



HOW APPLICABLE IS
ATTACHMENT THEORY
GLOBALLY AND CULTURALLY
AND WHAT ARE THE
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL
SERVICES AND
PSYCHOTHERAPY

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SEPTEMBER 23, 2024

MA PSYCHOTHERAPY 23 SEPTEMBER 2024

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr Beverly Cole for her suggestions and feedback that led to substantial improvements to this dissertation and Claire Edwards for help and guidance throughout the year.

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Abstract

It has been more than 50 years since John Bowlby's theory of attachment was first introduced into the framework of social and behaviour science. Originally used to explain the child's emotional connection to caregivers, it was quickly expanded to encompass topics such as developmental continuity and change, public policy, developmental psychopathology, romantic relationships and childcare protection. Bowlby also described the attachment system that is active over the entire lifetime of the individual. His theory has offered significant insight into the early years of human experience, yet many of the assumptions that underpin attachment are now considered contestable. At the heart of attachment theory is the claim that it is universally applicable, and it has a major influence on the perceived norms of how children should be raised. One of the most long-standing debates on attachment theory is its application to non-Western communities. There is some support for the universality of attachment theory, however, there is a limited amount of research into cross-culture studies, and it has been suggested that Bowlby's Attachment Theory represents the Western middle-class perspective, and completely ignores the parental values and practises of the majority of the world. This research looked at the dangers of applying Western theoretical perspectives to non-industrial cultures and families. It found that the misuse and misconception of Attachment Theory has been used by Western social care services to the detriment of indigenous families and communities, whose parenting practices are more likely to involve wider family and community care models. From a therapeutic standpoint this is important, as the therapist needs to be mindful of applying the Theory of Attachment, which is seen as appropriate for the Western world, but may not work for people from other cultures.

Key Words

Attachment theory, Bowlby, Alloparenting, sensitive parenting, culture, child protection, colonisation, child custody, attachment-based interventions, mother-infant relationship, cross-culture, therapy, attachment disorders, social work, psychotherapy.

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This dissertation is the result of my own independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

According to Thompson et al. (2022) attachment theory has become the most influential viewpoint in social science more than 50 years since it was proposed by John Bowlby. Bowlby (1907-1990) formulated his theory while working with children who had been evacuated from their homes during World War II (1939-45) (Jarvis, 2022). His theory has offered important insights into human behaviour in the early years of development and an insight into human relationships (Smith et al., 2017). The focus of attachment theory was the relationship that was formed between mother and child and how this attachment style is active over an entire lifetime (Sutton, 2018). Bowlby not only explored the building of the relationship between caregiver and child, but also the loss and grief that was experienced between mother and infant when separated (Harlow, 2021). According to Sutton (2019) the major focus of Bowlby's theory was the relationship between the parent and the child and how the attachment figure was sought after during times of danger and discomfort. Fearon and Roisman (2017) have pointed out that his original theory was not one of parenting and the interaction between mother and child, but a psychobiological and evolutionary account of human development, that was later developed further by Ainsworth (1978) who proposed differences in attachment behaviour. Ainsworth, Water and Wall (1978) developed a technique for analysing the quality of attachment, and concluded by categorising attachment into three types: secure, insecure avoidant, and insecure resistant or ambivalent. A fourth category, insecure disorganised attachment, was later added by Main and Solomon (1986, cited in Harlow, 2021).

Sutton (2019) has pointed out that Bowlby described a person's attachment style as being active over a person's entire lifetime, and that it would have an influence over the individual and how they related to the world and others. According to Harlow (2021), Bowlby argued that the attachment between caregiver and child, which provided a mental model for the child and later as an adult, was fixed early in life and would remain for the rest of the person's life. However, since its inception, attachment theory has become the framework for explaining children's emotional bonds with their caregiver and has been expanded to include romantic relationships and the development of psychopathology (Thompson et al., 2022). The theory has also had an influential impact on child-care systems globally, and has helped shape policies, attitudes and guidelines for teachers who work with vulnerable children (Smith et al., 2017).

Furthermore, attachment theory has proven to have a wide appeal in a variety of domains such as mental health, child development, personality, interpersonal relationships, and the social sciences (Sutton, 2019). According to Sutton (2019) there is a considerable amount of research that supports the connection between attachment styles and romantic relationships in adolescence and adulthood. Harlow (2021) has pointed out that positive parenting, by means of gestures of love, affection, kind words and praise that are communicated to children, make them feel valued and build self-esteem. Whereas, according to Ritblatt and Longstreth (2019) children with insecure attachment will have more difficulty in distinguishing between safe and threatening situations than those with secure attachment. Smith et al., (2017) argues that attachment theory is supported by neuroscience, which has found a correlation between neuroimages of infant's brain sizes and different attachment styles, but warns of the potential for this to be misleading and difficult to establish with certainty. Jarvis (2020) has also pointed to the recent neurophysiological research into the complex relationship between the biology of stress hormone cortisol and attachment in infants, and the impact on mental health. However, while the theory of human attachment has informed policies, practices, and theory, it has now become the subject of critique and the claims that underpin attachment theory are contestable (Harlow, 2021).

According to Fearon and Roisman (2017), there are many essential elements of attachment theory that support the primary hypothesis, but there are a few components that restrict the scope of its use. For instance, Behrens (2016) has pointed to the debate of attachment being universally applicable, and points to the cultural studies of children who are cared for by multiple caregivers. Choate et al. (2019) have argued that attachment theory has failed to capture the communal parenting systems that are completely different from the dyadic Western style of childcare that underpins attachment theory. Keller (2017) points to the middle-class model of parenting that rests purely on the dyadic relationship between mother and child during the early years of childhood. Keller (2017) has argued that there are many cultural variations in childcare responsibilities, and that it may not be the biological mother who comes to the aid of an infant in distress. Furthermore, mothers are not the only figures who form close bonds with the infant in the first few days of its life, and it has been argued that fathers play an important role in a child's early development (Kisla and Cetin 2023). The methodology of defining parenting from a Eurocentric perspective does not take into account the different parenting styles of Indigenous cultures and that this needs to be addressed, according to Choate et al. (2020).

Furthermore, Keller (2017) points to the traditions of non-Western farming communities, and the multiparty polyadic models that provide a vastly different experience for a child leading to different concepts of self and relationships. Whilst attachment theory has become the standard when it comes to placing children in care, and what is considered to be in the best interest of a child (Forslund et al 2022), placing children in foster care or residential homes has often been problematic, and treatment programmes do not have good outcomes because staff are not highly trained and only a few are trained therapists or counsellors (Smith et al., 2017). Furthermore, Choate et al. (2020) has highlighted the ongoing practice of the colonising of Indigenous children into intervention programs, and how Western psychological and social work theories have been central in placing children into non-indigenous homes. According to Smith et al. (2017) there has been an overzealous use of attachment theory when considering the practical aspects of parenting children in foster care settings, and there is evidence that the misapplication of attachment has led to children being removed from their families and in doing so has led to violation of children's and parents' human rights (Granqvist et al., 2017). Research shows that diverse cultures have different perceptions of child-rearing, and culture defines childcare where parents transfer cultural messages, rules, and values (Mohsen et al., 2020) and there is a growing concern amongst researchers that attachment theory as a universal theme for all children in the world does not consider the eco-social diversity of other cultures (Keller, 2017).

Attachment theory has contributed much to our understanding of individuals' mental health and well-being and represents one of the best attempts to explain important aspects of the psychological and relational functions of human beings (Gazzillo et al., 2019). Bowlby developed a theory not just for human development, but importantly for psychotherapy and how unhealthy attachment bonds may lead to many forms of emotional distress such as anger, anxiety, depression and emotional detachment (Levy and Johnson, 2019). Therapists from many different modalities see attachment as central to the therapeutic process as a way of making sense of their clients and a way of working to bring about change (Slade and Holmes, 2019). Making clients feel safety is a fundamental ingredient in the therapeutic encounter, and over the course of therapy patients begin to see their therapist as an attached figure (Mair, 2020). Providing clients with a temporary attached figure helps the individual feel safe and able to explore painful aspects of their lives in a safe and supportive environment (Levy and Johnson 2019).

According to Yotsidi et al. (2019), clients who show a secure attachment to their therapist are likely to develop a strong working alliance and are more likely to explore deeper aspects of their emotional experiences. Most people seeking therapeutic interventions have an insecure attached base, they will often display painful and self-defeating ways of managing their emotional lives, and will have difficulty in regulating intense feelings especially in interpersonal relationships (Slade and Holmes, 2019). According to Barazzone et al. (2019) there is also now a growing interest in the relationship between attachment and treatment plans for clients who demonstrate symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), and adult attachment insecurities have provided a rich link in understanding of the association between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and identifying appropriate strategies for intervention (Cooke et al., 2019). However, there have been questions raised as to whether a Western construct of mental health can be applied to cultures outside the developed world, and the appropriateness of applying Western theories (Duan 2018).

Rationale

The author has chosen this topic to research because of his increasing awareness of white Western constructs that has historically imposed itself on other cultures globally with a total disregard for other cultures and their beliefs. Attachment theory is another Western construct that has played a major role in decision making when placing indigenous children into care (White et al., 2020). Since attachment theory was first introduced as a theory for child development, it has attracted much criticism and there have been many who have challenged the concept (Jarvis 2022). With the rise in prominence of child development theories after World War II, Bowlby's attachment theory has dominated the landscape and has been used to describe many aspects of human development and mental well-being (Thompson et al., 2022). Anthropologist Margret Mead (1901-1978) was one of the first to challenge the theory pointing to the fact that Bowlby's theory was a Western construct, and she claimed that there is great diversity in child rearing practices globally, and that there are substantial flaws in attachment theory (Vicedo 2020). Additionally, the author has always had a keen interest in hunter-gatherer societies from his studies in archaeology and has been curious about how attachment theory can be applied to these societies that still do exist today in many parts of the world outside the Western developed world. Aspects of attachment theory have been misused in the past, and this has resulted in children being removed from their biological parents and placed into care, based on a preconceived view of infant-parent styles of attachment (Granqvist et al., 2017).

Research Aim:

The aim of this study is to critically review the literature on attachment theory and to examine its claim to be universal and culturally applicable when considering the variations in child-rearing practice, family dynamics and to consider implications on social work and therapeutic interventions. To gain a deeper understanding of its relevance to worldwide cultures and to help researchers to become initiative-taking in rectifying any misuse of attachment theory.

Objectives:

- Explore the role of attachment from a Western perspective and the implications on non-western cultures.
- Conduct a critical review of literature from the past six years.
- Identify whether attachment theory is applicable across diverse cultures.
- Highlight gaps in the research literature related to cross cultural diversity.
- Consider the implications of attachment theory for policy in child welfare and social work.

Research question:

How applicable is Attachment Theory globally and culturally and what are the implications for social services and psychotherapy.

Chapter 2. Methodology

The Philosophical Lens

The literature has been viewed through a social constructionist lens. This means that the perception of reality is shaped by social influences, and what is seen as real is constructed by language which creates a lens through which the world is experienced (Boyland, 2019). The theory is that many of the things that people see, and experience are not real, but are opinions given to them and shaped by collective knowledge of the world. Social construction theory is based on the concept that many aspects of the world are not real, but it is believed they are real through social agreement. Humans are continuously creating a shared experience that seems objective and factual and that gives meaning to the perceived reality. According to Social Constructionism, what is known about the world is not through intuition, but is shaped by other people's views and beliefs, and therefore perceptions of the world can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Vera 2016).

According to Boyland (2019) individuals live in their own worlds and interpret reality in their own way, and that interpretation has an influence on the perception of the data and research that they are investigating. This is a useful lens through which to view this topic, as according to Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), research methods have traditionally been exclusively focused on Western approaches, which have been transported around the world along with European attitudes towards other cultures, often leading to misinterpretations of reality. The Social Constructionist lens therefore highlights this potential for bias and mis-representation by Eurocentric Western science.

Thematic Analysis

The author used the 6 steps of thematic analysis that has been prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2021), as a method of identifying patterns and themes within the research literature. The thematic analysis began by reading the abstracts, introductions and conclusions to understand an overview of the research. According to Braun and Clarke (2021) this is the first stage where the researcher immerses oneself in the data looking for patterns and themes that related to the research question. The literature was gathered using databases from the university library such as Jstor, Proquest Central, Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, and APA Psych Articles. Search Terms, such as Attachment theory, Social services and Attachment, Attachment theory and culture, Attachment theory and Psychotherapy were entered into the data base, and this was narrowed down to the most recent according to date. The process of thematic analysis began with reading the abstracts, introductions and conclusions to understand an overview of the research. The author then began by looking at themes and patterns that were related to the research question. The next stage began with coding the themes, by identifying relevant sections of the data and grouping themes that showed similarities. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency within the data and then finally groups of themes were defined and labelled. The reference lists of the retrieved articles were examined manually to identify additional articles relevant to the research question (See Appendix 1).

Chapter 3. Critique of Literature and Discussion

According to Mesman (2021b) one of the biggest challenges to the theory of attachment is to evaluate the claim that it is universally applicable outside the Western developed world. The development of attachment theory over the last half century has ignited important insights into human relationships and has transformed attitudes to childcare. According to Ein-Dor and Hirschberger (2016), attachment theory has stimulated researchers, and it has been applied to many topics, such as relational well-being, mate selection, emotional response, dreams, ethical values, and psychotherapy. Whilst many of these developments have been valuable, it has also been claimed by Smith et al. (2017) that attachment has been used to support the ideal view of a family structure, and that mothers were advised to stay at home until the child reached the age of three or risk the child becoming psychologically damaged, highlighting the powerful influence this theory has had over society and the norms of childrearing. The idea of inadequate emotional support during infancy and childhood and the effects on mental health were suggested by the Mental Hygiene Movement that originated in America in 1909 and then expanded into Canada in 1918 (van der Horst, 2020). Yip et al., (2017) have pointed to the increasing number of articles critiquing attachment theory over the years, furthermore, there have been numerous foundational principles that have been debated and are highlighted in the current literature, indicating that the theory is contested.

Bowlby's theory was formulated to represent a universal account of the bond between the caregiver and the child, proposing that infants become attached to one figure (Mesman et al., 2016a). Bowlby, who was originally heavily influenced by Freud, was a member of a British group of relational theorists, who were exploring the relationship between caregiver and child and how the structure of the child's mind developed (Harlow, 2021). Attachment theory has been associated with John Bowlby, but the term was first used by Polish social teacher Janusz Korczak (Smith et al., 2017) who from his research concluded that the main caregiver has a particular role to play in maximising a child's chances of survival (Lai and Carr, 2018). Bowlby's theory began with the study of the psychological needs of displaced children following the end of the Second World War, and concluded that children need to experience a warm and nurturing relationship with a main caregiver to develop the capacity for satisfaction and enjoyment (Smith et al., 2017).

Bowlby claimed that from early infancy, children seek the sensitivity and care of their main caregiver for protection and security, and that from these early experiences the child will develop a sense of the self (Spruit et al., 2020). Following World War II, and five years of fighting and bombing raids throughout the continent, there were 13 million orphans in Europe and there was a need for psychologists and psychiatrists to address not just the problem of undernourishment but the social and emotional development of the displaced children (Van der Horst et al., 2020). Bowlby claimed that placing children in care institutions is generally harmful and emotionally damaging for the child (Duschinsky et al., 2020). This is backed up by Bakermans-Kranenburg (2021), whose recent study which included over 100,000 children from 65 countries worldwide, showed that individuals who grow up in institutions have severe delays in brain development and physical growth compared to children who did not grow up in institutions. According to Jarvis (2020), Bowlby's theory was that mother and child had a natural evolved drive to form a strong emotional bond, and that if this bond were broken, or never made, the result would create lifelong psychological problems for the individual. He proposed that the quality of this relationship and bond with the mother would shape the Internal Working Model of the child (IWM) (Bowlby, 1969 cited in Spruit et al., 2020). This theory was later expanded by Mian et al. (1985) and the focus shifted from solely looking at the child's behavioural patterns to include the developing adult. However, researchers have found it difficult to study how childhood behaviour is transferred to the adult (Bosmans et al., 2020). As the person grows and develops the more complex and elaborate the IWM becomes as do the attachment strategies and behaviours associated with the self and others (Simpson and Karantzas, 2018). However, understanding the fluctuations of attachment styles across a lifespan has been challenging and complex (Lia and Carr 2018). It has been found that children who have caregivers who are consistent with secure attachment can manage their stress more effectively, compared with children who have been exposed to trauma, neglect and maltreatment such as parental drug and alcohol abuse (Stubbs, 2018). One serious factor that Bowlby did not consider is the use of alcohol and drug consumption during pregnancy and postnatally, and the effects of this on the ability to care for an infant (Upadhyaya et al., 2018). Drug and alcohol abuse can have a devastating impact on offspring during their development, and substance misuse has also been linked to insecure attachment styles in children (Sutton 2019).

However, Bowlby conducted a significant report for the World Health Organisation (WHO), on Maternal Care and Mental Health, that outlined his views and supported his theory of important links between mother and child (Bowlby, 1952, cited in Lahousen et al., 2019). This widely influential report pointed out that psychiatry and psychologists had determined that maternal care was imperative for the emotional development of children (Vicedo, 2017). His theory gained enormous support from the public because so many children experienced emotional and physical disruption at the end of World War II, and there was a movement to encourage women to stay at home with the children (Jarvis, 2022). However, Van der Horst et al. (2020) have pointed out that Bowlby was relatively unknown at the time, and such an important appointment would have been unlikely for him at this stage of his career if it were not for his good friend Ronald Hargreaves (1908-1962). Hargreaves was familiar with Bowlby's theory and had met him while serving as a military doctor during the war (Bahn, 2021). Nevertheless, much of Bowlby's theory was shaped before the war from his work as a clinical professional where he concluded that many mental health conditions may be because the main care giver displayed inadequate emotional support to the infant (Van der Horst et al., 2020). Similar studies with orphaned children, which were conducted some years earlier than Bowlby's initial research, supported his theory but were fiercely dismissed by leading psychoanalytic representatives at the time (Lahousen, 2019).

Vicedo (2017) has pointed to the historical examination of the development of Bowlby's theory from the period between the 1950s to the 1980s, that shows the criticism and concerns of the substantial flaws in his viewpoint but were ignored. For instance, studies conducted in large extended middle-class families in Scotland, found that infants were able to bond with small groups of adults during their first few months (Jarvis, 2022). However, the major focus of attachment theory was initially the relationship between child and mother, and it later described the attachment system as active over the entire lifetime of the individual (Sutton, 2019). Bowlby went on to contend that the attachment between mother and child, provided a mental model for the child, and later on as an adult, influencing how they would react to the world and perceive others (Harlow, 2021). Underpinning Bowlby's theory were the leading European ethologists Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen who laid the foundation for a biological and evolutionary basis for the mother and child relationship (van der Horst et al., 2020). Bowlby claimed that the child's attachment behaviour is shaped in their early years as they learn to adapt in a particular environment and build a cognitive affective structure of the self (Gazzillo, 2020).

Bowlby pointed to the importance of secure attachment to the survival and well-being of children and for the capacity to emotionally regulate in times of stress (Barazzone, 2019). Since its inception, many anthropologists and cultural psychologists have challenged the theory of attachment, however, pointing to a greater diversity in behaviour patterns in humans than Bowlby claimed (Vicedo, 2017). For instance, in many cultural environments the mother is not the first to touch the child and from the moment of birth the infant is passed on to other caregivers which creates multiple attached figures (Keller, 2017). According to Yip et al. (2017) group attachment figures have an evolutionary advantage as the group can offer support when conditions become harsh. However, Bowlby moved from theoretical and observational claims to experimental evidence work with rhesus monkeys, in collaboration with American animal psychologist Harry Harlow (Van der Horst, 2020). The experiment with rhesus monkeys demonstrated that there is not just the need to satisfy the hunger of the young, but also the importance of physical contact which was essential for socio-emotional development (Lahousen et al., 2019). According to Smith et al. (2017) Bowlby's formulation of attachment theory can be traced back to the growth of psychoanalysis and the importance of personal emotional support in the care system. Bowlby concluded that the primary caregiver had a particular role to play in the development of the child, and from his findings deduced that there are four stages in the development of attachment (Harlow, 2021). He proposed that early attachment begins at birth with a 6-week pre-attachment stage, early arising attachment develops between 6 weeks to 8 months, clear cut attachment 8 to 24 months and differentiation and integration of attachment 18 months to 2 years (Lahousen et al., 2019).

Bowlby also hypothesised that the attachment system is the primary biologically evolved system that promotes the individual to seek support in times of danger (Ein-Dor and Hirschberger, 2016). Supporting Bowlby's theory, and expanding on the methodology, was Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) an American-Canadian psychologist who developed a typology of attachment patterns in infants, that was based on laboratory observations known as the 'Strange Situation Procedure' (Smith et al., 2017). Gregory et al. (2020) have pointed out that Ainsworth's development of this methodology was pioneering as it was able to provide evidence of behaviours in a clinical setting. According to Jarvis (2022), Ainsworth's studies began in Uganda working with 18-month-old babies and their mothers, observing behaviour types when they were separated from their mothers. She began by observing how children explored unfamiliar settings and toys in the room without the child's main caregivers (Granqvist et al., 2017).

Ainsworth observed how the infants reacted to the departure of the caregiver and how they behaved upon their return. From these observations seven responses to separation from the mother were noted and this formed the basis of Ainsworth's Attachment Scale (Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2021). Those who expressed distress on the departure of the caregiver, but were reassured on their return, were considered to have a secure attachment. Infants who found it difficult to be assured on the care giver's return were categorised as anxious or avoidant (Yip et al., 2017). Ainsworth also devised a method to determine the quality of attachment, and described three main types: secure, insecure avoidant and insecure resistant or ambivalent (Harlow, 2021). These theories were developed by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978), and were later advanced by Main and Solomon (1986). Ainsworth claimed that from her studies she was able explore the quality of attachments and proposed that insecure attachment was the result of fragility in the child's internal working model (Jarvis, 2022). Since the development of the theory of attachment patterns, a fourth category was added; insecure-disorganised attachment (Fearon and Roisman, 2017). This assessment procedure of mother and child behaviour patterns is seen by many as the gold standard within the construct of sensitive parenting (Gregory et al., 2020).

After her studies of care practices of the Ganda people of central Africa, Ainsworth continued her observations with 26 white middle-class mother-infant pairs in America (Vicedo, 2017). Keller (2018) has pointed out that the model of childcare from a Western middle-class philosophy, is based on families with an elevated level of education and few children in the family. Furthermore, the Western middle classes only represent about 5% of the world population, compared to traditional farming communities in non-Western countries that represent about 30-40% of the world population, therefore it could be argued that Ainsworth's findings are not applicable outside middle class America, however, Mesman et al. (2016b) have argued that even though there are a limited number of studies looking at attachment across diverse cultures, they do provide some support for the hypothesis of attachment theory being relevant across the world. According to Chaudhary and Swanepoel (2023), humans lived as hunter-gatherers for thousands of years, and studying contemporary hunter gatherer societies can offer important insights into caregiving practises and how children adapt psychologically to their conditions. According to Voges et al. (2019) using the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) as a means to measure attachment patterns could be problematic because separation and the response infants have to strangers can be different depending on their cultural background.

However, Ainsworth did not include any ethnographic data about the socio-economic background or culture of child rearing and cultural beliefs (Vicedo, 2017). According to Voges (2019) Africa is one of the most understudied continents when it comes to attachment theory, and could be the key to understanding such complexities between the child and an attached figure. Central to Bowlby's theory was the behaviour resulting from the loss of an attached care giver and the importance of the psychological and emotional intensity of the behaviour (Thompson et al., 2022). Attachment theory suggests that behaviours such as crying and smiling are social releasers from the infant, which stimulate the adult caregiver's behaviour and promote the need for emotional support (Upadhyaya, 2018). The parental response to infants crying has been debated for decades and there has been some debate as to the length of time it should take to comfort a child. Additionally, Mesman et al. (2016a) have highlighted that the sensitive construct of parenting that Ainsworth developed, does not include any list of concrete behaviours from the mothers that are considered sensitive or insensitive. This view assumes that a secure attachment base is only possible if the child experiences an unconditional and well attuned response from the main caregiver, mainly the mother, (Keller 2017). Critics have argued that the Western bias of attachment theory has led to it being applied in an oversimplistic manner in the context of parenting and that there is little clarity as to what sensitive parenting constitutes (Chaudhary et al, 2023).

It has been suggested that Bowlby focused upon the concept of behavioural systems, to illustrate how human beings organise behaviour in response to inevitable environmental changes, to maximise chances of survival and reproduction (Lai and Carr, 2018). His original theory was not one of parenting, but a psychobiological theory, claiming that from an evolutionary perspective, becoming attached to a caregiver is a valuable evolutionary element of human development and behaviour for survival (Mesman et al., 2016a). This is because human infants are defenceless and require adult care for a number of years before becoming completely independent (Mesman et al., 2016). Lahousen et al. (2010) have argued that the roots of human social motivations are primarily for hunger that leads the infant to approach the mother and attachment is a secondary motivation system, but this theory was strongly disputed by Bowlby. From an anthropological perspective, the evolutionary progression from hominids to homo sapiens required a larger and more complex brain, and as a result infants required longer periods of support and supervision (Lahousen et al., 2019).

According to Esposito et al. (2017) humans have a natural instinct that is evolutionarily driven to seek social interactions that influence the physiological and biological processes by modulation of brain sensitivity. Humans are dependent on an environment that is caring and supportive to help them develop competence for survival in the communities in which they live (Keller, 2017). Bakermans-Kranenburg (2021) contends that from an evolutionary perspective, humans have direct attachment behaviour to a specific figure that the infant would instantly turn to in times of danger for protection. Furthermore, the biological caregiver would not hesitate to react in times of danger to protect the child from harm. In contradiction to this, Ein-Dor and Hirschberger (2016) have argued that because human infants are poorly equipped to deal with danger, having none of the defences that wild animals have, such as sharp teeth and claws or the ability to fly from danger, their strength is in numbers, which makes the evolutionary case for collective parenting.

Alloparenting

Ainsworth and Bowlby promoted the view of a monotropic relationship, usually with the mother, that was unique and completely different from any other relationship, and stated that if never formed, this would have profound consequences for the child's development (Keller 2017). According to Jarvis (2022) this argument of monotropy in the animal world is perfectly plausible, but this concept in humans has always been open to question. Bakermans-Kranenburg (2021) has argued that having a single figure solely responsible for the child would be a significant risk, and is probably evolutionarily doubtful, because it reduces the chances of survival for the species, yet Bowlby's theory was formulated to represent a universally applicable model of the bond between mother and child (Mesman et al., 2016b). Another claim made by Ainsworth and Bowlby, which may be a misconception, is that the evolutionary basis of attachment can be universally applied, which in turn implies that parenting quality is universal (Keller, 2017). According to this hypothesis, similar patterns of sensitive caregiving should be observed across all cultures, however, if a particular cultural group does not display the expected parental sensitivity, this brings into question the universality of the hypothesis of attachment theory (Mesman et al., 2021). The early interactions between caregiver and infant help stimulate the cognitive and socioemotional development that is essential for forming relationships later in life (Esposito et al., 2017). Keller (2017) has argued that caregiving for the child is adapted to the sociocultural environment in which the children are raised in order for them to become competent adults within the community.

For instance, Vicedo (2017) has pointed to the studies of Samoan children who were cared for by a number of different people who later grew up to be well balanced individuals. From an evolutionary perspective having more than one main caregiver increases the chance of the infant's survival because the loss of the only dependent would have devastating consequences for the child (Bakermans-Kranenburg 2021). According to anthropological records there are a variety of non-Western communities which share the responsibility of childcare that include children, adults and kin (Morelli et al., 2017). In many non-Western rural cultures, infants are cared for by a number of caregivers, and one study showed that as many as 24 people cared for an infant (Mesman et al., 2016a). According to Nelson (2020) alloparental care, which means care by adults other than parents, has been essential for human reproduction, and it has been estimated that this form of care for infants has been conducted for over 200,000 years. Choate et al. (2020) have argued that this form of care around collective groups has persisted in indigenous cultures for thousands of years and is still practiced today. Non-maternal multiple caregiving has been practiced throughout human evolutionary history but understanding its role in childhood development remains limited and further research is required outside the Western construct (Chaudhary et al., 2023). Furthermore, access to a number of caregivers is more than likely to have helped the species to expand their environments and increased valuable resources that are vital for human survival especially in times of stress. According to Keller (2017), the practice of alloparenting is widely seen in the living arrangements of non-Western hunter-gatherer societies that also include farmers and fisherman. For instance, the rural Gusil community in Kenya where the mothers are the main caregivers, but leave the infants with older siblings when working on the nearby farm (Mesman et al., 2021). According to Lia and Carr (2018), with age the expansion and extension of social relations with an attached figure will provide a safe haven and a secure base for the individual. Mothers in rural Madagascar also demonstrate similar parental patterns, only tending to the child's basic needs, while the elder children provide the cognitive stimulating activities (Morelli et al., 2017).

[Sensitive Parenting.](#)

According to Mesman et al. (2018) Mary Ainsworth also developed the idea of 'sensitive response' within the theory of attachment and concluded that the more sensitive the response was from the caregiver, the more secure the attachment would be for the child. Sensitive responses is the most studied aspects of attachment theory and one of the most essential elements that determine a secure attachment style in children (Fourment et al., 2022).

Ainsworth developed this theory after extensive observations of mother and child dyads, claiming this concept was universally applicable (Dawson, 2018). Ainsworth defined this sensitive caregiving as the ability for the mother to recognise and to respond to the infant's needs and the competence to identify what the child's needs were (Mesman, 2021b). Ainsworth hypothesised that the sensitive mother is well attuned to the infant's needs, and signals are acutely interpreted to satisfy the child leading to a secure base for support (Mesman et al., 2016). Ainsworth claimed that infants are more likely to develop a secure base if the child has received a sensitive response from the mother, unless the infant has suffered neurodevelopmental problems (Fourment, 2022), however, as pointed out by Mesman (2018) the majority of her behavioural observations were based on Western middle-class cases. Studies in non-Western societies have demonstrated a greater diversity in behaviours than Bowlby's theory acknowledges, but according to Vicedo (2017) he chose to ignore the criticism, for instance babies within hunter gatherer communities are carried for much longer periods of the day compared to Western societies where contact with the infant is far less (Chaudhary et al., 2023). Attachment theory has also been criticised for making the assertion that the theory and the ways in which it is interpreted are universally applicable (Behrens, 2016). Mesman (2021a) has argued that Ainsworth's observations did not indicate what the mother should do, but the focus was on how sensitive the parent should be towards the infant. However, Ainsworth's concept of maternal sensitivity has been widely used to describe a number of caregiving attributes and maternal behaviours, for instance maternal competence, maternal responses and the quality of response (Dawson, 2018). One of the major criticisms is that it only focuses on the mother and infant relationship, and this theory does not fit with many non-Western communities where multiple caregivers play a key role in caring for the infant (Mesman et al., 2016a). Bakerman-Kranenburg (2021) points to the famous African proverb that it takes a whole village or community to raise a child.

Harlow (2021) has pointed out that since the establishment of Bowlby's attachment theory, researchers have developed findings, and new theoretical perceptions have given rise to criticism of the attachment model. Smith et al. (2017) have argued that many of the hypotheses that underpin attachment theory are now considered to be contestable. It is widely claimed that attachment has become the most important model for explaining the relationship between mother and child in professional settings (Fitzgerald, 2020), however, Smith et al., (2017) highlight concerns about attachment patterns and an over reliance on the theory with regards to how to bring up children from a socio-cultural perspective.

Many of the studies in recent years have focused on the mother and child attachment, with little research into the importance of the father in the development in the infant (Kisla and Cetin, 2023). According to Cowan and Cowan (2019), not including fathers in research has been standard practice in academic psychology, a practice that has continued in recent years due to the increasing divorce rate and single parenting. Mesman et al., (2016a) have pointed out that even when both parents are observed interacting with the child, they are treated only as mother-child and father-child relationships and not as a combined unit. Kisla and Cetin (2023) have argued that fathers have a key role to play in the development of the child and formation of a secure attachment. Furthermore, having both parents from birth reduces feelings of abandonment and increases the confidence in children. There is no doubt that Bowlby's ideas of the parent-child relationship have brought a better scientific understanding of sensitive behaviour towards children (Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Furthermore, there is not a dispute that all children require a place of safety, support, identity and a connection to values that resonate across diverse cultures (Choate et al., 2020). However, the starting point of critique is whether the theory's description of patterns between child and caregiver are the same behaviours across unfamiliar cultures in non-developed countries (Mesman, 2018). Keller (2017) points out that attachment theory only represents a Western middle-class philosophy, and the concept of a single caregiver does not correspond with worldwide patterns that cultural anthropologists have discovered. In support of this idea, Strand (2020) claims that attachment theory has often been questioned by anthropologists and psychologists as to its legitimacy in explaining parenting practices across other cultures. For instance, the lack of sensitivity response is normal practice in many non-Western countries, and a framework for assessing attachment in one culture does not necessarily fit other cultures, therefore assessments should be based on the culture in context (Strand, 2020).

Thompson et al. (2022) have argued that such questions on the problem of attachment promote reflection on how the theory has progressed over the past half century, and the need for further scrutiny. More importantly Strand (2020) claims that attachment theorists have rejected and distorted the evidence that indicates there is a greater diversity in maternal behaviour that might refute the claim of the universal model of attachment. As the theory of attachment has evolved, differing approaches have been gleaned, for instance Kisla and Cetin (2023) have pointed out that when examining the literature, the basis of the theory is the relationship between mother and child and the prediction of attachment styles.

Bowlby's view was that the mother and child relationship was unique and different from all other forms of attachment the infant would make during the sensitive years of care (Keller, 2017). However, according to Cowan and Cowan (2019) attachment theory has begun to develop by including fathers, and has shown that babies demonstrate similar reactions when separated from their fathers as they do from their mothers. This demonstrates that not only mothers form close relationships with their babies, but also fathers, who also have a significant role to play in the development of the child (Kisla and Cetin, 2023). Cowan and Cowan (2019) have argued that ignoring fathers in attachment research is missing essential information that could contribute to our understanding of attachment theory. According to Voges et al. (2019), there is an imbalance in knowledge regarding infant mental health, because 96% of articles published between 1996-2001 were authored by European and North American researchers. Furthermore, Bowlby's hypothesis has only been evaluated sporadically outside the global North, and any cross-culture data to support the competence of this hypothesis is still inadequate (Fourment, 2022).

The construct of sensitivity was first defined by Ainsworth to describe the patterns and behaviour of the caregiver and the attachment to the child (Mesman et al., 2016a). According to Keller (2017) Ainsworth developed this theory from her observation of American middle-class mothers and their children. In this famous, and important study of attachment, 26 families were selected, and extensive home observations were conducted into the first year of the children's lives, that measured parental sensitivity (Van-Ijzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2021). Ainsworth and her colleagues studied the mothers' ability to notice signals from the child, and the ability of the caregiver to respond accurately to the child's needs (Mesman, 2018). For instance, if the child cried the mother would respond by soothing the infant and interpreting the needs of the child. This is an important characteristic that creates a secure base for the child, providing that the signals are interpreted correctly by the caregiver. Furthermore, this gives the infant confidence to explore, with the knowledge that they have a safe place to return to if there is a perceived threat of danger (Mesman, 2016b). During the study, Ainsworth was unable to identify behavioural patterns that she had observed in Uganda, but did not see this as evidence for diversity of parenting styles in other cultures (Vicedo, 2017), and the construct of maternal sensitivity was developed to explain parental qualities that help promote attachment securities and to foster positive parenting skills globally (Dawson, 2018).

There is an increased amount of research that would suggest that early life experiences and close relationships have a significant impact on mental health and well-being (Gregory et al., 2019). According to Sutton (2019) this positive relationship would influence the person's internal working models (IWM) which provides a mental representation of the self and the way that a person relates to others. Furthermore, if a child were shown little or no response from their caregiver, this would have a negative impact on their IWM, resulting in low self-esteem and a negative perception of the world and others. According to Lia and Carr (2018), some attachment theorists have suggested that there are two separate working models of attachment theory. One that is fixed in early childhood, and the other which is a phase specific continuous working model that suggests attachment shapes and updates through the person's life span based on new experiences. Mesman et al. (2021) have pointed out that according to the universal hypothesis claim that is associated with patterns of sensitive caregivers, it would be expected to find similarities in other cultures. Keller (2018) points out that this Western middle-class model of parenting is based on a dyadic relationship between mother, child, and father, especially in the early years of the infant's development, and this model does not fit with non-Western rural farming cultures. Furthermore, it has been suggested that Ainsworth's view of parental sensitivity is very idealistic, even from a Western perspective, and does not take into account that the mother may have other children to attend to, or may share economic responsibilities and be unable to fulfil the role of full time caregiver (Spies and Duschinsky, 2021). Mesman et al. (2021) point to the Gusil rural community in Kenya as an interesting study of sensitive caregivers, and how the Western model has been challenged. According to Vicedo (2017) Margaret Mead was one of the first anthropologists to study childrearing in Samoan society, and criticised the claim that the mother as a single figure would have an impact on the infant's life. Furthermore, her opinion was that many of the authors had overstated the damaging effects on children of separation from their mothers.

[Attachment styles.](#)

Bowlby claimed that his attachment theory was an evolutionary system between mother and child that was necessary for the survival for the infant (Lahousen, 2019). According to Szepeswol and Simpson (2019) the attachment system is a natural psychobiological system that is activated when an individual seeks support in time of danger, because as a species humans are vulnerable and not able to fend for themselves especially as infants.

Thompson et al. (2022) have argued that Bowlby's observation of the mother and child relationship provided a window into the nature of attachment and Ainsworth later provided the methodology to Bowlby's theory with her studies of infant care during 1954-1955 and her classifications of attachment styles (Vicedo, 2017). Some of Bowlby's claims have been robustly challenged, for instance monotropy, but his concept of the Internal Working Model (IWM) remains at the heart of modern attachment theory. Attachment theory postulates that the early experiences the child receives from the main caregiver form the individual IWM and have an impact on interpersonal relationships for a lifetime (Grady et al., 2021). Repeated experiences of unavailability for the child, would lead to dysfunctional cognitive schemas about the self, for instance they could feel that they are unwanted, or nobody cares about them (Spruit et al., 2020). Hughes (2017) has argued that children turn to their parents not just for safety but for a guide, to learn about themselves and the wider world through intersubjective experiences such as facial expressions. Slade and Holmes (2019) have pointed out that in insecure attachments, the child's safety and security are threatened, and the relationship between caregiver and infant is often distorted, leading to an increased need for security from the infant. In adulthood, those who have a secure attachment style often have positive beliefs about themselves and are able to form close relationships with others (Pollard, 2019). Szepeswol and Simpson (2019) have pointed out that early positive experiences with the caregiver serve an evolutionary function, so that the child understands there is a reliable figure available to them, who is trustworthy, and this builds a secure base for the individual. Fitzgerald (2020) has pointed out that research has not been able to clarify what specific parental behaviours lead the child to have secure attachment with the caregiver. According to Sutton (2019), children who have a mother who engages with positive emotional coaching, demonstrate higher levels of security compared to those with mothers who were dismissive of their child's emotions.

According to Cooke et al. (2019), children who have experienced maltreatment during early development are prone to develop an insecure attachment base and are likely to suffer mental health problems later in adulthood. The inconsistency of attachment between caregiver and infant often results in emotional difficulties for the individual and there is also the risk of psychiatric problems and disorders (Upadhaya et al., 2018). Isobel et al. (2018) have argued that individuals who have experienced physical or emotional abuse in early childhood are likely to experience alterations to neurobiological mechanisms, that in turn will have an impact on the ability to emotionally regulate themselves.

Slade and Holmes (2019) have pointed out that many of the individuals seeking therapeutic support will often display insecure attachment and will have difficulties in managing the emotional aspects of life. Bowlby argued that a child's development is fixed by the first two years of age in terms of attachment categories, but this claim has now been contested (Harlow, 2021). Smith et al. (2017) state that the effect of early insecure attachment is not fixed for the remainder of the person's life, but can be reversed by a positive experience later in life. This claim has raised debate over the last 40 years, about whether attachment styles stay consistent over time, and whether a person's attachment style is an indicator of future behaviour (Rappaport, 2022). Szepeswol and Simpson (2019) have argued that the evolutionary role of attachment does not end with childhood but continues throughout life and has important consequences for the survival of the species. It has been argued that from an evolutionary perspective, attachment systems play an important part in adapting to harsh environmental conditions, and that this shapes the strategies for survival with those with secure and insecure attachment adapting to the conditions (Szepeswol and Simpson, 2019). The expectation that attachment styles remain fixed over time and function as a prototype in later relationships has attracted considerable interest and is complicated as it involves different attachment figures over time (Thomson et al., 2022). Child psychiatrists have raised concerns about diagnoses of attachment disorders that were often vague and too simplistic (Fitzgerald, 2020), but according to Fearon and Roisman (2017), many authors have argued that early experiences shape the child's interpretation of their social environment and how they respond to social situations later on in life. However, Jarvis (2022) points out a person's IWM forms a blueprint of how they perceive themselves, how they respond emotionally in relationships and how they behave toward others. In insecure attachment there is a greater possibility of psychopathology and the likelihood that the person will at some point seek psychotherapy in adult life (Slade and Holmes, 2018). Szepeswol and Simpson (2019) have pointed to the many studies showing if parents fail to provide early positive caregiving experiences, children are more likely to suffer a mediocre quality of life and will have a higher mortality rate.

When a caregiver fails to meet the needs and comfort of a child, the child may adopt hyper-activation strategies, such as intensifying the need for care, or suppressing the need for care to avoid disappointment (Lai and Carr, 2018). Children who are perceived to have a secure attachment may protest when left alone and will often cry and protest but will quickly calm down and return to play once the mother has returned (Lahousen et al., 2019).

According to Dozier and Bernard (2023) when parents or caregivers are unavailable to their children's distress or react in harsh or frightening ways, the child adopts ways to maximise the parent's response, but this can have problematic consequences on later relationships. Children with insecure attachment and avoidant attachment will demonstrate behaviours such as turning away from the caregiver or being fussy and difficult to soothe upon their return (Labella et al., 2020). Disorganised attachment is often the result of the child either witnessing frightening behaviour, such as domestic violence, or being a victim of aggressive behaviour such as shouting or physical violence (Dozier and Bernard, 2023). Parents or caregivers who respond to their child's needs from birth, will help the child form a healthy perception of themselves, so that they feel secure in exploring the world and other people (Slade and Holmes, 2019). At the end of the child's first year, the child has developed an attachment with at least one or more caretaker and the number of attachment relationships will help the infant's cognitive growth (Bakermans-Kranenburg 2021). Hughes (2017) has argued that when the child feels they have a secure base, they begin to explore the world and learn about themselves through intersubjective experiences. Research suggests that children who receive reliable and constant care will go on to develop secure attachment and have better self-esteem (Cooke, et al., 2019). If they experience an environment that communicates delight, interest and love, then they will feel secure, interesting and lovable (Huges, 2017). Barazzone (2019) has pointed out that the structures that underly the effect of secure attachment are not entirely clear, but one hypothesis is that people with secure attachment are able to call upon positive experiences of the self for comfort in times of stress. In insecure attachment, the child's safety and security are threatened and their emotional needs are not met, so they are more likely to require psychological support in adulthood (Slade and Homes, 2019). For instance, a negative experience a child has had about oneself can increase the chances of developing depression (Spruit et al., 2020).

Those who experience inconsistent and unreliable childcare, either through abuse or neglect, are more likely to form mental representations of their care giver as unreliable and untrustworthy (Cooke et al., 2019). According to Granqvist et al. (2017), infants who have experienced unreliable contact with their caregiver when there is a need for comfort, become highly vigilant to the attachment figure, and behave in way to maximise a response such as clinging to the mother. Flowers et al. (2019) have argued that research into disorganised attachment styles in early childhood has become an important marker in understanding socio-emotional and mental health problems.

Disorganised attachment has gathered widespread interest in recent years but Granqvist et al. (2017) claim this has been based on false assumptions and concerns have been raised about its implications in child welfare practices. Furthermore, the SSP is meant to be able to identify particular attachment styles in children, but it was found that some children do not fall into any of the attachment patterns (Spruit et al., 2019). There is a clear need for professionals in the field of child welfare to educate and to inform how to evaluate attachment disorders (Weinman, 2019).

Children in welfare

After the backdrop of two world wars, politicians met from all over the world with a view to establish the United Nations and to form the World Health Organisation (WHO) constitution (World Health Organisation, 1946; Van der Horst et al 2021). Smith et al. (2017) point to the conclusions from the WHO that healthy child development was seen as fundamentally important, and that the highest standard of health are a fundamental right for humans regardless of race, religion, political beliefs or social conditions. The author of this report 'Maternal Care and Mental Health' was British child psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1900) who later became known as the founder of attachment theory (Van der Horst et al 2021). The general consensus amongst policy makers today, is that attachment theory has extended significant awareness into human relationships and has been instrumental in improving the attitudes of professionals within the childcare system (Smith et al., 2017). Attachment theory has gathered a widespread interest from policy makers and practitioners in child protective settings and is seen as a reliable indicator of child maltreatment (Granqvist et al., 2017).

Attachment theory has dominated the landscape in directing the thinking and guidelines for children in care and has been adopted by The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), for teachers and other practitioners who work with vulnerable groups (Smith et al., 2017). During the 1980s and 90s, a number of attached-parent based interventions were developed that focused on improving the child parent relationship, and offering support to improve caregiving sensitivity (Levy and Johnson, 2019). According to Dozier and Bernard (2023) there is a host of factors and reasons why families have been targeted for interventions, for instance, poverty, housing instability, substance abuse and mental health. The design of these interventions was developed to target the child-parent attachment through psychotherapeutic approaches that would help strengthen relational and emotional experiences that needed to be corrected (Thompson et al., 2022).

According to Forslund et al. (2022) attachment theory has offered important insight into the care and wellbeing of children in care settings and has generated vast numbers of evidence-based interventions for the welfare of children. When children do not receive adequate care, or the caregiver is constantly unavailable, this can have devastating impact on their cognitive and socioemotional development, which is often seen in orphanage or care setting (Dozier and Bernard, 2023). It is also the case that parents who have experienced childhood trauma may replicate this to their offspring via the attachment relationship (Isobel et al., 2018). However, according to Harlow (2021), NICE have advised caution when using the term attachment, suggesting it should only be used when formally diagnosed by a qualified professional, and also warned social workers to use the term attachment with caution advising that the term relationship maybe more appropriate. Smith et al. (2017) have pointed to the overzealous use of the word attachment and the imprecise meaning that leads to social workers believing it holds scientific credentials, without any clinical understanding.

The rise of attachment theory within the family courts and decision making in the best interest of children has influenced the judicial system in its approach to what is best for the child (Forslund et al., 2022). The use of attachment to identify whether a parent has good enough or not good enough skills when considering child development has also been called into question (Fearon and Roisman, 2017), and there appears to be a false understanding of the scientific evidence when it comes to cultural and Western types of parental strategies (Keller, 2018). Research findings in the United States and Japan have questioned the hypothesis of attachment theory and have concluded that there is a bias towards Western styles of parenting and how to bring up children (Thompson et al., 2022). White et al. (2020) has argued that attachment has been used to explain all manner of behaviours in children that often leave parents in a no-win situation when placing children into care, and in some cases current interpretations of attachment styles and the influences it has on the justice system have resulted in justifying the placement of Indigenous children into non-indigenous homes (Choate et al., 2020). It has also been argued that the mis-application of attachment theory has led to children and parents' human rights being violated, and that the removal of a child that is solely based on attachment style to the caregiver can never be justified (Granqvist et al., 2017). Smith et al. (2017) believe that despite the dominance attachment theory has had on the social work profession, it has become questionable within care settings.

Determining what is best for a child is problematic in practice, as one must consider the many distinct factors that can influence the child's development and any other impact on the cognitive, physical and socioemotional growth in the future (Forslund et al., 2022), therefore, children entering the child welfare system are of great concern, because of the early development in forming attachment relationships with caregivers and the ability to regulate emotions (Labella et al., 2020). Even though there is a clear need for professional intervention when it comes to child welfare, caution is needed for the use of attachment theory in courts and other organisations (Weinman, 2018). According to Choate et al. (2020) attachment theory has become so powerful that it has been able to form a worldwide view on families and culture without foundation when child welfare is considered. Attachment theory is believed by many to be the best theory when it comes to child welfare, and many professionals subscribe to it as a means to determine what is best for a child (Forslund et al., 2021). Human attachments are seen as the crucial factors for the professionals who are tasked with the position of decision making for the development and wellbeing of children (Harlow, 2021), however, many of the decisions around what is in the best interest for the child are contestable, and are subject to conflicting criticism that highlight the contested domain of child welfare (Keddell, 2017).

Implications for therapy

According to Gopalkrishnan (2018), much of our understanding of mental health, that includes psychotherapy, psychology and psychiatry, has emerged from Western traditions that have been instrumental in understanding human conditions. Levy and Johnson (2019) cites Bowlby's (1977) claim, that disruption to healthy attachment bonds could lead to emotional stress such as anger, depression and emotional detachment. Traditionally, mental illness was seen as chronic diseases that could only be treated medically, but social relationships and interactions have now been identified as key ingredients to invoke change and recovery (Tjaden et al., 2021). The biomedical model dominated mental health until the end of the twentieth century and was seen as the answer for many medical illnesses as well as mental health, but with advances in neurobiology the biomedical model has come in for heavy criticism (Rocca and Anjum, 2020). According to Nowak and Mulligan (2021) doctors are now trained in person-centred primary care and in many cases, physicians might explore and introduce social prescription by referring the client to a local professional or an organisation that is better equipped to support the individual. However, Gopalkrishnan (2018) points to extensive research that mental health and illness are perceived differently across distinct cultures, and this has an impact on people seeking professional support. Furthermore, religion and spirituality play a key role and people from diverse cultures may not make the same distinction between mind and body as Western style therapy does. For instance, Raghavan et al. (2023) have pointed to the healing temples of India that are visited by thousands of people seeking help for mental health issues.

Seeking treatment is also linked to the historical context of a person's background, for example, indigenous people in places such as Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand may be distrustful of western health professionals because of historical links to oppression (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). Nevertheless, according to Lange (2021), there are a broad range of psychotherapy treatments deriving from a variety of different theoretical approaches, that are designed to bring about modifications of feeling and emotions and which can be tailored to individual needs. The field of Psychotherapy research has identified the use of attachment patterns as a useful approach when working with clients, and has developed distinct ways of collaborating therapeutically with them (Slade and Holmes, 2019). The use of attachment patterns has much to offer in guiding assessment and therapeutic intervention, especially for inexperienced therapists who are unsure how to react to attachment related encounters during the therapeutic session (Talia et al 2019).

According to Barazzone et al. (2018) research has come to understand how different attachment styles impact on the therapeutic outcomes in treatment programs. Many clinicians across various disciplines recognise the transformative power of the therapeutic relationship when applying Bowlby's theory of attachment to the therapeutic alliance, with some therapists applying attachment as a therapeutic technique (Talia et al., 2019). Research has also found that the therapist's own attachment style is activated during the therapeutic alliance, which can often lead to countertransference which may have an impact on the relationship because of the therapist's emotional state (Wisniewski, 2023). The therapist will therefore need to be aware of their own attachment orientation or the quality of the therapeutic relationship may be affected (Daniel et al., 2018). According to Adams et al. (2018) attachment patterns are good indicators of clients' behaviours towards the therapist and the impact on the therapeutic outcome. Petrowski (2019) has pointed out that more research is required to understand the relationship between the therapist's own attachment style and the client's attachment during the interactions in the therapeutic process. Research has shown that different attachment patterns have a direct impact on the outcomes of therapeutic interventions, and that insecure attachment has a poor treatment outcome and can lead to lengthy therapy compared to clients with secure attachment (Adams et al, 2018). According to Talia et al. (2019) one of the most obvious ways of identifying a client's attachment classifications can through the narrative the client brings to the therapeutic session.

Research has increasingly demonstrated that early life experiences and close relationships have a direct impact on mental health and the well-being of the individual (Gregory et al., 2020). Secure attachment promotes the ability to form long term romantic relationships, whereas clients who show anxious or avoidant attachment styles find it more difficult to form or maintain close relationships (Szepsenwol and Simpson, 2019). According to Kuncewicz et al. (2021), research has confirmed that the combination of insecure attachment patterns have a direct impact on the quality and length of a romantic relationship. Cooke et al., (2019) have alluded to the same point, arguing that children who have experienced maltreatment during childhood are likely to experience deep emotional problems in adult life, and are likely to avoid close romantic relationships for fear of rejection, placing the individual at further risk of deeper psychological issues. Adults who have anxious attachments have a negative working model of themselves, and this can lead to a constant feeling of being abandoned, along with hyper vigilance and a powerful desire to be loved by others (Strauß et al., 2018).

The loss of a relationship can be one of the most distressing experiences for an individual and can lead to a threat to mental health and well-being, and the individual may have difficulty understanding their psychological distress (Koh et al., 2020). Slade and Holmes (2019) have argued that an element of therapeutic competence is for the therapist to recognise the client's attachment style in order to reveal a picture of the early years of the patient's emotional environment. The therapist therefore needs to be finely attuned to engage with the client in a way that fosters attachment safety, and to create a secure base within the therapy setting that was lacking in their original family (Mair, 2020). Koh et al. (2020) have argued that individuals may deliberately sabotage relationships in order to protect themselves, but often find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of failed relationships that also reinforces their insecure beliefs. Furthermore, children who have experienced abuse, such as physical, psychological, or domestic violence, are likely to intergenerationally transmit this to families and communities in adult life (Isobel et al., 2018). According to research, not all those who were maltreated as children will pass this on to their offspring, and the cycle of abuse can be broken with the help of therapy or through support they receive from a healthy relationship (Granqvist et al., 2017). According to Arriaga and Kumashiro (2019) changes are likely to involve revisiting negative beliefs of feeling unworthy about oneself and distrust in others, but instilling positive associations can foster a secure working model over time.

There is a growing body of research that early intervention has helped improve the attachment between caregiver and child, particularly when the intervention has strong theoretical foundations (Gregory et al., 2019). Attachment and Biobehavioural Catch-Up (ABC) has been shown to be effective in helping parents improve prenatal sensitivity skills, helping to enhance the emotional adjustment of the child and the family, for parents who have experienced a range of adversities (Labella et al., 2020). According to Woollett et al. (2020) intervention programmes have helped parents understand how trauma is seen in the family setting, and how this has a direct impact on the child's development and behaviour. According to Gregory et al. (2019) the ABC programme is also used to help children between the ages of 6 months to 2 years, and is mainly used to target adoptive, birth and foster parents with the aim of developing better biological regulation. According to Kiser et al. (2023) parents who have been subjected to stress or trauma will have experienced a direct impact on their own mental health and also their ability to provide sufficient parental skills for their offspring.

Children who have been traumatised by neglect or abuse can often be difficult to treat as the child will lack trust in the treatment provider (Hughes, 2017). There are many intervention programs aimed at fostering good parental skills that are attachment based, and these programs raise serious ethical and scientific issues, because non-western cultures and their social background are not considered (Keller, 2017). However, according to Gregory et al. (2020) the most promising prevention programs are child-parent psychotherapy (CPP) and dyadic development psychotherapy (DDP). These are for parents with children under 5 years old who have experienced trauma in their early years and are suitable for a wide range of families from different incomes and ethnic backgrounds. Treating children who have been traumatised in childhood can be problematic because it is difficult for children to trust the therapist or the caregivers (Hughes, 2017). However, Mercer (2019) has raised concerns about attachment based interventions with poorly based concepts about attachment theory and the harmful treatment programs for childhood problems. This type of approach could also be problematic for non-Western countries where many aspects of mental health are perceived in a different way ranging from cultural differences towards mental health to the stigma and shame in seeking help (Gopalkrishnan 2018). Nevertheless, Woollett et al. (2020) have argued that through play therapy, the therapist can help build the relationship and help to understand a child's emotional world through role playing. Golding (2019) has argued that once a child feels safe, they are able to explore their world, and it is through effective attunement that the child can develop new ways to emotionally regulate themselves. Psychotherapy has a long tradition in using play therapy to treat children who have suffered trauma, and it is through play that adults could engage with their children in an authentic and less defensive way (Oehlman et al., 2021). Through intersubjectivity, the child discovers who they are by how the parents communicate through non-verbal cues such as expressions of love and delight (Hughes, 2017). Furthermore, it is through these intersubjective experiences that the therapist is able to engage with the child.

What are we doing to that baby?

During the literature search, two articles presented themselves as particularly pertinent to the research question. The first 'What are we doing about baby' (Bjerre, Madsen and Petersen, 2023) investigated how attachment theory was utilised by social service professionals when interviewing families who may pose a risk to their children. The article suggests that the social services misused attachment theory, and social workers had underdeveloped professional insight into attachment theory. The aim of this journal article was to provide an insight into the concerns surrounding attachment theory and the politicising of various aspects of child rearing practices. The article was published online in the *European Journal of Social Work* in 2023, and the research was carried out by observing three teams of Danish social workers over a period of three years. The choice of method was observations of and reflections on how social workers carried out their practice. The observations were conducted during three years of fieldwork by recording 42 hours of team meetings, recordings of which were transcribed and analysed for themes that arose including emotional themes. Present at these meetings was a member of the research team, which could have had an impact on the analysis of the data and interpretations of the findings, and only two case examples were used to represent how social workers try to understand the concept of attachment theory which provides limited evidence and is a potential weakness of this research paper (Bjerre et al., 2021).

This article points to the major reforms that social services across Western countries have undergone, and the need for more evidence-based research, rather than the perceptions and beliefs of the social workers when it comes to child welfare and protection. There has been a recognition that social services have made mistakes in the past when placing children into care and there is a need for greater levels of documentation at local government level of the reason for child interventions. According to Forslund et al. (2022) the misunderstanding of attachment theory is widespread and, in some cases, has resulted in misapplications especially when it comes to child protection and custody. This research has highlighted, from the transcripts and interviews, the dominance of attachment theory within social work practice and the concerns around its use in child protection.

From this research, it has become clear that the social workers being observed, had difficulty in being precise about the theory of attachment, but have a social construct about attachment theory. Vera (2016) points out that our perception of reality is shaped not by individuals but by society collectively, whether by group culture or communities with a shared idea of what reality is. This is problematic because when considering the child's needs and emotional support, the social workers had difficulty in defining attachment theory, and in turn passing this understanding on to parents and carers in their practice. Harlow (2021) has pointed out that directives from the National Institute of Health and Care (NICE) have made it clear that terms such as attachment disorders should only be used when they have been formally diagnosed by a professional who has used established criteria to make an assessment. This study contributes to what is understood about the misuse of attachment theory and how it has led to children being placed into care because of misconceptions of attachment theory. Rappaport (2022) has pointed out that there are numerous articles that have debated the concept of attachment theory in relation to child custody, with some researchers raising concerns and questioning the reliability of measures of attachment and others in support of its use in family courts. Social workers make a moral assessment of what is good parenting and what is not, and these observations are based on the norms of Western society (Forslund et al., 2022). Concerns have also been raised about what constitutes an attachment and how attachment is measured when it comes to attachment based interventions (Thompson et al., 2022). The use of Ainsworth's sensitivity methods has also been challenged when considering what is deemed a sensitive or insensitive mother, and more research is needed to enrich and enhance understanding of sensitive parenting in non-western contexts (Thomson, 2021). Furthermore, there is no universally agreed definition of a healthy attachment relationship that can be used as an assessment tool and which incorporates diverse cultures (Thompson et al., 2022).

Attachment goes to court

The title of this second article ‘Attachment goes to court’ (Forslund et al., 2022) provides the reader with a good indication of what the journal is about and makes a compelling statement about the misuse of attachment theory in the family court setting. This article was published in 2022, and the aim of this journal is to enhance the understanding of how attachment theory has misinformed family courts when it comes to child protection and child custody. The article also discusses the quality of attachment between the caregiver and the child, and how this helps to inform family courts and their decision making. For instance, Rappaport (2022) has argued that the use of an attachment construct in family courts is problematic, as it does not consider the complexity and multilayered relationship of parent and child, and relies on a few categories such as secure or insecure but does not provide the court with meaningful information. The authors of this journal have examined family court applications and what is considered to be in the best interest of the child and their protection. The authors have pointed out that gathering scientific data to present to court on the subject of attachment is challenging, and often health professionals make predictive claims that cannot be justified whilst family courts find it difficult to properly evaluate the scientific data.

This journal demonstrates what is already known about attachment theory and how it has been often misused and justified in placing children into care because parenting styles do not fit with a prescribed approach to childcare (Forslund, 2022). Decision making has often focused on the importance of one parent that is usually the mother, and the impact of the father’s role is insufficient in the research (Cowan and Cowan, 2019). Bowlby’s main focus was the bond between mother and infant and the role of the father was considered unimportant in his theory of attachment (Rappaport, 2022). Since the publication of Bowlby’s theory of attachment, research of mother and child attachment has grown enormously, but the role of the father in children’s development has been relatively neglected (Cowan and Cowan, 2019). Kisla and Cetin (2023) have argued that today there is an increased involvement with father and infant care, and studies have found that gender does not affect the attachment. The authors argue that there is a great deal of misunderstanding of what attachment is and in some cases the courts have been ill informed.

This article points out that attachment relationships are based and measured on observations and attachment quality equates to sensitive parenting. This has been reinforced by Ainsworth's theory of the sensitivity of the caregiver and the quality of attachment with the child. The authors argue over the use of the term attachment because this can often be misleading and mystifying within the court setting. Courts often make custody decisions that are based on one secure attached figure, but it has been argued that children can form bonds with multiple attachment figures simultaneously. According to Thompson (2022) a model of multiple caregivers is the normal practice for many children in farming communities across the globe, which is often overlooked when making custody decisions, and there is a concrete body of research that agrees with the importance of the child's relationship with all caregivers. The authors also argue that attachment is difficult to measure and questions the usefulness of these assessments in making decisions regarding child protection (Forslund et al., 2022).

This article provides strong evidence for the over-reliant use of attachment theory within the court setting and the unreliability of the theory as an assessment tool. For this study family court applications were examined where the theory of attachment was used in decision making in the best interest of the child (Forslund et al., 2022). There have been a number of child and adult focused interventions that have emerged since the 1980s, and researchers have attempted to identify common themes between attachment-based interventions and how they work (Thompson et al., 2022). Because psychologists, social workers and other health professionals inform their work with the use of attachment-based theories, there is a danger of its over-use as an explanatory tool, which can lead to misdiagnosis of a child's needs (Harlow, 2021).

Discussion

From the thematic analysis conducted and the data that was generated, important themes emerged relating to the research question 'how applicable is Attachment Theory globally and culturally and what are the implications for social services and psychotherapy?'. The main themes which emerged from the literature were cultural differences outside the developed world, misuse of attachment theory when placing indigenous children into care, attachment patterns changing with positive parenting, sensitive parenting practices varying across cultures, flaws in attachment theory, western constructs, the mother and child relationship, and cultural attitudes to mental health. Culture plays an important role in expression and meaning with distinct patterns of child rearing practices that demonstrate the universal need to attach to a consistent caregiver (Voges et al 2019).

Attachment theory was formulated to represent a global model of how mother and child form bonds and some research provides some support for the universality of some of attachment theory's components (Mesman et al., 2016b). In many non-Western cultures the infant is cared for by a number of caregivers which is seen as crucial for the infant's survival, and nature of sensitive responses to a child's needs in non-Western cultures is a topic that has been fiercely debated (Mesman et al., 2016a). Mesman (2021) has pointed out that in non-Western rural communities' responses towards the infant such as smiling, kissing and cuddling were much less than in Western samples. What the findings of this research demonstrate is that attachment theory represents only the Western middle-class perspective, and the theory totally ignores the caregiving values and practices of other cultures in the majority of the world (Keller 2017). Psychological theories such as attachment theory have become such an important scientific tool in describing how emotional bonds are made between caregiver and infant and how the individual develops into a self-governing productive member of society (Bjerre et al 2021), however, from a social work perspective this has proved to be problematic, as how children are cared for in other cultures may pathologise mothers if looked at through an attachment theory lens (Bjerre et al 2021).

Thompson (2021) has argued that there are cultures demonstrating different parental practices that appear to be insensitive and unresponsive to the child's desires, and there needs to be greater understanding of attachment from a cultural context. According to Choate (2020) attachment theory has failed to capture the various parental systems in indigenous cultures that are inherently different from the dyadic Western perspective, and ignores the consequences of imposing the theory on non-Western countries and communities. There are also implications that attachment-based interventions have on other cultures and the many ethical problems associated with parental interventions (Keller, 2018). These interventions focus on the caregiver's sensitivity, empathy and responsiveness, but not all interventions have received empirical support for their effectiveness (Levy and Johnson, 2019). Attachment focused family treatments are often lengthy, costly and can take months or even years especially with children who have experienced constant rejection from their caregiver (Huges, 2017). The primary therapeutic task is to provide a safe place for the clients to explore their emotions and also build a trusting relationship that has often been missing, especially for clients who have suffered maltreatment (Slade and Homes, 2019).

Therapists also need to be aware of cultures that are different from their own because different cultures will have a different attitude towards mental health that ranges from views of mental health to racism and discrimination (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). More than 50 years has lapsed since Bowlby created a theory that would explain a child's emotional bond to a caregiver, and the theory expanded quickly to encompass developmental psychopathology, public policies that concern child custody and educational programs (Thompson et al., 2022). Attachment theory has resulted in misunderstandings and misapplication especially regarding child protection and custody decisions and what is the best interest for the child (Forslund et al., 2022). There has been much debate and criticism of the theoretical principles of attachment theory and its application globally and culturally and there is an extensive body of literature reflecting the view of this perspective (Harlow 2021). There is also a need to disseminate up to date research that is evidence based, along with assessment methods and treatment to achieve the best therapeutic outcomes (Weinman, 2019). There is a need for more research to enhance understanding into sensitive parenting from non-western perspectives (Thomson, 2021). Africa is one of the most understudied continents and has the potential to unlock complex understandings of child and parental attachments (Voges, 2019). Weinman (2019) has argued that there is a clear need for professionals in child welfare to be educated and informed in different attachment disorders by qualified practitioners. Failing to include fathers in attachment research could lead to important information that could highlight understanding of attachment theory (Cowan and Cowan, 2019).

Conclusion

According to Levy and Benjamin (2019), John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth developed a theory that became the most influential framework for our understanding of human development, and a guide for clinical practice in psychotherapy. Bowlby's theory of attachment probably represents the first and finest example of the construction of human development, and important aspects of the psychology relating human behaviour (Gazzillo et al., 2020). Bowlby's theory is perhaps the most well researched framework for understanding how early life experiences influence child development, and a prediction of how the individual will function in social experiences in later life (Strand, 2020). According to Harlow (2021) his research led him to believe that the primary caregiver has a particular role in providing the infant with a safe and secure base through which the child can thrive and flourish. In his formulation of his theory, Bowlby incorporated other theories such as evolutionary theory, system theory, ethology and primatology, which formed the basis of his own theory of attachment (Keller, 2017). Bowlby also gathered research from other child psychiatrists from several European countries, but only absorbed information that supported his own ideas on child and mother separation, and ignored the broader view of social origins of children's mental health (Van der Horst, 2019).

From his studies as a psychologist working with orphaned children who were displaced after the end of World War II in the 1940s, Bowlby's theory of Attachment was formed (Van der Horst et al., 2020). Bowlby went on to conduct a report for the World Health Organisation (WHO) that provided substantial arguments in support of his theory, and the important link between the quality of maternal care and a child's mental health (Lahousen et al., 2019). His theory received enormous public support because at the time there was a movement to get mothers to stay at home with their children, and they were advised that they could psychologically damage their children if they returned to work (Jarvis, 2022). The use of attachment theory to support the traditional view of a social construct and the responsibility of the mother to stay at home to care for their young remains subject to debate (Smith et al., 2017). Bowlby argued that the attachment system is a psychobiological system which is activated when the individual seeks support from others in times of danger, and has played a crucial evolutionary role for the survival and reproduction of the species (Szepsenwol and Simpson, 2019).

Bosman et al. (2019) point out that in spite of the many articles and research that attachment theory has generated, there is little understanding of how attachments develop, because even though there is a link between supportive parenting and secure attachment, the mechanism of how it develops is unclear. Ten years after Bowlby's theory was articulated, Ainsworth built on Bowlby's theory, and identified noticeable differences in individual attachment behaviours through her famous Strange Situation Procedure, which was specifically designed for research purposes (Rappaport, 2022). From these observations, Ainsworth developed the construct of parenting styles that she labelled Sensitive Parenting (Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Attachment theory has become one of the most important theories of the twentieth century and it has helped shape child psychiatry, psychology, childcare and has added to our understanding of the problems faced by children and adolescents (Fitzgerald, 2020). Even though Bowlby's attachment theory has stimulated researchers, and covers an array of topics such as relationships, mental health, psychotherapy and emotional response, it has been argued that the primary function of attachment forming is to promote the survival of the species. However, even though there are many examples that support this hypothesis, there are a number of components that limit its use (Fearon and Roisman 2017). Smith et al. (2017) allude to the same point arguing that attachment theory is rendered problematic when it comes to the impact it has had on social science. According to Harlow (2021) attachment theory has fluctuated over the years and she has argued that it can no longer be seen as one theory but a collection of theoretical hypotheses to explain human attachment. Furthermore, Behrens (2016) suggests that there have been various debates as to whether attachment theory is universally applicable and has pointed to the many distinct cultures in non-western societies who have multiple caregivers that contribute to child rearing.

The majority of the criticism has focused on the fact that the construct of attachment is mainly on the relationship between mother and child, but the reality is that many communities outside the Western World have multiple care givers, and relationships to other caregivers are not represented in case studies (Mesman, 2016). Critiques have argued that there has been an overemphasise on the importance of the sensitivity of the main caregiver and research has paid extraordinarily little attention to multiple nonmaternal Alloparenting practices (Chaudhary et al., 2023). This has become one of the biggest challenges for attachment theory outside the Western World, and the starting point is to distinguish whether infant and caregiver patterns can be identified across many diverse cultures (Mesman, 2021b).

Voges et al. (2019) has pointed out that the drive to make human contact is universal and the theory demonstrates to have a cross-culture legality, but culture plays a significant role in the variations of attachment meanings and behaviours. Another challenge that attachment theory has been criticised for is the concept of attachment style being permanently fixed in the early years of life, and that the child's internal working model provides a blueprint for the individual's entire lifespan (Harlow, 2021). However, Yip et al. (2017) have pointed out that attachment patterns change as individuals grow and develop through interactions with others in adulthood. According to Van der Horst et al. (2019) Bowlby was selective about the sources from which he had gathered his data in several countries he visited after World War II, and only followed his own interest in his theory of mother and child separation. There have been many challenges to Bowlby's theory with claims of being yet another export globally, and there needs to be a broader narrative around decolonising research (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). Eurocentric beliefs that have dominated society's view of childrearing patterns, are focused on the individual nuclear family system, and not on a collective sharing of parenting, so the question is how relevant is attachment theory for these cultures (Root, 2018). According to Keller (2017), families from all corners of the world care for their children and have their best interests at heart, but the expression of care is different in different cultures and is shaped by ecological conditions and social history.

In answer to the research question 'how applicable is Attachment Theory globally and culturally and what are the implications for social services and psychotherapy?' it appears from the research undertaken that the universal application of attachment theory is not appropriate. The implications for social services and psychotherapy include child welfare practices and therapeutic interventions involving attachment, as well as the use of attachment theory in the family courts. Professionals who work in these areas need to be better informed and aware that Attachment theory is not always applicable or culturally appropriate.

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Appendices

Table of emerging themes

Codes	Themes	References
Sensitive parenting	Cultural differences	Keller (2017)
Sensitive caregiving	Misuse of attachment theory	Harlow (2021)
Sensitive response	Different in some cultures outside the developed world	Mesman., et al (2021)
Sensitive or insensitive	Cultures show different parenting styles compared to the developed world	Mohsen., et al (2020)
Attachment patterns	How different attachment styles relate to seeking mental health services	Levy and Johnson, (2019)
Western	Parenting styles	
Middle class	World view	Keller (2017)
Non western	Culture	Mesman., et al (2021)
Rural	Different parental practices	
Western style therapy	Cultural view of metal health and treatment programs	Duan (2018)
Ongoing Colonialism imposing western view on indigenous cultures	Placing indigenous children into based on attachment theory	Choate., et al (2020) Granqvist., et al (2017) White., et al (2020)
Not globally applicable	Flaws in the theory of attachment	Vicedo (2020)

Based on mother and child	Evidence that contradicts attachment to a single care giver	Sutton (2018) Keller (2017)
Groups of parents in Scotland	Alloparenting	Jarvis (2022) Bakermans-Kranenburg (2021)
Attachment is fixed	Theory is flawed and attachment patterns can be changed	Harlow (2021)
Evidence of Romanian orphans	Attachment patterns change with positive parenting	Lahousen (2019)
non-Western societies demonstrated a greater diversity in behaviours than Bowlby's claim, but he chose to ignore the criticism	Cultural diversity alloparenting	Vicedo (2017) Mesman., et al (2018) Chaudhary and Swanepoel (2023)
Over reliance on attachment theory	Social services	Weinman (2018)
Interdisciplinary influences	How attachment theory emerged from various disciplines	van der Horst et al., (2020) Keller (2017)
Misuse of attachment theory	Family courts and decisions	Forslund, et al (2022)
Clinical implications	Implications for mental health professionals	Gopalkrishnan, N., (2018)
Rhesus monkey – need for social contact	Arguments for attachment theory	van der Horst et al., (2020)
Social releasers e.g. smiling promotes contact with caregiver	Childcare practise globally differ in styles	Upadhyaya, (2018)

Humans have a natural instinct that is evolutionarily driven to seek social interactions	Importance of social interaction for survival	Esposito et al. (2017)
human social motivations are primarily for hunger strongly disputed by Bowlby	Evolution and caring for the survival of the species	Lahousen et al. (2010)