

The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds by John Bowlby

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The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds by John Bowlby**Brief Overview**

The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds by John Bowlby is a book that includes several lectures by the author over a period of time of about 20 years. Bowlby, a psychoanalyst, maintains that personality development has roots in infancy and childhood. While the book covers several issues, the central subject of discussion remains the formation and breaking of affectional bonds that a child shares with his primary caregiver, usually his mother. Bowlby coins the term affectional bond to refer to the attachment of two people, usually a mother and her child.

It is the mother who is the point and source of security and stability in a child's life. Understandably so, when the child is separated from his mother, anxiety is experienced, and the child searches for his or her mother. The same trend is seen later on in life as adults seek secure relationships that provide a source of security. The child's attachment may be of three types: secure, resistant, and avoidant. The affectional bonds and behaviours would be dependent on the type of care received and amount of separation from the mother.

Bowlby argues his case for psychoanalysis and draws references and examples from evolutionary biology, anthropology, cognitive science, etymology, and from his observation of interaction between children and their caregivers. Infants become attached to mothers who are sensitive to their needs and respond to them. As an infant begins to grow, he or she explores his or her environment and returns to the secure base of his or her mother. The child experiences ambivalence when he or she feels insecure. This may be projected in dreams, and the manner in which the ambivalence is regulated will affect

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his personality development. Psychopathology is based on the inability to regulate ambivalence and conflict.

The affectional bonds theory focuses on the manner in which the care and security provided to an infant and a child affects his or her growth and development as a person. It has a positive approach to how parents can help their children grow into socially functional individuals. Bowlby focuses on friendly but firm intervention when a certain behaviour or action is to be stopped. This not only models an acceptable behaviour and way of approaching a situation but also avoids the anger and bitterness that accompany conflicts. It shows the child that conflicts can be resolved without getting angry. Guilt felt by a parent may make him intolerant toward his child when it comes to the same behaviour or attitude.

Personal Reaction

A man or woman's behaviour as a parent is also rooted in his or her affectional bonds formed as a child. Thus, a mother who lacked parental attention in her childhood may feel the need to overcompensate and "possess" the love of her child. The affectional bonds theory can be used not only in examining or studying the behaviour of children but also that of adults. It helps them recognise trends that need to be changed.

According to Bowlby (2005), mother-child separation worsens the conflict of ambivalence. It is important for a child to be able to express him or herself openly and share his or her feelings of jealousy and other hostile feelings. Bowlby's work can be used as a guideline for parents when interacting with their child. He takes into account the physical and emotional development of a child and how parents need to respond to it to facilitate optimal emotional growth.

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He focuses on the positive impact in the form of social functioning in young adulthood due to both maternal and paternal attention. He emphasises that it is important for a mother to provide a strong and secure base that is consistent and that it is also vital for a father to play and explore with a child. The child thrives best when both the mother and father combine their resources. When a child grows in a balanced family environment, he or she is able to control his or her libidinal impulses in an effective manner. Thus, when a child grows up with little attention and interaction with his or her parents, it is likely that he or she will be unable to control his or her basic libidinal cravings in an acceptable manner and may be selfish and greedy.

Bowlby also identifies sensitive phases when it is important to ensure that the child receives the right kind of attention and feels secure. Bowlby states that a child's affectional bonds with his parents affect the affectional bonds he or she forms as an adult. Any disruption in the affectional bonds between a child and a parent affects the romantic, marital, and parental bonds he or she establishes later on in life.

Its Application to Therapeutic Work with Children

Grief is the natural reaction to separation from a parent or primary caregiver, usually the mother. It needs to be studied well in therapeutic work with children. For children in therapy, the therapist can use Bowlby's recommended techniques for collecting data. These include observational data of the child as well as observational data on affectional bonds that would change or be formed during the course of the therapy. Some of the issues that would be studied during therapy would include the child's behaviour toward the therapists, topics discussed, those that were avoided and changes in emotion, and behaviour and discussion based on everyday life changes and

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also due to the therapy and analysis. While Bowlby does provide conclusions from his research, he also lays emphasis on the need to empathise and respect the personal experiences of each client.

What Was Missed Out

Bowlby's theory is criticised for the tremendous emphasis he places in the parent-child relationship. Bowlby negates genetic factors that affect personality and that the parents cannot be blamed for all kinds of psychopathology in adulthood. It is important take into consideration that children of the same parents are quite different even if they receive the similar amounts of attention and care. Also, Bowlby only focuses on attachment bonds and behaviour toward parents and does not take into account bonds shared with siblings and other care givers such as grandparents. Furthermore, in the world that we live in today, a family may not always consist of two parents, and yet children can grow into well-developed and happy adults. Also, Bowlby's focus lies only on affectional bonds established in childhood and not during adolescence and adulthood.

A long-term research study concluded that unlike what Bowlby discusses in his books, children of working mothers do not have problems forming affectional bonds and do not suffer. They are equally stimulated, happy, and productive as children of stay-at-home mothers. Therefore, what is important is the kind of child care provided and also the mothers' interaction with the children when she is at home. The attachment styles that he refers to can help therapists understand the kind of attachment issues that clients have and can help them identify therapy techniques that will be effective.

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What You Have Learned

Bowlby's ideas and theories of the making and breaking of affectional bonds developed in childhood can be applied and used for therapy for children, adolescents, and adults as well. He emphasises on the fact that we grieve the loss of a secure parental base, and this trend continues in adulthood, too. The sensitive phases that he mentions in his book provide parents and therapists insight into special period of a child's life when he or she requires more attention.

How I Can Use What I Have Learnt

The manner in which affectional bonds are created and in instances where there is disruption in the bonds teaches me to identify potential problems in children and find the root of the problem. The recognition of a problem is the first step toward finding a therapeutic solution to it. This book has taught me how important the mother-child bond is and how its impact can be seen on most adult relationship later on in life. Also, I have learnt that it can be used in my understanding of child and later adult behaviour.

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Reference

Bowlby, J. (2005). *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

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