

# learning theory of attachment

## classical conditioning

- Dollard + Miller argued attachment is a learned behaviour acquired by both classical and operant conditioning.
- Cupboard love theory emphasises the importance of the caregiver as the provider of food. Children learn to love those who feed them.
- Food = UCS. Pleasure = UCR. Caregiver = NS. Caregiver gradually becomes CS + the sight of the caregiver produces pleasure = CR. (learning theorists call this love)

## operant conditioning

- babies cry for comfort. Crying leads to the caregiver providing a response e.g. picking them up, feeding them (reinforced). Crying is reinforced
- reinforcement is a 2-way process. Babier behaviour is positively reinforced and mum's behaviour is negatively reinforced (increase action of comforting child to avoid outcome of crying)
- **positive reinforcement**: babies increase crying to gain rewards (comfort)

## attachment is secondary

- learning theorists argue about drive reduction
- hunger is a primary drive (innate biological motivator). Eat food to reduce hunger.
- Sears suggested as caregivers provide food, the primary drive of hunger is generalised to them (the caregiver): attachment as a secondary drive learned by an association between caregiver + satisfaction of primary drive.

## evaluation

- **limitation**: contradicting research from animal studies. Lorenz's geese imprinted before they were fed + maintained these attachments, regardless of who fed them. Similarly, Harlow's monkeys attached to a soft mother rather than a wire mother that dispensed milk. Learning theorists believe that findings from animal studies can generalise to humans, but the contradicting research suggests the learning theory cannot be used as an explanation for attachment.
- **limitation**: research shows that feeding doesn't seem to be an important factor in humans. Schaffer and Emelison found that many babies formed an attachment to their biological mother, even though other carers did most of the feeding. Feeding isn't a key element to attachment, so there's no UCS + primary drive involved.
- **strength**: some aspects of CC can be involved in some parts of attachment. Babies may associate caregiver with enjoyment, comfort, social interactions, which is what builds the attachment, but CC wouldn't explain food as being the UCS.