Attachment and intersubjectivity

Ian R. Owen

Abstract

To say one's practice is influenced by attachment research is a respectable claim. Yet the understanding of attachment is often muddied by natural psychological science's focus on material being. Thus, conscious psychological senses and processes are discussed in terms of causative neurological development. Gaining an accurate understanding of attachment has an important role in addressing complex psychological phenomena, particularly when there is no consensus on how to proceed. How are attachment and intersubjectivity accurately identifiable? *Intersubjectivity* is capable of explaining *attachment* yet both terms need better definition and interrelation. This paper does not solve the problem of how to understand attachment and intersubjectivity. Rather, it attempts to demonstrate a series of problems in understanding attachment, everyday life and therapy as intersubjective. A scepticism is held concerning interpreting unconscious objects without relation to conscious ones. Consciousness is not an epiphenomenon. It is what needs explaining.

Key words

Attachment, intersubjectivity, co-empathy, interpretative stance.

Introduction

There have been attempts by Husserl (Allen, 1976), Merleau-Ponty (1964), Bowlby (1988), Hesse and Main (1999) and Stern (1985) to capture the inter-responsive nature of the meaningful world of children. The paper argues for an attendance to the phenomena of attachment and intersubjectivity, in order to distinguish each. It argues that the position of Stein (et al, 2002) is capable of supporting speculative theorising that can generate further findings. What is of concern is understanding how therapeutic practice, research and theory relate to conscious experiences of one individual. For instance, the stance called behaviourism refused any but the most simple of mental processes. It is

untrue to say that it refused to interpret observable events without acknowledging consciousness altogether. It did focus on the association between a cultural object and emotion (often anxiety, fear or frustration). Behaviourism believes that negative reinforcement provides temporary relief from conditioned emotions and so any temporary relief maintains the emotion. What is of concern is interpreting mental processes between two or more persons that are specifically about significant attachments rather than non-attachment forms of relationship. If basic distinctions cannot be made, and a form of theorising arises that does not relate to conscious phenomena, then the study of attachment and its use in therapy will be hampered. An argument is put forward that concludes with the assertion that attachment only relates to specific intimate relationships but these are not authoritatively defined by the paper.

This paper raises a number of questions about the use of attachment and intersubjectivity as ideas capable of justifying therapy. One question that is raised but not answered is 'what does attachment explain in adult relationships?' Any idea about relating should be capable of directing therapists in the heat of the moment. A further question concerns whether attachment, as it is currently understood, is capable of identifying specific causes and effects. Such thinking is close to understanding the defences as they appear in relationships. Attachment exists in relation to the fear of abandonment and how adults 'protect themselves' from others. The repeated frustrations of children who need to be attached, and the insecure forms of attachment that can occur, accumulate for individuals and co-exist with more secure forms of relating. Crittenden, for instance, has concluded (1) that avoidant infants are unable to interpret or use emotional communication. (2) That ambivalent infants have not socially learned to regulate their carers. And (3) that disorganised infants are unable to anticipate the responses that their carers make and remain angry and anxious (Cited in McCluskey, 2005, p 67). If theory cannot suggest guidelines, then choosing action will remain unclear.

Attachment theory shows empirically that there are specific sorts of relationship processes that occur between a child and its carers - before, during and after a temporary separation (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969). Attachment refers to formative intersubjective habits and 'positions' that can influence the adult in a tendency for being confident, gregarious and able to enjoy harmonious relations with others - or in conflict, retreat and dissatisfaction. Attachment can refer to the effects of disruption in adulthood (Brisch, 1999, Heard & Lake, 1986, 1997). Attachment as a whole includes its disappointment (in anticipatory fear, avoidance, betrayal and ambivalence). The influence across time is such that some form of presence of the past can be discerned but always as empathies of the first-hand experience of others. It is not controversial to believe that the past influences the present. It is difficult to pinpoint the nature of the influence though.

This paper is a reflection on the relation between attachment, theoretical stance and methodologically-derived outcome. If anything, it asks more questions than it solves. If it were the case that a theoretical stance was not appropriate for the phenomena, then the guiding ideas produced would increase the occurrence of mistaken actions. Because there is a lack of overall consensus within the field of attachment research and its theorising, as there is within all psychology, there is a need for some shared terms of reference and practice. "Internal working model," "schema" and other such terms show what sort of theoretical stance has developed towards the observable situation of child and carer interactions. The aim is to present theoretical work in progress and promote collegiate debate about how to investigate the key phenomena.

Attachment is intersubjective. But intersubjectivity includes meaning, and understanding communication and relating. But what is attachment? How is it possible to fend off unsuitable characterisations of attachment? (There are further questions concerning the extent and interrelation between observable phenomena that cannot be answered here). Section 1 problematises attachment through raising some unanswered questions. Section 2 is a speculation concerning the possible correlations between attachment and its possible defences or 'management,' in dismissing or being preoccupied (following Stein et al, 2002). Section 3 concerns how to interpret the intentionalities inherent in attachment. Finally, a conclusion is provided.

Section 1: Unanswered questions

Intersubjectivity is a contemporary watchword for the interrelation of changes in psychological meaningfulness and responsiveness in psychoanalysis (Renik, 2004), psychotherapy generally (Diamond & Marrone, 2003) and infant research in child development (Stern, 1985). Most accounts deal with it in terms of the development of neurological changes in the child's brain rather than the specifics of how it is possible to understand psychological meaningfulness and responsiveness, within the overall context of the ability to interact with respect to the point of view of others. Intersubjectivity is literally what lies between subjectivities, egos or personalities. It is often taken to mean the immediate inter-responsive nature of human communion. Whether the contact is between infants and carers or two or more adults. However, it is insufficient to define attachment by stating it is intersubjective without defining what both are, and how each may be distinguished and interpreted. When "intersubjectivity" is adopted as a watchword, a complex number of assumptions and necessities are invoked. What follows is a selection of comments on intersubjectivity. Next some comments are made that define attachment.

• Intersubjectivity is the basic form of interconnectedness between people within specific social contexts and relationships of all kinds (Owen, 2000, 2003). Although Husserl's account of intersubjectivity was an argument about the conditions for the public meaningfulness and being in a shared world of meaning, his ideas on inter-relation are also capable of accounting for non-verbal affective communication.

• Intersubjectivity includes reciprocal and non-reciprocal aspects of interrelating. Some aspects of roles may be complementary and not have exclusive tasks or duties. Whilst others might be complementary because tasks are reserved for one person in a pair or group and not available to others. For instance, in care seeking for infants, it is only the adults who are carers. But in adult, intimate relationships and some occupational relationships, the caring could be more mutual.

• Intersubjectivity concerns the performance of specific roles in home or occupational life. Sometimes such roles are specialised, mutually exclusive or predetermined by values and the cultural traditions of social convention. Some persons may be permitted or excluded from occupying roles by specific reasons of cultural markers such as profession, social class or race. Some rules may determine aspects of home or occupational life. There may be boundaries to the entering or leaving of social groups of various sorts.

• Intersubjectivity is about the effects of social rules, about constraint or social freedom, according to specific customs and practices of various cultures.

Attachment has been defined in a number of ways. The central research question of attachment research is understanding how fear of abandonment and its avoidance feature in the four forms[1] of attachment. The four forms are: (1) secure attachment and its form of coping with separation (Ainsworth et al, 1978, Bowlby, 1988, Main, 1985, Sroufe, 1983), (2) preoccupied attachment anxiety and its type of defence (Ainsworth et al, 1978), (3), dismissing attachment and its type of defence (Ainsworth et al, 1978, Bowlby, 1977, 1980, Main, 1985), plus (4), fearful attachment as exhibited in anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew, 1990, 1997). It was also the conclusion of Bowlby that neither nature nor nurture is predominant in attachment. They always co-occur and cannot be observed singly (1958, p 358). He believed that sense-material from different perceptual fields become the sense of the other at about five to six months (Ibid, p 361).

In understanding attachment phenomena as the end products of intentional processes, it becomes necessary to overcome the non-intersubjective entailments of attachment theory. This is because therapy practice should not be based on 'naturalised' attachment research and methods of research that do not fit the conscious experiences of attachment or intersubjectivity or wish to avoid

psychological meaningfulness altogether. Attachment is noting discrete, repetitious types of relationship between people in family, loving and sexual relationships, in work and friendship. Attachment is about potentially observable inter-relations where specific persons can be identified as having problematic or secure anticipations, abilities to engage or attempt to avoid engagement by actions or influences.

Bowlby stated that attachment is not immature physiological dependence (1958, p 371, 1988, p 12). His position can be read as making a distinction between emotional felt-senses and intellectual thought about a referent. Intentionality of a composite sort is what creates the attachment bond, either securely or defensively. Attachment has been noted as a person-specific type of relating (Allen et al, 2001, p 437). This would seem to suggest that attachment is not constant or ubiquitous but discretely different according to a specific understanding of a specific other person. Simpson and Rholes (1998, pp 4-9) note that secure parents often have secure children. Whereas dismissing parents may have anxious-avoidant children. And preoccupied parents have anxious-ambivalent children. They also note that secure adults are able to self-regulate and discuss their emotions more than insecure ones. Such an ability shows that persons who can often create secure processes around them first know and then trust what they feel. Generally, emotion and emotional expression are a call on care givers to respond. And it requires that people can understand emotion as the felt-sense of a *fundamental form of relation of self to other*, a most basic form of co-empathy and intersubjectivity. This special case is where the other is turned to self, as it occurs in two person relationships and as it momentarily occurs in any larger group.

Hesse and Main (1999, p 500) have provided details of specific examples of interactions between children and carers. They conclude that secure adults are co-operative and have infants that are secure. Secure infants might be distressed on separation but they become secure once the adult returns. Dismissing adults are overly self-reliant or controlling of others, dismissive of their own thoughts, feelings and past relationships, and have infants who are likely not to show distress on separation and ignore or avoid their parents when they return. Nor do the infants of dismissing adults show anger at having been separated. Preoccupied parents have a preoccupation with their past relationships that might include a mood of anger, passivity or fearfulness. They are believed to have infants who are wary before separation and cannot settle on reunion. Thus, the preoccupation is passed on.

Brennan (et al, 1998, p 69) concluded that attachment as conceived by Ainsworth (et al 1978) was correct in a two-dimensional view of the combinations of secure coping; preoccupied anxiety and approach; fearful anxiety and avoidance; and avoidance with no anxiety. Marris has called attachment "not, essentially, a relationship the child has learned to be predictably nurturing,

but an innate pattern of bonding which … very quickly becomes identified with the unique figures who thereafter become intensely important … The way the attachment develops into a relationship will be learned, but not the attachment itself", (1996, p 54). This view would seem to be supportive of a two-step process between nature and nurture but then states nothing about the mediating, affective and cognitive processes by which care-giving persons and contexts arise.

Possibly, attachment is a type of intimate bonding such as love, its disappointments and frustrations in close personal relationships and not a general form of relating in society. Attachment is not just about the caring between infants and care givers. The core focus for infants and adults is the developmental definition of empathy as emotional communication (Bowlby, 1958, p 369-370). What appears is that emotional attunement leads to lived senses where people know what they feel and can identify new occurrences due to knowing themselves well in relation to others. This type of accuracy is touched on by Rogers (1959) as an organismic valuing potential. Self-recognition and the ability to empathise are found to go hand in hand by Bischof-Köhler (1988, cited in Perner, 1991, p 132). Accurate self and other understanding are the fundament of good social learning, emotional intelligence and psychological mindedness. Emotional mis-attunement leads to alexithymia where infants are unable to know or trust what they feel and that may be connected to defences that modify, distract or obliterate unbearable feelings of loss, shame at having needs and other situations. In adults, higher intellectual beliefs about what and how things exist and are linguistically-expressed can drive emotions and actions. But still it may be possible to contact the base lived experience of an intersubjective relationships as emotion[2]. When the care seeking needs of infants are met, security of attachment is achieved. When the needs remain unmet, an insecure form of attachment appears.

Insecure attachment as defence shows varying abilities to make connection with, or remain distant from, others who could be closer and more constant in their quality of response. It is claimed that to develop Bowlby's initial aims requires working out cause and effect, due to differing forms of intentionality, the mental processes that can be interpreted as constituting attaching, insecurity and absence of attachment.

There are research questions concerning the understanding of movements between *one place* and *another* among the various types of attachment relationship.

1 Concerning the genesis of psychopathology as insecurity of attachment, how is insecurity first achieved? And later maintained?

2 Concerning the genesis of a cure through therapy (from insecurity to security) how is security first achieved and thereafter maintained?

3 What are the psychological conditions that need to be in place to enable movements of sorts 1 and 2?

4 How do relationships with specific others compare to a person's general overall, 'default,' attachment style? Do people occupy a region of several styles? Do they do this through conscious preference or unconscious habit? How is it the case that individuals have access to more than one attachment style? Are some forms of attachment mutually exclusive? How secure and insecure processes co-exist?

5 How do attachment styles change across the lifespan? What are the actual relations between infant, child, adolescent and adult forms of attachment? Are the infant and adult types largely the same? Or do they differ in complexity and organisation?

6 How do early and adult attachment styles co-exist such that, at moments of stress, the later more adult style is abandoned in favour of a much earlier one?

7 Attachment in non-nuclear families is much more diffuse as grandparents, aunts, uncles and others provide caring and will do so for much longer periods of time than in Western parenting (Marris, 1996, p 62-3). There is an anthropological dimension to attachment research, of understanding it as a panhuman phenomenon rather than confusing it with its culturally-bound instances.

Where behavioural, intrapsychic and other natural scientific formulations fall down is that they are not capable of relating self to the other, intersubjectively[3]. Their form of thinking is a 'one person psychology' that cannot properly represent the nature of human relationship except to state that there is conditioning and its negative reinforcement over time. Attachment as part of an phenomenological theory of mind has an advantage in that it identifies meaningful types of human relationship and posits how their intentionality is different (Perner, 1991). Thinking about intersubjectivity is a problem of accounting for a complex and infinitely variegated number of phenomena. To do so requires some explicit type of reasoning about the inter-related inter-responsiveness of human beings, verbally and non-verbally. These questions are left hanging in favour of investigating the theoretical research question concerning how expressive human bodies indicate that attachment and intersubjective communication are present.

Section 2 devotes itself to ascertaining how attachment styles comprise a whole, following the work of Stein (et al, 2002). A two person relationship can be interpreted as two, interrelated halves of what is observable. The back and forth sequences of interaction between the two parties is an abstraction from the whole. Furthermore, it is possible to work out how selves come to treat themselves, because of the cumulative effect of previous interactions[4]. The overarching theoretical research question is precisely how do researchers make sense of what is observed?

Section 2: A speculation after Stein

The original purpose of Stein and her team was to map "the relationship between underlying constructs of attachment insecurity and strategy for coping… confusion remains about what the questionnaires actually measure", (et al, 2002, p 77-78). Stein and colleagues investigated the inter-relation between avoidance and anxiety. The plot on page 84 of that paper can be read as suggesting there are two major dimensions that map all attachment. Accordingly, a two-dimensional space maps an infinite set of possibilities by positing attachment, and its absence, as a fundamental cause in relating. The team's effort was to "expand thinking about attachment along multiple dimensions instead of the usual two," of anxiety and avoidance, it was "not our intention to create a new typology". The plot of their findings "is a heuristic description of the underlying dimension of security," (Stein, personal communication, 2004).

Stein and colleagues explore similar topics to Brennan (et al, 1998) who focused on Ainsworth's view of attachment according to the self-rating of the avoidance of attachment and separation anxiety (et al, 1978). Brennan and colleagues found that there might be two types of preoccupied attachment, a high anxiety-low avoidance sort and a medium anxiety sort (Ibid, p 59). Brennan and colleagues replicated Ainsworth's original two-dimensional analysis of attachment. (In short, secure children are gregarious and cope well with separation and reunite easily with their responsive parents. Preoccupied children are anxious and ambivalent. Disorganised children are anxious, resistant to care and avoidant. Whilst dismissing children are avoidant and do not connect with carers). Allen (et al, 2001) compared two measures of attachment with one population. They noted that one adult can have relationships with others that are discretely different in attachment style (Ibid, p 437). This would seem to be confirmation of Ainsworth's "phase 4" of multiple attachments that can be attained after nine months of age (1970). Phase 4 concerns the formation of a reciprocal relationship, where the infant infers motives concerning the primary caregiver's actions. There is an intentional explanation of this because the empathic object of the carer is the infant self who is simultaneously empathising the carer.

Stein's research suggests a potential hypothesis about cause and effect in that it suggests there is some evidence that dismissing and preoccupied attachments are "strategies" that try to deal with being attached. The two dimensions are coherent in representing the whole of co-empathic representations. Stein's paper can be understood as claiming that secure attaching is an independent variable; and that its absence occurs in fearfulness. It also suggests a dependent variable of the manner or strategy of attachment. There is the possibility of investigating associated hypotheses, when there is clarity about the basic assumption that is being explored. The combinations of

attachment and its lack, and preoccupied or dismissive "strategy," provide a conceptual structure for testing hypotheses and interpreting what appears as attachment relationships. There is the hope of gaining a consensus within research and theorising. Results can be understood as reciprocal or "circular" forms of cause and effect that operate within intersubjectivity.

Although the original plot made by Stein (et al, 2002, p 84) was a two dimensional square where secure attachment was placed on the left hand side, along the length of a whole range of y values (see Figure 1 for a re-presentation of this). The re-writing of it in Figure 1 inverts this arrangement to place security on the right hand side, in-line with the standard manner of showing (x, y) co-ordinates. Instead of allocating the score of -1 to secure, and +1 to insecure along the x axis. Figure 1 allocates zero to non-attachment and +1 to secure attachment. The y dimension is maintained as it was in Stein's original paper but inverted in Figure 1. The y dimension now refers to +1 for dismissing or dominance, and -1 for preoccupied (sensitive, unregulated, submissive) attachment. Both may be considered as strategies for dealing with the degree of attachment, a quantified amount of attachment on the x co-ordinate, the independent variable or input. The y dimension is compressed to maintain the square shape. To repeat, the x dimension is from avoidant, non-attachment to securely attaching, left to right. What Figure 1 shows is a set of possible positions that comprise the whole of attachment actualities. The point is trying to imagine what the combinations in Stein's work mean prior to their empirical investigation.

Rather than there just being the focus on the research question of the relation of the fear of abandonment and its avoidance. There are several allied research questions concerning how emotions and repeating problems become part of a developmentally increasing problem in relating with others. In being able to get around the social world without doing harm of various kinds to others and oneself, there is the question of how we feel and how to interpret it. Regardless of the developmental phases of each of the participants and their physical ages, what the points in the two-dimensional space mean are as follows.

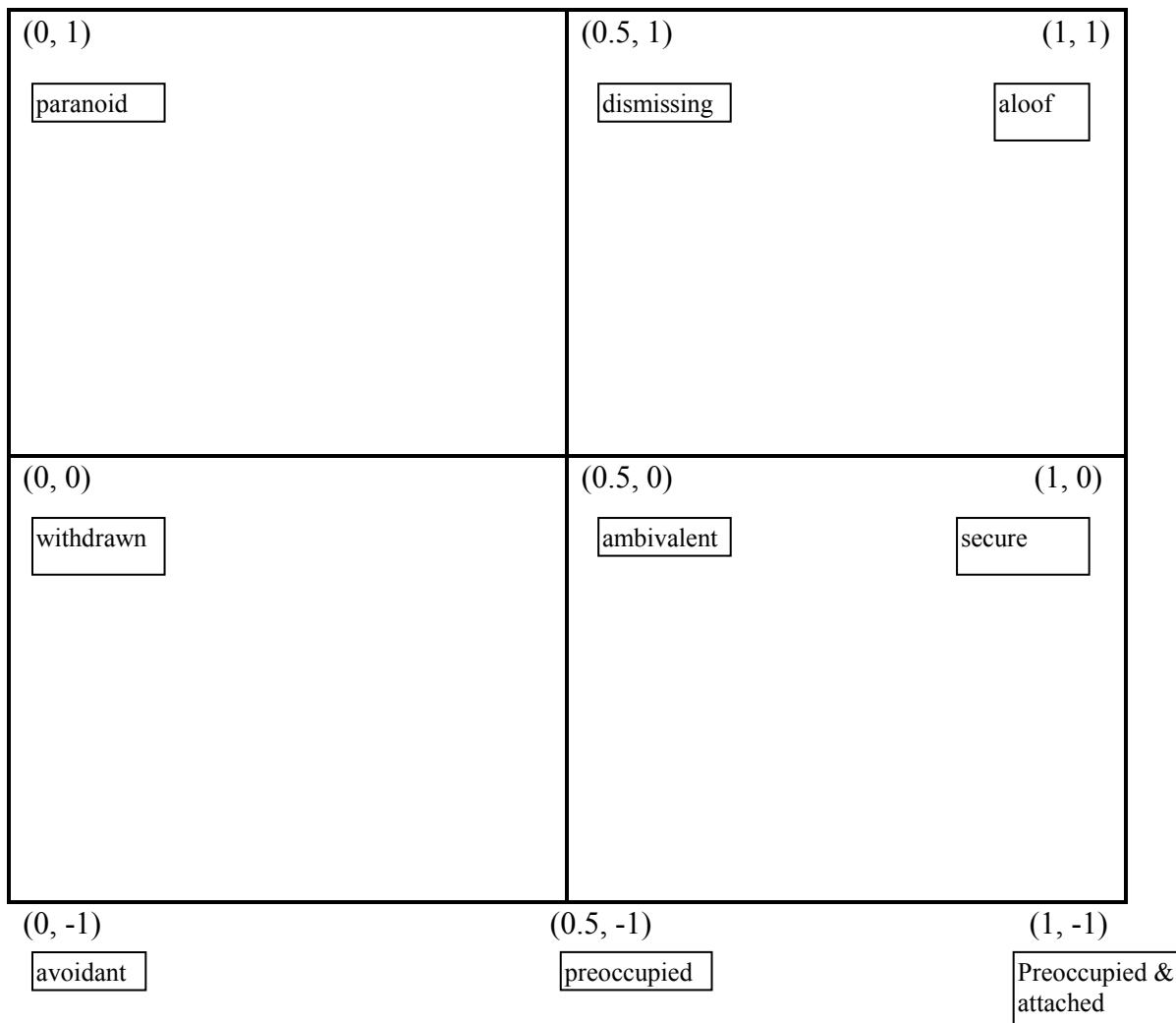| (0, 1) paranoid	(0.5, 1) dismissing	(1, 1) aloof
(0, 0) withdrawn	(0.5, 0) ambivalent	(1, 0) secure
(0, -1) avoidant	(0.5, -1) preoccupied	(1, -1) Preoccupied & attached

Figure 1 – an ideal space made by the combination of the degree of attachment along the x axis and the sense of the other along the y axis.

The following remarks are tentative hence the question marks in brackets. Moving from the bottom left corner to the bottom right corner:

(0, -1) Avoids and does not attach. (Is this despair? Being beyond protest?).

(0.5, -1) Preoccupied with separation, abandonment, rejection or receiving disapproval. Some attachment and some social anxiety. Maintains relationships.

(1, -1) Preoccupied but can attach securely. Has strong social skills but is focused on others in the past thus providing a sense of loss (?) that may influence present relationships.

Moving from middle left to mid right:

(0, 0) Withdrawn and does not attach. Ambivalence not achieved.

(0.5, 0) Ambivalent with some avoidance and desire to be attached that can be successfully maintained or broken off if necessary.

(1, 0) Securely attaching without unnecessary anxiety: gregarious, resilient, resourceful, co-operative, friendly and relaxed in company. Secure persons have good self esteem and the ability to understand themselves and others accurately. They have no unnecessary fear, hatred or need to control. Neither are they preoccupied with the past nor unduly fearful of the future. Securely attaching people are understood as a model of good psychological health.

Moving from top left to top right:

(0, 1) Paranoid protest and anxiety but overall not attaching due to anticipated or experienced hostility from others. Anticipates attacks and may empathise that attacks have taken place when there have been none.

(0.5, 1) Dismisses and controls others with some avoidance and attachment.

(1, 1) Aloof, dominant and dismisses but may require being in control to attach. This position may also include being intimidating or powerful.

With the testing of the predictions above, it is hoped to become more precise about how the overall combinations and fundamental parameters vary. One way of understanding attachment is to seek out its basic forms and work out how not only cause and effect but also psychological meaningfulness operates in human relationships of that sort. Attachment relationships are co-empathic and intersubjective but not all relationships concern attachment.

Table 1 is a sketch of some factors towards the theorising and empirical investigation of attachment as attachment, rather than construing it around material and neurological factors. What needs to happen is some further thinking through of the relations between consciousness and the material aspect of human being. Further factors co-occurring with the basic terms above can be found after further conceptual discussion and experimentation. Only empirical research can show what the contingent connections are between associated factors such as anxiety, defensive type and the role of meaning in guiding sought-for outcomes.

'Grid reference'	Self	Intersubjectivity	Sense of other & possible responses
(0, -1) Avoidant, schizoid	Withdrawn, no distress	Not achieved	Avoided. Other withdraws or feels ignored.
(0.5, -1) Preoccupied with separation, anger or loss	Fearful of rejection, sulking or loss	Preoccupied angry, or fearful	Empathised to be unavailable. Other feels attacked and could respond in a variety of ways.
(1, -1) Preoccupied distracted	Distracted, reparative to others	Preoccupied, not wholly involved	Can connect.
(0, 0) Withdrawn	Avoids care giving	Not attaching	Others are good but avoided.
(0.5, 0) Ambivalent, fearful & approaching	Socially anxious, fears rejection	Some attaching	Ambivalent: Feared, avoided & wanted. Other may feel anxious also.
(1, 0) Secure	Ego constant, self-regulated, self-worth achieved, accurate understanding, gregarious, good social skills	Secure, open	Non-threatening senses of others and accurate anticipations of the actions of others. Except when there is actual threat. Satisfying relationship established.
(0, 1) Paranoid	Paranoid, dysregulated responses to 'attacks'	Wary, attacking	Feared, attacked, rejected or out of reach. Other feels attacked and could respond in a variety of ways.
(0.5, 1) Controlling, dismissing	Self-reliant, controlling	Not reciprocal	Dismissed, conditions of worth applied. Other feels controlled, attacked, manipulated, ignored.
(1, 1) Aloof dominant, dismissing	Controlling	Not mutual	Controlled or fighting control or ignored.
Disorganised	Pan-anxiety, dysregulated	A tendency towards not attaching, co-occurring	A tendency to be influenced by the prior attachments. Other feels confused, attacked, anxious.
Meta-representational context	Reflection on total of self experience and comparison to others	Total of co-empathic manners of being-with	Total of felt senses of empathised others

Table 1 - Sketch of some concerning an intersubjective theory of attachment. The aim is to specify which intentionalities predominate in any specific form. The remarks above are tentative ones.

The speculation derived from the work of Stein and colleagues is that further research is required on how secure attachment is different to the insecure forms. Secure attachment is different in that some mental processes occur that enable self-soothing, self-cohesion and a confident openness to others. It means that 'uninterpreted emotions' are capable of being found that are potentially accurate lived senses of what is happening between self and other, in the past, present or future. Attachment security implies a coherency and trust in the senses of general and specific others. If a secure person is fearful of another, it is more likely due to their being at actual risk rather than the inaccurate empathising of risk where there is none. The problem of understanding attachment is how to interpret the results of various experiments and phenomena that are taken as meaningful. Avoidance, anxiety and security are not clearly apparent in relation to the mental processes that are occurring. Particularly, it is unclear how different types of attachment style are employed by the same infant or adult. In security, the emotions are trustworthy, co-operative, affiliative and pro-social. The senses of the other are accurate with respect to the long-term knowledge of that person. The other's sense of oneself occurs in a setting where distress is attenuated and in a context where accurate psychological understandings have accrued. Thus, accurate apperception occurs and the self understands itself.

When it comes to understanding attachment between infants and adults, there are further unanswered questions. First, intersubjectivity indicates the inter-responsiveness between two or more people but needs to go further in specifying those interactions.

Second, each experience a self has of another person is an instance, a single perspective on the referent of being together that comprises a whole of such senses. Understanding others attends to the part and the whole. There are theoretical parameters concerning the conditions of empathy and intersubjectivity. There is an appreciation of the actual whole - call it intersubjectivity as a conscious phenomenon.

Third, if self-regulation is understood as a feedback system, then such an interpretation should be based on the perceptual and empathic observation of how children and adults behave. All such matters require clarity about the theoretical stance adopted. What will compound faulty conclusions are theoretical assumptions that direct empirical attention towards biological and neurological phases of development because of the belief that defences are biologically-based,
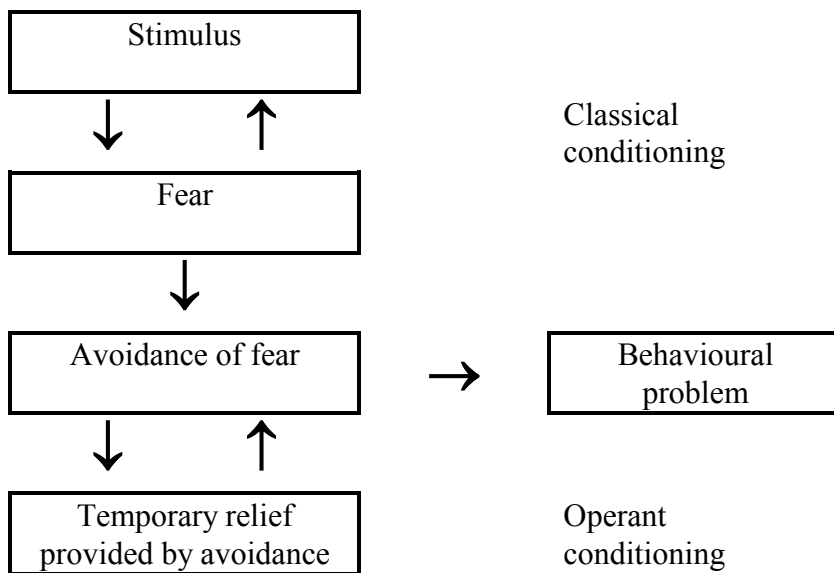
rather than attending to anxiety as a meaningful learned threat, due to the past actuality or anticipated occurrences in a relationship. There is a temporal aspect to attachment because the past influences how the present and future are empathised.

Section 3: Interpreting mental processes

One question is how to interpret mental processes within what appears. A further problematic appears concerning the complex set of interactions between various sorts of intentionality - namely separation anxiety, defence, approach in order to satisfy needs; and avoidance of anticipated abandonment or actual rejection (see below). Both Freud (1926) and behaviourism have provided answers. These are now compared with respect to finding a more intersubjective way of looking at this situation. Natural scientific psychology is not qualified to make comments on meaningfulness[5]. The diagram could be criticised for conflating behaviourism and psychoanalysis (Figure 2). If readers are in doubt about the similarities, then I refer them to the relevant texts.
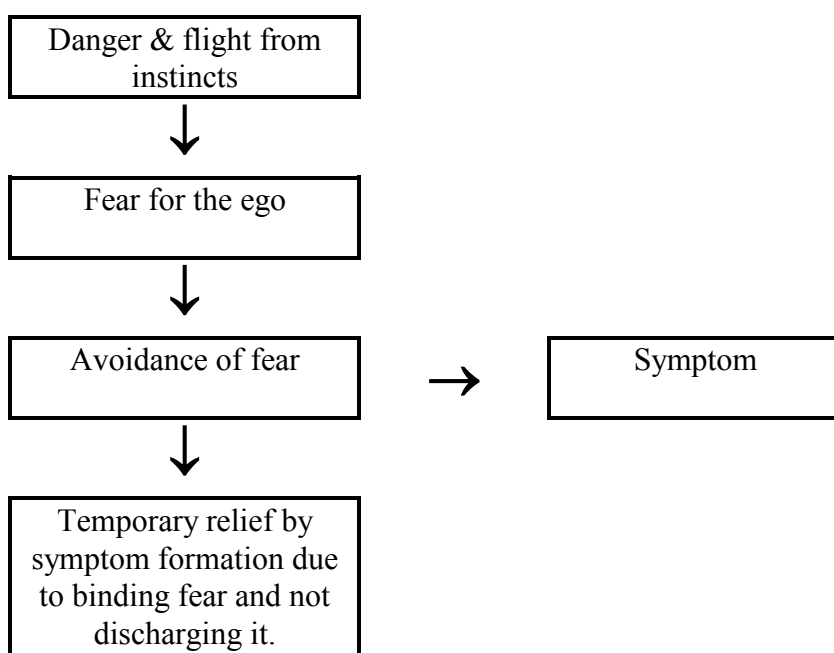
Freud's (1926) formulation of the causes of symptoms and the relation to childhood relationships.

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│       Stimulus      │
└─────────────────────┘              Classical
   │         ↑                       conditioning
   ↓         │
┌─────────────────────┐
│        Fear         │
└─────────────────────┘
         │
         ↓
┌─────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────┐
│  Avoidance of fear  │   →     │    Behavioural      │
└─────────────────────┘         │      problem        │
   │         ↑                  └─────────────────────┘
   ↓         │
┌─────────────────────┐
│  Temporary relief   │              Operant
│ provided by avoidance│             conditioning
└─────────────────────┘
```

A behavioural formulation applicable to many forms of conditioned problem. The on-set of the problem is due to classical conditioning (top half). The maintenance of the problem is through negative reinforcement, in the bottom half.

Figure 2 - Comparison of the psychoanalytic and behavioural formulations of anxiety and defence as similar alternatives to interpreting attachment. The problem here is how to take observable interactions and infer that specific composite forms of intentionality are occurring between care-seeking and care-giving.

On close inspection of what is asserted by Freud (1926, p 144-5) and behaviourism with its empirical support (Walker, 1984, 1987), there seems to be much in common. Figure 2 expresses these two different views of cause and effect, in the production of psychological problems. It might be the case that attachment could be interpreted in a similar way. One question often touched on in passing, is based on Freud's view that defences 'wipe out' or reduce fear about instinctual impulses through distraction from, or alteration of, conscious meaning caused by libidinal impulses. For Freud, anxiety is a signal in order to avoid danger. It has a function of negative reinforcement when the ego avoids the danger, thereby rewarding itself with less discomfort (1926, p 138, p 156).

There are other views of this situation though. One such view would be to believe that fear might be maintained because it is negatively reinforced, as Skinner suggested was the case in operant conditioning (Figure 2). Pavlov and Skinner offered a minimal understanding of the basic processes of learning. Classical conditioning and operant conditioning, through negative reinforcement, are empirically-validated (Walker, 1984, 1987). Please allow a brief recap of these views.

In classical conditioning, a stimulus is connected with a response. The way it is portrayed, in the top half of figure 2, is that a cause is established originally, in the perceptual presence of the stimulus that becomes paired when the subject becomes hypersensitive to it and selectively attends to it with anxious anticipation. In the particular case of the strange situation, possibly anxieties of specific sorts could be conditioned through the repeated absences of carers. A repeated type of intersubjective event, on re-establishing contact, could be sufficient to maintain insecure attachment. Negative reinforcement can also occur when children act on the motivating force of the anxiety produced. Specifically, in the bottom half of figure 2, it is believed that the accrual of anxiety is sufficient to motivate a behaviour that provides temporary relief from anxiety. The overall behavioural outcome, because of the child's attachment need, is the adoption of some characteristic behaviour as a result of the repeated reward of having done something to reduce anxiety and gain temporary relief. Such is the stance of behaviourism and it is useful as a minimal positing of some (not all) of the mental processes at stake in child and adult attachment.

Discussion

Whatever the differences and similarities between attachment and intersubjectivity, there is a need to make clear how specific phenomena are being interpreted. For instance, is it the case that the interpretation of attachment that currently occurs is a misguided technical and evolutionary psychological reading of love between parents and children? Attachment as a phenomenon is not co-extensive with all relationships in society because some relationships are not psychologically important. The term "ego" has been used to denote intersubjective style, which is one possibility. Whereas others prefer to interpret beliefs about others as causative. Whilst the psychodynamic tradition prefers metaphors of the projection of unconscious senses into real others to create their conscious senses (which are not recognised as having arisen in self).

When it comes to practice and the everyday life for that matter, there are some major differences in how to understand what we feel. Emotion is fundamental lived experience of self-other interrelation. But there are other possibilities of how emotions arise. Some emotions could be improper representations of the relationship in that they are either conditioned or otherwise not accurate with respect to the whole of the referent of the relationship. This is an abstract comment that needs an illustration. An inaccurate sense of a relationship is one where fear might be present yet there is 'nothing' in the relation that warrants the fear. The point is that conscious emotions occur in the living body in its current context of relating in which the person is and may also be influenced by a past relation or be influenced by the object of current feeling or discussion.

Emotions are a form of intentionality, a basic form of understanding, a code of communication and expression. Emotions may also be learned.

Another form of emotion is when linguistically-directed beliefs, internalised speech, discussion or theory dictate what emotion should be. The basic claim here is that thought can create emotion (and once it is felt, it could be further evidence for further thoughts about those feelings). Language could construct feelings helpfully where earned secure thinking could provide a framework for overcoming emotions that, if they were acted on, would be damaging to the person's well being overall. There could be unhelpful versions of causative internalised speech in social phobia where people tell themselves what will happen, and side with the feeling that they produced so avoid the feared situation, never entering it and not having a fuller experience of what it is like. What transpires is a fixed attitude, idea or relationship between self and the other, as the object of attention. This is an impoverished representation of what the relationship is and can be.

In practice, attachments are its felt senses. The conscious communications that occur are fundamentally about non-verbal affect and how it is communicated through perception and empathy of what is perceived in social learning. There is an implication of intentionality between people. In the case where self and other are turned towards each other, there is a simultaneous co-empathising. The referent is the shared relationship and reality testing occurs across time, so that in the special case of secure attachment, there is the outcome of gaining accurate representations of what self and others are capable of feeling and doing. Attachment processes are of the face-to-face sort and the outcome is that some feelings are veridical and worthy of being trusted, whilst others may not be at all accurate. Or, in some worst case scenarios, be entirely irrelevant to what is happening in the room. This is not a re-invention of transference and counter-transference but an entirely different explanation of the conscious interaction between people. A phenomenological meta-representational approach is one that spots the differences between secure openness and its ease of communication and specifies the role of fear, inhibition and shows that insufficient emotional experiences can become more capable of being felt and expressed in a more relaxed manner. There may be different sources of different forms of emotion. One consequence is that it is possible to judge when emotion is mis-interpreted but that requires knowing in a reliable fashion what situations emotions are about. Only careful and prolonged consideration through discussion and keeping the evidence open before drawing a conclusion can help spot reliable differences.

Mental process	'Grid reference'	Attachment process
Avoidance, no care seeking made & no giving accepted.	(0, -1)	Not achieved, care giving avoided.
Anxious ambivalence & preoccupation.	(0.5, -1)	Preoccupied, some dysregulation, semi-gregarious, anxious, clingy or angry.
Preoccupied, depressed & attached. Care seeking deficient.	(1, -1)	Preoccupied, depressed & neurotic attachment.
Paranoid hostile care seeking. Needs remain unmet.	(0, 1)	Paranoid pre-emptive attacks on mis-empathised carer so care giving possibly defeated.
Controlling, angry dominance.	(0.5, 1)	Dismissing, controlling.
Aloof, dominant & attached.	(1, 1)	Aloof, dismissing.
Withdrawn. Care seeking inactive. Care giving not received.	(0,0)	Not achieved.
Ambivalence of anxiety, retreat & approach.	(0.5, 0)	Attachment positively & negatively valued.
Secure regulation, mutual satisfaction & supportive context for exploration, care giving accepted.	(1, 0)	Secure, open, rewards itself, care seeking accepted and satisfied.
Failure of coherence between emotion and understanding -or coherence not yet attained. Pan-anxiety, not capable of attaching	An insecure tendency, co-occurring with others forms.	Disorganised & ineffective care-seeking tangles, rejects or defeats care-givers.

Table 2 - A second attempt at thinking through the relations between care seeking and care giving. Some notes on possible connections between the forms of intentionality and the sense of the referent of the shared relationship.

Conclusion

Through the identification of attachment phenomena, it may be possible to assess how a talking therapy will be suitable at all and provide treatment (of talking and relating) according to some ideas of how attaching has become damaged and how it can be restored. The problem is how the promise of attachment can be delivered for the practice of therapy. Secure forms of attachment are more mutual than the insecure sorts. Insecure attachment types are also attempts to understand the

common relationship between infants and carers. Secure attachment is when good social learning occurs with self-regulation. Conditioned emotions may exist in some situations. But not all meanings are conditioned. Social learning may well influence how people interpret various situations. But how to treat meaning remains an open question.

One point of the paper is noting that empirical findings do not give birth to themselves. Rather, empirical research always employs non-empirical, hermeneutic and theoretical reasoning and assumptions. It employs such assumptions to design the research method and interpret its results[6]. Stein's work is seen as pivotal because of the way it investigated the relationship between attaching and its lack, and the manoeuvres for dealing with the degree and quality of attachment created.

What is being asserted is that it might be possible to distinguish how the "pieces of attachment" fit together in a coherent way. A view of attachment as intersubjectivity is entailed in distinguishing the various forms of mental process, as they present different senses of the same referent. This view makes clear the problems of natural empirical research, because interpretation of what appears is currently outside of its scope. However, a self-reflexive understanding of the position taken could show what parts of theory are more or less accurate with respect to the phenomena. The point is that therapists provide psychological influence and work within that medium. They do not provide psychosurgery or drugs to alter neurological functioning. A focus on the material substrate of psychological meaningfulness is not a focus on psychological meaningfulness or its 'causes' in intentionality. It is unclear what readers are meant to do with findings about neurological development.

This paper assumes that a specific sense of one referent, the accumulated total of one or more carers or significant adult others, can be distinguished with respect to the whole set of senses concerning them. Theory and experimental methods need to bear that in mind or they risk misconstruing the topic under consideration. Attachment requires thinking about co-empathic intentionality and the manners of representing the first-hand experiences of others. Something that can never become first-hand for self.

Possibly attachment research does assume an inaccurate picture of attachment before beginning its work. What is understood is always a phenomenon from some perspective, rather than some non-interpreted reality-in-itself. It is further assumed that it is necessary to make distinct the interrelation between any particular attachment phenomenon; the theory and meta-theoretical understanding supplied (in such a way as to help theory correct itself with respect to the phenomenon); and to make sure that appropriate empirical methods can be devised. But this leads

on to show what it means to understand attachment as intersubjectivity, through intellectual analysis that relates to what is experienced (Owen, 2003).

The central focus for this paper has been a theoretical research question. It is a pressing concern to create a consensually agreed means of recognising how two human expressive bodies, in non-verbal affective inter-relation and speech, can be understood as indicating that attachment phenomena of discrete sorts are occurring. The paper has noted how phenomena exist relative to the theoretical stance taken. The theoretical problem is how to occupy a position that has benefits in that it reveals the core phenomena of attachment. The role of empirical research is to test such understanding, in a wide sense of the word "test" not necessarily including testing predictions by using statistics. The role of theory is to organise the data in a meaningful way. The lived experience of being attached and intersubjective should not be confused with neurological development and the psycho-physics of what may co-occur in meaningful relationships. If empirical psychology is not just methodology, devoid of the influence of assumptions, theory and interpretative stance, then the burden is on empirical psychology to show how it makes sense of what appears. Some people have read attachment as part of evolutionary psychology or as showing the development of the brains of children rather than what it originally meant: that child and carer were attached to each other.

Intersubjectivity is not co-extensive with attachment. It is likely that attachment phenomena may only happen in psychologically important relationships where intimacy is either achieved or its previous betrayal haunts the present and the future. These may concern the 'five drives' of care-seeking, care-giving, defence, sexuality, and interest sharing. Attachment is a distinguishable part of intersubjectivity in society. Attachment is not a form of relating that concerns social traditions, duties or roles towards specific others. Although cross-culturally, there are very different child-rearing practices that mould it. Any ultimate conclusions are referred to further empirical research. When attachment is understood as part of the whole set of actualities that are intersubjective, it challenges researchers, theorists and practitioners of therapy, to grasp its core qualities. One way of defining attachment is as co-empathic, intersubjectivity that happens between child and carer. Attachment can be understood adequately within its whole set of manners of inter-relating. Assumptions play a role in interpreting mental processes and this topic is opened up for discussion without it being possible to make any concluding remarks.

Ian Owen is a Principal Psychotherapist with the Leeds and York Partnerships Trust. He received his PhD in psychotherapy and counselling at Regent's College, London, in 2005 with a thesis entitled "what the analysis of empathy in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation reveals for psychotherapy". The work focused on the creation of a hermeneutic pure psychology for understanding human relationships and making 'formulations' of intentionality to explain psychological problems and their amelioration. It was a critique of Freud, Heidegger and Boss from the perspectives of Kant and Husserl, Dilthey and H.P. Rickman.

Notes

[1] Across the spectrum of attachment research, it is not at all clear how many basic forms of attachment exist. Hardy (et al, 2004) believe there are only three major types. Attachment is arguably a natural scientific way of understanding love. What I mean is that love, when understood intersubjectively, is about how two or more people becoming positively and negatively involved with each other.

[2] Thanks to Yvonne Agazarian of the Systems Centered Therapy Institute, Philadelphia, for showing me the force of a psychological reduction in attending to emotions as important sources of information. What I mean is that it is all too easy to think about these topics and not to feel them.

[3] Other ways of interpreting the nature of self is to see it as intrinsic with others in relation to shared public or cultural objects (Owen, 2000). What this means for attachment is that self and other are turned toward each other so that the cultural object is their relationship. The infant emotes and expresses itself in relation to its needs. The carer empathises the child's needs and satisfies them to some degree or not. It is argued that research requires clear statements concerning its own theoretical commitments, for it to devise suitable experiments that explicate the phenomena.

[4] Basically, the ego is the object of oneself for oneself, oneself for others and is empathised by others and is then a further object of empathising by selves. Tyson (1996, p 172) has theorised that there is a progression towards types of egoic constancy in child development. Namely, there are three types of egoic constancy in (1) self-esteem, (2) an overall apperceptive coherence of self-recognition and identity, and (3), in learning to act towards itself in a specific manner.

[5] Aitken and Trevarthen, for instance, hold the belief that development is "guided by regulatory mechanisms in the brain that formulate a behavior field for the individual acting practically in relation to the objective world, and socially related fields of subjective expression for a self and one or more others", (1997, p 672). Whilst this may be generally true, it says nothing about specific

psychological intersubjective processes that have conscious senses. This is the sort of problem that intersubjectivity as a watchword should overcome by being able to have a language for discussing the relation to conscious senses. Aitken and Trevarthen (Ibid, p 669) also note that "joint awareness" and "joint referencing" exist as part of affective non-verbal communication. Joint awareness and joint referencing occur in the type of conceptual intentionality inherent in speech and language as well as nonverbal communication and emotion. Aitken and Trevarthen urge the creation of theory that does adequately address "both cognitive (individualist) and intersubjective (communitarian) aspects in the formulation of an adequate theory of the emergence of human mental functions", (p 655). Specific phenomena need to be recognised within observable interactions and mental processes interpreted to explain them.

[6] Attachment needs to be properly contextualised. Fonagy quite rightly points out that there is a question about how to represent relationships (1999a, p 457, 1999b). Blatt, Auerbach and Levy seem to be at least some way to stating how the conscious objects of consciousness, self and other, are central to psychological development (1997, pp 355-6). They relate secure attachment to a positive sense of others and a positive sense of self. When this happens it can be seen as a response within the greater whole of child development, cultural acquisition and participation in an intersubjective life of responding to the responses of others.

References

Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1970) Object relations, dependency and attachment: A theoretical review of the infant-mother relationship. *Child Development*, 40, 969-1025.

Ainsworth, M.D.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E. & Wall, S. (1978) *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ainsworth, M.D.S. & Wittig, B.A. (1969) Attachment and the exploratory behavior of one-year olds in a strange situation. In B.M. Foss (Ed) *Determinants of infant behaviour, Vol. 4*. (pp. 113-136). London: Methuen.

Aitken, K.J. & Trevarthen, C. (1997) Self/other organization in human psychological development. *Development & Psychopathology*, 9, 653-677.

Allen, J. (1976) A Husserlian phenomenology of the child. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 6, 164-179.

Allen, J.G., Huntoon, J., Fultz, J., Stein, H., Fonagy, P. & Evans, R.B. (2001) A model for brief assessment of attachment and its application to women in inpatient treatment for trauma-related psychiatric disorders. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 76, 421-447.

Bartholomew, K. (1990) Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, 147-178.

Bartholomew, K. (1997) Adult attachment processes: Individual and couple perspectives. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 70, 249-263.

Bischof-Köhler D. (1988) Uber den zusammenhang von empathie und der fahigkeit, sich in spiegel zu erkennen. *Schweizerische Zeitschift fur Psychologie*, 47, 147-159.

Blatt, S.J., Auerbach, J.S. & Levy, K.N. (1997) Mental representations in personality development, psychopathology, and the therapeutic process. *Review of General Psychology*, 1, 351-374.

Bowlby, J. (1958) The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 39, 350-373.

Bowlby, J. (1977) The making and breaking of affectional bonds. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130, 201-210, 421-431.

Bowlby, J. (1980) *Attachment and loss, vol. 3: Loss, sadness and depression*. New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1988) *A secure base*. New York: Basic Books.

Brennan, K.A., Clark, C.L., & Shaver, P.R. (1998) Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview. In J.A. Simpson & W.S. Rholes (Eds) *Attachment theory and close relationships*. (pp. 46-75). New York: Guilford.

Brisch, K.H. (1999) *Treating attachment disorders: From theory to therapy*. New York: Guilford.

Diamond, N. & Marrone, M. (2003) *Attachment and intersubjectivity*. London: Whurr.

Fonagy, P. (1999a) Points of contact and divergence between psychoanalytic and attachment theories: Is psychoanalytic theory truly different. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 19, 448-480.

Fonagy, P. (1999b) Psychoanalytic theory from the viewpoint of attachment theory and research. In J. Cassidy and P.R. Shaver (Eds) *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. (pp. 595-624). New York: Guilford.

Freud, S. (1926) Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, vol 20*. (pp. 87-175). London: Hogarth.

Hardy, G.E., Aldridge, J., Davidson, C., Rowe, C. & Reilly, S. (2004) Assessing and formulating attachment issues and styles in psychotherapy. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 20, 493-512.

Heard, D.H. & Lake, B. (1986) The attachment dynamic in adult life. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 149, 430-438.

Heard, D.H. & Lake, B. (1997) *The challenge of attachment for care giving*. London: Routledge.

Hesse, E. & Main, M. (1999) Second-generation effects of unresolved trauma in nonmaltreating parents: Dissociated, frightened, and threatening parental behavior. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 19, 481-540.

Main, M. (1985) An adult attachment classification system: Its relation to infant-parent attachment. Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Toronto, April.

Marris, P. (1996) *The politics of uncertainty: Attachment in private and public life*. London: Routledge.

McCluskey, U. (2005) *To be met as a person: The dynamics of attachment in professional encounters*. London: Karnac.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) The child's relations with others. In J.M. Edie (Ed) *The primacy of perception: And other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics*. (W. Cobb Trans). (pp. 96-155). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Owen, I.R. (2000) Husserl's theory of meaning: Meaning arrives with the other. *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 11, 11-31.

Owen, I.R. (2003) What the analysis of empathy in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation reveals for psychotherapy. Unpublished doctoral thesis. London: Regents College, School of Psychotherapy and Counselling.

Perner, J. (1991) *Understanding the representational mind*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Renik, O. (2004) Intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85, 1053-1056.

Rogers, C.R. (1959) A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centred framework. In S. Koch (Ed) *Psychology: A study of a science, Vol 3*. (pp. 184-256). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Simpson, J.A. & Rholes, W.S. (1998) Attachment in adulthood. In J.A. Simpson & W.S. Rholes (Eds) *Attachment theory and close relationships*. (pp. 3-21). New York: Guilford Press.

Sroufe, L.A. (1983) Infant-caregiver attachment and patterns of attachment in pre-school: The roots of maladaptive competence. In M. Perlmutter (Ed) *Minnesota symposium on child psychology, vol. 16*. (pp. 41-83). Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum

Stein, H., Koontz, A.D., Fonagy, P., Allen J.G., Fultz, J., Brethour, J.R., Allen, D. & Evans, R.B. (2002) Adult attachment: What are the underlying dimensions? *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 75, 77-91.

Stern, D.N. (1985) *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology*. New York: Basic Books.

Tyson, P. (1996) Object relations, affect management, and psychic structure formation: The concept of object constancy. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 51, 172-189.

Walker, S.F. (1984) *Learning theory and behaviour modification*. London: Methuen.

Walker, S.F. (1987) *Animal learning theory: An introduction*. London: R & KP.