

Whether a child or adult is in a state of security, anxiety or distress is determined in large part by the accessibility and responsiveness of his principal attachment figure.

If a child has a surrogate carer, parents may fear that it will be the surrogate carer, not themselves, who will take that special top spot in the child's affections. It is of the greatest importance to the child that the initial primary attachment figure should be accessible for many years, preferably well into adulthood. I accept, of course, that there are many situations when the sensitive use of good quality, age-appropriate substitute care is the realistic choice for parents. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, a Professor of Anthropology, in her excellent book *Mother Nature*, explains how she used her knowledge of Attachment Theory to arrange day care for her baby. The programme at the Harvard Yard Day Care Centre, which she used, was designed by Berry Brazelton, a leading advocate of Attachment Theory; Professor Hrdy describes a facility that worked so well precisely because it addressed the various attachment needs of the children.

In 1951 my father met Konrad Lorenz; it was a red-letter day for him. He had read Lorenz's work on the imprinting of goslings and how they incessantly followed the first moving object they saw during the crucial early phase. This was an inspiration to my father and he began to examine the biological origins of an infant's "proximity-seeking" behaviour. Imprinting is a bit different to attachment, for the birds evolve from a different stem, but nevertheless the behaviour was sufficiently close to arouse his interest. Birds had always been a source of fascination to him—in fact, I got involved in photography because I discovered the camera that he had used as a naval cadet at Dartmouth College to indulge his hobby of photographing nesting birds.

Being on sabbatical in Palo Alto in 1957 gave my father enough time to pull together all the strands of his work. This was when he said to me:

You know this business about the instinct for a small child to stay close to its mother, and the intimate relationship they form, well, I believe that it's the same instinct to form close relationships that stays with us all our lives; and we suffer the same feelings of loss when a loved one dies as a child feels who's lost his mother.

Part 2

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The following year he read a paper to the British Psycho-Analytic Society (BPAS) called *The Nature of the Child's Tie to its Mother*, in which he first outlined what was to become known as Attachment Theory. This paper was received with great hostility in London; an orchestrated attack on his ideas was mounted. I believe that it was on this occasion that somebody remarked "Very interesting, Dr Bowlby, but what has it got to do with psychoanalysis?" He considered this paper was a watershed in his career—because it simultaneously outlined the basis of the attachment relationship, and also alienated him from the vast majority of his professional psychoanalytic peers for many years to come. Not only was he challenging many of the theories of Klein and Freud, but he was presenting a coherent alternative theory instead. To psychoanalysts at the time, many with unbearable traumas in their past, this new theory must have been deeply disturbing. Years later, in 1987, he remarked: "I have found it extremely unfashionable to attribute psychopathology to real-life experiences."

It is important to realize how many years it took my father to work all this out, and what a struggle it was to establish which parts of the jigsaw fitted where; which bits belonged to a different puzzle; and which bits were just rubbish. Many people still think that he created Attachment Theory fully-formed, in an instant of time, in 1950. He did not. People say he changed his mind; well, the seeds were sown when he was four years old; he was forty-six when *Child Care and the Growth of Love* came out; and he was seventy-three when he completed the Attachment trilogy. I think it is reasonable to assume that there was some development in his knowledge between the ages of four and seventy-three. As for changes of mind, Germaine Greer writes in *The Whole Woman*, (published 2002):

In *The Female Eunuch* I argued that motherhood should not be treated as a substitute career; now I would argue that motherhood should be regarded as a genuine career option, that is to say, as paid work and, as such, as an alternative to other paid work. What this would mean is that every woman who decides to have a child would be paid enough money to raise that child in decent circumstances.

My father supported the view, in print, that mothers should receive proper financial support from the State for the first three years of their child's life.

His guiding principle was that: "If the theory doesn't fit the data, change the theory, not the data." It took him years to develop a theory of attachment that incorporated all the research data that his colleagues had amassed; only then did he start to write the three volumes. I think his forthright manner made him the champion of those who felt supported by him, but a pariah to those who felt threatened by his ideas; I fear there has been a limited meeting of minds as a result.

Video clip of John Bowlby interview

John Bowlby: "About sixty per cent of mothers do a very good job, so the majority of women have a good model to follow—and there is an awful lot to be said for that."

Interviewer: "So you are saying that 40 per cent do not do a good job?"

John Bowlby: "I am."

Interviewer: "And what does that mean?"

John Bowlby: "Well, it means a lot of mental ill-health and disturbance and delinquency and what have you."

Well, that's telling you! No wonder he had his battles! In taking up this principle, I try to be as thoughtful and as considerate as I can, but I do think that these issues have to be addressed. One cannot just sweep great chunks of human nature under the carpet; these are the chunks that make us who we are, that make us human. He considered the best conditions for optimum mental health for children under three years old were:

• a resourceful parent (usually but not necessarily, the biological mother) who was happy to stay at home, with adequate emotional, practical and financial support, where both the parent and child found satisfaction and enjoyment.

My wife, Xenia, was a full-time, stay-at-home mother; she is sometimes asked what it was like to live next door to John Bowlby and bring up his grandchildren. She says that he only ever once gave her advice. This was in 1968, when she was pregnant for the second

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time and under some peer pressure to stop providing "comfort on demand" for our two-year-old. (They said: "You'll make a rod for your own back.") He said to her: "Carry on exactly as you are; take no notice of what others say, you are doing it right." I think that may be a message for some of us to take away tonight. Our daughter Sophie and her husband Matt have recently had a baby and bought a small house. They told us that when house-hunting, they had drawn a three-mile circle around our house, and had only looked at places inside that circle.

I now turn to some of the financial and emotional obstacles that have made Attachment Theory so unpalatable to the public. Humans have an insatiable appetite for knowledge and invention aimed at making life better and easier. However, our genetically inherited developmental needs remain unchanged. If we allow them to be submerged by the lifestyle that technological and social progress has made available, we get into trouble. I was born in 1941 and people of my age are now becoming grandparents; we can see some of our children struggling to arrange their lives and afford the lifestyle that they have grown to accept—the lifestyle and values adopted by my generation. We need to look at the care of small children from the perspective of their parents, the thirty-something generation of new mothers and fathers.

Two big changes during my lifetime can be singled out. First is the dramatic increase in wealth and living standards that much of society enjoys, compared with the 1940s and 1950s when I was a child in England. The second change is perhaps even more dramatic: the huge social and cultural changes brought about by the equal opportunities movement in the 1970s. This opened up to a much wider spectrum of society an array of social, educational, and employment possibilities that had previously been closed on grounds of race, gender, age, class, or creed. The consequent rise in living standards and disposable income for a broad band of middle-class young people raised their expectations very high. These included good housing, transport, holidays, television, designer clothes, mobile phones, central heating, entertainment and leisure activities—not to mention PCs, CDs, plasma screens and all those gizmos. These expectations have been created by my generation and it is not unreasonable for my children to wish to provide these high standards for their own families. However, they need to pay

for this lifestyle and, particularly nowadays, decent housing is expensive. As a result, many new families feel they have little or no choice but to continue earning two salaries throughout their child-rearing years. Having choices is very important and these financial pressures drastically limit the choice of most parents.

I want to touch on the emotional sensitivity of new parents, and in particular the reaction that information on attachment findings produces when people first encounter it. Let me first, however, acknowledge that some parents of small babies feel that parenting would be so frustrating to them that the baby would fare better with long periods of day care and shorter periods of their own "quality time". It must also be acknowledged that in some very dysfunctional circumstances, long periods of non-parental care, foster-care or even adoption may be needed to reduce the transmission of dysfunction to the baby. Lastly, I respect anybody who does not have children at all.

Most informal discussions with parents about attachment-related issues rapidly become focused on their own personal experiences. These reflections may go back to childhood memories of family pleasures, or the pain of family breakdown, or of personal trauma; sometimes people also worry about the parenting arrangements for their own children. The problem here is that much of the memory of childhood is, as this audience will certainly know, stored at the unconscious level. Triggering these memories makes some parents very uncomfortable although they are not sure why; fight, flight, or freeze may be the instinctive response that emerges.

Of the many difficulties surrounding parenting issues, I think day care is the most contentious. One outspoken psychologist, Jay Belsky, has created controversy by spreading the findings of the massive National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) study of day care for over 1,200 children. In spring 2001 the results were released for the cohort which had reached the age of four-and-a-half years. Belsky was quoted as saying:

We find clearly, indisputably and unambiguously that the more time spent in care, the more likely [the children] are to be aggressive and disobedient. . . . Even more surprising, the results are the same regardless of the type of quality of day care, the sex of the child, or whether the family is rich or poor. What seems to matter

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most is time. The more hours spent away from parents, the
more likely is the child to have behavioural problems. . . . In no
case can the findings be described as strong, but a small impact on
many may be of far greater social significance than a large impact
on a few.

Many parents who have no choice but to work will find these
words painful, and will not want to hear them. I think there is a
similarity between the way my father was treated when he deliv-
ered his uncomfortable message many years ago and the way
Belsky is being treated today when he reports the more uncomfort-
able aspects of the NICHD day care study. I did, by the way, take
this quote to Belsky to check he was comfortable with my using the
piece; he confirmed that it was accurate and that he would stand by
it. When I likened the struggle that he was having to my father's
struggle, he said: "I think it has something to do with the initials!"

There is currently a culture glorifying the independence of the
nuclear family who can make it on their own without being depen-
dent on anyone else, and of denigrating the inter-dependence of the
extended family. Peer pressure often encourages mothers to return
to work promptly, aided by attractive employment offers which
may not be available after a maternity break of several years. Many
young couples have made financial commitments which require
them both to return to work after the birth of a baby; there is often,
however, a dramatic shift in their feelings once the new baby
arrives, and they may come to regret entering into those commit-
ments. There are some positive reports about the advantages of
modern childcare arrangements that are reassuring to new parents:

- Playing with other infants in day care helps the social devel-
opment of the child.
- Infants have a better standard of living with two-income
parents.
- Day care infants have a larger vocabulary and are more ready
for pre-school facilities.
- Working parents are less depressed and isolated than stay-at-
home parents.
- High-quality day care can compensate for a very poor family
environment.

- Childcare professionals are more experienced and know how to stimulate babies.

There are also reports of problems associated with modern day care arrangements:

- Parents are less sensitive to the baby's cues for attention if they are apart all day.
- Only one in ten day care places is rated as high-quality, and for many these are unaffordable or unavailable.
- The more time an infant under three is apart from his parents, the more likely he is to be aggressive.
- When multiple care-workers look after a baby, there is a negative impact on his emotional development.
- Separating a small child from a surrogate primary attachment figure can leave lasting emotional scars.

In 1987, on my father's eightieth birthday, the *Boston Globe* quoted from an interview with him where he had said: "What astonishes me most about family life in the United States is that mothers tell me they can't afford to look after their own babies—in the richest country in the world!" He felt that society had overlooked the enormous amount of time involved in delivering emotionally enriching parenting, and that we too often short-change our infants. He thought that making appropriate arrangements for the care of babies and small children needed the intelligent application of Attachment Theory in order to avoid the pitfalls of the past. I realize that there is no benefit in ramming Attachment Theory down the throats of vulnerable parents who cannot alter their circumstances. We need, therefore, to find new ways of opening up the debate before people become locked into decisions they later regret.

How to be a good enough parent, or whether our own parents were good enough for us, or if our children will become good enough parents, or even the definition of a good enough parent, are powerful attachment issues that most people find difficult to talk about. It is frightening to enter the world of scientifically demonstrable evidence concerning the long-term mental health of children. The irony is that it is often people's own past attachment

experiences that prevent them from having a clearer understanding of Attachment Theory.

Video clip of John Bowlby

I think boys learn an enormous amount from being apprenticed to their fathers and girls learn an enormous amount by being apprenticed to their mothers. This is the usual pattern. It's not necessary, but it is the common pattern. Children flourish on attention from adults and if children get an adult's attention, and affection, and enjoyment, and company, and so on, they prosper. So many children unfortunately don't get that from their parents and grandparents. I would say you cannot over-estimate the importance of parental attitudes towards children. It is absolutely crucial. The lessons here are frightfully simple and people who neglect their children do not like hearing them; that's the trouble!

Did you notice that he was quite emotionally choked at one point? It was obviously a very personal message that he brought, but he always tried just to stick with the data. He was guided by his feelings, by his experiences, but he used classic scientific methods in his work and stuck very carefully to the science. His article "Psychoanalysis as Art and Science", is a particularly helpful way of looking at these matters.

An article written shortly after the death of my father summed up, in a sentence, the dilemma between parents' social aspirations and the demands on them as parents. That sentence, which I quote from memory, was: "Why couldn't John Bowlby come up with a theory of child development that was more appropriate [*sic*] to the needs of modern parents?" The dilemma is plain to see in such distorted logic. Part of the trouble is the word "theory"—I've got my theory, you've got yours, and we can have any old theory! Our use of the word "theory" in common parlance is very loose, so why shouldn't somebody come up with a theory that suits us better if you are not using the word in the proper, strictest scientific sense? It is a bad word. I use it here because you all understand what I mean, but I don't use it to a general public audience.

Over the years there has been a polarizing of opinion, whipped up by the media, between those who are vehemently against

attachment thinking as they understand it, and those who are passionately in favour of their version of it. This destructive polarization of opinion prevents the general public from getting a balanced view of Attachment Theory. Let me summarize the four main factors that I believe are preventing the knowledge of Attachment Theory from becoming more widely accepted by the general public:

1. Some people are securely attached and are comfortable with their life choices, hence the topic is of little concern to them.
2. Some are confused by the widespread misrepresentation and ridicule of my father's work in the popular media.
3. Some have personal memories of painful childhood issues that are awakened by the insights afforded by Attachment Theory.
4. Some are anxious about the long-term consequences that limited parenting choices may have for their own children.

The research data on many aspects of Attachment Theory is now unassailable. Somebody recently asked me if I had attended a "big conference in Minneapolis". I had not, and asked why I should have gone there. The answer was: "It was astonishing; there were 3,500 people and the only show in town was your father's work!" Despite that, the way we have been communicating this knowledge to the general public for the past fifty years has not been effective. Many lay people are still mystified by the emotional and social development of their children. For me, the challenge ahead is to find new and appropriate ways to help ordinary men and women to benefit from my father's knowledge.

Vote of thanks by Brett Kahr

Thank you very much, Sir Richard. I think we all realize how lucky we are—those of us who practise in the fields of psychology, counselling, psychoanalysis, or psychotherapy—that Sir Richard has now retired from his post at the Royal Free Hospital, and therefore may devote himself full-time to the furtherance of his research. He has actually given a great gift to those of us who work as mental health professionals.