

Bowlby developed  
and refined the  
concept of  
attachment



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Attachment theory originated in the work of the British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-90) who argued that the propensity to form strong emotional bonds with particular individuals was a fundamental characteristic of human young; it had survival value by bringing nurturance, protection and security to infant.

John Bowlby developed and refined the concept of attachment over a number of years. He drew on ideas from psychodynamic theory of Sigmund Freud and from ethology – the study of animal behaviour – to create a theory about a bonding relationship that develops between parents and their children, and the disruption to that relationship which can occur through separation, bereavement or emotional deprivation. He argued that affectional ties between children and their parents or caregivers have a biological and evolutionary basis. There is a predisposition in babies to maintain proximity to their caregivers and to behave in ways that attract their attention and engage their involvement.

Bowlby thought of attachment in the early years of life as a behavioural system which has as a set goal the maintenance of appropriate proximity to the primary caregivers. Separation from the caregivers activated the attachment system in order to restore proximity. But in the first year of life the child's proximity – promoting behaviours – crying, vocalizing, clinging – become organized into a goal – oriented system focused on a specific caregiver, usually, but not necessarily, the mother. When the attachment system has achieved its goal – being in sufficiently close contact with the caregiver – then attachment behaviours subside. The child no longer needs to cry or reach out to the caregiver.

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Bowlby also hypothesized that infants have a predisposition to explore the world around them. This need to explore and play takes the child away from the primary caregiver and counteracts the need for proximity.

He proposed a critical period between around 6 months and 3 years of age. During that time, he argued, the child needs continuous love and care from one person, the mother or a permanent mother – substitute. (1)

peter barnes . personal, social and emotional development of children 1997  
the open university

### Freudian theory

Freud's theory of personality development had a major impact on initial theorising about children's socio – emotional development. As a biologist, Freud assumed that at birth infants were equipped with biological instincts that demanded satisfaction. He identified two important drives:

1 the drive for self – preservation

2 the drive for procreation (that is, for preservation of the species)

According to Freud, as the child strove for sensory pleasure, this was reflected in the level of psychic energy or libido. Freud believed that during the individual's life – span libidinous energy was concentrated in different parts of the body – principally the mouth, anus and genitals, in that order.

The oral stage (0-1 ½ years)

Freud's theory, during the first year of life psychic energy of the infant is focused on the mouth. Events surrounding the reduction of psychic tension and attaining pleasure relate primarily to acts of feeding, such as sucking on the nipple or bottle. In turn, the infant's attention is focused on the person providing gratification and/or who helps reduce the level of psychic tension. From this process, which Freud named cathexis, the attachment between the child and the person develops.

Freud believed that too much or too little gratification of the infant's oral needs would impede the process to the next stage. The infant would then become fixated at the oral stage and the effect of this would manifest itself later in terms of psychological symptoms. Thus, those who have been fixated orally as infants may as adults derive an undue amount of pleasure from mouth, reflected in activities such as smoking, drinking, eating or kissing. Those whose infant needs were undergratified might as adults be prone to depression, while those who were overgratified might become excessively dependent upon others.

### Erikson's theory

Erikson was a student of Freud's who later broke away from Freud's view of psychosexual development. He emphasised that development was a life-long process and focused much more attention than Freud on the development of the ego (psychodynamic theory). Erikson believed that the ego continued to develop throughout the life-span: it was that part of the individual that was in contact with the real world. In Erikson's view, the ego did more than simply ward off the demands of the id and superego, or

conscience. It enabled individuals to respond in inventive, creative and resourceful ways to their environment.

According to Erikson, the first one and half years of life essentially form an ‘incorporative stage’, when the infant takes in food and drink and experiences the world through the five senses. During this time, the chief issue for the infant involves the development of a sense of trust, which Erikson describes as ‘an essential trustfulness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one’s own trustworthiness’. Trust is achieved along a bi – polar continuum, such that the infant develops a sense neither of trust nor mistrust, but rather a feeling somewhere in between of two.

A sense of trust results from consistency and continuity of care: it develops not from quantity of care a child receives, but from the quality of that care. A sense of trust helps the child to develop a rudimentary sense of ego, providing the foundation for ‘a sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being “all tight” of being oneself, and of becoming what the other people will trust one will become’ (Erikson 1963, p. 241). A sense of mistrust results from uncertainty and unpredictability of care, and from a feeling of having lost or given up a desirable state.

According to behavioural theory, the infant is literally a blank slate (tabula rasa) at birth and the environment is all important in shaping what the infant becomes. The behaviourists (Pavlov, Watson & Skinner) strongly rejected Freudian notions of personality development and the related concepts of the id, ego and superego, primarily because such concepts cannot be seen or

measured. Instead they emphasised biological drives (such as hunger and thirst).

An important feature related to infant emotional development is that of attachment. The essential argument put forward regarding attachment is that the emotional bonds established in infancy form the basis of attitude and behaviour patterns in later adult life, particularly in terms of their relationship with others. The essential goal of such relationships is the maintenance of intimacy via emotional and psychological closeness. Forming strong bonds with significant others enhances the survival possibilities for the infant and young child. Various theories have been put forward to account for the process by which infants become attached or show a preference for their care givers.

#### Psychoanalytic theory

According to psychoanalytic theory, as proposed by Anna Freud (1964), infant social bonding is based on the child's dependency needs. For example, the child 'loves' that person who feeds him or her (the cupboard-love theory of mother-love).

#### Behavioural (learning) theory

Behavioural theory, as proposed by Dollard and Miller (1950), proposes that there are countless opportunities during the first year of life when the caregiver's behaviour is positively associated with the alleviation of an uncomfortable state (for example, changing a wet nappy). When a caregiver responds to such primary needs, his or her actions take on secondary

reinforcing value. The infant then learns to engage in attachment behaviour (for example, crying) to gain closeness to the care-giver who will then fulfil the infant's needs.

### Bowlby – Ainsworth ethology theory

As described by Bowlby (1973), attachment does not start to become organised until some time during the second six months of the first year. Certainly, attachment is gradually developed as a result of behaviours shown from birth (such as crying, looking, smiling) that appear designed to encourage the caregiver to interact and come into closer proximity with the infant. As the infant gets older, these behaviours become organised and directed more explicitly to a particular person, such as the mother, in preference to others, such as strangers. (2)

2. Phillip T. Slee Child, adolescent and family development, second edition  
Cambridge university press 2002

### Attachment

Several theoretical frameworks have been advanced to explain attachment. The most prominent have been psychoanalytical theory, learning theory and ethological theory. As already indicated, by far the most influential theory has been that based on the ethological approach, led by Bowlby, Ainsworth and others. (3)

Kevin Durkin Developmental social psychology from infancy to old age 1995  
Blakwell

## Cognitive theories

The group of theories known as cognitive theories emphasizes mental aspects of development such as logic and memory.

### Piaget's cognitive-development theory

Piaget was struck by the fact that all children seem to go through the same sequence of discoveries about their world, making the same mistakes and arriving at the same solutions.

### Cognitive changes

The remarkable cognitive advances that happen in infancy are highly consistent across environments. Of course, 2-year olds are still a long way from cognitive maturity, but some of the most important steps toward that goal are taken in the first 2 years of life.

Piaget assumed that that a baby assimilates incoming information to the limited array of schemes she is born with – looking, listening, sucking, grasping – and accommodates those schemes based on her experience. He called this form of thinking sensorimotor intelligence. Thus, sensorimotor stage is the period during which infants develop and refine sensorimotor intelligence.

### Sensorimotor stage

In Piaget's view, the newborn who is in Substage 1 of the sensorimotor stage is entirely tied to the immediate present, responding to whatever stimuli are



available. She forgets events from one encounter to the next and does not appear to plan. Substage 2 (from roughly 1 to 4 months) is marked by the beginning of the coordinations between looking and listening, between reaching and looking, between reaching and sucking that are such central features of the 2-month-old's means of exploring the world. The technique that distinguishes substage 2, primary circular reactions, refers to the many simple repetitive actions seen at this time, each organized around the infant's own body. For example, the baby may accidentally suck his thumb one day, find it pleasurable, and repeat the action.

In substage 3 (from about 4 to 8 months), the baby repeats some action in order to trigger a reaction outside her own body, a secondary circular reaction. The baby coos and Mom smiles, so the baby coos again to get Mom to smile again. These initial connections between body actions and external consequences seem to be simple, almost mechanical, links between stimuli and responses. However, in substage 4, the 8-to 12-month-old baby shows at the beginnings of understanding causal connections, at which point she moves into exploratory high gear. Once consequence of this new drive to explore is means-end behaviour, or the ability to keep a goal in mind and devise a plan to achieve it. Babies show this kind of behaviour when they move one toy out of the way to gain access to another. The end is the toy they want; the means to the end is moving the other toy.

In substage 5 from about 12 months to 18 months, exploration of the environment becomes more focused, with the emergence of tertiary circular reactions. In this pattern, the baby doesn't merely repeat the original behaviour but tries out variations. He may try out many sounds or facial

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expressions to see if they will trigger Mum's smile, or he may try dropping a toy from several heights to see if it makes different sounds or lands in different places. At this stage, the baby's behaviour has a purposeful, experimental quality. Nonetheless, Piaget thought that the baby still did not have mental symbols to stand for objects in this substage.

The ability to manipulate mental symbols, such as words or images, marks substage 6, which lasts from roughly 18 months to 24 months of age. This new capacity allows the infant to generate solutions to problems simply by thinking about them, without the trial- and- error behaviour typical of substage 5., as a result, means-end behaviour becomes far more sophisticated than in earlier stages. For example, a 24-month-old who knows there are cookies in the cookie jar can figure out how to get one.

Furthermore, she can find a way to overcome just about any obstacle placed in the path (Bauer, Schwade, Wewerka & Delaney, 1999). If her parents respond to her climbing on the kitchen counter in pursuit of a cookie by moving the cookie jar to the top of the refrigerator, the substage 6 toddler's response will likely be to find a way to climb to the top of the refrigerator. Thus, changes in cognition are behind the common impression of parents and other caregivers that 18-to-24 month -old cannot be left unsupervised, even for very short period of time.

Imitation. Piaget also studied infants' ability to imitate the actions of others, he observed that as early as the first few months of life, infants could imitate actions they could see themselves make, such as hand gestures. But he found that they could not imitate other people's facial gestures until

substage 4 (8-12 months). This second form of imitation seems to require  
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some kind of intermodal perception, combining the visual cues of seeing the other's face with the kinesthetic cues (perception of muscle motion) from one's own facial movements. Piaget argued that imitation of any action that wasn't already in the child's repertoire did not occur until about 1 year, and that deferred imitation – a child's imitation of some action at a later time – was possibly only in substage 6, since deferred imitation requires some kind of internal representation.

Many studies since Piaget's time have suggested that he underestimated the cognitive capacity of infants. By changing the methods used to measure object permanence, for instance, researchers have found that younger infants better understand object movements than Piaget suggested.

Moreover, studies have shown that imitation appears at younger ages than Piaget research implied.

### The beginning of language

#### Theoretical perspectives

The nature-nurture debate is alive and well in discussion of language development. The child's amazing progress in this domain in the early years of life has been explained from both behaviourist point of view and nativist point of view and as part of larger process of cognitive development.

#### The behaviourist view

In the late 1950's, B. F. Skinner, the scientist who formulated operant conditioning theory, suggested a behaviourist explanation of language

development (Skinner, 1957). He claimed that language development begins <https://assignbuster.com/bowlby-developed-and-refined-the-concept-of-attachment/>

with babbling, While babbling, babies accidentally make sounds that somewhat resemble real words as spoken by their parents. Parents hear the wordlike sounds and respond to them with praise and encouragement, which serve as reinforcers. Thus, wordlike babbling becomes more frequent, while utterances that do not resemble words gradually disappear from babies' vocalizations. Skinner further hypothesized that parents and others respond to grammatical uses of words and do not respond to nongrammatical ones. As a result, correct grammar is reinforced and becomes more frequent, but incorrect grammar is extinguished through nonreinforcement.

At first glance, Skinner's theory might appear to make sense. However, systematic examination of the interactions between infants and parents reveals that adults do not reinforce babies' vocalizations in this manner. Instead, parents and others respond to all of a baby's vocalizations, and even sometimes imitate them – a consequence that, according to operant conditioning theory, should prolong babbling rather than lead to the development of grammatical language. Skinner's mistake was that his theory was not based on observations of language development but rather on this assumption that the principles of operant conditioning underlie all human learning and development.

The Nativist View.

Chomsky proposed a nativist explanation for language development: Children's comprehension and production of language are guided by innate language processor that he called the language acquisition device (LAD), which contains the basic grammatical structure of all human language. In

effect, the LAD tells infants what characteristics of language to look for in the stream of speech to which they are exposed. Simply put, the LAD tells babies that there are two basic types of sounds – consonants and vowels – and enables them to properly divide the speech they hear into the two categories so that they can analyze and learn the sounds that are specific to the language they are hearing.

Another influential nativist, Dan Slobin (1985a, 1985b), proposes that babies are pre-programmed to pay attention to the beginnings and the endings of string sounds and to stressed sounds – a hypothesis supported by research (e. g.. Morgan, 1994).

### The Interactionist View

Some theorists argue that language development is part of the broader process of cognitive development and is influenced by both internal and external factors. These theorists are known as interactionists. There are two common threads that run through the interactionists' theories. First, infants are born with some kind of biological preparedness to pay more attention to language than to other kinds of information. Second, interactionists argue that, rather than having a neurological module that is specific to language (i. e., an LAD), the infant's brain has a generalized set of tools that it employs across all of the sub – domains of cognitive development. These tools allow infants to extract general principles from all kinds of specific experience, including those that they have with language. Consequently, some interactionists argue that the nativists have paid too little attention to the role that the social context plays in language development (Tomasello,

1999), while others point out that nativist theories fail to capture the degree to which language and cognition develop independently (Bowerman, 1985).

(4)

4 Denise Boyd, Helen Bee Lifespan Development fifth edition, 2009 united states of america

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