

*Consider the extent to which psychological theories have been successful in explaining attachments.*

There are various psychological theories to regard as which have been successful in explaining attachments and I will be explaining the majority of them.

Sigmund Freud developed a theory of personality – an explanation of how each individual's personality develops. This theory can be used to explain many aspects of behaviour, including attachment.

Freud proposed that attachment grows out of the feeding relationship. In essence Freud claimed that infants are born with an innate drive to seek pleasure. He called this the pleasure principle, and suggested that one 'structure of the personality' (id) was motivated by this principle. The id is the primitive, instinctive part of our personality that demands immediate satisfaction. In infancy the id demands oral satisfaction. The person providing this satisfaction becomes the love object, and an object is formed.

This is another 'cupboard love' theory and can be dismissed with the same evidence as for behaviourist theory. This approach has been called the 'cupboard love' theory of attachment because it suggests that the infant becomes attached because he/she is fed, and that the infant becomes attached to the person who feeds him/her.

Both Psychoanalytic and behaviourist theories are agreed on this primary source of attachments.

Behaviourist approach: An infant learns that certain individuals are associated with the feelings of pleasure and reduce feelings of discomfort. The infant becomes attached to these individuals.

Psychoanalytic approach: Attachment is adaptive and innate. Infants elicit care giving and become attached to those individuals who respond most sensitively to their signals. The relationship with the primary caregiver acts as a template for all later relationships

However, the classic experiments of Harry Harlow (1959) on rhesus monkeys demonstrated that this theory was inadequate. This study concerned rhesus monkeys who were raised on their own by two 'wire mothers'. One wire mother had a feeding bottle attached and the other and the other was wrapped in soft cloth but offered no cloth. According to the learning theory, the young monkeys should have become attached to the 'mother' associated with food and offering drive reduction. In fact, the monkeys spent most time with the cloth-covered mother and would cling to it especially when they were frightened.

These studies suggest that 'cupboard love' is not likely to be an explanation for attachment, though we must remember that this research concerned monkeys and it may not be wholly appropriate to generalise the findings to human behaviour.

Schaffer and Emerson (1964) conducted an important study observing the development of attachments in 60 infants who came largely from working-class homes in Glasgow. The infants were observed over a period of a year in their homes.

The results of the study proved that infants were not most attached to the person who fed them, nor to the person who spent most time with them. They were most attached to the person who was most responsive and interacted with them. A person's constant presence is no guarantee that interaction will occur.

Ethologists suggest that it is vital for the survival of young animals to stay close to their parents, and that this is something that is too important to be left to chance learning. The phenomenon of imprinting is difficult to account for by learning theory, because the imprinting infant attaches itself to the mother-figure prior to any rewards (reinforcements) being obtained. Human infants do

not show clear signs of social selectivity until the latter part of the first year when a preference for the caregiver and wariness of strangers is demonstrated. Ethologists suggest that this is the result of an imprinting-like process.

Bowlby drew on the concept of imprinting when he was developing his theory of attachment. Newborn animals, such as ducks, imprint on their parents. They appear to form an indelible picture of their parent within hours of birth, and this helps them stick closely to this important source of protection and food. A young animal who wanders away from its parent would have to find its own food and is likely to be eaten rather quickly

Since imprinting is innate there is likely to be a limited window of development- a critical period. If the infant has not been exposed to a suitable object during this critical period, no imprinting will take place.

Bowlby applied the concept of a sensitive period to attachment. He claimed that infants who did not form attachments by a certain age would find it difficult to become attached later.

Although there are a wide range of theories which explain attachment, it is believable to accept many of them. For example, the behaviourists approach which states that an infant becomes attached to an individual when that infant realises the certain individual is associated with feelings of pleasure like food.