

Are Childhood Experiences with Parents Linked to Feelings in Romantic Relationships During Adulthood?

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Introduction

During the last three decades, attachment theory has been one of the most influential theories of social-emotional development in modern psychology stimulating a great amount of research in the fields of developmental, clinical and social psychology (Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Meyer & Pilkonis, 2001; Mikulincer & Florian, 1999). Its contribution rests in the fact that it has provided a broad and deep understanding of personality processes and human development and interactions in childhood and adulthood. Moreover, it has demonstrated that attachment behavior is a major component of the human behavioral equip-

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ment throughout life, and that early experience plays a determinative role in the emergence and organization of secure-base behavior (Posada et al., 1999).

Hypothesis

Given the research that has been documented regarding adult attachment theory, the hypothesis of this study is that a sample of intelligent graduate students in a university will demonstrate the same interactional dynamics in their relationships and, more precisely, they will exhibit consistency between their childhood attachment patterns and their romantic attachment styles in adulthood. The main aim of this study is to investigate whether people's adult romantic attachment styles reflect their early attachment experiences with mother and father. More specifically, the study aims to explore: 1) whether there are any different gender patterns in the interrelationship of childhood attachment styles and adult romantic attachment, 2) whether there are any significant correlations between the characteristics of an individual's paternal attachment style or maternal attachment style and the way he or she perceives intimate relationships. It is very likely that women with a very controlling father or mother might experience anxiety in intimate relationships. Likewise, people who lacked care from their parents and whose emotional needs were not satisfactorily met might also exhibit more anxiety and avoidance in their close romantic relationships. Furthermore, individuals who lacked in care and control from their parents would be expected to be very insecure in their romantic relationships and to experience a lot of anxiety.

In this study, it is expected that individuals who classify themselves as having been securely attached to their caregivers and describe their childhood relationships in more positive terms than not (they recall their relationship with their caregivers as warm, accepting, and their caregivers as sensitive and dependable) also

have relatively more positive working models regarding romantic relationships. Such individuals will also be more confident about trusting and depending on their partner, and will feel comfortable (rather than anxious or avoidant) being in an intimate relationship. Adults who classify themselves as having been insecure-avoidant children (they don't recall much physical contact and affection from their caregivers and they remember them being cold, distant and rejecting) are expected to maintain the same attachment style in their romantic relationships and to have more negative schemata about intimate relationships. More specifically, they are expected to report that they feel less comfortable and anxious when someone gets too close, that they have difficulties in trusting their intimate partners, and that they don't allow themselves to depend on them. Finally, adults who classify themselves as having been insecure-resistant/ambivalent children (they remember their caregivers sometimes loving and responsive but other times too preoccupied to respond) are expected to exhibit preoccupation that their partners don't really love them or that their partners might abandon them and that their desire to be very close scares people away.

Attachment Theory

The origins of the theory lie in the work of the British psychoanalyst John Bowlby and the Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). Its developmental history begins in the 1930s with Bowlby's focus on the link between maternal deprivation and Ainsworth's interest in security theory. Bowlby framed the basic lines of the theory regarding a child's bond to the mother and its distraction through separation, deprivation, and bereavement; Ainsworth expanded the theory by adding the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world and as a haven of safety. Furthermore, she set forth the concept of maternal sensitivity to infant signals and emphasized that cooperating with

ongoing behavior, accessibility, and acceptance are important aspects of infant care that significantly influence the development of infant-mother attachment patterns (Bretherton, 1992). More specifically, attachment theory proposed that a baby's attachment occurred through a repertoire of genetically based behaviors that focused on the principal caregiver, usually the mother. This cluster of behaviors included crying, sucking, smiling, clinging and following - the last two were considered by Bowlby as the most prevalent. These behaviors were activated and terminated in the beginning independently, before an attachment was developed, but later as organized together towards the attachment figure (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). Ainsworth observed that various indications that an attachment had clearly developed included distress and following when separation occurred and expressions of greeting when mother returned from an absence. She also demonstrated that there was an association between the maternal sensitivity and the infant's attachment behavior, by using the Strange Situation (a baby and its mother play together in a room and there are two conditions: in the first condition the mother is signaled to leave the baby alone and in the second condition to leave the baby with a female research assistant; what is important is the baby's response when the mother leaves, the separation, and when she returns, the reunion), a twenty-minute procedure that was developed to examine the interplay between attachment and exploration in a controlled laboratory setting (Fraley & Spieker, 2003).

Observations by Bowlby and Ainsworth, consistent with the above, (Hazan & Diamond, 2000) proposed that attachments have four defining features that are evident in the behaviors directed toward an attachment figure: seeking and maintaining physical proximity (proximity maintenance), seeking comfort or aid when needed (safe haven), experiencing distress on expected prolonged separations (separation distress), and relying on the attachment figure as a base of security from which to engage in

exploratory and nonattachment activities (secure base). Based on how these features are expressed Bowlby and Ainsworth distinguished three major patterns of attachment in infancy: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-resistant/ambivalent. According to this classification (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) in the cases in which mothers were maintaining close physical contact with their baby and were sensitively, consistently, and appropriately responsive to the baby's signals there was a secure mother-infant attachment. Hence, secure babies were more confident in the mother's availability; they responded positively to being picked up and being put down by the mother, and they greeted her with a positive gesture when she returned. They also sought proximity and interaction on reunion and, overall, tended to be more bound to turn to exploration away from their mother when they were left alone in the room. On the other hand, insecure-avoidant babies demonstrated difficulties in trusting their mother and their reunions were very hard. They turned away from their mother, refused to look at her, and generally avoided her. Insecure-resistant babies kept crying even after their mother returned in the room. If she tried to pick them up they resisted and pushed away. In addition, they would show their ambivalence by kicking or hitting her. Ainsworth and Bowlby's analysis showed that insecure infants tended to have been rejected by their mother during the first year, when they sought physical contact and that their mother was less responsive to their signals (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Overall, insecure avoidant and insecure resistant babies had a less harmonious relationship with their mother at home as opposed to secure infants. As Ainsworth and Bowlby (in Fraley & Spieker, 2003) suggested, "[A]n infant's representations of the availability and responsiveness of its attachment figures are fairly accurate reflections of its attachment history" (p. 388). Consequently, early experience has a very strong effect on the molding and formation of a person's personality and more precisely of a person's beliefs and expectations regarding future relationships. A child that receives emotional feedback from care-

givers who are warm, responsive, and consistently available feels that he or she can depend on others in the future when needed. Prospectively, he or she is more likely to initiate warm and social interactions with other people. On the contrary, a child that has been experiencing rejection, disapproval and whose caregivers are cold, unpredictable or insensitive learns not to count on others. Hence, it is more difficult for him or her to develop trusting relationships in the future.

Parental Styles

The role of parenting in children's socioemotional and cognitive development has been one of the central issues in developmental and clinical research. Moreover, it has been found that, in most cultures, parental attitudes and behaviors towards the child might have a long-term impact on parent-child relationships and the child's (mal)adaptive functioning (Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000). Baumrind (1971) proposed three parental styles for both mothers and fathers: permissive, authoritarian (low in warmth and care, and high in control), and authoritative (high in control and high in warmth). These parental styles are conceptualized in terms of two dimensions labeled *warmth* and *control*. According to her theory, the permissive style is high in warmth, care and affection, and low in control. More precisely, permissive parents behave in an accepting and affirmative manner towards the child's impulses, desires, and actions. They consult with the child and provide explanations for family rules. In addition, they allow the child to regulate his or her own activities as much as possible, avoid the exercise of control, provide a lot of care and affection, do not encourage the child to obey externally defined standards, and attempt to use reason rather than overt power to accomplish their ends. On the contrary, the authoritarian parental style is low in warmth and care, and high in control. Hence, authoritarian parents shape, control, and evaluate the child's behavior and attitudes in accordance with a set of standards that are formulated by

a higher authority. Thus, they value obedience as a virtue and favor punitive measures to discipline the child's actions and beliefs. They strongly share values such as respect for authority, respect for work, and respect for the preservation of order and traditional structure. Furthermore, they do not encourage verbal and physical affection. Finally, the authoritative parental style is, according to Baumrind (1971), the optimal parental style as it is high in control and high in warmth. Authoritative parents direct the child's activities but in a rational issue-oriented way. They encourage verbal and physical contact and share with the child the reasoning behind their policy. In addition, they value expressive attributes as well as both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity. In other words, authoritative parents give affection and tenderness to the child and at the same time they empower his or her need for independency. Therefore, they exert firm control at points of parent-child divergence, but do not constrain the child. Authoritative parents affirm the child's qualities, but also set standards for future conduct.

Baumrind (1971) reported that children of parents with a permissive style, characterized as warm and less apt to employ punishment, tend to lack self-reliance and inquisitiveness. Authoritarian parents, who control through harsh punishment, tend to produce children who are discontent, withdrawn, and distrustful. In Baumrind's opinion, the ideal parent is one who exerts a high degree of control but encourages the child's striving for autonomy in appropriate areas. Children raised in this environment, termed authoritative, tend to be self-reliant, self-controlled, and inquisitive, and report high-esteem (Ferrari & Olivette, 1993). Scientific literature (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005; Shaw et al., 2003; Lopez & Hsu, 2002) has revealed that the effects of perceived parental attitudes in childhood play a great role in the molding of an individual's personality and moreover in the way that individual perceives intimate relationships. According to Fox, Platz and Bentley (1995), in a stable environ-

ment, early attachment styles tend to prevail in future relationships. Furthermore, these attachment styles are also reflected in the relationship between the individual and his or her own child in adulthood. Several studies suggest that the caregivers' perceptions of their own bonding experiences are connected with the quality of the child-caregiver attachment.

Adult Romantic Attachment

Research (Cassidy, 2000; Collins & Freeney, 2000; Elliot & Reis, 2003; Freeney & Noller, 1990; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002; Tolmacz et al., 2004; Waters, 2004) has showed that early behavior patterns shape patterns of beliefs about adult relationships and that infant attachment affects relationship attitudes and behavior between intimate partners. The theory of adult romantic attachment was originally developed by Hazan and Shaver in the 1980s (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). According to their theory romantic love is conceptualized as an attachment process that follows the same sequence of steps and results as infant-parent attachment. This conceptualization of romantic love provided by attachment theory includes negative and positive emotions such as fear of intimacy, jealousy, caring and trust. Moreover, the attachment framework deals with separation and loss and offers an explanation of how loneliness and love are related. Finally, it demonstrates how adult romantic love is linked with socio-emotional processes that are evident in infants. Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested that Ainsworth's three attachment behavioral patterns might also characterize adults' feelings regarding their romantic relationships. This notion was based on the fact that the emotional and behavioral dynamics of infant-caregiver relationships and adult romantic relationships are governed by the same biological system which is pre-programmed to promote safety and survival. Hence, romantic relationships exhibit similar dynamics, emotions and behaviors to the

ones that are prevalent in infant-parent relationships. Adults feel safer and more secure when their partner is accessible and responsive and they may use him or her as a source of comfort, protection and as a secure base for further exploration. Furthermore, individual differences in adult attachment behavior are reflections of the expectations and beliefs people have formed about themselves and their close relationships on the basis of their attachment histories. These expectations and beliefs are rather stable and may be reflections of early attachment styles (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Attachment theory suggests that the child learns to regulate his or her future behavior according to the signals he or she gets from the significant others. These signals influence the formation of the schemata a child develops regarding relationships and if, for example, a child has developed secure schemata of attachment, he or she will be more confident to apply this knowledge in other relationships and, more precisely, in romantic relationships. If the child has an insecure schema about attachments, then he or she will more likely maintain a more reserved or anxious position toward relationships in general. This claim of cross-situational and cross-age continuity of attachment styles is supported by a fair amount of longitudinal studies (see Hazan & Shaver, 1987) which promoted the notion that a person's adult romantic attachment style is deeply influenced by his or her attachment history. Further research (Elliot & Reis, 2003; Freeney & Noller, 1990; Fraley & Shaver, 2000) indicates that attachment patterns can be conceptualized in terms of two dimensions, labeled *avoidance* and *anxiety*. High avoidance represents defensive dismissal or avoidance of close relationships and low avoidance represents comfort with closeness and confidence in the dependability of others. High anxiety refers to anxious or fearful preoccupation with close relationships and low anxiety refers to confidence that a person will be accepted and embraced in intimate relationships. Consistent with the above, Levy and Davis (in Freeney & Noller,

1988) provided empirical support for Hazan and Shaver's three attachment styles: secure attachment tended to be associated with positive relationship characteristics; avoidant attachment related to less satisfying and intimate relationships; and anxious-ambivalent attachment negatively related to positive relationships characteristics. More explicitly, secure adults feel comfortable being close to partners/significant others in romantic relationships, enjoy sharing their private thoughts and feelings with their partners, and feel that they can trust them and count on them. Insecure-avoidant adults become nervous when someone gets too close, feel uncomfortable when their partners want them to be more intimate than they feel comfortable being, and cannot easily trust and depend on their partners. Finally, insecure-ambivalent adults worry that their partners do not love them as much as they love their partners and that their desire to merge completely with their partners scares people away. Overall, it is evident that the major characteristics of both secure and insecure attachment styles are very similar to their equivalent infant attachment styles and that infant attachment patterns are critical determinants of adult romantic attachment styles.

Conceptualization and Measurement of Attachment

Measurement has strongly influenced conceptualizations of attachment (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005). Scientific literature reveals a number of instruments that measure parental styles (see Lewinsohn & Rosenbaum, 1987). One of them is the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) which was constructed by Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979) and measures fundamental parental styles as perceived by the child. The PBI is a self-report questionnaire that can be used to assess memories of attachment figures in adults. Parker et al. (1979) classified attachment in terms of parental care and control. Romantic-attachment researchers also used self-report measures to assess attachment. More specif-

ically, in an integrative overview of self-report measures of romantic attachments, Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) found that attachment was more accurately conceptualized as consisting of the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. Hence, they developed the questionnaire, Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) to measure these dimensions.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 35 individuals (24 women and 11 men) between 22 and 52 years of age. The average age of the participants was 28.8 years. All the participants were graduate students of the Graduate Faculty at the New School for Social Research - New York and were chosen randomly. Participants were asked to sign a consent form, after which they were given two questionnaires in the order in which they were to complete them. All participants were given the questionnaire in the same order (PDI mother, PDI father, ECR). Participation lasted approximately 15 minutes for each individual.

Measures

Memories of early attachment figures. The Parental Bonding Instrument (PDI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) is arranged in two parallel forms of 25 items each, the first for ratings of mother and the second for ratings of father. Respondents are directed to make ratings based on "your earliest memories until you were 16 years old." Within each form, 12 items compose the Care scale, and 13 items compose the Overprotection scale. Care refers to memories of emotional responsiveness and warmth. Overprotection indicates memories of a parent who was intrusively controlling and reluctant to allow the client to gain autonomy. Higher scores on the Care scale indicate parental affection, emotional warmth, empathy, and closeness; lower scores indicate parental indifference, emotional coldness, and rejection. Higher

scores on the Overprotection scale indicate parental control, intrusion, excessive contact, infantilization, prevention of independent behavior, and overprotection; lower scores indicate parental encouragement of independence and autonomy. Factor analyses have supported the authors' two-factor model. A test - retest reliability (3 - week interval) of .76 was obtained for the Care scale and .63 for the Overprotection scale. In a test of concurrent validity, ratings between independent judges and participants correlated at .77 for the Care scale and .50 for the Overprotection scale. Moreover, self-ratings were significantly correlated with mother ratings (Parker et al., 1979).

Adult romantic attachments. The Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998) consists of 36 items on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = Disagree Strongly to 7 = Agree Strongly). The ECR contains two factor scales that assess attachment avoidance and anxiety respectively. The Avoidance scale consists of 18 items which tap discomfort with interpersonal closeness, dependence, and self - disclosure. The Anxiety scale consists of 18 items that measure fears of abandonment and desires for intimate contact. Brennan et al. (1998) reported Cronbach alphas of .92 for anxiety and .94 for avoidance. Furthermore, the two scales were almost uncorrelated, $r = .11$ and each was highly correlated with its total factor score, $r = .95$, indicating that the measure had strong internal consistency and construct validity.

Results

In order to test the hypothesis that childhood experiences with mother and father are linked to feelings in close relationships during adulthood, bivariate correlations between the questionnaires tapping these two domains were carried out. Given the observation that some of these scales did not meet the assumptions of a normal distribution, Spearman's rho was relied upon to

test the extent of association. Since statistical analysis revealed that the hypothesis was not supported further correlations were used in order to investigate the relations between gender, parental bonds, and dimensions of romantic attachment. For this purpose separate analyses were run for male and female participants. First correlation coefficients were calculated between mothers' and fathers' scores for each of the two parenting dimensions assessed by the PBI and the dimensions of romantic attachment in male participants. The correlations are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations between Parent Bonding Instrument and Experiences in Close Relationships Scale in male participants ($N=11$)

| <u>PBI</u> | | <u>Experiences in Close Relationships Scale</u> | |
|------------|--------|---|-----------|
| | | Anxiety | Avoidance |
| Care | Mother | .04 | .05 |
| | Father | .30 | .01 |
| Control | Mother | .62* | .24 |
| | Father | .20 | .00 |

Note: * = $p < .05$, two-tailed

Table 1 indicates that a significant correlation was found between mother control and anxiety in male participants ($r = .62, p < .05$). This correlation suggests that men with recollections of a controlling mother reported more anxiety in intimate relationships. No significant correlations were found between parental care and anxiety or avoidance or between father control and anxiety or avoidance.

Since the female sample was bigger than the male sample female

participants were divided into two group according to their age. The first group included women of 29 years of age or less. Again, bivariate correlations were carried out and Spearman's rho was relied upon to test the extent of association. The correlations are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations between Parent Bonding Instrument and Experiences in Close Relationships Scale in female participants ≤ 29 years of age ($N=17$)

| <u>PBI</u> | | <u>Experiences in Close Relationships Scale</u> | |
|------------|--------|---|-----------|
| | | Anxiety | Avoidance |
| Care | Mother | .30 | .40 |
| | Father | .57* | -.17 |
| Control | Mother | -.03 | .07 |
| | Father | .07 | .14 |

Note: * = $p < .05$, two-tailed;

Table 2 demonstrates that father care was significantly correlated ($r = .57, p < .05$) with anxiety in romantic relationships in women of 29 years of age or less. This finding indicates that women with childhood recollections of a very caring father report more anxiety in adult relationships. The same correlations were computed between the parental scores and the romantic dimensions for the second female age group of 25 years of age or less. These correlations are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3 reveals an even higher correlation ($r = .76, p < .05$) this time between father care and anxiety in romantic relationships in women of 25 years of age or less. No correlations were found between parental control and anxiety and avoidance or mother care and anxiety and avoidance.

Table 3: Correlations between Parent Bonding Instrument and Experiences in Close Relationships Scale in female participants ≤ 25 years of age ($N=10$)

| | | <u>Experiences in Close Relationships Scale</u> | |
|------------|--------|---|-----------|
| | | Anxiety | Avoidance |
| <u>PBI</u> | | | |
| Care | | | |
| | Mother | .48 | -.04 |
| | Father | .76* | -.17 |
| Control | | | |
| | Mother | .09 | .10 |
| | Father | .31 | .92 |

Note: * = $p < .05$, two-tailed

Finally, correlations were calculated between the parental dimension of PBI and Avoidance as measured by ECR in participants who scored high in Avoidance (a score of 72 or more). The correlations are exhibited below in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlations between Parent Bonding Instrument and Experiences in Close Relationships Scale in participants with high Avoidance score $> = 72$ ($N=28$)

| | | <u>Experiences in Close Relationships Scale</u> | |
|------------|--------|---|-----------|
| | | Anxiety | Avoidance |
| <u>PBI</u> | | | |
| Care | | | |
| | Mother | .06 | .18 |
| | Father | .07 | .09 |
| Control | | | |
| | Mother | .30 | .26 |
| | Father | .20 | .40* |

Note: * = $p < .05$, two-tailed

Table 4 demonstrates that father control was significantly correlated ($r = .40, p < .05$) with avoidance in romantic relationships in participants with high scores of avoidance (a score of 72 or more). This finding indicates that people with childhood recollections of a very controlling father report more avoidance in adult relationships.

Discussion

The scientific literature (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005; Shaw et al., 2003; Lopez & Hsu, 2002) has shown that the effects of perceived parental attitudes in childhood play a great role in the molding of an individual's personality and moreover in the way that individual perceives intimate relationships. Furthermore, several studies have revealed that early attachment styles prevail in future relationships and that caregivers' perceptions of people's own bonding experiences are connected with the quality of the child-caregiver attachment (see Fox et al., 1995). The hypothesis of the present study that individuals develop the same attachment styles in intimate romantic relationships as the ones they have in childhood with their parents was not verified in this particular sample of students. More specifically, statistical analysis did not reveal any significant correlations between these two attachment patterns. This might be due to the fact that the sample was very small and that the number of measures used was restricted.

Even though the hypothesis was not supported the results obtained revealed very interesting correlations between the parental dimensions of PBI and the romantic dimensions measured by ECR. More specifically, two significant gender patterns were found in relation to the parental styles. First, two-tailed tests demonstrated that there is a significant positive correlation between mother control and anxiety in romantic relationships in men. In other words, men who reported having perceived their

mother as controlling in their childhood also reported more feelings of anxiety in their intimate relationships. In support of this proposition research has demonstrated that high levels of psychological control predict internalized problems such as anxiety, depression, loneliness or confusion (Barber, 1996; Pettit et al., 2001). Moreover, excessive control prevents psychological autonomy which is a fundamental element for healthy psychosocial development. Since adult romantic love is linked with socioemotional processes that are evident in childhood, it would be plausible to assume that maternal control in childhood has played a very determinative role in the molding of the schemata one develops regarding intimate relationships. Likewise, men who experienced excessive control from their mother and, therefore, anxiety in their relationship with her probably developed negative and insecure schemata of attachment. These schemata then affected them in other relationships and, more precisely, in their romantic relationships. From a psychoanalytic viewpoint this finding could be explained based on the notion that men with controlling mothers tend to project the negative feelings and anxiety they experienced in their relationship with their mother into their current romantic relationships. Research (Baumrind, 1971) shows that parents who exhibit high levels of control tend to produce children who are discontent, withdrawn, and distrustful. Consistent with that reasoning, people who score high on attachment anxiety are overrepresented among excessive reassurance seekers (Joiner & Metalsky, 1998; Shaver, Schachner & Mikulincer, 2005). That means that they tend to be concerned about rejection and abandonment, and that they feel that their partner does not show enough feelings and commitment in their relationship. Overall, they appear to be more distrustful and discontent with their relationships than otherwise. These findings are very compatible with the gender pattern that was observed in the male sample of the present study. Thus, it seems that some individuals, and particularly men of this sample, tend to perpetuate the attachment pattern they had with their mother and trans-

fer the feelings they had of the mother into their romantic relationships. As Waters (2004) mentions, "There is always a thread connecting life in your mother's arms and life in your lover's arms."

Father care was significantly and positively correlated with the anxiety dimension in women. More explicitly, women who reported having a warm and caring father also reported more anxiety in their intimate relationships. This finding could be interpreted based on the notion that women who have experienced a lot of care and affection from their father in childhood also tend to project their fathers' representation of their attachment experiences into their romantic relationships. Therefore, women who have positive schemata regarding their relationship with their father will probably have high standards and expectations from their partner and their relationships in general. These expectations in combination with their need to find a partner who will be able to respond adequately to their needs and be warm, accepting, sensitive, and dependable, might create anxiety, since they are more likely to be preoccupied with the fact that it is not going to be easy to meet a person with the qualities of their father. Again, from a psychoanalytic point of view this finding could be interpreted based on the proposition that women with a highly caring and sensitive father tend to seek a partner with equivalent qualities and characteristics in order to make sure that they will have a secure relationship from which they will derive satisfaction and support. This unconscious or even conscious realization that they have to choose the right partner for themselves is obviously creating anxiety and tension.

Finally, the study revealed a significant positive correlation between paternal control and avoidance in romantic relationships. This finding could be interpreted based on explanations provided by a fair number of studies on adult attachment (see Hazan & Shaver, 1987). More precisely, research shows that the

child learns to regulate his or her future behavior according to the signals he or she gets from the significant others. These signals influence the formation of the schemata one develops regarding relationships and if, for example, a child has developed insecure schemata of attachment, he or she will be more confident to apply this knowledge in other relationships and, furthermore, in romantic relationships. Individuals who reported having perceived their father as controlling in their childhood might have developed avoidant feelings regarding close relationships. This is due to the fact that excessive control can create confusion to the child and make him or her adopt defensive attitudes towards relationships in general. Consequently, people who experienced excessive control in their childhood are afraid that they might experience something similar in their romantic relationships that will restrict their autonomy and hence, they become nervous when someone gets too close, feel uncomfortable when their partner wants them to be more intimate than they feel comfortable being, and cannot easily trust and depend on their partner. In other words, they tend to project the negative feelings they developed in their childhood toward the controlling relationship with their father into their current romantic relationships and, hence, act in a defensive way that does not allow them to share the intimate part of their self with their partner.

Overall, the present study demonstrated that childhood experiences with mother and father are linked to feelings in close relationships during adulthood and that an infant's confidence in its first relationships sets up beliefs and expectations that might play a role in guiding later relationships. It is very important to take into account that there is an interplay of various factors that contribute to the formation of relationship dynamics and that the interpretations presented above are just providing a general picture of the possible gender patterns that appeared in this sample. In order to further examine and analyze this interplay of factors future work could focus more on the subjective experience of the

participants. More precisely, the use of interviews would clarify and provide more information regarding the participants' personal understanding and interpretation of how their own childhood experiences with their parents are linked to their perception about their current intimate relationships.

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