

The influence of early attachment on later relationships

Key Questions

- **What impact does an Internal Working Model have?**
- What impact does early attachment have on childhood relationships?
- **What impact does early attachment have on adult relationships?**

Bowlby's Internal Working Model

- [Quizziz](#)
- Fill in the blanks

Exam Question:

What is meant by an Internal Working Model? (3)

- **A mental representation of the relationship between the baby and their primary attachment figure**
- A baby who experiences a loving relationship with a reliable attachment figure will assume this is how relationships are meant to be – and seek out functional relationships (neither avoidant or resistant)
- **A baby who has a bad experience of first attachment may struggle to form relationships in the first place, or display insecure avoidant/resistant behaviour in later relationships**

Childhood relationships – Bullying

Think / Pair / Share

- Which type of child could get involved in which type of bullying behaviour and why?
- Secure
- Insecure-avoidant
- Insecure-resistant

Childhood relationship research

- **Kerns (1994) - infant attachment types.**
- Sroufe et al. (2005) Minnesota child–parent study
- **Myron-Wilson and Smith (1998) – bullying and attachment type in 7–11-year-olds Secure children**

Adult relationships

Hazen and Shaver (1987) – ‘The Love Quiz’

- The study aimed to investigate whether early attachment types are associated with later romantic relationships in adulthood.
- **The questionnaire was printed in an American local newspaper**
- 620 responses were received
- **3 parts across around 100 Likert Questions (SA to SD)**
 - **Part A: the current most important relationship to the participant**
 - **Part B: current + previous romantic experiences**
 - **Part C: attachment style**
- This was a self-report study using volunteer ppts

Adult relationships

Hazen and Shaver (1987) – ‘The Love Quiz’

Findings: Attachment type	%	Later behaviour
Secure	56	More likely to have stable, trusting relationships in adulthood. Comfortable with intimacy and independence.
Insecure-avoidant	25	May struggle with intimacy, avoid closeness, and have difficulty trusting others.
Insecure-resistant	19	May become overly clingy, worry about abandonment, and struggle with maintaining balanced relationships.

Love Quiz - Results

	<i>Secure adults</i>	<i>Resistant (anxious) adults</i>	<i>Avoidant adults</i>
Different love experiences	Relationships are secure	Preoccupied by love	Fearful of closeness
Adults' views of relationships	Trust others and believe in enduring love	Fall in love easily but have trouble finding true love	Love is neither durable nor necessary for happiness
Memories of the mother-child relationship	Positive image of mother as dependable and caring	Conflicting memories of mother being positive and rejecting	Remembers mother as cold and rejecting

Securely attached adults...

- Find it easier to form solid relationships with others
- Hold beliefs (e.g. love is enduring) about relationships

Report experiences in relationships such as mutual trust

- Are less likely to get divorced

Insecurely attached adults...

- **Feel that true love is rare**
- Fall in and out of love easily
- **Find relationships difficult**
- Are more likely to get divorced

Hazen and Shaver (1987)

- [Quizziz](#)

Adult relationships and the IWM

The IWM also affects the child's ability to parent their own children. People tend to base their parenting style on their IWM, therefore

attachment types tend to be passed down in families.

It was found that mothers who reported poor attachments to their own parent was much more likely to have children classified as poor.

Supporting the idea of the internal working model as a factor that can shape relationships later in life.

and 99 mothers with 1 year of their attachment to standard interviews.

ment of the babies to the

Review – effects of attachment type

Whiteboards

Behaviour at school

- Relationship quality and friendships
- Bullying behaviour

Adult romantic behaviour

- Secure vs insecure romantic behaviour
- Insecure-resistant versus Insecure-avoidant romantic behaviour

Evaluation – PRC practice

- **Read the ‘relevance’ (evidence)**
- On whiteboards, write what you think the Point and Conclusions are

Mixed findings

Point:

For example, some studies do appear to support continuity and so provide evidence to support internal working models. However, **Zimmerman (2000)** assessed infant attachment type and adolescent attachment to parents. The findings indicated that there was very little relationship between quality of infant and adolescent attachment.

Conclusion:

Mixed findings

A weakness is that the evidence on continuity of attachment type is mixed.

For example, some studies do appear to support continuity and so provide evidence to support internal working models. However, **Zimmerman (2000)** assessed infant attachment type and adolescent attachment to parents. The findings indicated that there was very little relationship between quality of infant and adolescent attachment.

This suggests that the IWM cannot necessarily reliably predict how infant attachments impact later behaviours and may not fully explain how such behaviours emerge.

Self-report issues

Point:

For example, many assessments of early attachments and current day attachments rely on the use of questionnaires and interviews (self-report methods) as a means of categorising participants as a specific attachment type.

Conclusion:

Self-report issues

Another weakness is that most studies of the influences of early attachment on later relationships are based on self-report surveys.

For example, many assessments of early attachments and current day attachments rely on the use of questionnaires and interviews (self-report methods) as a means of categorising participants as a specific attachment type.

Self-report data may be influenced by demand characteristics or social desirability. Therefore, the findings from studies like Hazen and Shaver may be inaccurate and validity in their conclusions

Alternative explanations

Point:

For example, there are alternative explanations for the continuity that is often observed between infant and adult attachments. A third environmental factor such as parenting style might have a direct effect on both attachment and the child's ability to form relationships with others. Alternatively, the child's temperament may influence both infant attachment and the quality of later life relationships.

Conclusion:

Alternative explanations

One issue with the IWM is that there may be other valid explanations for the behaviours seen in adult attachments.

For example, there are alternative explanations for the continuity that is often observed between infant and adult attachments. A third environmental factor such as parenting style might have a direct effect on both attachment and the child's ability to form relationships with others. Alternatively, the child's temperament may influence both infant attachment and the quality of later life relationships.

This suggests that the IWM isn't a full explanation of how infant attachment links to later relationship behaviour.