

ATTACHMENT

1. *What is attachment; why is it important; how is it demonstrated and classified?*
2. *Using appropriate research studies criticise Bowlby's theory of Maternal Deprivation.*

The initial part of this essay will explain attachment, say why it is important and show the various ways in which it is demonstrated. The second will be critically examining Bowlby's theory of Maternal Deprivation using theories and hypotheses that both support and oppose him.

Kagan et al (1978) defined attachment as 'an intense emotional relationship that is specific to two people, that endures over time, and in which prolonged separation from the partner is accompanied by stress and sorrow'.

This applies to attachments formed at any time in life and is accepted by psychologists as being crucial for normal, healthy development.

Our first attachment is the prototype for all the attachments that follow. If initial experiences are negative, it could affect further attachments and relationships. (Bowlby 1953)

Klaus and Kennel, believe 'bonding may be immediate'

Which agrees with John Bowlby's hypothesis that attachment is innate (nature) Others, like Rutter feel that 'bonding may be gradual'. This leans towards the hypotheses of Freud (1926) and Behaviourists who believe that attachment is a learnt process (nurture).

The first and most intense attachment is normally that between mother and child. Because of this, most research is focused on this particular attachment.

So what are the reasons for attachment?

John Bowlby (1953) did much research on this subject and argued that newborns, being helpless at birth, are genetically hardwired to behave toward their mother in ways that ensure their survival. His initial hypothesis stated that infants displayed a strong innate tendency to attach to 'mother' but he later changed this to 'primary caregiver'

Other purposes of attachment are to provide oneself with a carer and role model that we can learn various things from, like social skills and how to communicate. We also provide ourselves with someone that wants to interact with us. These interactions have great personal reward and are of huge importance to future learning.

According to Maccoby (1980) there are key behaviours that show attachment has taken place. Seeking proximity to primary caregiver, particularly at times of stress. Distress on separation. Pleasure upon being reunited, and a general orientation of behaviour towards its primary caregiver.

The formation of an attachment offers a safe base for an infant during times of stress, but psychologists wanted to determine the different attachments made between an infant and its primary caregiver. Schaffer and Emerson (1968) found that some infants became more strongly attached to their caregiver, and this can be shown by the extent of their distress upon separation from them. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) devised a laboratory set observation to classify the different kinds of attachment. It was called 'The Strange Situation'. The infants' behaviour was observed during seven, three minute episodes.

Firstly there was a thirty second introduction of parent/caregiver (normally mother) and infant to the room. Then mother and child are left alone while the child familiarises itself with the surroundings. A stranger enters the room and plays with baby while the mother leaves, and then returns, soon leaving again along with the stranger. The stranger returns, tries to comfort the baby and then the mother returns to take over while the stranger quietly leaves.

'Stranger Situation' identified three types of attachment in the infants that were observed. **Anxious avoidant (15%)** where baby ignores mother, is unaffected by her lack of presence. Few/no signs of distress when mother departs. Ignores mother on her return. Infant were distressed at being left alone rather than being left by mother. **Securely attached (70%)** baby plays happily in mothers' presence, stranger present or not. Mother largely ignored as she is trusted. Infant distressed at mothers' departure. Infant seeks immediate comfort from mother on her return; stranger can provide some comfort. **Anxious resistant (15%)** fussy and wary in mothers presence. Cries more, explores less than A or B. Has difficulty using mother as safe base. Seeks contact on her return but shows anger and ambivalence toward her. Resists stranger.

These differences were seen to represent the different relationships the mother and infant had. Mothers sensitive and responsive their baby's needs understandably had securely attached infants. Inconsistent mothers had resistant infants, and suffocating, or by contrast, uninterested mothers had infants that displayed anxious avoidant attachment.

John Bowlby was born to an upper-middle class family in 1907. He was primarily raised by the family nanny. She left when he was four years old. He later described this as being as tragic as the loss of a mother

In his adult life, Bowlby's research was mainly focused on the long term effects that early maternal separation could have on an infant.

His Maternal Deprivation hypothesis stated that the attachment between an infant and its mother (or permanent mother figure) needs to be continuous; therefore can not be broken in the early stages of life without serious/permanent harm being done to the infants' emotional, social and intellectual development.

This would seem to be supported by research carried out by Harlow (1962) on Rhesus monkeys. The newborn monkeys were separated from their mother and each other. When they were later reintroduced to their peers, they were antisocial, aggressive and near impossible to breed. The ones that were successfully artificially inseminated went on to reject their young, also confirming the importance of a prototype attachment in the early stages of development.

Bowlby always maintained that there was a critical period in which a primary attachment needs to be made (in humans, before the age of 2½) in order for the formation of normal future attachments and these monkeys had not formed any peer attachment during this period. Rutter argued that there was no such critical period. Hodges and Tizard's theory supported Rutter and offered that perhaps rather than a critical period; there was a sensitive period.

Although this investigation had parallels, obviously it could not be extrapolated to human research.

In contrast to the Bowlby, Hodges and Tizard (1978) put forward that even in severe cases of deprivation; careful therapy could improve a child's chances of successful future relationships. They did a longitudinal study on children who had spent at least their first two years of life in care with no chance to form any close, continuous relationships. On leaving care, they either returned to their families or were adopted. By the age of eight, Hodges and Tizard reassessed them and found that most of the children had formed close attachments with parents/adoptive parents even though they had been deprived of early attachment. Though this did depend on the family concerned and how they nurtured the attachment.

It also showed that these children did suffer difficulties in their social relationships.

This proved that although Bowlby was right in the fact that separation did have some affect, it was not always as disastrous as he had predicted.

This could be seen in the case of the Koluchová twins (1976) whose mother died giving birth; as a result they were continuously moved around and could not form a stable primary attachment. They were eventually placed in good care and grew up to be well adjusted adults, but this could be due to the fact that they had each other to attach to so a primary attachment was still made.

Bowlby (1951) also believed that early deprivation could lead to affectionless psychopathy, which he seemed to prove in his 44 Juvenile Thieves experiment. 16 of these thieves were identified as being affectionless psychopaths, meaning they had no sense of shame or guilt. 86% of these had experienced early and prolonged separation from their mother which suggested a link between early separation and emotional maladjustment, but Rutter felt that Bowlby's methods of data collection were unreliable as the parents of the thieves could only give a retrospect answer for the duration of the separation and this could lead to falsification of the results. In addition, it was very small scale research.

Michael Rutter also believed that maternal privation was more likely to be the key here and that even though deprivation/separation and affectionless psychopathy were linked; one didn't necessarily cause the other. He also felt that other factors were not being considered, for example, family discord and adverse living conditions.

He interviewed over 2000 boys and their families and discovered that delinquency was most common where the boys had suffered separation because of family discord.

Bowlby was also a great believer in monotropy; this is to say that there should be one permanent figure that provides permanent care to ensure normal development.

This has come under great amounts of criticism.

Rutter believed that several attachments can be made other than to mother.

Schaffer and Emerson also dispute Bowlby's monotropy theory and say that multiple attachments are not the exception, they are the rule.

Bowlby did not disagree with this but felt the mother/infant bond was unique in that it was the first and the strongest. This would obviously make it the most important and influential.

Most of Bowlby's early research was carried out in the 1930's and 40's on children in large institutions and residential orphanages. Rutter (1981) felt this was giving a very limited view. It didn't consider other factors, for example the under stimulating nature of these environments, and in affect, other things could also be as contributory to the results observed as Maternal Deprivation.

Although the Maternal Deprivation theory has become dated and undergone much criticism over the years, it can not be disputed that John Bowlby's research has had huge impact on the way in which hospitals treat children during their stay. Parents are now actively encouraged to stay with their children, whereas before, they weren't, and newborns are no longer separated from their mother unless it would be detrimental to their health or wellbeing. Thanks to John Bowlby, it is now recognised that separation from a primary caregiver, does have long lasting, detrimental affects and should, if at all possible, be avoided.

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Class handouts

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