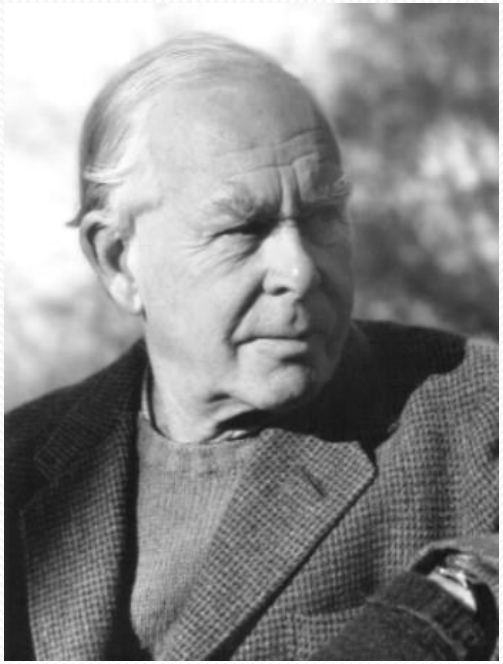
THEORY OF ATTACHMENT – JOHN BOWLBY

JOHN BOWLBY (1907-1990)

- British Child Psychiatrist & Psychoanalyst.
- He was the first attachment theorist, describing attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings".
- Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life.
- According to Bowlby, attachment also serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival.



WHAT IS ATTACHMENT?

- Attachment is a strong, affectionate tie we have with special people in our lives that lead us to experience pleasure when we interact with tme and to be comforted by nearness in times of stress. (Laura Berk)

- According to psychoanalytic perspective and behavioristic perspective feeding was seen as a central context in which the care-giver and babies developed attachment.

HARLOW & ZIMMERMAN (1959)

- A famous experiment was conducted by Harlow and Zimmerman in 1959, Which showed that developing a close bond does not depend on hunger satisfaction.
- They conducted the experiment where rhesus monkey babies were separated from their natural mothers and reared by surrogates- terry cloth covered and other was wire mesh.
- Babies cling to terry cloth mothers even though wire mesh had bottle.
- This shows 'contact comfort' is a more important and need for closeness and affection much deeper.

BOWLBY'S ETHOLOGICAL THEORY

- Ethological Theory of Attachment recognizes infant's emotional tie to the caregiver as an evolved response that promotes survival.
- John bolby applied this idea to infant-caregiver bond.
- He retained the psychoanalyst idea that quality of attachment to caregiver has profound implication for child's security and capacity to form trusting relationship. But he said '**FEEDING IS NOT THE BASIS FOR ATTACHMENT**'
- The central theme of attachment theory is that mothers who are available and responsive to their infant's needs establish a sense of security in their children. The infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world.

4 PHASES OF ATTACHMENT DEVELOPMENT

- Babies are born equipped with behavior like crying, cooing, babbling and smiling to ensure adult attention & adults are biologically programmed to respond to infant signals.
- He viewed the First 3 years are very sensitive period for attachment
- The 4 phases of attachment according to Bowlby are as below:
  - Preattachment Phase (Birth – 6 Weeks)
  - “Attachment in Making” Phase (6 Weeks – 6 to 8 Months)
  - “Clear Cut” Attachment Phase (6-8 Months to 18 Months-2 Years)
  - Formation Of Reciprocal Relationship (18 Months – 2 Years and on)

PREATTACHMENT PHASE (BIRTH -6 WEEKS)

- Baby's **innate signals** attract caregiver (**Grasping, crying, smiling and gazing into the adult's eyes)**
- Caregivers remain close by when the baby responds positively
- The infants encourage the adults to remain close as the the closeness comforts them
- Babies recognise the mother's smell, voice and face.
- They are **not yet attached** to the mother, they don't mind being left with unfamiliar adults.
- They have **No fear of strangers**

“ATTACHMENT IN MAKING” PHASE (6 Weeks – 6 to 8 Months)

- Infant **responds differently** to familiar caregiver than to strangers. The baby would babble and smile more to the mother and quiets more quickly when the mother picks him.
- The infant learns that her actions affect the behavior of those around
- The begin to develop **“Sense of Trust”** where they expect that the caregiver will respond when signaled
- The infant still does not protest when separated from the caregiver

“CLEAR CUT” ATTACHMENT PHASE (6-8 Months to 18 Months -2 Years)

- The attachment to familiar caregiver becomes evident
- Babies display “**Separation Anxiety**”, where they become upset when an adult whom they have come to rely leaves
- Although Separation anxiety increases between **6 -15 months** of age its occurrence depends on infant temperament, context and adult behavior
- The child would show distress when the mother leaves but if the caregiver is supportive and sensitive then this anxiety could be short-lived.
- Also if the baby has not developed the concept of Piagetian object permanence they usually do not become anxious when the parent leaves

(Lester et al 1974)

FORMATION OF RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP (18 Months – 2 Years and on)

- With rapid growth in representation and language by 2 years the toddler is able to understand some of the factors that influence parent's coming and going and to predict their return. Thus separation protests decline.
- The child could negotiate with the caregiver, using requests and persuasion to alter her goals
- With age the child depends less on the caregiver , more confidence that the caregiver will be accessible and responsive in times of need.

INTERNAL WORKING MODEL

- Based on the 4 phases of attachment set of expectations about the availability of attachment figures , their likelihood of providing support during times of stress and the self's interaction with those figures.

- The Internal Working Model is a vital part of personality and a guide for all future close relationships (Bretherton & Munholland,1999)

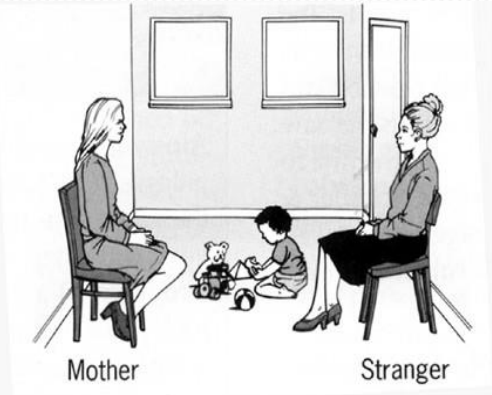
STYLES OF ATTACHMENT

- Attachment is not an ‘all or nothing’ process
- There may be variations, or individual differences between children in the attachments they form
- Ainsworth and Bell (1978) assessed about 100 American infants and their primary caregivers for the quality of attachment
- They found there are different styles of attachment:
  - Secure attachment
  - Avoidant Attachment
  - Resistant Attachment
  - Disorganised /Disoriented attachment

STRANGE SITUATION EXPERIMENT

1. Observer shows caregiver and infant into the experimental room and then leaves. (30 Seconds)
2. Caregiver sits and watches child play. (3 mins)
3. Stranger enters, silent at first, then talks to caregiver, then interacts with infant. Caregiver leaves the room. (3 mins)
4. First separation. Stranger tries to interact with infant. (3 mins)
5. First reunion. Caregiver comforts child, stranger leaves. Caregiver then leaves. (3 mins)
6. Second separation. Child alone. (3 mins)
7. Stranger enters and tries to interact with child
8. Second reunion. Caregiver comforts child, stranger leaves.

- All episodes except 1 last for 3 mins unless the child becomes very upset



STYLES OF ATTACHMENT

%	Type of Attachment	Description	Mother's behaviour
60	Secure	Upset, subdued when mother leaves. Happy on reunion. Avoidant of stranger when mother not there, but OK when present	Sensitive & Responsive. Child feels positive and loved.
15	Insecure Avoidant	Unconcerned by mother's absence. Unresponsive on return. Strongly avoidant of mother and stranger.	Unresponsive. Child feels unloved and rejected.

STYLES OF ATTACHMENT

%	Type of Attachment	Description	Mother's behaviour
10	Insecure Resistant	Intense distress on separation. Fear of stranger. Clingy and rejecting on return.	Inconsistent . Child feels angry and confused.
15	Insecure Disorganised/Disoriented	No consistent way of dealing with the stress. They reflect greatest insecurity show confused and contradictory behavior	When parent tries to hold them they look away. Typical attachment style when the infant is abused or neglected

- Infants reaction in the Strange Situation closely resembles their use of parent as a secure base and their response to separation and reunion at home

RESEARCH STUDIES

- Schaffer and Emerson 1964 observed that strongly attached infants had mothers who responded quickly to their demands and who offered the child the most interaction, whereas weakly attached infants had mothers who failed to interact with them.
- The Minnesota longitudinal study (Strofe et al ,2005) followed children from infancy to adolescence and found continuity between their early attachment styles and their later emotional social behaviour. This supports the continuity hypothesis.

RESEARCH STUDIES

- Cross cultural patterns of attachment – (Van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg 1988), investigated a global attachment pattern through meta-analysis of 32 ‘strange situation’ studies across 8 countries. It was found that globally, secure attachment was the most common and concluded as the ‘best’ for healthy social and emotional development. Child rearing practices in different countries may affect the attachment of babies. It may also be so that ‘strange situation’ does not work well in all cultures.
- Maternal deprivation and emotional problems in children(Bowlby, 1946) – Study on 44 Juvenile thieves where it was found that Children who experienced maternal deprivation before the age of 5 years were more likely to become affectionless psychopaths than children who hadn’t experienced maternal deprivation, supporting the hypothesis. Once the attachment bond was broken, the negative effects couldn’t be undone.
- Note : More researches have shown that ‘secure attachment’ is associated with good psychological health in adulthood.

STRENGTHS

- It is considered the dominant explanation of how and why attachment develops
- Imprinting is supported by Lorenz's ducks
- Bowlby suggests that attachment evolved as an aid to survival. If this is true, then attachment and caregiving behaviour should be universal, in all cultures, despite differences in child rearing practices. There is evidence to support this (Tronick et al)

WEAKNESS

- The idea that attachment behavior have evolved to promote child development has good face validity but evolutionary ideas are very difficult to test and so, difficult to prove or disprove.

- Bowlby's theory focuses on the role of the mother. There is evidence that in two parent families, the quality of attachment of the father can also have a big effect on the child's behavior and development (Grossman & Grossman, 1991)

THANK YOU