



UNDERSTANDING ATTACHMENTS
Belfast APT : 2013

STARTER

Which of the following three descriptions most closely resembles your view of relationships ?

STATEMENT A

I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

STATEMENT B

I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

STATEMENT C

I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my boyfriend/ girlfriend doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my bf/ gf and this sometimes scares people away

OVERVIEW

- What are attachments ?
- How do attachments develop ?
- Bowlby's evolutionary theory of attachment
- Individual differences in attachment
- Disruption of attachments
- Attachment and continuity
- The Love Quiz
- Attachments and adult relationships

WHAT ARE ATTACHMENTS



Attachments are close emotional ties between two people :

4 behavioural signs of attachment (Maccoby 1980)

1. Distress on separation:
2. Joy at reunion :
3. Seeking proximity:
4. Orientation of behaviour towards the other :



THE DEVELOPMENT OF ATTACHMENTS

- o In many animal species, attachments occur through **Imprinting** (Lorenz 1935)
- o This is a rapid attachment to the first large moving object seen by the young animal
- o Imprinting ensures that vulnerable young stay close to the parent and can be protected

o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGBqQyZid04>



BUT ATTACHMENT TAKES LONGER IN HUMAN BABIES.....

Schaffer and Emerson (1964) studied attachments in a sample of 60 Glasgow babies.

- o Mothers kept records of their baby's behaviour
- o The researchers visited the family each month until the infant was one year old and observed the baby's reaction to them as they made friendly contact.



SCHAFFER AND EMERSON FOUND THE FOLLOWING PATTERN :

Up to around 6 months, babies became increasingly sociable with a range of people, but didn't prefer anyone in particular.

Around 7 months, two behaviour patterns appeared:

- o **Fear of strangers** - babies would show fear by howling loudly when confronted with the unfamiliar face of the researcher
- o **Separation anxiety** - babies protested loudly when separated from the parent figure even briefly

- o These two behaviours mark the development of the first attachment in infants.
- o In most infants, first attachments were to the mother
- o In about 30% of the sample, first attachments were shown to fathers or both parents jointly.
- o By the age of around one year, most babies demonstrated **multiple attachments** with a range of people such as grandparents and siblings

BOWLBY'S THEORY OF ATTACHMENT

- o Attachment is based on **instincts** which aid the survival of the child.
- o Babies possess instincts such as crying and smiling (called social releasers) which lead to care giving from the parent
- o Parents have instincts to respond to these signals by offering comfort, care and protection.

INTERNAL WORKING MODELS

The first attachment enables babies to build up an internal working model (IWM) The model includes beliefs about:

- o How loveable we are
- o How trustable adults are
- o How people ask each other for comfort (ie how relationships work)

The IWM provides a **template** which shapes later relationships. This is the **continuity hypothesis**

CRITICAL AND SENSITIVE PERIODS

- o The secure child uses the parent as a **safe base**, returning for security and reassurance when a threat is detected and moving away to explore the environment when the threat disappears.
- o Attachment should take place within a particular window of development - or a **sensitive period** - before the age of around three years

DIFFERENCES IN ATTACHMENTS: THE STRANGE SITUATION

Ainsworth and Bell (1970)

The Strange Situation is a controlled observation which allows infant's responses to a variety of situations to be measured and recorded.

- o Mothers and babies aged between 12 and 15 months were observed for around twenty minutes.
- o Each episode lasted for three minutes and the basic variations were repeated twice.
- o The behaviour of the babies and their mothers was filmed through a hidden
- o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsewNrHUHU>

THREE KINDS OF ATTACHMENT

- **Type A (Avoidant)** showed little distress when their mother left and her when she returned. Treated mum and stranger in similar, offhand way
- **Type B (Secure)** babies were happy to play and explore when the mum was in the room. Became distressed when she left and welcomed her back. Treated mum and stranger very differently
- **Type C (Ambivalent)** babies showed considerable distress when mum left but did not settle when she returned. Behaviour alternated between approaching and avoiding/ rejecting mother. Rejected stranger's attempts to comfort them.

EVALUATING THE SS

- Some babies didn't fit the 3 patterns so Type D (disorganised) added in 1990
- Reliability - why was each episode repeated ?
- Validity – similarities and differences to other kinds of separations ?
- Ethics - study was halted if babies became very upset
- Cultural validity – there are considerable differences in upbringing which means that babies respond differently (Germany, Japan, Israel)

DISRUPTION OF ATTACHMENT

- Can occur through short term separations (father works away)
- Longer / permanent separation (parental divorce, death)
- **Privation** is the failure to form an attachment
- Bowlby believed this would have lasting effects (affectionless psychopathy)

STUDIES OF PRIVATION : TIZARD AND HODGES

- Studied 65 children who were institutionalised from around 4 months of age (i.e. before an attachment had been formed) until the age of 4 years.
- Institutional policy dissuaded staff from forming attachments with children
- Physical care was good and the environment was stimulating.
- At around the age of four, 24 of the children were adopted, 15 were returned to their birth parents and the remaining 26 stayed in the institution, making three groups for comparison.

TIZARD AND HODGES

- Children were followed up at age 8 and 16.
- At age 8, 20/21 of the adopted children had formed close and loving attachments with their new families. In the restored group, close attachments were seen in less than half of the children (6/13)
- Restored children had poorer relationships with siblings than adopted children.
- All three groups of institution raised children showed difficulties with peer relationships and friendships according to their teachers.

- Tizard and Hodges demonstrate how lack of early attachment can be largely overcome when subsequent care provided is of high quality.
- Even when this occurs, children may struggle with the demands of friendship and peer relationships
- Implications for Bowlby's theory?

RUTTER (2007) : ROMANIAN ORPHANS

Longitudinal study comparing :

- o 58 children adopted under the age of 6 months
- o 59 children adopted between 6 and 24 months
- o 48 children adopted between 2 and 4 years (classed as late adoptees)
- o Late adoptees show **disinhibited attachment**: they demonstrate none of the usual fear of strangers shown by normally developing children and are often indiscriminately friendly, seeking attention and affection from any adult.

CONTINUITY OF ATTACHMENT

- o Hamilton (1994) studied a group of US adolescents and found a strong link between attachment type in infancy and adult attachment type. However, attachment style changed in a few individuals when major life events, such as loss of a parent, occurred.
- o Zimmerman et al (2000) assessed a sample of 44 German children for attachment type at 12 - 18 months of age and then again at ages 10 and age 16

CHANGE CAN OCCUR IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

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- o Zimmerman et al found that CAT was not a good predictor of AAT at sixteen when life events (parental divorce) or parental illness had intervened.
- o Rutter, Quinton and Hill (1999) identified a sample of people who had experienced poor relationships with parents but had gone on to achieve secure and happy adult relationships which they termed '**earned security**'.

THE LOVE QUIZ : HAZAN AND SHAVER

- Hazan and Shaver published a 'Love Quiz' in the Rocky Mountain News which asked volunteers to :
- Chose one of the 3 statements (A, B or C)
- Tick items from a checklist to describe the relationship they had with their parents (warm, detached, fearful)
- Answer questions about how long their adult relationships had lasted.



HAZAN AND SHAVER.....

- Analysed 630 responses chosen randomly from over 1200 received then repeated the exercise with a sample of 108 students
- Most of the respondents were classed as securely attached. They were generally happy and trusting & expressed a belief in lasting love.



- Around a quarter chose statement A (avoidant) This group were doubtful about the existence of love and felt that they did not need a close relationship to enjoy their lives.
- The final group chose statement C (ambivalent) This group experienced jealousy and possessiveness, fell in love often but rarely found 'true love'



ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Securely attached people are more likely to change their own behaviour when conflict occurs in relationship.

Insecurely attached people deal with conflict in less constructive ways (Levy and Davis 1988).

- Students with avoidant attachment types are more likely to split up (Feeney and Noller 1992)
- Problematic childhood attachments are a significant factor in later marital breakdown (Terling-Watt 2001)
- Parental divorce and a poor relationship with their mother are most significant for girls and for guys, a problematic relationship with their father is important.

ATTACHMENTS AND ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS



- Moore (1997) studied 100 adolescents aged 14/ 15
- She measured their attachment style using the Adult Attachment Interview **and** asked a close friend of each teenager to rate their behaviour for social acceptability.
- 'Secure' teenagers were less likely to engage in risky sexual activities (i.e. Unsafe sex) leading to pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections than their insecure counterparts.
- But, secure teenagers were **more likely** to have sexual relationships at this age than insecure teenagers.

SIMPSON, RHOLES AND NELLIGAN (1992)

- Dating couples were asked to take part in an experiment together
- They were asked to wait separately and a state of high anxiety was created in the female members of each couple by showing them a room filled with alarming technological equipment.
- They were informed that the experiment involved high levels of stress and then reunited with their partner to wait together for the next 'stage' of the experiment
- The researchers observed them through two-way mirrors.

SIMPSON, RHOLES AND NELLIGAN (1992)

- o Women who had been classed as securely attached were likely to share their anxieties with their partner and seek support and comfort.
- o Women who had been classed as avoidant often did not mention their anxieties to their partner giving them little chance to offer support.

SIMPSON, RHOLES AND NELLIGAN (1992)

- o Men who were securely attached were likely to offer support to their partners based on the amount of fear they showed. The more upset the partner seemed to be, the more support they offered.
- o Avoidant men offered less support when their partners showed greater fear or distress. It seemed as if their partner's emotional neediness led them to withdraw from the situation.

CONCLUSIONS..

- o Childhood Attachment style is reasonably stable but change is possible in both directions
- o Internal working models continue to influence later relationships in many ways
- o Adult relationships are made up of two people, with two (different) attachment styles and different relationship histories
- o Other factors can also play a role
