Van Izendoorn and Kroonenberg (Cultural Variations in Attachment)

PROCEDURE (METHOD): Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg researched various databases to carry out a meta-analysis which compared the findings of 32 studies that had used the Strange Situation to measure attachment and to classify the attachment relationship between the mother and the infant. Studies were excluded if they looked at special groups such as Down’s Syndrome or twins, or they involved fewer than 35 infants. In all 2,000 Strange Situation classifications were examined. Research from 8 different nations was compared, which included Western cultures (eg: US, Great Britain, Germany) and non-western cultures (eg: Japan, China, Israel).

RESULTS (FINDINGS): Considerable consistency in the overall distribution of attachment types was found across all cultures. Secure attachment (Type B) 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 insecure type is anxious-avoidant (Type A), whereas in non-Western cultures it is anxious-resistant (Type C), with China being the only exception, as anxious/avoidant and anxious/resistant were distributed equally. One of the most significant findings was that there is 1.5 times greater variation within cultures than between cultures. Eg: the 2 Japanese studies. One found no anxious-avoidant but a high proportion of anxious-resistant. The other found a pattern much more like the ‘standard’ Ainsworth one.

Privation describes the situation of children who have never experienced attachment, such as Genie. She was 13 but looked much younger; she only made infantile noises and was still wearing nappies. Genie had spent her life locked in her room by her father because he thought she was retarded: most of the time she had been tied to a chair and had little contact with anyone. Genie was given intensive training in social and linguistic skills by a team of psychologists however she never fully recovered, either socially or in terms of being able to speak.

Deprivation refers to the loss of emotional care that is normally provided by a primary caregiver. An example of this is Spitz and Wolf (1946) who observed that 100 ‘normal’ children who were placed in an institution became severely depressed within a few months. Another example is Bowlby (1944), who conducted the 44 Thieves study, where he studied juvenile ‘thieves’ and diagnosed 14 of them as ‘affectionless psychopaths’. He also noted that 86% of the affectionless thieves had experienced frequent separation as children, which suggests that a lack of continuous care may be a cause of emotional maladjustment. However these effects can sometimes be undone, as Hodges and Tizard (1989) found that recovery from deprivation is possible if there is sufficient care. However a limitation of this may be sample bias as the children first chosen for adoption may have been easier to get on with.

Robertson & Robertson (1971) conducted a study on a number of cases involving separation from the mother. They attempted to minimise the consequences of distress by preparing children for the separation. The child made visits to the Robertson’s home beforehand and during the separation the child was talked to about his/her mother regularly. These cases, cared for in the Robertson’s own home, were compared with the case of John who was taken into more conventional residential care for nine days.

The findings of the research were that the children cared for by the Robertsons coped well with the separation. However John, initially an outgoing and cheerful child, showed severe distress and later, despair and detachment, that continued after he returned home to his mother.