Associations between Caregivers' Global and Specific Attachment Representations and the Infant-Caregiver Attachment Relationship

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**ABSTRACT**

The primary objectives of the current study were: (1) to determine the extent to which caregivers’ conceptualizations of their own attachment history (global attachment representations) are congruent with the way in which they conceptualize their relationships with a specific child (relationship-specific attachment representations); and (2) to evaluate whether these relationship-specific representations play a mediating role in the intergenerational transmission of attachment. Prenatal assessments of caregivers’ global attachment representations, as measured by the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), and relationship-specific attachment representations, as measured by the Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI), were obtained in a sample of 196 mother-infant dyads. Infant-caregiver play a mediating role in the intergenerational transmission of attachment representations, as measured by the Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI), were obtained in a sample of 196 mother-infant dyads. Infant-caregiver attachment status was assessed using the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) when infants were 12 months of age. Considerable correspondence was found between caregivers’ global and relationship-specific attachment representations; however, there was no evidence for the mediational hypothesis. The current study makes a significant contribution to the literature as it represents the first attempt to directly evaluate the links between caregivers’ global and relationship-specific attachment representations and the infant-caregiver attachment relationship.

**METHOD**

**Participants**
- 196 mother-infant dyads
- 94 girls, 102 boys
- Middle class, community sample

**Measures and Procedure**
1. Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985, 1996)
2. Administered prenatally
3. Working Model of the Child Interview (WMCI; Zeanah, Benoit, & Barton, 1986)
4. Administered prenatally
5. Strange Situation Procedure (SSP; Ainsworth et al., 1978)
6. Administered when infants were 12 months old

**RESULTS**

1) There was significant congruence between global and relationship-specific attachment representations (see figure).
   - 70.2% of cases corresponding as theoretically expected ($k = .47$, $p < .001$, Cramer’s $J = .46$).

2) There was no evidence of mediation (see table).
   - AAI classifications were significantly associated with SSP classifications, and with WMCI classifications
   - However, when controlling for AAI classifications, the association between WMCI and SSP classifications was not significant.
   - The link between AAI and SSP classifications was not reduced when controlling for WMCI status

**CONCLUSIONS**

Caregivers’ current conceptualization of their attachment history has a particularly strong impact on their prenatal conceptualizations of their relationships with their own children.

Although caregivers’ attachment representations constitute an important antecedent in the development of infant-caregiver attachment relationship, caregivers’ expectations of their relationships with their infants did not mediate the association between their global attachment representations and the infant-caregiver attachment relationship.

Please contact erinn.hawkins@albertahealthservices for more information regarding this study.