

DISCUSS RESEARCH INTO THE INFLUENCE OF CHILDHOOD ON ADULT RELATIONSHIPS (8 + 16 marks)



Bowlby believed that the relationship with our primary caregiver as a child provided us with an INTERNAL WORKING MODEL which gives the child a view of themselves and others and also of the relationship between the two. This view acts as a template and so continues into adulthood (the CONTINUITY HYPOTHESIS), leading the child to expect the same in later relationships.

Children also develop an ATTACHMENT STYLE as originally found by **Ainsworth**. She found that the three main attachment types were; secure, insecure avoidant and insecure ambivalent. **Hazen and Shaver** then used Ainsworth's information to test the continuity hypothesis using their "love quiz". They found that 56% of their sample were classed as have a 'secure' attachment during childhood and were happy and trusting in their adult relationships. 25% were 'insecure avoidant' as children and were doubtful of the existence of true love in adulthood and 19% were 'insecure ambivalent' during childhood which lead them to feel emotional extremes in later relationships. It is evident that the relationship experiences in childhood continue as the person grows, as stated in Bowlby's original theory.

In evaluation, a study by **Zimmerman** found contradicting evidence. He found that infant attachment type did not in fact predict adult attachment types but rather life-events had a greater influence. These findings therefore challenge the idea of an internal working model by showing that the environment may have a more profound effect of attachment types than the early childhood atmosphere. This was further supported by **Hamilton** who concluded that children can move from being classed as secure to insecure if they go through major life events, again contradicting the idea that attachment styles are consistent and so this criticises bowlby's continuity hypothesis.

These findings may be due to a different and contradicting hypothesis, the 'temperament hypothesis'. This states that a child's personality and temperament affects how people respond to them and this will then affect their attachment style and this can explain the variation found in attachment types, highlighting the reductionist nature of the internal working model as it doesn't show all the possible reasons as to why childhood affects later attachments.

However, the research is inconsistent and several studies have actually found supporting results. **Simpson et al** found that the expression of emotions in adulthood can be related to a person's attachment experiences during their social development, just as **Fraley** who concluded that there was a correlation between attachment types and adult relationships. These studies show support for the continuity hypothesis.

However much of the research into the influence of childhood suffers from demand characteristics and this affects the validity. To overcome this **Main** developed that ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW which looks at *how* people talk about their past relationships and thus this may be a better analysis of childhood than the methods used to develop Bowlby's theory.

The internal working model is also significantly deterministic as it believes that the behaviour in adult relationships is pre-determined by childhood experiences and thus leaves no room for free will. It also does not allow for the fact that some individuals do experience positive adult relationships despite being insecurely attached in childhood which would show that these children have clearly emphasised their free will and worked to develop healthy relationships instead of their fate having been determined by their childhood environment.

A last potential problem, as pointed out by **Wood**, is that we may need to distinguish between relatedness (the way we relate to others that stems from our attachment style) and relationships (which stems from the interplay between two peoples' attachment styles). For example, a secure person may act differently with a secure rather than an insecure partner.