



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Infant Behavior and Development

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/inbede

Mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters: Are there sex differences in the organization of secure base behavior during early childhood



Carla Fernandes^a, Manuela Veríssimo^{a,*}, Ligia Monteiro^b, Marta Antunes^a,
Brian E. Vaughn^c, António J. Santos^a

^a William James Center for Research, ISPA-Instituto Universitário, Portugal

^b Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), cis-IUL, Portugal

^c Auburn University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Attachment
Mothers and fathers
Sex differences

ABSTRACT

Recent empirical studies reporting sex differences in attachment relationships have prompted investigators to consider why and under what conditions such results might be observed. This study was designed to explore possibilities of identifying sex differences in the organization of attachment-relevant behavior during early childhood. Observations of 119 children (59 boys) with their mothers and (separately) with their fathers were completed and children were described using the AQS. Results indicated that girls and boys did not differ with respect to global attachment security but at more specific level analyses revealed differences between parents that reflected differences in the behaviors of girls vs. boys with mothers and fathers. Our findings contradict arguments from evolutionary psychologists claiming that sex differences in attachment organization arise during middle childhood. By adopting an attachment measure sensitive to the possibility of behavioral sex differences our data suggest that such differences may be detectable earlier in development. Moreover, these differences are subtle and nuanced and do not suggest large sex differences in attachment security *per se*.

1. Introduction

Attachment theory recognizes that a child may have a network of attachments, and recent research demonstrates that fathers are attachment figures (e.g., Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006; Monteiro, Veríssimo, Vaughn, Santos, Bost, 2008; Monteiro, Veríssimo, Vaughn, Santos, Fernandes, 2008; Monteiro, Veríssimo, Vaughn, Santos, Torres, & Fernandes, 2010; Steele, Steele, & Fonagy, 1996). These researches provide unequivocal evidence that non-maternal attachments are regular features of children's lives, however some researchers stress that the interaction domains leading to attachment formation and maintenance may differ qualitatively for mothers vs. fathers (e.g., Grossmann, Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Kindler, Scheuerer-Englisch, & Zimmermann, 2002; Lamb, 1975). Furthermore, these differences may be especially relevant to the father's role in socializing the regulation of arousal in the context of vigorous play (e.g., Feldman, 2003) and subsequent outcomes contingent on this experience (e.g., Pinto, Veríssimo, Gatinho, Santos, & Vaughn, 2015).

Attachment theory, as formulated and elaborated by Bowlby and Ainsworth (e.g., Ainsworth, 1969, 1972; Ainsworth, Blehar, & Waters, 1978; Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973) did not suggest sex differences either in the early organization and operation of the attachment behavior system or in the organization of secure base behavior around a specific attachment figure (i.e., attachment

* Corresponding author at: Rua Jardim do Tabaco, 34, Lisboa, Portugal.

E-mail address: mveriss@ispa.pt (M. Veríssimo).

security) during infancy or childhood. In part, the failure to consider possible sex differences can be attributed to the assumption that the attachment behavior system had evolved as a protective mechanism to maximize proximity between infants and their major caregiver(s), thereby making it easier for the caregiver(s) to provide protection against threats present in the environment(s) of evolutionary adaptedness. As all infants were equally incapable of self-defense, there seemed no need to distinguish female and male “strategies” with regard to how protection was elicited or provided. Moreover, because attachment *relationships* were assumed to be products or consequences of the repeated operation of the attachment behavior system (and a complementary caregiving system) over time (Ainsworth et al., 1978), theorists did not have a compelling reason to posit, nor did researchers have a rationale to look for, differences between the sexes with regard to the ways in which attachment relationships were organized. These assumptions have largely been corroborated in the empirical data on infant/parent attachment security; that is, when tested, it is extremely rare that sex differences in the distribution of attachment classifications are reported in the early years of life.

Sensitive parenting is central for fostering a secure attachment and explaining individual differences in attachment organizations (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003; De Wolff and van IJzendoorn, 1997). Nonetheless several studies have highlighted that mothers tend to receive higher scores on sensitivity measures than do fathers (e.g., Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, Powers, & Wang, 2001; De Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Fuertes, Faria, Beeghly, & Lopes-dos-Santos, 2016; Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014) prompting discussions of whether fathers are less sensitive or whether we are measuring sensitivity the wrong way for fathers. For example, the interaction basis for attachment security for infants (i.e., sensitivity to communicative signals) has been found to differ for fathers and mothers (De Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997) but when fathers and children are studied, relatively vigorous play interactions are often given greater emphasis, reflecting an interaction domain seen as more typical for fathers than for mothers (who are more likely to be observed in the context of verbal exchanges or lower intensity play activities (Grossmann et al., 2002; Lamb & Lewis, 2013). This tendency of researchers to sample different activity domains for mother-child vs. father-child interactions might result in differences in ratings of sensitivity. Even so, it is most often observed that the relative frequencies of secure and insecure attachments for infants/toddlers is about the same for father-child pairs as it is for mother-child pairs.

1.1. Sex differences

However, when measures of attachment evolved from characterizations of the sensory-motor attachment representations of pre-verbal children to the mental representations emergent from those sensory-motor representations during early childhood (e.g., Bretherton, Ridgeway, & Cassidy, 1990), reports of sex differences in doll-play tasks assessing attachment (mostly favoring girls) began to appear (Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2004; Page & Bretherton, 2001; Pierrehumbert et al., 2009; Woolgar, Steele, Steele, Yabsley, & Fonagy, 2001).

Del Giudice and associates have proposed an explanatory framework based on evolutionary life history strategies to interpret the observed sex difference that locates the onset of these differences during the juvenile period (nominally ages 5–6 through 10; Del Giudice, Angeleri, & Manera, 2009; Del Giudice & Belsky, 2010). In this model, the juvenile transition marks the onset of physiological sex differences (i.e., adrenarche, or the moment in development when the adrenal glands start to increase the secretion of adrenal androgens). These neuroendocrine changes are thought to participate in the cascade of changes that take place as the child transitions to adolescence and presage a host of physical, physiological, behavioral, and psychological sex differences that become more apparent after puberty. The details of this model are beyond the scope of this report, but it is fair to say that both the basic data regarding sex differences in the distributions of insecure attachments and the explanatory framework proposed are controversial and not widely accepted within the attachment research community for a range of reasons (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg and Van IJzendoorn, 2009; Petters & Waters, 2009; Seltzer & Pollak, 2009; van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010a, 2010b).

Independently of how the dispute over the existence of sex differences in attachment quality will be resolved, there remains the empirical fact that, for some measures, investigators are discovering more female/male differences than the attachment research community has been led to expect from either the theory itself or its relevant empirical tests. This fact alone should be sufficient to prompt the investigators to consider why such results might be observed and also to suggest research strategies for probing the possibilities that sex/gender differences relevant to attachment organization might be evident at any age.

We indicated above that measurement issues might be involved (i.e., dimensional scores vs. categorical classifications) in finding sex differences, and some theorists have suggested that narrative measures (e.g., attachment relevant stories told after being prompted by story stems, graphic representations, or word lists) are more likely to yield sex differences in the mean average of security, at least during middle childhood (see Maia, Veríssimo, Ferreira, Antunes, & Silva, 2012; van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010b).

From the measurement perspective, we would prefer an instrument that provides both continuous scores relevant to attachment security and categorical characterizations of differences among children with regard to attachment security. The measure should also be validated as an attachment security index across the period of infancy and early childhood. Q-methods (e.g., Block, 2008; Vaughn, Santos, & Coppola, 2014) are excellent candidate(s) for this purpose because: 1) Q-sorts typically cover a very wide range of behaviors relevant to some smaller set of broad constructs; 2) Q-methods have established procedures for identifying criterion prototypes for the constructs they are intended to survey (e.g., Block & Block, 1980; Waters, 1995); 3) Q-item data may also be used to identify detailed differences in the salience and implicative utility of specific cognitive, behavioral, and emotional attributes for males and females from childhood to adulthood (e.g., Block & Haan, 1971; Block & Robins, 1993; Funder, Block, & Block, 1983).

The Attachment Q-sort (AQS; Waters, 1995) shares these attributes (e.g., numerous items, criterion prototypes for security and dependency, and the possibility of using scales) and is also a widely used and well-validated (see van IJzendoorn, Verijken,

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات