

Human Growth, Behaviour and Development

Essential Theory and Application in Social Work

Alastair Gibson and Neil Gibson



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Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
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SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Kate Wharton
Production editor: Katie Forsythe
Copyeditor: Roza I. M. El-Eini
Proofreader: Philippa Emler
Marketing manager: Tamara Navaratnam
Cover design: Lisa Harper-Wells
Typeset by: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Ashford
Colour Press Ltd



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First published 2016

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2015935203

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4739-1273-1

ISBN 978-1-4739-1274-8 (pbk)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alastair Gibson graduated with an MA in History before becoming frustrated as a hospital administrator and deciding to move into the more challenging and rewarding practice of social work. He worked in Aberdeen and Gateshead in a variety of health care social work settings and then taught at Robert Gordon University (RGU). Developing his enthusiasm for interprofessional practice, he was a founder member of the Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education (CAIPE) and helped develop shared training for social work, health, education and police trainees. He has thoroughly enjoyed teaching Human Growth and Behaviour as well as being Course Leader of the BA (Hons) Social Work by Distance Learning before retiring in 2009. He is now an independent practice teacher.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Joyce Lishman for her support and companionship in furthering my knowledge of psychosocial theory. In addition, thanks to the many students whose motivation and desire to learn have been a further inspiration. Finally, thanks to Maureen for tolerating my antisocial fixation on a computer screen for the past year and to Coen for keeping me active and entertained.

Alastair Gibson

Thanks to the students who have crossed my path when teaching Human Growth and Behaviour for making me think about the best way to describe these complex theories. Thanks to Ian Jeffries for reading and critiquing sample chapters, and thanks to Kirsi and Coen for all the support.

Neil Gibson

We would both like to thank Kate Wharton, Katie Norton and Katie Forsythe at Sage for their encouragement and enthusiastic support.

INTRODUCTION

In this book, we are hoping that you will find a clear explanation of the main theories which are delivered on social work courses under the headings of 'human growth and behaviour' or 'human growth and development'. These theories are psychodynamic and psychosocial, which means that they address the conscious and unconscious parts of an individual's personality, but also address the individual's relationships with other people. Experience has taught us that the understanding of individuals is a complex matter, and that there is no simple, straightforward approach which provides an easy answer. To apply social work interventions without making a holistic assessment of personality may result in negative outcomes for the service user and a sense of failure or frustration for the worker. The theories that we address in this book reflect this complexity, and we shall try to make them as clear as possible in the written word.

With greater understanding of the theories, you will hopefully develop more confidence in incorporating them into your practice. One of the potential dangers is that social workers apply these theoretical approaches mechanistically, as if 'one size fits all', whereas the message we wish to convey is that of understanding the uniqueness of each individual with whom you may work. Therefore, in addition to providing an explanation of theories, we also intend to demonstrate how these theories can be applied to social work or social care practice by providing case examples.

We understand that you may wish to skip over this Introduction to get to the actual content, but please read on for a few more minutes in order to find out how best to use the book.

First, we are going to concentrate on the psychosocial: we are not going to go into psychological or sociological theories in any depth, but we shall direct you to further reading throughout. Second, we are going to attempt to show you how theories overlap and complement one another: in assessing people's needs, you are putting together a jigsaw and these various theories are your jigsaw pieces. Third, we hope to show you that, while these theories provide broad knowledge and understanding, the individual's unique set of experiences determine how these theories can be applied, and it is fundamentally important that we apply theory to the individual's circumstances and do not try to fit the individual to the theory.

You will find the book arranged in four parts. Part 1 will address the importance of early childhood in the formation of personality and behaviour, looking at the emotional needs of a child and the potential implications of the care received by a child on future behaviour and development. The three chapters in this first part all

focus on how the young child develops in relationship with other people, from the immediate primary carers to a widening range of contacts with extended family, neighbours, friends and others. Chapter 1 considers the importance of attachments and bond formation; Chapter 2 considers the framework of Erik Erikson's Life Cycle, which sees personality development as a succession of expectable stages; and Chapter 3 introduces Object Relations Theory, which applies a psychodynamic approach to understanding the individual. In Part 1, we draw parallels between these three key themes, which we see as the basic psychosocial 'toolkit' for practice.

Part 2 follows the same pattern. We continue to discuss Attachment, Life Cycle and Object Relations theories, but we move on chronologically to older childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Chapter 4 considers how earlier attachment patterns impact on relationships as we move from the dependence issues of childhood to the responsibilities of adulthood. Chapter 5 considers the importance of identity formation, the implications of unresolved emotional factors from young childhood and the significance of adult relationships as opposed to adolescent relationships. Chapter 6 develops the Object Relations theoretical approach by considering how personality development from childhood may affect our capacity to form positive adult-to-adult and adult-to-child relationships. While our primary aim is to help you better understand these key theories, we shall be acknowledging their contexts within a sociological and environmental perspective and shall direct you to further reading on these areas.

Part 3 deliberately has the same format as Parts 1 and 2 and moves on to adulthood and older age. Attachment is too often applied only to young childhood, and, in Chapter 7, we consider how attachment styles impact on adult relationships, including those adults who are carers or who are cared for. Chapter 8 considers Erikson's final two stages of his Life Cycle Theory and the links between the emotional outcomes of earlier stages on the older adult, as well as the link between adult experiences and the emotional demands of old age. Chapter 9 considers to what extent issues from childhood which impacted on young adulthood can be strengthened at this point in life or whether they limit an individual's capacity to develop emotional maturity. Object Relations Theory provides insights into themes of dependence, interdependence and rejection, which are very relevant to this stage of life.

Finally, Part 4 moves away from the chronological framework and addresses the principal challenges which face individuals in their everyday lives. Chapter 10 considers transitions that occur throughout life and will look in detail at how successfully or unsuccessfully we cope with change. In considering change, the chapter will also focus strongly on the individual's experience of loss, including loss as bereavement. Chapter 11 will consider the individual within the context of family, looking at family structure, family systems and psychodynamic influences and questioning whether there can be such a thing as a 'normal family'. Chapter 12

acknowledges that much emphasis has been placed on understanding how difficulties or problems may arise throughout the book and considers how individuals may develop resilience to cope with their lives and tolerate frustrations. Chapter 13 will provide evidence from direct practice about the efficacy of the theories explored in this book as qualified social workers explain and illustrate which theories they have found useful and how they have applied them.

In each chapter, you will find case examples, further reading and exercises on critical thinking. We hope that you enjoy reading the book and that you find it helpful.

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PART 1

CHILDHOOD IN THE EARLY YEARS

Over the following three chapters, we shall consider the baby and the very young toddler. We shall discuss how relationships between the child and the child's carers are hugely important for the child's present and future development. The formation of attachment patterns and the development of affectional bonds are discussed in Chapter 1; the importance of a positive balance of care provision, based on Erikson's Life Cycle Theory, is discussed in Chapter 2; and the significance of meeting a child's emotional needs for dependence and consistency, based on Object Relations Theory, is discussed in Chapter 3.

1 ATTACHMENT – BONDING AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

An understanding of attachment theory and behaviour is absolutely essential for effective social work practice. This chapter will look at the work of Bowlby, Ainsworth and more recent theorists to understand the foundations of attachment and identify the various styles of attachment.

The chapter will begin by clarifying the concept of bond formation and will explain how this differs from attachment theory, before going on to look at the basic concepts of attachment and why they are so useful within social work and social care practice.

It is important that any worker understands what a secure attachment should consist of, so focus will be given to this attachment style to begin with, before going on to look at the insecure attachment styles, namely anxious/ambivalence, avoidance, and disorganised. Examples will be given to illustrate some of the typical behaviours exhibited within each style.

The chapter will then look at recent developments in neuroscience which recognise the importance of attachment styles on brain development. Throughout the concluding sections, links will be made to social work practice to demonstrate how this knowledge can be used within assessment and interventions.

By the end of the chapter the reader should:

- Know the difference between 'bonding' and 'attachment'
- Understand how relationship-building begins
- Appreciate the importance of a secure attachment style
- Know the difference between the three insecure attachment styles
- Recognise the potential for neurobiological impact
- Begin to think about how to apply this knowledge in practice

BONDING

'Bonding' is a general term used to describe the process of forming an emotional connection with another person. As human beings, we will form many bonds with many people throughout our lifetime, and from the moment that we are born we begin the first of these bonding processes with our mothers. In maternity wards all across the country, the first experience of the outside world that a baby will encounter is skin-on-skin contact as the midwife encourages the mother to place the newborn across her chest so that the baby can hear the comforting sounds of her heartbeat. But this was not always the case in maternity hospitals – even in the mid-1980s, the practice of skin-on-skin contact to encourage bonding at birth was seen as a radical move (Brody, 1983) – and 20 years previously, babies were wrapped in swaddling cloth and placed in cots as soon as they were born.

There is now a realisation that bonding with a baby begins long before the skin-on-skin experience. From the moment a pregnancy is discovered, the bonding process is initiated – parents will begin to develop hopes and wishes for the developing child, they may possibly give the 'bump' a name, and an emotional connection begins. The bonding process can be affected by a number of factors, including the mental and physical health of the parents, the development of the fetus, how much planning there was in the pregnancy, and even how active the fetus is in the womb and its response to external stimulus.

Critical Thinking

In essence bonding is the first relationship with the developing child and makes up the foundation blocks for attachment. In 'normal', healthy relationships, the bonding process has a good chance of developing in an appropriate manner, but some pregnant mothers and their partners might not be able to bond in a straightforward way.

- How might bonding be affected with mothers who are going to put their child up for adoption when it is born?
- How might the lack of pre-natal bonding affect foster carers and adoptive parents?

When the child is born, it is not concerned with bonding to form an emotional bond, it is simply looking to survive, and to do that, nature has provided the newborn with innate responses to seek out the person holding them, turning their head towards the face of the person and seeking with their blurry vision (Christiano, 2008). Later, the developing infant will also equate bonding with the psychological feeling of