To what extent does Bowlby's work on attachment theory remain relevant today?

Introduction
- define key terms: attachment theories – attempt to explain the emotional bond between an infant and their primary caregiver.
  - believed to have a significant impact on development i.e. adult relationships.
  - characterised by specific behaviours in children e.g. looking for the adult caregiver when feeling threatened.
- Bowlby’s theory: we develop enduring emotional bonds with our caregivers for both physiological and psychological needs i.e. the ‘safe base’.
  - source and maintain nurturance as well as protection and security from this figure.
- arguably relevant today: the first to examine how important a child’s relationship is with their mother in terms of social and emotional development.
  - look at how certain critics argue his work as dated, with the changing landscape of attachment and children’s independence.

Point 1: relevant because it emphasises the importance of early childhood experiences which still influence adult development
- Bowlby: studied attachment behaviour of delinquent children, WW2 – how such experiences can impact rest of our lives.
  - e.g. experiencing war and related separation at an early age: any form of separation from the mother may elicit distress.
    - evident in adoption studies: found that late-placed adopted children with anxious tendencies are more concerned about whether others will be there for them, and they tend to be emotionally immature – impact adult relationships.
- relevant today, evidence from study of Romanian adoptees in 21st century: found greater disposition to developing attachment related disorders.
  - related to deprivation, also behavioural and peer-related issues: shown to have a relationship with the quality of mature, adult relationships.

Critical Evaluation:
- consistent with the psychodynamic approach also: how childhood trauma can influence adult personality.
  - Anna Freud, defence mechanisms: may resort to repressing attachment difficulties into the unconscious mind, causing potential disorders in development of disorders.
- however, babies can form multiple attachments: in the absence of a mother, children can as easily attach to their father.
  - may not be as much of an influence on adult development as originally thought: children from adoptive homes with a difficult start can still develop functioning adult relationships e.g. with angry patterns of adoption.
- Bowlby also worked with traumatised children: most likely had attachment issues – no support that this will apply to a stable upbringing with the impact on adult development.
  - may not be relevant today: the politics of post-war Britain.

Point 2: relevant because theory of attachment phases can explain the development of attachment disorders
- Bowlby developed a theory of attachment phases: will begin to recognise the primary caregiver, leading to stranger anxiety, and eventually a mild independence.
  - 0-2 months, pre-attachment: little response or differentiation between mother and other people.
  - 2-7 months, early attachment: begins to recognise mother, able to be comforted by her.
  - 7-9 months-2 years, separation protest: seeks to maintain proximity with mother, wary of strangers.
  - 2-3 years and upwards: more abstract representations of attachment, understand mother’s needs with increased independence.
- this understanding can explain attachment disorders, particularly disinhibited: disruptions in a stage of this process, particularly separation protest, may play a role in attachment problems.
  - risk factors for disinhibited attachment disorder: result of an inconsistent or absent connection to a primary care giver in the first years of life.
    - more willing to go off with a stranger if they do not seek to maintain proximity with their mother.
- therefore, Bowlby’s theory is still relevant: able to understand the crucial nature of reliance on a primary caregiver and the functional role of separation anxiety in maintaining safety and emotional relationships.

Critical Evaluation:
- there many other theories and explanations for the development of attachment disorders: may be a genetic basis, or a result of childhood trauma which Bowlby’s theory does not account for.
  - may naturally be a more withdrawn and independent child, and have little developmental difficulties.