Attachment Theory and the Social Work Curriculum

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Abstract

Attachment theory, as developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth, represented a major departure from the current theories of human development of the time, particularly in its rejection of the major tenets of psychoanalytic theory and its integration
of core ideas from evolution theory and cybernetics (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Attachment theory posits that a foundational human instinct, the desire to achieve safety and protection through proximity to a protective figure, is responsible for the
formation of a special class of life-long affectional bonds, referred to as "attachments." Emotional security is derived to a great extent, according to the theory, from experience with caregivers who are consistently responsive to the developing infant's expression of attachment behavior toward them. Forty years of empirical research has shown that attachment is a universal characteristic that predicts children's development of cognitive and social competence, emotional regulation, and positive self-image (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). Social work educators are currently challenged to better integrate the findings of attachment research into their curricula to reflect more the current state of developmental science.

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