

CAPP
Centre for Attachment-based Psychoanalytic
Psychotherapy
presents
The Centenary John Bowlby Memorial
Conference 2007

**Attachment Theory And The John Bowlby Memorial
Lecture
A Short History
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This year's Bowlby Conference marks the centenary of John Bowlby's birth in 1907. One of the outstanding psychoanalysts of the twentieth century, as a theory builder and reformer his societal impact and influence on social policy have been greater than that of any other. He has been described by Diamond as 'the Dickens of psychoanalytic theory': he illuminated the human experiences of attachment and loss as vividly as Dickens represented those of poverty and deprivation.

The origins of Bowlby's work lay in his early work with children displaced through war or institutionalization. This led him to the conviction that at the heart of traumatic experience lay parental loss and prolonged separation from parents. His landmark report for the World Health Organisation in 1952, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, enabled him to establish definitively the primary link between environmental trauma and the disturbed development of children

With these understandings, he entered the public arena to bring about change in the way childhood suffering was addressed by the adult world. Bowlby's work created a bridge over the chasm between individual and social experience and hence between the personal and the political

There is congruence between the social and therapeutic perspectives of John Bowlby and those of this year's Bowlby lecturer, Judith Herman. She too, has directed her life's work to the 'restoring of connections' between the private and public worlds in which traumatic experience takes place; but her focus has been on the traumatic experiences that take place in adulthood. She has shown the parallels between private terrors such as rape and domestic violence and public traumas such as political terrorism. Her conceptual framework for psychotherapy

with traumatized people points to the major importance of attachment in the empowerment of the survivor. She writes 'Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.'

Bowlby had also sought to bridge "the chasm between clinician and researcher". His preparedness to leave the closed world of psychoanalysis of his time in order to make links with other disciplines such as animal studies and academic psychology was vital in the building up of Attachment Theory. The documented and filmed sequence of children's responses to separation in terms of protest, detachment and despair as researched by James Robertson, provided evidence of separation anxiety. The impact of these ideas on the development of care of children in hospital has been enormous. The 2001 Bowlby Lecturer, Michael Rutter, discussed institutional care and the role of the state in promoting recovery from neglect and abuse. His lecture was a testament to the continuing relevance of Bowlby's thinking to contemporary social issues.

Although Bowlby joined the British Psychoanalytic Society in the 1930s and received his training from Joan Riviere and Melanie Klein, he became increasingly sceptical of their focus on the inner fantasy life of the child rather than real life experience, and tended towards what would now be termed a relational approach. Thus, in searching for a theory which could explain the anger and distress of separated young children, Bowlby turned to disciplines outside psychoanalysis such as ethology. He became convinced of the relevance of animal and particularly primate behaviour to our understanding of the normal process of attachment. These relational concepts presented a serious challenge to the closed world of psychoanalysis in the 1940s, and earned Bowlby the hostility of his erstwhile colleagues for several decades.

The maintenance of physical proximity by a young animal to a preferred adult is found in a number of animal species. This suggested to Bowlby that attachment behaviour has a survival value, the most likely function of which is that of care and protection, particularly from predators. It is activated by conditions such as sickness, fear and fatigue. Threat of loss leads to anxiety and anger; actual loss to anger and sorrow. When efforts to restore the bond fail, attachment behaviour may diminish, but will persist at an unconscious level and may become reactivated by reminders of the lost adult, or new experiences of loss.

Attachment theory's basic premise is that, from the beginning of life, the baby human has a primary need to establish an emotional bond with a caregiving adult. Attachment is seen as a source of human motivation as fundamental as those of food and sex. Bowlby (1979:129) postulated that "Attachment behaviour is

any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other preferred and differentiated individual ... While especially evident during early childhood, attachment behaviour is held to characterise human beings from the cradle to the grave."

Attachment Theory highlights the importance of mourning in relation to trauma and loss. An understanding of the relevance of this to therapeutic practice was a vital element in the foundation of CAPP. The consequences of disturbed and unresolved mourning processes was a theme taken up by Colin Murray Parkes when he gave the first John Bowlby Memorial Lecture in 1993.

Mary Ainsworth, an American psychologist who became Bowlby's lifelong collaborator, established the inter-connectedness between attachment behaviour, caregiving in the adult, and exploration in the child. While the child's need to explore, and the need for proximity might seem contradictory, they are in fact complementary. It is the mother's provision of a secure base, to which the child can return after exploration, which enables the development of self-reliance and autonomy. Ainsworth developed the Strange Situation Test for studying individual differences in the attachment patterns of young children. She was able to correlate these to their mother's availability and responsiveness. Her work provided both Attachment Theory and psychoanalysis with empirical support for some basic premises. This provided the necessary link between attachment concepts and their application to individual experience in a clinical setting.

Over the last two decades the perspective of Attachment Theory has been greatly extended by the work of Mary Main who was another Bowlby Lecturer. She developed the Adult Attachment Interview in order to study the unconscious processes which underlie the behavioural pattern of attachment identified by Mary Ainsworth. Further support came from the perspective of infant observation and developmental psychology developed by yet another Bowlby Lecturer, Daniel Stern. The Bowlby Lecturer for 2000, Allan Schore, presented important developments in the new field of neuro-psychoanalysis describing emerging theories of how attachment experiences in early life shape the developing brain.

The links between Attachment Theory and psychoanalysis have also been developed. Jo Klein, a great supporter of CAPP and also a former contributor to the Bowlby Conference, has explored these links in psychotherapeutic practice. In particular, the 1998 Bowlby Lecturer, Stephen Mitchell, identified a paradigm shift away from drive theory within psychoanalysis. His proposed "relational matrix" links Attachment Theory to other relational psychoanalytic theories which find so much resonance in the

current social and cultural climate. Within this area of convergence, between attachment research and developmental psychoanalysis the 1999 Bowlby Lecturer, Peter Fonagy, has developed the concept of "mentalisation", extending our understanding of the importance of the reflective function, particularly in adversity.

In similar vein, the work of Beatrice Beebe, the 2001 Bowlby Lecturer, represents another highly creative development in the unfolding relational narrative of the researcher-clinician dialogue. Her unique research has demonstrated how the parent infant interaction creates a distinct system organised by mutual influence and regulation which are reproduced in the adult therapeutic relationship.

In the movement to bring the body into the forefront of relational theory and practice the 2003 Bowlby Lecturer, Susie Orbach, has been a leading pioneer. It was the publication of her ground breaking books, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* and *Hunger Strike* which introduced a powerful and influential approach to the study of the body in its social context. Over the last decade, one of her major interests has been the construction of sexuality and bodily experience in the therapeutic relationship.

The 2004 Bowlby Lecturer, Jody Messler Davies, has made major contributions to the development of the relational model. Her integration of trauma theory and relational psychoanalysis led to new understandings of the transference-countertransference as a vehicle for expressing traumatic experience.

Kimberlyn Leary, Bowlby Lecturer in 2005, illuminated the impact of racism on the clinical process. The importance of her contribution lay in her understanding of the transformative potential inherent in the collision of two 'racialized subjectivities' in the therapeutic process. She showed the possibility for reparation when both therapist and client break the silence surrounding their difference

Last year's Bowlby Lecturer Bessel van der Kolk's contribution to the understanding of post traumatic stress in terms of a developmental trauma disorder has been seminal. His book, *Psychological Trauma*, was the first to consider the impact of trauma on the entire person, integrating neurobiological, interpersonal and social perspectives.

Within this tradition of great trauma theorists, the contribution of this year's Bowlby Lecturer, Judith Herman, a collaborator of Bessel van der Kolk, has been outstanding. As a teacher, researcher and clinician, her life's work has been directed to survivors of trauma. Her landmark book, *Trauma and Recovery* is considered to have changed the way we think about trauma. Bridging the world of war veterans, prisoners of war,

survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, she has shown that psychological trauma can only be understood in a social context.

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