

Developmental Psychology

Attachment



Unit one: Attachment

Key concepts

Candidates should be able to:

- describe separation protest and stranger anxiety as measures of attachment;
- distinguish between different types of attachment: secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent.

Core theory: Bowlby's theory

Candidates should be able to:

- explain the concept of monotropy;
- explain the concept of a critical period in attachment;
- describe the effects of attachment, deprivation and privation;
- explain the criticisms of Bowlby's theory of attachment;

Alternative theory: Behaviourist theory

Candidates should be able to:

- consider behaviourist theory as an alternative theory, with specific reference to instinct.

Core study: Hazen and Shaver (1987)

Candidates should be able to:

- describe Hazen and Shaver's survey of the relationship between attachment types and adult relationships;
- outline limitations of Hazen and Shaver's study.

Application of research into attachment: care of children

Candidates should be able to:

- explain how psychological research relates to care of children, eg dealing with separation in nurseries, encouraging secure attachments through parenting classes, dealing with stranger anxiety in hospitalised children.

Key terms

Attachment	A two-way enduring emotional bond between two people
Separation protest	Showing distress or being upset when separated from your attachment figure
Stranger anxiety	Showing distress or being upset when in the presence of a stranger
Secure attachment	Child and caregiver have a relationship based on trust and security
Insecure-avoidant	Child and caregiver have a relationship where the child is quite independent
Insecure-ambivalent	Child and caregiver have a relationship where the child can be clingy but awkward at the same time
Monotropy	Having one main attachment normally to primary caregiver
Critical period	First three years of a child's life when they should form their first attachment
Privation	Never having the opportunity to form an attachment
Deprivation	Forming an attachment and then it being broken

Core theory: Bowlby's theory

Bowlby developed a theory which suggested that babies have an innate drive to form an attachment. This means that they are born wanting to form an attachment. He thought that the ability to form attachments was crucial in helping a baby to survive.

Bowlby thought that we formed an attachment with one main caregiver (normally mum), this was called monotropy. He also believed that there would be psychological consequences if we did not form our attachment in the first 3 years of life (ideally the first year), this was called the critical period.

Bowlby suggested that if we did not have the opportunity to form an attachment (privation) then there would be significant problems with relationships later on in life and that child may have poor social and language skills. Genie is an example of privation, she did not have the opportunity to form an attachment and even when rescued, found relationships and social situations difficult.

If an attachment is formed and then broken (deprivation), Bowlby suggested that these individuals could grow up to show depression (withdrawing from others) or becoming emotionless psychopaths (having a lack of consideration for others). He developed the PDD model of deprivation. This described the stages a child went through if they were deprived of their attachment. The first stage was Protest, this is when children would cry and look for their mum. The second stage was despair, during this stage, children would withdraw from their surroundings, sob and not be interested in what is going on around them. The last stage was detachment, this was when a child may appear to be 'ok' and would begin to interact with their surroundings, however they would seem to be emotionally 'flat' and not really care very much about things. An example of when deprivation could occur would be if a child had formed an attachment with their parents and then their parents died in a car crash.

Criticisms

There are a number of limitations with Bowlby's theory

- ⊖ Bowlby's critics said that children can have multiple attachments. There is evidence to suggest that some children form attachments to their fathers or child-minders which are equally as strong as the attachment they have with their mother.
- ⊖ Other critics say that the idea of a critical period is too severe. They suggest that there may be a sensitive period when it is best for children to form attachments (the first 3 years) but that they are able to form attachments after this time. For example, children who have had a turbulent infancy (first 3 years) can still form secure attachments to adoptive parents after 3 years of age.
- ⊖ Lastly, Bowlby thought that the effects of deprivation were irreversible, however some psychologists suggest that it can be reversed. For example, the Czech twins suffered from deprivation in early childhood, but made a (seemingly) full recovery and formed secure relationships in adulthood.

Alternative theory: The behaviourist theory

The behaviourist theory suggests that all behaviour is learnt and that our experiences influence this. Reinforcement provides rewards or punishments for behaviour which lead to them being repeated or not.

For example, parents will reward behaviour that is linked with attachment. If a child holds their mums hand when walking down the street, they will be told they are a good boy. Children are encouraged to give hugs or kisses to family when saying goodnight. They might be told they are 'being lovely' if they give their mum a hug for no reason. It has been suggested that this could explain why children do not form secure attachments to parents who abuse them.

- ☒ Securely attached children tend to have caregivers who are very sensitive to their child's needs.
- ☒ Insecure avoidant children tend to have caregivers who are generally uninterested in their children
- ☒ Insecure ambivalent children tend to have caregivers who are interested in them but who tend to misunderstand their child's behaviour.

Core study: Hazen and Shaver (1987)

Aim

To investigate if the attachment type you have as a child impacts on adult relationships.

Procedure

Hazen and Shaver used a questionnaire. Their participants were 620 adults who had replied to an advert in the local newspaper, they were all between the ages of 14 and 82 years old. The questionnaire measured two things, infant attachment type and attitude towards love and relationships using multiple choice questions.

Results

Hazen and Shaver found that most people were securely attached (56%), 25% of people were insecure-avoidant and 19% were insecure-ambivalent.

Adults who had secure relationships as children were found to have had the longest adult relationships with an average length of 10 years. Participants who were insecure avoidant reported an average relationship length of 6 years, whilst those who were insecure ambivalent reported an average length of 5 years.

Adults who had secure childhood attachments had happy adult relationships, they were also more supporting and accepting of their partners. These participants were the least likely to be divorced.

Adults who had insecure avoidant attachments were afraid of intimacy and experienced highs and lows in their relationships. They were prone to jealousy and felt that they would be fine if they were not in a relationship.

Adults who had insecure ambivalent attachments were prone to be obsessive. They were likely to experience extreme jealousy as well as extreme sexual attraction. These people were the most likely to be divorced.

Conclusion

Hazen and Shaver conclude that there was a relationship between the type of attachment a person has during their childhood and their later adult relationships.

Criticisms/Limitations

- ⊖ Hazen and Shaver only advertised in one newspaper, this means that their sample all came from the same area and read the same paper. It could be that a certain type of person reads and responds to things they see in newspapers. This makes the sample bias.
- ⊖ People may have lied when answering the questionnaires. They may not have wanted to admit to having poor adult relationships or insecure attachments with their parents. It's easy when answering questions on a questionnaire to choose an answer that is not the complete truth, especially as they completed the questionnaire and posted it back so did not see anyone face to face.
- ⊖ Another limitation is that the questionnaire used multiple choice questions. This meant that participants were not able to give their own answer, but had to select from the answers provided for them. Relationships can be complicated and vary greatly from person to person, this method of gathering the information may have meant that participants were unable to give the answer they truly wanted to.

Applications of research: Care of children

Hospital

50 years ago, it was the norm for babies to be taken away from their mothers after birth so the mother could recover. Now, mothers are encouraged to hold their baby and stay close to it in order to form a bond.

It used to be that if a child went into hospital for a period of time, their parents may not be able to see them very often (couldn't stay over at the hospital and may find it difficult to travel long distances). Bowlby noticed that children began to show the effects of deprivation in these situations. Now, parents are encouraged to visit as often as possible, visiting times are often very flexible to accommodate this. In the case of young children, parents are often allowed to stay overnight with their child.

Nurseries

Parents often need to use nurseries so they can return to work after having a child. Some parents feel that going to nursery can help their child's development, whilst others worry that the time spent away from them will impact on the child. Due to research into attachment, many nurseries now ensure that children have a key worker who can report back to parents. They often also write in a notebook what the child has done on that day so that parents can discuss it with the child and feel involved in the child's day.

At home

Research into attachment has led to various organisations becoming involved in helping parents raise their children. Parents are not left on their own anymore, there is encouragement and advice available through many organisations. Parenting classes are an example of this, in some situations, parent may be asked to go to classes to give them advice on how to raise their children, this could include help in communicating with their child or setting appropriate boundaries. Parents are also becoming aware of the effects of the amount of time they spend with their children.