

The Evaluation of Social Competence and Internalizing and Externalizing Problem Behaviors of French and Turkish Children by their Attachment Representations

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between attachment representations of preschool children living in different cultures and their social competence, and between their attachment representations and internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. The participants of this study were 44 children: 20 French and 24 Turkish. The data were collected from Besancon, France and Ankara, Turkey in the academic year 2011-2012. Two measurement instruments (Attachment Story Completion Task and Preschool Socioaffective Profile) were used for data collection. The research findings reveal that the rate of secure attachment is higher in girls compared to boys, and that nationality does not play a determining role in the attachment styles. In Turkish children, anger-aggression scores and anxiety-withdrawal scores do not differ significantly by the attachment style, whereas social competence differs significantly by the attachment style. In French children, externalizing behavior problems scores do not differ significantly by the attachment style, whereas social competence and internalizing behavior problems scores differ significantly by the attachment style.

INTRODUCTION

The attachment theory offers a conceptual framework to underline the quality and importance of interpersonal relationships in socialization and life in and out of the family. Accordingly, the experience with providers of basic care constitutes internal working models (IWMs). The content of IWMs consists of the unconscious representations of the attachment figure and the individual's cognition about themselves and others. Over time, through these IWMs, the child internalizes the feeling of security and this relationship continues to exist symbolically in the brain. With respect to IWM development in attachment, Bowlby defined the period between 6 months and 5 years as the sensitivity period. Subsequent relationships or changes in life conditions may affect the quality of attachment;

however, these IWMs are mostly determined, and security or insecurity patterns are permanent. The mental attachment representations of the primary caregiver are regarded as a major factor that ensures the continuity of this process (Bowlby 2011; Crittenden 1990).

The first attachment relationship developed with the mother plays a primary role in social interaction and the development of social and emotional self-organization skills. Through IWMs, parent-child attachment relationships influence children's expectations from others, beliefs, behaviors, and social interaction. Positive IWMs, developed on the basis of a secure attachment with parents, have positive effects on children's interaction with peers. In helping children develop positive perceptions of other children's behaviors, these models provide a motivational basis for constructive peer interaction (Bowlby 2011).

A central tenet of attachment theory is that early child-caregiver attachment is reflected in the quality of the child's interpersonal relationships throughout life. Schneider et al. (2001) and Pallini et al. (2014) conducted the meta-analysis of studies to corroborate that contention. They found a significant and similar effect size, doc-

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umenting consistency in the predictive power of attachment theory. The literature also draws attention to the strong link between the quality of parent-child attachment, social skills, and self-esteem. Compared to insecure children, securely attached children perceive relationships as more positive, reciprocal, and supportive and they develop more positive social behaviors such as cooperation and empathy (Cassidy et al. 1996; Ooi et al. 2006).

The studies carried out with preschool children show that the quality of attachments continues to play an important role in children's development and social functions after infancy (Gloger-Tippelt et al. 2002). The attachment style of five-year-old children was evaluated with the use of different scales, and was found to be correlated with the characteristics reflecting their social and emotional development: "self-esteem, ego-resiliency, school adjustment, peer social competence, internalizing-externalizing behavior problems, and dissociation" (Smeekens et al. 2009).

Securely attached children, in their interaction with parents, develop skills such as empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation, which play a facilitating role in interpersonal relations. Compared to insecure children, these children have more positive self-perceptions and establish close friendships more easily (Grossmann and Grossmann 1990). The quality of attachment supports the regulation of feelings in the preschool period, and constitutes a basis on which children develop confidence in their capacity to cope with new situations (Steen and Goussé 2011).

Securely attached children have more positive emotional characteristics and display fewer internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors compared to insecurely attached children. These children were rated by mothers and teachers as less excluded by peers than avoidant and disorganized children (Seibert and Kerns 2014). Children with insecure parent-child attachment may have hostile and rejecting behaviors, and may have problems in establishing healthy peer relationships, as they have developed negative perceptions of themselves and others (Goldberg 1991). These children get angry more easily, are ostracized more by others and seek closer proximity with teachers, compared to other children. Furthermore, there is a significant correlation between being rejected and negative emotional reactions in children (Cartron and Winnykamen 2004; Ongari 2008). Karaman (2013) reported that there is a strong relationship between problem

behavior and risk factors and, indirectly, risk taking behavior.

Studies on the relationship between attachment and undesired behaviors reveal that the rate of hostile behaviors and the level of emotional stress is lower in securely attached children, and that insecure children show more aggressive behaviors, have behavior problems such as anxiety and depression, are less socially competent, have low self-esteem, are more attached to teachers, are less assertive, and give up more easily (Gloger-Tippelt et al. 2002; Kerns and Brumariu 2014; Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvits 2008; Moss et al. 2004). Some studies show a high correlation between insecure attachment and internalizing behavior problems, such as depression and anxiety disorders (Greenberg et al. 1993).

The family as a system is effective in the development of the child (Kabasakal 2013). Some studies, conducted particularly in the western countries, support the validity of the attachment theory in different cultures. These studies may also provide proof on the universality of attachment characteristics (Grossmann and Grossmann 1990; Van Ijzendoorn et al. 1999). Nevertheless, studies involving eastern cultures do not point out differences between cultures. For instance, Mizuta et al. (1996) show that, in studies that identify attachment behaviors such as in strange situation experiments, Japanese children display more *amae* behaviors (desire for physical proximity) than American children. Thus, *amae* is positively correlated with the symptoms of internalizing behavior problems of American children, but not correlated with similar symptoms of Japanese children.

Despite these results, there is need to indicate that no culture is the same as another. That is why it may be of particular importance to define attachment representations of children in France -a western society- and in Turkey -a society that brings together the characteristics of western and eastern cultures- and to evaluate the relationship between attachment representations and social competence, and internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to identify the relationship between attachment representations of preschool children living in different cultures and their social competence, and their internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Design

In this descriptive study, where the relational screening model is used, the aim is to evaluate French and Turkish children's social competence and internal and external behavior problems by their attachment representations.

Research Sample

For the purpose of this study, convenience sampling (non-random sampling model) was used. This method was preferred due to restrictions regarding access to children, receiving permission and time limitations in the group of French children. In order to ensure the balance of the group, the number and characteristics of the children in the Turkish group are close to the number and characteristics of the French group.

The participants of this study are 44 children. In this group, 20 children are French (45.5%) and 24 are Turkish (54.5%); 22 children are female and 22 are male. The average age of the participants was 53 months (age range=54-72 months). The study was conducted with children in three preschool institutions; one in France and two in Turkey.

Procedure

The data were collected from Besancon, France and Ankara, Turkey in the academic year 2011-2012. In order to administer the data-collecting instruments to preschool children, the researchers first received legal permissions. After this stage the researcher carried out the Attachment Story Completion Task procedure with children. The test administration process was video recorded.

The Preschool Socio-affective Profile (PSP) form (Dumas et al. 1997) was used in the French group. As the 80-item version of the scale has not been standardized in Turkish, the short version (Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale-30) was used in the present study (Corapci et al. 2010).

Data Collection Instruments

Attachment Story Completion Task

Developed by Bretherton et al. (1990), this test enables researchers to assess the stories

told by children and identify attachment representations. The test consists of five incomplete stories related to attachment that need to be completed by children.

For the purpose of this study, Q-Sort, developed by Miljkovitch et al. (2003), was used to evaluate the stories of French children. This system provides four styles defining the attachment pattern of a child: secure, anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant, and disorganized. The consistency of observers is .94, .95, .66, and .78, respectively (Annexe 2008).

The instrument was adapted into Turkish by Uluc and Oktem (2009). The general classification was based on the number of insecure stories. The protocols involving three or more insecure stories were classified as insecure. In the form adapted to Turkish, the reliability was .83 for the general attachment classification and the inter-judge reliability ranged between .81 and 1.0 for each individual story (Uluc and Oktem 2009).

Uluc and Oktem (2009) used only the categories of secure and insecure in adaptation to Turkish; therefore, in the present research, the secure – insecure categorization was adopted in compliance with Uluc's work. In the study the stories were assessed by two judges and the reliability coefficients between the judges were respectively (.96 - .98).

Preschool Socioaffective Profile (PSP)

PSP, a test standardized in many countries, is a measure developed by Dumas et al. (1997) to assess the social competence and adaptation levels of children aged between 2.5 and 6. The standardization in France (N=994) shows that the scale explains 77.7 percent of the total variance in three factors. These factors are social competence (.44-.87), externalizing problems (.60-.83), and internalizing problems (.37-.78). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated between .79 and .92. The test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as .70 and .87 (Dumas et al. 1997).

Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation-30 scale (SCBE)

(LaFreniere and Dumas 1996)

The SCBE-30 scale adapted into Turkish by Corapci et al. (2010) consists of three sub-scales: Anger-Aggression (AA), Social Competence (SC) and Anxiety-Withdrawal (AW). The adap-

tation was based on data gathered from 417 children aged between 31 and 73 months. According to the analysis results, the total variance explained by three factors was found to be 48.3 percent. For SC, AA, and AW sub-scales, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were respectively .88, .87, and .84. For each subscale, the total item correlation coefficients were .41 and over. The test-retest reliability coefficient calculated for each subscale produced the results of .45 for AW, .64 for AA, and .71 for SC.

Data Analyses

Fisher's Exact Test was used to determine whether or not the attachment styles of children in the sample differ by gender and nationality. This test is preferred because the expected frequency in a grid is lower than 5. The study evaluates whether there is a difference in scores subscales of the SCBE-30 in the case of the Turkish children and whether or not the scores of subscales of the PSP in the case of the French children by their attachment style are different. For the analysis of these data, Mann Whitney Utest was used.

FINDINGS

The research findings are presented in two parts. In the first part, attachment styles are evaluated by gender and nationality. The second part questions whether the scores of subscales of the SCBE-30 in the case of the Turkish children and the scores of sub-scales of the PSP in the case of the French children differ according to attachment styles of children. The distribution of children's attachment style by gender and by nationality is provided in Table 1.

The table reveals that, in the group of participants, the rate of secure attachment is higher in female children than male children. This difference is statistically significant (χ^2 (sd=1) = 6.84, $p=.021$). As seen in the table, nationality does not play a determining role in attachment styles in the group of participants. The difference in attachment styles is not significant in statistical terms (χ^2 (sd=1) = 0.46, $p=.710$).

Table 2 shows scores of sub-scales of the SCBE-30; that is, anger-aggression, social competence, and anxiety-withdrawal of the Turkish children by their attachment style.

Table 1: Children's attachment style by gender and by nationality

Attachment styles	Gender						Nationality					
	Female		Male		Total		Turkish		French		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Secure	21	60.0	14	40	35	100	20	57.1	15	42.9	35	100
Insecure	1	11.1	8	89.9	9	100	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	100
Total	22	50	22	50	44	100	24	54.5	20	45.5	44	100

Table 2: U test results for subscales of the SCBE-30 scores of the Turkish children by attachment style

Social Competence Attachment Style	n	Mean	Sum of ranks	U	p
Secure	20	13.78	275.50	14.50	.045*
Insecure	4	6.13	24.50		
Anger-Aggression Attachment Style	n	Mean	Sum of ranks	U	p
Secure	20	11.43	228.50	18.50	.097
Insecure	4	17.88	71.50		
Anxiety-Withdrawal Attachment Style	n	Mean	Sum of ranks	U	p
Secure	20	12.05	241.00	31.00	.52
Insecure	4	14.75	59.00		

* $p < .05$

The table reveals that the social competence scores of children differ significantly by their attachment style ($U=14.50, p<.05$), the anger-aggression scores of children do not differ significantly by their attachment style ($U=18.50, p>.05$), and the anxiety-withdrawal scores of children do not differ significantly by their attachment style ($U=31.00, p>.05$). However, the average score of children with insecure attachment is higher compared to the others.

Table 3 shows scores of sub-scales of the PSP; that is, social competence, internalizing problems, and externalizing problems of the French children by their attachment style. The table shows that the social competence scores of children differ significantly by their attachment style ($U=29.50, p<.05$) and the internalizing behavior problem scores of children differ significantly by their attachment style ($U=12.50, p<.05$). The average score of children with secure attachment is higher compared to the others. A higher score indicates less problem behaviors. As seen in the table, the internalizing behavior problem scores of children do not differ significantly by their attachment style ($U=30.50, p>.05$).

DISCUSSION

The present study results show that the rate of secure attachment is higher in female children compared to male children. *Similar results have been found in more recent studies.* Gulay (2011) reported significant differences in terms of ag-

gression, prosocial behavior, hyperactivity, and peer victimization in relation to the gender of children. The relationship between insecure attachment and peer interaction differs by gender, according to the literature. Insecurely attached boys display more aggressive and deconstructive behaviors than secure children. Insecurely attached girls are more dependent than securely attached girls (Turner 1991). Recent studies based on gender socialization theories have shown that insecurely attached boys mainly have physical aggression in peer relations, whereas insecurely attached girls mostly have relational aggression (Laible et al. 2008; Ostrov and Godleski 2010; Panfile et al. 2012; Rubin et al. 2003). In a similar study, Deklyen and Greenberg (2008) state that insecure attachment in boys is associated with externalizing behavior problems.

The present study results show that nationality does not have a decisive effect in attachment styles. This is compatible with the findings that the cultural effects on attachment are limited, and attachment characteristics are mostly universal (Rothbaum et al. 2000). However, in the literature there are also studies that point out to a difference between cultures (Mizuta et al. 1996; Posada et al. 1999). Generally, parental attitudes and maternal practices show differences between cultures (Posada et al. 2002). Thus, the lack of cultural difference in attachment styles may result from the fact that aspects such as maternal sensitivity, physical contact, and affinity, which are normally expected to differ by culture, are compatible with the cultural context in which they

Table 3: U test results for subscales of the PSP scores of the French children by attachment style

<i>Social Competence Attachment Style</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Sum of ranks</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure	15	11.03	165.50	29.50	.49*
Insecure	5	08.90	44.50		
<i>Internalizing Behavior Problem Attachment style</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Sum of ranks</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure	15	12.17	182.00	12.50	.025*
Insecure	5	5.50	27.50		
<i>Externalizing Behavior Problem Attachment style</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Sum of ranks</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Secure	15	10.97	164.50	30.50	.55
Insecure	5	09.10	45.50		

* $p < .05$

live. However, the findings of studies such as strange situation experiments, which evaluate a child's behavior (Mizuta et al. 1996), may be more sensitive to intercultural differences.

In this study there is no difference by culture in the relationship between attachment style and social skills/problem behaviors. While the anger-aggression/externalizing behavior problem scores do not differ significantly by their attachment style and social competence, scores differ significantly by attachment style for Turkish and French children. However, the internalizing behavior problems/anxiety-withdrawal scores are different in the two groups. These scores differ significantly by the attachment style for French children, but do not differ for Turkish children. Certain studies not compatible with the present findings (Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvitz 2008; Munson et al. 2001; Van Ijzendoorn et al. 1999; Vondra et al. 2001; Wood et al. 2004) have found that there is a negative correlation between secure attachment and behavior problems/antisocial behaviors.

In the literature there are studies reinforcing the argument that attachment style is significantly correlated with internalizing behavior problems and social skills (McCartney et al. 2004; Pierrehumbert et al. 2000). This study does provide any statistically significant difference between attachment style and internalizing behavior problems. Similar to the findings of the present study, the meta-analytic review examines the association between attachment during the early life course and social competence with peers during childhood, and compares the strength of this association with those for externalizing and internalizing symptomatology. Avoidance, resistance, and disorganization were significantly associated with lower peer competence. Attachment security was significantly more strongly associated with peer competence than internalizing, but not externalizing, symptomatology (Groh et al. 2014).

Cohn (1990) has reported that, compared to securely attached children, insecurely attached children are less liked by their friends and teachers, are perceived as less competent and more aggressive, and are considered to have more behavior problems by their teachers. The study has not provided such a link for girls. The children that suffer from problems in their primary attachment with their mother may have difficulty in establishing relationships, and thus are at risk for aggression, academic problems, anxiety, de-

pression, and loneliness (Kochanska and Kim 2013; Pettit et al. 1997).

The quality of the attachment relationship between children and their parents is important for children's social-emotional development and can have profound consequences for adaptational processes in later life. Attachment theorists suggest that attachment security with parents supports the quality of social adaptation in peer groups during early childhood. In the study conducted for the purpose of giving an overview of the current knowledge about sensitive parenting and its role in affecting infants' attachment security, and developmental outcomes of attachment (Van der Voort et al. 2014) conclude that numerous empirical studies and meta-analyses have confirmed the importance of sensitive parenting and attachment security for children's social-emotional development, providing a robust evidence base for translation, implementation, and intervention in practice.

In a similar study, Verissimo et al. (2014) tested relations between preschool children's mental representations of attachment by using the Attachment Story Completion Task and child-level indicators of social competence based on direct observations and sociometric interviews. Analyses revealed positive, significant associations between attachment measures and all social competence composites. Children with more secure attachment representations were more socially engaged and more likely to exhibit social, emotional, and cognitive skills that contribute to peer acceptance.

The short-term longitudinal study investigated whether attitudes about seeking academic help, social competence, and self-compassion mediated the relations between parental attachment and college student adjustment. Results showed that attitudes about seeking academic help mediated the attachment-academic adjustment relation and social competence mediated the attachment-social adjustment relation. These findings suggest that help-seeking attitudes and social competence could be fruitful targets of intervention for personnel working with college students who have strained parental relationships (Holt 2014). The quality of the parent-child relationship has long been recognized as playing a central role in the development of children's social skills and problem behaviors; however, little attention has focused on the preschool years, a period now recognized as critical for the devel-

opment of prosocial behavior (Pasiak and Menna 2015).

CONCLUSION

The present study evaluates whether or not there is a difference in social competence and internal and external behavior problems scores between Turkish and French children by their gender, nationality, and attachment style. The research findings revealed that the rate of secure attachment is higher in girls compared to boys, and that nationality does not play a determining role in attachment styles. In Turkish children, anger-aggression scores and anxiety-withdrawal scores do not differ significantly by the attachment style, whereas social competence differs significantly by the attachment style. In French children, externalizing behavior problems scores do not differ significantly by the attachment style, whereas social competence and internalizing behavior problems scores differ significantly by the attachment style.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The lack of difference between cultures may lead us to support the findings and arguments related to the universality of the reflections of a secure relationship with the mother in early childhood. These findings may be tested with longitudinal studies that focus on attachment styles of children in strange situation experiments, where cultural effects are more salient.

The results obtained in the study are restricted to the data collected from a small sample, and are thus not generalizable. That is why it is suggested that the study be replicated with a larger sample and with the support of observation data on the interaction of children with their peers in a school environment.

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