

The relationship between perceived parental models, anxiety and the attachment style in adult age

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Abstract: Having as a starting point the perspective offered by the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and the idea that during the early relationship between parent and child a certain attachment style is formed, this present study aims to verify the linkage between parental models described by the participants and their adult type of attachment, taking into account their anxiety trait of personality. The attachment style is relatively stable during the lifespan and is also expressed in the context of other important ulterior relationships. This study was conducted on 106 persons (53 couples), with an age range between 22 and 48 years, the subjects coming from urban areas. The variables described in the hypothesis (self-reported parental models, the adult attachment style and the anxiety trait of personality) have been correlated and, in order to see what the significant predictors are, as well as their importance order in the explanation of the attachment dimensions, the regression analysis has been applied. The results of this study showed that there are significant correlations between an adult's anxiety as a trait and both adult attachment dimensions, anxiety and avoidance. Also, although the parental model, perceived as overprotective, correlates with the couple anxiety and avoidance, the parental model perceived as offering emotional warmth correlates significantly with a lower degree of avoidance (as a dimension of the couple attachment) but does not correlate with the other dimension, anxiety; nevertheless, the rejective perceived model does not correlate with either of the couple attachment styles. Last but not least, both dimensions of the adult attachment style in a couple can be explained by specific contributions of the participants' self-reported parental models, as well as by the degree of their anxiety trait.

Key words: adult attachment styles, anxiety, avoidance, parental models, rearing practices.

Introduction

According to the attachment theory, (Bowlby, 1969), the quality of the relationship with the dominant caregiver in early childhood has an impact over the degree of safety that the child receives and uses as a base to build his/her personality on. The structuring of the representations, called *internal working models*, depends on the way the parent responds to the child's needs (Bowlby, 1980, 1988), these models consisting in a series of postulates about how close relationships work, how much the others and oneself are worth to be trusted and loved. In this context, studying the way in which different types of parental models are associated with attachment dimensions, their styles of security at different ages becomes of a crucial importance.

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Although *attachment security* is defined by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall (1978) as the state of being *safe and sound as related to the availability of the attachment figure*, this construct cannot be directly measured but only detected from what is accessible and observable (Solomon & George, 1999). So different approaches of the specialty literature will make inferences either on the basis of some *recorded behavior* that are related to searching for and maintaining closeness, security or on the basis of *mental representations* about relationships, ego and the others, as internal models built earlier, in the context of interaction with an attachment figure, according to cited literature.

According to the attachment theory, but also on the basis of previous studies (Baldwin & Fehr, 1995; Davila, Burge & Hammen, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004), one can learn that these internal working models from childhood and the attachment patterns from early childhood are relatively stable during life. They will guide the individual’s perceptions and behavior for future significant relationships (Crowell & Treboux, 2001). The types of attachment from childhood were correlated with some similar ones, at an adult age.

In this context, the theorists of this domain (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) describe at the adult age four styles of attachment, by combining models of self and others, as well as the degree of dependence and avoidance in relationships (Feeney, 1999). Bartholomew (1990) suggests that the avoidant style of attachment is much more complex than the one described in children, so she explains that individuals can be avoided in two distinct ways. They either wish for intimate relationships, but they are afraid that they will get hurt (*the fearful-avoidant style of attachment*) or they sincerely wish to be independent of others (*avoidant attachment style*). There are four types of attachment at adult age presented below.

Table 1. *The adult attachment types. (after Feeney, as cited by Cassidy & Shaver, 1999)*

		SELF MODEL (Dependence)	
		Positive (Low dependence)	Negative (High dependence)
MODEL ABOUT THE OTHERS (Avoidance)	Positive (Low avoidance)	SECURE Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy; high self - esteem and sociability.	PREOCCUPIED/ AMBIVALENT/ DEPENDENT Extremely dependent; low self -esteem and high sociability.
	Negative (High avoidance)	AVOIDANT Attachment denial, contra-dependent, high self- esteem and low sociability.	FEARFUL-AVOIDANT / UNRESOLVED Fear of intimacy, social avoidant, low self - esteem and low sociability

Because the attachment styles in childhood are structured during the early experience with the person that takes care of the child, this article is aimed in the same direction to the ones that consider *parental models* as predictors of the *attachment style* and its *dimensions* in adult age. There will be several studies cited below that correlate these variables.

Perris & Andersson's study (2000) offers probably the most extended investigation of the association among parental models (investigated by the same psychological test that the present study uses – EMBU) and several dimensions of the attachment style in adult age, on a sample of 361 participants. They use a number of tests to establish the attachment styles (AAS - *Adult Attachment Scale*, ASQ - *Attachment Styles Questionnaire* and RAQ - *Reciprocal Attachment Questionnaire*), in order to investigate aspects that influence the attachment in a greater range of relational categories, not only in a couple. All the predictions initially made by the researchers were validated after the analysis, so that they would have reached some results: there is a significant correlation between emotional warmth during childhood and the indicators of a secure attachment during the adult age; there is a significant correlation between the experience of dysfunctional parental models (rejection and overprotection) and measures of insecure attachment, as well as a negative correlation between the last and emotional warmth; the correlation between the variables mentioned earlier is the same, whatever the relational area may be, for a certain style of attachment.

The study also offers some nuances of these correlations, referring to the differences recorded among men and women, in their relationships with their mother and respectively with their father. Some of the ideas that kept our attention will be mentioned briefly. According to the cited study (Perris & Andersson, 2000) there is a stronger correlation between insecure attachment styles and the experience of overprotection in the case of men, while in the case of women the correlation was stronger concerning the experience of parental rejection.

An older study (Gittleman, Klein, Smider & Essex, 1998) even presents the differences between the memories about the two parents. Practically, in the case of men, those that had a secure attachment reported a greater degree of care from their fathers, in contrast to the insecure and a man's fearful attachment style. Moreover, men with insecure style of attachment mentioned a greater degree of maternal care than those with a fearful attachment style. Both categories of men, those with secure attachment and those with insecure avoidant attachment reported a lower degree of maternal control, compared to those having a fearful, preoccupied attachment style.

Another important topic linked to attachment security and parental rearing styles is the one regarding the development of an anxiety trait in adulthood. Moreover, the studies we found talk about the anxiety disorder than the anxiety trait, so we decided to investigate this latter aspect. Anyway, there will be a few researches mentioned connecting anxiety disorders with attachment and parental rearing styles, in order to get a closer image of this area.

The classic attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) links the anxiety disorder in adult age with the child's fear regarding the parent's availability. He talks about specific family constellations which dispose the child to develop a certain anxiety disorder. And one can refer here to families in which the control is realized by overprotection or rejection. To be more specific, there are situations described like: 1) the child worries for his parent's life in his absence (because of fights or suicidal attempts); 2) the child fears of abandonment or rejection (because of several parent's threatening); 3) the child feels the need to stay home as a parent's companion; 4) the parent has difficulties in letting go of the child, because of the fear of not getting hurt (Dozier, Stoval & Albus, 1999).

Specific researches have linked the child attachment and anxiety disorders in adolescence. For instance, Warren, Huston, Egeland & Sroufe (1997), showed that anxiety disorders in 17 ½ year old adolescents are more frequently associated with an ambivalent attachment than those who are secure or avoidant. In the same time, Rosenstein & Horowitz (1996, as cited in Dozier, Stoval & Albus, 1999) showed that 65% of the adolescents diagnosed with a high level of anxiety had preoccupied mental states, while 35% of the investigated adolescents corresponded to the dismissing adult attachment style. Nevertheless, Fonagy et al. (1996) and Cassidy (1995) identified in the same manner the fact that subjects with a preoccupied attachment style reported a higher rate of anxiety disorders.

Very few recent researches link the anxiety trait to the attachment style. For instance, one paper (Ozturk & Multu, 2010) presents a study conducted on 305 students from Turkey, mainly assessing the relationship between well-being and happiness. As an additional conclusion, this research showed that a preoccupied, fearful, dismissing attached students' social anxiety level is higher than a secure attached students' social anxiety level and that a socially anxious student's level of subjective well-being is lower than the others.

In this context, this present research aims to investigate the attachment implications, in terms of correlations between dimensions of the anxiety trait in adult ages.

Moreover, this present study aims to identify and evaluate the correlations between parental model and adult attachment dimensions.

Not the least, it was aimed to explore the explicative value of the parental models and anxiety as a trait on the adult attachment style in the couple.

Our research aimed to test the following general hypothesis:

- 1) There are significant correlations between adult anxiety trait and the adult attachment dimensions.
- 2) There are significant correlations between perceived parental models and adult attachment styles.
- 3) Self-reported parental models and the degree of anxiety as a trait have specific contributions in explaining the adult attachment dimensions in adult ages.

Method

Participants

In order to verify the hypothesis advanced by the current study there were 106 investigated participants (53 couples), aged between 22 and 48 (a media of 31.8 years old), all of them coming from the urban area.

Concerning the professional membership, the participants belong to the following professional domains: exact science (jobs like mathematicians, engineers, informatics engineers, economists), educational, literature and linguistics, social sciences (sociologists, psychologists, historians), judicial domain (jurists, medical assistants, orderlies), but also unqualified persons.

As for marital status, the majority of couples were married, (98%), but there were also some couples who were not married (2%). Concerning the duration of the couple's relationship, 32, 1% had been in a relationship from 3 and 7 years and 34% had been in a relationship for more than 10 years. Concerning the number of children, 82, 5% of the couples investigated had one child, and 17.5% had 2 children.

Regarding the selection criteria of participants, there were contacted couples that had a child aged between 1 and 3, and who either attended a Lamaze prenatal course (within the courses of "Elena Doamna" Maternity from Iasi or within the courses of a private practice in Timisoara) or didn't have a prenatal education, but they were accessible and wished to participate in the study, providing support for the project. That's how a convenience sample was elaborated.

Instruments

For collecting the data and testing the hypothesis a battery of tests relevant for the study's variables was constructed, a battery which includes the following: *The Inventory for Perceived Parental Rearing Styles – EMBU* (Perris et al., 1980); *The Experience in the Close Relationship Adult Attachment Questionnaire – ECR* (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000); *State Trait Anxiety Inventory S.T.A.I. X2* (Spielberger, Gorusch & Lushene, 1964); *General Data Questionnaire* (specially conceived for this purpose).

The Inventory for Perceived Parental Rearing Styles – EMBU

The test was elaborated by Carlo Perris and his collaborators in 1980, being a self-reported scale, in which the subjects evaluate their perception of their behavior and of the relationship with their parents during childhood. Initially developed in Sweden, EMBU is the Swedish acronym for "Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran", respectively „self-memories concerning childhood experiences". The questionnaire is made up of 81 questions and is evaluated with a Likert Scale, the frequency with which the mother and respectively father had a certain type of behavior in relationship with the child. The score for each item

varied between 1 and 4, where 1 stands for “never” and 4 for “always”. Each item refers to behavior and does not imply any situation evaluation.

The questionnaire explores 14 dimensions of parental education as possible practices in raising kids: abuse, deprivation, punishment, generating shame, rejection, overprotection, over-involvement, tolerance, affection and favoring the subject.

In the previous variants of the questionnaire, these scales were grouped in 14 subscales which were superposed over the 14 *parental rearing styles*, and the maximum score obtained for the mother’s evaluation, respectively for father evaluation fit them in one of these parental styles. According to the researches’ aim, these scores can be either combined or compared (Gerlsma, Arrindell, Van der Veen & Emmelkamp, 1991). In this present study the combined score was used.

In this study the four factors that are forms were considered by combining the 14 dimensions as the literature of the domain suggests (Ross, Campbell & Clayer, 1982): *Rejection* (as the parental practice characterized by using physical punishment, rejection and hostility, individual derogation), *Emotional Warmth* (that refers to paying attention in a warm, loving way, helping the subject, offering support in difficult situations, facilitating trust in the parent), *Overprotection* (highlighting protection from a negative experience, a great degree of intrusion, high expectations in order to know everything about the subject, imposing strict rules and requiring unconditioned obedience from him/her) and *Favoring the subject* (in the situation where there is a sibling, a brother or a sister; this scale presented some psychometric problems in its adaptation to other cultures and states, which is why we chose not to use it in this study). Factorial analysis used in this study confirmed the structure in four factors. The high score signifies that a specific parent style was dominant in the adult’s perception.

The questionnaire was translated and applied in more than 25 states, and intercultural studies revealed a good internal consistency.

Calculation of internal consistency of the three scales lead to the following values: $\alpha=.79$ (rejection); $\alpha=.87$ (emotional warmth); $\alpha=.82$ (overprotection).

The Experience in Close Relationship Adult Attachment Questionnaire – ECR

The test was elaborated by Brennan, Clark & Shaver (1998), than revised by Fraley, Waller & Brennan (2000). The Romanian variant was translated and validated by Negrei & Sava (2007).

ECR measures two factors: *anxiety* and *avoidance*, the combination of which results from the four styles of attachment, after the model proposed by Shaver and al. (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987): *secure attachment* (low anxiety and avoidance), *dependent/preoccupied* (high anxiety and low avoidance), *fearful-avoidant* (high anxiety and high avoidance) and *avoidant* (low anxiety and high avoidance).

The Romanian version of the *ECR* has 30 items, from which 17 refer to the anxiety scale and 13 to the avoidance scale. The subjects tested were asked to think about their close relationships, without thinking only about a certain partner and to

evaluate the extent in which each item accurately describes their feelings in their close relationships, using a seven point scale having 7 points from “almost never agree” (1) to “always agree” (7), where 1,5,8 and 17 are inverted.

A high score at the anxiety scale means high anxiety, and a high one at the avoidance scale means low avoidance.

Reliability of the two subscales was demonstrated in a wide range of tests and in different languages (for ex., Brennan et al., 1998; Mikulincer & Florian, 2000). The ECR Scale, in the version adapted for the Romanian population, presents a good construct validity and high internal consistency. This could be useful not only in the research field but also in practice, especially in psychological counseling and psychotherapy (Negrei & Sava, 2007).

In this present study, the internal consistency of the *anxiety* factor is $\alpha=.88$, and that of the *avoidance* factor $\alpha=.76$.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Scale – S.T.A.I. X2

Known as the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), this test was constructed in 1964 by Spielberger, Gorusch & Lushene, as an anxiety evaluation instrument for adults.

S.T.A.I. is made of two scales of self-evaluation in order to measure two different concepts concerning anxiety: *the state of anxiety* (X1 variant) seen by the authors as a transitory emotional state and the *anxiety as a trait* (X2 variant), meaning differences relatively stable of the anxiety level (Spielberger, Gorusch & Lushene, 1970). In the case of this study the X2 variant was applied, in order to evaluate the anxiety as trait.

The scores vary from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 80. The subjects responded to each item of S.T.A.I., evaluating themselves from 4 points (with the following categories: 1- almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-frequently, 4-almost always). The test presents reversed items: 1, 6, 7, 10, 13, 16 and 19. A high score at this scale signifies a high degree of anxiety.

The internal consistency of STAI X2 in this study is $\alpha=.88$.

General data questionnaire

In order to increase the accuracy of the research results, a questionnaire was constructed with general data that collected demographical data and some personal information.

The questionnaire has 18 items that reference the following particular aspects: a) the participation of Lamaze prenatal courses (informational sources, utility perception, motivation to follow this educational program); b) child care; c) the “growing up” and care experience that the adult lived; d) openness to self-development.

The items have multiple variants of response, but they also allow open answers to the ones that complete the questionnaire.

Procedure

The respondents were contacted by phone or e-mail, and the general objective of the study and the procedure used was explained, thus obtaining informed consent from all the participants. They were guaranteed the confidentiality of their answers. The participation was voluntary.

The contact of the couples and the application of the tests took place during two different periods, September-October 2009 and May-September 2011. Responses to questionnaires were collected after several days, either in pencil-paper form or electronic form; this was up to the respondents' preference.

Results

The data was analyzed using the statistical program SPSS 16. After calculating the basic statistical data (media and standard deviation), an output of correlations was obtained between the variables described in the hypothesis and, in order to see what the significant predictors are, as well as their importance order in the explanation of the attachment dimensions, the regression analysis was applied.

The first hypothesis asserts that there is a correlation between anxiety as a trait and the attachment dimensions in the couple. In the table below the value of the correlations coefficients between anxiety as a trait and the two attachment dimensions is presented.

Table 2. *The correlation coefficients (the attachment dimensions in the couple and anxiety as a trait)*

		Anxiety dimension	Avoidance dimension
Anxiety as a trait	Pearson Correlation r	.480**	-.232*
	Significance limit p	.000	.021
	N	99	99

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01.

One can notice here a significant positive correlation between *structural anxiety* and the *dimension anxiety in a couple*. (r=.48, p<.01). The higher the structural anxiety is, the more preminent the anxiety as a couple dimension is.

As well, one can also see in the table above a negative significant correlation (r=-.23, p<.05) between the value of the *anxiety as a trait* and that of the *avoidance in the couple attachment*. Respecting the quotation system from the ECR Test, means that a high level of structural anxiety is associated at the individuals of the participating sample in the study with a high level of the

avoidance dimension of the couple's attachment, predisposing to an avoidant and fearful-avoidant attachment style.

The second hypothesis investigates the relationship among the three factors that group *the perceived parental rearing styles* of the respondents, considered at a global, familial level and *the adult attachment styles* (table 3).

Table 3: *The correlation coefficients values (attachment dimensions and the perceived parental styles)*

		Anxiety dimension	Avoidance dimension
parental rejection	Pearson r Correlation	.202	-.096
	Significance p	.054	.362
	N	92	92
Parental over-protection	Pearson r Correlation	.301**	.225*
	Significance p	.004	.031
	N	92	92
Parental emotional warmth	Pearson r Correlation	.001	.247*
	Significance p	.991	.018
	N	92	92

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01.

The table above represents parental overprotection as having a strong significant correlation with the couple's anxious attachment ($r=.30$, $p<.01$) and significant with avoidance ($r=.22$, $p<.05$). So the greater the parental overprotection, the higher the anxious attachment is, while avoidance is lower (similar to the preoccupied attachment style).

One can also deduce from table 3 that a parental model perceived as offering emotional warmth significantly correlates positively with the avoidance dimension of the attachment ($r=.24$, $p<.05$). Practically, a high level of emotional warmth from the part of the family, perceived by the respondent, is associated with a low level of avoidance as an attachment dimension.

Parental rejection does not correlate either with anxiety, nor with avoidance, therefore one cannot call it a rearing practice with an impact onto the attachment style.

In the third hypothesis, in order to see what the significant predictors are, as well as their order of importance in the explanation of the attachment anxiety dimension a regression analysis, has been conducted (Table 4).

Table 4: *Regression analysis for the predictors of the anxiety dimension of couple attachment*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>β</i>
Step 1	.220	
Trait anxiety		.47***
Step 2	.273	
Trait Anxiety		.43***
Parental Overprotection		.23**

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

In step 1, there was *anxiety as a trait* as a predictor, having as a dependent variable the dimension anxiety of the attachment. One could notice that anxiety as a trait explains 22% of the total variance of the dimension (R^2).

In step 2, *the overprotection* model has been added to the *anxiety as a trait* as a predictor for the same dependent variable. One can notice that the overprotective model offers plus 5% which is significant when it comes to explaining the dimension couple anxiety, and the entire model explains 27% of the total of the variance of this dimension.

From table 4 one can notice that both predictors are significant (the trait-anxiety is significant at $p=.000$, and the overprotective model is significant at $p=.01$) for the anxiety as a dimension of couple attachment. Analyzing the coefficient β values, the most important predictor for the anxiety dimension of the attachment is the trait-anxiety ($\beta=.43$), followed by the overprotective parental model ($\beta=.23$).

To see what the significant predictors are, as well as their importance in explaining the dimension *avoidance* of the adult attachment type the regression analysis, has been also conducted (table 5).

Table 5: *The regression analyses for the predictors of the avoidance dimension of couple attachment.*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>β</i>
Step1	.059	
Parental emotional warmth		.24*
Step 2	.131	
Parental emotional warmth		.29**
Parental overprotection		.27**
Step 3	.196	
Parental emotional warmth		.27***
Parental overprotection		.31***
Trait anxiety		-.26**

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p>.001.

In step 1 the parental behavioral style has been considered as a predictor based on *emotional warmth*, having as a dependent variable the *avoidance* dimension of the attachment. One can notice that this parental behavior explains 6% of the total variance of the dimension (R^2).

In step 2 *overprotection*, has been added as a predictor to the parental model based on emotional warmth. One can notice that the overprotective model gives a plus 7% in explaining the *avoidance* dimension of the attachment, and the entire model explains 13% of the variance of this dimension.

In step 3, looking at the parental model based on *emotional warmth* and the *overprotective* one, the *trait-anxiety* was added as a predictor. Thus, one can notice that the latter brings a significant plus of almost 7%, the entire model explaining 19.6% of the variance of the *avoidance* dimension of the attachment.

It can also be noticed from table 5 that all three predictors are significant (emotional warmth and overprotection are significant at $p > .001$, and the trait-anxiety is significant at a $p = .01$) for the avoidance dimension of the attachment. Analyzing the coefficient β values, the most important predictor for the avoidant attachment is the *overprotective parental style* ($\beta = .31$), followed by the model based on *emotional warmth* ($\beta = .27$) and finally by the anxiety as a trait ($\beta = -.26$).

A short discussion of the above results will be held in a further section of this article.

Discussion and conclusions

This present study explores the direct connections between parental rearing models perceived by the adult respondents, trait-anxiety and the dimensions of adult attachment.

The first hypothesis asserts that there is a correlation between anxiety as a trait and the attachment dimensions in a couple.

One can notice here a significant positive correlation between *structural anxiety* and the *dimension anxiety in a couple*. The higher the anxiety trait is, the more preminent the anxiety as a couple dimension is.

The persons with a high intensity of anxiety tend to see the future in a negative manner; they also have the tendency to take even minor problems too seriously. They are also characterized by difficulties in decision making, preferring to avoid confrontations and critical moments. Overall, the anxiety as trait refers to individual differences in personal tendencies of reacting to situations perceived as threatening (Spielberger, 1966). In contrast with anxiety as a state, conceptualized as a transitory emotional reaction to a stressful event, anxiety as a trait is a behavioral pattern having a strong invariability.

The anxiety dimension of the couple attachment refers to the internal negative model about oneself and the world (Bowlby, 1988; Hamilton, 2000). That results in a tendency of that individual to worry about not being abandoned by his partner, clinging firmly to him/her, having, at the same time the impression that his

love for that partner is stronger than his partner's. The persons having a high level of anxiety as a dimension of the adult attachment need from their partner, reassurance that they are important and loved.

A positive correlation between the two concepts is justified by the fact that his/her own emotional insecurity predicts a high level of the anxiety dimension of the attachment, the partner being invested with a protective role, as a secure base. This relationship can also be interpreted from the perspective of the cognitive-social theory of attribution (Rotter, 1966): persons that have anxiety as a trait make predominantly situational attributions, evoking external factors as causes for the events that happen to them (Archer, 1979). The situational attributions express a reduced control over what the person experiences, which results in the high need of protection from the part of the important other. In the adult age, that important other is the partner.

One can also see a negative significant correlation between the value of the *anxiety as a trait* and that of the *avoidance in the couple's attachment*. Respecting the quotation system of the ECR Test, means that a high level of structural anxiety is associated at the individuals of the sample participating in the study with a high level of the avoidance dimension of the couple's attachment, predisposing to an avoidant and fearful-avoidant attachment style (Feeney, 1999).

Avoidance as a dimension of the couple's attachment refers to the individual's tendency to keep the emotional distance away from the partner, preferring to retreat, even though he/she would have liked the intimacy.

The correlation between a high level of structural anxiety and that of the avoidance of the adult attachment can be explained by the fact that the tendency to retreat in front of a confrontation is a central trait of the anxious individual.

As a general conclusion, *persons with a high level of anxiety as a trait* are in great proportion individuals having a fearful-avoidant attachment style (high anxiety, high avoidance) (Feeney, 1999). This result contradicts in a certain manner with the literature, which supports the idea that people with anxiety disorders come mostly from a preoccupied attachment group (Cassidy, 1995; Dozier, Stoval & Albus, 1999; Fonagy et al., 1996; Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996; Warren, Huston, Egeland & Sroufe, 1997).

The second hypothesis investigates the relation among the three factors that the group *the perceived parental rearing styles* of the respondents, considered at a global, familial level as well as *the adult attachment styles*.

The results show parental overprotection as having a strong significant correlation with the couple's *anxious attachment* and significant with *avoidance*. So the greater the parental overprotection, the higher the anxious attachment is, while avoidance is lower (similar to the preoccupied attachment style) (Feeney, 1999).

Parental overprotection refers to rearing behaviors in which parents constantly show their anxiety for diverse possible dangers or mistrust in the child's ability to manage by himself/herself, depriving them from assuming

responsibilities. These kinds of parental worries are too much for the child's health, and they permit to their child to do fewer things in comparison with children of their age. An idea concerning "control" highlighted in the literature is that parents who protect their children from solicitant experiences, limiting their control over stressful situations teach them that the world is a dangerous place, where they need protection and cannot be in control (Rapee, 2001, as cited by Van Zalk & Kerr, 2011).

It is easy to explain thusly the correlation between a parental model perceived as overprotective in one's own childhood and the manifestation of a clinging to the partner's behavior, which is specific to the anxiety dimension from the adult attachment. The correlations between the anxious attachment and the overprotective parental style were confirmed for different groups of ages, on clinical samples and also for nonclinical ones, on different empirical research (Greco & Morris, 2002; Spokas & Heimberg, 2009).

A low avoidance is almost implicit; the distance from the partner's attachment figure is really dangerous for these adults. An adult that perceived the parental model as overprotective, with a high level of control, leaving him/her few possibilities of assuming personal responsibility and testing their personal abilities, will tend to offer the partner the power over his/her life decisions.

To conclude, *the overprotective parental model* has a greater probability of being associated with a preoccupied attachment style, highlighted by the logical combination of the two dimensions (high anxiety, low avoidance).

It can also be deduced from the results that a parental model, perceived as *offering emotional warmth*, significantly correlates positively with the avoidance dimension of the attachment. In a practical sense, a high level of emotional warmth from the part of the family, perceived by the respondent, is associated with a low level of avoidance as an attachment dimension.

A familial parental model that is characterized by emotional warmth comprises those parental rearing styles that are centered on the respect for the child's contrary opinions, on the tenderness expression, on warmth gestures, words and hugs. These kinds of parents encourage the child, support him/her, congratulate them for their success, and offer opportunities to assume the responsibility and to become an autonomous adult.

A low avoidance in the adult attachment means an openness or tendency of closeness to the other. The presence of an adult invested with significance is welcomed and encouraged.

Emotional warmth implies openness to the other, the correlations between the two variables thus being easily explained. The fact that there is no correlation between this group of parental styles and anxiety *does not permit us to assert anything about the correlation between emotional warmth perceived by the participants during childhood and a certain attachment type.*

Similarly, the *rejective parental style* does not correlate either with the anxiety, or with avoidance (the hypothesis being partially denied), which permits us to categorize it as a practice not having any impact on the couple's attachment.

On the other hand, as the results show, one can conclude that *overprotection is associated at adulthood with high anxiety and low avoidance, with the tendency to cling to the partner, and the emotional warmth is the factor that offers the openness to the other and a premise of a good relationship.*

In the third hypothesis, in order to see what the significant predictors are, as well as their importance order in the explanation of the attachment anxiety and avoidance dimensions, a regression analysis was conducted. The results presented in the section above show that structural anxiety explains the *anxiety dimension* of a couple's adult attachment, but if an overprotection parental model has been added to it, the explanation value for this type of attachment rises. In the same manner, the model based on emotional warmth explains the *avoidance dimension* of the adult couple's attachment. Adding to this, the overprotection parental model, the explicative value for this type of attachment rises, and when there is structural anxiety added to the emotional warmth and overprotection perceived from the part of the parents, then the explicative value for dimension avoidance of the attachment rises.

There have been a series of partial conclusions formulated so far. As part of a more ample study, which proposes to describe some elements of intergenerational transmission of attachment, this research investigates the first level, that of the relation between parental models and the attachment style at an adult age. The results also took into consideration the correlation established with the trait-anxiety of the participants. The hypotheses were confirmed to a great extent. The first hypothesis was totally confirmed, which means that there were highlighted significant correlations between trait-anxiety during the adult age and both dimensions of adult attachment, anxiety and avoidance. The second hypothesis was partially confirmed. This because even though the *overprotective perceived parental model* correlates with *anxiety*, as well as with *avoidance* as a dimension of couple attachment, the model offering *emotional warmth* only correlates with the *avoidance*, but not with the other dimension, the *anxiety*, while the *model perceived as rejective* does not correlate with either of the adult couple's attachment. The last hypothesis was also confirmed by the results, as both dimensions of adult couple attachment were explained by specific contributions of the perceived parental models reported by the respondents as well as by the intensity of their trait-anxiety.

At this point one has to be aware of some limitations of this study, such as the low number of subjects for testing the hypotheses or the fact that the direct relations between the variables were only taken into account. This could imply that checking needs to be done for mediate or moderate relations between variables for further studies regarding this idea. Anxiety as a trait is one frequent variable used for moderating relations between variables, so it becomes important to test its value

as a mediator or moderator between the perceived parental rearing models as well as the adult attachment style for these data findings. One other important idea cited in the literature when using the EMBU inventory for the perceived parental rearing styles is the fact that the recollection of those memories can be distorted and does not represent the full reality. Therefore we consider it important to find and test the possible variables that might influence the responses of the current subjects at the inventory cited above.

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