distortion and explained that sensitivity to stress and the way children cope influence the way that individuals react to later stress or adversity.

Ultimately Rutter's contribution was not to cause people to reject Bowlby's hypothesis but to change the emphasis of this hypothesis. Maternal deprivation should be seen as a 'vulnerability factor' (Brown and Harris, 1978) which raises the likelihood of a child becoming disturbed but not a factor that necessarily implies that maladjustment will follow.

There have been many studies on institutionalisation and hospitalisation, which mainly state that children suffer from deprivation and later possible maladjustment if separated or deprived of their caregiver. '1951 WHO report claimed that the use of day nurseries would result in permanent damage to the emotional health of a future generation.' (Cowie, 1994 page 19) Studies of child rearing in institutions have since been re-evaluated. Psychologists have since found that deprivation and maladjustment may be caused by third factors such as lack of stimulation, too many different caregivers, and general home problems. While there is now evidence to suggest that children can recover from severe deprivation it is still a matter of concern that needs to be addressed when considering the needs of children in care.

Some people interpreted Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis as meaning that day care was a bad thing. Separation would harm the child's emotional development if they spent time away from a primary caregiver. Bowlby felt that it was logical to argue that, if absent mothers create unhappy children, and then mothers need to be present full time. Kagan et al (1980, as cited by Eysenck and Flanagan, 2000) studied nursery care in Boston. Their findings showed that there were no consistently large differences between nursery and home children but did however, find large variability among all the children, but it was not related to the form of care. So this underlines individual differences in attachment which may be due to temperament or home factors. The study also showed that day care need not have harmful effects on a child's development.

A larger scale longitudinal study of day nurseries was conducted by Andersson (1992, as cited by Eysenck and Flanagan, 2000). The conclusion again was that day care had few negative effects in fact some children appeared to benefit from the care offered. Instead it has been shown that day care can have a positive effect on children socially and cognitively. However, when children are shy and unsociable, the nursery experience can be threatening which may have effects on their school career.

Belsky and Steinberg (1978, as cited by Cowie, 1994) at first believed that child care disrupts the child's tie to its mother but then when further research was carried out, Belsky and Rovine (1988) found that there was an increased risk of an infant developing insecure attachments if they were in day care for at least 4 months and if this has begun before their first birthday. From this Belsky believed that the higher levels of insecure attachment might imply that the separations between working mothers and their young children lead the latter to doubt their mothers availability and responsiveness and to develop a coping style that masks their anger. However this sort of explanation is highly speculative and would be difficult to substantiate.

By conducting investigations on Day care, hospitalisation and institutionalisation it has been discovered that quality of care, a stimulating environment and consistency is vital to ensure that children do not suffer from deprivation and later emotional maladjustment. This is obviously dependent on individual characteristics of the child and their home life and also different cultures. However a combination of these studies and Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis have made people aware of the importance of these aspects in raising children and has changed the way the particular institutions take care of children.

Although time will tell if attachment theorists are right, their findings provide an excellent framework to motivate parents and other caregivers to provide highly sensitive and responsive care to children throughout the world, if only for the benefit of humankind.

**References:**

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