**Cultural variations in attachment**

**WHAT DOES ‘CULTURAL VARIATIONS’ MEAN?**

**The way that different groups of people vary in terms of their social practices, and the effects that those practices have on development and behaviour.**

Do attachments vary by culture? Bowlby argues that attachments are universal (that means they do not vary) but different cultures may achieve attachments in different ways. We can think of cultural differences in broad terms:

An **individualistic culture** is one where importance is placed on individual achievement and values independence. Compared to......

**Collectivist culture** is where importance is placed on the social group. In this type of culture things are shared – groups live and work together sharing tasks, belongings and childrearing. They want to be dependent on each other.

This line of reasoning suggests that the culture we are born into will affect the attachment we form to our parents.



**Germany**

Culture

Independence and individual achievement is highly valued in Germany. From a very young age parents encourage their children to become independent and confident on their own. As an infant develops the parents promote independent behaviour. A greater interpersonal distance progresses between the parent and infant as they mature.

Research

Grossman and Grossman (1991) studied German infants using The Strange Situation experiment. They found that many infants did not engage in proximity seeking behaviour and therefore were more likely to be classified as insecurely attached, in particular insecure avoidant.

Van Ijzendoor and Kroonenberg (1988) carried out a meta-analysis by combining the results from a large number of studies in a variety of countries to produce percentages of infants classified as avoidant, securely attached and resistant in different cultures.

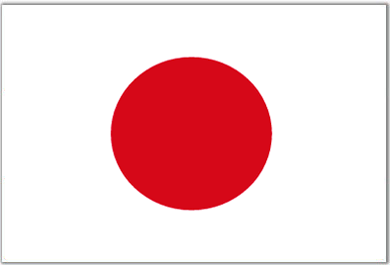
*The results from three studies in Germany were:*

Secure attachment = 57%

Avoidant = 35%

Resistant = 8%

**Japan**



Culture

In Japan the emphasis is on social cooperation and compliance. The family is seen as a very close, strong unit. As a result of this infants are rarely separated from their mother and sleep in their bed up to the age of two years old. Mothers usually carry the infant around on their back all day and often bathe together. Infants would experience much stress if they were separated from their mother. Infants and children are taught from a very young age not to ignore others as this is seen as very rude. Parents would actively discourage such displays of behaviour.

Research

Takahashi 1990 studied 60 Japanese infants aged one years old and mixed gender. He found that 68% were classified as securely attached, 32% were classified as insecure resistant and 0% was classified as insecure avoidant. The infants were very disturbed during the ‘left alone’ stage and 90% had to be stopped at this stage. If they had not had to stop it is predicted more infants would have been classified as securely attached (as much as 80%).

Van Ijzendoor and Kroonenberg 1988 carried out a meta-analysis by combining the results from a large number of studies in a variety of countries to produce percentages of infants classified as avoidant, securely attached and resistant in different cultures.

*The results from two studies in Japan were:*

Secure attachment = 68%

Avoidant = 5%

Resistant = 27%



**Cross Cultural Variations of Ainsworth’s Strange Situation**

**Van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988)**

AIM: This study aimed to investigate the differences in attachment types formed by infants from different cultures. This would allow the researchers to decide whether the Strange Situation is an accurate measurement of attachment across different cultures.

PROCEDURE: The researchers compared the findings of 32 studies that had used the Strange Situation to measure attachment type. Research from 8 different nations was compared, which included Western cultures (e.g. US, Great Britain, Germany) and non-Western cultures (e.g. Japan, China, Israel). The findings from almost 2000 infants were compared.

FINDINGS: Secure attachment was the most common type of attachment in all 8 nations. However, significant differences were found between the distributions of insecure attachments. For example, in Western cultures the dominant (main) insecure type was insecure-avoidant, whereas in non-Western cultures it was insecure-resistant, with China being the only exception, as insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant were distributed equally. One of the most significant findings was that there is one-and-a-half-times greater variation in attachment types *within* cultures than *between* cultures.

CONCLUSION: The finding that secure attachment was the most common type of attachment in all 8 nations suggests that there may be universal characteristics that underpin infant and caregiver interactions. Differences in the types of insecure attachment shown in Western and non-Western cultures may be linked to the different child-rearing methods used in these cultures, i.e. children in Western cultures may be more used to being left by their parents and therefore ‘avoidant’ behaviour may instead be a sign that they are independent. Also, the greater variation in attachment types found within cultures suggests that more research should be carried out to find out about how subcultures influence attachment type.

**Problems with Cross-Cultural Use of the Strange Situation**

* The Strange Situation assumes that separation anxiety means the same thing in all cultures. The assumption made is that separation anxiety means secure attachment. However, it is possible that a baby who doesn’t show separation anxiety may be an independent child rather than an insecurely attached child. This may be because their culture (e.g. Germany) encourages parents to use child-rearing methods which encourage independence.
* It is also possible that separation anxiety may not be a measure of secure or insecure attachment, but a measure of how unusual the situation is. For example, research findings demonstrate that for Japanese infants, who rarely leave their mother, the Strange Situation is more stressful than it would be to an American infant.
* The finding that the variation in attachment types within cultures was greater than the variation between cultures (Van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg) suggests it is wrong to assume that the child-rearing methods within a culture are the same. It is likely that a single culture is made up of a number of sub-cultures, each with different child-rearing styles. Therefore it is over simplistic to make generalisations about a culture.
* It used limited studies (32) and 18 were from the US. Only one was from China. Care should be taken when generalising the results.
* The strange situation reflects the customs of the US and to use it in other cultures may not be appropriate.

In all cultures, **secure attachments** (Type Bs) are the most common but there is considerable variation in the relative percentages. For example **avoidant attachments** (Type As) are more common in Western Europe and **anxious-resistant** (Type Cs) in Israel and Japan.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Number of studies | Secure  (B) | Avoidant  (A) | Resistant  (C) | **Possible explanation** |
| **West Germany** | 3 | 57 | **35** | 8 | Children are encouraged to be independent and not `clingy`. This does not necessarily mean they are insecure |
| **Great Britain** | 1 | 75 | 22 | 3 |  |
| **Netherlands** | 4 | 67 | 26 | 7 |  |
| **Sweden** | 1 | 74 | 22 | 4 |  |
| **Israel** | 2 | 64 | 7 | **29** | Children reared in Kibbutzim only have a few hours daily contact with their parents. These children rarely encounter any strangers and their anxiety showed when the stranger entered the room. |
| **Japan** | 2 | 68 | 5 | **27** | Japanese infants are rarely left by their mothers, so the Strange Situation may be particularly stressful for them |
| **China** | 1 | 50 | 25 | 25 | This study involved 36 infants – the sample may be too small to make generalisations to all (hundreds of millions) of Chinese children (Bee, 1992) |
| **United States** | 18 | 65 | 21 | 14 |  |
| **Overall average** |  | 65 | 21 | 14 |  |

The Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg study is well known in psychology and you must know it well. Two key points from this study are:

1. Cultures differ from each other in terms of attachment types.
2. Even ***within*** cultures there are differences in attachments.

Using specific examples of how cultures vary in attachment can add a lot to an exam answer. It shows that you not only understand that cultures do vary, but also how they vary and why.