

Attachment Theory: The Mother's Influences Across the Child's Lifespan

Abayomi Israel Olaofe¹, Habibat Princess Odumosu²

^{1,2}University of Bedfordshire

*e-mail: Olaofeabayomi@gmail.com, Habibatodumosu@study.beds.ac.uk

Abstract

This study aimed to elucidate the nature of Attachment that exists between mother or caregiver from the lenses of Attachment Theory; explained the tenants of Attachment Theory as it's relates to Human Development from foetus to adulthood, and the levels and characteristics of attachment existing between mother and/ or caregiver figures. This study discovered that the child diversifies its attachment needs to individuals based on needs and satisfaction of those needs as the child grows from one developmental milestone to another. The study concluded that the child's Attachment with parents or caregiver is not maintained throughout lifespan, ever it is characterised based on needs.

Keywords: Attachment; Attachment Theory; Human Development; Foetus; Adulthood; Developmental Milestone.

How to cite : Olanrewaju, M., Kehinde Maruf, M., & Omolare, O. (2023). Civic Value and Political Interest as Determinants of Political Participation Among Primary School Teachers in Oyo State. *Pedagoggi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 23(2). pp. 174-181, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24036/pedagogi.v23i2.1587>



Licensees may copy, distribute, display and perform the work and make derivative and remixes based on it only if they give the author or licensor the credits (attribution) in the manner specified by these. Licensees may copy, distribute, display, and perform the work and make derivative works and remixes based on it only for non-commercial purposes

INTRODUCTION

It will be important to highlight that the impact and role of mothers can never be underestimated. In fact, the role of a mother can be very hard to substitute in reality basically because of the several bonds that had existed between the mother and the child during and after pregnancy. This bond is signaled by different physiological and psychological changes with the propensity of impacting the life of the mother and the foetus and/or the child.

Oxytocin has a hormone creates a bond between the mother and her child with an undertone of influence that flows naturally in mammalian. For humans, oxytocin does not just generate a calm, stress-free state (Uvnäs-Moberg, 1996) but it equally strengthens affection and bond between mother and offspring. The mother and child after delivery enjoy the benefits of Oxytocin, body-to-body contact and Prolactin in form of emotional bonding and seamless breastfeeding process (Er et al., 2016).

(Ainsworth, 1967) oppositely opined that mother-to-infant connection is considered as a lovely tie that an infant forms to his mother representation which by natural design binds them together in an enduring and endearing way over the space of time, and such bond is developed during the very first year of child birth and growth.

It will be critical to examine different theories, especially those that clearly analyses the relationships and attachments that exist between mother and child at different stages of a child or infant development, and the process of autonomy and independence.

METHODS

The method used in writing is literature study. The data used in this research are scientific articles containing the concepts studied. To explore the contents of an article, the author uses a content analysis approach model (content study). The author conducted an in-depth study of the contents of scientific articles.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Stage of Human Development According to Different Theories

It is well known that there are sufficient factors that instigate and promote the development of a child. Therefore, it will important to question and answer how and what trigger child development at all levels of growth, and to this end different developmental psychology theories have postulated enough conception about child development (Jackson, 2021).

(Lai & Carr, 2018) noted that it will be worthy to indicate that the “Attachment research has diverged into two major schools of thought: the Psychodynamic, Clinical School, and the Personality and Social Psychology school. Much of the research that we have connected our ideas to in this paper stems from assumptions made by the personality and social psychology tradition.”

This definitely leads to the need to bring to the purview the Psychosocial Developmental Theory of Erik Erikson and the Attachment Theory which falls within the Psychodynamic Theory pioneered by John Bowlby to elucidate the very core of this write-up.

Erikson’s Psychosocial Developmental Theory

(Erikson, 1977) postulation produced a unique Psycho-developmental Theory laced with Socio-psychological suggestion with a framework that outlined and structured human growth at all stages of life, into eight dissimilar and antithetical stages: (1) Trust as oppose to Mistrust; (2) Autonomy as oppose to Shame and Doubt; (3) Initiative as oppose to Guilt; (4) Industry as oppose to Inferiority; (5) Identity as oppose to Role Confusion; (6) Intimacy as oppose to Isolation; (7) Generativity as oppose to Stagnation; (8) Integrity as oppose to Despair.

These stages corresponded with a diverse period in the history of **human development**, example of which is Trust against Mistrust that coincide with infancy, outlining the period through which infants learn who and what to belief and who and what to distrust. Erikson was of the believe that babies who had the privilege of receiving decent care at this stage will learn to trust others within their circle, and this trust and mistrust would be carried over into their future relationships and interactions with others, allowing for sound and fit child development. Otherwise, babies whose needs are catered for by their caregivers or mothers or parents may develop feelings of mistrust and distrust in their future relationships (Jackson, 2021)

In contrast with Erikson’s eight stage of Psychosocial Theory of human development, Integrity as against Despair corresponds with the concluding part of the human lifespan. However, the earliest stage of human growth, humans learn how to trust or how not to trust others, and it is marked by the reproduction of what we have experienced simultaneously over time. If possible we can retrospect with pride on living a decent and worthy lifestyle, we will cultivate feelings of integrity. However, if a reflective past accomplishments gathers regret, it can lead to despair and bitterness as a resultant effect of unfulfilled dreams for the rest of one’s life (Jackson, 2021).

Erikson’s **developmental theory highlights** of human growth occur across the lifespan. His theory is reflective of that and is accepted as a more realistic view of **human development, emotional growth, and social change** (Jackson, 2021).

John Bowlby Theory of Attachment

John Bowlby groundbreaking psychological theory stands at the very core of developmental theory. His ideas on **child development** shaped the earliest psychology understanding of the sequence of child development which made him gain prominence in terms of use and citation till today. Bowlby’s Attachment Theory stated much clearly that child development is centered on the inborn need of the child to form attachment with a caring individual. This attachment may be

directed to any number of persons, places, or things, and eventually will have a significant effect on the developmental structure of a person's capabilities throughout their lifespan (Lai & Carr, 2018).

Bowlby as a psychoanalyst like Sigmund Freud placed a vital importance on **early childhood** development, and how exposure to situations at this period could define whether or not a child would develop or grow up to possess considerable **mental health issues or otherwise** (Lai & Carr, 2018).

Bowlby supposed that children who failed to form attachments at this delicate period would probably not form solid attachments at all throughout life. He postulated that newborns that experience constant disruptions in their attachment exposure with their primary caregivers will be susceptible to possible **deficits** during adulthood such as significant **social, emotional, and cognitive weaknesses** (Lai & Carr, 2018).

Therefore, it is important to note that the theories that discussed child development have variants in its exploration of the understanding and knowledge of how children behave, learn, develop and adjust to their realities. Children start-off their life with **innate characteristics** that may influence their **cognition and emotional advancement and growth**. The guardians may pass on these genetic factors to the infant, without them knowing the level of impact of their genes. As soon as children begin to perceive, understand, experience and relate to phenomena around them, as well as react to the **emotional issues** as it affect them (Lai & Carr, 2018).

Tenet of Attachment Theory

It is quite tempting to conclude that one of the theories of attachment is the right one. As a matter of fact, each of the theories has different usefulness and evidence-based applications for better understanding of **human behavioral pattern**. Furthermore, it is then imperative to state quite frankly that different theories have specificity in terms of its application to events which in no doubt places Bowlby's Attachment Theory at the core of this very discussion (Lai & Carr, 2018).

Bowlby incited a notion using the behavioral systems, using biological neural human structure, to analyze the methods by which humans display behaviors in reaction to unavoidable environmental modifications and requirements to optimize possibility of continuous reproduction and survival. Bowlby suggested that the natural function of the attachment structure agrees that children seek out a wiser, understanding, stronger and caring attachment figure for protection, trust and care, particularly at the time of danger or difficult circumstances (Mikulincer et al., 2009).

Basically, the attachment system is activated once an individual is faced with environmental dangers or trigger in a bid to receive care or protection from the chosen caregivers. Immediately the protection systems are neutralized or at the absence of threats, the attachment alert is silenced. However, afterwards psychological strength can be redirected to the exploration of other rewarding activities (John Bowlby, 1998). The attainment of the sense of safety is the drive of such attachment reaction and the "felt-security" disables additional attachment-driven efforts (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). The "secure base script" sense helps to develop an original process of experiencing security around key problems such as the likelihood of handling threat, care and support, while managing damaging feeling in future social relationships (Mikulincer et al., 2009).

When a chosen caregiver fails to perform the responsibility of meeting the child's desire for comfort at the time wanton distress, the child is forced to adjust or change his or her attachment models, resorting to a secondary alternative attachment. This is called "hyper-activation" and "deactivation" attachment strategy which maybe be activated as situations warrant (Main, 1990). The Deactivation model is tagged "compulsory self-reliance" according to Bowlby as means to suppress the urge for attachment- it can also be called "Attachment Behavioral Strategy."

The Attachment Behavioral Strategy bears a similitude to the Cassidy, Kobak, and Main's "Deactivation Attachment Strategy" of withdrawal of attachment from a desired caregiver figure. According to (John Bowlby, 1970) individuals masters the act of deactivation to checkmate and deal with distress, threat, pain, disappointment, frustration that may emanate from the caregiver's non-availability (John Bowlby, 1970).

For (Johnson, 2019), he believed there is a modern outlook to the Attachment Theory as a result of the following rationale: (1) Relationship is basic innate human necessity; (2) Regulating emotion and anxiety boost one's energy; (3) Growth and adaptation are promoted.

Levels of Child Attachment to the Mother at Each Stage of Development

Even though the Attachment Theory places great importance on the connection that exists between mother and the child, it further proposes a complete or partial independence between the mother, and if possible a substitute mother and the child.

Bowlby created the following broad category as follow:

First Stage (Birth to 3 months)

(John Bowlby, 1972) posited that at this stage the infant in the process of establishing relationship with an identifiable person which in most cases the mother, is perhaps completed during this phase of growth of 5 to 6 months old.

For him, it is evidential that within the family circle, the infant quickly within three months has begun the journey of identification and interaction with the mother in relation to other individuals. When infants of this age bracket see their mother they send verbal and nonverbal cues such as smile, gesticulate and as well as monitors the mother with his eyes more than he does with others. Lingering discrimination is therefore expressed by this act. In conclusion, we can absolutely mention that there is a form of attachment between the mother and the infant except it is ascertained that the child not only recognizes the mother but also tilt towards her in a way that shows an established close relationship between them (John Bowlby, 1970).

Second Stage (From 3 to 6 Months)

The child at this phase requires and desires the attention and presence of the mother more; he carries this attitudinal feeling and behavior into the third year of his life. At about three years of age of the infant, they begin to engage in what I called Selective Relationship (SR) by filtering and reserving individuals in their life to determine who they want to relate with and who to form behavioral attachment with.

Although babies may smile and make noises at familiar people, they tend to simply stare at strangers and seek comfort from those they know best if they cry. Babies usually have a limited preference for two to three individuals, with a particular inclination toward one person. While Bowlby and other researchers initially believed that the mother would be the preferred individual, it could actually be anyone who effectively responds to and interacts positively with the baby (Vinney, 2019).

Third Stage (From 6 Months to 6 Years)

During this phase, infants are capable of forming and strengthening a relationship with their mother or caregiver. The absence of the primary caregiver may lead to Separation Fear, causing the infant to become anxious and exhibit behaviors such as wailing or tantrums. Once the infant begins to crawl, they often follow their preferred individual. At around 7 to 8 months of age, infants may begin to fear strangers as they interact more with the world around them. These fears can result in cautious behaviors, including crying and withdrawing from unfamiliar situations or people. According to (Vinney, 2019), babies develop a working model of their preferred individual by the time they reach one year of age, which encompasses an understanding of how effectively that person responds to them.

As a child enters the phase between six and nine months of age, they begin to display more distinct and consistent behavioral patterns that signify a stronger attachment or bond with their mother. During this period, children often follow their mothers around and eagerly crawl towards her with intense emotions upon her return after a prolonged absence (John Bowlby, 1970).

According to (John Bowlby, 1970) the bond between a mother or caregiver and a child can only persist into the fourth and fifth years if certain facilitating circumstances occur and as long as

it remains beneficial. In some cases, this relationship may endure into another phase of the child's development, but it may be accompanied by significant struggle, anxiety, and stress.

Fourth Stage (From 6 Years Until Childhood Ends)

Between the ages of 6 and the onset of puberty, which is known as the fourth stage of development, children begin to expand upon the attachment connections they have established with their primary caregivers or mother during infancy and early childhood.

Attachment Theory posits that infants and children develop internal working models of attachment based on their experiences with their primary caregivers, typically their mother. These models shape the child's expectations and beliefs about themselves, others, the world, and relationships, which can have enduring effects on their cognitive and social development. During this stage, children seek out attachment figures for comfort and support while also beginning to explore the potential for developing attachments with peers beyond their family circle.

Stages Of Partial Independence Or Independent In The Mother -Child Relationship

In his book, "Attachment and Loss", Bowlby observed that although children typically show less frequent and intense attachment behaviors after age three, such behavior remains a significant aspect of their overall behavior. During adolescence, a child's attachment to their parents changes as other adults may become equally or more important and sexual attraction to peers enters the picture. This leads to a wide range of individual variation, with some adolescents becoming increasingly independent from their parents while others remain highly attached and struggle to redirect their attachment behavior to others. Most individuals maintain their bond with their parents into adulthood, influencing their behavior in numerous ways. In many societies, daughters' attachment to their mothers is more visible than sons' attachment to their mothers (John Bowlby, 1970).

During adolescence and adulthood, attachment behavior is not only directed towards individuals outside the family, but also towards groups and institutions. Schools, colleges, work groups, religious and political groups can serve as a secondary or even primary attachment figure for many individuals. It is likely that attachment to a group is initially facilitated by attachment to a person of prominence within that group. For instance, for some individuals, attachment to their country is based on their attachment to its leader, such as the president or sovereign (John Bowlby, 1970).

Bowlby argues that attachment behavior in adulthood is a continuation of the attachment behavior observed in childhood, as evidenced by the circumstances that trigger an adult's attachment behavior. During times of sickness, calamity, or sudden danger, adults naturally become more dependent on others and seek proximity to known and trusted individuals. It is therefore inaccurate to label attachment behavior in adulthood as "regressive," as psychoanalytic writing often does, as this term implies a pathological or undesirable connotation. Such a label overlooks the essential role that attachment behavior plays in the life of humans from birth until death (John Bowlby, 1970).

Bowlby and Ainsworth, who initially studied the dynamics of infant-caregiver relationships, held the view that attachment patterns persist throughout a person's life, from birth to death. This notion has been important in contemporary research in two main ways, as described by Gillath et al, 2016).

The idea that attachment patterns persist throughout a person's life, from birth to death, is an essential aspect of contemporary attachment theory research. Bowlby and Ainsworth's initial focus was on infant-caregiver relationships, but they believed that attachment played a significant role in human behavior across the lifespan (J. Bowlby, 1977).

(Gillath et al., 2016) highlight two main ways in which the persistence of attachment patterns throughout life is relevant to contemporary research. First, it has led to a focus on understanding the links between early attachment experiences and later adult relationships. This research has shown that individuals who have secure attachment styles in infancy and childhood are more likely to have secure, healthy relationships as adults (Sroufe et al., 2005).

Second, the persistence of attachment patterns has also led to a focus on the importance of attachment in adult relationships. Researchers have found that attachment styles impact adult relationship quality, communication, and conflict resolution (Mikulincer et al., 2009). For instance, individuals with anxious attachment styles may experience greater relationship insecurity, jealousy, and conflict, while individuals with avoidant attachment styles may be less willing to engage in intimate communication and experience difficulty expressing emotions.

The notion that attachment patterns persist throughout a person's life has been an important aspect of contemporary attachment theory research, leading to a focus on the links between early attachment experiences and later adult relationships, and the impact of attachment styles on adult relationship quality and communication.

In the context of infant-parent attachment, it is widely acknowledged that there is a clear asymmetry in the attachment-caregiving relationship (Gillath et al., 2016). The infant is said to be attached to the parent, and the parent's role is that of a caregiver. The parent's strong and profound affectional bond towards the infant is not considered an attachment bond.

However, in romantic relationships, attachment and caregiving tend to be balanced, and both partners are likely to be attached to each other and function as attachment figures for one another (Gillath et al., 2016). In these relationships, partners often switch between being attachment figures and caregivers, providing each other with comfort, support, and security. The attachment bonds in romantic relationships are mutual and reciprocal, unlike in infant-parent attachment, where the attachment is primarily one-sided.

According to (Bowlby, 1970), in old age when individuals can no longer direct their attachment behavior toward members of their own or older generations, they may instead turn to members of younger generations. This suggests that attachment behavior remains important throughout the lifespan and that individuals continue to seek social connections and relationships regardless of their age or life stage.

CONCLUSION

Recent research exploring child-parent attachment and children's well-being related outcomes has brought attachment theory research into the domain of specific "contexts". Research has indicated that throughout the lifespan individuals are capable of developing various context-specific (e.g., school-specific, sport-specific, community-specific) attachment bonds with a variety of relationship partners, including parents, close friends, teammates, teachers, coaches, and romantic partners (Carr, 2009); (Sukys et al., 2015); (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

This is often because these significant others are more accessible, attainable, and able to satisfy specific attachment functions (e.g., proximity, safe haven, and secure base) in a given context and at a given developmental stage (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994); (Allen, 2008); (Schachner et al., 2008).

Such a view tends to be favored in contemporary research and is sensible to explain both the fluctuation of attachment throughout the lifespan and the inconsistent research in relation to continuity of attachment characteristics (Fraley & Shaver, 1999); (Mikulincer et al., 2009). According to Fraley's meta-analysis of attachment stability from infancy to adulthood, there is a moderate level of association between attachment orientations across different developmental stages (especially up to 19 years old).

This result seems to be in line with other research (Owens et al., 1995); (Fraley & Shaver, 1999) that has found a moderate correlation between early attachment security with parents and attachment in later adult relationships, suggesting that prototypical attachment styles do not completely set the tone for attachment through the lifespan.

REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1967). *Infancy in Uganda: infant care and the growth of love*. Johns Hopkins Press.
- Allen, J. . (2008). *The attachment system in adolescence* (J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (eds.)). The

Guilford Press.

- Bowlby, J. (1977). The making and breaking of affectional bonds. I. Aetiology and psychopathology in the light of attachment theory. An expanded version of the Fiftieth Maudsley Lecture, delivered before the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 19 November 1976. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130(3), 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.130.3.201>
- Bowlby, John. (1970). *Controversial Issues. Attachment and Loss: Volume I. Attachment*. Basic Books, Inc.
- Bowlby, John. (1972). *Child Care and the Growth of Love*. Pelican Books Inc.
- Bowlby, John. (1998). *Loss-Sadness and Depression: Attachment and Loss Volume 3*. Pimlico.
- Carr, S. (2009). Adolescent-parent attachment characteristics and quality of youth sport friendship. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(6), 653–661. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.04.001>
- Er, M., Bergman, N., Gc, A., & Medley, N. (2016). Early skin-to-skin contact formothers and their healthy newborn infants. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD003519.pub4.www.cochranelibrary.com>
- Erikson, E. (1977). *Childhood: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. Childhood and Society. https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&lr=&id=CbproApQsCAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA313&dq=Eight+Ages+of+Man+in+Child+and+Society&ots=rvQJ9v9G-C&sig=QKwEgzk6298nmSzjx4r2eg-Ymnk&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Eight+Ages+of+Man+in+Child+and+Society&f=false
- Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (1999). Loss and bereavement: Attachment theory and recent controversies concerning “grief work” and the nature of detachment. *The Guilford Press*, 735–759. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1999-02469-032>
- Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children’s perceptions of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology*, 21(6), 1016–1024. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0012-1649.21.6.1016>
- Gillath, O., Karantzas, G. C., & Fraley, C. (2016). *Adult attachment: A concise introduction to theory and research*. Academic Press.
- Hazan, C., & Zeifman, D. (1994). Sex and the psychological tether. *Attachment Processes in Adulthood*, 5, 151–178.
- Jackson, S. (2021). 5 Theories of Child Development. <https://www.onlinepsychologydegree.info/lists/5-theories-of-child-development/>
- Johnson, S. M. (2019). *Attachment theory in practice: Emotionally focused therapy (EFT) with individuals, couples, and families*. Guilford Publications.
- Lai, Y. H., & Carr, S. (2018). A critical exploration of child-parent attachment as a contextual construct. *Behavioral Sciences*, 8(12). <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs8120112>
- Main, M. (1990). Cross-Cultural Studies of Attachment Organization: Recent Studies, Changing Methodologies, and the Concept of Conditional Strategies. *Human Development*, 33(1), 48–61. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000276502>
- Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., Sapir-Lavid, Y., & Avihou-Kanza, N. (2009). What’s Inside the Minds of Securely and Insecurely Attached People? The Secure-Base Script and Its Associations With Attachment-Style Dimensions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(4), 615–633. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015649>
- Owens, G., Crowell, J. A., Pan, H., Treboux, D., O’Connor, E., & Waters, E. (1995). The prototype

- hypothesis and the origins of attachment working models: Adult relationships with parents and romantic partners. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 216–233.
- Schachner, D. A., Shaver, P. R., & Gillath, O. (2008). Attachment style and long-term singlehood. *Personal Relationships*, 15(4), 479–491.
- Sroufe, L. A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E. A., & Collins, W. A. (2005). *The development of the person: The Minnesota study of risk and adaptation from birth to adulthood*. Guilford Press.
- Sroufe, L. A., & Waters, E. (1977). Attachment as an Organizational Construct. *Child Development*, 48(4), 1184. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1128475>
- Sukys, S., Lisinskiene, A., & Tilindiene, I. (2015). Adolescents' participation in sport activities and attachment to parents and peers. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 43(9), 1507–1518. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2015.43.9.1507>
- Uvnäs-Moberg, K. (1996). Neuroendocrinology of the mother—child interaction. *Trends in Endocrinology & Metabolism*, 7(4), 126–131.
- Vinney, C. (2019). *What Is Attachment Theory? Definition and Stages*. ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/attachment-theory-4771954>