

## WORDCOUNT - 5347

It has been established that human social development depends in a fundamental way on the early formation of lasting bonds with other people. The processes involved in the formation of bonds are known as attachment. The word 'attachment' has been applied to the reciprocal processes between an individual/infant and another specific individual/person, which is the foundation for acceptance of each other.

Early relationships are thought crucial to emotional development as a caregiver that is consistently caring gives a child the self-assurance that will carry on in subsequent relationships.

Freud and learning theorists once thought that bonding and attachment process between infant and mother was 'cupboard love' due to the mother providing the infant with nourishment. Basic needs of an infant such as nourishment were given priority over emotional needs because little was known of their emotional needs. Studies and research, ( Schaffer and Emerson 1964) show basic needs are inter-related and inter-dependant upon emotional needs for example, an infant that is hungry will not eat if unhappy and may need physical contact as the priority. (See Harlow's studies of primates that prefer comfort to food detailed on page 6)

This assignment attempts to critically evaluate some of the many studies of the psychological theory of attachment and their importance or otherwise to child development and whether early experiences such as separation from a significant carer has any detrimental or lasting effect to emotional health and subsequent behaviour.

Attachment theories will be analysed to determine what extent the theory influences contemporary social work practice and whether knowledge of the theory benefits a social work practitioner working with children and families.

Whilst many studies have explored and explained attachment theory as a lifelong process developing throughout the life cycle, this assignment will focus on attachment patterns from infancy up to young adults.

After analysing the theory links will be made to attachment theory in relation to adoption and fostering practice.

Gross (1996) propose there to be studies highlighting the existence of primary and secondary attachment formations. Primary attachment studies pertaining to relationships with immediate/close family and carers and secondary attachments relating to other attachment formations such as with a favourite pet or toy.

Whilst both primary and secondary attachment are considered important and significant to our self-concept, it is acknowledged that loss of our main attachments may result in a redefining of oneself that could lead to emotional difficulties, whilst loss of secondary attachments are usually less significant to a person's well-being. Consequently this assignment will be concentrating on primary attachments, and not on secondary attachments.

John Bowlby published the first major study of attachment in 1951. It is analysis of this study that will begin the assignment and other studies that agree with Bowlby will be explored. Challenges to Bowlby's theory, conflicting studies and criticism of Bowlby's theory will then be examined.

How the theories, research and studies impact on or influence social work practice will be discussed.

John Bowlby a psychoanalytic theorist described attachment as "an invisible 'affectionate bond' between two people that consisted of instinctive interactions". Bowlby believed infants had a biological instinctive urge to attach to someone, and mothers had a biological instinct to be near their child, and that this was universal.

Bowlby believed that the formation of an early bond is crucial to a child's mental health as an adult. Children need their mothers or at least another person who would be their mother substitute and with whom they could form an attachment.

Bowlby argued that behaviours such as crying smiling and clinging are examples of genetically inherited skills that infants use to keep their carers close by. It was Bowlby's belief that these behaviours aided that attachment process through the stimulus of a smile for example initiating the response e.g. cuddle from their mother. Further stimuli would enhance and strengthen this bond. Bowlby (1951) put forward as a consequence that "motherlove in infancy is as important for mental health as vitamins and proteins for physical health" When a child does not have a warm loving and continuous relationship with one significant person the child is said to be experiencing maternal deprivation.

Because the bonding process of stimulus for response was an intimate interaction Bowlby argued that only one significant attachment could be formed, he called this Monotropy.

Bowlby (1969/73) went further suggesting that individuals who have a psychiatric disorder had developed the behaviour as a direct consequence of ineffective or

disturbed attachments in childhood. Agoraphobia a common mental disorder affecting between one and six per cent of the population is caused through the patient having lost the ability to tolerate separations from attachment figures. Reacting in this extreme way as a loss to their 'safe base'.

Bowlby described the child who did not form an early attachment as an 'affectionless character' and he emphasised the need for continuous care, he argued that any subsequent care could not make up for any earlier deprivation. Bowlby studied 44 juvenile delinquents at a clinic for mentally disturbed young people; all the participants were thieves. He compared their mental health development with 44 adolescents who had emotional problems but were not thieves and deduced that maternal deprivation had contributed to the delinquency. (Bowlby 1946) Bowlby also studied the effects of war on children in relation to maternal deprivation, especially on the effects of broken attachments. Bowlby also looked at research from ethologists who were studying the effects on animals who had been deliberately separated from their mothers.

As attachment is the theory of the existence of an invisible bond and therefore unobservable studies look at attachment behaviours, all the skills a child uses to keep someone they are attached to close by for example, smiling and crying. Other studies look at the behaviour children display when their attachment figure leaves their sight or their behaviour when their attachment figure returns.

The attachment behaviour patterns can be seen to develop in stages. The first stage around three months of age consists of 'proximity promoting' behaviour to keep its carer close-by. From three months to around six months the infant begins to respond to the carer that looks after them most for example giving them more smiles. After six or seven months of age a bond between the child and the main care giver can be seen to have formed as the child will get upset if their main care giver is out of sight. During this phase a child may also display a fear of strangers for the first time. The infant uses this person as a safe base from which to explore their environment and this is seen as proximity promoting giving way to proximity seeking.

As speech and awareness develops the fourth stage is entered and the interaction between the child and the main caregiver becomes more complex this is thought to reinforce and maintain the developing attachment. It was Bowlby's belief that if an attachment was interrupted during this stage or the attachment broken then the child's

ability to form attachments would be irretrievably damaged and behavioural problems would occur.

Criticisms were levelled at Bowlby's theories due to his ideas stemming from work he had undertaken with juvenile delinquents that had been separated early in life from their mothers as being unrepresentative of the general population, and too small a sample. It was also argued that not all maternally deprived children became juvenile delinquents. But in agreement with Bowlby, Stroufe (1979) stated that "we cannot assume that early experiences will somehow be cancelled out by later experiences. Lasting consequences of early inadequate experiences may be subtle and complex"

Bowlby came from a psycho-dynamic background of psychology which itself emphasises early experiences and relationships as being crucial to adult well-being, many critics therefore felt his studies were consequently biased and other factors such as environmental may have been overlooked.

Further his studies of the effects of war on children who were separated from their mothers at an early age was considered to be research done in a crisis situation. Critics argue under these circumstances it would be impossible to conclude how the same children would have reacted out of a war time environment. It was also argued that Bowlby failed to take account in his studies what had happened to the children after the separation.

Bowlby was influenced greatly by James Robertson's research on the effects of separation on mother and child through hospitalisation. Robertson's studied children between six months and three years of age who were separated from their mothers due to hospitalisation. Robertson claimed to have established a sequence of behaviour that all children would pass through. This sequence consisted of distress, where children behaved in a disturbed manner. Despair whereby the child seems to lose hope of finding their lost parent. Lastly, the child display detachment type behaviour, refusing anyone to become involved with them. Robertson concluded that separation from their mother was harmful.

In 1971 Klein and Stern studied why parents abuse their children. They found evidence in their studies that a high percentage of abused children had been born prematurely. Because these children were put into an incubator and separated from their parents an attachment was unable to develop, resulting in later abuse toward the children. The study concluded that there is a crucial period when attachments not

formed adequately would not be able to be re-formed. This is of considerable importance to social work in relation to the modern day understanding of child abuse as further research has shown that many abusers were once abused themselves.

Klaus & Kennell (1976) two paediatricians put forward the theory that they too believed there was a critical period when attachment took place, this was immediately after birth, when the mother was physiologically pre-disposed to bond with her infant. It was during this time that the strength of the attachment was determined.

The American National Center for Clinical Programs supports Bowlby's notion of 'motherlove'. They propose that a parent who realises they are going to have a long-term relationship with their child will put more into the caregiving and interaction, as opposed to a substitute care giver who may not be so motivated as they see many children come and go and therefore do not build up a caring relationship with children. This idea has implications for fostering as a consequence may be lack of care or favouritism towards other children in their care.

John & Elisabeth Newson (1986) point out that one function of a parent is to act as a memory store for the children to play back and compare experiences. Children in a care setting without a key adult with whom they have a close relationship with will be unable to build upon past experiences and this may have an impact on their emotional development.

Many studies have looked at whether attachment is instinctive, as Bowlby had believed.

Konrad Lorenz (1935) agreed that attachment was instinctive when he put forward his imprinting theory. His observations revealed that newly hatched goslings follow the first thing they saw, this could be a human or other object and there was a brief critical period early in the goslings life when this would occur and was found to be irreversible. Lorenz's believed this was biological, a factor of evolution that ensures the young of all species are able to attach to someone for survival, and was relevant to the way humans form attachments in relation to it being an instinctive behaviour. Critics of his theory (Sluckin 1961 and Bateson 1964) have shown that if a young bird is kept isolated it stays unimprinted beyond Lorenz's 'critical period' and imprinting can take place after the critical period has passed. This casts doubt on Lorenz's claim that imprinting processes are instinctive. Many researchers now believe that imprinting is actually a process of rapid learning (MacFarlane 1975)

In contrast to the theory that attachment is instinctive Colin Turnbull and Margaret Mead when studying families in various African tribes concluded that they saw no signs of instinctive love or affection between parents and children. It was quite normal for many children to be left to fend for themselves; many were even killed as they were thought of as burdens by their parents. The researchers came to believe attachment to be a learnt process that we internalise from observing our own mother's behaviour, and if not learnt properly for example through illness or as in the tribes case through a different set of family norms and lifestyles, then no bonding or emotional attachment can occur.

In New York in 1943 Goldfarb conducted a study of orphans. Two groups of fifteen orphans were matched for age, sex and social background of their parents. The orphans of group A had been fostered before nine months old. The orphans in group B had spent at least their first three years in an orphanage before they were fostered. Goldfarb visited each child at ages three, six, eight and twelve years and measured their development with regard to intelligence, language skills, social maturity and their ability to form relationships. Goldfarb found that every child in group A did better than those in group B leading to the conclusion that a 'normal' family home is crucial to emotional and cognitive development. Critics of this study argue that the children may not have had the same intelligence to begin with and that the children in Group B did not have the stimulation of a family for as long a period as those children in Group A.

Harlow & Zimmerman conducted studies on a group of rhesus monkeys. Their studies consisted of isolating young monkeys for three months, six months or twelve months. The researchers concluded that the behaviour of the monkeys who had been isolated for twelve months was proportionately worse than those who had been isolated for three months. The behaviour of all the monkeys who had suffered isolation was seen to be disturbed. The same researchers also placed monkeys in a cage with surrogate mothers, a doll made of wire with a feeding bottle and a doll made of wood and towelling without a feeding bottle. The monkeys spent equal amounts of time with each 'surrogate mother'. The studies showed that the monkeys preferred to cling to the towelling doll even if it meant they did not have a feeding bottle. This led the researchers to believe that warm contact is of critical importance as a need for the monkeys and leads to affectionate responses. Critics of both these studies question the relevance of animal studies to human behaviour.

Bowlby's influential theory managed to link together the evolutionary focus of adaptation with the psychodynamic and behavioural importance of social relationships during infancy and childhood. (Hollin 95)

A measure of its influence can be gained from the action of the World Health Organisation in 1955 stating that "Permanent damage can be done to the emotional health of babies and children when put into nurseries or sent to child-minders." The WHO report had many consequences and resulted in lots of practices regarding child care and children's needs being changed. Women were encouraged to stay at home and were made to feel guilty and bad mothers if they went out to work. (Which suited the government at the time, as they needed these vacated jobs for men)

Family Allowance payments were also introduced as a further inducement to keep women from going out to work

Maternity wards encouraged siblings to stay with their mother, whilst children's wards encouraged mothers to stay.

A main influence on social work practice was the idea that 'a bad home is better than the best institution' which resulted in less fostering and removal of children from poor if not dangerous situations at home.

Bowlby's findings were influential but controversial and became the starting point for further studies. Some studies began to disagree with Bowlby, Fraiberg in 1974 argued that it was possible to strengthen an attachment; Parents of blind children who did not experience eye contact with their infant felt rejected and consequently were unable to develop a strong attachment to their children. When taught to interpret their child's hand movements, it was found the bond could be strengthened. Interaction was thought to be the important element in developing the attachment.

Barbara Tizard (1977) when studying children who had been institutionalised for the first few years of their lives and then adopted, found that most of the children in the study had no problems in developing normal attachments towards their adoptive families. Tizard's view in contrast to Bowlby's was that early deprivation experiences in childhood do not always have irreversible effects. If an intimate relationship develops within the adoptive family then secure attachments can be made after the critical period as emphasised by Bowlby and other researchers.

Micheal Rutter argued it was the cause of the separation and not the separation itself that correlates with anti-social behaviour e.g. it was not divorce that causes

behavioural problems but the stress and unhappiness leading up to the divorce that leads to behavioural problems. Rutter argued it was also the length of the separation, and under what conditions the separation was done, gradually or traumatically, and how much interaction the child had with subsequent carers. He emphasised that maternal deprivation would not affect all children the same way anyway, individual temperaments would mean different reactions. He believed one of the reasons why family conflicts are so disrupting and impact so adversely upon children is that the problems experienced tend to be enduring (Rutter 1990).

Mary Ainsworth developed a method whereby a child's behaviour is observed when reunited with their mother after a short separation. This is known as the 'strange situation' and became widely used to determine whether their attachment was secure or insecure. Ainsworth's strange situation is used to measure Bowlby's hypotheses that early relationship experiences affect later adult functioning. The strange situation procedure consists of eight three minute episodes that have been arranged so as to create increasing levels of stress for a child that will activate attachment behaviours that researchers can then observe. (British Journal Psychology 1997)

The resulting behaviour was used to classify the child into one of three categories. These categories are insecure avoidant attachment, secure attachment and insecure resistant attachment. Securely attached children were able to balance their need to explore the environment with their need for comfort and support from their caregiver in relation to their feelings of stress. Insecure avoidant attached children when stressed continued to explore the environment showing minimal need for comfort and support. The children who were classified as having insecure resistant attachments stop their exploration and return to their care giver show the maximum amount of attachment behaviours. (Ainsworth et al 1978) Main (1991) has since identified a fourth category that of the disorganised/ disorientated child.

Critics of the method used e.g. instigating great stress for children question its ethical viability and believe the behaviour displayed by the child may not represent their true behaviour, for example the child may be not be well that day. The method also fails to take account of different methods of child rearing. e.g. cultural. Critics also argue the studies fail to take account of a child's natural temperament e.g. shyness. But Horowitz et al have been able to relate the different attachment styles to different types



of interpersonal problems that may be beneficial when assessing foster placements as needs could be met specifically rather than generally.

Critics have asked the relevance of determining the strength of an attachment but Gross argues that if the purpose of bonding and attachment is for the child to feel secure in different environments, to move away from their mother literally and emotionally, increasing independence - detachment. (Gross 1996) For detachment to be successful attachments had to be secure to begin with.

Ainsworth (1977) found through many studies the factors influencing these attachments to be how strong the interaction is between mother and child. How supportive the mother is of independent play and how sensitive and emotionally expressive she is towards her baby are also important factors. The mother does not have to be involved with the caring of the infant full-time as Bowlby had emphasised if these key factors are evident in the relationship. (Blehar, Leiberman & Ainsworth 1977)

Contrary to Bowlby's belief that children would suffer if separated from their mothers many studies (Caldwell Wright Honig & Tannenbaum 1970, Farran & Ramsey 1977, Kagan, Kearsley & Zelazo 1978) of children in nursery care, found the same proportion of secure as insecure attachments occurred, when compared, with children brought up entirely at home. But the nursery care had to provide certain key features to be successful. The key features were found to be the same in all studies. In the caring environment there had to be quality care and a key person for the child to identify with and with whom a close interactive relationship could develop. But it can be argued that if separation from the main caregiver is acceptable as long as there is quality of care then this implies there must be non-quality care and how is this to be distinguished? What is quality care?

The American National Center for Clinical Programs link quality care to basic universal needs specifically,

1. Physical protection and attention to health and nutrition,
2. Awareness of and respect for individual differences in infants and toddlers.
3. Sensitivity to the infants cues and communications.
4. The capacity to shift care giving practices as the child develops.
5. Warm, loving human relationships based on continuity of care.

Continuity of care is an important factor of quality care, studies showed that if a child was continually moved from one nursery to another, then behavioural problems concerning social development were evident (Schaffer 1977).

Martin S et al (1994) argue their studies of children in care show that children who had experienced frequent changes of care settings were significantly slower in both cognitive, linguistic and emotional development. They point to further evidence that shows these abilities are still underdeveloped through later childhood.

Research and studies done in prisons have highlighted prisons contain a high proportion of individuals who in childhood lacked consistent, continuous, concerned care, resulting in a secure attachment not being formed. (Pringle 1970). Much research has shown insecure attachments can be strengthened, it is argued that early relationships are important to social development but not exclusively so, later relationships matter too. (Tizard 1975)

Further studies using Ainsworth's strange situation methods have shown attachments are not always permanent. Should a child experience important changes in their life such as divorce then their attachment can move from secure to insecure. Children display a resilience to recover from damaging or inadequate early experiences and insecure attachments are not irreparable.

Research has shown that contrary to Bowlby's idea of monotropy children can form more than one significant attachment and these need not be the biological parents, and can be of either sex, although there is often a definite hierarchy. Father's attachments to infants are as strong as the mothers in the first few days of life. Then the attachment changes because of the different amount of time available to interact with the infant due to their work commitment. Both mother and father are important attachment figures for their infants but the circumstances that lead to selecting mother or father may differ, for example the father is usually selected for play. (Schaffer & Emerson 1964) According to Parke (1981) "Both mother and father are important attachment figures, the father is not just a poor substitute for the mother".

Bowlby had argued that maternal deprivation was the cause of abnormal or deviant behaviour, this has been criticised because the person displaying deviant behaviour or abnormal behaviour may be biologically predisposed to it. This may result in that person being unable to empathise with other people. This lack of empathy could mean that attachments in childhood were unable to form and that their subsequent deviant

behaviour links to several issues not just maternal deprivation. To consider how attachment theory and the studies detailed can be linked to social work Coulshed (1988) proposed

“Psychology has been useful in the degree to which you can apply some of the theories, if you are prepared to see theoretical contributions as ways of enriching your thinking and understanding. You will gain a broad framework of information through which you will recognise the complexities and possible causes of human suffering.”

Using the term ‘human suffering’ and linking it to psychology reinforces the contemporary social work view of individualism. A problem for social workers will be determining which needs of the client should be addressed, those that the client reveals or those that they do not. Also the dilemma faced when determining In a non-judgmental way what parenting skills are considered acceptable or unacceptable, e.g. when the parent/s are meeting some of the child’s need but not others.

Attachment theory has had an impact on many areas relating to how children are cared for including the legal framework it operates under and how services for children have developed. Some of the areas where clear links can be made to practice being underpinned by attachment theory has effected changes are;

When negotiating contact between children and their families it is undertaken from a child centre perspective rather from the adults involved. This may include having closer links with grandparents, relatives and any other persons who the child considers significantly important to them.

Attachment theories underpin the policies that are relevant to the development of children in public care and form the basis for assessing their needs such as pre placement and post placement support systems. The effects of separation and loss that children have experienced can be taken into account in assessing their needs.

Social Work as a profession can promote the needs of children through influencing policy and practice e.g. Acknowledgement that delays in placing children may be detrimental to their wellbeing should ensure that the adoption and fostering processes can be as speedy and efficient as possible. Likewise, it is clear from research that children are adversely affected by the loss of familiar peers. Children who maintain friendships over time are seen to have greater social skills and better social adjustment this should also be promoted.

Current stereotyping of young people 'in care' suggests that they are either helpless victims or out of control hooligans, social workers with a knowledge of attachment theory can challenge this stereotyping and any discrimination that occurs through promoting anti-oppressive practices stemming from a secure knowledge base, and values that uphold respect for all irrespective of age. An example of this could be how a child with Reactive Attachment Disorder has equal opportunities to successful placements given their needs have been recognised and there is in place strategies that help to achieve this.

This disorder which affects many children is often mis-diagnosed with the result that the children often end up in young offenders institutes. Gregory Keck from the Attachment and Bonding Centre of Ohio USA believes RAD can occur if a child does not form a healthy attachment to the parents in the first three years. Keck uses Erik Eriksons theory of human development to explain that if a baby regularly cries in rage for food but is not fed then that baby will not develop trust in the parents. According to Keck this results in the developing child becoming self-reliant and storing up rage against the parents. This has been found to happen most often in chaotic families where the child is neglected or abused.

Keck states that if this child came into the care system unmet rage will be transferred to the foster carers. Multiple moves will intensify the disorder. Pre-placement support as well as post placement support systems have to be initiated if there is to be a successful placement for these children.

According to Department of Health figures in 1996 there are approximately 50,000 children and young people being 'looked after' and this figure excludes those disabled children in respite care. This is a lot of children from unsettled backgrounds needing social work intervention and specialist knowledge.

Because children from unhappy backgrounds with damaged attachments come into the care system attachment theory has been used as a basis for various methods that can help children who are often unable to be able to speak about their experiences e.g. Eco-maps that help children plot the people they care about have proved reliable and effective.

Attachment studies have shown that there is a tendency for children to idolise their attachment figures, even if the reality is they are being badly cared for. Other studies show that children with insecure attachments often develop an air of 'toughness' to

mask their vulnerability (Thoburn 1991). Both studies are instances when attachment theory can be used constructively if abuse or neglect is suspected e.g. if the child has to experience a separation then understanding that they may blame themselves (it has happened because I am bad), can be pre-empted with coping strategies already in place to help the child manage their emotions without delay e.g. appropriate counselling. Both studies are also examples of how attachment theory has given an insight into otherwise unexplainable behaviour e.g. that children have and develop defensive mechanisms in order to better manage the psychological stress that occurs when close relationships are unreliable and unpredictable. (Goffman 1969)

In conclusion it can be said that attachment theory offers a valuable perspective on the development of feelings and behaviours relating to human needs. It also deals with the impact of separation and loss and explains their significance to emotional development and subsequent well being.

It is clear Bowlby's theory had a major impact and has influenced and initiated further research into an otherwise unexplored areas.

To pull the theory and practice together, it can be said that attachment theory is useful in four different but complimentary ways. 1. In understanding universal reactions. 2. Understanding individuals different reactions. 3. Understanding the nature and impact of lost relationships. 4. Understanding appropriate coping strategies.

As a consequence of this wealth of knowledge attachment theory has allowed optimism to develop towards caring for children as a less distorted and confused picture of child development has emerged. It is now apparent that healthy development can occur in many different family environments. There are many 'right' ways of meeting children's needs.

Stressful experiences can be minimised by effective action on the part of the care practitioners involved. Traumatic events do not have to have lasting or damaging consequences if positive action is taken.

Children are more resilient and adaptable than was once thought.

Productive and meaningful placements can be effected through knowledge of children's needs.

Children being 'looked after' need not be disadvantaged if 'quality care' is obtained.

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