

## **Outline and evaluate Bowlby's theory of attachment**

According to Bowlby and his theory (also known as evolutionary theory), children have an innate drive to be and become attached to a caregiver. Bowlby suggests that this is the way that all infants are 'programmed' as it is a way of ensuring the survival and reproduction. Bowlby would suggest that this attachment is very important for later-development and has a key impact on the relationships they form.

According to this theory, infants and carers have innate programming to become attached, something known to physiologists as 'social releasers'. One of these many social releasers is called the 'sensitive period', an essential period in the second quarter of the first year, where it is most effective to form an attachment with the infant. Anything after these months, Bowlby would suggest, becomes increasingly difficult to form a strong attachment. The 'sensitive period' is seen as one of the strengths of Bowlby's evolutionary theory. This is from a conclusion of research carried out by Hodges and Tizard who found that children which had not formed any attachments had later difficulties with peers.

Another 'social releaser' for Bowlby's theory 'the continuity hypothesis'. This is the idea that emotionally secure infants go on to be emotionally secure, trusting and socially confident adults if a positive and similar attachment to this is experienced as an infant. Again, when evaluating Bowlby, it is another strength of his theory. This is in conclusion to Minnesota longitudinal study by Scroufe et al in 2005. They followed participants from infancy to late adolescence and, just like Bowlby suggested, found continuity between early attachment and later emotional and social behaviour.

The final 'social releaser' being explored is the 'secure base'. The 'secure base' suggests that as attachment is important for protection from the world and therefore acts as a 'secure base' from which the child is able to explore the world and return to if it is threatened. The secure base proves that attachment promotes the independence of the infants rather than dependence as some people may argue.

As well as receiving mainly positive feedback, there are also weaknesses to Bowlby's theory of attachment. One of these weaknesses is the fact that Bowlby states that there is only one important and central attachment in an infant's life and sometimes a secondary one; something that causes debate between physiologists. The argument against his is that there are in fact multiple attachments all equally important to a child, for example the role of the Father, peers, siblings etc; a conclusion drawn from research by Grossman in 1991.

Another weakness found with Bowlby's theory is that he says that there is continuity between early attachment and later behaviours. However physiologists say such continuity can be explained without using Bowlby's theory. Kagan offered the contradicting explanation in 1984 with his temperament hypothesis. This suggests that these attachments can be down purely to certain personalities or temperamental characteristics of the infant. There is also evidence that children are born with innate temperamental differences.