Attachment and Parenting Styles

Nanu Elena Doinita a*, Nijloveanu Dorina Maria b

a,b PhD Student, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Bucharest University, 90 Panduri Street, District 5 Bucharest, P.O. 050663, Romania

Abstract

Psychology and social sciences are clearly attest the importance of family in children's lives and as a context for children's development (Buriel Parke, 1998). Attachment experiences are critical for human emotional and cognitive development. Usually, the family is the primary context of patterns attachment and emotional adjustment strategy and determine relationships with others and later socializing (Bowlby, 1969/1982, Mikulincer et al., 2003, Allen 2012). Although there is no definitive and comprehensive theory about how parents shape children's development, researches found associations between specific styles and strategies used by parents and children results (O'Connor, 2002). Starting from specific characteristics of each type adult attachment and characteristics of each parenting styles, the present study examined the correlations between the types of adult attachment and parenting styles. 74 adults were evaluated with Adult Attachment Questionnaire(adapted to Stancu by Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) and Parenting Styles Questionnaire (Nanu, 2015). The results of the present study indicate that there is a significant correlation between secure adult attachment and authoritative parenting style.

Keywords: attachment, parenting styles, caregiving, responsiveness, demandingness

1. Introduction

According to attachment theory, early interaction between the child and the child's primary caregiver had formed some beliefs that are internalized and encoded as internal working models - cognitive/affective schemas, or

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +4 0771 541 977;
E-mail address: ina_for@yahoo.com
representations - with predictive function interactions in close relationships later, responsiveness and willingness to trust in the partner relationship (Bartholomew, 1990; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996). The initial central figure is the attachment primary caregiver (mother), but during the development, age group (peers) and subsequently romantic partner become central figures of attachment to the person and directs attachment behaviors. Theoretically, the working model influence a person's expectations, emotions, defenses, and relational behavior in all close relationships and empirical evidence from longitudinal studies have led researchers to suspect that the effects of childhood attachment relationships extend into adulthood, where they can be seen in the domains of parenting and close peer relationships, including romantic relationships (Weiss, 1982; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Bartholomew, 1990, 1993).

Parenting is a specific behavior – taken over or acquired – that a parent chooses to use in his/her child’s care, raising, and education. The attachment and caregiving systems are often activated simultaneously.

Darling and Steinberg (1993) distinguish between parenting practices and parenting styles. Parenting practices are defined as specific behaviors that parents use to socialize their children and parenting style as the emotional climate in which parents raise their children.

Diana Baumrind (1967, 1978, 1991) categorized parents based on two dimensions, responsiveness and demandingness, and define three different kinds of parenting styles: Authoritative style has a high responsiveness and high demandingness; Authoritarian style has low responsiveness and high demandingness; Permissive style, which is labeled by high responsiveness and low demandingness.

**Responsiveness** - refers to parental responsiveness to the needs of children, the degree of support, warmth and affection from parents to their children displays. Parents responsive, available, have a degree of unconditional acceptance of their children grew up, his praise and encourage their children while parents are less receptive lower grade children unconditional acceptance, a lower level of response to the needs children and are prone to criticize, punish or ignore and are less emotionally available to their children. Warm and receptive parent consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes such as emotional attachments safe, good relations with others, high self esteem and a strong sense of morality (Hoffman, 1970; Loeb et al, 1980; Janssens Gerris, 1992; Hastings et al, 2000; Ladd and Pettit, 2002).

**Demandingness** - concerns that parents have requirements for their children to be mature and responsible, and the rules and limits established and applied by parents for their children.

Positive parenting practices include more specific behaviors such as parental warmth and openness and constant support, constant monitoring and surveillance, a certain degree of autonomy, availability, setting limits and clear rules accompanied by inductive discipline, expectations and applications depending on the child's age. These parental practices are similar to secure attachment figure and authoritative style (high responsiveness and high demandingness). Secure attachment in childhood occurs when a parent is responsive to the needs of the child. This allows the child to explore the environment safe, and it develops confidence in its ability to interact with autonomous world, to face challenges, and regulate their own emotions (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). Attachment security and the capacity to be a responsive caregiver, affords the parent the resources required to provide not only a safe haven in times of threat, but also as a secure base from which to explore. The provision of both safe haven and secure base is a fundamental component of authoritative parenting, which comprises a warm, child-centered approach, but with clear boundaries and democratic rules (Robinson et al., 1995).

Neglect or failure to involve parents, indifference or brutal discipline leave their mark in emotional circuit and lead to adopt secondary attachment strategies, anxious or avoidant attachment. Collins & Feeney (2010) suggest that responsive caregiving for others in distress might be particularly difficult for those who are uncomfortable with emotional expression or who have difficulty regulating their own emotions. These difficulties are associated with attachment insecurity, which explains why both, avoidance and anxiety, are associated with lower levels of responsive caregiving.

Anxious attachment develop in an environment that constantly maintaining proximity to a parent is inconsistent and need proximity (privacy) and approval of others. The adults with anxious attachment feel a chronic fear of rejection if they are not enough close or appreciated as person, and have high level of anxiety.
Avoidance is a strategy caused by the suppression of pain, stress, by the frustration. The parent is distant, cold, or reject the child. Inhibition is a strategy driven by fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, shame, guilt. These emotions are associated as threats and vulnerabilities.

2. Method

2.1. Hypotheses

The adult attachment types influence parenting styles adopted. Starting from this general hypothesis we formulated the following specific hypotheses:

- Secure Adult attachment is positively correlated with Authoritative parental style.
- Dismissing Adult attachment is correlated with Authoritarian parental style.
- Preoccupied Adult attachment is negatively associated with Permissive parental style.
- Fearful Adult attachment correlates positively with Permissive parental style.

2.2. Participants

There were involved 74 Romanian parents (46 female and 28 male participants) with children aged 4-8 years. They completed measures of adult attachment types and parenting styles (self-reported), to determine statistically significant correlations positive / negative between adult attachment and parenting styles. To respect the rules of professional conduct, the written consent of each participant has been demanded. The results are confidential and used only in the present study.

2.3. Measures

Adults were individually assessed with two psychological tests that measure: adult attachment type – Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Stancu, 2010, by Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and Parental Styles Questionnaire (Nanu, 2015).

Adult Attachment Questionnaire (adapted by I. Stancu to Romanian population in 2010) includes 4 statements, specific to each type of attachment. The answer to each item were given based on a 7 point Likert scale, where 1 means "not characterizing me" and 7 means "very much characterizing me".

According to Baumrind (1978), for the purposes of this study the parental styles variables were operationalized by dimensions: responsiveness, demandginess and communication. We construct a Parental Styles Questionnaire, a self-report measures of parenting styles which define the styles in terms of theoretically expected profiles.

The authoritative style is warm and responsive, providing to the children affection and support in their explorations and pursuit of interests. Authoritative parents have high score on measures of warmth and responsiveness, bidirectional communication (induction - explanations for expectations, achievement and behavior), control and maturity demands (Maccoby and Martin, 1983, apud. Spera, 2005).

The authoritarian style is neither warm nor responsive to the children. Authoritarian parents have high maturity demands for their children primarily, because they are intolerant of selfishness or inappropriate behavior. These parents are strict, expect obedience, and assert power when their children misbehave. When socializing their children, authoritarian parents express their maturity demands and expectations through rules and orders, and do not communicate to their children the rationale behind these rules. These parents have high score on measures of maturity demands and control but low on measures of responsiveness, warmth and bidirectional communication.

The permissive style is moderate to responsiveness (some parents are high and some are low) toward their children’s needs. These parents, however, are excessively lax in their expectations for their children’s level of maturity and their tolerance of misbehavior. When socializing their children, permissive parents are usually dismissive and unconcerned. These parents have moderately high score on measures of responsiveness and low on measures of maturity demands and control (Maccoby and Martin, 1983, apud. Spera, 2005).

The questionnaire was composed of 18 items, with six characteristic items for each scale. The answer to each item were given based on a Likert scale, where 1 means strong disagreement, 2 means disagreement, 3 is partial
agreement, 4 is agreement and 5 represents total agreement. Regarding the internal consistency of high values of Alpha Cronbach coefficients were obtained for all three types: authoritative style= .722; authoritarian style=.704; permissive style=.718.

3. Results

In the present study were used nonparametric statistical tests, variables were transformed in categorial variables because data distribution isn’t a normal for attachment and parenting styles (except .preoccupied attachment and permissive style).

Table 1. Normal distribution One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

|                      | Authoritarian style | Permissive style | Authoritative style | Secure Attachm | Fearful Attachm | Preoccupied Attachm | Avoidant Attachm |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| N                    | 74                 | 74               | 74                  | 74             | 74              | 74                  | 74              |
| Mean                 | 12.59              | 14.47            | 25.35               | 4.45           | 2.80            | 2.99                | 3.66            |
| Std. Deviation       | 3.226              | 4.304            | 3.809               | 2.095          | 2.054           | 1.969               | 2.400           |
| Absolute             | .168               | .109             | .189                | .172           | .201            | .151                | .164            |
| Positive             | .168               | .109             | .111                | .111           | .201            | .151                | .164            |
| Negative             | -.089              | -.066            | -.189               | -.172          | -.123           | -.117               | -.132           |
| Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z | 1.443              | .938             | 1.628               | 1.479          | 1.730           | 1.301               | 1.407           |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .031              | .342             | .010                | .025           | .005            | .068                | .038            |

a. Test distribution is Normal.
b. Calculated from data.

Using SPSS Bivariate – Correlate – Analysis procedure the studies show that adult attachment is linked with self-esteem. We performed a correlational analysis and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between adult attachment types and parentig styles

|                      | Authoritarian style | Permissive style | Authoritative style |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Secure Attachment    | Correlation Coefficient | .122 | .140 | .329** |
| Sig. (2-tailed)      | .300               | .235             | .004               |
| N                    | 74                 | 74               | 74                 |
| Correlation Coefficient | .165             | .223*            | -.066              |
| Fearful Attachment   | Sig. (2-tailed)    | .160             | .050               | .576             |
| N                    | 74                 | 74               | 74                 |
| Spearman's rho       | Correlation Coefficient | -.015 | -.124 | -.033 |
| Preoccupied Attachment| Sig. (2-tailed)   | .899             | .292               | .783             |
| N                    | 74                 | 74               | 74                 |
| Correlation Coefficient | .037             | -.018            | -.112              |
| Avoidant Attachment  | Sig. (2-tailed)    | .753             | .878               | .342             |
| N                    | 74                 | 74               | 74                 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The statistical analysis of the variables included in this research led to the confirmation of the general hypothesis and the confirmation of two out of the four specific hypotheses. To check if there is a significant correlation between
attachment and parenting style was calculated Spearman’s Correlation, condition of normality distribution of variables was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. According to the results obtained, there is a positive correlation between secure attachment and authoritative style ($\rho = .329, p=.004<.05$) and also, a positive correlation between fearful attachment and permissive style ($\rho = .223, p=.050$). No correlations were recorded between preoccupied / avoidant attachment and specifically parenting styles.

4. Discussion and conclusions

These results highlights the link between type of adult attachment and parenting style, in concur with other studies, as Millings, Walsh, Hepper, & O’Brien, (2013), which results suggest that secure attachment experiences to partner, responsive caregiving to partner was positively associated with authoritative parenting styles and negatively associated with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. In their study, avoidance and anxiety attachment were associated with lower levels of responsive caregiving, which in turn were associated with reduced authoritative parenting and increased authoritarian and permissive parenting. Their final model revealed that responsiveness to partner mediated the relationships between attachment and parenting styles and these relationships did not differ between mothers and fathers.

We intend to resume this research using Adult Attachment Scale – AAS (Collins, 1996) with 3 orientations of adult attachment, secure, avoidance and anxiety.

Recent research has shown global caregiving hyperactivation and deactivation are associated with support provision in parent-child interactions (Shaver, Mikulincer, & Shemesh-Iron, 2010). Positive parenting practices require the capacity for responsive caregiving, and the requirements for responsive caregiving are the same in response to adult romantic partners.

Anxious and avoidant individuals have different affect regulation strategies which come into operation when the attachment system is triggered. It might be difficult for person with avoidant attachment (affect regulation strategies include the denial of negative emotions and a detachment from relationships) or anxious attachment (affect regulation strategies involve hyperactivation of the attachment system, preoccupation, excessive proximity and contact maintenance) to offer a responsive caregiving, adequate communication and demandingness.

This research gives us valuable guidance on how to implement psychological interventions aimed at enhancing parent-child interactions. Specifically, helping insecure attachment parents to elevate their emotion regulation may provide a path to enhance their parental ability and improve the parent-child relationship.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been financially supported within the project entitled „SOCERT. Knowledge society, dynamism through research”, contract number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132406. This project is co-financed by European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013. Investing in people!”

References

Bartholomew, K.; Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol 61, pp. 226-244, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.226, PsycINFO Database Record.

Baumrind, D. (1991). Parenting styles and adolescent development. In J. Brooks-Gunn, R. Lerner, A.C. Peterson (Eds.), The encyclopaedia of adolescence (746-758), New York: Garland.

Cassidy, J. (1990). Theoretical and methodological considerations in the study of attachment and the self in young children. In M. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), Attachment in preschool years: Theory, research and interventions (pp. 87± 120).Chicago:University of Chicago Press.

Collins, Nancy L.; Read, S.J (1990). Adult Attachment, Working Models, and Relationship Quality in Dating Couples, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 1990, Vol. 58, No. 4, 644-663

Collins, N. L. & Feeney, B. C. (2010). An attachment theoretical perspective on social support dynamics in couples: Normative processes and individual differences. In K. Sullivan & J. Davila (Eds.), Support Processes in Intimate Relationships. Oxford University Press.

Kim, Y. (2005). Emotional and cognitive consequences of adult attachment: The mediating effect of the self. Personality and Individual Differences, 39, 913-923. http://doi.org/b9t5v
Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., & Pereg, D. (2003). Attachment theory and affect regulation: The dynamics, development, and cognitive consequences of attachment-related strategies. Motivation and Emotion, 27, 77-102. http://doi.org/gns

Millings, A., Walsh, J., Hepper, E. G., & O’Brien, M. (2013). Good partner, good parent: Responsiveness mediates the link between romantic attachment and parenting style. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 39, 170-180. DOI: 10.1177/0146167212468333; http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167212468333

Narvaez, D., Panksepp, J., Schore, A., & Gleason, T. (2012). Bowlby’s Environment of Evolutionary Adaptiveness: Recent studies on the interpersonal neurobiology of attachment and emotional development, in Evolution, Early Experience, and Human Development: From Research to Practice and Policy (pp. 31-67). New York: Oxford University Press.

Parke, R. D., & Buriel, R. (1998). Socialization in the family: Ethnic and ecological perspectives. In W. Damon (Ed.), Handbook of Child Psychology, (5th ed). New York: Wiley

Shaver, P. R., & Hazan, C. (1993). Adult romantic attachment: Theory and evidence. In D. Perlman & W. Jones (Eds.), Advances in personal relationships (Vol. 4, pp. 29± 70). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M., & Shemesh-Iron, M. (2010). A behavioral systems perspective on prosocial behavior. In M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), Prosocial motives, emotions, and behavior: The better angels of our nature (pp. 73-91). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Spera, C. (2005). A review of the relationship among parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement. Educational Psychology Review, 17(2), 125-146.