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ATTACHMENT

EARLY ATTACHMENT IN INFANTS

- Animal studies of attachment: Lorenz and Harlow (lines 6-64)
- Caregiver-infant interactions in humans: reciprocity and interactional synchrony. Stages of attachment identified by Schaffer. Multiple attachments and the role of the father (lines 65-171)

EXPLANATIONS OF ATTACHMENT & ATTACHMENT TYPE

- Explanations of attachment: learning theory and Bowlby’s monotropic theory. The concepts of a critical period and an internal working model (lines 172-253)
- Ainsworth’s ‘Strange Situation’. Types of attachment: secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant. Cultural variations in attachment, including van Ijzendoorn (lines 254-367)

DEPRIVATION & INSTUTIONALISATION

- Bowlby’s theory of maternal deprivation. Romanian orphan studies: effects of institutionalisation (lines 368-473)

EFFECTS OF ATTACHMENT ON LATER RELATIONSHIPS

- The influence of early attachment on childhood and adult relationships, including the role of an internal working model (lines 474-522)
ANIMAL STUDIES OF ATTACHMENT: LORENZ AND HARLOW

A definition of attachment

• An affectional tie that forms between one person and another, binds them together and endures over time.
• An attached infant tries to gain and maintain a certain degree of proximity to the person they are attached to: e.g. by following, clinging, smiling, crying and calling.

LORENZ (‘35)

A study into imprinting and critical period for attachment

Procedures

• Lorenz divided geese eggs into 2 groups: 1 group was left with the mother, the other group in an incubator. Lorenz was the first person/object the incubator group of geese saw when they hatched and they imprinted (see below) on him: i.e. in all respects treated Lorenz as their mother. Lorenz mixed the new born geese raised in the incubator back with those who had imprinted on their natural mother, but the incubator geese immediately separated themselves, followed him (as they would their mother) and showed a strong infant-mother attachment bond.

Findings

• The geese who had imprinted on Lorenz treated him as their mother. Imprinting can be defined as an innate readiness to develop a strong bond with the mother which takes place soon after birth. The strongest imprinting behaviour occurred at 13-16 hours after hatching and if imprinting has not occurred within a critical period of 32 hours geese did not imprint at all. Lorenz found that geese could be imprinted on to any moving object and that imprinting was permanent and irreversible. Mature female geese would seek out a mate the same as the object/person/animal they had imprinted on.

Imprinting is an innate instinct aimed at maximising survival chances of young. By keeping close proximity to the mother their chances of surviving (via protection and food) are increased.

EVALUATION

• Various research studies drew similar conclusions to Lorenz. For example, Guiton (‘66) found that leghorn chicks became imprinted on the yellow gloves used to handle them and that adults often attempted to mate with these gloves. This supports Lorenz’s research and confirms that imprinting can occur on any moving object. However, Guiton found that imprinting was not permanent and irreversible – by encouraging chicks to spend more time with their own species they reverted to normal behaviour. Therefore, although imprinting appears to be an innate behaviour subsequent learning can alter this instinct.
HARLOW (’59)
A study in food versus contact comfort as the basis for attachment

Procedures

- 8 baby rhesus monkeys who had been removed from their mothers at birth were split into 2 groups of 4. All were individually kept in cages. Each monkey had access to a wire ‘surrogate mother’ or a ‘surrogate mother’ covered in a cloth. For 1 group of 4 the wire mother had a milk bottle feeder attached and for the other group of 4 the cloth mother had the milk feeder attached. Harlow observed the monkeys’ attachment behaviour for 165 days and how they responded when distressed.

Findings

- All monkeys spend the vast majority of time clinging to the cloth covered mother. Those with the wire mother only briefly clung to her to feed. When frightened they clung to the cloth covered mother for reassurance. This suggest that the basis for attachment is not food but ‘contact comfort’.
- As a result of their failure to attach to a real mother, as adults the monkeys were socially abnormal, either freezing or running away when confronted by other monkeys, they showed abnormal mating behaviour and rejected their own babies. Those raised with the wire mother showed a higher degree of abnormal behaviour.

EVALUATION

- Research that is ethically unacceptable with humans is sometimes performed on animals. Many would argue that the short and long-term psychological harm done to the monkeys cannot be justified. However, it can be argued that Harlow’s research is justifiable in that the monkeys’ suffering was outweighed by the psychological insights gained in helping better understand the attachment process and the long-term effects of failing to attach.
- Whether we can generalise monkey attachment behaviour to humans is also questionable. Human attachment behaviour is much more complex. However, studies such as Quinton’s (’84) provide support: she found that human mothers who had failed to attach as infants tended to experience problems mothering their own children later on in life.
CAREGIVER-INFANT INTERACTIONS IN HUMANS: RECIPROCITY AND INTERACTIONAL SYNCHRONY. STAGES OF ATTACHMENT IDENTIFIED BY SCHAFFER. MULTIPLE ATTACHMENTS AND THE ROLE OF THE FATHER.

RECIROCITY
From birth onward, human infants engage in rhythmic turn-taking interactions with carers. For example, the mother leans in and smiles and the baby will then ‘reciprocate’ or mirror this movement. Brazelton (‘79) argued that this reciprocity was the foundation for later turn-taking communication and exchanges in the adult world: for example, we let a person talk, then we respond. The carer’s sensitivity and responsiveness to the infant’s gestures is important in forming a healthy, secure attachment bond.

INTERACTIONAL SYNCHRONY
Meltzoff described a form of reciprocity called interactional synchrony. From 2-3 weeks old, infants imitate specific facial and hand gestures exhibited by their carers.

- Meltzoff (‘77) conducted an observational study where infants were exposed to 4 different stimuli (3 facial gestures, 1 hand gesture). The infants’ responses were videotaped and independent observers were asked to rate each infant according to whether they showed (i) mouth opening, (ii) mouth closing, (iii) tongue protrusion, (iv) retracting tongue. A high level of interactional synchrony was observed.

- Each observer scored all tapes twice to check for degree of agreement between observers (inter-rater reliability) and for each observer themselves (intra-rater reliability) – i.e. they scored the observation twice to make sure there was agreement between their 1st and 2nd scoring. Statistical analysis of data found both types of reliability to be extremely high (+0.92 [see Research Methods]).

In a later study, Meltzoff demonstrated the same kind of interactional synchrony in 3 day old infants. Given that these infants are virtually new born we can conclude interactional synchrony is innate rather than learnt.

EVALUATION OF RECIPROCITY & INTERACTIONAL SYNCHRONY
Piaget argued that true imitation only developed in infants at around the age of one. It could be that what appears to be reciprocity/synchrony is in fact infants simply learning to imitate carers as carers reward imitative behaviour with positive reinforcement: e.g. smiles, attention, etc. If this was the case, infants are not showing genuine imitation at so young an age but pseudo-imitation (pseudo = false): i.e. it looks like imitation but it isn’t, and the infant has not consciously decided to imitate the carer’s gestures.
A study by Murray (‘85) allowed 2 month old infants to view and interact with their mother on a video monitor in real time. The baby was then exposed to an image of their mother where she did not respond. Babies showed acute distress and tried to attract the mother’s attention to gain a response to their gesturing. This provides evidence that reciprocal synchrony is genuine imitation as the babies actively sought to interact with the mothers and were not being rewarded for doing so. This finding supports Meltzoff’s view that interactional synchrony is innate.

Researchers cannot ever show cause and effect relations between care-giver interactions and the development of attachment because it would be ethically wrong and impossible to artificially manipulate the amount/quality of caregiver-infant interaction.

To overcome difficulties in studying this field such as lack of ecological validity, researcher bias and ethical issues, researchers should try to conduct as much research as possible in natural contexts – for example, in the family home, be as unobtrusive as possible when carrying out research and make sure other observers are present to make sure observations are reliable, and ensure that research is conducted in such a way as to prevent distress to the infant (e.g. protection from psychological harm).

STAGES OF ATTACHMENT IDENTIFIED BY SCHAFFER & MULTIPLE ATTACHMENTS

A study into the stages of attachment

- Schaffer and Emerson (‘64) studied 60 infants who ranged from 5-23 weeks at the start of the study. Once a month, their mothers were visited and asked to rate their babies’ response to 7 different separation situations (e.g. being left alone in a room) on a scale of 1-4 and to whom the baby directed its emotional response. The researchers also measured stranger anxiety by assessing the degree of anxiety the infant showed to researchers during their visits.

From their findings, they proposed 4 stages of attachment.

1. Indiscriminate attachment: 0-2 months. Infants produce similar responses to animate or inanimate objects and people they do or do not know. Toward the end of this period reciprocity and interational synchrony play an increasingly important role.

2. The beginnings of attachment: 4-7 months. Infants now prefer the company of humans to inanimate objects and can distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar people. They do not yet show stranger anxiety.

3. Discriminate attachment: 7 months +. Infants begin to show separation anxiety (distress and anxiety at being separated from their main carer) and happiness on reunion with the carer. Thus, they have formed a specific attachment to the primary
attachment figure. They also exhibit stranger anxiety: fear and moving away from people they do not know.

4. Multiple attachment: 7 months +. Soon after stage 3, infants form multiple attachments to other carers: e.g. father, grandmother, etc. and will also show separation anxiety from these figures. Schaffer found that 29% of infants formed secondary attachments within 1 month of attachment to the primary attachment figure and 78% within 6 months.

EVALUATION

• Asking mothers to self-report on their infant’s distress may lead to a lack of validity in that mothers may be unwilling to report or underestimate distress thinking that it reflects badly on them as mothers. Equally, some mothers may be less sensitive to signs of distress so less likely to report it.

• Schaffer’s sample was drawn from traditional working-class families in Glasgow in the 1960’s. Findings from this limited sample may not be generalisable to modern families where child-rearing practices are considerably different: e.g. mother more likely to work, fathers more involved in child-rearing.

• There may be cross-cultural differences in the development of attachment depending on child-rearing practices. Tronick (’92) studied the Efe people of Zaire who live in extended family groups. The infants were looked after and breastfed by different women but slept with their own mother at night, thus we might expect to find more multiple-attachments. Despite such differences in childrearing practices, however, the infants showed one primary attachment to the mother. This provides support for the stage theory of attachment.

THE ROLE OF THE FATHER

Schaffer found it was far less common for fathers to be primary attachment figures. Although this may have been because they spend less time with their infant, Lamb (’77) found little relationship between amount of time fathers spent with their baby and strength of attachment bond. This implies that babies are less likely to attach to fathers which could be explained because:

1. Babies are biologically predisposed to attach to female mothers.
2. Females are biologically predisposed to show the sensitivity necessary for a strong attachment bond to form: for example, higher levels of oestrogen in females may produce more caring behaviour.
3. Men are less sensitive to infants’ needs and thus are psychologically less able to form strong attachments.
4. Social and cultural norms lead men to acting less sensitively to their infants and take a secondary role in infant care.

However, although research shows that men are, in general, less sensitive to their babies need, they do exhibit as much physiological arousal (e.g. stress, anxiety) as mothers when shown videos of their babies crying. Clearly, cases of single fathers very successfully
attaching to their babies indicates that men are capable of being a primary attachment figure, but they may be less predisposed to doing so by biological, social and cultural factors.

The traditional father role compliments the more caring, sensitive role played by the mother in that the father encourages exploratory behaviour which exposes babies to more challenging situations.
EXPLANATIONS OF ATTACHMENT: LEARNING THEORY AND BOWLBY’S MONOTROPIC THEORY. THE CONCEPTS OF A CRITICAL PERIOD AND AN INTERNAL WORKING MODEL.

LEARNING THEORY

Behavioral Learning Theory proposes that babies are not born with a need to attach but learn to do so through the processes of classical and operant conditioning.

Classical conditioning

- Food (the unconditioned stimulus) produces pleasure (the unconditioned response).
- The person who feeds the baby becomes associated with the food, and the pleasure the baby feels towards the food, the baby starts to feel towards the feeder.
- The feeder now becomes the conditioned stimulus and the food the conditioned response. In this way attachment is formed.

Operant conditioning

- Operant conditioning suggests that when a behaviour produces pleasure, or stops an unpleasant sensation (i.e. the behaviour is reinforced), then it is likely to be repeated in the future.
- Therefore, a baby learns that crying will result in it being fed which will remove hunger (negative reinforcement) and given attention (positive reinforcement). Therefore, the baby becomes attached to the parent – the source of this reinforcement.
- Similarly, for the parent, feeding and giving attention to the baby removes the unpleasant crying (negative reinforcement), so they attach to the baby.

EVALUATION - weaknesses

Learning theory has some serious limitations as an explanation of attachment.

Schaffer and Emerson (’64)

- Studied babies for the first year of their lives to monitor attachment behaviour.
- In 39% of the babies, the first attachment figure was the person who carried out physical care such as feeding and changing - it was more likely to be the person who was sensitive to and played with the baby.
- This suggests that food is not the primary reason for attachment, as proposed by Learning Theory.

Harlow (’59)

- Harlow gave baby rhesus monkeys who had been removed from their mothers at birth the choice of a wire ‘surrogate mother’ with a milk bottle or a wire surrogate mother covered in a soft cloth (but no milk).
- Learning Theory would predict that they would become attached to the wire monkey with the milk, but the monkeys attached to the cloth mother and in times of distress would run to it for comfort.
- This suggests that attachment is not based on the need for food but an innate need for comfort and security.
- As Harlow’s research is based on monkeys we should be cautious in directly generalising findings to humans.

**BOWLBY’S THEORY – MONOTROPIC THEORY**

Bowlby proposed that attachment is adaptive, meaning that it exists because it maximizes our chances of survival. Hence we have an innate drive to become attached to a caregiver because attachment has long-term benefits – ensuring that infants stay close to a caregiver who will feed, protect and nurture them.

- Bowlby proposed that attachment should take place within a critical period of 3 to 6 months. He argued that if babies do not form an attachment during the critical period they will have difficulty forming relationships with others in later life and be socially and psychologically maladjusted.
- An infant has an innate drive to display social releasers (e.g. smiling and crying) that cause care-giving from adults.
- The baby will have one primary attachment figure (monotropy), usually the mother.
- The first attachment relationship is a model for and creates expectations about what all future relationships will be like (the internal working model). For example, a secure, trusting relationship with the mother creates positive expectations about what future relationships with friends and partners will be like and creates healthy psychological and emotional adjustment. Thus, there is a mirroring (the continuity hypothesis) of the 1st relationship with the mother in later relationships.

**EVALUATION - strengths**

Research evidence supports Monotropy theory. For example:

**Harlow (’59)**
- In Harlow’s study, the monkeys formed one-way attachments with unresponsive mothers and became, as adults, emotionally and socially maladjusted: they were aggressive, anti-social and had problems mating and parenting. This provides evidence for the internal working model.

**Tronick et al. (’92)**
- Studied the Efe tribe from Zaire. Although childrearing practices were different (e.g. they were breastfed by many women) they still formed one primary attachment to their mother as predicted by Bowlby, suggesting that attachment and monotropy is universal and innate.
Schaffer and Emerson (’64)

- Showed how strongly attached infants had mothers who responded quickly to their demands and who interacted with the infant a lot whereas mothers who failed to interact with their offspring produced weak attachments.

EVALUATION – weaknesses

- Kagan’s temperament hypothesis argues that it is the innate personality characteristics of an infant which are responsible for attachment behaviour rather than the quality of the mother as a caregiver – a baby with a naturally anxious or aggressive temperament is more likely to form insecure attachments as an infant and in later life. Equally, the innate personality characteristics of the infant will influence how sensitive and responsive the mother is likely to be. Twin studies have found that temperament for MZ twins has a higher concordance than DZ twins suggesting that personality type is, to some extent, genetic rather than acquired as a result of interaction with the attachment figure.

- It is not always the case that poor early attachments lead to poor adult relationships. Research has suggested that positive school experiences and strong adult attachments can repair harm done in childhood.
TYPES OF ATTACHMENT: SECURE, INSECURE-AVOIDANT & INSECURE-RESISTANT, AND THE ‘STRANGE SITUATION’ STUDY.

Ainsworth (’67) expanded on Bowlby’s work and argued that mothers who were ‘sensitive’ to their infants’ needs produced a ‘secure attachment bond’ and ‘securely attached’ infants who cried little and seemed content to explore their surroundings in the presence of their mother. She argued that secure attachment as an infant led to positive social/psychological/emotional adjustment in later life and ‘insecure’ attachment led to the opposite.

Ainsworth & Bell (’78) – The Strange Situation Study
Ainsworth used the strange situation study to be able to test and classify the nature of the attachment bond between mother and infant.

Procedures
- The experiment was set up in a room with one-way glass so that the behaviour of the infant could be observed. The mother, her infant (12-18 months) and a stranger went through the procedures described below. The sample was composed of 106 middle-class American families.
- The infant was observed to see how they would respond at each stage in terms of
  - Exploration – how much the infant explored the unfamiliar room.
  - Stranger anxiety – the response of the infant to the stranger.
  - Separation anxiety – how the infant reacted when the mother left.
  - Reunion behaviour – how the infant reacted when the mother returned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Behaviour assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent and infant play</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent sits and reads a magazine while the child plays</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger enters and talks first to the mother then interacts with the child through play and talk</td>
<td>Stranger anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother leaves and stranger plays, and if necessary, comforts the child</td>
<td>Separation anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent returns and stranger leaves</td>
<td>Reunion behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent leaves the infant alone</td>
<td>Separation anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger enters and plays, and if necessary, comforts the child</td>
<td>Stranger anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent returns and greets the infant and offers comfort</td>
<td>Reunion behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each of the above procedures lasted for 3 minutes. A group of observers recorded what the infant was doing every 15 seconds.

**Findings**

- They found that the behaviour of the infants and mothers fell into one of 3 categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>SECURE ATTACHMENT</strong></th>
<th><strong>INSECURE – AVOIDANT</strong></th>
<th><strong>INSECURE – RESISTANT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WILLINGNESS TO EXPLORE</strong></td>
<td>Explored the unfamiliar environment, returning to the mother at regular intervals.</td>
<td>Explored the unfamiliar environment but did not orientate to the mother when exploring.</td>
<td>Unwilling to explore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRANGER ANXIETY</strong></td>
<td>High stranger anxiety – will move closer to the mother. Less worried about the stranger when mother present.</td>
<td>Unconcerned – show little preference for mother over stranger – generally avoid both.</td>
<td>High stranger anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEPARATION ANXIETY</strong></td>
<td>Some anxiety but easy to soothe.</td>
<td>Unconcerned with the separation.</td>
<td>Intensely distressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REUNION BEHAVIOUR</strong></td>
<td>Greet the mother positively and makes physical contact with her.</td>
<td>Show little reaction to the mother.</td>
<td>Seeks the mother then resists contact – may push her away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN GENERAL</strong></td>
<td>Harmonious, cooperative interactions between mother and infant. Comfortable with social interaction. Uses mother as a safe base from which to explore.</td>
<td>Infant avoids social interaction and intimacy. Infant shows independent behaviour but is also anxious/angry as their attachment needs are not being met.</td>
<td>Infant simultaneously seeks and rejects intimacy and social interaction. A confused mix of distress and anger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOTHERS BEHAVIOUR WHICH CAUSES ATTACHMENT TYPE</strong></td>
<td>Mother is sensitive, accepting, cooperative and accessible. She is sensitive to and fulfils the needs of the infant.</td>
<td>Unresponsive and insensitive to needs and crying. Unaffectionate tending towards rejecting. Encourages independence.</td>
<td>Inconsistent responses – sometimes appropriate, sometimes neglectful. Generally only responds after increased demands from infant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% IN THIS CATEGORY</strong></td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EVALUATION - strengths

• Ainsworth tested the inter-rater reliability of those who observed and classified infants' behaviours in the strange situation. This involves asking 2 or more observers to independently record a single infant’s behaviour then compare the classifications they had made for similarity. This helps avoid any bias on the behalf of individual observers. Statistical analysis of inter-rater reliability was extremely high (+0.94 [see Research Methods]).

• A number of longitudinal studies have supported the claim that there is a link between attachment types and later social and emotional behaviour. Prior ('06) summarised findings of research as
  
  o Secure attachment – associated with less emotional dependence, higher achievement orientation and interpersonal harmony.
  
  o Avoidant attachment – related to aggressiveness and negative affect.
  
  o Resistant attachment – later anxiety and withdrawn behaviour.

EVALUATION - weaknesses

• Main ('81) found that children behaved differently in the strange situation test depending on which parent they were with. This questions the internal validity of the study, as it may be just measuring a particular relationship rather than something stable about the child's personality.

• As the location and activities were unnatural the child might have been acting unnaturally so we could question the study’s ecological validity: e.g. they may have displayed insecure attachment temporarily as they were in an unfamiliar situation.

• Mothers could have shown demand characteristics. Because they knew they were being observed they may have acted more sensitively than they normally would, possibly causing their infant to display a different attachment type.

• This study had low population validity as the participants were middle-class American infants. We may not be able to generalise the results to others.