

Outline at least two theories of attachment and evaluate the extent to which studies support them.

The two theories which describe attachment are the psychodynamic theory and the learning theory. There is also the social learning theory which describes attachment as well.

The psychodynamic theory was designed by Sigmund Freud in 1924. He said “the reason why the infant in arms wants to perceive the presence of its mother is only because it already knows by experience that she satisfies all its needs without delay”. Freud’s psychodynamic theory was based on his theory of development, where it describes how an adult’s personality is dependent on early childhood experiences. The attachment to its mother is produced as she is related to the satisfaction of pleasure. He suggested that the first stage or the oral stage of the psychosexual development is when the infant gains pleasure orally, he believed that this had lasting effects throughout life.

The learning theory suggested that all behaviour is learnt and is not innate. Conditioning whether it is classical or operant is said to lead to learning according to behaviourists. All humans and animals are born with reflex responses, and an unconditional stimulus such as food can produce an unconditional response such as a sense of pleasure. The mother providing the unconditional stimulus (food) will become associated with pleasure and will then independently produce pleasure. Even if no food is given there will still be a source of pleasure. This is also demonstrated with animals, when a dog is shown a piece of meat when a bell is rang, this triggers a salivation response and then eventually once an association is produced the dog will salivate when the bell is rang without seeing the meat. It is on the basis of the attachment bond to the caregiver.

A study which backs this up is one by Dollard and Miller (1950) who offered a further explanation which focuses on motivation and what drives behaviour. Operant conditioning has principle that say that anything which is rewarded is more likely to be repeated meaning that the behaviour is learned. A primary drive is hunger and the mother providing the food reduces the drive known as a secondary reinforcer.

The social learning theory is more sophisticated and takes place directly with no other mental processes. It suggests that we learn from others by copying them and in turn learning new behaviours to gain rewards. This is supported by the explanation of Hay and Vespo (1988) who said that attachment occurs because parents “deliberately teach their children to love them and to understand human relationships” and this is achieved by modelling, direct instructions and social facilitation.

The psychodynamic approach has not supported by many studies as Freud suggested that attachment behaviour will be related to feeding in babies but there is evidence to show this is not the case. In the study of Harlow (1959) young monkeys showed that food alone does not help the explanation of attachment as the monkeys went for comfort of the covered mother. Also this may not be relevant in humans as animals' behaviours are changed by innate behaviour pattern. However research with human has supported Harlow's findings. A study by Schaffer and Emerson (1964) who found with about 40% of human infants that the adult who fed, bathed, and changed the infant was not the person to whom the infant was most attached. Therefore is no link between food and attachment which was assumed by Freud. It is clear that children were most likely to become attached to the human who offered a response of playing and touching which was seen as stimulation.

The learning theory cannot be the full explanation as in Schaffer and Emerson 1964 study it said that children often become attachment to adults who are not involved in the basic care giving or feeding. It could be said that the learning theory reduces the complexities of humans' behaviour and this is called 'reductionist'. The ideas are too simple to explain attachment.

The social learning theory had been used for the basis of more consideration of the interational processes that happened between children and parent. It has been found that as least some of attachment learning does stem from the processes that this theory outlined. However, Durkin (1955) realised that the strong emotional intensity of many parent-child attachments is not really explained by this theory.

This can lead us to evaluate that these theories have been backed up by studies and that they have supported that key elements but, however, many issues are left unsolved and unknown to whether we can apply these theories in real life situations. Another theory that could help with more explanations to attachment could be Bowlby's theory which basically explains attachment in terms of adaptation.