

Theories Of Attachment

Introduction

The theory of attachment has been widely debated for years. It is an important issue because it concerns on how important it is in affecting later adult relationships. A variety of different theories in attachment have been put forward in this essay and point to some of the problems that could happen later in life.

Attachment describes patterns of relationships from birth to death. It was first studied with non-humans, then human infants and later in human adults. Attachment theory provides an understanding in emotional reactions in infants, and also the basis for understanding love and behavioural problems such as aggression in adults.

Attachment process for the parents seems to begin with the development of an initial emotional bond and then extends to more and more skilful attachment behaviours. For the infant,

the process seems to begin with attachment behaviours and then progresses to the full attachment somewhat later.

John Bowlby's interest in child development began when he worked as a volunteer at two progressive institutions. Two children the first being an affectionless teenager with no history of any stability, the second an anxious boy aged seven or eight caused bowlby to examine the theory of harmful effects of maternal deprivation in early character development.

It was claimed that attachment to the mother was that she provided all of the babies needs, such as warmth and nourishment. Freud's view, which was to become later known, as the Cupboard Theory was that the absence of the mother would frighten the baby into believing it, would not be nourished. This theory has been criticized many times, as there is no evidence to suggest that the infant associates the mother with food. Bowlby's view to supplement this is that babies have inborn tendencies towards the mother and are not attached by food or warmth.

In an experiment conducted by Harlow & Harlow (1977), Rhesus monkeys were raised without their mothers. Isolated in cages each of the monkeys had one model mother made from wire, and another model mother made from terry cloth. The terry cloth model's had no provision in which to feed the infant monkey's but the study concluded that every time the monkey's were frightened they would cling to the terry cloth model. Harlow called this "contact comfort". The model mother's made from wire had the provision for feeding as they were equipped with a milk yielding nipples, yet the monkey's never sought any comfort from them, this disputed Freud's cupboard theory completely. It proved that mother love is not nourishing but comforting, and children like the rhesus monkeys use teddy bear's for comfort if they feel in anyway threatened. (As cited in Gleitman,H; Fridlund,A.F; Reisberg,D.(1999). Psychology,5th Edition).

Konrad Lorenz's imprinting and attachment study with duckling's provided a link with Bowlby's separation anxiety theory. Duckling's form an attachment with the first thing they see which is usually the mother, and if separated show great distress. Lorenz's study was to expose sets of ducklings to his own booted legs, a moving toy duck and a rectangle sliding backwards and forwards behind a glass window. The results proved convincing as the duckling's imprint on

Lorenz's legs, the toy and the rectangle caused the duckling's to follow these objects wherever they went, and they all showed great distress whenever the objects were not nearby.

In addition Bowlby's study of separation anxiety is that of a later stage in life of that of the ducklings. The study was aimed at children at the ages of six-eight months to eighteen months-two years. He suggests that the infants understand attachment as they show distress and anxiety when the mother is absent. Infants cried a great deal and took time to comfort, the toddlers acted more defiantly, protesting at the mother's departure but he found this decreased from the age of two years up.

This is put into doubt by Schaffer & Emerson (1964). Their study of separation anxiety found that infants did show distress but not only with their mothers it was also directed to any adult who interacted or showed attentiveness towards the infant. (As cited in Bower, T.G.R. Human Development).

The most widely accepted way of describing variations in the first attachment relationship has been proposed by Mary

Ainsworth (1978) who distinguishes between secure attachment and two types of insecure attachment. Ainsworth's method of measuring security of attachment, called the "strange situation", has been widely used. The strange situation consists of a series of episodes in a laboratory setting. The child is first with the mother, then the mother and a stranger, then alone with the stranger, then left completely alone for a few minutes. Next the child is reunited with the mother, then left alone again, and finally re-united with the stranger then with the mother. Ainsworth suggested the children's reactions to this situation could be classified into three groups: securely attached, insecure/avoidant, and insecure/ambivalent. The securely attached infant's mothers had encouraged close positive contact, this showed in the infant's behaviour as they cried less and were the least anxious. Insecurely attached infants were rejecting and avoidant as their mothers showed less sensitivity, they also proved to be agitated and anxiously attached. Ainsworth suggested that these strange situations predicted later social and emotional stability. (As cited in Bukatkot and Daehler. Child Development 3rd Edition).

In addition a study by Waters (1995b) he found that the children's attachments could change with major events such as bereavement, divorce and abuse from secure to insecure. (As

cited in Bee, Helen. The Developing Child 9th Edition). Changes in environment, finances, discipline and affection can all affect children's behaviours, and could cause poor educational development and social relationships later in life.

In different cultures attachments do vary according to a study by Grossman (1995). Evidence indicated that in Germany infants seemed more unresponsive to their parents than American infants. When the mother's were absent the German babies showed no distress and avoided greetings when their mother's returned, yet this could not be classed as Ainsworth's insecure/avoidant theory as with Germany being a different culture this could have a different meaning. Another study with Japanese infants however showed them in great distress when their mothers were absent and resistive behaviours when their mother's returned as these infants are rarely left with anyone to care for them other than there mother's. (As cited in Berk. Child Development 4th Edition). This confirmed Ainsworth's strange situation behaviours securely attached, insecure/avoidant, and secure/resistant.

It is claimed that aggression has been linked to poor child attachment and targeted highly towards young men. Further research found that there is a link. In a study of reactive

and proactive aggression involving boys between the ages of thirteen to seventeen, Dodge (1997) found that failure of parental warmth and care giving by the parents is a factor of insecurity and aggression in later relationships. This is agreed by Furman & Wehner (1994) who state that poor parent-child attachment relationships gave individuals negative expectations about how to behave themselves and in future relationships. They also state that during adolescence the mother is the key figure. Brendgen, M; Vitanol, F; Tremblay, R.E; & Lavoie, F. (2001). Reactive and Proactive Aggression: Predictions to Physical Violence in Different Contexts and Moderating Effects of Parental Monitoring and Caregiving Behaviour. Journal of Abnormal Psychology. **29**, 293-304.

Further research has found that poor parent-child interaction (maternal rejection) could lead to suicide ideations in adulthood. Levy (1995) states that for boys maternal rejection predicts self harm, and for girls predicted hopelessness and the two strongly relate to vulnerability in adolescence. McGee, R; Williams, S & Nada-Raja, S (2001). Low Self-Esteem and Hopelessness in Childhood. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, **29**, 281-291.

According to John Calvin Each person is predestined to be blessed or damned before ever being born (as cited in Gleitman, H; Fridlund, A.F; Reisberg, D. (1999). Psychology, 5th Edition). But it is debatable that individual's insecure/secure attachment experiences develop through to adulthood. Secure attachment being that the adult has high self esteem, social competence and good leadership skills, insecure attachment being that the individual suffers disruption and disconnection. Theorists have agreed and disagreed with each others views on attachment, such as Bowlby who disagreed with Freud's cupboard theory, Klein's unconscious childhood fantasy as he said she minimised the importance of the child's experience, yet he agreed with Konrad Lorenz's concept of imprinting with rhesus monkey's. Ainsworth's strange situation theory has been a popular powerful tool in ability to identify patterns of childhood attachment for researchers, yet there is still no conclusive evidence that attachment whether secure or insecure leads to any behavioural problems later in adulthood. Another factor for insecure attachment could be the infant's parents, perhaps because they did not receive interaction or caregiving from there own parents.

In conclusion it is essential for the infants to have a secure initial attachment to the mother. A secure attachment in infancy can remain strong in adolescence and increase into adulthood. The failure of an initial attachment could lead to isolation and disconnection later in life.