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Commentary

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In her study on attachment in African-American families, Jackson shows that a multiple caregiver arrangement is normative for African-American infants. These infants not only have experience with 2-5 caregivers, but are also regularly exposed to unfamiliar people. Jackson raises the issue of whether the traditional concept of 'monotropy' adequately describes attachment development in the multiple caregiver situation, and she also doubts the validity of the traditional measure of attachment - the 'strange situation' procedure - in cases of infants who are accustomed to separations from their mothers and to frequent encounters with strangers. The development of attachment relationships in an African-American multiple-caregiver context should be analyzed and understood on its own terms (the 'emic' approach), to avoid an ethnocentric 'Euro-American' perspective (the 'etic' approach).

Jackson's paper is stimulating in providing an ethnographic account of daily life in African-American families with infants. Her paper is provocative in claiming that traditional attachment concepts and measures fail to be useful in the African-American context of multiple caregiving. Furthermore, she tries to empirically validate her claim that monot-

ropy is absent in her sample. An alternative measure of differences in strength between multiple attachments is used to avoid the alleged etic bias of the 'strange situation' procedure. However, this alternative procedure appeared to contain too few stressful components to activate the attachment behavioral system in the majority of cases. Therefore, conclusions about the absence of monotropy in the African-American group remained equivocal.

The relation between multiple-caregiver arrangements and monotropy is complicated. The presence of multiple caregivers does not necessarily imply the absence of a special bond between infant and mother. On the contrary, the infant-mother attachment relationship appears to be important even when mothers take care of their infants during only a minor part of the day. In this respect, Morelli and Tronick's [1991] Efe study is illustrative, especially because Jackson elaborates on this study and tends to draw a quite different conclusion. The Efe are a semi-nomadic African group usually considered a hunter-gatherer people, and therefore representative of what Bowlby [1984] called the 'original environment of evolutionary adaptedness' - the environment in which the basic 'need' of the

infant's attachment to a protective caregiver is hypothesized to be established. Jackson claims that the Efe study throws doubt on the normative value of monotropy or the existence of one salient relationship between infant and an attachment figure. Efe infants are raised in a multiple caregiver environment from the very beginning and it is suggested that they develop multiple attachments.

It is curious to note that Morelli and Tronick [1991], in one of their most recent papers on the Efe (not cited by Jackson) are forced to conclude that by the age of 12 months Efe children develop primary attachments to their mothers in the context of experiencing sensitive multiple caregiving during the first year of life. Although infants are even nursed by several different women, 1-year-olds clearly appear to prefer proximity to their mothers in stressful situations. Morelli and Tronick propose that one of the reasons that a special infant-mother bond continues to exist even in the context of a multiple-caregiver arrangement may be the care at night. During the night, only the mothers care for their infants, and sleep is regularly interrupted by episodes of interaction exclusively between mother and infant. The night of course may be an especially stressful time during which the infant needs a protective caregiver most.

The crucial contribution of the care at night to the development of attachment in a multiple-caregiver arrangement is also illustrated in a recent study of home-based and communal kibbutzim in Israel [Sagi et al. in preparation]. In this study attachment classification distributions of infant-mother pairs living in two types of Israeli kibbutzim were compared. In both the communal and the home-based setting, infants are cared for by professional caregivers for about 9 h each day, 6 days per week. All infants spend afternoon hours at home with their parents. Infants in the home-based setting remain with their par-

ents during the night whereas infants of the communal group are returned to the infants house where they stay under the responsibility of a night watchwoman until the morning. Sagi et al. were able to show that apart from the infant sleeping arrangement, both groups of mothers and infants were drawn from the same population. The difference in care at night however influenced the quality of infant-mother attachment dramatically. Among the home-based infants, 80% were found to be securely attached to their mothers versus only 48% of the infants raised under the communal sleeping conditions.

The recent Lie and Israeli data suggest that if mothers take care of their infants at night, a special infant-mother attachment relationship may develop whatever other caregivers are involved in raising the children during the daytime. Nevertheless in a multiple-caregiver arrangement infants may develop multiple attachments as has been shown in several studies on mother-father-infant attachment in European and American cultures. Mothers may remain very important attachment figures but other caregivers have been shown to be part of the infants attachment networks as well. In this sense the issue of monotropy in a multiple-caregiver arrangement has already been settled because it is a well-established fact that infants develop a network of attachment relationships. The question of which attachment relationship in the network is 'strongest' cannot be answered simply because attachment theory does not provide criteria for strength of attachment only for quality of attachment relationships. The more interesting issue is how multiple attachments are mentally represented i.e. integrated into an internal working model of attachment [van IJzendoorn et al. in press]. In the case of the Israeli kibbutz data for example, we have shown that the concept of attachment networks is more powerful in pre-

dicting later socioemotional development than is the traditional construct of single attachments [van IJzendoorn et al., in press].

In the case of African-American families, infants evidently develop multiple attachments, and the intriguing question is whether the quality of the infants' attachment network is more decisive for later development than the quality of the separate infant-caregiver attachment relationships. Comparing the strength of infants' attachments to different caregivers seems less fruitful. Children's preference for a specific attachment figure may largely be determined by situational factors. The quality of attachment, however, has been shown to be rooted in a history of more or less sensitive interactions between infant and caregiver. Furthermore, quality of attachment has been shown to (partly) determine mental representations of self and others. It would therefore be extremely important to study quality of attachment networks and their mental representations under multiple-caregiver conditions.

How should we study attachment in different cultural settings? Jackson rightly argues

for the complementarity of the emic and etic perspectives. If a certain paradigm has been developed in a specific cultural setting, it is useful to try to test the limits of that paradigm in other cultural settings (the etic approach); if the paradigm is clearly not applicable in a certain cultural setting, alternatives have to be developed in an emic way. From philosophy of science, numerous historical and theoretical reasons for severely and persistently testing the limits of a paradigm or research program may be derived [van IJzendoorn and Tavecchio, 1987]. In the case of attachment theory and its major assessment measure – the 'strange situation' procedure – it has not been shown empirically that they fail to be valid in the African-American cultural setting. The presence of multiple caregivers does, for example, not preclude the fruitful use of attachment concepts and measures in the Israeli case. To assess the validity of attachment theory for African-American infant-caregiver relationships, we still need more carefully conducted etic studies

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