

Attachment Theory



Ainsworth et al (1969,
1971)



Ainsworth: Attachment Theory

- Used a research procedure called the “strange situation” to study ways in which the presence or absence of the mother affects the behaviour of the child.



She found that:

- In a strange environment the child usually stays close to the mother but uses her as a safe base for exploration and returns to the mother from time to time.
- The child usually goes closer to the mother in the presence of a stranger, to view the stranger from a safe distance.



She found that:

- Children will usually respond to the stranger and play with them, but some cling to the mother.
- Children are more responsive when the mother is present.
- When the mother leaves the room the children will display the following behaviours – stop playing and wait for her return; follow her to the door; cry.

Attachment Theory



John Bowlby



Bowlby: Attachment Theory

- Bowlby worked on how babies become attached to the mother figure and what happens when they are separated.



He found that:

- Young children can experience feelings of loss and grief when separated from loved ones.
- Young children need to develop strong bonds with parents or key carers for healthy development.
- When children are left by families in hospital they go through the following stages: protest, despair and detachment in dealing with people. (working in conjunction with J. Robertson)



Bowlby's work has influenced:

- How children are settled into a new setting.
- The assignment of key workers to babies and children.
- The use of play workers, and provision for parents to accompany children when in hospital.



Secure Attachments

- Upset when parts from parents but settles quickly and greets parent happily on return
- Child sees parent as a source of security and safety
- Child is able to form and maintain relationships with others
- Child shows trust in adults
- Child has good self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of self
- Parent is responsive, alert and sensitive to the child



Insecure Attachments

- Child is fearful and upset when they part from parent and difficult to console when they return
- Child may demand parental attention but at the same time resist it and become angry
- Child may form inconsistent and unreliable relationships
- Child may appear untrusting of adults
- Parent may appear unavailable and unresponsive to child
- Parent may be insensitive and inconsistent in meeting child's needs



Harry & Margaret Harlow

- Carried out experiments on monkeys.
- They believed that contact and comfort are critical to emotional and social development.



Barbara Tizard

- Found that children can make attachments with “new mothers”.
- Highlighted the importance of key relationships between children and childcare workers.



D. W. Winnicott

- Showed how comforters were important to children who were making a transition to a new setting.
- These were referred to as transitional objects that comforted the child alone in a new situation.
- The object becomes a symbol of the mother/carer who will return.