

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS ENTITLED
INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFERENCE
OF THE ATTACHMENT STYLE.
OPTIMIZING INTERVENTIONS

Key words: attachment, internal working models, parenting style, anxiety trait, adult attachment in a couple, anxiety, avoidance, marital adaptation, mother-toddler interaction, Lamaze Childbirth Education.

Chapter 1 of the thesis broadly describes the attachment theory issue (Bowlby,1969) and its key concepts, as well as the framework in which it finds its place in our applicative approach. Inventoried are the main factors that contribute to the formation of a certain attachment style, as well as the way in which these operate on the mother, and mostly on the toddler, in the early stages. Based on this, the concept of internal working models is mentioned (Bowlby, 1988), corresponding to the attachment style, as internalization and encodment of the precocious interaction between toddler and dominant caretaker, these having the role of predicting self-confidence and responsibility and the availability of the significant other, during close lifetime interactions. Later, infantile styles of attachment are presented, as well as those from adult age, with all their characteristics, as resulted from the domain literature. Finally, the history and the current characteristics of a possible optimization method are presented, namely the Lamaze Childbirth Education.

Chapter 2 encompasses the first study of the thesis, its objective being that of exploring direct and moderate links between parental examples perceived by respondent adults and the dimensions of their attachment in a couple, respectively their marital adaptation.

The introductory part presents a series of studies that bond the reported experience of the subjects regarding the parental examples to which they have been exposed with their attachment style.

Methodology.

Participants. For verifying advanced situations in the first study, 106 persons (53 couples), with ages between 22 and 48 years old (the average age being that of 31, 8 years old) have participated, all of them hailing from an urban environment.

Instruments. For collecting data and testing hypotheses a battery task that is relevant to the variables of the study, has been devised: The Inventory for Perceived Parental Rearing Styles-EMBU (Perris, 1980); The Experience in Close Relationship Adult Attachment Questionnaire-ECR (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000); State Trait Anxiety Inventory S.T.A.I. (Spielberger, Gorusch &Lushene, 1964); Dyadic Adjustment Scale-DAS (Spanier, 1976); General Data Questionnaire (devised purposefully for this aim).

Procedure. The respondents were called on the phone or received an email, during which/in which the general objective of the study and its procedure, was explained to them. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. Their partaking in the study was voluntary. The answers to the surveys were collected a few days later, either in pencil-paper form, or electronically, as per the choice of the participants.

Statistical Analysis and Data Interpretation.

Data were processed using the statistical package SPSS 16. After calculating the main statistics (scores and standard deviations from the norm), correlations between variables described in hypotheses were devised, and advanced restraint relations between various variables of the example (using the hierarchical multiple regression analysis) were studied.

Results. The most important conclusions collected from the data analysis are as follows.

As stated, results show that people who have high levels of anxiety as a trait are mostly individuals with a fearful-avoidant/ dismissive attachment styles.

Moreover, in adult age, overprotection is associated with high anxiety and low avoidance, with the significance of a clinging tendency to the partner, and emotional warmth is what makes opening up to our significant other possible and is a premise of a good relationship.

It has further been learned that only the parental model based on giving emotional warmth was significantly associated with elevated levels of satisfaction, respectively dyadic cohesion.

For persons that have had a parental style of giving emotional warmth in their childhood, participating in a personal growth program will decrease the scope of the anxiety as well as the level of avoidance of couple attachment. Conversely, for those subjects that have had a parental style based on rejection, personal growth increases the avoidance levels in a couple.

It has also been noticed that for persons who have personal development, the existence of a rejecting parenting style was associated with a low level of couple satisfaction, while for those who have not participated in such a program, parental rejection was associated with a slightly higher level of dyadic satisfaction. Personal growth amplifies the positive effects of a model based on offering emotional warmth, in a relationship of a future adult.

The same effects were obtained by subjects that have taken a Lamaze Childbirth Education class.

Chapter 3 encompasses the second study of the thesis, its objective being that of exploring the direct and moderate bonds between variables characterizing parents (the dimension of their couple attachment and their marital adjustment) and the characteristic of the main relationship interiorized by their own child (the dimensions of the infant attachment). The investigated moderate variables are represented by psychosocial elements specific to the parents or related to the child; concretely we are speaking of parents “taking a Lamaze Childbirth Education class”, the child’s “dominant caretaker” at the time of the study (the mother or another), respectively the child’s “starting preschool”.

The introductory part partly resumes the theory related to the factors involved in the structuring of the infant attachment styles, mentioning a few studies regarding the influence of parental relationship quality on the child's attachment, and referring to intergenerational transference of attachment styles.

Methodology.

Participants. To verify advanced hypotheses 86 subjects, namely 29 couples and their toddlers, have participated. The adults participating in the study were between 24 and 48 years old (the average age being that of 33,46 years old), all hailing from an urban environment. The toddlers taking part in the study were between 14 and 35 months old (with a average age of 22,15 months). Regarding the participants' selection criteria a convenience sampling elaboration is still involved, as those couples that have permitted researchers to videotape the mother-toddler interaction in their natural environment (their homes) have been extracted from the first study's sampling.

Instruments. The battery task includes: Experience in Close Relationship Adult Attachment Questionnaire-ECR (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000); Dyadic Adjustment Scale-DAS (Spanier, 1976); General Data Questionnaire (devised purposefully for this thesis). In addition to these, another task for diagnosing the child's attachment style, namely Toddler Attachment Sort-TAS-45 (Bimler & Kirkland, 2002) has been used.

Procedure. The respondents were called on the phone or received an email, during which/in which the general objective of the study and its procedure, was explained to them. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. Their partaking in the study was voluntary. The answers to the surveys were collected a few days later, either in pencil-paper form, or electronically, as per the choice of the participants. For the purpose of evaluating their attachment style in their relationship with their mothers, the collection of data on toddlers was achieved through the observational method, followed immediately by the sorting of task TAS-45's item cards. The researcher has observed each mother-toddler dyad during a home visit in the cities of Timisoara and Iasi. The subjects' game has been videotaped.

Statistical Analysis and Data Interpretation.

Data were processed using the statistical package SPSS16. After calculating the main statistics (scores and standard deviations from the norm), correlations between variables described in hypotheses were devised, and advanced restraint relations between various variables of the example (using the hierarchical multiple regression analysis) were studied.

Concretely, it has been noticed that the anxiety dimension of a mother's couple attachment is associated with a high level of cooperation as a toddler's attachment dimension. The decreased level of the avoidance dimension of a father's couple attachment is associated with a high level of the warm, cuddly dimension of a toddler's attachment.

As a significant predictor, in the situation in which the mother declares a high level of dyadic cohesion to be a dimension of her marital adaptation, the toddler will register low scores in the sociability dimension of a toddler's attachment.

Likewise, a high level of maternal dyadic cohesion is associated with a high level of avoidance in a toddler's attachment. A high level of dyadic consensus reported by the mother is associated with a high level of independency adequate to toddler attachment.

For those mothers who have taken the Lamaze Childbirth Education class, a high level of their couple anxiety is associated with a decreased independency of their toddler, while for those dyads in which mothers have not had prenatal education, the association is with an increased independency of toddler attachment.

The respondent subjects affirm that Lamaze Childbirth Education has moderately to greatly aided them in domains such as: pregnancy, playing the parent role, the couple relationship and giving birth.

Finally, toddlers of mothers with high levels of avoidance have low separation anxiety if they are taken care of by someone else besides the mother (grandparents, nanny, other relatives), and a high level of separation anxiety if they are taken care of by the mother. Moreover, should the mother be the main caregiver and have a high level of the avoidance domain of the couple attachment, the toddlers will display demanding and attention seeking behavior, but if they are taken care of by somebody else, they have been through the first separation from the attachment figure (the mother) and they put into practice the interior model of avoidance, which resembles a low-level behavior meant to get attention through provocation, solicitation.

Chapter 4 of the thesis encompasses the third study, qualitative in its nature, centered on describing mother-toddler interaction models, regarding infantile attachment styles. This is an evidently-inductive structure study.

The main objective of the study is to depict in as much detail and as differently as possible the schemes of individual action and mother-toddler interaction, for the different categories of toddler attachment.

Methodology.

Participants. 29 mother-toddler dyads that gave their permission to be videotaped in the game interaction have been used to collect the data. The mothers' age was between 24 and 42 years old, and that of the toddlers between 14 and 35 months old.

Procedure. This study, at its basis, has a previously unseen methodological approach, is qualitative in its nature, and it offers a ground theory perspective (GT) (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) for the treatment of the data collected in the field.

Describing sequentially the collecting data procedure, the researchers have videotaped a number of 29 mother-toddler interactions short films, which took place in the toddler's familiar environment (at the family's home). The parent-child dyad has participated in this interaction by playing a game, which lasted approximately 30 minutes. Through instructions, the researchers have defined 3 stages: "the free game stage"-the mother and the toddler play spontaneously, like they do every day; the "toddler's

frustration” stage- the mother asks the toddler to gather its toys; the “mother`s frustration” stage-the toddler must put together a puzzle without concrete help from the mother (the mother may verbally assist the toddler, she may not touch the pieces).

Method of Treating Information. The short films were then qualitatively analyzed with the help of a special program, ATLAS.ti 6.0, its objective being that of emphasizing certain mother-toddler interaction patterns, for the toddlers that were “diagnosed”¹ as predominately having the same attachment style. The obtained codes were then used in the depiction of the interaction schemes specific to the 3 distinct stages, for each of the 4 attachment styles (a total of 12 schemes, which are largely presented and interpreted in this thesis).

Main Results. In short, it has been shown that in the case of the secure attachment style, for each of the three stages of the semi-structured exercise, the most frequent registered codes refer to synchronized actions, of the stimulus-answer kind, of the two protagonists, the mother and the toddler. The interaction between the two is one which appears to be able to go on incessantly. The mere joy of interacting seems to represent entirely by itself the achieving goal of getting attention, closeness, and of security.

Both in the toddler`s frustration stage, and in the one applied on the mother, the two always maintain a positive attitude, having the experience of the joy of having gone through this process together. The sentiment that comes from observing this type of interaction is one of content interaction and of security.

Regarding the insecure ambivalent attachment style, there is a much richer and more dominant action of the mother. As a structure of the mother-toddler interaction in the free game stage, it was observed that the interaction sequences were short, with numerous disruptions, hesitations, invitations, and contact resuming. Another characteristic of the interaction specific to this attachment style is represented by numerous discordances between the social and psychological level of the communication.

In the toddler`s frustration stage, the two protagonists seem to be acting separately so as to satisfy the initial needs of the other, which they realize relatively until the end of the sequence.

In the mother`s frustration stage, it was noticed that there was a relative maintainability of the contact between the two protagonists, the ambivalent element being the quantity of the tension/fight between the two for the primacy of the need.

Regarding the insecure avoidant attachment style, a high balance between the relational space occupied by the actions of the two actors was noticed. In the free game stage, the two maintain contact, with a low level of intimacy, set this way by concentrating attention on an object foreign to the relationship, which may be the toy or even an unfamiliar person!

The same strategy remains true in the toddler`s frustration stage, as well, when its dominant reaction is that of avoiding the mother, but wants to cooperate with her as well. Practically, they maintain the relationship on a psychological level, through actions which, on a social level, express “Fight”/dissonance. It may be said that, in this stage, maintaining contact/the relationship on a

psychological level is conditioned by physical distance! The observations related to the mother's frustration stage show that, in comparison with all the other stages of the exercise applied to the toddlers with avoidant attachment, but also relative to the other attachment styles, the interaction is the poorest.

Regarding the fourth attachment style, the disorganized attachment, the absence of a coherent strategy is the main characteristic of the interaction between these toddlers and their mothers, in all of the three stages of the semi-structured observation. These toddlers alternatively exhibit strategies that are specific to the secure, ambivalent, and avoidant attachment styles. The conclusion is that, like in the case of the other attachment styles, these toddlers seek also the attention of the mother, the difference being that in this instance the mother's response is so inconsistent, that they try to change or to briefly repeat all the possible strategies for its captivation.

Chapter 5 encompasses the general conclusions of this thesis. These are theoretical and applicative in their nature.

The theoretical conclusions may be mentioned: the necessity of broadening the batch of toddler participants, on which to apply the relatively recent task of evaluating the infant attachment, TAS-45 (Kirkland, 2007), for a better depiction and verification of the psychometric qualities, and for the acclimatization on the autochthonous population; the extensions of the number of dyads investigated for the depiction of the mother-toddler interaction schemes.

In the applicative conclusions category, recommending that the relationship or family counseling should be focused on the reduction of the avoidance domain of the couple attachment; recommending that the mother's awareness on the importance of their informational availability behavior should be raised, may be mentioned. A series of conclusions refers to Lamaze Childbirth Education. The most important conclusion is that of initially performing a screening of the participants' attachment styles, as well as one of their parental models, and that of developing a method hallmark that should raise their awareness level on the effects of the behavior involved in avoidant couple attachment on the lowering of the capability of soothing their child (warm and cuddly attachment style). As a result of the screening, mothers with high anxiety of the attachment, may be advised to get counseling.

In the interventions of optimizing the security level of infant attachment style category, we may also include the usage of the interaction schemes elaborated in the last study of this thesis. As shown on this level also, the elaboration of some postnatal and prenatal classes (or the devising of some themes that are specific to the Lamaze Childbirth Education) is considered to be especially useful, although even individual usage may be considered.

Among everything hitherto mentioned, it is considered that this thesis adds theoretical significance, completing the attachment domain literature, but at the same time having a powerful applicative accent, due to its being able to use the interaction schemes elaborated here, in order to optimize the mother-toddler security level, even in their familiar environment, namely their homes.

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