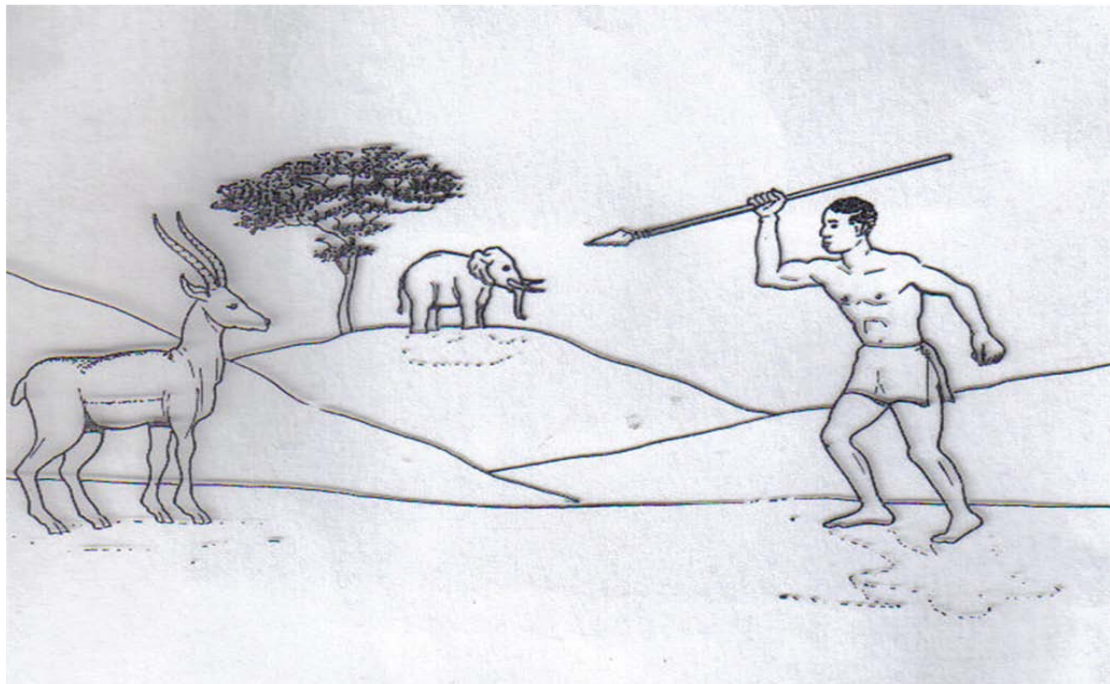


## CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN ATTACHMENT

### Introduction

Psychologists study different cultures in order to look for **similarities** and **differences** in behaviour. If a behaviour is **culturally universal**, then because it occurs irrespective of the environment, it almost certainly has a **biological cause**. However, if a behaviour is only seen in some cultures, this would suggest that it is influenced by the environment, and almost certainly has an **environmental cause**.

Consider, for example, the picture below. To our eyes, the hunter is attempting to spear the gazelle. However, members of certain African cultures would say that the hunter was attempting to spear the elephant.



The reason for the cultural difference is that we use cues to depth, such as overlap and relative size. However, cultures living in some environments do not develop these depth cues, and hence they perceive the world differently from us. This shows how perceptual abilities are influenced by the **environment**.

However, some behaviours do not appear to be determined by environmental factors. For example, the incidence of schizophrenia is more-or-less the same the world over. Every culture has members affected by schizophrenia irrespective of the kind of environment they

live in. This shows how some behaviours appear to have **biological** rather than environmental causes.

### Are there cultural variations in attachment?

**Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg (1988)** looked at all the published research on attachment behaviour which has used the **Strange Situation**. They knew that Ainsworth had found that **66%** of her American infants were securely attached and **34%** were insecurely attached. They wanted to compare these figures with figures from studies conducted in other cultures.

In all, they found **32 studies** conducted in **8 countries** (a grand total of over 2000 infants). Their findings (expressed as percentages) are summarised below:

Country	Number of studies	Percentage of each attachment type (to the nearest whole number)		
		Secure	Avoidant	Resistant
West Germany	3	57	35	8
Great Britain	1	75	22	3
Netherlands	4	67	26	7
Sweden	1	74	22	4
Israel	2	64	7	29
Japan	2	68	5	27
China	1	50	25	25
United States	18	65	21	14
Overall average		65	21	14

You do not need to learn all of the findings! The most important are summarised below:

- Secure attachment is the **most common** type in all cultures.
- The overall world-wide pattern is **similar** to Ainsworth et al's 'standard' pattern in terms of secure attachment

- **Type A** insecure attachment is **relatively more common** in **Western European** cultures.
- **Type C** insecure attachment is **relatively more common** in **Israel, Japan and China**.

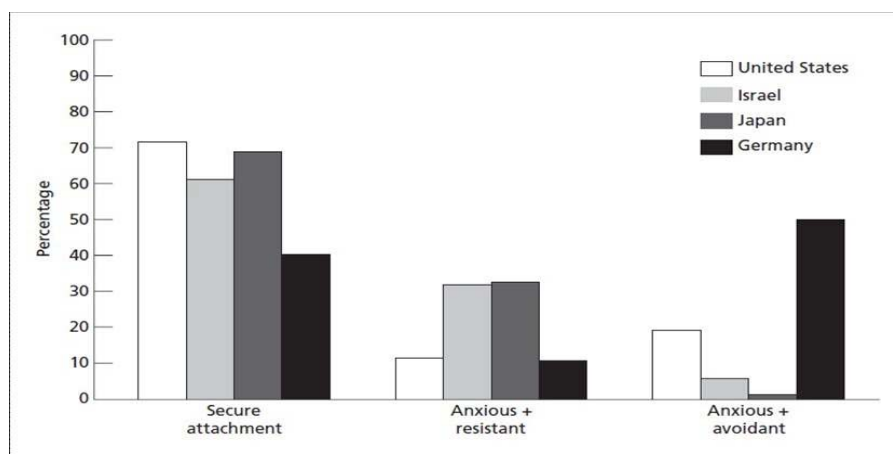
Van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg's findings indicate that there are differences both **between cultures** and **within cultures** in terms of the distribution of attachment types. This would suggest that attachment is strongly influenced by environmental factors.

### How can cross-cultural research into attachment be evaluated?

One way of evaluating research in this area is to examine the methodology used by van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg. Two evaluative points can immediately be made:

- Some of the findings are based only **one** study, which may not be representative
- Where more than one study has been done, an average is taken, which may mask important variations in the findings obtained in different studies

Research conducted by **Takahashi (1990)** using Japanese infants, and **Grossman & Grossman (1991)** suggests that the key factor in explaining attachment differences appears to be the **child rearing style** that is associated with a particular culture. Although America, Germany and Japan do not differ in terms of secure attachment, **insecure resistant** attachment is more common in **Japanese** infants, whilst **insecure avoidant** attachment is more common in **German** infants.



**Japanese culture:** Japanese infants are very rarely separated from their mothers in the first year of life. The greater frequency of insecure resistant attachment may be a result of the greater stress they experience as a result of being left with a stranger.



A Japanese mother is rarely parted from her infant

**German culture:** German culture requires keeping some interpersonal distance between parents and children. As **Grossmann et al (1985)** have noted: "The ideal is an independent, non-clinging infant who does not make demands on the parents, but rather unquestioningly obeys their commands." The greater frequency of insecure avoidant attachment may be a consequence of German culture's emphasis on early independence training.

As an extreme illustration of the influence of culture on attachment types, consider the Dogon people of Mali in West Africa. **True et al (2001)** found **no** anxious-avoidant insecure attachment in Dogon infants. This is probably because Dogon infants are always kept close to their mothers and are breast-fed whenever they show distress. However, True et al found that **25%** of infants showed insecure-disorganised (Type D) attachment (as mentioned in the previous section).

The researchers explain this high rate like this: "Dogon infants have an extremely high mortality rate, with at least 10% dying in the first 12 months, and 25% dying before age 5. A mother's experience with, or fear of, bereavement is seen in her frightening or frightened behaviours in front of her infant whenever they have to be separated. This could be why there are unusually high rates of this form of attachment in this cultural group."



The high infant mortality rate in Dogon culture may account for the high rate of Type D attachment