

Bowlby's monotropic theory of attachment

Bowlby's monotropic theory

- Bowlby (1905) rejected the learning theory of attachment, and proposed an evolutionary explanation → attachment is an innate system that gives us a survival advantage.
- Imprinting + attachment evolved as they ensure young animals stay close to caregivers + this protects them from hazards e.g. in the past, wild animals, nowadays, traffic.
- **monotropy**: child's attachment to one particular caregiver + the attachment is different and more important. He called this person the mother (doesn't have to be biological). More time spent with PC → better.
- 2 principles illustrating importance of monotropy:
 - **law of continuity**: more constant + predictable child are, the better attachment quality.
 - **law of accumulated separation**: the less separation, the better.

social releasers + critical period

- **social releasers**: cute innate behav. babies have to encourage attention from adults.
- He realised AH is a reciprocal process → both baby + mother become attached through innate across babies SR trigger that response in adults. AH system increases gradually through SR + interactions.
- **critical period**: age 2, when infant's AH stage is active. Bowlby viewed it as a sensitive period. If an AH isn't formed during CP, a child would find it harder to form AH in later life.

internal working model

- **IWM**: child forms a mental representation of their relationship with their primary caregiver, serving as a model for what rel. are like. IWM has powerful effects on child's future rel. e.g. a child whose first rel. was loving will bring this quality to future rel.
- IWM suggests those who had a poor rel. will learn to treat others that way. IWM affects child's later ability as a parent themselves → people tend to base parenting behav. on their own experiences.
 - positive + loving = secure attachment
 - unloved + rejected = insecure avoidant attachment
 - angry + confused = insecure resistant attachment

evaluation

- **strength**: supporting research into social releasers. Brazelton (1975) observed mothers + babies, and told the mothers to ignore their babies' signals (ignoring SR). The babies initially showed some distress, but when they continued to get ignored, some responded by curling up + laying motionless. This shows social releasers are important in emotional development + attachment development.
- **limitation**: concept of monotropy lacks validity. Schaffer + Emerson found that most babies formed multiple attachments at the same time. This contradicts Bowlby's idea of monotropy, that children form one unique AH to PC. It may simply mean that the AH to PC is stronger than other attachments, but not different in quality, which Bowlby suggested. The contradicting research reduces the validity of his theory.
- **limitation**: Bowlby's theory is socially sensitive. The law of accumulated separation states that mothers who work will put their child at a disadvantage in many ways. Burman (1994) argues this places a burden of responsibility on mothers, pushing them into a certain lifestyle (not working + remaining at home). This suggests monotropy is a socially sensitive topic.