



Research Paper

## Attachment Theory

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**Abstract**—Attachment theories revolve around the child and its primary caregiver. Attachment figure acts as a secure base and provides comfort at the time of distress. Significance of early attachment as it forms the foundation for the later relationship in the child's adult life. Effect of attachment on social, emotional and cognitive development. Main theories, researches and case study and their contributions in attachment theory.

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### I. ATTACHMENT

Attachment can be defined as a great relationship, long enduring and emotional tie between two people. Here; in Child development, we can describe Attachment as a relationship between a child and their caregiver. Attachment is important for the child's safety, successful interactions with peers, stress regulation, adaptability, and it also provides a Secure Base. It is necessary: for a child so that he/she can explore the world, for the child's well-being and his/her motivation. Attachment is a strong factor that influences a child's later social and emotional outcome. Every child has an inborn need to attach to at least one main attachment figure, and this is called Monotropy, and it suggests that this one relationship is more important for the child than any other. Securely attached children also tend to become more resilient and competent adults. The attachments between the child and parents affect children's physical, psychological, behavioral, and developmental well being. Attachment can be classified into the following 4 types:

- ✱ Secure Attachment.
- ✱ Avoidant Attachment.
- ✱ Insecure ambivalent/ Resistant Attachment.
- ✱ Disorganized Attachment

❖ When is attachment developed?

◆ Attachment is developed in the following 4 phases:

- (1) Pre-attachment (Birth - 6 weeks).
- (2) Attachment in the making (6 weeks - 6 to 8 months).
- (3) Clear-cut attachment (6 to 8 months - 18 months).
- (4) Formation of reciprocal relationship (18 months - 2 years).

❖ What are Case-studies and Researches?

◆ A case study is a research methodology and an in depth investigation that investigates a topic in a real-life context. Case studies can be used in a lot of fields like psychology, education, political science, and social work. The objective of the case study is that the learning gained from studying one case can be generalized for others as well but unfortunately, they are highly subjective and it is difficult to generalize the results to a larger population.

❖ The Researches/Case-studies that we have included in our assignment report are as follows:

- (1) John Bowlby's ethological theory of Attachment.
- (2) Konrad Lorenz Imprinting theory.
- (3) Mary Ainsworth experiment on Attachment.
- (4) Mary Main's Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) perspective.
- (5) Harry Harlow's Monkey experiment.

### JOHN BOWLBY'S ETHOLOGICAL THEORY OF ATTACHMENT

John Bowlby (a British psychoanalyst) defined attachment as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.' He was inspired by the work of ethologists, people who study animal behavior,

especially Konrad Lorenz, and his work on the imprinting. And according to him, attachment is an evolutionary process, and children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with their caregivers. Forming an attachment bond with the caregiver (primary) is very important for the survival of the infant. The infant also has innate behavior like crying that keeps the parents nearby to protect or to provide comfort at the time of need. From one of the scenes in the movie Dharm, we observed that the infant was crying and his mother was cooking in the kitchen, so the infant looked and asked for his father's attention to provide comfort to him. Similarly, when the infant and his father were alone at home and the infant started crying, his father comforted him by hugging and playing with him. Bowlby tried to understand the distress of infants, who were separated from their caregivers, and he observed that separated infants would show Attachment behaviors (like crying) to overcome the separation from their caregivers. He also concluded that the infants who were successfully able to form secure bases with the caregivers were more likely to be playful, sociable, and had less anxiety and stress. The Attachment behavior system has an important role in attachment theory because it provides the conceptual linkage between ethological models of human development and modern theories. He divided four phases of child-caregiver attachment development: First; Birth to six weeks, Second; Six weeks to 6- 8 months, Third; 6 -8 months to 18-24 months, and Fourth; 24 months and on. Bowlby's conclusion was that to grow up mentally healthy "the young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his caregiver in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment." According to Bowlby, during these four phases, children build a very strong attachment tie with the caregiver that they use as a secure base in the caregiver's absence. The theory also suggests that there is a critical period for developing an attachment tie, which is about 0 - 2.5 years. If the attachment is not developed, then the infant will suffer from irreversible developmental issues, such as reduced intelligence, increased anxiety, and will get easily irritated and annoyed.

- **KONRAD LORENZ IMPRINTING THEORY**

- Konrad Lorenz researched imprinting in which he observed that animal infants form an attachment to the first large moving object that they see and meet, because of their biological need to form an attachment bond. He observed goose eggs and took care of them until they were about to hatch out. Then he placed half of the eggs under the goose mother and kept the other half in an incubator because he wanted them to perceive Lorenz as their attachment figure. After the eggs were hatched, Lorenz imitated the mother duck's quacking sound so that the newborns look at him as their mother, and the young goose infants did the same and followed him. The other group followed their mother. Lorenz found and concluded that the young goose followed the first moving object they saw. This process is known as Imprinting. Lorenz believed that once imprinting has occurred, it cannot be reversed, and he also concluded that attachment formation promotes the survival of newborns.

- **MARY AINSWORTH'S STRANGE SITUATION EXPERIMENT**

- Psychologist Mary Ainsworth expanded John Bowlby's original work and explained Strange situations via an experiment. The strange situation experiment helped to identify the infant attachment style. Ainsworth emphasizes the Nurture theory and says that attachment is dependent on the behaviour that the caregiver shows towards the infant. To form a secure attachment pattern with the infant the mother/caregiver should be sensitive in reacting and responding to the infant's signals, moods, and needs. There are a total of 3 types of attachment bonds according to Mary Ainsworth, one is 1) Secure attachment and the other two are insecure attachments: 2) Avoidant attachment, 3) Ambivalent attachment. Ainsworth did her experiment with the mothers and their infants. She let the infants play in a room with toys and observed their reactions to various situations. She observed children between the age group of 12 to 18 months. Strange Situation attachment styles are primarily based on four interaction behaviours:

- ❖ Proximity and contacting seeking.
- ❖ Contact maintenance.
- ❖ Avoidance of proximity and contact.
- ❖ Resistance to contact and comfort.

- By her observations about the experiment; she concluded that:

(1) A Secure attachment helps the child to use their attachment figure as a safe base to explore their environment and seek comfort at the time of distress. Securely attached infants are easily comforted by the attachment figure when they feel upset. Bowlby also said that an infant with secure attachment 'is likely to possess a representational model of attachment figures as being available, responsive, and helpful.' Erik Erikson's theory of Psychosocial development, stage 1 (Trust vs Mistrust) mentioned that early patterns of trust help infants build a strong base of trust that's crucial for their social and emotional development. If a child successfully develops trust, they will feel safe and secure in the world.

(2) If the child faces an ignorant, unavailable and insensitive caregiver, they adopt avoidant behaviour. They show no sign of distress when the mother leaves and feels okay with the stranger and play normally in the

presence of the stranger. They show very little interest when the mother returns. This kind of attachment pattern is called Insecure Avoidant Attachment.

(3) If the caregiver is inconsistent in providing care to the child's needs. The infant will respond by exaggerating and distorted attachment behaviour, resulting in crying and clinging and will also face difficulty in moving away from the caregiver to explore their environment. This type of attachment is called Insecure Ambivalent/ Resistant Attachment. For an instance, we can take an example scene from the movie *Taare Zameen Par* where Ishaan (the child) was sent to boarding school and he showed resistant behaviour, the dialogue "ईशान, अब गुस्सा छोड़ो, और चलो।" made him angry and anxious and he ran across the football ground and resisted meeting his parents, he even refused to respond to them on a phone call.

Mary Main's Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

Mary Main needed a way to observe the behaviour of the parents (adults), so in 1982, she decided to interview them. Adult attachment interviews were semi-structured interviews wherein parents were asked to recall and then describe memories of attachment-related experiences of their childhood. Parent-infant having secure attachment provided a narrative that was believable and rational. On the other hand, the parents of avoidantly attached infants minimise the significance of their attachment relationship. "According to researchers Howard and Miriam Steele in *Clinical Applications of the Adult Attachment Interview*, it was "the single most important development in attachment research over the last 25 years." Mary Main is particularly known for her introduction of the 'disorganized' infant attachment style in the continuation of Mary Ainsworth's strange situation experiment. This is technically the 4th type of attachment pattern: Insecure Disorganized Attachment in which the child shows disorientation in the form of wandering, confused expressions, freezing, undirected movements, or unorganized patterns of interaction with the caregiver. Infants with insecure attachment face difficulty in adopting social interactions and particularly in stressful times. Insecure attachment can result in mistrust which can cause children to become anxious, fearful and confused.

Harry Harlow's Rhesus Monkey Experiment

Harry Harlow in 1958 wanted to study the newborn rhesus monkeys bond with their mothers. According to Harlow and Bowlby's explanation; feeding which is a primary factor is not only the base of attachment but also the comfort which is a secondary factor. Harlow explained this through his experiment on rhesus monkeys. He separated infant monkeys from their mothers immediately after birth and placed them in cages with access to two surrogate mothers, one made of wire which provides food and one covered in a soft cloth. Monkeys spent more time with the soft-cloth mother even when she had no milk. Infants only went to the wire-mother when they were hungry, once they were fed they would return to the cloth-mother. The cloth-mother provides comfort which helps the monkey to face new and scary situations and forms a secure base for the infant monkey to be able to explore its environment. Infants have a biological need for clinging and hugging to get emotional comfort at the time of distress and to get attached. A dialogue from the movie *Taare Zameen Par*: "Caring is very important Mr Awasthi. It has the power to cure; A salve for pain. The child feels wanted. A hug, a loving kiss now and then to show that I care. Son, I love you. If you have any fears. Come to me." This emphasizes the importance of hugging and clinginess to form a secure attachment. Monkeys who had grown up with wired surrogate mothers had to face social interaction difficulties with other monkeys. Maternal deprivation leads to long term difficulties such as cognitive, social, and emotional issues. Sigmund Freud was also of a view that earlier attachment with the caregiver forms the foundation for future attachment. If the infant doesn't form secure attachment during the critical period of birth to 2.5 years it will be difficult to form attachment in the course of a sensitive period of 2.5 to 5 years. Maternal Deprivation is permanent and irreversible. Because of maternal deprivation, the parent-child bond gets weak. "In one study, infants born to mothers who were depressed during pregnancy were four times as likely as babies of nondepressed mothers to have engaged in violent antisocial behaviour." as mentioned in our reading from Laura E. Berk.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZED INFANTS

Institutionalization is the process that includes a person being institutionalized which means either that he/she has been placed in a deprived institution, or that he/she has been separated from their caregiver and is feeling psychological distress. Institutionalised infants suffer from difficulties in adjustment which can lead to social avoidance, cognitive impairments, aggressive behaviour, depression and anxiety in adolescence. Institutionalized infants who were separated from caregivers between 3 and 12 months of age faced a lot of difficulties; they lost weight, withdrew from their surroundings, had problems in making social interactions, and faced difficulty in sleeping. They showed attachment behaviours like crying and getting irritated easily. They also faced emotional problems because they were not able to form a bond with anyone. These infants wanted more adult attention, love and care because they had less or very few friendships. Institutionalized infants show reduced ERP (event-related potential) brain waves which shows that they had problems in differentiating expressions and emotions.

Impact of infant characteristics on attachment (Nature vs Nurture) Infant characteristics are devoted to the infant-caregiver relationship. Nature or nurture? It is an ongoing debate. The question that arises is: Are a person's essential qualities and behaviour genetically determined (nature) or experientially determined (nurture)? Caregiver's care, love and kindness determines child security of attachment (nurture) where else infant temperament (nature) determines the form of insecure attachment. If an infant's temperament is high, he/she will show irritable behaviour even when separated only for a short period irrespective of the caregiver's sensitivity to the infant. Infants with medical conditions (nature) like prematurity or any disability are more likely to have an insecure attachment, as parents tend to modify their parenting method (nurture) according to the needs of the infant. Like in the example of Taare Zameen par movie scene, case of Ishaan having Dyslexia, so he is facing difficulty in forming secure attachment but his teacher modified his teaching method which helped Ishaan to form a secure attachment. Caregiving (nurture) has more impact on determining infant attachment. Maternal problems like maternal depression, mental illness, teenage parents and child abuse are more correlated with insecure attachment. Also, behaviorists mainly focused their explanation on behaviors that are learned through either classical or operant conditioning (nurture). Temperament and attachment theorists suggest that attachment is influenced by both; infant and caregiver factors

#### A CASE STUDY ON CULTURAL VARIATION

Here we are going to share our knowledge and learning from a case study that is using a strange situation experiment on Great Britain, Germany, Israel, Japan, the USA and China population to find out how cultural variation affects attachment patterns? It was found that the most common type of attachment pattern in different cultures was a secure attachment pattern. "China has the lowest percentage of secure attachment, on the other hand, Britain has the highest." Countries like Germany that promote independence have the highest percentage of Insecure anxious-avoidant attachment, this is because parents in Germany look for and want independent and non-clingy infants, who do not make demands, do not fight on with their parents and obey the commands of their parents. Whereas countries that are more culturally close like Japan have the highest percentage of Insecure ambivalent resistant attachment. Japanese mothers rarely leave their babies with other people, so maternal separation probably creates even greater stress for them and hence they show resistant behaviour. The cross-cultural variation shows that attachment patterns may have different interpretations and different effects in different cultures.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ABOVE MENTIONED THEORIES

We are going to discuss the contributions, theoretical clarification, research, clinical interventions, and policy applications of the theory.

- ❖ Bowlby's attachment theory is a theory about development and attachment patterns. Attachment relationships in early childhood play a special role in supporting children to develop to their maximum potential and physical and mental wellbeing. It gave us the knowledge that individual differences in attachment are based on early caregiver–infant interaction and the quality of care and love given during the critical period of development. These early differences in attachment patterns have implications and directly affect the patterns of adaptation in later developmental stages. Attachment theory also made us familiar with the fact that secure attachments in early childhood can support children's future development. The research on attachment theory highlights the positive impact of quality interactions between teachers and infants.

- ❖ Mary Ainsworth's strange situation experiment research on attachment has played an important role in our understanding of child development. Mary Ainsworth's experiment on attachment contributed to the department as based on her research, three major styles of attachment were found that children have with their parents or caregivers. The strange situation experiment has been found to have good reliability, but it has one point that has been criticized over the years: that it explains only about the type of attachment to the mother, and not the general attachment style as the child may have a different type of attachment to the father or his/her any other caregiver.

- ❖ Mary Main and her colleagues developed an interview method called the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), this interview had a total of 20 open-ended questions about an adult person's recollections of their childhood memories. The AAI has helped in understanding how the childhood experiences of the parent (adult) affect the parent-infant relationship and how a child of that particular adult interviewee (parent) would be attached to his/her parent. Mary Main also introduced the fourth style of attachment named disorganised attachment.

- ❖ Harry Harlow's experiment on rhesus monkeys helped us to study the effects of maternal separation and social isolation. Harlow's research contributed a great deal to our understanding of the importance and need of caregiving, affection, and social relationships early in life. Harlow also concluded that the separation from the mother can negatively affect the infant, and can lead to psychological disturbances and even death too. He also stated that feeding is the physical closeness that provides the comfort and security that a child needs for healthy and positive development.

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