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Biographical Notes and Early Career

Childhood, Upbringing, and Schooling

Edward John Mostyn Bowlby was born in a Victorian upper-middle-class family in London in 1907. He was the fourth of six children to May Bridget Mostyn and Anthony Alfred Bowlby. His parents belonged neither to the old land-owning class nor to the new rising class of merchants and entrepreneurs, but to the top group of higher professionals (Van Dijken, 1998). John's father Anthony was a high-ranked officer in the British army. He was appointed surgeon to the household of King Edward VII and later surgeon-in-ordinary to King George V. He was knighted in 1923 and the Bowlby baronetcy is in existence to this day.¹ Father Bowlby had a successful career and is typified as a "strong personality who stuck to his ideas when he believed they were right" (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 18). As a father, though, Anthony Bowlby was not much available to his children – owing partly to his work as a military surgeon in wartime. This pattern was repeated by his son John. Also, as we shall see, John Bowlby would in his professional career stick to his ideas. He would almost stubbornly look for evidence to support

them and for ways of convincing other people, just because “he knew he was right” (Van der Horst, Van de Veer, and Van IJzendoorn, 2007, p. 324). Also, just like his father, John was not much involved in the day-to-day matters of the Bowlby family (see later in the chapter).

Less is known about John’s mother May Mostyn, who was from a comfortable – though not wealthy – family. She had no formal education, but was taught by her parents. She seems to have had a very good relationship with her father, but a rather ambivalent one with her mother (Van Dijken, 1998). It is difficult to say in what way this influenced her as a parent, but as a mother she is sometimes typified as “remote and self-centered” (Holmes, 1993, p. 36) and “cold” (Parkes, 1995, p. 248). What we do know is that she passed on to the children her unequivocal passion for nature. During stays in the English countryside and during long summer holidays in Scotland, where John’s maternal grandparents lived, John’s mother “tried to pass on her love for nature to her children” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 24) and the children learned “to identify flowers, birds and butterflies, to fish, ride and shoot” (Holmes, 1993, p. 17). This is of interest, as this ‘inherited’ passion for nature probably made John more receptive to ethological ideas later on in life (see Chapter 4).

The six Bowlby children were often grouped into couples by their parents: John’s older sisters Winnie and Marion – ‘the girls’ – his 13-months-older brother Tony and John – ‘the boys’ (see Figure 1.1), and ‘the babies’ Jim and Evelyn. John had a very close relationship with his only-slightly-older brother Tony, but they were rivals too: John did not accept his brother’s seniority and Tony would “fight like a little tiger” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 19) whenever he was challenged. So apart from close friendship, there was some rivalry and jealousy between the brothers (Holmes, 1993).

Typical of their social class, the Bowlby children were raised in a distant, reserved manner. The children spent most of the day in the nursery on the top floor of the Bowlby residence, isolated from the rest of the house and from their parents. A nanny and several nursemaids took over the care and most of the education of the children from father and mother Bowlby, and the children saw their parents only occasionally – their mother for an hour a day, and their father typically only on Sundays. Nanny Friend was in charge of the Bowlby children, but in practice John’s favorite nursemaid Minnie took care of him on a daily basis. So when Minnie left when John was four years old, he was conceivably hurt by the event. When Bowlby (1958a) later stated that “for a child to be looked after entirely by a loving nanny

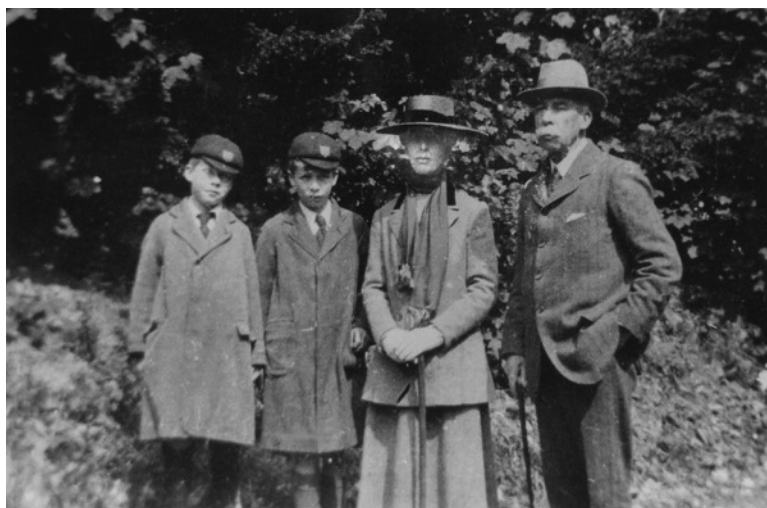


Figure 1.1 From left to right: John and Tony (the ‘boys’), May Mostyn, and Anthony Bowlby. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London (AMWL: PP/BOW/L.29).

and then for her to leave when he is two or three, or even four or five, can be almost as tragic as the loss of a mother” (p. 7), could he possibly have had in mind his own separation from Minnie?

The education of the children began at home where a governess instructed them from age six onward. Subsequently, ‘the boys’ attended day school in London, but the outbreak of the Great War changed all that. As a consequence of the air raids on London in 1917, John underwent another separation experience (Hunter, 1991). In 1918, at age 11, he was sent to preparatory boarding school together with Tony (see Figure 1.2). He did not have good memories of his time at Lindisfarne, as the school was called, and later stated that “he would not send a dog to boarding school at that age” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 34). After leaving Lindisfarne, in 1921, Bowlby started training as a naval cadet at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth. Interestingly, it was here that he was first introduced to the writings of Freud (Newcombe and Lerner, 1982). What influence reading Freud had on him at that point is unclear, but soon Bowlby decided that he wanted to pursue a career that “would improve the community as a whole” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 46). In order to legally leave the Royal Naval College, John’s father had to buy him out first (he was not free to leave, having committed himself to a military career).

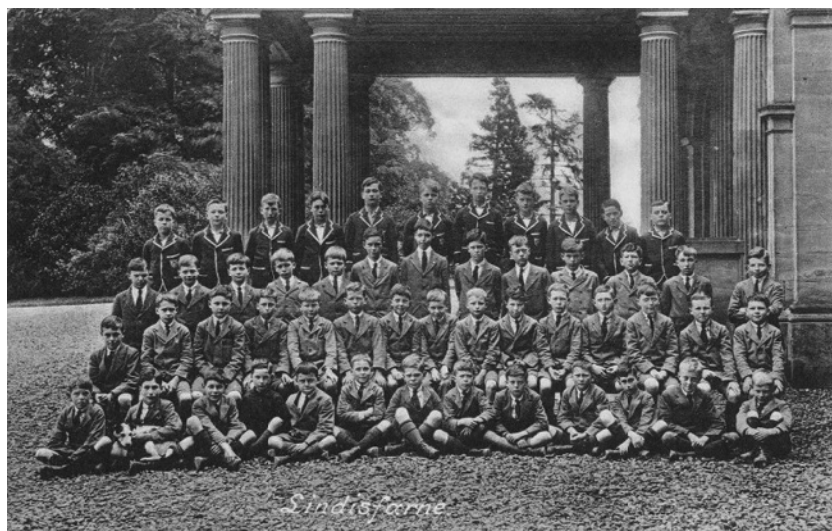


Figure 1.2 School picture of John Bowlby (2nd row, 5th from right) and Tony Bowlby (2nd from top, 4th from left). Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London (AMWL: PP/BOW/L.29).

Encouraged by father Anthony to follow in his footsteps, John decided to “go up to university” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 38), and he started his pre-medical studies, a so-called Natural Sciences Tripos, in Cambridge in 1925.

Although in public Bowlby referred to his childhood as perfectly conventional (Hunter, 1991; see also Karen, 1994), in private he stated that it had a great effect on him and that he had been “sufficiently hurt but not sufficiently damaged” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 11). These early experiences in Bowlby’s personal life arguably influenced his subsequent thinking and research. The distant, upper-middle class upbringing by his parents, the frequent absence of his father, the departure of his favorite nanny, and the attendance at a boarding school, taught him that young children can be hurt by separation experiences.

Studying Medicine at Cambridge

Bowlby began studying medicine at Trinity College in Cambridge in 1925, but more and more he became “interested in psychology, especially what would now be called developmental psychology” (Senn,

1977a, p. 1). It eventually, after two years, led him “to read psychology and to give up medicine” (Senn, 1977a, p. 1). Bowlby was exposed to the more experimental Cambridge variant of psychology (see Smuts, 1977b) which emphasized careful observation and experimentation in real-life settings (Van Dijken, 1998). Of course, Bowlby was to make this approach to the study of human behavior his own in later years, although, as we shall see, he had to climb a mountain to gain-say the ideas of Melanie Klein and others in the psychoanalytic world.

Since we know that Bowlby later on would turn to psychoanalytic thinking and since attachment theory is rooted in Freudian theory, it is of interest to look at possible psychoanalytic influences at university. These seem to have been scarce, at least they were not evident in the official curriculum, and in later years Bowlby would claim that he had not been completely satisfied with his psychological training at Cambridge. In his opinion there was too much fuss “about IQ and animals in cages” (Van Dijken, 1998, p. 43). However, at Cambridge, Bowlby’s tutor in the natural sciences was Lord Edgar D. Adrian, the expert in the field of nerve conduction (Boring, 1950), who displayed a vivid interest in Freudian theory from its very beginning. In a paper published in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Adrian (1946) would claim that psychoanalysis “went far beyond a single range of facts: it showed or tried to show quite unexpected relations between different fields” (p. 1). This leaves open the possibility that Bowlby discussed matters of Freudian theory with his tutor. What we know for sure (Van Dijken *et al.*, 1998) is that two years later, in 1927, Bowlby purchased W. H. R. Rivers’ *Instinct and the Unconscious* (1920), a book that was widely used in medical circles and that contained a moderate (or watered-down, according to some) version of psychoanalysis, i.e., psychoanalytic considerations which de-emphasized the dynamic role of the sexual instinct. Shortly thereafter, in 1928, Bowlby bought and read Freud’s *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1917), a book which he would later rank among the 11 most important books he ever read.² Bowlby’s interest in Freudian theory would be further stimulated when he volunteered at two progressive schools – schools that were heavily influenced by Freud’s ideas. It was at these schools that Freud’s work “came alive” for Bowlby and it would remain “a major influence on all his later work” (AMWL: PP/BOW/A.1/7; dated October 24, 1979).³

Bowlby and Progressive Schooling

Freud's psychoanalytic ideas slowly began to infiltrate the British educational system in the 1920s. Various books on how teaching could benefit from psychoanalytic insights were published around this time (e.g., Green, 1921; MacMunn, 1921; Miller, 1927; Revel, 1928) and different psychoanalytically oriented 'progressive' schools were founded in Britain, following the international examples (e.g., Bernfeld's *Kinderheim Baumgarten* in Vienna and Vera Schmidt's *International Solidarity* in Moscow; see Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991). Among them were Malting House School, founded by Susan Isaacs, and Summerhill, founded by A.S. Neill (Van Dijken, 1998). Experts in the field of education claimed that even teachers at ordinary schools could benefit from an acquaintance with psychoanalytic theory as the teacher would be "in a better position to study his pupils with advantage than was his forerunner of the pre-psycho-analytical times" (Adams, 1924, p. 269).

It was at two of such 'progressive' schools, in the second half of 1928 and the first half of 1929, that Bowlby spent a year as a teacher. Both schools – called Bedales and Priory Gate – espoused a philosophy which combined a belief in G. Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory (i.e., the children were believed to go through the stages that mankind had gone through) with 'progressive' ideas about the need for children's 'free expression' and strict reservations about adult intervention. In the second school, called Priory Gate School, these ideas were mixed with clearly psychoanalytic ones (Van Dijken *et al.*, 1998). Here, it was head master Theodore Faithfull who was responsible for the grafting of Freud's insights onto those of Hall (Van Dijken, 1998). Faithfull also found inspiration in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry – an anti-industrialistic, Scouting-like movement in England that propagated a frugal life and an emphasis on nature and craftsmanship (Van Dijken, 1998). Another source of inspiration was Homer Lane, an American psychotherapist who was among the first to use psychoanalytical ideas in the education of children. Lane (1928) claimed that deprivation of love in childhood is the source of later delinquency and mental disturbance, a claim that Bowlby would make his own.⁴ The psychological problems of the children at Priory

Gate School – it was a school for ‘difficult children’ – were as a rule attributed to adverse experiences in the children’s families, notably to inadequate parent–child relationships.

The period spent at these two progressive schools made an unforgettable impression on Bowlby, as did his acquaintance with staff member John Alford (Holmes, 1993; Senn, 1977a; Smuts, 1977b; Van Dijken, 1998). Bowlby would later say about this experience:

I spent twelve months in ... [two] of the progressive and free schools [i.e. Bedales and Priory Gate School], which was very valuable experience, because I saw a number of disturbed children at first hand, I lived with them, indeed I had to look after them, and I met there the first ‘affectionless character’ of my career. (Tanner and Inhelder, 1971, p. 26)

So, not only did Bowlby have the opportunity to witness the behavior of these “difficult” children on a daily basis, he was also presented with an explanatory model for their problems: they were pilfering, lying, and so on, *because* they had grown up in a family that did not provide the security and love that normal parents supposedly do (see Lane, 1928). The cause of mental disturbances and deviant behavior at large is deprivation of love in childhood. More than 50 years later, Bowlby (1981a) remembered that “apart from a medical background and an interest in psychology, my choice of career had been determined by what I had seen and heard during the six months that I had spent in a school for disturbed children [i.e. Priory Gate School]” (p. 2).

It is clear that Bowlby was now definitely won for the psychoanalytic viewpoint. Psychoanalysis seemed to provide a satisfactory model in which adult mental problems are explained by reference to adverse emotional experiences in childhood. In 1929 – at the age of only 22 – Bowlby, at the suggestion of Alford, began his psychoanalytical training at the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, the training center of the British Psycho-Analytical Society – and not with the Tavistock group, it being “a bit amateur” (Smuts, 1977b, p. 3; see also Hunter, 1991). His training analyst was Joan Riviere, a friend and follower of Melanie Klein, who by that time had already gained a prominent position in the British Psycho-Analytical Society.

Different Schools of Psychoanalysis in Interbellum Britain⁵

Now that Bowlby had decided to engross himself in psychoanalytic theory, he became more and more familiar with the different schools within British psychoanalysis. At the turn of the previous century, Freud had postulated revolutionary ideas about human mental life. Ever since the formulation of his theory debates about its value and applicability in clinical practice have been commonplace. In this respect, it is of interest to pay some more attention to the reception of Freudian theory by both scientists and laymen in British society of the time. As we have seen above, Freud's ideas were applied to teaching in British schools, but there are other striking examples.

For instance, the authors of baby manuals (e.g., Bennett and Isaacs, 1931; Brereton, 1927; Hartley, 1923; Isaacs, 1929; Thom, 1927), i.e., books that advised parents how to take care of infants and young children, now began to picture the infant and young child as little savages who were torn apart by violent emotions, who showed marked preference for the parent of the opposite sex, and might be strongly jealous of their (newly-born) brothers and sisters. The sinister chapter headings of Thom's (1927) manual, for example – e.g., Anger, Fear, Jealousy, Destructiveness, Inferiority, Delinquency, Sex – spelled misery for the unprepared parent. Thom's (1927) statement that "children who have vivid sex phantasies often find a certain relief in the excitement associated with stealing" (p. 243) was typical for that period during which common sense notions about education became mixed with the "scientific" ideas of Freud, Adler, and Jung (Beekman, 1977; Hardyment, 1995).

Meanwhile, the British public press was paying increasing attention to psychoanalytic ideas (Rapp, 1988). In the period from 1920 to 1925, the number of publications in newspapers and journals grew considerably. According to the *New Statesman*, it was "as difficult for an educated person to neglect the theories of Freud and his rivals as it would have been for his father to ignore the equally disconcerting discoveries of Darwin" (Hynes, 1990, p. 366). The chances were quite high, then, that 'educated persons' were at least partially acquainted with – although not necessarily receptive to – psychoanalytic or semi-psychoanalytic ideas.

As for the reception of Freud's work in scientific circles, there are many ways to subdivide psychoanalysts of that time – and probably none of them does justice to reality. One possible division into groups is to make a distinction between Kleinian and Freudian psychoanalysts in the British Psycho-Analytical Society. Whereas Melanie Klein and her followers emphasized Sigmund Freud's clinical practice and paid much attention to the child's hostile fantasy life – based on Freud's (1905) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – Anna Freud and her followers focused on his theoretical ideas on child development and emphasized ego functioning, referring to Freud's (1923) *The Ego and the Id* (see Donaldson, 1996). But there is more. Bowlby, Donald Winnicott, Ronald Fairbairn, Michael Balint, and others were neither Kleinians nor Freudians and were reckoned to be members of the Independents or the so-called Middle Group (see Van Dijken, 1998, pp. 121–127) and adhered to an object relations version of psychoanalysis (see later in the chapter). Despite his independent ideas, Bowlby was respected in the British Psycho-Analytical Society and played a conciliatory role in the conflict between followers of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. At that time, he was Training Secretary of the society and credited with keeping the Freudian and Kleinian factions from splitting up by instituting two separate, concurrent training programs (Van Dijken, 1998).

Another way of depicting different schools of psychoanalysis is to distinguish between the so-called “eclectic” psychiatrists (mainly at the Tavistock Clinic), on the one hand, and “orthodox Freudian” psychiatrists, on the other (see Newcombe and Lerner, 1982). The “eclectics” used Freudian concepts such as unconscious motivation and repression – albeit sometimes in modified forms – but rejected the search for infantile sexual trauma. This “eclectic” movement ultimately evolved into a school centered around the Tavistock Clinic (with Ian Suttie as the central figure; see Gerson, 2009; see later in this chapter).

The eclectic and orthodox Freudian opponents essentially differed in opinion on one major point: the role of infantile sexual trauma in personality development as put forward by Freud (1905) in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. During World War I, this debate was fueled by descriptions of the many cases of “shell shock” – soldiers who had developed neurotic disorders in combat. At first, medical doctors thought these symptoms to be of a purely physical nature, others dispatched them as mere evidence of cowardice. But during

the war medical opinion gradually changed: increasingly, experts became convinced of the psychological origin of war neuroses. Unfortunately, prevailing theories of development could not explain the etiology of war neurosis. For example, it seemed impossible to retrace these traumata to unresolved sexual conflicts in childhood or infancy, as Freud had suggested. To come to terms with this felt lacuna in Freud's theory, both the eclectic and orthodox schools of psychoanalysis therefore had to come up with new explanations.

As a result of the discussion on "shell shock," Freud revised parts of his theory in his monograph *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920; see also Lomax, Kagan, and Rosenkrantz, 1978). He used concepts such as "repetition compulsion," the "death instinct" (*Thanatos*), and "life instinct" (*Eros*) in a complicated attempt to explain the symptoms of "shell shock." Not everybody was convinced of the clinical relevance of this hypothetical construction, though. Melanie Klein, Bowlby's later supervisor in psychoanalytic training, developed the position that adult mourning (one of the factors supposedly causing "shell shock") is conditioned by the way infants and young children manage separation experiences (e.g., in weaning). These issues and the ones mentioned above led to differences between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud shortly before World War II – when Anna Freud arrived in London from Austria in 1938. However, despite the fact that Klein was very much influenced by the Budapest or Hungarian school of Sándor Ferenczi (who placed emphasis on object relations as opposed to drives), both Klein and Anna Freud can be considered as orthodox Freudians in their own ways (Donaldson, 1996; Van Dijken, 1998). At least "opposition to [Bowlby's] views provided one small area of common ground for the followers of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, and for the next decades Bowlby was a relatively isolated figure in psychoanalysis" (Fonagy, 2001, p. 1). In all, the orthodox Freudian reaction to the issue differed from that of the eclectic school, to which I will now turn.

In the 1930s, the eclectic movement formed into a school centered around the Tavistock Clinic. But the clinic was initially founded in 1920 by doctors – led by Hugh Crichton-Miller – who had been concerned with neurosis during World War I (Trist and Murray, 1990). One example of the eclectic approach was that of the before mentioned W. H. R. Rivers, who was one of the first to explain how soldiers who had been in psychologically grievous war experiences could become ill by repression or "the active or voluntary

process by which it is attempted to remove some part of the mental content out of the field of attention with the aim of making it inaccessible to memory” (Rivers, 1918, p. 173). His therapy consisted in encouraging the soldiers to remember their war experiences and to reinterpret them. Rivers further posited that there is an instinct for self-preservation side by side with the sexual instinct (Rivers, 1920). This led Bernard Hart, another “eclectic,” to explain what was later to be called “shell shock” as an unconscious conflict in which the instinct for self-preservation clashed with the conscious sense of duty to be a brave soldier (Southborough, 1922, p. 77; see also Hart, 1910, 1912).⁶

Another characterization of the eclectic approach is by Harry Edelston, who stated that “without necessarily accepting the *whole* doctrine of Freud (or Jung or Adler), it is possible to take advantage of the psychological techniques introduced and elaborated by these and other pioneers which have created a revolution in extramural psychiatry and allied fields” (Edelston, 1960, p. 744; original italics). He added that “there are many like myself who, having been trained at the old (pre-war) Tavistock Clinic, practice an eclectic brand of analytic psycho-therapy. One should almost call it the ‘English school’, based as it is on the teaching of Hadfield and Suttie, etc.” (Edelston, 1960, p. 744). I will now turn to the ideas of Ian Suttie, who is regarded by Edelston as a central figure of the “English school.”

Suttie was the most prolific in finding eclectic alternatives for orthodox Freudian theory (Newcombe and Lerner, 1982). Although the two men never met (Bowlby in Suttie, 1935/1988, p. xxiii), Suttie and Bowlby developed ideas that were quite similar in a number of respects. First of all, they – together with Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn, and Donald Winnicott for that matter – can be seen as adherents to the object relations version of psychoanalysis (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). This current in psychoanalysis emphasized the development of the self in relation to real people. In the Foreword to Suttie’s *The Origins of Love and Hate*, Bowlby stated that:

[w]ith the notable exception of Melanie Klein, all those named [i.e., Bowlby, Fairbairn, Klein, Suttie, and Winnicott] have held explicitly that most differences in individual development that are of consequence to mental health are to be traced either to differences in the way children are treated by their parents or else to separations from or losses of parent-figures to whom the children had become attached. (Bowlby in Suttie, 1935/1988, p. xvi)

According to object relations theory, not all motivation is sexual, real-life interpersonal relationships have an independent and autonomous status, and experiences of children mattered for their subsequent development. In the early 1930s, Suttie (1935/1988) regarded as a major shortcoming of classical Freudian theory “the Freudians’ obstinate determination to leave out of account social situations” (pp. 39–40). Historically, Suttie’s position owed much to the Hungarian school of Ferenczi, Imre Hermann, and Michael and Alice Balint. Ferenczi’s (1931) statement that real-life experiences matter was clearly in accordance with Suttie’s views. Through Suttie, but also independently, Bowlby was familiar with the ideas of Ferenczi and his colleagues as well (Bacciagaluppi, 1994; Bowlby, 1958d).

This eclectic line of thought concerning the value of real-life experiences evolved in the Middle Group of the British Psycho-Analytical Society and in object relations theory. Many independent thinkers were considered members of either or even both groups. As shown by Edelston, Suttie and other psychoanalytically oriented psychiatrists at the Tavistock Clinic were often referred to as the so-called “English school” of British psychiatry. This school emphasized the importance of a primitive need for security and thought “that a child begins life completely helpless and dependent, and that it responds with every expression of terror to ... loss of mother” (Dicks, 1939, p. 20) and therefore has “a tendency to seek love and security as such” (Dicks, 1939, p. 90). For example, Fairbairn (1941) – a member of the Middle Group of the British Psycho-Analytical Society and an object relations theorist – advanced that the libido is object-seeking (i.e., directed toward a person) not pleasure-seeking. According to Edelston (1943), “even the strict psycho-analytical school” had at that time “been compelled ... to recognize the importance of this earliest of human needs” (p. 74). Bowlby certainly picked up the idea of a primary need for mother in this context (Newcombe and Lerner, 1982).

In his work on *The Origins of Love and Hate*, Suttie (1935/1988) wondered whether the “attachment-to-mother is merely the sum of the infantile bodily needs and satisfactions which refer to her [i.e. a secondary drive], or whether the *need for a mother is primarily presented to the child mind as a need for company and as a discomfort in isolation*” (p. 16; original italics). He explicitly stated that “love of mother is primal in so far as it is the *first formed and directed* emotional relationship” (p. 31; original italics). These statements about the primary need for the mother were, of course, all very much similar to Bowlby’s ideas – although for

Bowlby it was the need for protection, not the need for company that was focal. Also in line with Bowlby's later theorizing on attachment, Suttie related that in the "ideal state anxiety is at a minimum and resentments are only transient. There is no abiding sense of insecurity or of grievance." Unfortunately, "the exigencies of life itself... interrupt [the] happy symbiotic relationship" between mother and child, which leads "the infant [to] feel insecure." Now that "the 'separation anxiety' is in full force ... all effort is devoted to ... remove the *cause* of the anxiety and hate by restoring harmonious social relationships" (pp. 39–40; original italics). Of course, it is impossible to exactly equate Suttie's and Bowlby's ideas, but the above statements make clear that they both emphasized the relationship to the mother.

Remarkably, Suttie (1935/1988) also highlighted the survival value of the interaction with the caregiver when he introduced "the innate need-for-companionship which is the infant's only way of self-preservation" (p. 6). Suttie went on by stating that "instead of an armament of instincts – latent or otherwise – the child is born with a simple attachment-to-mother who is the sole source of food and protection" (p. 15). Of course, the evolutionary view of the mother–infant relationship was to become Bowlby's favorite topic in later years when he made an attempt to rewrite psychoanalysis in the light of ethological principles (see Van der Horst, 2008; see also Chapter 4). Thus, we can see that Suttie's terminology and conceptual framework was similar to Bowlby's (e.g., attachment-to-mother, insecurity, separation anxiety, innate need-for-companionship) and that Bowlby was neither the first nor the only one to emphasize the potential importance of such real-life events as mother–child separations for child development. It is important to note, however, that Bowlby did not claim that he was the first to think of the importance of the quality of early mother–infant relationships. In "The nature of the child's tie to his mother," for example, Bowlby (1958d) made a very careful review of which other psychoanalysts held views that were acceptable to him.

Medical and Psychoanalytic Training

Although Bowlby turned to psychoanalysis and entered a training analysis, he – again at the advice of Alford – also started his normal medical career (Bretherton, 1991). He worked as a clinical assistant

at the Maudsley Hospital under Aubrey Lewis, a critic of the psychoanalytic movement. After obtaining his M.D. degree in 1933, and encouraged by his close friend Evan Durbin, Bowlby registered as a Ph.D. student at University College London under the formal supervision of Sir Cyril Burt. This experience as a doctoral student was something Bowlby never talked about in interviews. Maybe this was because he never finished his project “Examination of guilt and anxiety on the basis of case-studies” (see Van Dijken, 1998, p. 73); but more likely he wished not to be associated with Burt, who was later accused of gross scientific fraud. In practice, his supervisor was Susan Isaacs, the psychoanalytic psychologist and writer of baby manuals mentioned above.

Although Bowlby never finished his Ph.D., his formal involvement with Burt is still of interest. By that time Burt was investigating the psychological causes of delinquency (e.g., Burt, 1925). He professed as his belief that “nearly every tragedy of crime is in its origin a drama of domestic life,” (as cited in Wooldridge, 1994, p. 99) argued that it is frequently parents rather than children who require treatment, and warned that removing children from their home should only be undertaken as a last resort (Hearnshaw, 1979; Wooldridge, 1994). By the end of the 1930s and in the 1940s Bowlby would express the same views. Moreover, Burt had been one of the founding members of the London Psycho-Analytical Society and became a member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. He also was a member of the Council of the Tavistock Clinic and thus might be reckoned to be a member of the “eclectic” group mentioned above.

From 1934 to 1938 Bowlby worked part-time at the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (ISTD). Staff members of the ISTD carried out scientific research into the causes and prevention of crime and gave therapy to young offenders. The basic philosophy of the ISTD was that juvenile crime was caused by mental problems. The ISTD recruited its members from both the ‘orthodox’ British Psycho-Analytical Society and the “eclectic” Tavistock Clinic.

In 1936 Bowlby began working part-time at the London Child Guidance Clinic. Child Guidance Clinics (see Figure 1.3) – an originally American phenomenon that had been imported in Britain by (again) Cyril Burt (Hearnshaw, 1979) – treated “difficult” children in multidisciplinary teams consisting of a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and a social worker. The general conviction at these clinics – and especially that of the social workers – was that the children’s



Figure 1.3 Photograph of a child therapy session with Bowlby, titled “Just child’s play.” “The doctor and Joan discuss the drawing and after a time, Joan tells him all about it. From the drawing and the things she said, he realized that her trouble was loneliness. The father was in the army, a railway journey from home, and the mother missed her husband too acutely to pay enough attention to the child.” Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London (AMWL: PP/BOW/L.4, nr. 11).

problems might result from an inadequate relationship with their parents (e.g., unresolved conflicts from the parents’ own childhood might cause or perpetuate the problems of their children). Bowlby would later state that he “learned a hell of a lot more from those ... social workers than [he] learned from [his] psychiatric colleagues” (Senn, 1977a; see Smuts, 1977b). It was while working at this clinic that Bowlby first came across two cases of the so-called “psychopathic personality type,” i.e., he identified two children who seemed unaffected by praise or blame and did whatever they wanted. Both children had suffered a major separation experience in their infancy (being sent to a hospital for many months without any visiting from the parents) and Bowlby hypothesized that it was the separation from their mother that had caused their characters to deviate (Van Dijken *et al.*, 1998).

Bowlby worked at these various institutions which all belonged largely to the “eclectic” current in British psychiatry, i.e., while psychoanalytic insights were being widely used they did not follow the ‘orthodox’ therapy model (of five therapy sessions per week) or accept all of Freud’s ideas (e.g., his heavy emphasis on childhood sexuality). Simultaneously, he was exposed to the ‘orthodox’ and Kleinian tracks within the British Psycho-Analytical Society. His training analysis with Riviere lasted for more than seven years and was finally concluded in the summer of 1937, supposedly because his future wife Ursula disapproved of him continuing to spend money on it (Bretherton, personal communication, April 28, 2009). His training had been full of frictions, partly because Riviere (1927) espoused the Kleinian view that “analysis ... is not concerned with the real world ... It is concerned simply and solely with the imaginings of the childish mind” (pp. 376–377).

However, through his work at the Maudsley Hospital, at the ISTD, and at the London Child Guidance Clinic, Bowlby became convinced that “the real world” (in the form of mentally disturbed or neglective parents, etc.) does matter in causing problematic child behavior and that neglect, emotional and physical deprivation, etc., do not just exist in the “imaginings of the childish mind” – convictions that were formed during his time at Priory Gate School. Small wonder, then, that when Bowlby started his training in child analysis under the supervision of no less than Melanie Klein herself, that this led to immediate conflict (Van Dijken *et al.*, 1998).

From Kleinian Psychoanalysis to Real Life

In an interview with Robert Karen (1994), Bowlby described an influential experience in 1938, while training as a child psychiatrist under the supervision of Melanie Klein. Contrary to Klein, who believed all behavior was motivated by inner feelings or drives, Bowlby felt that external relationships, e.g., the way a parent treats a child, were important to consider in understanding the child’s behavior. At the time, he was seeing an anxious, hyperactive child as a patient five days a week. The boy’s mother would sit in the waiting room, and Bowlby noticed that she too seemed quite anxious and unhappy. When he told Klein he wanted to talk to the mother as well,

Klein refused adamantly, dismissing the mother as a possible causal or related factor in the child's behavior, and saying: "Dr. Bowlby, we are not concerned with reality, we are concerned only with the fantasy" (Kagan, 2006, p. 43). When the mother was subsequently taken to a mental hospital for treatment of anxiety and depression, Klein was unaffected and untouched and only replied that it was "a nuisance," because now they had "to find another case" (Karen, 1994, p. 46). Bowlby was thoroughly annoyed – even 50 years later, in a conversation with the well-known developmental psychologist Jerome Kagan, he still became angry when relating this case (Kagan, 2006) and distanced himself from the Melanie Klein school of thought. It is apparent his views conflicted with those of Klein. Many years later, Bowlby described as his own view that:

most of what goes on in the internal world is a more or less accurate reflection of what an individual has experienced recently or long ago in the external world. Of course, in addition to all that, we imagine things ... but most of the time we're concerned with ordinary events. If a child sees his mother as a very loving person, the chances are that his mother is a loving person. If he sees her as a rejecting person, she is a very rejecting person. (Bowlby, Figlio, and Young, 1986, p. 43)

Despite his theoretical differences with Klein, a leading member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, Bowlby stuck to his views and when he had to submit a paper to qualify as a full member in 1939 he deliberately focused on the importance of real-life experiences in causing neurosis and neurotic character. Bowlby made clear, however, that he stuck to the psychoanalytical principles, i.e., that he at least disregarded most of the child's environment.

My own approach to the role of environment in the causation of neurosis has of course been from the analytic angle. For this reason I have ignored many aspects of the child's environment such as economic conditions, the school situation, diet and religious teaching. (Bowlby, 1940a, p. 155)

In his paper, Bowlby subsequently explained that he was primarily interested in (1) the history of the mother–child relationship and the possible separations between them; (2) the mother's treatment of the child (her unconscious attitude included); and (3) illness and

death in the family and how it affected the child. By far the most important in his view were the actual separations between mother and child.

Here, for the first time, Bowlby (1940a) explicitly stated (in print) that it was his “belief that the early environment is of vital importance” and that in his treatment of children he made “careful inquiries into the history of the child’s relations to his mother and whether and in what circumstances there have been separations between mother and child” (Bowlby, 1940a, p. 156). He first acquired this idea at Priory Gate School and therefore resisted Kleinian notions which (presumably) came up in his training analysis with Riviere. Over the years, his view did not change “in any material way” (Bowlby, 1958b, p. 248). Even in the 1970s, after the publication of the first and second part of his trilogy, whenever “people preach[ed] to him” (Smuts, 1977b, p. 19) about the all importance of the way parents treat their children, Bowlby used to react: “I thought that forty years ago but wasn’t allowed to say it” (Smuts, 1977b, pp. 19–20). That Bowlby knew he would have his hands full getting his ideas accepted in the psychoanalytic movement, becomes clear from a remark he once made to his wife Ursula when she asked him what he would pursue in his further career – after his research on separation would be completed: “Separation ... will keep me busy for the rest of my life” (Dinnage, 1979, p. 323). In all, despite his wide-ranging mind, Bowlby “confess[ed] to a rather one-track, one-problem mind” (Tanner and Inhelder, 1971, p. 27).

We have seen that Bowlby, at the suggestion of Alford, pursued training in psychoanalysis with the British Psycho-Analytical Society, instead of with the Tavistock Clinic, which was supposedly a bit “amateur.” But the fact of the matter is that the people who were at the pre-war Tavistock Clinic (e.g., Jack Rees, Henry Dicks, Wilfred Bion, Ronald Hargreaves, John Rickman, Jock Sutherland, and Eric Trist) would become Bowlby’s colleagues in army psychiatry during World War II. Most of them were involved, with Bowlby, in evaluating the admission process to officer training. Because of this connection Bowlby was invited to the Tavistock Clinic after the war. Moreover, their “eclectic” ideas about children’s needs were much more in accordance with Bowlby’s. The “English school” emphasized the emergent object relations approach in psychoanalysis, emphasizing relationships rather than instinctual drives and psychic energy (Gerson, 2009; Trist and Murray, 1990; see also earlier in the chapter). This was, of

course, all grist for the mill for Bowlby, who found support for his idea of a primary need for mother, ideas he expressed from very early on in his career (Van der Horst and Van der Veer, 2010).

It is interesting to note that Bowlby first became acquainted with Freud's views through Adrian and Alford, subsequently picking up Klein's idea of the connectedness of childhood separation experiences and adult reactions to loss, but in his search for an explanation of that phenomenon he came into contact with the eclectic group of the Tavistock Clinic whose ideas were more congenial to the views he already held (see Hinshelwood, 1991; Pines, 1991). But although the Tavistock was known to be "eclectic," the Kleinian approach to clinical practice was still very much around when Bowlby became head of the Children's Department of the Tavistock Clinic after the war – too much, according to Bowlby, which made him remark once: "So in certain respects I have been a stranger in my own department" (Senn, 1977a, p. 16). The fact that the therapists and analysts at the clinic held clearly different views was the reason why Bowlby later founded a separate research lab across the street, so he could pursue his own ideas there.

Bowlby's Forty-four Juvenile Thieves

After qualifying as an analyst in 1937 and becoming a full member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1939, Bowlby "documented his position in much greater detail" (Bowlby, Figlio and Young, 1986, p. 39) than he had done in the paper he had read to the British Psycho-Analytical Society. In a study, published as *Forty-four Juvenile Thieves*, Bowlby (1944, 1946), tried to corroborate his view that separation from the caregiver is the source of later delinquency and mental disturbance – a view that he clearly adopted from people like Cyril Burt and Homer Lane, as we have seen earlier. According to Robert Hinde – Bowlby's later mentor in ethology (see Chapter 4) – "the real key [to the development of Bowlby's thinking] is the forty-four thieves paper," because Bowlby "noticed that many of the delinquent adolescents had disrupted childhoods and that put him on the trail" (Van der Horst *et al.*, 2007, p. 322).

In this classic study, Bowlby compared the case histories of 44 thieves treated at the London Child Guidance Clinic by Bowlby and his colleagues with a control group of 44 non-thieves. The goal of the

paper was “a systematic investigation of possible adverse effects in the young child’s environment ... and in particular that part of it comprised by the parents” (Bowlby, 1944, p. 125). Bowlby distinguished three different factors that might lead to maladjusted behavior: (1) genetic factors; (2) early home environment; and (3) contemporary environment. To no surprise, Bowlby particularly emphasized the adverse effects in the early environment when a child is “separated from his mother or mother-substitute for long periods or permanently during his first five years of life” (Bowlby, 1944, p. 109).

On the basis of an examination of his and his colleagues’ files, Bowlby (1940a) predicted that a “broken mother-child relationship” in the first three years of life leads to emotionally withdrawn children who do not develop “libidinal ties” (p. 158) with others. Bowlby sample consisted of 31 boys and 13 girls aged 5 to 17. The average intelligence of the children was above the average of the population. Unfortunately, Bowlby (1944) was unable to provide the economic status of the children, but the “general impression of the cases suggests that there were relatively few who were dependent on support from public funds and many were comfortable” (p. 23). Of 16 cases of emotionally withdrawn children who were prone to stealing, the so-called ‘affectionless thieves’, 14 turned out to have experienced major separations from their mother in the critical age period. In 30 cases of other thieves, Bowlby found another five separations, whereas in 44 cases of non-thieves (his control group) there were only three separations to be found. He concluded “that the socially satisfactory behavior of most adults is dependent on their having been brought up in circumstances ... which have permitted ... satisfactory development of ... object-relationships” (Bowlby, 1944, p. 125) and that a certain clinical syndrome – the affectionless thief – is caused by major separation experiences. The statistical analysis in Bowlby’s study was greatly ameliorated by advice from his army colleagues (e.g., Eric Trist, Jock Sutherland; see also Chapter 3).

The basic idea of the influence of early separation from the mother on later development again becomes clear (see Van der Horst and Van der Veer, 2010), although of course phrased in the psychoanalytic jargon of the time (i.e., ‘emotionally withdrawn children do not develop libidinal ties or object-relationships’). Bowlby did not explain why exactly mother–child separations would lead to stealing whereas other pathogenic environments would lead to other forms of deviant behavior, but made clear that “a child separated from his mother comes to crave ... for her love,” and “by stealing ... hopes for libidinal

satisfaction” (Bowlby, 1944, p. 121). Also, he did find it necessary to warn that in his view the further conclusion followed that minor breaks too might have a damaging effect on the child’s development.

The study of the 44 thieves ultimately led to Bowlby’s assignment with the World Health Organization (WHO). Ronald Hargreaves, whom Bowlby had met during the war, had become Chief of the Mental Health Section at the WHO in Geneva. Hargreaves was impressed by Bowlby’s earlier work and in 1949 asked him to do a report on mental health problems of homeless children, who had become a major problem after World War II (Van der Horst *et al.*, 2007). Bowlby accepted the offer and undertook a literature survey in order to test the hypothesis that “separation experiences are pathogenic” (Bowlby, Robertson, and Rosenbluth, 1952, p. 82). He read extensively into the early work on deprivation and travelled around to consult international experts in Europe and the US in an effort to “draw the strands together into one coherent argument” (Rutter, 1972a, p. 121). His efforts resulted in a monograph titled *Maternal Care and Mental Health* (Bowlby, 1951, 1952). The outcome of this research would greatly and decisively influence his further career and his research activities (Holmes, 1993). How Bowlby embarked on this new venture is the subject of the next chapter.

Personal Life During the Pre-war Years

It is of interest to pay some attention to Bowlby’s personal life during the pre-war period. In the 1920s and 1930s, while pursuing a clinical and scientific career, Bowlby’s private circumstances changed in several ways. While he was at Cambridge, his brother Tony studied chemistry in Oxford. Through him, Bowlby got acquainted – and roomed in – with Tony’s group of “Oxford friends”, amongst whom where his later brother-in-law Henry Phelps Brown, who married his sister Evelyn, and Evan Durbin, “an immensely impressive personality” (Ursula Bowlby, personal communication, April 29, 1996) and “a remarkable fellow” (Smuts, 1977b, p. 10). These two close friends, both academic economists, “were very powerful debaters and any position which [Bowlby] took up [he] had to justify up to the hilt by argument and evidence” (Senn, 1977a, p. 5). Phelps Brown and Durbin challenged Bowlby’s newly acquired psychoanalytic views – views that Bowlby admitted were “still very controversial and needed a lot of academic justification” (Senn, 1977a,

p. 5). Often they had “long discussions” during which Bowlby learned that:

it was necessary for [him] to give good reasons why psychoanalysis ‘and all that’ was about important things. The intellectual climate in which [he] was living was one where one had to think rigorously and give good reasons and good evidence for one’s statements. (Smuts, 1977b, p. 10)

Soon Durbin became Bowlby’s closest friend – they shared the same house in London from 1929 to 1939 (Smuts, 1977b) and “were each other’s ‘best men’ at their weddings” (Ursula Bowlby, personal communication, April 29, 1996). Also, Durbin had a profound influence on Bowlby’s scientific orientation and academic interest: instead of thinking of himself as a clinician, Durbin “encouraged [him] to think of [him]self as an academic, not to become an academic, but to think of [him]self as having an academic orientation” (Smuts, 1977b, p. 10; original underlining). As we have seen above, it was Durbin who encouraged Bowlby to register as a Ph.D. student under Burt. Their close personal friendship, as well as their analogous political ideas, led them to publish a book called *Personal Aggressiveness and War* (Durbin and Bowlby, 1939). According to Bowlby, it was “a strange book – Evan wrote ... a fifty page essay, and I wrote a hundred page appendix ... [which] reviewed the evidence” (Smuts, 1977b, p. 11). The basic theme of the book was that “war is due to the expression in and through group life of the transformed aggressiveness of individuals” (Durbin and Bowlby, 1939, p. 41). In the appendix, Bowlby explained war and aggression by connecting Freud’s views with evolutionary and anthropological thinking. He put forward the view that aggressiveness in humans is caused by the same basic biological forces as in apes and stated that “men will fight ... like any monkey” (Durbin and Bowlby, 1939, p. 59). Bowlby thus saw a straight progression from the behaviours of apes via primitive men and modern-day children to adults in Western society. Of course, these views are highly relevant in light of Bowlby’s move to ethological thinking in later years (see Chapter 4).

The joint project with Durbin was Bowlby’s “first venture into a quasi academic sort of article” (Durbin and Bowlby, 1939, p. 59). So, we may conclude that Durbin was of great importance to Bowlby, not only at a personal level, but at a professional level as well. All the

more dramatic, then, is the fact that Evan Durbin drowned in 1948, while trying to rescue two children; according to Ursula (personal communication, April 29, 1996) this “was the worst loss John suffered.” She could not “see how [his] death ... could fail to affect John’s feelings about loss and mourning” (Ursula Bowlby, personal communication, May 26, 1996).

Another important event in these years was Bowlby’s introduction to his future wife Ursula, in 1937, and their subsequent marriage in 1938. In the preceding years, Bowlby had had difficulties in forming lasting relationships with women and several relationships were ended for rather dramatic reasons – such as Bowlby sleeping with the sister of one of his girlfriends (Holmes, 1993; Van Dijken, 1998). But when he met Ursula Longstaff during a shooting holiday in Ireland, he immediately fell in love with her. This time it would prove to be a long-lasting love – they were together until John died in 1990. Together they had four children: Mary (b. 1939), Richard (b. 1941), Pia (b. 1945), and Robert (b. 1948). Ursula almost entirely took care of the children by herself, and Bowlby is said to have been a far better grandfather than he was a father (Holmes, 1993). Apart from a “remote” (Holmes, 1993, p. 25) parenting style, Bowlby also followed his father’s tradition of hard work – both were involved in the army in wartime, when several of the children were small – and long holidays. However, during long vacations on the Scottish Isle of Skye, where the Bowlbys had bought a second house, the family enjoyed walking, boating, bird-watching, shooting, and fishing – just as John had done in his childhood. So a family tradition was continued for better or for worse.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have argued that the course of Bowlby’s later career – his interest in the caregiver–child relationship and its importance for the child’s well-being – ultimately had its roots in his formative years: in his personal life and in professional experiences in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Bowlby’s typical distant, upper-middle class upbringing was marked by separation experiences (e.g., the departure of his favourite nanny, the absence of his father, and the attendance at boarding school). This led him to remark that during his

childhood he was “sufficiently hurt but not sufficiently damaged.” In all, these moulding experiences taught him that young children can be hurt by separation experiences and this arguably influenced his subsequent thinking and research. In addition, in 1948, Bowlby experienced a traumatic loss through the death of his best friend, something that, according to his wife, clearly influenced his later ideas on grief and mourning.

Of specific interest for the purport of this book is the early interest Bowlby showed in nature. He “inherited,” so to speak, his mother’s passion for the outdoors. Also, as a naval cadet at Dartmouth, Bowlby was an enthusiastic bird-watcher and photographer (Van Dijken, 1998) – like many ethologists were (Burkhardt, 2005; Roëll, 2000). When he had a family of his own, Bowlby took his children to the countryside, just as his parents had done with him. Thus, Bowlby’s later choice for ethology as a framework was preceded by an interest in nature combined with an emphasis on observation of behavior. In other words, “his love for the outdoors and his keen eye for observation made him naturally responsive to the basic tenets of classical ethological theory and methodology” (Suomi, 1995, p. 185).

In the late 1920s, Bowlby’s attention was drawn to psychoanalysis as a new frame of reference – first at the Naval College, and later by his mentors Adrian and Alford. While following the usual track of training through training analysis – being exposed to “orthodox” Kleinian ideas but never fully accepting them – he simultaneously worked at several “eclectic” institutions and became familiar with the influential “English school” of psychiatry. The views that Suttie, Dicks, and others adhered to were much closer to Bowlby’s own ideas regarding the all-importance of real-life events than were the views of his Kleinian colleagues who emphasized the fantasies of children. So the “early Bowlby” (for which, see Van Dijken, 1998) is best characterized as a rather independent thinker within the psychoanalytic movement – leaning towards the ideas of the eclectic “English school” of psychiatry – but a psychoanalyst nonetheless. Moreover, he was a psychoanalyst who arrived at the position that the early social and socio-economical environment of children had a strong influence on their later development – which was in sharp contrast with views of more orthodox members of the British Psycho-Analytical Society.

Notes

- 1 The baronetcy is currently held by John Bowlby's son Richard, who inherited the title from his uncle, and John's brother, Tony Bowlby when the latter died in 1993.
- 2 The full list of these 11 books reads: Ainsworth (1967), De Beer (1958), Erdelyi (1974), Freud (1917), Hinde (1956), Hinde (1966), Kuhn (1962), Lane (1928), Lorenz (1935), Marris (1958), Sommerhoff (1950).
- 3 AMWL stands for Archives and Manuscripts, Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE. The letters PP/BOW stand for Personal Papers Bowlby.
- 4 During his time at Priory Gate School Bowlby read Lane's (1928) *Talks to Parents and Teachers*. This work was listed among the eleven most influential books – see footnote 2 (AMWL: PP/BOW/A.1/7; dated October 24, 1979).
- 5 The labels assigned in this chapter to different groups or schools within psychoanalysis are of limited value. Just like in politics one can take a 'liberal' viewpoint with respect to one issue and a 'conservative' one with respect to another, psychoanalysts could be both 'orthodox' and 'eclectic' or 'independent' at different times.
- 6 The phrase "shell shock" was coined by army psychologist C. S. Myers in a series of papers in *The Lancet* (Myers, 1915, 1916a, 1916b, 1916c; see also Jones, 2010).

