

Investigating the Relationship between Attachment Styles and Child's Defensive Styles

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ABSTRACT

The present research has been conducted with the aim of investigating the predictive role of mother's attachment styles on child's defensive styles in students in Eghlid. The research method was correlation and the desired population was all male and female high school students that 120 students along with their mothers were selected using stage cluster sampling method. The research tool includes Collins and Read attachment styles and defensive styles questionnaires (DSQ). Pearson correlation coefficient, and simultaneous multiple regression were used to analyze the data. The results showed that developed styles have significant relationship with secure and ambivalent attachment, developed defensive style with secure and avoidant attachment styles and psychologically abused defensive styles with avoidant attachment style. Also ambivalent attachment style had the ability to predict undeveloped defensive style, and secure attachment style also has the ability to predict the developed defensive style. But ambivalent attachment style is able to predict the psychologically abused defensive style.

Key Words: Attachment Styles, Defensive Styles, Mother, Child

Introduction

Undoubtedly, family and the emotional environment within it is the first founder of personality, values and intellectual criteria, which plays an important role in determining the destiny and policy style of one's future life, and one's morality, well-being and mental health to a large extent depend on it. The child's reaction to his/her environment is influenced by the social, cultural and group norms in which he/she has developed. Since the family itself is a social unit and social values and criteria are connected to the child through it, as a mediator in terms of social environment it is very important to the child, in other words, the family has a great impact on determining his/her fate and behavior (Ahadi and Mohseni, 2001).

In this regard, Bowlby (1969) described the process of the formation of infant and mother attachment and showed how the attachment feelings and behaviors system brings the infant closer to the mother and away from danger, and separation from the mother leads to the child's anxiety and helplessness. Attachment is the product of a person's real experiences about sensitivity, responsiveness, active and regular presence of the mother during childhood and adolescence. A child, who is unable to establish an accurate connection to others, has attachment disorders. Attachment disorder has high correlation with unacceptable behaviors in society, such as violent behaviors, as well as with psychological pathology in adulthood. Prominent psychologists such as Freud, Erikson, Piaget, and Skinner believe that the child grows in interaction with his/her environment. The child's first contact with the environment is with his/her parents, and the parents are a source of nourishment, love and comfort for him/her. The quality of this interaction is the main background for the formation of a sense of security in the child, which has various consequences (Khanjani, 1999). Mothers with secure attachments more than insecure mothers are warm, supportive, and sensitive and help more their children in solving problems. By intervening in the relationship between

mother and child attachment, how close and intimate relationships and the ways the child faces stressful life events changes, his/her sense of ability increases, his/her tension decreases and his/her pattern in attachment relationship changes. Researchers have placed great emphasis on the impact of childhood attachment relationships (Riggs and Jacobvitz, 2002) and childhood care practice. Maternal behavior and the reactions of the mother are influenced by her attachment style. Attachment styles are operational patterns that are transferred from caregivers to children, and the type of mother-child relationship is influenced by these patterns. Thus, attachment experiences in childhood have a profound effect on personality development and subsequent attachment relationships in life. In fact, the child's attachment behavior gradually emerges during the normal development, to ensure the emotional relationship between an adult and another adult, and the person's experiences with attachment figures during the undeveloped years (childhood and adolescence periods) determine his/her behavior path and attachment patterns. Thus, a person's emotional relationships throughout life depend on how attachment behavior develops within his/her personality (Dadsetan, 2003). Therefore, attachment theory is a process theory and does not consider attachment disorders due to the existence of a particular experience alone in the past. On the other hand, in recent years, researchers in investigating maternal behavior and attachment style have placed great emphasis on personality traits and the expression of emotion (Adam, Gunnar and Tanaka, 2004). Therefore, it seems that in examining the components of maternal behavior, in addition to the mother's attachment style, her personality traits should also be examined. Many researchers in the field of mother-child relationship have conducted researches by different research methods. But investigating these researches does not confront us with uniform and convergence findings. Therefore, through entering the field of attachment and personality traits of mothers, we intend to further examine their children's defensive styles. The researches conducted in Iran in the field of attachment have been mostly to examine the relationship between child attachment and other variables, among which the share of research about the relationship between mother and child attachment is not that much important (Razzaqi et al., 2005). The researchers showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between mothers' ambivalent insecure attachment and separation anxiety disorder in children. On the other hand, there is a significant and negative relationship between mothers' secure attachment and separation anxiety disorder in children. Therefore, in this research, mothers with insecure attachment (ambivalent and avoidant) in their emotional expression showed instability, irritability, mood swing and insensitivity to others. Nervous and unbalanced behavior and mood, restlessness, impulsivity, emotional irritability, shortage of psychological activity, attention seeking, feelings of boredom or failure, feelings of competition, fear of losing power had more relationship with insecure attachment of mothers and had a higher ratio of predicting power in the anxiety of children. Zolfaghari Motlagh et al. (2008) showed that the intervention based on attachment and the management training of parents have been able to reduce the severity of separation anxiety symptoms in children statistically. However, there are very little researches regarding the attachment style and the characteristics of the mother's personality and its effect on children's defensive styles, so the present research is a step, although small, to state this fundamental question that whether the attachment of mother can predict the child's defensive styles?

Research Theoretical Foundations

Defensive Mechanisms

The knowledge of psychology, in line with its goals of discovering and compiling the laws governing human behavior, has revealed measures that are used in various situations to adapt and defend itself, and it is referred as defensive mechanisms. Familiarity with these mechanisms will give us the opportunity to analyze human behavior in famous cases and find a logical justification for such behaviors. Psychological defenses or defensive mechanisms are any mechanism to escape from real emotions. For this reason, defense which has the nature of self-deception, becomes self-destructive identity in pathological cases and destroys internal and external realities (Shojaei Razavi, 2006).

Davanloo (1990) divides defenses into three categories: repressive, obsessive, and regressive. Repressive defenses place painful thoughts and feelings outside the realm of consciousness and awareness. Suppression, reverse reaction, and displacement can be included in this category. Obsessive defenses are

that group of defensive mechanisms that isolate emotions from cognition, such as rationalization, reasoning, and isolation. Also in regressive defenses the person uses childish and highly uncompromising methods for controlling anxious emotions. Projecting, introjections, transforming, acting out, and thoughts are some of these defenses. One of the most famous researchers about defenses divides them into narcissistic, immature, neurotic and mature categories (Ghorbani, 2003).

Attachment

Bowlby (1982; quoted by Edwards, 2002) has conceptualized attachment as a fundamental understanding of the relationship between the infant and his/her parents that affects subsequent development, the formation of one's identity and personality. He believes that the human child, like the child of animals, has a set of innate behaviors that help keep the parent close to him/her and increase the likelihood that the child will be safe from danger. Contact with the mother also guarantees that the child will be nourished, but Bowlby cautiously stated that nutrition is not the basis of the child's attachment to the mother, but the attachment bond itself has a strong biological basis that can be better received in the evolutionary context, the context in which the survival of the species is very important; in other words, the relationship between the infant and the mother begins as a series of innate symptoms that draw the mother towards the infant. Over time, an intimate emotional bond is created, which is supported by new cognitive and emotional abilities, as well as the history of intimate and receptive care (Burke 2003).

In attachment theory, Bowlby, coordinated with his predecessors, believes in the existence of primary and essential needs for satisfaction (for example, the need for nutrition). Nevertheless, he emphasizes the point that in addition to the needs that have so far been identified as the primary needs of the human being, there is another need that has hitherto been considered secondary, and this need is the need for attachment. The uniqueness and novelty of the concept of attachment in the Bowlby's system, while relying on experimentation, expresses the hypothesis that the need for attachment is also primary. That is, it has not been derived from any other need and is a basic need for personality development. Thus, Bowlby distances from Freud, for whom needs are only bodily needs, because in Freud's view, the child's attachment is a secondary driver that relies on the primary need of nutrition (Mansour and Dadsetan, 1997).

Attachment behavior is a compromising behavior that has vital usefulness. Bowlby realized that the attachment system, as one of the behavioral systems, includes an interconnected set of exploration, care, and mating, and has been designed for survival and reproduction. From a more external point of view, the purpose of this system is to regulate behaviors designed to create stability or maintain contact with an attached person; from the point of view of the attached person, the goal of the system is to "feel safe" (Wilkinson, 2004). According to Bowlby, the search for proximity (including protest against separation) is the basis of a safety base and protects the child from dangers.

There are various methods for assessing child and adult attachment, which in the following, the two methods of assessing attachment in childhood and the four methods of assessing attachment in adulthood are mentioned.

Secure Attachment

Children whose attachment style towards caregiver is safe compose the majority of children. They consider their attachment figure as a confident haven for returning to the caregiver in critical conditions, as well as a safe base for exploring in the environment. There is a balance between seeking proximity with the caregiver and exploring in the environment. Usually, these children do not show separation anxiety in the absence of the mother and consider the caregiver as an effective factor for controlling emotions during reunions. Parents of secure children are generally more accessible, responsive, and sensitive to their children's feelings and needs than parents of insecure children. Secure children learn that the attachment figure is available and responsive when needed (Belsky and Cassidy, 1994; quoting by Levy et al., 1998).

Armsden and Greenberg (1987) have stated that secure adolescents are satisfied with their lives, seek social support, and give less nervous responses to the stressful events of the environment. They are able to make decision against issues and problems and the formation of identity is done easier in them.

Avoidant Insecure Attachment

The avoidant insecure class includes a considerable minority; these children have the least intimate and physical interactions with their caregiver, do not show the attachment, and concern figure after separation, are indifferent, and in reuniting with their caregivers avoid him/her. Parents of avoidant children are often rejecting, withdrawn, and introverted and do not feel comfortable interacting with the child. They often give up when their child needs them. Avoidant children learn that the efforts for searching proximity with the caregiver are futile and are ignored. This behavioral pattern is a kind of defensive mechanism against the future rejections of caregiver to reduce emotional arousal (Belsky and Cassidy, 1994; quoted by Levy et al., 1998).

Resistant Insecure Attachment

These children seek closeness to the mother before separation and often do not explore in the environment. And when their mother returns, they show anger, hostile and sometimes beatings behaviors. Many of them continue to cry even after lifting and they cannot be easily calmed. Researches conducted about the parents of these children have shown that when the child's words and eyes are on the parents, the parents have little interaction with him/her, but when the child wants communication, they avoid interaction. The behavior of these parents is very unstable and inconsistent (Belsky, 1984; Louise Fring, 1989; quoted by Wilkinson, 2004).

Ambivalent Insecure Attachment

Ambivalent insecure children fail when exploring in the environment, show extreme anxiety and concern after separation, and have adhesive behaviors along with aggression toward the caregiver during the reunion. The parents of ambivalent children pay more attention to their own needs and their behaviors towards the child are often uninvited and inconsistent. Such parents are more confused, distracted, depressed, and bad-mouthed, perhaps because they are still engaged in the lack of their attachment figure or their insecure attachment. Ambivalent children learn that attachment figure responses are incoherent, so the child maintains closeness and proximity, and by doing childish actions, forces parents to pay attention to him/her. In these families, the roles are reversed, the child behaves like a parent, and the mother, because of a need for love, threatens the child to leave in order to reinforce the child's approximating behaviors (Belsky and Cassidy, 1994; quoting by Levy et al., 1998).

Attachment in Adolescence and Youth

According to Bowlby's hypotheses, attachment behavior remains stable throughout life- from the cradle to the grave. Various studies have shown attachment behavior in school-age children, adolescents, and adults. The students of universities who leave their paternal home for the first time achieve good social adjustment, if their primary attachment with their caregivers is accompanied by a sense of security. Low self-esteem level, improper social relationships, and emotional vulnerability against tension are associated with attachment lacking the sense of sufficient security in the first year of life. And especially, if attachment to parents is weak, it also appears to other people such as teachers, close relatives, mentors or older siblings. These attached people appear in the role of parents and may have been the person's counselor and even therapist. These people are considered a safe source from which one gains self-confidence by trusting in them and feels him/herself capable to tolerate outside world. In this way, the issue of new attachment causes the emergence of a corrective emotional experience (Kaplan and Zadok, 1991; quoting by Poor Afkari, 1994). Einsworth (1989; quoting by Fanny and Noler, 1996) designed the feature of attachment relationships throughout the life cycle and considered attachment relationships to be a special form of loving relationship. The relationship that exists to the end is based on the desire to be close to a partner (or spouse) who seems to be someone who cannot be replaced by anyone else. In order

for adolescents to be able to truly become adults and their growing up is not limited to physical aspect, they must gradually be able to become independent of their parents, adapt themselves to physical maturity, and establish cooperative and professional relationships with their peers. In the process of coping with all of these issues, adolescents should be able to find a philosophy for life and achieve a sense of identity, and adolescents before being able to give up their childhood dependence successfully, should know to some extent who they are, where they are going, and to reach the place they are going, what facilities do they have?

Research Method

According to the research purpose, this research is of correlation type. The statistical population includes all high school students in the city of Eghlid who are studying in the academic year of 2013-2014, whose number is 1,421, including 729 female students and 692 male students. Also, the mothers of these students are considered in the statistical population. The statistical sample of this research, using stage cluster sampling, was considered 120 students (and 120 mothers) including 60 female students and 60 male students. It should be mentioned that the mothers of these students also participated in this research as sample.

Data Collection Tool

Collins and Read Attachment Styles Questionnaire

The Adult Attachment Scale was first prepared in 1990 by Collins and Read and revised in 1996. The theoretical basis of this test is attachment theory. The Adult Attachment Scale, which examines how a person evaluates his/her communication skills and intimate relationship style, and includes self-assessment of relationship-building skills and self-description of the method of attachment relationships formation to close attachment figures, consists of 18 data that is assessed by marking on a 5-degree scale (of Likert's type) which is formed from "It does not correspond to my characteristics in any way: (1)", to "It corresponds to my characteristics: (5)". It evaluates the three types of attachment styles of secure, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent. For scoring the answers of 1 to 5, scores of 0 to 4 are considered, respectively, unless in cases that the scores are inverse (Collins, 1994, quoting from Pakdaman 2001). Scoring: According to the instruction of the questionnaire, 6 items related to each subscale is specified. Considering that in each case of every sentence in the answer sheet, the subject has marked on which circle, his/her score is specified for each subscale. Collins obtained the reliability of this test for each one of the attachment style types using the Cronbach's alpha method as 0.82 for secure attachment style, 0.80 for avoidant attachment style, and 0.83 for anxious-ambivalent attachment style, respectively (Pakdaman, 2001). Arefi et al. (2007) have reported the reliability of this test using test-retest as a correlation between two performances for secure attachment style as 0.53, avoidant attachment style as 0.40 and anxious-ambivalent attachment style as 0.70.

Defensive Styles Questionnaire

The Psychological Defensive Styles Questionnaire was first compiled by Band et al. in 1983 that consisted of 88 articles and examined 24 defensive mechanisms. Then, by factor analysis, he was able to identify 4 factors at the level of defensive styles from each other. By revising this tool in 1986, he was able to separate and name four factors again.

- 1- Uncompromised practical patterns
- 2- Defenses of distorting the mental image
- 3- Self-sacrificing defenses
- 4- Compromised defenses (quoted from Heidari Nasab, 2007).

To modify the previous questionnaire, Andrews et al. considered numerous criteria to evaluate the construct validity and the criterion validity and the reliability of each article.

Statistical Data Analysis Method

In the present research, data analysis was performed based on descriptive statistics and inferential statistics using SPSS software version 18. Descriptive statistics was used to categorize information, form tables, and calculate the mean and standard deviation. At the level of inferential statistics, according to the research hypotheses, step-by-step multiple regression, Pearson correlation coefficient and independent t-test were used.

Results

Demographic Information of Sample People

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Mother's Job and the Children's Order of Birth

Mother's Job	Frequency	Percentage
Housewife	106	88.3
Employed	14	11.7
Total	120	100
Children's Order of Birth	Frequency	Percentage
First	27	22.5
Second	26	21.7
Third	26	21.7
Fourth and Above	41	44.1
Total	120	100

Descriptive Findings

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Defensive Styles and Attachment Styles

Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation
Undeveloped	127.90	19.83
Developed	44.90	8.23
Psychologically Abused	45.49	8.80
Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation
Secure Attachment	11.97	2.07
Avoidant Attachment	12.50	3.23
Ambivalent Attachment	10.07	4.56

It is observed that avoidant attachment has the highest mean and ambivalent attachment has the lowest mean.

Inferential Findings

Question 1: Is there a relationship between mother attachment styles and child's defensive styles?

In order to investigate this question, the statistical method of Pearson correlation coefficient was used. The results have been presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Matrix of Pearson Correlation between Mother's Attachment Styles and Child's Defensive Styles

Components	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Secure Attachment	1					
2. Avoidant Attachment	0.01	1				
3. Ambivalent Attachment	0.03	0.18*	1			
4. Undeveloped	-0.18*	-0.10	0.20*	1		
5. Developed	0.23**	0.21*	0.04	0.13	1	
6. Psychologically Abused	0.05	0.18*	-0.13	0.21*	-0.42**	1

It is observed in Table 3 that:

Undeveloped defensive style has a positive and significant relationship with ambivalent attachment style and has a negative and significant relationship with secure attachment style. Also, no significant relationship was observed with avoidant attachment.

Developed defensive style has a positive and significant relationship with avoidant attachment style and secure attachment style. Also, no significant relationship was observed with ambivalent attachment style. The psychologically abused defensive style has a positive and significant relationship with the avoidant attachment style. Also, no significant relationships were observed with ambivalent attachment style and secure attachment style.

Question 2: Can the mother's attachment styles predict the child's defensive styles?

In order to investigate this question, the statistical method of simultaneous multiple regression was used and the results obtained from this investigation have been presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Simultaneous Regression to Determine the Ratio of Predicting Personality Traits and Mother's Attachment Styles on the Developed Defensive Style

Criterion	Predicting Variable	R	R ²	F	P	B Coefficient	Beta Coefficient	t	Significance Level
Developed Defensive Style	Secure Attachment	0.50	0.25	4.75	0.001	0.83	0.21	2.38	0.02
	Avoidant Attachment					0.21	0.08	0.87	NS
	Anxiety Attachment					-0.05	-0.03	0.30	NS

The regression was performed by simultaneous method. It is observed that mother's secure attachment style has a significant linear relationship with the child's developed defensive style, due to $F=4.75$, $R^2=0.25$. This relationship indicates that 25% of the variance of developed defensive style is explained by this attachment style and personality trait. Also, the other two attachment styles are not able to predict the developed defensive style in these students.

Question 3: Is there a difference between the defensive styles of male and female students?

Independent t-test was used to investigate this question. The results have been presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Independent T-Test to Determine the Difference between Defensive Styles in Male and Female Students

Defensive Styles	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
Undeveloped	Boy	60	129.54	21.11	1.38	118	NS
	Girl	60	124.63	16.75			
Developed	Boy	60	44.54	7.71	0.64	118	NS
	Girl	60	45.63	9.27			
Psychologically Abused	Boy	60	46.05	9.35	1.05	118	NS
	Girl	60	44.38	7.57			

It is observed that there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of the mean of defensive styles.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research showed that there is a relationship between mother's attachment styles and child's defensive styles; the statistical method of Pearson correlation coefficient was used for investigation. According to the results, it is observed that undeveloped defensive style has a positive and significant relationship with ambivalent attachment style and has a negative and significant relationship with secure attachment style. Developed defensive style has a positive and significant relationship with avoidant attachment style and secure attachment style. Psychological abused defensive style has a positive and significance relationship with avoidant attachment style. This finding is consistent with the researches of Bagheri et al. (2013), Besharat (2012), Hadinejad (2003), Besharat (2001), Greenberg and McLaughlin (1998), Rice et al. (1997), and Kobak et al. (1993).

Attachment has been conceptualized as a fundamental understanding of the relationship between the child and the parents, especially the mother, which affects the subsequent development, the formation of the child's identity and personality. Mothers, who have a secure attachment style, are satisfied with their lives, give less nervous responses to the stressful events of environment, and are able to make decisions against issues and problems. These characteristics in mothers cause the creation of developed mechanisms in

their children. In contrast, people with avoidant insecure attachment have the least intimate and physical interactions with those around them, are indifferent, are often repulsive, withdrawn, and introverted and do not feel comfortable interacting with their children. They often withdraw when their children need them. This pattern of behavior creates a kind of defensive mechanism against future rejections in children and causes children to turn to undeveloped and psychologically abused mechanisms. Mother's attachment styles can also predict the child's defensive styles; the statistical method of simultaneous multiple regression was used for investigation and the obtained results showed that 10% of the variance of the undeveloped defensive style is explained by anxiety attachment style. Also, the other two attachment styles and personality traits are not able to predict the undeveloped defensive style in these students; 25% of the variance of the developed defensive style is explained by secure attachment style and neurotic personality trait. Also, the other two attachment styles and other personality traits are not able to predict the developed defensive style in these students; 9% of the variance of the psychologically abused defensive style is explained by the anxiety attachment style and the personality trait of having conscience. Also, the other two attachment styles and other personality traits are not able to predict the psychologically abused defensive style in these students. This finding is consistent with the researches of Bagheri et al. (2013), Kachuei et al. (2012), Besharat (2012), Besharat (2001), Ahadi et al. (2008), Greenberg and McLaughlin (1998), Rice et al. (1997), and Kobak et al. (1993).

According to the results of the study, there is a difference between the defensive styles of male and female students; independent t-test was used for investigation. The results showed that no significant difference was observed between male and female students in terms of the mean of defensive styles. This finding is consistent with the research of Henrikson et al. (1977, quoted by Afzali 2008).

Defensive mechanisms are learned from childhood and eventually become habitual in adulthood. Defensive mechanisms are responsible for protecting me in facing with various forms of anxiety, and under the influence of various personality structures, may have normal or abnormal actions. The purpose of these defensive styles and mechanisms is to neutralize the anxiety associated with my contradictions and threats. Considering that the students of the present research sample are in the same group in terms of socio-cultural and economic aspects, and the training cultural method and educational environment in the sample is almost similar, there are many factors, regardless of gender, that affect on individuals' defensive styles, including family performance and mother's characteristics and parenting style, so no significant difference was observed between male and female students in terms of the styles they use.

By informing and enlightening families and mothers, counselors, psychologists, researchers and those involved about the importance of mother's attachment style as one of the most important factors affecting the development of personality and the mental health of children (because a secure attachment style prevents unhealthy growth of the child) appropriate solutions and trainings can be adopted to increase parental sensitivity and responsibility; also, by using therapeutic interventions, the emergence of complications due to mother's insecure attachment, can be prevented and also the mental, behavioral and emotional health of the child can be promoted so that he/she can be recognized and live as an independent and useful person in society.

Considering that the basis and foundation of attachment styles is formed during infancy and also people's attachment style type affects personality and the life of their adulthood; therefore, parents, especially mothers, are advised to be taught or learn the pattern of raising a child in a secure attachment style so that they raise their children in a secure attachment way.

Also, considering the importance of attachment quality in people's well-being, the following research lines can be drawn for the future: investigating the relationship between attachment and various components of health psychology such as happiness, hope, quality of life, creativity and so on.

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