Marriage Quality as a Mediating Factor in the Intergenerational Transmission of Attachment Security from Mother to Child

Introduction

• Continuity in attachment patterns from mother to babies across generations has been established. Yet, not all mothers who are classified as insecure develop an insecure attachment with their babies.
• Maternal sensitivity has been found to be a mediating factor in these cases of inconsistent transmission.
• The role of marital quality in these cases has not been examined.

Study Goal

• Study Goal: to examine marital quality factors that allow a mother with an insecure attachment pattern to form a secure attachment with her baby.

Methods

• Participants: The 125 couples were followed over the transition to first-time parenthood. Couples, ages 16 to 42, were mostly Caucasian & middle SES.
• Measures:
  - Mother Attachment (Adult Attachment Interview)
  - Baby Attachment (Strange Situation Procedure)
  - Marital Boundaries and Balance (Jacobvitz Measure)

Results

In insecure moms with secure babies experience significantly more marital balance than mothers of insecure babies. In cases where attachment patterns of mom and baby were not the same, insecure moms were more likely to have secure babies than secure moms were to have insecure babies.

Conclusions

• Marital quality, specifically couple boundaries and balance, is an important factor in the transmission of attachment pattern from mother to infant. Future directions of this research could examine marital interventions as treatment for at risk mother-child relationships.
• In addition to this, the chi square analysis of the sample suggests that it is more likely that an insecure mother improves her relationship with her child than an is for a secure mother to have an insecure relationship with her child.