

II. Low visibility of attachment-types in normal young Dutch children

The problem

A Q-sort based procedure is available for assessing attachment quality in a child's dyadic relationships. It is an efficient procedure involving 100 items, each describing how the child behaves in a given situation. The adult partner of the target child judges the degree of applicability of each item to the child. Scoring is based on the correlation between the pattern of judgements over the 100 items and criterial patterns usually provided by a group of experts. In the original study (Waters & Deane, 1985) criterion Q-sorts were used for security, dependency, sociability and social desirability. Q-methodology allows also for the use of criterion Q-sorts for *theoretically ideal* A-, B-, and C-type children. Such criterion patterns obtained from Dutch expert judges were used in this study for the scoring of Q-sorts of individual children.

Attachment theory postulates discrete types of working-model based relationships. The question is to what degree Q-sort assessments of attachment quality in a relatively large sample of Dutch children support the hypothesis that such discrete attachment-types exist. Absence of

such support signals a need to revise the Q-sort procedure, and/or the construct of 'attachment types'.

The data

Upon instruction by the author Utrecht Psychology students contacted and visited a family at their home to collect Q-sort data on 'parent-child relationships'. Q-sort judgements were obtained from mother and father separately; each parent had to complete a Q-sort for a) the target child (between 18-45 months), b) the older sibling of this target child, going *mentally back in time when this sibling had the same age as the target child has now*, and c) an 'ideal-child'. Nearly complete data are available for 375 families. About half of the children are boys. Ninety nine of these families indicated - upon request- to be willing to participate again in such Q-sorts next year. So, for each family six Q-sorts were available: [Mother, Father] X [Target child, Sibling, Ideal child].

The results

Consistency of similarity to ideal-types over type of relationship (mother/father).

Indices for similarity between a Q-sort and one of the three ideal types (A,B,C) showed only very moderate mother-father consistency: correlations between mother's and father's Q-sorts were .41, .30, and .42 for the Target child and .52, .51 and .58 for the Sibling-child regarding respectively similarity to A-, B-, and C-ideal type; all coefficients are significant ($p < .01$, two-sided, $N=241$). For the

'Ideal-child' these correlations were .40, .56 and .36, respectively.

Do the ABC attachment-types dominate interindividual differences?

Alpha-factor analysis on the interrelations between mothers' and fathers' Q-sorts of Target-, Sibling- and Ideal-child showed 6 factors with an eigenvalue larger than 1.0, which explained in sum 59% of the inter-family/child differences (N=236: listwise deletion of cases due to missing scores). The varimax-rotated factormatrix is shown in Table 1. Factor 1 shows clearly a Sibling-factor where B-

attachments are opposed to C-attachments; similarly factor 3 is a Sibling-factor opposing B- to A-attachments. Factor 2 is an Ideal-child factor ['sibling insecurity'] showing the contrast of B- to A- and C-attachments. Factor 5 is a 'Target child'-factor opposing C- to B-type of attachments. All factors mentioned previously show a convergence between mother and father. Factor 4 is a 'Father-factor' opposing A- to B-attachments for Target- and Ideal-child; factor 6 is an analogous 'Mother-factor' opposing A- to B-attachments for the Target child and - less clearly- for the Idealchild.

Table 1. Varimax rotated 6-factor solution (alpha-factor analysis) for the interrelations between similarities to the three Attachment ideal types [A, B, C] based on Q-sorts by *Mother* and by *Father* for each of three children [Target child, older Sibling when at same age as T, Ideal child]. Complete data from 236 Dutch families .

Q-sort	FACTOR					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mother/Target/A	.02	.03	-.03	.32	-.11	.65
Mother/Target/B	-.11	-.01	-.06	-.07	-.46	-.75
Mother/Target/C	.18	.06	.08	-.11	.62	.16
Mother/Sibling/A	-.00	.01	.79	-.11	.08	.16
Mother/Sibling/B	-.62	-.11	-.54	.18	-.08	-.22
Mother/Sibling/C	.76	.13	-.12	-.08	.06	.11
Mother/Ideal/A	-.22	.33	.21	.08	-.10	.26
Mother/Ideal/B	-.04	-.77	-.21	.03	-.04	-.29
Mother/Ideal/C	.11	.42	-.09	-.11	.04	.02
Father/Target/A	.09	-.03	-.02	.67	.01	.27
Father/Target/B	-.08	-.01	-.05	-.75	-.54	-.12
Father/Target/C	.03	.07	.04	.16	.77	-.10
Father/Sibling/A	.10	-.00	.69	.24	.04	-.14
Father/Sibling/B	-.63	-.00	-.51	-.35	-.08	.19
Father/Sibling/C	.74	.04	.01	.16	.12	-.04
Father/Ideal/A	-.14	.38	.23	.49	-.17	.06
Father/Ideal/B	-.05	-.67	-.11	-.41	-.02	.06
Father/Ideal/C	.07	.61	-.10	.04	.11	-.16

Apparently, the ABC-typology is not strong enough to overrule inter-parental or inter-sibling differences. The B-A and/or B-C oppositions are only visible within specific children (target-, older sibling, ideal child). Mother and father have orthogonal judgements (factors 6 and 4) on the B-A quality of the target child, while at the same time converging in the same judgement on the older sibling (factor 3). However, the B-A quality of the older sibling is independent from that of the target child (whether judged by mother or by father). This is even more puzzling, when one assumes that the older sibling as well as the target child were provided with nearly similar rearing conditions by their parents.

Visibility of attachment types in the Q-sort data.

Each Q-sort results for each child in a pattern of scores on 3 variables: the respective similarities to the ABC-types. As attachment-theory postulates the existence of discrete types, the following operational rule was used to identify a 'very pure type': the correlation/similarity for a given child with one of the criterion Q-sorts for A-, B-, or C had to be at least .60, while at the same time the correlations/similarities with the other two criterion Q-sorts had to be in the region around zero (between -.30 and +.30). As a relaxation of the previous rule a 'pure type' was defined in a similar way, except that the last requirement allowed for opposition to the other two types (correlations had to be between -.60 and +.30).

Table 2. Percentage of 'very pure' and 'pure' attachment types encountered among Attachment Q-sorts by Mother from 99 Dutch families. Percentages for father-data are in brackets when different from mother-data.

Attachment type	child judged	% 'very pure' cases	% 'pure' cases
A	Target child	0	0
	(Older) Sibling	0	0
	Ideal child	0	0
B	Target child	0	12 [6]
	(Older) Sibling	0	6 [3]
	Ideal child	0	37[27]
C	Target child	0	0
	(Older) Sibling	0	0
	Ideal Child	0	0

For the 'motivated' subsample of 99 families *mothers* identified no 'pure' or 'very pure types' regarding A- and C-attachments; there were also *none* 'very pure' B-types. Only 12 'pure' B-types out of 99 Target children were observed. In the Siblings *mothers* identified no 'very pure' A-, B-, or C-types, no 'pure' A- or C-types, and only 6 'pure' B-types. For the Ideal-child mothers identified no 'pure' or 'very pure' A- or C-types, no 'very pure' B-type, but 22 'pure' B-types (out of 60 cases).

Fathers judged analogously. No '(very) pure' A- or C-types were found in all 3 types of children. Only 'pure' B-types could be found: 6 for the Target children (out of 98), 3 for the Siblings (out of 98), and 16 (out of 59) in the Ideal-children. Table 2 gives an overview of the results.

Conclusions

The pattern of results reported above *does not support* traditional claims of attachment theory about the existence of *dis-*

crete attachment types, at least when the Q-sort is used for data collection.

The parent-judged attachment qualities of a child's relationship with his parents are unpredictable from one child to another child in the same family. This *does not support* the hypothesis from attachment theory that rearing conditions have a substantial influence on the formation of the attachment type.

With regard to the target child mothers' judgement was completely independent from fathers' judgement of the B-A quality of the relationship with this child, although there was convergence with regard to the B-C quality.

References

- Waters, E. & Deane, K. (1985). Defining and assessing individual differences in attachment relationships: Q-methodology and the organization of behavior in infancy and early childhood. In I. Bretherton & E. Waters. (1985) *Growing Points of Attachment Theory and Research. Monographs of the SRCD*, 50(1-2) serial No. 209.