

Attachment in context.
Kibbutz child-rearing as a historical experiment*

Marinus H. van IJzendoorn

Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, June 27-July 2, 1994, in Amsterdam (The Netherlands).

* Preparation of this paper was supported by a Pioneer award from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). The paper is based on Aviezer, Van IJzendoorn, Sagi, and Schuengel (1994).

1. appreciate for my work
2. title board: I will restrict myself to the project I have been carrying out with the help of meetings etc. in Israel.

2

Attachment theory is often considered to reject a basic assumption of historical and anthropological approaches namely that raising children is essentially context-bound in at least two ways: bound to a specific historical time-frame and bound to a specific cultural context. As Zuckerman and Kessen argue in "Children in time and place", developmentalists should refrain from their universalistic and etic approaches, and refrain from their search for lawlike generalizations to be equal and fruitful partners in the interdisciplinary description of children's development in time and place.

Attachment theory is considered as a theoretical framework to describe and explain the universal phenomenon of infants getting emotionally attached to their ^{parents or} caregivers somewhere around their first birthday. In particular its evolutionary perspective seems to force attachment theory to be ahistorical and etic instead of emic in its approach to ^{historical + cultural} ~~cross-cultural~~ issues. Infants would be born with an innate bias to become attached to a protective adult to ensure survival in a hostile environment. The bias would be originated in the evolution of humankind during millions of years of living in a so-called environment of evolutionary adaptedness.

For the sake of a lively discussion I would like to present myself here as a defender of the universalistic stance and of an etic approach in historical as well as cross-cultural studies, and at the same time I hope to show how important the historical dimension is for understanding the boundaries and conditions under which universal laws operate. I would like to start with a small event described by Homer in ancient Greece to illustrate the meaning of attachment, and then continue with the main part of my contribution: a description of the development of research on child-rearing and child development in Israeli kibbutzim. During the past 10 years or so, my Israeli colleague Avi Sagi and I have worked together on a series of studies on attachment in the kibbutz system. My contribution to this workshop is based on a paper that he and I, together with Ohra Aviezer and Carlo Schuengel, wrote for Psychological Bulletin. It will appear this year. *I have some copies of manuscript available for those of you who are interested.*

Our kibbutz studies can be considered as being based on what Elder, Modell, and Parke called the 'institutional model' of intertwining historical and developmental research. I consider the changes in the kibbutz child-rearing systems

quote

of the last few decades as "historical shifts in institutions (that) represent important and powerful natural experiments that often permit the testing of theories and models under conditions that are much more dramatic than those that developmental scientists could either engineer or produce, ethically or practically, in the laboratory or in field" (p. 242). Part of our kibbutz studies will turn out to be historical in the strict sense because the specific institution itself does not exist anymore. More about this later!

First, then, an anecdote from Homer. It is about 3000 years ago. A war is going on around Troy. The city is attacked by the Greeks and the war is in its final stage. Hector, the leader of the Trojan forces, comes back from the fighting covered with blood, to fetch his coward brother Paris. Homer describes vividly how Hector takes leave of his wife and infant. Andromache and Hector realize that they might see each other for the last time in their life, because Hector seems to return to a lost fight. Andromache tries to keep Hector from going but he would prefer dying during the fight than to see his wife caught by the Greeks. Hector stretches his arms towards his child Astyanax who is carried by his nanny. The child is afraid of the brightly shining helmet and the bloodstained father. He seeks closer contact to the nanny. Hector immediately realized that his child is afraid of the helmet, takes it off, and is then able to fetch the child and play with him. He cuddles him and Astyanax is enjoying the contact.

sheet

Despite the raging war Hector provokes attachment behavior in his child: in the first round to the nanny, and in the second round to himself. Homer does not describe many events in which children play a role, in particular in the Iliad. The farewell of Hector is one of the few, and in a few lines of beautiful poetry, Homer manages to describe the warmth and the loving bond between the spouses, between the child and his nanny, and between the father and his child. The competence to be attached to a protective adult - not necessarily the biological mother - seems to be present in Astyanax, a child living some 3000 years ago in a completely different culture from the western, industrialized society we live in today. Homer nicely illustrates that human beings are able to get attached to their caregiver in

any time or culture - that is, they have the competence to engage in an attachment relationship. Whether and how this competence is actualized depends of course largely on contextual factors. Performance and competence might show a deep divide: competence is universal and performance is bound to the context, to put it bluntly.

Of course, the quote from Homer is just an illustration of a possibility, and might not be taken as definite proof. For the moment it is sufficient to indicate the assumption of most work in attachment: that attachment is a universal competence, or innate bias in every infant - past and present. To test this assumption it is important to show how fruitful a universalistic theory is under extremely deviating circumstances. A strongly deviating child-rearing arrangement is to be found in the history of the Israeli kibbutz system. I would now like to discuss the historical background and functioning of this system, and to describe some results of our attachment studies in two different types of kibbutzim - the traditional, communally oriented kibbutzim and the modern, family-oriented kibbutzim.

An Israeli kibbutz (pl., kibbutzim) is a cooperative, democratically governed, multi-generational community, with an average population of 400-900 people. Each kibbutz is economically and socially autonomous. Every kibbutz member works for the kibbutz economy, and is in turn provided by the community with housing, food, clothing, health and educational services, recreation and other living needs. In the past kibbutzim had been fairly isolated agricultural communities in which living conditions were exceedingly hard. Today kibbutz economies are based on a diversity of industries and agricultural activities, and are able to provide their members with a satisfying standard of living.

The kibbutz is known as being one of the very few utopian experiments that have succeeded in establishing a radically different way of living and of raising children. As many as four generations have been brought up in kibbutzim since the first such communities were founded at the turn of the century. The kibbutz child-rearing system, also called "collective education", has been treated in the literature

as furnishing a "natural laboratory" for testing the consequences of unique child rearing methods.

The early pioneers of the kibbutz movement were idealistic young people who rejected the culture of the shtetl that had dominated the life of Eastern European Jews for centuries, and sought to create instead a new society founded on socialist and Zionist principles. The task they set for themselves was in no way minor. They proposed to create a collective society which emphasized production and physical labor, striving at the same time to achieve both national and personal independence under conditions of perfect equality. The Marxian precept of "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" was established as the primary and essential principle of kibbutz life. The political aspirations of kibbutzniks dictated their settlement in remote locations, where they were constrained to cultivate barren land in a harsh climate and a hostile environment. In these circumstances the decision to raise children collectively contributed to the protection and well-being of the young. Children were housed in the only brick building on kibbutz grounds and never went hungry, whereas the adults of the community lived in tents and their food was rationed. Early in kibbutz history this reality interacted with an awareness of the role of child-rearing in furthering the goals of the collective by discouraging individualism, abolishing inequalities between the sexes, and bringing up a person who was better socialized to communal life.

One of the principal goals of early kibbutzim was to alter the patriarchal organization of the family that was typical of Eastern-European Jewish culture, where women were economically dependent on men and parental authority over children was absolute. Collective education was assigned an important place in achieving this goal. It was instituted so as to free women from the burdens of child care, thereby allowing them to participate in the socioeconomic life of the community on an equal footing with men. Men, on the other hand, would share in the duties of child care, and become nurturing rather than authoritarian figures in the lives of their children. Bringing up children collectively was moreover regarded

as essential in fostering the solidarity of the group and restraining individualistic tendencies in both children and adults.

During the formative years of collective education, psychoanalytic theory was eagerly adopted as an educational guide. A token of this influence is already apparent in the work of Bernfeld, a reform pedagogue whose utopian visions were widely accepted among young German Jews who immigrated to Palestine and joined the kibbutz movement. Given that one of the principal goals of the kibbutz founders was to change family relations, it is not surprising that psychoanalytic views about the pathological consequences of conflicts in parent-child relations should have had a special appeal for them. Kibbutz educators interpreted these views as furnishing support for the idea of dividing the task of socialization between parents and educators (caregivers and teachers), and not to rely on parents alone in raising infants and young children. Maintenance of two emotional centers for kibbutz children - the parental home and the children's house - was thought to protect children against their parents' shortcomings, while at the same time preserving the benefits of parental love. The practice of having children sleep away from the parental home was justified on the grounds that it spared them from the trauma of exposure to the so called primal scene, and from the conflicts with parents that are immanent in the Oedipus complex.

In addition, living among peers from an early age was regarded as being an inseparable part of bringing up future kibbutz members, since it presented children with a supportive environment for dealing with the kind of human values which are perceived to be at the core of kibbutz life, such as sharing and consideration for others.

Past trends. Prior to the 1940s the medical model dominated approaches to child care both on the kibbutz and outside it. Cleanliness was maintained in infant houses to the point of sterility, infants feeding was rigorously scheduled, parents' visits were restricted, and caregivers (Hebrew: s. metapelet, pl. metaplot) were trained in hospitals. Caregivers were regarded as the experts and the ultimate

authority in kibbutz children's care. Characteristically, a small staff of two or three caregivers took care of a large group of between 12 and 18 children. Some of these early practices can be better understood when we take into account the ecological context of kibbutzim at the time, which were isolated communities far from medical facilities. Moreover, because of the prevalence of serious diseases in this pioneering period, the major concern was to keep babies alive, which was indeed managed quite successfully by the kibbutzim.

Following World War II and Israel's War of Independence, the emphasis shifted from physical health to the emotional needs of children and mothers. This change was supported by a gradual improvement in economic conditions, and the increasing influence of the conceptualizations of Bowlby and Spitz about "maternal deprivation", which replaced both the medical model and classical psychoanalysis. Parental participation in child care, in particular on the part of mothers, through the infant's first year was also allowed to increase. Mothers were granted maternity leave, which over the years was expanded from six weeks to a period of three or four months. In addition, demand feeding replaced schedule feeding, and breast-feeding was encouraged. Since the 1970s infants no longer live in the infant house upon arrival from the hospital, but remain at home with their mothers for as long as maternity leave lasts. Since the early 1960s, daily visits of mothers were instituted for the purpose of allowing mothers to spend time with their children, this being humorously referred to as the "love hour".

Collective sleeping arrangements. Collective sleeping arrangements for children – even infants! – away from their parents, constitute probably the most distinctive characteristic of kibbutz practices in collective child-raising. Many cultures practice multiple caregiving. The pattern is in many ways similar to the practice in kibbutzim. However, a worldwide sample of 183 societies shows that none of them maintained a system of having infants sleep away from their parents. The major reasons for instituting collective sleeping for children in the early years of kibbutzim had to do with the concern for children's safety on the one hand, and with women's equality and training children for communal life on the other. These

aims were later interpreted by kibbutz educators as concordant with fundamental psychoanalytic ideas.

At night two night watchwomen were responsible for all children in the kibbutz under the age of 12. The women were assigned on a weekly rotation basis; and they monitored the children's houses from a central location, usually the infant house, by making rounds and with intercoms. In most cases night watchwomen were not complete strangers to the children. However, the weekly rotation system makes sensitive responses to the infants' needs nearly impossible.

Most kibbutzim abandoned collective sleeping by the 1990s, so that today this practice is maintained in only three of the country's 260 kibbutzim. Doubts about children's collective sleeping were already voiced as early as in the 1950s, and a small number of kibbutzim had always maintained home-based sleeping arrangements. The movement to change children's sleeping arrangements gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s along with an upsurge in familistic tendencies. This trend was reinforced by the growing prosperity of kibbutz economies which afforded to build better family homes for members on the one hand and the weakening of ideological identifications of young kibbutz members on the other hand. Familistic trends were accelerated significantly in the last decade. These trends have moreover continued, notwithstanding serious economic problems. Many kibbutzim had to commit themselves to heavy financial obligations to be able to make the necessary modifications for family housing.

The success of familism in kibbutzim reduced women's participation in community life, pushing their struggle for equality into the background. Collective education failed to free kibbutz women from child care as their primary responsibility, or from leading a dual-career life in which motherhood and work are combined. Frustrated by their work options, many kibbutz women invested in motherhood, and were the leading proponents for changing the practice of collective sleeping for children. Thus, along with the men, rather than attempting to change the sex-typed occupational structure of kibbutzim, they instead helped to preserve it. For example, men are almost absent in the role of metapelet or professional caregiver.

Present practices.

sheet Kibbutz infants are exposed to multiple caregiving very early in their lives. In their first three months, kibbutz infants receive exclusive maternal care in the family's residence. They are brought to the infant house as soon as their mothers return to work part time. During the initial period of their stay in the infant house, they are cared for jointly by the mother and the metapelet. Mothers are almost exclusively in charge of feeding, and they arrange their work schedule accordingly; caregivers are responsible for the infants between maternal visits. During the second half of the infants' first year, caregivers gradually assume responsibility for the children's various needs as the mothers increase their workload. Thus by the infants' second year, they come under the full care of the caregivers, who play an increasingly larger role in their socialization with respect to issues like table manners, sharing, play habits, and knowledge of the environment.

Home-based sleeping has changed the proportionate time spent by kibbutz children in the children's house to a pattern similar to that of nonkibbutz day-care settings. Children come to the children's house in the morning and go home during late afternoon. Children's sleeping at home has clearly changed the balance between the two emotional centers of the family and the community. The family has become the principal authority and has assumed additional care-giving functions, whereas the caregivers' influence has declined and become secondary.

Now I would like to talk about attachment research on kibbutz children.

According to attachment theory, the security of infants' attachment to their caregivers is determined by the quality of the care they receive. Sensitive responses to infants' signals and needs are associated with secure attachments, whereas rejection of infants' communication and inconsistent care are related to insecure attachments. In current conceptualizations, attachment is viewed as a strategy of dealing with the emotions elicited by stressful events, and with the status of the attachment figure in this process. Three fundamental strategies have been identified: (A) denial of negative emotions and avoidance of the attachment figure, who is not expected to provide relief; (B) open communication with the attachment

sheet figure about negative emotions, and (C) preoccupation with negative emotions and ambivalence towards the attachment figure, who for the child is both a source of stress and a potential "haven of security". The classification of attachment behavior in a standard laboratory procedure, the so-called Strange Situation, is based on the following strategies: A child's attachment to the primary caregiver can be classified as either (A) insecure-avoidant, (B) secure, or (C) insecure-resistant.

In the beginning of the eighties, Sagi, Lamb and others used the Strange Situation to study the relationships of 85 communally sleeping kibbutz infants with their parents and caregivers. They also examined the relationships with their mothers of 36 Israeli infants attending city day-care facilities. They found that only 59% of kibbutz infants were securely attached to their mothers, as compared with 75% of Israeli day-care infants, and with 65%-70% found in most studies. Among children with insecure attachments in both Israeli samples, anxious-ambivalent relationships were overrepresented.

Communal sleeping in children's houses - the unique characteristic of a collective upbringing - was postulated by Sagi and his colleagues to be a possible antecedent for the development of insecure attachments and a new study was designed to investigate this assumption.

In a quasi-experimental study, starting around 1985, we observed 23 mother-infant dyads from traditional kibbutzim (with communal sleeping arrangements), and 25 dyads from nontraditional kibbutzim (where family-based sleeping was instituted) in the Strange Situation. The skewed distribution of attachment relationships for communally sleeping infants was confirmed, being even more extreme in the same direction as earlier: only 48% of the infants were securely attached to their mothers. However, the distribution for infants in the family-based sleeping arrangements was completely different. Eighty percent of these infants were securely attached to their mothers - a rate similar to that found among urban Israeli infants.

In order to rule out alternative explanations for the effect of communal sleeping arrangements, assessments were also made of the ecology of the children's house during the day, maternal separation anxiety, infants' temperament, and

mother-infant play interactions. But the two groups (i.e., family-based and communal sleepers) were found comparable on all of these variables. Thus it was concluded that collective sleeping, experienced by infants as a time during which mothers are largely unavailable and inaccessible, was responsible for the greater insecurity found in this group. Inconsistent responsiveness was inherent in the reality of these infants, since sensitive responding by mother or caregiver during the day sharply contrasted with the presence of an unfamiliar person at night. Inconsistent responsiveness has previously been considered to be an important antecedent condition of insecure ambivalent attachment.

The following sheet represents the distribution of attachment classifications with mothers, and illustrates how the collective kibbutz samples differ from other groups in Israel and elsewhere in the world. The plot is based on an earlier published correspondence analysis of the then known studies of attachment. In addition, we calculated the relative positions of the subgroups of kibbutzim both with and without collective sleeping from the new study.

sheet

The first dimension in Figure 1 shows a progression of an overrepresentation of the A classification on the left to an overrepresentation of the C classification on the right, while the second dimension indicates a B versus A plus C overrepresentation. The plot clearly shows that the collective kibbutz samples are very much at variance with other Israeli samples and samples from other countries. The anomalous position of the collective kibbutz samples is accounted for by the overrepresentation of insecure and, in particular, ambivalent attachments. Because the communal arrangement was characteristic of the early stage in the kibbutz history, the historical change is reflected in the developmental outcome: the traditional system tends to produce anxious-ambivalent infants, whereas the new system without communal sleeping tends to show similar patterns of attachment to what we find in middle class families from the western countries.

Insert Figure 1 about here

More evidence about problematic aspects of communal sleeping can be

derived from our study with Main's Adult Attachment Interview, which assesses adults' current mental representations with regard to their early childhood attachment relationships. Because of limited time I cannot go into details about this wonderful instrument. We presented the Adult Attachment Interview both to 20 mothers from kibbutzim maintaining collective sleeping arrangements, and to 25 mothers from home-sleeping kibbutzim. Parent-child concordance in attachment classifications was relatively low for the communally sleeping group (40%), whereas it was rather high for the home-sleeping group (76%). A rate of about 75% concordance between parental and infant attachment has been found in most AAI studies in western countries. Possibly, caring for infants within the ecology of collective sleeping may have disrupted the transmission of ^{the} ~~parental~~ ^{attachment} ~~internal model~~ ^{to their} ~~of relationships into their parenting style.~~

Consequences of attachment relationships. These recent findings of attachment research in a sense support Rabin's argument that kibbutz infants suffer from a partial psychological deprivation; they also suggest that collective sleeping is an important contributing factor to this effect. Is this effect a long lasting one?

Oppenheim, Sagi and Lamb assessed a broad spectrum of socioemotional competencies of most of the subjects in Sagi's first kibbutz sample when the children were 5 years old. They found that secure attachment to the metapelet during infancy was the strongest predictor of children being empathic, dominant, independent, achievement oriented, and behaviorally purposive in kindergarten; on the other hand no significant relationships were found between these socioemotional developments and the quality of children's attachment to their parents. These results suggest that the influence of attachment relationships may be viewed as domain specific. Since the infants' relations with caregivers had been formed in the context of the infant house, they are the best predictor of children's socioemotional behavior in similar contexts.

However, one can expect attachment relationships in a multiple caregiver environment to interact in such a way that the predictive power of individual relationships is weaker as compared to their combination. We examined a sample

of kibbutz children and of Dutch children for the predictive power of the extended network of infants' relationships (mother, father, and professional caregiver), in comparison to the family network (mother and father) and the mother-infant relationship. We found that secure relationships with the extended network were the best predictor of later advanced socioemotional functioning, although this finding was much stronger for kibbutz children. In the kibbutz sample, for example, security of the extended network was related to a higher I.Q. and more independent behavior in kindergarten, as well as to higher ego resilience, ego control, field independence, ~~dominance~~, goal-directed behavior, and empathy. Security of the family network in the kibbutz was also related to some of these variables, whereas infant-mother relationships were by themselves unrelated to any of the children's outcome variables. Thus we can conclude that the quality of early relationships does predict future development.

I come to some conclusions. The present overview shows that collective kibbutz education underwent tremendous changes in the course of the 70 years of its existence. Initially an extreme form of collectivism was instituted that was motivated by economical needs and ideological convictions. Its intended goal was to nourish a "new type" of human being that would be untainted by the shortcomings which those who instituted the practice had observed in their own upbringing.

Judged strictly in terms of this ambition alone, collective education can be regarded as a failure. The family as the basic social unit has not been abolished in kibbutzim. On the contrary: familistic trends have become stronger than ever, and kibbutz parents have reclaimed their rights to care for their own children.

Collective education has not produced a new type of human being; and any differences found between adults raised on and off the kibbutz have been ^{shown to be} minimal.

Moreover, research results indicate that collective sleeping arrangements for children negatively affect socioemotional development in the direction of a more anxious and dependent personality instead of the autonomous and free personality that was envisioned at the beginning. Collective sleeping, which may have been

justified in early periods in the history of kibbutzim, was abolished as it became clear that it did not serve the emotional needs of most kibbutz members. Its disappearance demonstrates the limits of adaptability of parents and children to inappropriate child care arrangements. Because of the disappearance of this type of kibbutz, part of our empirical study has become historical in the strict sense: documentation of a child-rearing institution from the past.

However, when we set aside communal sleeping as too radical a practice, collective child-rearing seen from a broader perspective has to its credit remarkable achievements that are unprecedented in other cultures. It has furnished very high quality care for all the children in the community without exception, and long before multiple caregiving was contemplated for the population at large. Only in Eastern Europe have such attempts been made, at the cost of providing mediocre care. Collective education has developed a long-term practice of normal multiple caregiving which is supported by caregivers and parents as well as the community and which has beneficial effects on the children. In fact, in terms of attachment the multiple caregiver attachments of the kibbutz children do not seem to be essentially different from Astyanax' attachments to the nanny, to the father and to the mother in Homer's description of Hector and Andromache's dramatic farewell.

The bottom line is ^{- somewhat provocatively -} that without the use of an etic approach in the first kibbutz studies - imposing a universal theory and instrument on a deviating cultural practice of child-rearing - we would not even have posed the intriguing question why communal kibbutzim produced so many anxiously attached children. With the application of the Strange Situation procedure, and the theory behind this instrument, we now even know the answer.

Thank you.



Hector's farewell to Andromache before his battle with Ajax. Drawing, about 1815, by Felice Giani (Italian), illustrating the Iliad.

Strange Situation Classification of Attachment

- A. Insecure-avoidant: denial of negative emotions and avoidance of the attachment figure.
- B. Secure: open communication with the attachment figure about negative emotions.
- C. Insecure-ambivalent: preoccupation with negative emotions and ambivalence towards the attachment figure.

Table 1: Overview of the distribution of the caregiving responsibilities during early childhood.

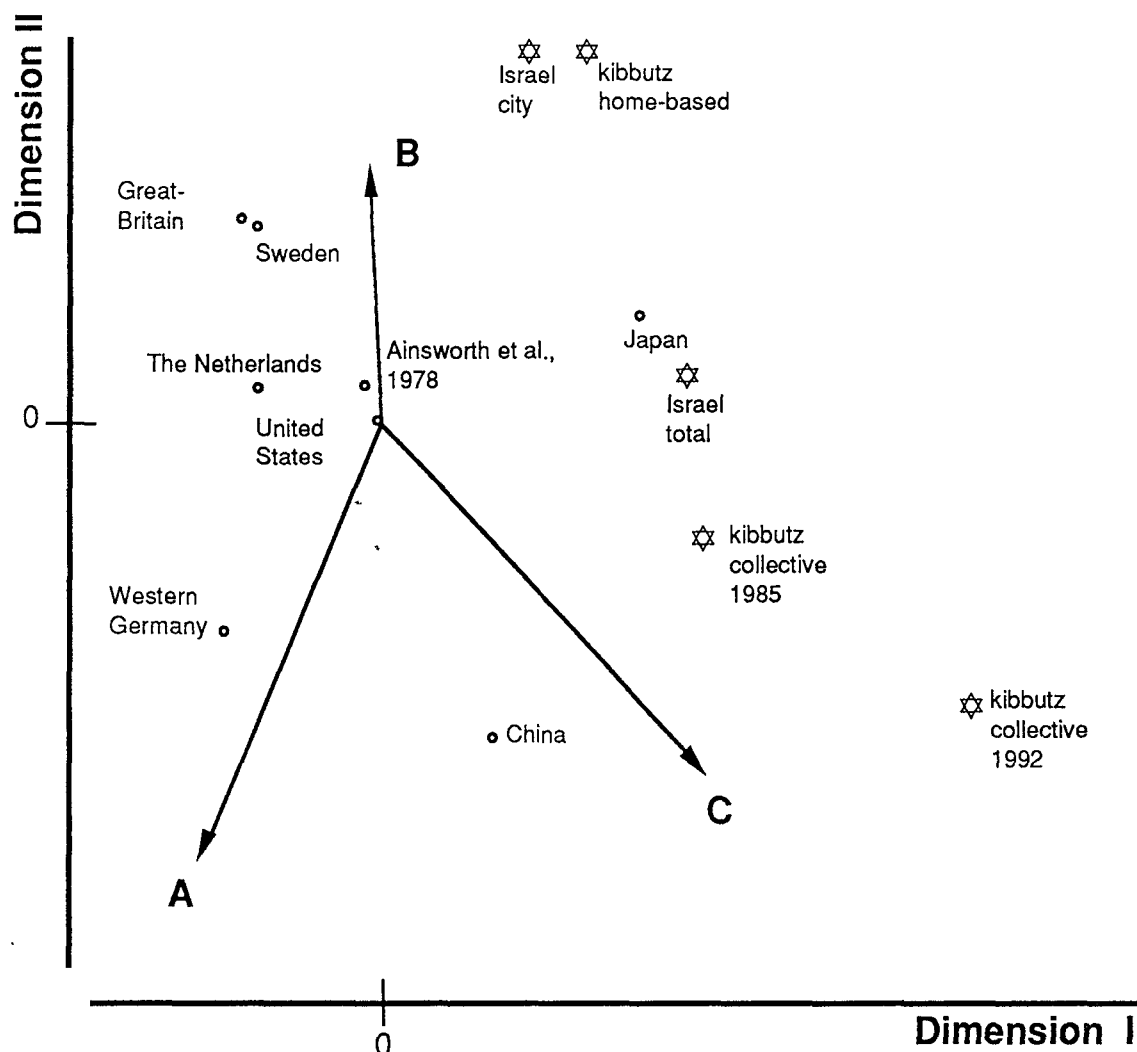
age-period	feeding/drinking	washing/ diapering	play	socialization	education	putting to bed	sleep*	waking up*
0-6 weeks	parent(s): on demand	parent(s): between feedings	parent(s)	n.a.	n.a.	parent(s) metapelet*	night- watch- woman	metapelet parent(s): saying "good- morning"
6 weeks - 6 months	parent(s): if possible every 3-4 hours	parent(s) metapelet	parent(s) metapelet	parent(s)	n.a.			
6-9 months	parent(s): weaning. metapelet begins to take over	parent(s) metapelet	parent(s) metapelet	parent(s) metapelet	n.a.			
<i>possibly changing metapelet</i>								
9-14 months	metapelet (3 meals/day)	metapelet	parent(s) metapelet	parent(s) metapelet	metapelet			
14 months - kindergarten	metapelet	metapelet	parent(s)/ metapelet/ peers	parent(s) metapelet	metapelet			
<i>possibly changing metapelet</i>								
after kindergarten	metapelet	metapelet	parent(s)/ metapelet/ peers	parent(s)/ metapelet/ peers	teachers			

* Valid only for collective sleeping arrangement.

1) This table is based on data from : Ben-Yaakov (1972); Rabin & Beit-Hallahmi (1982)

2) The picture of the kibbutz child-rearing system is continuously changing. For this reason it may not be adequate in the light of recent development. However, it represents the system in its most characteristic form.

Figure 1: The distribution of attachment classifications in various countries and in various Israeli samples (based on Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988)



This plot is based on the meta-analysis by Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) of almost 2000 world-wide attachment classifications. The distribution of the attachment classifications is plotted for every country by use of correspondence-analysis. The origin of the plot represents the global distributions. The distance between points represents discrepancy, the direction of the discrepancy is indicated by the three vectors. Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg (1988) provide location of the datapoints. Only Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) sample and the Israeli samples have individual datapoints in this figure. Added to Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg's plot is the sample of Sagi et al. (in prep.). This sample is indicated by 'kibbutz home-based' and 'kibbutz collective 1992'. This information is also accounted for in 'kibbutz total'.