

P4 – Parental Bonding and Attachment Style as Predictors of Loneliness

Supervisor: Dr Nola Passmore

Research Purpose: This project examines parental bonding, attachment style, and loneliness in a community sample of adults.

Research Description: According to attachment theory, the type of attachment that children form with their primary caregivers can influence interpersonal relationships in adulthood. While a number of studies have found correlations between (a) people's perceptions of the way they were parented (e.g., parental care) and a secure attachment style and (b) secure attachment and lower levels of loneliness, few studies have examined all three variables in the one study. One exception is a study by Wiseman, Mayseless, and Sharabany (2006) which found that the relationship between parental care and loneliness was mediated by a secure attachment style. However, their findings were limited in that they (a) only used university students as their participants, and (b) used a global measure of loneliness rather than a more specific multidimensional measure that could tap different kinds of relationships. More recently, Feeney, Passmore, and Peterson (2007) included measures of parental bonding, attachment, and loneliness in a study comparing adult adoptees and non-adoptees. They found that parental bonding variables significantly predicted attachment, and that attachment significantly predicted three types of loneliness. However, they did not test a mediation effect as it was not one of the goals of their study. This project will examine whether secure attachment mediates the relationship between parental bonding and loneliness. It will extend Wiseman et al.'s study by (a) using a community sample of adults, and (b) using a multidimensional measure of loneliness. Gender differences will also be examined. Wiseman et al. controlled for gender in their analyses, but did not specifically examine whether the pattern of results differed for males and females. This may be important as it is possible that participants' relationships with their same-sexed parent may differ from those with their opposite-sexed parent.

Participants: This study will build on a data set collected by three Honours students in 2008. None of those students included all three of the above variables in their theses. Data from approximately 130 participants have already been collected. The student assigned to the current project will collect data from another 50-80 adults. Participants will be recruited from community groups and organisations and networks available to the student. The supervisor will work together with the student to identify suitable avenues for data collection and will arrange for permission letters from relevant groups. There was a gender imbalance in the 2008 data, with approximately 50 males to 80 females. In order to achieve a better gender balance for the extended study, the student will be required to access more male participants than female participants.

Methodology: The following questionnaires will be used:

(a) The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979). Four subscores are derived from this questionnaire: mother care, father care, mother overprotection, and father overprotection.

(b) The short version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness scale for Adults (SELSA-S; DiTommaso, Brannen, & Best, 2004). This measure

provides separate subscales for family, romantic, and social loneliness.

(c) The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) which measures adult attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

The questionnaire pack also includes other measures that were relevant to the 2008 students.

- Data Analysis:** The data file from 2008 will be made available to the student. The student will then need to add the new data to the file and do all data screening procedures and analyses on the complete sample. Pearson product-moment correlations and regression analyses will be the main analyses used. Baron and Kenny's (1986) method will be used to test for mediation. See Berzonsky (2003) for a relatively straightforward article that applies their techniques.
- Student friendliness:** This project is suitable for local or distance students. Weekly contact will be required in the early stages of the project, but can be more flexible throughout the year to reflect the different needs of the student. Contact with distance students will mainly be via email or phone. However, the student may need to schedule an extra day or two at one of the workshops in order to scan the completed questionnaires and do the data screening. The student will need to take a fair amount of initiative in data collection, particularly in accessing male participants. The statistics required are relatively straightforward, but it would be helpful if the student is fairly confident with statistics (or at least not afraid of statistics). If you are interested in this project, please send me an email and include two or three sentences indicating why you are interested in the project.
- Expected research outcomes:** It is hoped that the results of the overall study will be published in a journal article and/or presented at a psychology conference. The supervisor, the current student, and the 2008 students will all be co-authors on these papers.
- Further reading:**
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *61*, 226-244.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2003). Identity style and well-being: Does commitment matter? *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *3*, 131-142. (N.B. useful for mediation).
- DiTommaso, E., Brannen, C., & Best, L. A. (2004). Measurement and validity characteristics of the short version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults. *Education and Psychological Measurement*, *64*, 99-119.
- Feeney, J. A., Passmore, N. L., & Peterson, C. C. (2007). Adoption, attachment, and relationship concerns: A study of adult adoptees. *Personal Relationships*, *14*, 129-147.
- Parker, G., Tupling, H., & Brown, L. B. (1979). A Parental Bonding Instrument. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, *52*, 1-10.
- Wiseman, H., Maysseless, O., & Sharabany, R. (2006). Why are they lonely? Perceived quality of early relationships with parents, attachment, personality predispositions and loneliness in first-

year university students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 40, 237-248.

Ethics:

This acts as a check for the supervisor

- Ethical approval will be sought by supervisor; or
- Ethics approved – number _____

Resources:

This acts as a check for the supervisor

- Project able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit
- Project not able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit – additional funds will come from: _____

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