Attachment and Culture

Security in the United States and Japan

Fred Rothbaum	*Tufts University*
John Weisz	*University of California, Los Angeles*
Martha Pott	*Tufts University*
Kazuo Miyake	*Hokkaido University*
Gilda Morelli	*Boston College*

Attachment theorists maintain that cultural differences are relatively minor, and they focus on universals. Here the authors highlight evidence of cultural variations and note ways in which attachment theory is laden with Western values and meaning. Comparisons of the United States and Japan highlight the cultural relativity of 3 core hypotheses of attachment theory: that caregiver sensitivity leads to secure attachment, that secure attachment leads to later social competence, and that children who are securely attached use the primary caregiver as a secure base for exploring the external world. Attachment theorists use measures of sensitivity, competence, and secure base that are biased toward Western ways of thinking: The measures emphasize the child's autonomy, individuation, and exploration. In Japan, sensitivity, competence, and secure base are viewed very differently, calling into question the universality of fundamental tenets of attachment theory. The authors call for an indigenous approach to the psychology of attachment.

> When most investigators [have] . . . a common cultural perspective or ideological position, the effect may be to retard or to corrupt the search for scientific knowledge by collectively blinding them to alternative conceptions. (Spence, 1985, p. 1285)

In this quotation from her 1985 American Psychological Association presidential address, Janet Spence argued that Western[1] theories of achievement, although assumed to have universal significance, are in fact deeply rooted in American individualism. Criticisms about ethnocentrism have also been leveled against Western theories of control and self, and attempts to develop culturally specific theories of these phenomena have been made (e.g., Baumeister, 1986; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984a, 1984b).

In this article, we make similar criticisms of psychology's most influential theory of relatedness: attachment theory. We argue that Western investigators have been blinded to alternative conceptions of relatedness, because they tend "to construct other cultures in terms saturated with Western ideals and preconceptions" (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996, p. 497; see also Bruner, 1990). The attachment perspective has dominated academicians' understanding of relatedness for the past 20 years, as evidenced by the many articles published (e.g., 662 entries in a 1999 psycINFO search), and has "spawn[ed] one of the broadest, most profound and creative lines of research in 20th century psychology" (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999, p. x). Moreover, it has served as an ideological basis for parent intervention programs and therapeutic interventions (Bowlby, 1988; Lieberman & Zeanah, 1999; Slade, 1999). If, as we suggest, the concepts that frame this theory are deeply rooted in a Western perspective, then the theory and these derivative interventions require renewed scrutiny through the lens of culture.

Attachment theory has been accused of ethnocentrism less often than have other Western theories of relatedness. For example, psychoanalysis has been criticized for its emphasis on separation and individuation (Roland, 1989). Criticisms about ethnocentrism have also been leveled against family systems theory, because of its emphasis on differentiation (Tamura & Lau, 1992); against Stern's developmental theory of relatedness, because it depicts a "masterful, feeling, continuous infant" that fits with Western ideals (Cushman, 1991, p. 211); and against diverse social psychological theories of adult relationships, because they regularly neglect cultural influences (Berscheid, 1995).

Editor's note. Kenneth J. Gergen served as action editor for this article.

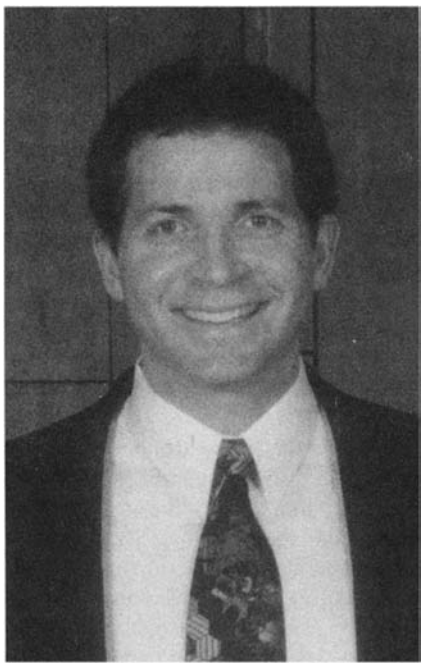
Author's note. Fred Rothbaum and Martha Pott, Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development, Tufts University; John Weisz, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles; Kazuo Miyake, Department of Psychology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan; Gilda Morelli, Department of Psychology, Boston College.

We thank Ann Easterbrooks, Robin Harwood, Charlie Greenbaum, Miki Kakinuma, and Gisela Trommsdorff for their thoughtful comments on drafts of this article. We are especially grateful for Hiroshi Azuma's support and guidance, without which this article would not have been possible.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Fred Rothbaum, Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155. Electronic mail may be sent to frothbau@tufts.edu.

[1] The term *Western* as used here refers to the United States, Canada, and Western European countries. Because most of the studies conducted in these countries primarily use mainstream middle-class samples, these are the samples to which the findings reported here pertain.

0003-066X/00/$5.00
Vol. 55, No. 10, 1093–1104 DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.55.10.1093



Fred Rothbaum

One reason why attachment theory has been spared charges of ethnocentrism is that proponents of the theory acknowledge cultural influences. However, attachment theorists' emphasis on the evolutionary roots of attachment has led them to downplay the role of culture, and there is remarkably little cross-cultural research or theory in the attachment field. A recent review of cross-cultural research on attachment (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999) identified only 14 studies, and only 1 chapter in the recent 36-chapter *Handbook of Attachment* (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999) devotes more than cursory attention to cultural issues.

Beyond the limited amount of attention to culture, one could question the focus of the work that has been done. When addressing culture, attachment theorists have examined the periphery of their theory more than its core. For example, they are more likely to examine differences in specific behaviors (e.g., proximity seeking) and the incidence of different types of insecure attachment than to examine core tenets of the theory involving the antecedents, consequences, and nature of attachment security (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Bretherton, 1995). We attempt to show that core tenets of attachment theory are deeply rooted in mainstream Western thought and require fundamental change when applied to other cultures or minority groups. Our goal is to foster an enriched understanding of what is culturally specific about human attachment and to shift from a unified theory to indigenous theories of this central aspect of human relationships (cf. Gergen et al., 1996).

First, we briefly describe attachment theory and three core hypotheses that attachment theorists assume are universal (Bowlby, 1973; Main, 1990; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). Then, we critically examine each hypothesis and its supporting evidence. Finally, we call for indigenous theories of attachment and explain why such theories are needed. We have chosen to focus on differences in attachment between the United States and Japan for the same reasons that cross-cultural research on achievement, control, and the self have focused on differences between these two countries: Despite economic and technological similarities, the two cultures have profoundly different histories, demographics, philosophies, politics, and ideals. Moreover, there are sufficient studies comparing these countries to support meaningful theoretical inference.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory addresses the prolonged period of helplessness in human infants and infants' biologically based need to elicit their mothers' (or other caregivers') protection and care. According to Bowlby (1982), attachment behaviors (e.g., smiling, crying, approaching) are rooted in evolution, providing a survival advantage by increasing mother–child proximity and thus increasing the many beneficial outcomes the mother can provide. The attachment behavioral system is particularly activated by stress, either within the child (e.g., hunger, pain) or in the environment (e.g., an unfamiliar person, a loud noise). The system, which peaks in intensity around the age of one year, when the infant has the motor capacity to venture away from the mother, serves to keep the mother close enough to protect the baby should a physical or psychological threat arise.

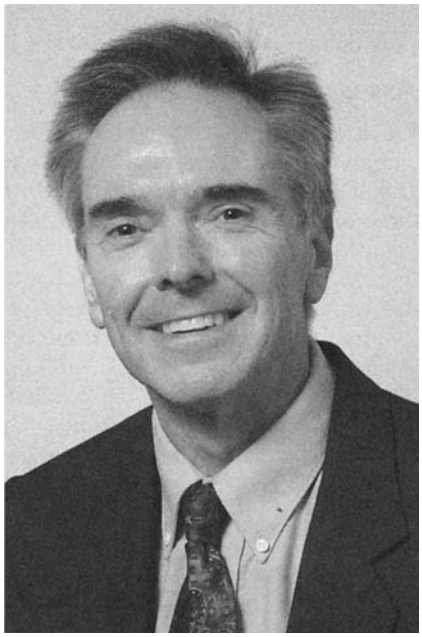
Three Core Hypotheses

Several hypotheses are central to attachment theory, but three have been especially emphasized in cross-cultural research (Bowlby, 1973; Main, 1990; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). These hypotheses, described below, address the antecedents, consequences, and nature of secure attachment.

1. The sensitivity hypothesis. Infants become securely or insecurely attached on the basis of several factors, the most important of which is the mother's ability to sensitively respond to the child's signals (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). For example, if the infant perceives danger and signals for help, security stems from the mother's accurately perceiving and appropriately responding to the child's need for help in a timely manner.

The association between maternal sensitivity and security of attachment, referred to as the *sensitivity hypothesis*, is widely supported by studies in the United States and other Western countries. On the basis of studies from other cultures, Van IJzendoorn and Sagi (1999) concluded that there is substantial support for the universality of the sensitivity hypothesis. Later, we cite evidence of fundamental cultural differences in parental sensitivity, thus calling into question the universality of this hypothesis.

2. The competence hypothesis. The success of attachment theory derives largely from its ability to predict consequences of different patterns of attachment. According to this theory, children who are secure become



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more socially and emotionally competent children and adults than do children who are insecure. Studies conducted in the West have indicated that secure children tend to be more autonomous, less dependent, better able to regulate negative affect, less likely to have behavior problems, and more likely to form close, stable peer relationships than those who are insecure (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Researchers in the West group these features together under the rubric of social competence.

This association between security of attachment and later social competence is referred to as the *competence hypothesis*. In reviewing cross-cultural evidence on consequences of attachment security, van IJzendoorn and Sagi (1999) acknowledged that few studies from non-Western cultures have examined the competence hypothesis, but they nevertheless concluded that "secure attachment seems to increase the likelihood of better social competence in the future" (p. 730). In this article, we provide evidence of fundamental cultural differences in how social competence is construed, thus challenging the universality of the competence hypothesis.

3. The secure base hypothesis. A third hypothesis deals with the concept of the secure base. According to Bowlby (1982) and Ainsworth et al. (1978), infants are likely to explore their environments when they feel sufficiently protected and comforted by their mother's presence. When threatened or otherwise stressed, infants seek proximity with their caregivers. In this conceptualization, the attachment and exploration systems are inexorably linked.[2] If mothers are unable to provide their infants with a sense of safety—a secure base from which to explore—infants' exploration is not appropriately responsive to environmental exigencies, and autonomy from the mother is compromised (Seifer & Schiller, 1995). The capacity of caregivers to serve as a secure base is believed to increase infants' survival, thus providing infants with a selective advantage; accordingly, it has evolved into a species-wide characteristic.

Both Bowlby and Ainsworth "placed the secure-base phenomenon at the center of their analysis and defined an attachment figure as a person whom the child uses as a secure base across time and situations" (Posada et al., 1995, p. 27). The claim that the secure base is universal is referred to here as the *secure base hypothesis*. In this review, we challenge the notion that the link between the attachment and exploration systems is universal and primary, and we point to a culture (that of Japan) in which the link between attachment and another system (dependence) is primary.

Attachment Theory's Universalist Perspective

Although most attachment theorists recognize the role of culture, they suggest that culture influences only specific behaviors that demonstrate the theory and that there is a substantial core of attachment that is immune from cultural influence (Main, 1990). According to Cassidy and Shaver (1999), "Although many of the parameter settings of the attachment behavioral system vary in understandable ways with context, the system itself is recognizably the same" (p. xiii). Ainsworth too downplayed cultural variation, citing only "specific" differences in "particular conditions" and emphasizing "similarities across cultures" (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995, pp. 8–9). Van IJzendoorn and Sagi (1999), leading cross-cultural attachment researchers, were more circumspect but ultimately sided with the universalistic view: "Taken as a whole, the [cross-cultural] studies are remarkably consistent with the theory. Attachment theory may therefore claim cross-cultural validity" (p. 731).

We disagree. We question the universality of the three core hypotheses of attachment theory. These hypotheses are embedded in Western historical, social, political, economic, demographic, and geographic realities in the same way that theories of achievement, control, and self are embedded in Western experiences and ideas (cf. Gergen et al., 1996). Consider, for example, Bowlby's (1979) emphasis on allowing children to express themselves:

> By putting up with these outbursts we . . . provide for the child the tolerant atmosphere in which self control can grow. . . . As in politics so with children. In the long run tolerance of opposition pays handsome dividends. (p. 12)

It is difficult to imagine that open expression would be seen as central to secure attachment in a cultural context that did not also value and adopt democratic government.

We do not deny the biological and evolutionary predispositions that underlie attachment, but we claim that biology and culture are inseparable aspects of the system

[2] Attachment theorists maintain that exploration refers to interactions with people as well as objects (Ainsworth, 1990). As the child matures, exploration subsumes autonomy seeking (Allen & Land, 1999), independence, and mastery (Ainsworth, 1990). We use the term *individuation* to refer to the psychological process underlying all of these behaviors.

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within which a person develops. Bruner, who has eloquently championed this view, contrasts it with the view of "culture. . . [as] an 'overlay' on biologically determined human nature" (Bruner, 1990, p. 20). Most attachment theorists seem to adopt the latter view. They tend to overlook or downplay the culturally laden meanings that actions have for members of different societies.

Next, we examine cross-cultural evidence relevant to the three attachment hypotheses noted above. This evidence seriously challenges claims that the antecedents (i.e., sensitivity), consequences (i.e., competence), and nature (i.e., secure base) of attachment, as described in contemporary theory, are universal. Then, we discuss implications for practice and justify our plea for indigenous psychologies of attachment.

The Sensitivity Hypothesis

Ainsworth's early research supported her claim that primary caregivers' sensitive responsiveness to children's signals are a major determinant of children's attachment security (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Although subsequent studies have indicated that the association is not as strong as Ainsworth's original findings suggested, there is substantial support for a modest version of the sensitivity hypothesis: A meta-analysis of 66 studies of the association between sensitivity and attachment security conducted in the West yielded a medium-size effect (de Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). However, findings from studies in other cultures are much less compelling (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). Moreover, many of the studies that have been cited as providing cross-cultural support for the hypothesis have relied on indirect measures of sensitivity, such as the availability of caregivers, the age of mothers, and the size of households. We believe that these measures of sensitivity provide very limited support for the hypothesis.

Assessing Sensitivity

Much of what Ainsworth considered sensitive, responsive caregiving reflects the value placed on children's autonomy (a value also emphasized by Bowlby, 1973). This is seen in three of four caregiving scales that Ainsworth (1976) developed to evaluate caregiving. For *acceptance,* she stated that the mother "values the fact that the baby has a will of its own, even when it opposes hers . . . [she] finds his anger worthy of respect. . . . [She] respect[s] the baby as a separate, autonomous person" (Ainsworth, 1976, p. 4). For *cooperation,* she said that the "mother views her baby as a separate, active autonomous person, whose wishes and activities have a validity of their own . . . she avoids situations in which she might have to impose her will on him" (Ainsworth, 1976, p. 4). For *sensitivity,* she stated that "it is a good thing for a baby to gain some feeling of efficacy. She nearly always gives the baby what he indicates he wants" (Ainsworth, 1976, pp. 3–4). This conceptualization of sensitive, responsive caregiving served as the prototype for subsequent measures and is still regarded as the standard in the field (Sroufe & Waters, 1997).

Cultural Differences in Caregiving Relevant to Sensitivity

The problem with this perspective can be stated simply: What constitutes sensitive, responsive caregiving is likely to reflect indigenous values and goals, which are apt to differ from one society to the next. Japanese parents prefer to anticipate their infants' needs by relying on situational cues (Clancy, 1986; Doi, 1973). Sometimes this means identifying situations that may stress their infants and taking anticipatory measures to minimize the stress (Vogel, 1991). Parents in the United States, by comparison, prefer to wait for their infants to communicate their needs before taking steps to meet those needs. The different expressions of sensitivity and responsiveness suggest that for Japanese caregivers, responsiveness has more to do with emotional closeness and the parent's role in helping infants regulate their emotional states, whereas for caregivers in the United States, responsiveness has more to do with meeting children's need to assert their personal desires and, wherever possible, respecting children's autonomous efforts to satisfy their own needs (Keller, Voelker, & Zach, 1997; Vogel, 1991).

Other aspects of maternal sensitivity promote Japanese infants' dependence on their mothers and U.S. infants' exploration of their environment. These include the different ways that Japanese and U.S. mothers communicate with their infants (Japanese maternal speech is focused on emotions, rather than on information as in the United States), maintain contact with infants (prolonged physical contact in Japan, rather than distal eye contact as in the United States), and orient their children's attention (in Japan, mothers direct attention to social objects, particularly themselves, rather than to physical objects as in the United States). Japanese sensitivity is seen as responsive to in-

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fants' need for social engagement, and U.S. sensitivity is seen as responsive to the infants' need for individuation (see Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, in press, for a review of all of these findings).

Antecedents of Insecure Attachment

When U.S. parents care for their babies in ways valued by Japanese parents, they are considered insensitive, and their babies are found to be insecurely attached. Consider George and Solomon's (1999) description of insensitive U.S. mothers of insecurely attached (i.e., ambivalent) babies. When interviewed about their caregiving, these mothers

> described strategies to keep their children close, . . . promoted dependency, . . . tend[ed] to overemphasize caregiving and to overinterpret their children's attachment cues. They emphasized their children over themselves. . . . These mothers . . . were so concerned with their availability to their children that they deliberately scheduled their employment hours or errands to occur when children were in school or asleep. (George & Solomon, 1999, pp. 661–662)

Japanese mothers view these very behaviors—skin-to-skin contact ("skinship"), indulgence of dependency, and arranging or quitting work to become fully devoted to the child—as key ingredients of sensitive caregiving. These behaviors are thought to encourage much needed emotional closeness and a desirable dependency between parent and infant (Azuma, Kashiwagi, & Hess, 1981; Lebra, 1994; Rothbaum et al., in press).

Summary: The Sensitivity Hypothesis

In contrast to attachment investigators' focus on superficial cultural differences in sensitivity, such as caregivers' proximity when children are exploring or the timing of independence training (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; van IJzendoorn, 1990; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999), we have identified fundamental differences in the ways sensitivity is expressed (prolonged skin-to-skin contact as compared with distal forms of contact) and when sensitivity occurs (in response to vs. in anticipation of children's signals). Most importantly, we have identified fundamental differences in the objectives of sensitivity (to foster exploration and autonomy or dependency and emotional closeness). Such core differences reveal a Japanese conceptualization of sensitivity that veers sharply away from attachment investigators' rendering of the construct.

The Competence Hypothesis

According to the competence hypothesis, there are indexes of social competence common to all children and adults, and competence is a consequence of the security of infants' attachment relationships with their caregivers (Main, 1990; van IJzendoorn, 1990). Attachment theorists define competence in terms of behaviors associated with individuation, such as exploration, autonomy, efficacy, independence, self-expression, affect regulation, and positive peer relationships (Feeney, 1999; Thompson, 1999; Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). Next, we review the studies on competence and provide evidence that in Japan competence is defined differently and security is associated with different types of competence.

Competence in Children

Exploration, autonomy, and efficacy. U.S. children who are classified as securely attached as infants are later more likely to be willing and able to venture forth on their own. Securely attached children are more autonomous, more likely to persist in problem solving, have higher self-esteem and ego resilience, and engage in more versatile and positive exploration than do their insecure counterparts (Grossman, Grossman, & Zimmermann, 1999; Weinfield et al., 1999). Insecurely attached children not only score lower on these indexes of competence, but they score higher on dependency—widely regarded as a marker of failure to successfully individuate (Weinfield et al., 1999).

In their review of the evidence on attachment and social competence, Weinfield et al. (1999) concluded,

> Overall, these findings on dependency, self-reliance and efficacy suggest that early attachment history does contribute to a child's effectiveness in the world. Children with secure histories seem to believe that, as was true in infancy, they can get their needs met through their own efforts and bids. In contrast, children with anxious histories seem to believe that . . . they must rely extensively on others who may or may not meet their needs. (p. 77)

In this quotation, the authors' focus on individuation and on related qualities, such as self-reliance and efficacy, seems to lead them to devalue reliance on others as a way of meeting one's needs. The path of relying on others, so often devalued in the West, is often favored, even prescribed, in Japan (Azuma et al., 1981; Lebra, 1994; Roth-

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baum et al., in press). For example, Japanese preschoolers' group-oriented accomplishments are much more encouraged and valued than are their individual accomplishments (Lewis, 1988; Peak, 1989). Dependence on others as a way of meeting one's needs and coordinating one's needs with the needs of others (e.g., social fittedness or accommodation) are seen as essential to the goal of social harmony, which is highly valued in Japan (Kitayama, Markus, Masumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Roland, 1989; Weisz et al., 1984a, 1984b).

Self-expression and affect regulation. Another quality that is associated with individuation and with security of attachment in U.S. children is emotional openness (Cassidy, 1988; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Leading attachment theorists regard emotional openness as important to children's well-being. Bowlby (1979), for example, maintained that "Nothing helps a child more, I believe, than being able to express hostile feelings candidly, directly and spontaneously" (p. 12), and Bretherton (1995) argued that children's feelings of security are particularly associated with their "sensitive, open communication with parents" (p. 316). Yet, emotional openness is less likely to be seen as a desirable quality in Japan, where children are encouraged to keep hostile feelings to themselves or to express them indirectly to preserve social harmony (Rothbaum et al., in press). To model inhibition of expression, Japanese parents tend not to scold children directly (Miyake & Yamazaki, 1995), and they often back down when children resist their requests (Lebra, 1994; Vogel, 1991). If hostile feelings are expressed, it probably means the relationship is beyond repair.

Sociability. Many studies have found an association between security of attachment and indexes of sociability, like positive social behavior, popularity, and friendships (Allen & Land, 1999; Thompson, 1999). For example, when involved with peers, securely attached children more openly communicate their emotions and maintain eye contact when losing to a competitor (Grossman et al., 1999)—behaviors that are viewed positively in the West. Children's peers are also likely to view these behaviors as positive, contributing to the popularity of the children who exhibit them. By contrast, these behaviors are likely to be viewed as inappropriate in Japan (Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993).

In the West, securely attached as compared with insecurely attached children manifest more sociability with unfamiliar adults, reflecting their interpersonal exploration. In Japan, children are more often encouraged to distinguish in-group from out-group members and to fear and avoid unknown others. For example, Japanese mothers often tell misbehaving children that their behavior will elicit negative reactions from others—demons, police, and strangers—thereby instilling in their children fear of outsiders. Thus, in Japan, secure attachment is less likely to lead to sociability with strangers, and sociability is less likely to be viewed as a form of social competence (Lebra, 1994; Miyake & Yamazaki, 1995; Thompson, 1999).

Competence in Adulthood

Western adults who are securely attached show higher levels of social competence than do adults who are insecurely attached (ambivalent, resistant, or preoccupied). This finding takes on added significance when combined with the attachment theory claim that secure attachments in infancy and adulthood are related (Bowlby, 1979; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Adults who are securely attached show greater competence in several areas: They have greater comfort with autonomy and greater valuing of it; indeed, attachment theorists refer to securely attached adults as "autonomous." They have a more positive view of self. They have a greater willingness to verbally communicate with their partners, a lesser likelihood of avoiding discussion of strong affect, and a lesser likelihood of showing signs of distress related to disagreement with attachment figures. They also assess others more realistically, rather than idealizing their partners and past relationships (Allen & Land, 1999; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, 1999).

There is evidence that all of these aspects of "competence," which are associated with security in the West, are seen more negatively by Japanese: "From [an East Asian] perspective, an assertive, autonomous . . . person is immature and uncultivated" (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998, p. 923). In Japan, self-enhancement is less common and less valued, and self-criticism and self-effacement are more common and more valued. People are expected to respectfully and empathically preserve harmony by avoiding any expression of discord or direct expression of wants, and adherence to values of filial piety makes negative comments about parents inappropriate (Fiske et al., 1998; Kitayama et al., 1997).

The dissimilarity between Western and Japanese ideas about consequences of security is clearest with regard to

independence. There is substantial evidence in the West that secure adults tend to be less dependent: They are less likely to be clingy and to rely on others to meet their needs, less anxious about gaining acceptance from others, have less of a preference for unqualified closeness, and are less likely to experience love as involving union (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Feeney, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). In Japan, dependence (i.e., interdependence), seeking of acceptance and commitment, and desire for union are more common and more likely to be associated with competence (Fiske et al., 1998) and presumably with security.[3]

Summary: The Competence Hypothesis

What counts as social competence varies substantially from one culture to another. Because attachment theorists define competence largely in terms of Western values, they emphasize exploration, autonomy, efficacy, willingness to discuss strong affect and to disagree with partners, sociability with peers and unfamiliar others, and a positive view of self. In Japan, where preservation of social harmony is particularly valued, social competence often entails dependence, emotional restraint, indirect expression of feelings, a clear differentiation between appropriate behavior with in-group versus out-group members, self-criticism, and self-effacement.

The Secure Base Hypothesis

At the heart of the notion of attachment security is the concept of the secure base. "For both Bowlby and Ainsworth, to be attached is to use someone preferentially as a secure base from which to explore" (Waters & Cummings, 2000, p. 165). If the antecedents (sensitive responsiveness) and consequences (social competence) of attachment security are conceptualized and expressed differently in different cultural communities, then the conception and expression of the secure base may also depend on the community examined.

Attachment and Exploration

The concept of secure base was originally intended (Ainsworth, 1963) and is sometimes used to refer to infants' sense of safety in all aspects of engagement with the world. However, the majority of attachment researchers use the concept of secure base to refer to the link between attachment and exploration (e.g., Cassidy, 1999; Kobak, 1999; Posada et al., 1995). Although acknowledging that the attachment system can be linked to other behavioral systems, including affiliation and sexual mating, these investigators presume that attachment is most closely linked to exploration (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971). They claim that infants who are sufficiently protected and comforted by the presence of caregivers are better able to use their caregivers as a secure base from which to explore their environment.

Our analysis of the secure base focuses on this attachment–exploration link. We maintain that attachment theorists' conceptualization of the secure base reflects the Western emphasis on exploration and the belief that exploration leads to individuation—which is viewed as a healthy, positive outcome. As noted by Seifer and Schiller (1995), "Secure base behavior provides a context in which differentiation of self and other can take place" (p. 149). Japanese experts are less likely to emphasize a dynamic that is so centered on individuation. On the basis of her study of attachment in Japan, Takahashi (1990) concluded that "mothers' effectiveness in serving a secure base function well represents the quality of attachment only in the American culture, in which social independence or self-reliance is emphasized" (p. 29).

Observations of infants in different cultures (and different species) suggest that there may be a biological basis to the link between attachment and exploration (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). It is adaptive for human young to explore and to do so only as long as a caregiver is available to respond if needed. However, there is evidence that the extent to which exploration occurs, and the primacy of the link between attachment and exploration, varies across cultures.[4] In five separate studies, Japanese babies were observed to engage in less exploratory activity than were U.S. babies (Bornstein, Azuma, Tamis-LeMonda, & Ogino, 1990; Bornstein, Toda, Azuma, Tamis-LeMonda, & Ogino, 1990; Caudill & Schooler, 1973; Caudill & Weinstein, 1974; Shand & Kosawa, 1985). Another study found that Japanese babies explored much less than U.S. babies when left alone in the Strange Situation and manipulated toys less often when their mothers returned (Takahashi, 1990). Moreover, Japanese babies were more oriented to their mothers in circumstances involving both distress and positive emotions, and U.S. infants were more oriented to the environment in those circumstances (Bornstein, Azuma, et al., 1990; Miyake et al., 1985).

Attachment and Dependence

In addition to suggesting that the link between the attachment and exploration behavioral systems is less primary in non-Western cultures, we suggest that the link between the attachment and dependence behavioral systems is more primary in these cultures. Just as exploration serves a larger social outcome valued in the West—individuation—dependence serves a larger behavioral system valued in Japan—accommodation or social fittedness (Emde, 1992). These terms refer to children's empathy with others, their compliance with others' wishes, and their responsiveness to social cues and norms. As mentioned earlier, Rothbaum

[3] We are not suggesting that most Japanese are insecurely attached. Two characteristics of insecure-ambivalent people that are not at all common among Japanese individuals are uncertainty about caregivers' availability caused by caregiver inconsistency and difficulty regulating negative affect. Our point is that Japanese children and children classified as insecure in the United States share several salient qualities. Perhaps this is why many Japanese are classified as insecurely attached (Miyake, Chen, & Campos, 1985; Takahashi, 1990).

[4] Several studies have found greater exploration in the United States than in other cultures, including Mayan culture (Gaskins, 1996), Tanzanian culture (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Subramanian, 1996), and Argentinian culture (Bornstein, Haynes, Pascual, Painter, & Galperin, 1999). Gaskins (1996) noted that the motivation to master and explore, although valued in the United States, "would be considered by Mayan caregivers a negative characteristic for infants" (pp. 361–362).

et al. (in press) have found that Japanese mothers encourage their infants' orientation to themselves (i.e., to the mothers) more than they encourage their infants' exploration of the environment, which suggests that in Japan dependent (and accommodative) behavior is exercised more and exploration (and individuated) behavior is exercised less within the caregiver relationship than in the United States (see also Clancy, 1986).

Support for our view of attachment in the life of Japanese children comes from the study of *amae*, an indigenous Japanese concept that refers to relationships involving both attachment and dependence (Doi, 1989; Emde, 1992; Okonogi, 1992). According to Doi (1992), *amae* means "to depend and presume upon another's love or bask in another's indulgence" (p. 8); *amae* is "what an infant feels when seeking his or her mother" (p. 7). The parallels between the Japanese notion of *amae* and the Western construct of attachment are striking: Attachment and *amae* both become fully developed around the end of the first year of life and take on different forms throughout the lifespan (Doi, 1989); both are fostered by caregiver responsiveness and empathy (Emde, 1992; Okonogi, 1992); both lead to emotional competence, including affect regulation (Emde, 1992); and secure and insecure patterns of both have been identified (Okonogi, 1992). According to Doi (1989), "The concept of attachment which was introduced by John Bowlby . . . obviously covers the same area as *amae*" (p. 350).

The view that *amae* typifies attachment relationships in Japan is supported by research that used a modified separation–reunion paradigm with preschool children (Mizuta, Zahn-Waxler, Cole, & Hiruma, 1996). After the reunion, Japanese mothers and children, as compared with U.S. mothers and children, expressed more feelings of sadness due to separation (presumably related to interpersonal loss) and expressed fewer feelings of fear (presumably related to perceived danger). Japanese children also exhibited more dependent behaviors characteristic of *amae* than did U.S. children when reunited with their mothers. Mizuta et al. (1996) speculated that *amae* "may be an appropriate means of deactivating an attachment system aroused by loss more than exploratory risk" (pp. 155–156; see also Hirata, 1997, for similar findings). Findings with adults also indicate a closer link between attachment and *amae* in Japan than in the United States (Kondo-Ikemura & Matsuoka, 1999).[5]

Attachment Classifications

These cultural differences in views about children's relationships may relate to the higher incidence of "insecure–ambivalent" babies and the lower incidence of "insecure–avoidant" babies in Japan than the United States. Attachment theorists suggest that because Japanese babies experience less separation, they may be unduly stressed by strange situations, and that the paradigm must be altered to provide a veridical assessment of attachment relationships (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). However, attachment theorists would be hard pressed to explain the many similarities between descriptions of insecure–ambivalent behaviors and behaviors widely regarded as adaptive in Japan. These include exaggerated cute and babyish behaviors (Main & Cassidy, 1988), extreme expressions of need for care and attention, extensive clinging and proximity seeking, helpless dependency (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994), extreme passivity, blurring of boundaries between self and other (Weinfield et al., 1999), and failure to engage in exploration (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Many of these features of ambivalent behavior characterize the normal *amae* relationship in Japan (Doi, 1973; Lebra, 1994; Kondo-Ikemura & Matsuoka, 1999; Mizuta et al., 1996).

Summary: The Secure Base Hypothesis

Youngsters of many cultures use the secure base with the attachment figure to gain the support they need to adapt to the outside world, but cultural differences abound in the behavioral system to which attachment is most closely linked, as well as in the meaning of adaptation. In the United States, the major link is with exploration, and adaptation primarily refers to individuation and autonomous mastery of the environment. In Japan, the major link is with dependence, and adaptation primarily refers to accommodation, avoidance of loss, fitting in with others, and ultimately loyalty and interdependence.

Conclusion

Practical Implications

Assessment. Our review points to cultural differences in the attachment categories that derive from current assessment practices. In the past, attachment researchers have reported cultural differences in the incidence of attachment categories (e.g., the greater percentage of insecure–ambivalent babies in Japan and of insecure–avoidant babies in the United States), without paying sufficient attention to the cultural meaning of these categories (e.g., insecure–ambivalent behavior is associated with incompetence more in the United States than it is in Japan). One consequence may be misinterpretation, with a concomitant risk of misunderstanding between cultural groups.

The underlying problem, we suspect, is the reliance on a paradigm (i.e., the Strange Situation) and measures (e.g., the Attachment Q Sort) designed by Western investigators

[5] Although there is evidence to suggest similar conceptions of the secure base in the United States and Japan (Posada et al., 1995; Vereijken, Riksen-Walraven, & Van Lieshout, 1997), the studies reporting these findings used instruments developed in the United States (e.g., the Attachment Q Sort), and they either ignored concepts indigenous to Japan (e.g., *amae*) or they operationalized those concepts in Western terms. Other research supports our notion that there is cultural variation in the meaning of the secure base: First, Solomon and George (1999) found low correlations of maternal Q sorts across cultures. Second, Kojima (in press) reanalyzed Vereijken et al.'s (1997) findings to show that security of attachment is associated in complex ways with *amae* in Japan but not in the United States (Vereijken et al.'s, 1997, analysis led them to conclude that the two constructs are not related). Third, Kondo-Ikemura and Matsuoka's (1999) research in Japan (Kondo-Ikemura was a member of Posada et al.'s, 1995, research project) led to the conclusion that "the attachment concept is biased toward the Western culture" (Kondo-Ikemura, June 22, 1999, personal communication).

for use with Western participants. Assumptions underlying these measures, such as that children are the logical focus of attention and that behavior in reunions best captures the dynamics of close relationships, are based in Western thought. Japanese researchers would more appropriately focus on parent–child units rather than on children alone, and they would focus on children's ability to determine when to exhibit *amae* (e.g., when the caregiver is able to respond), rather than on children's ability to reunite with caregivers following a separation (Doi, 1973, 1992). Similarly, assessments of sensitivity need to be shorn of their Western assumptions (e.g., the importance of exploration as compared with dependence) if they are to apply in Japan. When the attachment paradigm and measures are altered in these ways, then psychologists are likely to come to understand what it means to be securely attached in new, more diverse, and more context-relevant ways.

Interventions. Parental programs and therapeutic approaches in the United States are often based on the features of attachment theory, whose universality we have called into question. One consequence may be an array of interventions that do not cross cultural or ethnic boundaries very successfully. For example, attachment theorists encourage parents to deal with their children's disruptive behavior by reinterpreting children's disruptive behavior as a need for control and autonomy, praising children's success and otherwise enhancing their self-efficacy, helping children recognize and label their emotional states, and verbally communicating and negotiating with the child (Lieberman & Zeanah, 1999). Because these parental practices foster children's individuation, they are viewed more positively in the United States than in Japan. Japanese parents do not value either these practices or their intended outcomes, and Japanese experts would be less likely to recommend them (Rothbaum et al., in press).

Similarly, attachment-oriented American therapists aim to help their clients individuate. They assume that they are fostering this goal by promoting their clients' awareness of anger and sadness toward their parents and their awareness of defenses against these feelings (Slade, 1999). Although the ultimate goal is to accept one's parents, attachment-oriented theorists assume that the expression of negative feelings about parents is a prerequisite (Bowlby, 1988). Japanese therapists, by contrast, often encourage their clients to reflect on the kindnesses that others, particularly parents, have bestowed on them, and they stress clients' ingratitude and the virtues of giving care and devotion back to others (Bankart, Koshikawa, Nedate, & Haruki, 1992; LeVine, 1993).

Moreover, attachment-oriented therapists in the United States are ambivalent about meeting their clients' dependency needs, because there is an underlying assumption that "psychiatric disorders are nearly always associated with a nonautonomous state of mind" (Dozier, Stovall, & Albus, 1999, p. 515; see also Cassidy, 1994). These therapists also believe that they best serve their clients' needs by serving as a secure base for their clients' exploration and interpretation of internal states (Bowlby, 1988; Speltz, 1990). Therapists in Japan, by contrast, are much more likely than their U.S. counterparts to meet the dependency needs of their clients—to serve as indulgent, benevolent, and nurturing caregivers (Bankart et al., 1992; Roland, 1989; Tatara, 1982) and to view their clients' dependency as positive movement toward healing (Bankart et al., 1992; LeVine, 1993). As summarized by Roland (1989), Americans often come to therapy for self-exploration, whereas Japanese more often come to therapy for the indulgent dependency intrinsic to the relationship.

Although it is appropriate that the parental and therapeutic interventions used most often in a culture reflect that culture's dominant views, practitioners may benefit from an understanding of interventions used in other cultures. After all, attachment behavior varies substantially within cultures (Posada et al., 1995; van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988), and people with different problems in attachment relationships benefit from different therapeutic practices (Dozier & Tyrrell, 1998). A long-term goal for practitioners is to have such a diversified, culturally enriched knowledge of treatment options that they can tailor their interventions to fit different people in different social contexts who are seeking different outcomes. For some relationship problems, a synthesis of Eastern and Western remedies may work better than exclusive reliance on a single culture's formula (see, e.g., Lawrence, Eldridge, Christensen, & Jacobson, 1999, for a program of marital therapy that blends acceptance and change).

Intercultural understanding. If basic assumptions about attachment are not the same for people of different cultures, then it is inevitable that misconceptions about relationships will occur. For example, Americans' assumptions about attachment lead them to view Japanese caregiving practices as misguided, rather than as simply different, because Japanese practices inhibit infant exploration. Similarly, Japanese assumptions about attachment lead them to perceive U.S. relationships as being undermined by individualism and as weaker than, rather than merely different from, their own relationships. Our review points to the fallacy of cultural analyses that pit individualism against relatedness (e.g., Guisinger & Blatt, 1994) and highlights instead the different ways that people around the world think about and engage in close relationships.

An awareness of different conceptions of attachment would clarify that relationships in other cultures are not inferior but instead are adaptations to different circumstances. It is our hope that this heightened awareness will lead to investigations of the different institutional and philosophical realities underlying different attachment relationships. Such knowledge could help people living in rapidly changing contexts (e.g., because of immigration, modernization, or dramatic upheaval in economic and political institutions) adapt appropriately to their new circumstances. Ultimately, such an enriched understanding may make it easier for people from very different relational backgrounds to learn from one another in a climate of mutual respect.

Attachment Theory and Culture: Current Status and Future Directions

We have called into question the universality of attachment theory, the dominant theoretical perspective on the development of close relationships, by providing evidence that core hypotheses of the theory do not apply in all cultures. These hypotheses involve the role of sensitive caregiving, effects of security versus insecurity on later social competence, and the nature of the secure base. Attachment theorists have considered cultural influences, but only at the periphery of their theory. They consider the core hypotheses discussed here to be universal, and they presume that basically the same attachment dynamics apply in different cultures. By contrast, we maintain that these hypotheses are not universal, and we try to understand the very different dynamics that apply in other cultures.

Our concern is that attachment theory is infused with cultural assumptions, leading to misguided interpretation of research findings and unfortunate consequences for assessment, intervention, and intercultural understanding. However, there remains much to admire about attachment theory, not least is its remarkable generativity and empirical orientation. Our own insights about attachment processes in Japan were inspired by the theory's probing questions and voluminous research base, and this research was made possible by the clearly articulated and testable hypotheses provided by Ainsworth and others. We believe that this penchant for testability could be a potent resource in creating a more culture-conscious attachment theory.

What we propose is a new generation of research and theory on attachment, specifically attuned to ways in which the attachment process is tied to the cultural context in which it is embedded.[6] This goal might best be achieved by adopting the approach of indigenous psychologists, who build theories of human behavior by identifying convergent findings among studies that rely on locally generated observations, theories, and measures. Indigenous psychologists can contribute invaluably by attending to whether processes posited by extant theory are operative in their own cultures and whether extant theory has overlooked processes important to their cultures.

In arguing for greater context specificity in theorizing about attachment relationships, we have focused on differences across national boundaries. However, future research must address differences within cultures as well. Our conclusions about attachment relations in the United States were based largely on samples of Caucasian middle-class participants from the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the studies we cited included participants with different characteristics, but it is difficult to determine whether the hypotheses applied to them as well as they applied to those who have been most studied. Indeed, there is reason to suspect substantial within-culture differences in attachment-related processes (Posada et al., 1995; van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988). The historical, cohort, social class, and other differences within each culture may rival differences among cultures in their impact. As psychologists move toward a more context-conscious theory of attachment, these within-group differences will require increased attention.

What needs to change, in our view, is a tendency to accept as human universals elements of the theory that have not been thoroughly tested in the crucible of human diversity and a tendency to overlook relevant studies already conducted and awaiting synthesis. What cultures should be sampled in the search process we envision? Certainly those differing in ways of construing, constructing, enacting, and repairing relationships should be considered. The contrast in this article between Euro-American findings and those in a well-studied Asian society provides but one example of many that could be quite instructive.

If this search and testing process is sufficiently thorough, we expect that a few attachment universals will remain but that these will be limited to abstract principles (e.g., pursuit of proximity and protection, suffering resulting from loss). Most of the basic tenets of attachment theory—including the concepts of sensitivity, competence, and secure base—are apt to be of greater value as they assume more culture-specific forms. This search and testing process may help investigators in the United States break the habit of imposing Western assumptions and theories on cultures where the fit is poor. Limiting assumptions of universality and opening the door to human diversity could greatly enrich the understanding of the myriad ways in which human relationships take shape, go awry, and undergo repair in social contexts around the world. Expanding the research agenda in this way may, in fact, reveal what an intellectual treasure chest attachment theory truly is.

[6] See Harwood, Miller, and Irizarry's (1995) research in Puerto Rico for an excellent example of how such research might be conducted and the enlightening findings it might yield.

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