

APPROACHES IN PSYCHOLOGY

WHAT THE SPEC SAYS:-

- A) origins of psychology,
- B) the learning approach,
- C) the cognitive approach,
- D) the biological approach,
- E) Ainsworth's strange situation,
- F) Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation,
- G) Romanian orphan studies,

A)

- Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. From an early age babies have meaningful social interactions with their caregivers. It is believed that these interactions have important functions for the child's social development, in particular for the development of caregiver-infant attachment.

- **RECIPROCITY:** this is a description of how two people interact. Mother-infant interaction is reciprocal in that both infant and mother respond to each other's signals and each elicits a response from the other. From around three months this interaction tends to be increasingly frequent and involves close attention to each other's verbal signals and facial expressions.

- **INTERACTIONAL SYNCHRONY:** this is when both mother and infant reflect both the actions and emotions of the other and do this in a co-ordinated synchronised way. This can occur in infants as young as two weeks old and is important for the development of mother-infant attachment.

- **EVALUATION:**

- Many studies between mothers and infants have shown the same patterns of interaction. However, what is being observed is merely hand movements or changes in expression. It is extremely difficult to be certain, based on these observations, what is taking place from the infant's perspective. Is the imitation of adult signals conscious and deliberate? Therefore, we cannot really know for certain that behaviours seen in mother-infant interaction have a special meaning.
- Observations of mother-infant interactions are generally well controlled procedures, with both mother and infant being filmed, often from multiple angles. Also babies do not know or care that they are being observed so their behaviour does not change in response to controlled observation. This is a strength because it means the research has good validity.
- Synchrony and reciprocity simply describe behaviours that occur at the same time, but this may not be particularly useful as it does not tell us their purpose. However, there is some evidence that reciprocal interaction and synchrony are helpful in the development of mother-infant attachment, as well as helpful in stress responses, empathy, language and moral development.

B)

-In 1964 Schaffer and Emerson aimed to investigate the formation of early attachments; in particular the age at which they developed, their emotional intensity and whom they were directed. They did this by studying 60 babies that were all from Glasgow and the majority were from skilled working-class families. The mothers and their babies were visited at home every month for the first year and again at 18 months. The researchers asked the mothers questions about the kind of protest their babies showed in seven everyday separations. This was designed

to measure the infant's attachment. The researchers also assessed stranger anxiety. They found that between 25 and 32 weeks of age about 50% of the babies show signs of separation anxiety towards a particular adult, usually the mother. Attachment tended to be to the caregiver who was most interactive and sensitive to infant signals and facial expressions and so this was not necessarily the person with whom the infant spent most time. By the age of 40 weeks 80% of the babies had a specific attachment and almost 30% displayed multiple attachments.

- **EVALUATION:**

- This study was carried out in the participants own homes and most of the observation was done by parents during ordinary activities and reported to researchers later. This means that the behaviour of the babies was unlikely to be affected by the presence of observers. Therefore, the study has good external validity.
- The study was carried out longitudinally which means that the same children were followed-up and observed regularly. Longitudinal designs have better internal validity than cross-sectional designs because they do not have the confounding variable of individual differences between participants.
- The fact that all of the families involved were from the same district and social class in the same city and at a time over 50 years ago is a limitation. Child-rearing practices vary from one culture to another and one historical period to another. These results do not necessarily generalise well to other social and historical contexts.

- **ASOCIAL STAGE (first few weeks):** The baby begins to recognise and form bonds with its carers. However, the baby's behaviour towards non-human objects and humans is quite similar. Babies show some preference for familiar adults in that those individuals find it easier to calm them. Babies are also happier when in the presence of other humans.

- **INDISCRIMINATE ATTACHMENT:** From 2-7 months babies display more observable social behaviour. They show a preference for people rather than inanimate objects, and recognise and prefer familiar adults. At this stage babies usually accept cuddles and comfort from any adult, and they do not usually show separation or stranger anxiety. Their attachment behaviour is therefore said to be indiscriminate because it is not different towards any one person.

- **SPECIFIC ATTACHMENT:** from around 7 months the majority of babies start to display anxiety towards strangers and to become anxious when separated from one particular adult. At this point the baby is said to have formed a specific attachment. This adult is termed the primary attachment figure and is not necessarily the person the child spends the most time with but the one who offers the most interaction and responds to the baby's signals with the most skill.

- **MULTIPLE ATTACHMENTS:** shortly after babies start to show attachment behaviour towards one adult they usually extend this attachment behaviour to multiple attachments with other adults with whom they regularly spend time. These relationships are called secondary attachments. In Schaffer and Emerson's study, 29% of the children had secondary attachments within a month of forming a primary specific attachment. By the age of about one year the majority of infants had developed multiple attachments.

- **EVALUATION:**

- The problem with studying the asocial stage is that babies that are young have poor co-ordination and are generally pretty much immobile. It is therefore very difficult to make any judgements about them based on observations of their behaviour. This does not mean the child's feelings and cognitions are not highly social but the evidence cannot be relied on.
- It is not clear when children become capable of multiple attachments. Some psychologists believe it is after they have formed an attachment to their primary carer. Whereas, others say it is from the outset.
- There may be a problem with how multiple attachments are assessed. This is because if a child gets upset when someone leaves, it does not necessarily mean that the child is attached to this person. This is a problem with Schaffer and Emerson's stages because their observation does not leave us a way to distinguish between behaviour shown towards secondary attachment figures and shown towards playmates.

C)

- **LORENZ'S RESEARCH:** Lorenz set up an experiment when he randomly divided a clutch of goose eggs. Half the eggs were hatched with the mother goose in their natural environment. The other half hatched in an incubator where the first moving object they saw was Lorenz. He found that the incubator group followed him everywhere whereas the control group followed their mother. When the two groups were mixed up the control group continued to follow the mother and the experimental group followed Lorenz. He called this imprinting and observed that there was a critical period that needed to take place. Depending on the species this can be as brief as a few after birth. Lorenz also investigated the relationship between imprinting and adult mate preferences. He observed that birds that imprinted on a human would often later display courtship behaviour towards humans and this is called sexual imprinting. There is a problem generalising these findings on birds to humans. This is because the mammalian attachment system is quite different from that in birds. This means that it is not appropriate to try to generalise any of Lorenz's ideas to humans. Also, researchers have also questioned some of Lorenz's findings. For example, a researcher found out that chickens that had been imprinted on yellow washing up gloves would try to mate with them as adults, but that with experience they eventually learned to prefer mating with other chickens. This suggests that the impact of imprinting on mating behaviour is not as permanent as Lorenz believed.

- **HARLOW'S RESEARCH:** Harry Harlow observed that new-born rhesus monkeys kept alone in a bare cage usually died but usually survived if given something soft like a cloth to cuddle; maybe because the soft object serves some of the functions of a mother. In 1958 he reared 16 baby monkeys with two wire model 'mothers'. In one condition milk was dispensed by the plain wire mother whereas in a second condition the milk was dispensed by the cloth-covered mother. It was found that the baby monkeys cuddled the soft object in preference to the wire one and sought comfort from the cloth one when frightened regardless of which dispensed milk. This showed that 'contact comfort' was of more importance to the monkeys than food when it came to attachment behaviour. Harlow also followed the monkeys who had been deprived of a 'real' mother into adulthood to see if this early maternal deprivation had a permanent effect. The monkeys reared with wire mothers were dysfunctional; however, those reared with a soft toy did not develop normal social behaviour. They were more aggressive, unsociable and bred less often. Harlow concluded that there was a critical period for this behaviour- a mother figure had to be introduced to an infant monkey within 90 days for an attachment to form. After this time attachment was impossible and the damage done by early deprivation became irreversible. These findings have had a profound effect on psychologists' understanding of human mother-infant attachment. Most importantly Harlow showed that attachment does not develop as a result of being fed by a mother figure but as a result of contact comfort and also the effect that deprivation has on later life. Also Harlow's research has had important applications in a range of practical contexts. For example, it has helped social workers to understand the risk factors in child neglect and abuse and so intervene to protect it. However, Harlow faced severe criticism for the ethics of his research as the monkeys suffered greatly as a result of Harlow's procedures. This species is considered similar enough to humans to be able to generalise the findings, which also means that their suffering was presumably quite human-like. The counter-argument is that Harlow's research was sufficiently important to justify the effects.

D)

LEARNING THEORY

This is a set of theories from the behaviourist approach to psychology that emphasise the role of learning in the acquisition of behaviour. Explanations for learning of behaviour include classical and operant conditioning.

- **CLASSICAL CONDITIONING:** involved learning to associate two stimuli together so that we begin to respond to one in the same way as we already respond to the other. In the case of attachment, food serves as an unconditioned stimulus as being fed gives us pleasure – we don't have to learn that, it is an unconditioned response. A caregiver starts as a neutral stimulus. When the same person provides the food over time they become associated with 'food'. The neutral stimulus has become a conditioned stimulus. Once conditioning has taken place the sight of the caregiver provides a conditioned response of pleasure.

- **OPERANT CONDITIONING:** involves learning to repeat behaviour, or not, depending on its consequences. If a behaviour produces a pleasant consequence, that behaviour is likely to be repeated again. The behaviour has been reinforced. If a behaviour produces an unpleasant consequence it is less likely to be repeated. Operant conditioning can explain why babies cry for comfort as crying leads to a response from the caregiver, for example feeding. As long as the caregiver provides the correct response, crying is reinforced. This reinforcement is a two way process. At the same time as the baby is reinforced for crying, the caregiver receives negative reinforcement because the crying stops.

- A range of animal studies have shown that actually young animals do not necessarily attach to or imprint on those who feed them. For example, Lorenz's geese imprinted before they were fed. Learning theorists believed that non-human animals and humans were equivalent and therefore this must be the same for humans as well.
- Research with human infants also shows that feeding does not appear to be an important factor in humans. For example, in Schaffer and Emerson's study many of the babies developed a primary attachment to their biological mother even though other carers did most of the feeding. These findings are a problem for learning theory as they show that feeding is not the key element to attachment and so there is no unconditioned stimulus or primary drive involved.
- The quality of attachment is also associated with factors like developing reciprocity and good levels of interactional synchrony. In addition, studies have shown that the best quality attachments are with sensitive carers that pick up infant signals and respond appropriately. It is very hard to reconcile these findings with the fear of cupboard love. If attachment developed purely or primarily as a result of feeding, there would be no purpose for these complex interactions and we would not expect to find relationships between them and the quality of infant-caregiver attachment.

BOWLBY'S THEORY

- **MONOTROPY:** Bowlby's theory is described as monotropic because he placed great emphasis on a child's attachment to one particular caregiver and he believed that the child's attachment to this one caregiver is different and more important than others. Bowlby believed that the more time a baby spent with this primary attachment figure, the better. He put forward two principles to clarify this:

1. The law of continuity- the more constant and predictable a child's care, the better the quality of their attachment.
2. The law of accumulated separation- the effects of every separation from the mother add up.

- **SOCIAL RELEASERS AND THE CRITICAL PERIOD:** Bowlby suggested that babies are born with a set of innate 'cute' behaviours like smiling; cooing and gripping that encourage attention from adults. He called these social releasers because their purpose is to activate the adult attachment system. Bowlby proposed that there is a critical period around two years when the infant attachment system is active. If an attachment is not formed at this time, a child will find it much harder to form one later.

- **INTERNAL WORKING MODEL:** Bowlby proposed that a child forms a mental representation of their relationship with their primary caregiver. This is called an internal working model because it serves as a model of what relationships are like. For example, a child whose first relationship is loving with a reliable caregiver will tend to form an expectation that all relationships are as loving and reliable, and they will bring these qualities to future relationships. Most importantly the internal working model affects the child's later ability to be a parent themselves. This explains why children from functional families tend to have similar families themselves.

- Bowlby believed that babies generally formed one attachment to their primary caregiver, and that this attachment was special. Only after this attachment was established could a child form multiple attachments. However, Schaffer and Emerson found that a significant minority of babies appeared able to form multiple attachments at the same time.
- There is clear evidence to show that cute infant behaviours are intended to initiate social interaction and that doing so is important to the baby. For example, when Brazleton instructed primary attachment figures to ignore the baby, some responded by curling up and lying motionless. The fact that the children responded so strongly suggests Bowlby's ideas about the significance of infant social behaviour in eliciting caregiving.
- In 2007 Bailey assessed 99 mothers with one-year-old babies on the quality of their attachment to their own mothers using a standard interview procedure. The researchers also assessed the attachment of the babies to the mothers by observation. It was found that the mothers who reported poor attachment to their own parents in the interviews were much more likely to have children classified as poor according to the observations. This supports the idea that an internal working model of attachment was being passed through the families.

E)

The strange situation was developed by Mary Ainsworth in 1969. The aim was to be able to observe key attachment behaviours as a means of assessing the quality of a child's attachment to a caregiver.

- **PROCEDURE:** The strange situation is a controlled observation with a two-way mirror through which psychologists can observe the infants behaviours. The behaviours used to judge attachment were: proximity seeking, exploration and secure-base behaviour, stranger anxiety, separation anxiety and response to reunion. The procedure has seven episodes, each of which last three minutes.

1. the child is encouraged to explore	Tests exploration and secure base
2. a stranger comes in and tries to interact with the child	Tests stranger anxiety
3. the caregiver leaves the child and stranger together	Tests separation and stranger anxiety
4. the caregiver returns and the stranger leaves	Tests reunion behaviour and exploration / secure base

5. the caregiver leaves the child alone	Tests separation anxiety
6. the stranger returns	Tests stranger anxiety
7. the caregiver returns and is reunited with the child	Tests reunion behaviour

- **FINDINGS:** SECURE ATTACHMENT (TYPE B) : these children explore happily but regularly go back to their caregiver. They usually show moderate separation distress and moderate stranger anxiety. Securely attached children require and accept comfort from the caregiver in the reunion stage. About 60-75% of British toddlers are classified as secure. INSECURE-AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT (TYPE A) : these children explore freely but do not seek proximity or show secure base behaviour. They show little or no reaction when their caregiver leaves and they make little effort to make contact when the caregiver returns. They also show little stranger anxiety. They do not require comfort at the reunion stage. About 20-25% are classified as insecure-avoidant. INSECURE-RESISTANT ATTACHMENT (TYPE C) : these children seek greater proximity than others and so explore less. They show huge stranger and separation distress but they resist comfort when reunited with their carer. Around 3% of British toddlers are classified as insecure-resistant.

- Babies assessed as secure typically go on to have better outcomes in many areas, ranging from success at school to romantic relationships and friendships in adulthood. Insecure-resistant attachment is associated with the worst outcomes including bullying in later childhood and adult mental health problems. This is evidence for the validity of the concept because it can explain subsequent outcomes.
- The strange situation shows very good inter-rater reliability. This means that different observers watching the same children in the strange situation generally agree on what attachment type to classify them with- they agreed on attachment types for 94% of tested babies. This means we can be confident that the attachment type of an infant identified in the strange situation does not just depend on who is observing them.
- It is questionable whether the main influence on the anxiety in the strange situation is actually attachment. As in fact, temperament which is the genetically influenced personality of the child is a more important influence of behaviour in the strange situation than attachment. It means that temperament may be a confounding variable.

F)

- John Bowlby proposed this theory in 1951 and this focused on the idea that the continual presence of nurture from a mothers or mother-substitute is essential for normal psychological development of babies and toddlers, both emotionally and intellectually.

- **THE CRITICAL PERIOD:** Bowlby saw the first 30 months of life as a critical period for psychological development. If the child is separated from their mothers in the absence of suitable substitute care and so deprived of her emotional care for an extended period during this critical period then psychological damage was inevitable.

- **EFFECTS ON DEVELOPMENT:** maternal deprivation effects children's intellectual development. If children were deprived of maternal care for too long during the critical period they would suffer mental retardation, characterised by abnormally low IQ. For example, Goldfarb found lower IQ in children who had remained in institutions as opposed to those who were fostered and

thus had a higher standard of emotional care. A second major way maternal deprivation affects children is in their emotional development. Bowlby identified affectionless psychopathy as the inability to experience guilt or strong emotion for others. This prevents the person developing normal relationships and is associated with criminality.

- **44 THIEVES STUDY:** this study consisted of 44 criminal teenagers accused of stealing. All 'thieves' were interviewed for signs of affectionless psychopathy. Their families were also interviewed in order to establish whether the 'thieves' had prolonged early separations from their mothers. A control group of non-criminal but emotionally disturbed young people was set up to see how often maternal separation / deprivation occurred in the children who were not thieves. Bowlby found that 14 of the 44 thieves could be described as affectionless psychopaths. Of this 14, 12 had experienced prolonged separation from their mothers in the first two years of their lives. In contrast only 5 of the remaining 30 'thieves' had experienced separations. Of the control group, only 2 out of 44 had experienced long separations. It was concluded that prolonged early separation / deprivation caused affectionless psychopathy.

- **EVALUATION:**

- Not all research has supported Bowlby's findings. For example, Hilda Lewis partially replicated the 44 thieves study on a larger scale, looking at 500 young people. She found that a history of early prolonged separation from the mother did not predict criminality or difficulty forming close relationships. This is a problem for the theory of maternal deprivation because it suggests that other factors may affect the outcome of early maternal deprivation.
- Research has shown that the damage from maternal deprivation inside the critical period is not always inevitable. Some cases of very severe deprivation have good outcomes provided the child has some social interaction and good aftercare. For example, Czechoslovakian twins were isolated from the age of 18 months until they were seven years old. After this, they were looked after by two loving adults and appeared to recover fully. Cases like this show that the period identified by Bowlby may be a 'sensitive one' but it cannot be critical.
- Some animal studies support this theory of maternal deprivation. For example, Harlow's monkeys and Levy et al in 2003. They showed that separating baby rats from their mother for as little as a day had a permanent effect on their social development though not other aspects of development.

G)

- **RUTTER'S ERA STUDY:** In 2011 Rutter and his colleagues followed a group of 165 Romanian orphans adopted in Britain to test to what extent good care could make up for poor early experiences in institutions. Physical, cognitive and emotional development has been assessed at ages 4,6,11 and 15 years. A group of 52 British children adopted around the same time have served as a control group. When they first arrived in the UK half the adoptees showed signs of mental retardation and the majority were severely undernourished. At age 11, the mean IQ of those children adopted before the age of six months was 102, compared with 86 for those adopted between six months and two years and 77 for those adopted after two years. In terms of attachment here appeared to be a difference in outcome related to whether adoption took place before or after six months. Those adopted after they were six months showed signs of a particular attachment style called disinhibited attachment. Symptoms include attention seeking, clinginess and social behaviour directed indiscriminately towards all adults, both familiar and unfamiliar. In contrast those children adopted before the age of six months rarely displayed disinhibited attachment.

- **THE BUCHAREST EARLY INTERVENTION PROJECT:** In 2005 Zeanah assessed attachment in 95 children aged 12-31 months who had spent most of their lives in institutional care. They were compared to a control group of 50 children who had never lived in an institution.

Their attachment type was measured using the strange situation. In addition carers were asked about unusual social behaviour including any characteristics of disinhibited attachment. They found that 74% of the control group came out as securely attached in the strange situation. However, only 19% of the institutional group were securely attached, with 65% being classified with disorganised attachment.

- **EVALUATION:**

- Studying the Romanian orphans has enhanced our understanding of the effects of institutionalisation. Such results have led to improvements of the way children are cared for in institutions. For example, orphanages and care homes now avoid having large numbers of caregivers for each child. This shows that such research has been immensely valuable in practical terms.
- Research studies that involved orphans before the Romanian orphans had much more extraneous variables. For example, the children had already experienced loss or trauma before they were institutionalised. This means that it was very hard to observe the effects of institutionalisation in isolation because the children were dealing with multiple factors which functioned as confounding participant variables. This increases the internal validity.
- The Romanian orphanages were not typical as the conditions were very bad and unusual. This means that results cannot be applied to understanding the impact of better quality institutional care or indeed any situation where children experience deprivation. This is a limitation of the studies because the unusual situational variables may after all lack generalisability.