

Outline and evaluate research into individual differences in attachment.

Attachment is when you get a strong reciprocal, emotional bond between two people like with a mother and infant. The attachment acts as a basis for further emotional and psychological development.

Shaffer and Emerson (1964) were the first to discover differences in attachment in their study of the development of attachments which they conducted to investigate how infants behaviour changes over time. They studied 60 infants from middleclass families in Glasgow. They observed the infants every 4weeks up until they reached 1yr old then again at 18months. They were conducted in the children's homes so that it was a natural environment making the results more valid. They looked at two measures to try and work out how strong the attachment was, these were stranger anxiety and separation anxiety. They concluded that specific attachments were generally formed around the 7month mark with multiple attachments forming shortly after this (within 1-6months). They also found that the attachments made were to the individuals who interacted most with the child and that were the most responsive rather than the one that was around the child for the longest amount of time.

Ainsworth and Bell (1971) then conducted a study using the "strange situation" procedure. Observers recorded the reactions of a child and mother (caregiver), who were introduced to a strange room with toys. A sequence of controlled events then took place, including; being left alone together, a stranger entering, the mother leaving, the stranger leaving, the mother re-entering then leaving, the stranger re-entering, followed, finally, by the mother re-entering the room. Observers noted the child's willingness to explore, separation anxiety, stranger anxiety and reunion behaviour.

Using the findings from this procedure it was concluded that there are individual differences between children, most of whom are securely attached (though there is cultural bias towards American middle class which is the people that were used for the study). The remainder are insecure-avoidant or insecure-resistant. Security of attachment also appears to be related to the responsiveness of the mother.

The big criticism of the Ainsworth study is its universality. The measures, when used in different cultures, were proved inappropriate due to the different ways in which varying cultures raise their infants.

Van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) brought together the results of 32 'strange situation' studies carried out in eight different countries and summarized them into a table. There is a considerable consistency across the countries but some show very different results, for example Japan, Israel and China show high rate of resistant and very low avoidant with high secure. Rather than highest secure (around 62%), followed by avoidant (around 26%) then the smallest percentage being resistant (around 12%). This shows that the strange situation is not universally acceptable as a measure of attachment.

This is backed up by the Takahashi study which was carried out on 30 middleclass home raised infants in Japan. Due to the fact that these infants had never been

previously parted from their mother/caregiver they become so distressed that the experiments kept having to be stopped as not to distress the child even further. When comparing the infants' behaviour to Ainsworth's findings of the 3 different types of attachment, secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant, the infants would appear to be resistant even though for them this would be the norm. Due to the distress Takahashi's study caused the infants there is also the large ethical issues to take into consideration. The study, as well as being unethical, was culturally biased and only looked at a very small number of people.

Another study wherein the universality of the Ainsworth study is proven to be up for debate is the study carried out in Germany by Grossman and Grossman (1991) who found that due to the way the children was expected to act and the way they were brought up, i.e./ keeping an interpersonal distance between the infant and the parent, they were more likely to be labelled as insecurely attached even though in that country this would be seen as secure.