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| **LT 3: Attachment: An Alternative Theory: The Behaviourist Theory** |
| This theory argues that attachment is based on **learning, experiences and the role of nurture.** |
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| Infants learn to attach to people through a process of reinforcement. Reinforcement refers to learning by consequences. This is known as operant conditioning. If the consequence of behaviour is positive, then a person will repeat that behaviour. For example….**Applying Operant Conditioning to attachment.**If an infant interacts with its caregiver (e.g. by gazing at them, smiling, cooing or crying), they will receive attention and this is rewarding for him or her. The caregiver will also feed, comfort and keep the child safe, which is also rewarding. This reinforces the bond between caregiver and infant, which means that attachment behaviours become more common.Attachment is a two-way process and so caregivers also form an attachment because it is rewarding for them too. Having a child that interacts with you, relies on you and is happier in your company is also reinforcing.The infant and caregiver learn to bond with each other because they both benefit from the relationship. This also explains why the children do not bond with caregivers who neglect or abuse them – there is nothing rewarding about the relationship.In general terms, the behaviourist theory suggests that whether a child attaches or not, depends on experience. This can be seen between attachment type and parenting styles.1. Securely attached children tend to have caregivers who are very sensitive to their child’s needs. They see things from the child’s perspective and correctly interprets their signals. The caregivers are co-operative, accepting and accessible.
2. Insecure avoidant children tend to have caregivers who are uninterested in their child. These caregivers often reject their child, they can be self-centred and strict.
3. Insecure ambivalent children tend to have caregivers who are interested in them but who tend to misunderstand their child’s behaviour. As a result, their child cannot really rely on the caregiver’s emotional support.
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