

Attachment Scripts Across Cultures: Further Evidence for a Universal Secure Base Script

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ABSTRACT

The current study evaluated the universal quality of a secure base script by collecting attachment narratives from different cultures. This was an extension of an ongoing cross-cultural project in which data has been collected from throughout the world. In the current study, we collected attachment narratives from two cultures that were more noticeably removed from our own Western culture, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Twenty-four women from each culture, married and with at least one toddler, participated. Each produced attachment narratives organized around mother/child and adult/adult storylines using a story prompt procedure. A similar range of stories from rich secure base content to moderate to none was evident in both cultures. Furthermore the correlations within and across mother/child and adult/adult narratives were all significant and similar to previous cultures. The findings are both consistent with a generalized secure base script and the universal quality of that script.

INTRODUCTION

A central tenet of attachment theory is that attachment behavior is species-specific behavior, the product of evolutionary forces. A direct implication of this tenet is that infants in all cultures exhibit secure base behavior and become attached to their primary caregivers. This common ground of early attachment experiences also serves as a starting point for constructing attachment representations (“internal working models”). Given recent evidence that links early attachment assessments in infancy to adult attachment representations, we can anticipate that adult attachment representations should also exhibit important common features across cultures.

Recently, H. Waters & Rodrigues (2001) introduced a narrative technique for prompting attachment related stories in adults and reported that secure base script scores correlated highly with coherence scores from the Adult Attachment Interview. Furthermore they reported evidence of the universality of the secure base script by collecting comparable attachment narratives in different countries (Switzerland, Zimbabwe, Peru). In the present study we provide a stronger test of a universal secure base script by adding two cultures less closely tied to western culture (Turkey, UAE).

Participants and Design

Twenty-four women from the United Arab Emirates and 24 women from Turkey participated. The women were in their twenties and thirties, married, and with at least one toddler. The H. Waters & Rodrigues narrative assessment was adapted to match the experiences of the individuals in these different cultures (only the Camping Trip storyline was changed to a “Lost Purse” story for UAE participants). Each participant produced four attachment narratives, two mother-child stories (Baby’s Morning, Doctor’s Office), and two adult-adult stories (Camping Trip or Lost Purse, The Accident), along with two neutral stories to vary the story materials, for a total of six narratives.

Script Assessment

Participants were asked to use the columns of words to frame a story, going from left to right. The prompt words are only a guide and elaborations are welcome. After the participant reviews each outline and indicates they are ready, a tape recorder is turned on and the generated passage is recorded. For each story line there is a prototypic secure base script. All stories are scored on a 7-1 scriptedness scale by two independent raters. Alphas of the averaged scores ranged from .82 to .92.

TABLE 1: SAMPLE PROMPT-WORD OUTLINES

Baby's Morning

mother	hug	teddy bear
baby	smile	lost
play	story	found
blanket	pretend	nap

The Doctor's Office

Tommy	hurry	mother
bike	doctor	toy
hurt	cry	stop
mother	shot	hold

PROTOYPIC SECURE BASE SCRIPT

(Mother-child)

Sequence of events in which the caregiver:

- 1) supports the child's exploration
- 2) remains available & responsive & serves as a resource as necessary
- 3) the child encounters an obstacle or threat and becomes distressed
- 4) either the child retreats to the caregiver or the caregiver effectively comforts the child
- 5) the difficulty is resolved or removed
- 6) proximity and/or contact with the caregiver effectively comforts the child
- 7) the child (possibly with the caregiver's assistance) returns to constructive play (or ends play comfortably & makes a transition to another activity)

Baby's Morning – Secure Base Script – U.S. Sample

The brand new mother woke up to her little baby's cry. And she went running into the baby's room to see what was wrong. And actually, the baby was crying with happiness cause she was playing in her crib and she was playing with the brand new toy that her father had given her. The blanket that was generally around the baby was tied over the toy, and the baby was actually pretending that this doll was her little baby. So she was hugging it, and her mom just smiled, cause she thought this was so cute. The little baby, Sarah, wanted to give her mom a hug also. So she reached up and gave her mom a really big hug. And this made her mom smile even more. So then she wanted to hear a story. And the story was 'Goldilocks and the three bears.' And Sarah started laughing because her mom would pretend to be each of the bears. So she would say, "Oh, I'm Papa Bear," in this low and deep voice, "and whose been sleeping in my bed." And Sarah thought this was the funniest thing cause her mom had this really deep Papa Bear voice and then she'd have the little Baby Bear voice., "Oh, someone's been sleeping in my bed, and she's still there." So the little Sarah was very happy with her mom's story. And she played for most of the day while her mom watched her and played with her. And she had her favorite gift from her big brother was a teddy bear that was lost and she couldn't find it anywhere. She looked up and down the stairs and she looked in her room, and she looked in her brother's room, but she couldn't find it anywhere. But her mom said, "Well, let's think really hard. If I was a teddy bear where would I be?" And they thought, and they thought and they thought. "I know, I know, it would be in my bed." So Sarah went running up the steps, toddling up the steps, and there they found the teddy bear, laying in her bed where she had left him. So she was so tired that her mom said, "Why don't we both lay down for a little nap?" And Sarah and her mom took a nap for the rest of the afternoon.

Baby's Morning - Secure Base Script - United Arab Emirates

One day, the mother went to shopping and when she reached one of the toy shop, she saw a beautiful teddy bear, and she liked it very much. So, she decided to buy it for her dear child. When she came back from shopping, she called her dear baby. The baby run to her and kissed his mother on her cheeks. The mother hugged him. The baby asked her what she bought for him today. So, she gave him the beautiful teddy bear. The baby yelled because he was so happy and he always dream to have a big teddy bear. The baby directly took the teddy bear from his mother and started playing by it. At lunch time, the baby finished his meal quickly, and decided to take a nap as usual. So he went to his bed and put the beautiful teddy bear next to him in order to sleep with him too. And he acted as the bear pretend to sleep. Then he covered himself and the teddy bear using the blanket. The baby slept and after two hours he woke up. But he didn't find his teddy bear. So, he went to his mother crying mama, mama, I lost my beautiful teddy bear that you bought it for me this morning. The baby continued "I am sure that my sister stole from me while I am sleeping and took it to play by it in the garden, she will ruin my toy, she will make it dirty. The mother ease her baby and assured him that she will find the teddy bear and it will be okay. So, she went to ask her daughter about the place of the teddy bear. The daughter told her that she didn't take it from her brother and she didn't also know where its place. The mother go back to her baby's room and keep searching for the lost teddy bear inside his room. When she raise the child's blanket she found the bear under it. The mother smiled and said to her baby "look, your beautiful teddy bear was sleeping next to you honey, but you didn't noticed it." The baby laughed and hurried to his bear and told him "my beautiful teddy bear, I thought that you were lost and I will never see you again". Then the baby gazed at his mother face, and kissed her. The mother smiled for her baby and she told him "you are the smartest baby in this world". After that, she carried him to his room and read a story for him about the forest bear.

Baby's Morning - Secure Base Script - Turkey

The mother got up when she heard the baby crying. She thought that the baby might be hungry. After preparing the baby's food in the kitchen, she picked the baby up from his bed, fed him, and changed him. The baby's eyes were closing. She put the baby back in his bed and covered him with his favourite blanket that never left his side when he was sleeping. Then the mother went to bed, too. After two hours the baby woke up. The mother picked him up from his bed and she dressed him in the clothes he was going to wear during the day. Because she thought that he was not hungry yet, she took him to the living room and they started playing together. They took out the baby's blocks and made towers with them. Then they got his stuffed animals. The baby's favourite animal was a dog. He hugged his dog. And the mother held a cat and together they made one meow and the other bark and they laughed a lot at this game that they played. Then the baby was hungry again. He ate his food. Because he was little, his mother started thinking that he must be sleepy. His eyes were closing. He was rubbing his eyes. She took her baby into her arms and made gentle shooshing (calming) sounds. There was a tape of fairy tales with music that the baby liked. She put it into the tape player and put the baby back into his bed. When about 15 minutes had passed, the mother went back and realized that the baby was pretending to be asleep. He wasn't sleeping, but he closed his eyes during these morning naps in order to fool his mother. The mother went out of the room without saying anything. After about ten minutes the baby had really fallen asleep. After a while he woke up. His mother picked him up and caressed him and changed him. She thought that she had put his teddy bear beside him when he laid down. The baby could not sleep without the teddy bear and the blanket.

Baby's Morning - Secure Base Script - Turkey (continued)

The baby woke up and started looking for his teddy bear. But unfortunately the teddy bear was not in the bed. The mother opened the cabinet where the toys always were. She was hoping that the teddy bear would be there, but the teddy bear wasn't there, either.

The baby started to get really upset. He was looking for his teddy bear and starting to cry. The mother thought that the teddy bear was lost. She asked the cleaning lady whether she had seen the child's teddy bear. And she said that she had put the teddy bear into the baby's room. The teddy bear had fallen off the bed and the woman had not realized that it belonged to the baby and put it with his older sister's other stuffed animals. The mother was very happy to have found the teddy bear. She showed the teddy bear to the baby at once. The baby was very happy. They started playing games with the teddy bear again. They made the bear sit in the high chair. They took out their toy baby bottles and plates. They put a bib on the teddy bear and fed the bear a nice meal. Now the baby was going to eat his lunch. The mother went to the kitchen and prepared his vegetable soup and sat him in the high chair. The teddy bear was sitting in his own high chair and the baby was in his own. The mother pretended to give one spoon to the teddy bear and one to the baby. This way the baby ate the vegetable soup, which he generally didn't like, more easily. And after the vegetable soup was finished it was now time for the midday nap. The mother picked up the baby again, sang him lullabies for a while and put him in his bed. And she put his blanket and his teddy bear in his bed again and closed his door.

CROSS-CULTURAL HYPOTHESES

- H1:** Script scores will show a similar range from rich secure base content to moderate to none across cultures in support of the universal quality of the secure base script.
- H2:** Correlations within and across mother/child and adult/adult attachment stories will be significant and consist with a generalized secure base script.
- H3:** Similar patterns of correlations within and across different attachment stories across the different cultures will support the hypothesis that adults in different cultures share a generalized secure base script.

Correlations Between Script Scores Across Attachment Stories Previously Studies Cultures - SRCD 2001

U.S.A.

Mother/Child Stories	$r = .82, p < .001$
Adult/Adult Stories	$r = .61, p < .001$
Attachment Composite Scores	$r = .73, p < .001$

Switzerland

Mother/Child Stories	$r = .89, p < .001$
Adult/Adult Stories	$r = .68, p < .001$
Attachment Composite Scores	$r = .83, p < .001$

Zimbabwe

Mother/Child Stories	$r = .85, p < .01$
Adult/Adult Stories	$r = .73, p < .001$
Attachment Composite Scores	$r = .81, p < .001$

Correlations Between Script Scores Across Attachment Stories New Cultures

Turkey

Mother/Child Stories $r = .51, p < .01$
(Baby's Morn & Doc's Office)

Adult/Adult Stories $r = .67, p < .001$
(Camping Trip & Accident)

Attachment Composite Scores $r = .59, p < .01$
(correlation between child & adult stories)

United Arab Emirates

Mother/Child Stories $r = .50, p < .01$
(Baby's Morn & Doc's Office)

Adult/Adult Stories $r = .72, p < .001$
(Lost Purse & Accident)

Attachment Composite Scores $r = .83, p < .001$
(correlation between child & adult stories)

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the scriptedness analysis showed a similar range in secure base content across cultures in support of the universal quality of the secure base script and attachment representations. Mothers from Turkey and the U.A.E. showed similar variations in their stories from rich secure base content to stories noticeably lacking in that content. Further-more, the correlations within and across the mother/child and adult/adult attachment stories were not only consist with a generalized secure base script, but showed a remarkably similar pattern of correlations across cultures.

Nonetheless, we should note that there were some differences in the narratives across cultures. To some degree the situations that prompt a secure base script vary across cultures. For example, “The Camping Trip” story line was replaced with “The Lost Purse” in the U.A.E because men and women do not go camping together in that culture. It is likely that we will encounter further cultural differences, particularly when we consider adult-adult scenarios. But the basic finding of a universal secure base script has been strongly supported by the results from these two additional cultures.