Attachment Theory

Attachment = the emotional bond between the infant and his or her primary caregivers

The Roots of Attachment Theory: Theoretical perspectives

• Learning theorists

The Roots of Attachment Theory: Theoretical perspectives

• Ethologists: Imprinting
  – Instinctual learning
    • Happens immediately
    – Following a moving object

The Roots of Attachment Theory: Theoretical perspectives

• Ethologists
  – Attachment is biologically programmed response system
  – Activated early in the infant’s development
  – Follows the principles of imprinting

B. F. Skinner
(1904-1990)

Konrad Lorenz
(1903-1989)
The Roots of Attachment Theory: Living in isolation observations

- Institutionalized children
  - Health care was impeccable
  - No physical contact or warmth

Rene Spitz
(1887-1974)

The Roots of Attachment Theory: Living in isolation observations

- Experiments with monkeys
  - Harlow

Harry Harlow
(1905-1981)

John Bowlby’s Attachment Theory

- Why do human infants form attachments?
  - Not for food and warmth
  - For social interactions
  - Innate tendency to seek human contact
  - The mother provides protection from the unfamiliar

John Bowlby
(1907-1990)

John Bowlby’s Attachment Theory

- Why do infants form attachments?
  - Most important reason:
    - Those who form enduring social-emotional relationships with caregivers are more likely to survive
      - (evolutionary psychology)
9.1 Attachment

John Bowlby’s Attachment Theory

- Attach to Whom?
  - Responsive
  - Consistent
  - Appropriate
  - Caregiver

- ~ age 12 months the mother becomes a secure base

Measuring Attachment & Attachment Patterns

- There are distinct patterns of mother-infant interactions
  - Secure
  - Insecure

- The ‘Strange Situation’ Paradigm
  - How babies make use of the mother as a secure base

The Strange Situation Paradigm

- Mary Ainsworth: Strange Situation Test
  - Put child in room with mom
  - Stranger enters room & approaches child
  - Mom leaves; stranger tries to comfort infant (if necessary)
  - Mom returns, tries to comfort baby & leaves again
  - Stranger attempts to calm & play with the baby
  - Mom returns & attempts to comfort child.

Measuring Attachment & Attachment Patterns

- Secure
  - Explores environment when mom is there
  - May be distressed when mom leaves
  - Seeks comfort from mom when she returns
Measuring Attachment & Attachment Patterns

- Insecure
  - Avoidant Attachment (AKA Anxious-Avoidant)
  - Resistant Attachment (AKA Anxious-Resistant or Anxious Ambivalent)
  - Disorganized Attachment (AKA disoriented attachment)
    - Baby is confused by the whole scene
    - Unpredictable behavior at reunion

- Responsive and consistent parenting
  - Secure attachment
- Constant rejection of infant’s bids
  - Insecure Avoidant
- Non-Responsive and inconsistent parenting
  - Insecure Resistant
- Frightening or abusive parenting
  - Disorganized

Stability of Attachment

- According to Ainsworth, one’s attachment pattern is fairly stable throughout life
- But changes in attachment security can happen
  - When there are stressful experiences
  - In different developmental periods
  - Problems with predictions
- Childhood attachment security may predict later romantic attachment patterns
  - Internal working models

Positive Outcomes

- Securely attached
- Insecurely attached
  - Avoidant
  - Resistant
  - Disorganized
  - Disorganized
Attachment to Others

• Fathers
  – Early opportunities to interact with the baby → close attachment with the father
  – In stressful situations babies prefer the mother as a secure base
  – Less involved in routine care
  – Play rough-and-tumble games

Attachment to Others

• Daycare providers
  – Being in daycare does not affect attachment to parents
  • But if parents are already “at risk” for less sensitive care giving, then too much time in daycare accelerates the negative effects on attachment quality.

Attachment to Others

• Relatives
  – Attachment depends on how much time spent together

• Peers
  – When friends leave preschool change in behavior occurs indicating separation stress

But are these attachments?