

“Like mother, like child”?

Relationship Between Maternal Attachment to Spouse and Child Attachment to Mother
Mediated By Maternal Caregiving

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to test the relationship between child attachment and maternal spouse attachment mediated by maternal caregiving. It was hypothesised that (1) maternal spouse attachment is related to the caregiving of the mother; (2) the caregiving style of the mother is related to the child's attachment to her; (3) maternal spouse attachment is related to the child's attachment to the mother and that (4) the relationship between maternal spouse attachment and child attachment is mediated by maternal caregiving. Attachment was analysed through avoidance and anxiety while maternal caregiving was analysed in terms of oversensitivity and distance. The sample consisted of 118 mother-child dyads. Results revealed that (1) maternal attachment anxiety to the spouse is related to caregiving oversensitivity while avoidance is related to caregiving distance; (2) caregiving distance is related to child attachment anxiety and avoidance; and (3) maternal attachment avoidance to the spouse is related to child attachment anxiety. Given the results, a mediation model of maternal caregiving in relation to maternal attachment to the spouse and child attachment to mother was built. This model revealed that (4) the mechanism of child attachment is explained through maternal caregiving and maternal attachment to the spouse.

Keywords: adult spouse attachment; child attachment; caregiving

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“Like mother, like child”?

The Mediation Model of Maternal Parenting in Relation to the Maternal Spouse and Child Attachment

Attachment theory offers a psychological model attempting to explain human psychological and social functioning relating to and resulting from the bond built between a primary caregiver (usually mother) and the child. Depending on the quality and the quantity of this bond in the relationship built, a child develops a certain pattern of attachment that would be either child secure or child insecure attachment. Child insecure attachment patterns can be further divided into child attachment anxiety and avoidance, as studied in this paper. But what specifically is related to child insecure attachment patterns? In this paper the relationship between maternal attachment to the spouse and child attachment to the mother was examined and mediated by maternal caregiving. The paper seeks to predict child attachment and maternal caregiving perhaps even before the child is born into a family.

Attachment Insecurity in Adults and Children

According to John Bowlby’s theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969), aspects of parenting such as responding to a child’s needs, being physically and emotionally available to him/her, and proximity and closeness between the child and the primary caregiver are crucial for the child to form an attachment (Bowlby, 1969). Following Bowlby’s findings, Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters&Walls, 1978) studied infants to test child attachment style and she designed an experiment called ‘The Strange Situation’. During this experiment, a mother start alone in a room full of toys and other interesting objects for the child to explore. After some time given to the child for his/her exploration, a stranger joins the mother and the child in the room and starts talking to the mother. Following the conversation with the mother, the stranger starts to pay attention to the child. As the stranger and the child start interacting, the mother leaves the room. When the mother comes back into the room after a

few minutes to comfort the child, it is soon time for mother to leave again — but this time, the stranger leaves with her. After several minutes, the stranger comes back into the room to interact with the child and, finally, the mother returns. Ainsworth found that depending on the experience of the relationship and caregiving environment, infants develop one among three organised patterns of attachment: secure, avoidant and anxious (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters&Walls, 1978). The findings of the study suggested that most infants had secure attachment, meaning that they were observed to be comfortable and exploring when mothers were present but upset when their mothers left. It was found that securely attached children use their caregiver as a secure base for exploration and seek proximity to their mothers. Moreover, the study revealed a clear distinction between securely attached children and insecurely attached ones, meaning anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Anxious children were found to protest when mothers left, and they continued to be anxious even when mothers came back into the room, which suggests that they cannot use their caregiver as a secure base to regulate their emotions. On the other hand, avoidant infants were found to seek little contact with their mothers and they showed low levels of distress when their mothers were away. In avoidant child attachment, it was also observed that during child-mother interaction there is little affective sharing. Avoidant children were found to treat strangers in a similar way to how they treat their caregivers.

Ainsworth described these attachment patterns as lasting beyond infancy and being typical of adult romantic attachment (Hazan&Shaver, 1987; Ainsworth, 1989). These attachment patterns were found in numerous studies to be related to one's trust capability and intimacy in romantic relationships (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) as well as parenting style in future life (Adam, Gunnar & Tanaka, 2004). According to the categorisations of adult attachment patterns in these studies, securely attached children are high likely to have positive views of themselves, others and the world (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000;

Bartholomew&Horowitz, 1991). Thus, they are likely to feel comfortable in intimate relationships (Hazan&Shaver, 1987/1990/1994) and they become caregivers who respond appropriately and consistently to the child's needs (Hazan&Shaver, 1987/1990/1994). On the other hand, anxiously attached children tend to seek high levels of intimacy in their relationships when they reach adulthood; being overly dependent on their partners, they also seek approval from them (Hazan&Shaver, 1987/1990/1994). Unlike securely attached individuals, they tend to have problems trusting their partners and have less positive views of themselves, others and the world (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000; Bartholomew&Horowitz, 1991). Lastly, children with avoidant attachment are more likely to become adults with mixed feelings towards their partners in their intimate relationships, meaning that they might both desire and feel uncomfortable with closeness in these intimate relationships (Hazan&Shaver, 1987/1990/1994). Thus, they tend to seek less intimacy and suppress their feelings. They are likely to become caregivers with little or no response to child distress — the same as their own caregivers (Hazan&Shaver, 1987/1990/1994).

Relationship Between Adult Attachment to Spouse and Child Attachment

Bowlby (1979) believed that there was a continuous development in human life: "There is a strong causal relationship between an individual's experiences with his parents and his later capacity to make affectional bonds" (p. 135). In other words, Bowlby postulated that adults with secure romantic attachments, for instance, would have secure child attachment. According to Del Giudice and Belsky (2010), romantic relationships serve "to promote long-term bonding, cooperative parenting and (ultimately) parental investment" (p. 112). Previous studies found that securely attached individuals, relatively to partners with other attachment patterns, are the most responsive romantic partners (Feeney & Collins, 2001; Kuncé & Shaver, 1994; Millings & Walsh, 2009). These trusting and intimate relationships between partners were found to be related to warm and close relationships with

their children as well (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988; Engfer, 1988). Furthermore, Engfer (1988) found that mothers who experience strong conflict in their intimate relationships tend to be emotionally dependent on their infants. It was found that highly ambivalent (meaning anxious) mothers who experience distress in their intimate relationships are likely to be closer to their children (Rholes, Simpson & Blakely, 1995). Furthermore, mothers' attachment concerns in relation to their spouses were found to correlate with the quality of their infants' attachment to the mothers (Mayseless, Sharabany & Sagi, 1997). For instance, a mother with greater fear of abandonment by her spouse tends to have a child with anxious/ambivalent attachment, while a mother with a greater fear of emotional closeness was found to be more likely to have a child with attachment avoidance (Mayseless, Sharabany & Sagi, 1997). While the mother's fear of abandonment resembles anxiety in her intimate relationship (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987), her fear of emotional closeness resembles distance and avoidance (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Therefore, it is hypothesised that the adult attachment of mothers to their spouses will be related to children's attachment to their mothers (Path c in Figure 1). The first hypothesis of this study postulates that children whose mothers experience anxiety in their intimate relationships tend to have anxious attachment to their mothers, while those whose mothers experience avoidance in their intimate relationships tend to have avoidant attachment to their mothers. This might occur for two reasons. Firstly, insecure maternal attachment to the spouse indicates that the mother's attachment needs are not sufficiently fulfilled and therefore the mother might seek to satisfy those needs through her child. This might result in a transmission of the mother's attachment needs to her child. Thus, **(1) anxiety in maternal spouse attachment is expected to be related to child attachment anxiety** and **(2) avoidant maternal spouse attachment is expected to be related to child attachment avoidance.**

Adult Attachment to Spouse and Caregiving Behaviours

Maternal sensitivity refers to the ability of a mother to notice her baby's signals and respond to them appropriately. Romantic love cannot be separated from the caregiving system towards the spouse as well as to the child (Ainsworth, 1989; Shaver, Hazan & Bradshaw, 1988). Caregiving behaviour is an important component in intimate relationships in order to maintain a healthy and satisfying relationship (e.g., Acitelli, 1996; Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1996; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Cutrona, 1996; Feeney, 1996; Julien & Markman, 1991). Previous studies found that securely attached individuals, when compared to partners with other attachment patterns, are not only the most responsive and cooperative romantic partners (Feeney & Collins, 2001; Kunce & Shaver, 1994; Millings & Walsh, 2009) but are also highly sensitive and attuned parents (George & Solomon, 1999; Selcuk, Zayas & Hazan, 2010). Furthermore, it was found that secure romantic attachment and partner caregiving in intimate adult relationships was linked to the degree to which an individual provided sensitive and responsive emotional care to the child (e.g., Feeney & Collins, 2001; Kunce & Shaver, 1994; Millings & Walsh, 2009). Accordingly, avoidant adult attachment was associated with lower levels of caregiving (Carnelley, Pietromonaco & Jaffe, 1996) and it indicated less responsive and more controlling caregiving behaviours (Feeney & Collins, 2001), whereas anxious adult attachment was associated with less responsive caregiving and less support to the child (Collins & Ford, 2010; Millings & Walsh, 2009). Another study that examined spouse attachment and its contribution to caregiving behaviour found that attachment avoidance and anxiety were both negatively associated with responsive caregiving (Millings, Walsh, Hepper, O'Brien, 2013). It suggested that adult intimate attachment to the spouse could predict caregiving behaviour, which in return also predicts child attachment (Millings, Walsh, Hepper, O'Brien, 2013). It was also found that insecure adult attachment indicates more negative expectations about parenting such as doubts about

one's caregiving capability, being insufficiently emotionally affectionate, and having too strict a caregiving style (Rholes, Simpson & Blakely, 1995; Rholes, Simpson, Blakely, Lanigan & Allen, 1997). Moreover, one study that examined the contribution of romantic attachment to caregiving behaviour found that attachment avoidance and anxiety were both negatively associated with responsive caregiving to a child (Millings, Walsh, Hepper, O'Brien, 2013). It suggests that adult attachment to a spouse predicts caregiving behaviour, which in return also predicts child attachment (Millings, Walsh, Hepper, O'Brien, 2013). Moreover, while adults with high attachment avoidance tend to detach from partners in intimate relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and have low proximity and sensitivity in caregiving (Carnelley et al., 1996; Feeney, 1996; Kuncé&Shaver, 1994), those that are high in anxiety tend to have attachment anxiety, meaning excessive proximity-seeking and contact maintenance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

To sum up, the studies listed above support the idea that maternal attachment to the spouse is linked to the child's attachment to the mother on many levels. Apart from the importance of frequency of parent-child activities, the quality of the relationship between the mother and child is important for child attachment, as the quality of the parent-child relationship affects the adolescent's self-concept and his/her integration into the world of peers (Dekovic, Meeus, 1997). In other words, a child's internal working models seem to be affected by the quality of the relationship they have with their parents and also (directly or indirectly) by the quality of the relationship that parents have in their intimate relationships. However, the paternal child-rearing style was not found to have an effect on child internal working models, meaning his/her views of himself/herself, others and the world (Dekovic, Meeus, 1997). It was previously revealed that mothers' adult attachment orientations, but not fathers', is related to their daughters' adult attachment organisations (Obegi, Marrison, Shaver, 2004). These findings clearly emphasise that mothers' bonds and interaction with

their children have a more significant impact than do fathers' on children's developmental outcomes (Obegi, Marrison, Shaver, 2004) such as child attachment styles. For this reason, this current study focuses *specifically* on mothers' attachment styles to their spouses and its relation to child attachment.

Therefore, given the reasons above, it is expected that **(1) maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal oversensitivity in caregiving to the child** and **(2) maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal distance in caregiving to the child** (Path a in Figure 1).

Maternal Caregiving and Child Attachment

Caregiving is a motivational system in parents through which occur protection of the child, responsiveness to his/her needs and emotion regulation of the child. It varies from parent to parent which caregiving behaviour he/she adapts as the caregiving system is believed to shape through parents' own internal working models (Bowlby, 1982 and caregiving is not separable from the attachment system. It is related to responsive and sensitive parenting (Bowlby, 1982). Sensitivity in caregiving was found to be significantly related to child secure attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters&Walls, 1978; Benoit&Parker, 1994; van IJzendoorn, 1995), while mothers with avoidant spouse attachment were associated with low levels of caregiving sensitivity in relation to the child (Millings et al., 2013; Mills-Koonce et al., 2011; Edelstein et al., 2004; Rholes et al., 2011). When a child seeks comfort and protection from the primary caregiver, responsive and sensitive caregiving behaviour will most likely result in child secure attachment. Children with unresponsive caregivers, however, are more likely to develop insecure child attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Because attachment styles develop depending on interaction and experiences with the primary caregiver, it is likely to have various child attachment patterns (secure or insecure anxious/avoidant) based

on specific caregiver behaviours (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Kunce & Shaver, 1994). Highly intrusive parental behaviour and over-involvement in a child's life were found to be non-optimal caregiving behaviours (Feeney&Collins, 2001). These findings show that mothers' distance to and over-involvement in a child's life is influential for the child's attachment quality and attachment pattern. Distance in caregiving behaviour resembles rejection and avoidant caregiving behaviour (Ainswort, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978), while too much involvement in and closeness to the child resembles anxious caregiving behaviour (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). Thus, it is expected that **(1) maternal caregiving oversensitivity will be related to child attachment anxiety** and that **(2) maternal caregiving distance will be related to child attachment avoidance** (Path b in Figure 1).

Maternal Spouse Attachment and Maternal Caregiving

Studies focused on adult intimate attachment found that mothers' adult attachment styles in relation to their spouses mediate the frequency of positive parent-child activities (Green, Furrer, McAllister, 2007), which is thought to be one of the crucial aspects in fostering a secure base for a child to shape his/her attachment pattern (Laible & Thompson, 2003). The fact that maternal spouse attachment mediates parent-child activities means that there is an indirect influence on parent-child interactions by spouse attachment patterns. It was found that parents who have sufficient (perceived or received) support from emotionally close figures (such as a spouse) tend to reflect this in their caregiving behaviours and in the relationship they have with their children (Abidin, 1992; Andresen & Telleen, 1992; Cutrona & Troutman, 1987; Kotchick et al. 2005), which in return influences child attachment quality (Lai & Carr, 2018; Laible & Thompson, 2003). Therefore, it might be the case that mothers who are insecurely attached to their spouses reflect their attachment concerns onto the relationship with their children.

**A) MEDIATION MODEL OF MATERNAL ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE IN
RELATION TO SPOUSE**

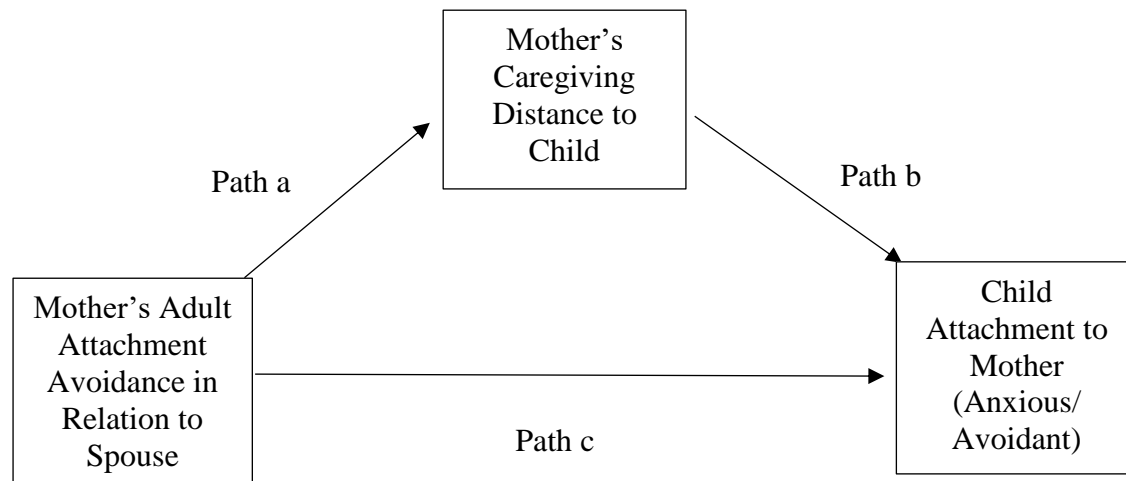


Figure 1. Mediation model of maternal avoidant spouse attachment hypotheses tested in this project

Previously, it was found that there is an intergenerational transmission of attachment from parents to children (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2019) — parents' adult attachment styles predicted child attachment styles. However, there were a few moderators found such as the differential susceptibility of the child to the environment (Belsky, 1997), meaning that susceptible (versus less susceptible) children would be influenced by their caregivers' behaviours, while easy-going children would be less influenced by their parents' caregiver behaviours – for better or worse (Belsky, 1997). Moreover, it was found that the attachment built between a mother and her child could be insecure due to the unavailability of the mother and the lack of interaction in her caregiving behaviours (Sagi et al., 1997). These studies have emphasised the effect of caregiving quality on child attachment. Given the advanced knowledge on the relationship between caregiving behaviour and attachment in intimate relationships, it is perhaps surprising that there are only a few studies that investigate the relationship between maternal spouse attachment and child attachment. Meanwhile, there was no evident previous study that investigated the model of maternal spouse attachment

mediated by maternal caregiving. Given the reasons above, this study hypothesises that **the impact of maternal spouse attachment on child attachment is mediated by maternal caregiving.**

Answering these questions and investigating maternal spouse attachment and the mediation model of maternal caregiving would have important conclusions on the general understanding of family relationships and dynamics in order to identify their relationship to child attachment styles. When further research is done, this link might allow parents to change a potential insecure child attachment outcome by changing their caregiving styles and spouse attachment quality. These changes will allow parents to foster healthy personality formation and a good sense of self, the world and others in a child — known as ‘working models’ as suggested by Bowlby (1972/1980). These working models are believed to stay stable and yet open to alterations in attachment patterns through experiences. There have been a number of studies examining the stability of attachment patterns (Hamilton, 2000; Waters, Merrick Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000; Lewis, Feiring & Rosenthal, 2000; Weinfeld, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2000). The results of these studies suggest that there are factors likely to trigger a change from secure attachment to insecurity in child attachment such as the divorcing of parents, traumatic experiences, and other negative events in life. It is also known that insecure attachment could be turned into security through certain experiences such as relationship satisfaction, greater emotional openness and fewer negative life events (Egeland & Farber, 1984; Vondra et al., 1999). Therefore, the findings of the current study may shed some light on the relationship between child attachment, maternal caregiving behaviour and maternal spouse attachment. Therefore, one of the aims of the present study is to test a mediation model of maternal spouse attachment to accomplish the goals listed above in Figure 1.

In summary, there are four research questions and six hypotheses formulated in the study (see Figure 2):

- 1) Path a: Is maternal spouse attachment related to caregiving style of the mother?
 - A. maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal caregiving oversensitivity in relation to the child
 - B. maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal caregiving distance in relation to the child
- 2) Path b: Is the caregiving style of the mother related to the child's attachment style to her?
 - A. maternal caregiving oversensitivity will be related to child attachment anxiety
 - B. maternal charging distance will be related to child attachment avoidance
- 3) Path c: Is maternal spouse attachment related to child's attachment style to mother?
 - A. maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse is expected to be related with child attachment anxiety in relation to the mother
 - B. maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse is expected to be related with child attachment avoidance in relation to the mother
- 4) Is the relationship between maternal spouse attachment and child attachment mediated by maternal caregiving?

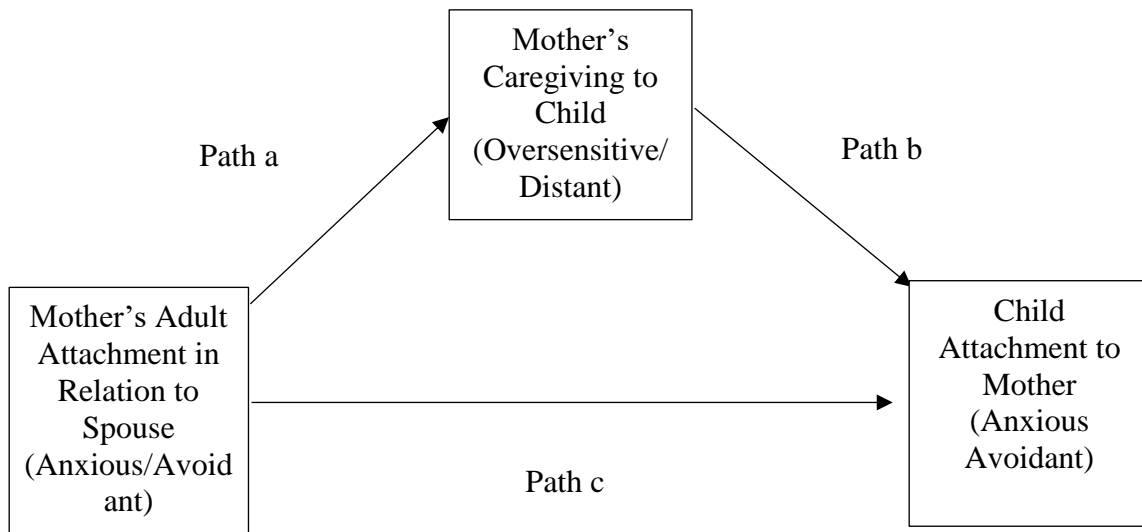
B. MEDIATION MODEL OF MATERNAL SPOUSE ATTACHMENT

Figure 2. Model of relations between mother's adult attachment to spouse and child attachment to mother mediated by the quality of maternal caregiving

Method

Participants:

The sample consisted of 118 mother-child dyads. The criteria of sampling addressed mothers who: (1) have Polish citizenship, (2) have a child between the ages of 10 to 12 years of life and (3) have a romantic partner/spouse. 11 pairs from this sample were failed to qualify for the criteria of the study and therefore the sample used in the analysis was down to 107 mother-child dyads.

Measures

Adult attachment style in intimate relationships. A short version of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-S) by Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt & Vogel (2007) was used in the Polish language to assess mothers' adult attachment styles to their spouses. The questionnaire included the avoidance subscale ($\alpha = .86$) (see Appendix A), consisting of 5 items (e.g. "I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back") and the anxiety subscale ($\alpha = .58$) (see Appendix B), consisting of 7 items (e.g. "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner"). Mothers were asked to rate their agreement with items using a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree).

Maternal caregiving. To assess attachment related parental caregiving, EmPA Parenting scale (Lubiewska, Głogowska, Sumer, Aran, 2017) was used. The scale is currently in the process of validation and was acquired through qualitative interviews with mothers of school age children carried out in Poland, the Netherlands and Turkey. The scale includes two subscales investigating caregiving oversensitivity (see Appendix C) and caregiving distance (see Appendix D). The oversensitivity subscale ($\alpha = .72$) consisted of 5 items (e.g. "I blame others for my child's failures") and the distance subscale ($\alpha = .59$). consisted of 4

items (e.g. “ I am not as close with my child as I should be”) The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).

Child attachment style. A brief version of Experiences in Close Relationships Scale Revised Child version (ECR-RC) by Brenning, Petegem, Vanhalst, Soenens (2014) was used to assess child attachment to the mother. The version of the questionnaire used in this project included 10 items, comprising of two subscales, and items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). The avoidance subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = .77$) (e.g. “ I don’t like telling my mother how I feel deep down inside”) (see Appendix E) while the anxiety subscale consisted of 4 ($\alpha = .76$) (e.g. “When I show my mother I love her, I am afraid she doesn’t love me as much”) (see Appendix F).

Procedure

The entire sample was recruited through schools, community groups and social media and the data was gathered through an online questionnaire as well as printed versions of it. The first two parts of the questionnaire (for mothers to complete) were to investigate mothers’ adult attachment style to their spouses and their attachment related caregiving styles. Following these two parts, mothers were asked to give their children privacy and were asked not to interfere with children’s answers to the questions. At the end of the questionnaire, children were asked to confirm whether or not they had had privacy while completing the questionnaire and whether their mothers had interfered with their answers.

Statistical Analysis

To assess the relationships between variables, analyses were carried out in order to draw conclusions on expected relationships between variables and for explanative reasons. Therefore, the study cannot be used to draw inferences about the causal relationships between these variables.

Results

Relationship Between Adult Attachment to Spouse and Caregiving Style (Path a)

The first hypothesis of the study was to investigate whether maternal spouse attachment anxiety and avoidance is related to mothers' caregiving dimensions (Path a).

Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test two hypotheses.

- A. maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal caregiving oversensitivity in relation to the child
- B. maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal caregiving distance in relation to the child

Two regression models were tested, and one explained maternal oversensitivity by maternal attachment anxiety and avoidance. The other model explained maternal caregiving distance by the same attachment dimensions. The results of both models are presented in Table 1. First, a significant relationship was found between maternal attachment anxiety to the spouse and caregiving oversensitivity ($F(2, 93) = 12.0, p < .001$). The relationship between maternal avoidance and the mother's oversensitivity in caregiving was not significant. This model explained 20% of the maternal oversensitivity. Moreover, a significant relation was found between maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and caregiving distance ($F(1, 94) = 9.98, p < .01$). The relationship between maternal anxiety and the mother's distance in caregiving was not significant. This model explained 10% of the maternal distance.

Table 1

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Maternal Spouse Attachment and Maternal Caregiving Behaviour

Maternal Spouse Attachment	Oversensitive Caregiving			Distant Caregiving		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Anxiety	.23	.06	.36**	.04	.04	.1
Avoidance	.09	.05	.17	.09	.03	.27*
<i>R</i> ²		.20**			.10*	

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

Relationship Between Caregiving Style and Child Attachment (Path b)

The next hypothesis was formulated to test whether the caregiving style of the mother related to the child's attachment style to her (path b). Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test two hypotheses.

A. maternal caregiving oversensitivity will be related to child attachment anxiety

B. maternal charging distance will be related to child attachment avoidance

Two regression models were tested. One of these explained child attachment anxiety by caregiving oversensitivity and distance. The other model explained child attachment avoidance by caregiving oversensitivity and distance. The results of both models are presented in Table 2 below. First, a significant relationship was found between caregiving distance and child attachment anxiety $F(2, 93) = 4.81, p < .05$. The relationship between caregiving oversensitivity and child attachment anxiety was not significant. This model

accounted for 9% of child respondents with attachment anxiety in the sample. Moreover, a significant relationship was found between caregiving distance and child attachment avoidance $F(2, 93) = 7.62, p < .01$. The relationship between caregiving oversensitivity and child attachment avoidance was not significant. This model accounted 14% of child respondents with attachment avoidance in the sample.

Table 2

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Maternal Caregiving Behaviour and Child Attachment

	Child Attachment Anxiety			Child Attachment Avoidance		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Maternal Caregiving Behaviour						
Oversensitivity	.16	.09	.18	.04	.1	.04
Distance	.29	.13	.22*	.6	.15	.36**
R^2		.09*			.14**	

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

Relationship Between Adult Attachment to Spouse and Child Attachment (Path c)

It was tested whether maternal spouse attachment is related to a child's attachment style to mother;

- A. anxiety in maternal spouse attachment is expected to be related to the attachment anxiety of the child towards the mother
- B. attachment avoidance of mothers to the spouse is expected to be related to child attachment avoidance

Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test two hypotheses. Two regression models were tested. One model explained child attachment anxiety by maternal spouse attachment anxiety and avoidance. The other model explained child attachment avoidance by the same maternal spouse attachment dimensions. The results of both models are presented in Table 3 below. First, a significant relationship was found between child attachment anxiety and maternal attachment avoidance to the spouse $F(2, 93) = 4.48, p < .05$. The relationship between maternal attachment anxiety and child attachment anxiety was not significant. This model accounted for 8% of the child respondents with attachment anxiety. Also, the relationship between maternal attachment anxiety and avoidance to spouse and child attachment avoidance was not significant $F(2, 93) = 2.72, p = .071$. This model accounted for 5% of child respondents with attachment avoidance.

Table 3

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Maternal Spouse Attachment and Child Attachment

Maternal Spouse Attachment	Child Attachment Anxiety			Child Attachment Avoidance		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Anxiety	.07	.06	.12	.13	.78	.18
Avoidance	.13	.04	.22*	.05	.06	.09
<i>R</i> ²		.08*			.05	

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

Relationship Between Maternal Spouse Attachment and Child Attachment Mediated by Maternal Caregiving Quality

According to the results above, path a and b were both significant and they met the conditions of a mediation (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017). Therefore, mediation between maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and child attachment avoidance (Model 1) and anxiety in relation to the mother (Model 2) were tested as mediated by maternal caregiving distance. According to the mediation analysis, maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and the maternal caregiving distance accounted for a significant direct effect in child attachment anxiety [$R^2 = .09$, $F(1, 94) = 9.98$; $p < .05$]. Results testing Model 2, as shown in Figure 2 and Table B, revealed that maternal caregiving distance did not add significantly to explaining the variance of child attachment anxiety by maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse [$R^2 = .09$, $F(1, 94) = 9.98$; $p = .08$]. Moreover, according to the mediation analysis, maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and the maternal caregiving distance accounted for significant indirect effect in child attachment avoidance [$R^2 = .09$; $F(1, 94) = 9.98$; $p < .01$]. According to the analysis of testing Model 1, results showed that an indirect effect of maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse on child attachment avoidance was insignificant, while in Model 2 a direct effect on child attachment anxiety was found to be significant [$R^2 = .14$, $F(1, 94) = 7.64$; $p < .05$].

C. MEDIATION MODEL OF MATERNAL ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE IN RELATION TO THE SPOUSE AND CHILD ATTACHMENT ANXIETY

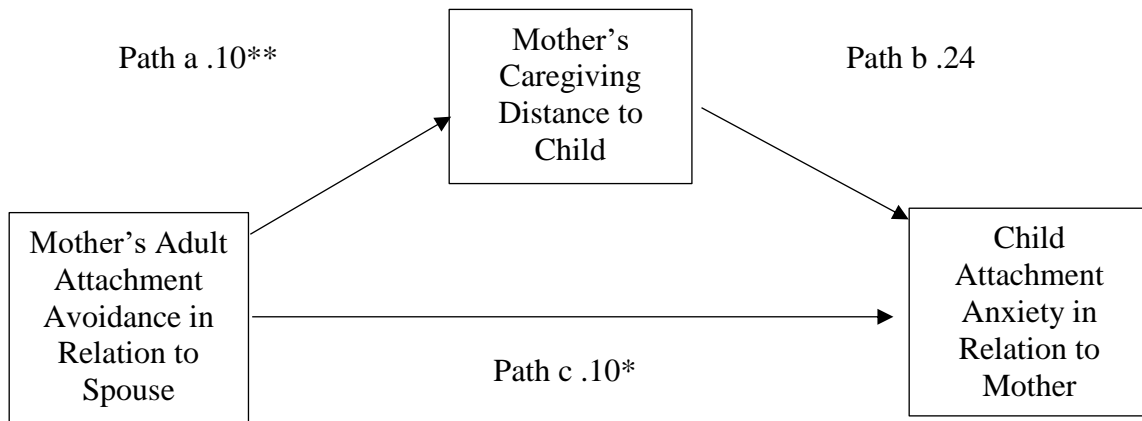


Figure 3. Mediation model of maternal avoidant spouse attachment and child attachment anxiety hypotheses tested in this project

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

D. MEDIATION MODEL OF MATERNAL ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE IN RELATION TO THE SPOUSE AND CHILD ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE

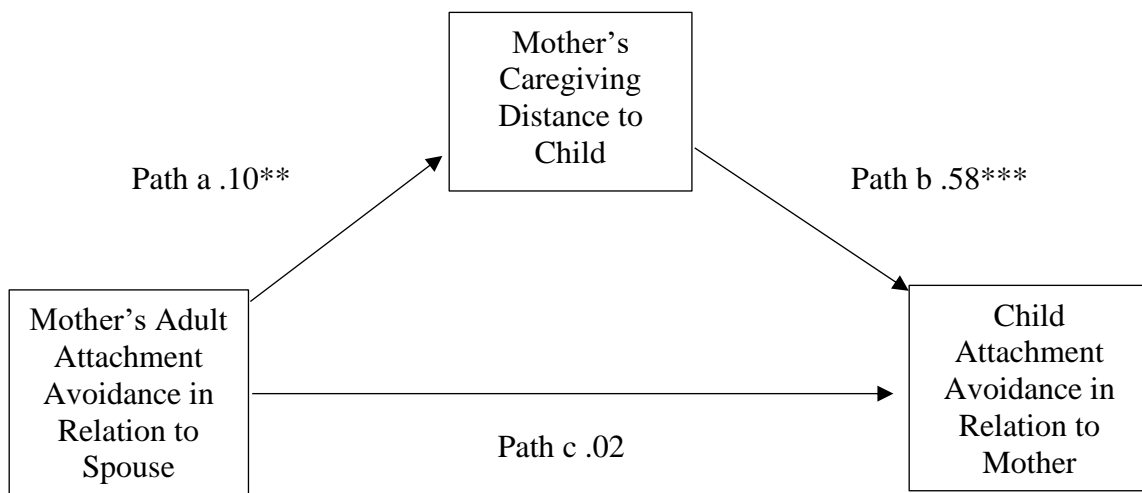


Figure 4. Mediation model of maternal avoidant spouse attachment and child attachment avoidance hypotheses tested in this project

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

Discussion

In the present study, maternal spouse attachment was comprehensively investigated in the context of child attachment and maternal caregiving. To this end, the mediational model between maternal attachment to the spouse and child attachment to the mother by maternal caregiving was tested focusing on each reaction separately and on the holistic model. The hypotheses tested in the study were as follows:

- 1) Path a: Is maternal spouse attachment related to caregiving style of the mother?
 - A. maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal caregiving oversensitivity in relation to the child
 - B. maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse will be related to maternal caregiving distance in relation to the child
- 2) Path b: Is the caregiving style of the mother related to the child's attachment style to her?
 - A. maternal caregiving oversensitivity will be related to child attachment anxiety
 - B. maternal caregiving distance will be related to child attachment avoidance
- 3) Path c: Is maternal spouse attachment related to child's attachment style to mother?
 - A. maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse is expected to be related with child attachment anxiety in relation to the mother
 - B. maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse is expected to be related with child attachment avoidance in relation to the mother
- 4) Is the relationship between maternal spouse attachment and child attachment mediated by maternal caregiving?

According to the results, the hypotheses tested in this study were partially supported.

The results revealed that maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse *is* related to caregiving oversensitivity, while maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse *is* related to caregiving distance as hypothesised (path a). However, only caregiving

distance was found to be related to both child anxiety and avoidance (path b). On the other hand, maternal attachment avoidance was found to be related to child attachment anxiety (path c). Further analysis showed that maternal caregiving distance partially mediated the relation between maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and child attachment anxiety and avoidance in relation to the mother.

Relationship Between the Attachment of the Mother in Relation to the Spouse and Her Caregiving

In line with previous studies (Millings, Walsh, Hepper, & O'Brien, 2013), the results of the present study revealed a link between maternal spouse attachment and caregiving behaviour. Mothers with anxious spouse attachment tended to be oversensitive caregivers in relation to their children. Similarly, in the study of Feeney & Collins (2001), they were found to be compulsive and controlling. An anxious mother may feel uneasy when it comes to being sure of her partner's love towards her and she may develop distrust in the relationship that might shape her caregiving behaviour tendency (Feeney & Collins, 2001). As suggested by Engfer (1988), mothers who experience attachment concerns (conflicts) in their intimate relationships tend to also demonstrate a "spill-over" negative affect into their caregiving behaviours. The reason why such a mother becomes an oversensitive caregiver might be that she is constantly uneasy in her relationship and has uncertain caregiving behaviours. She might seek approval and reassurance not only from her partner but also from her child. This results in an oversensitivity against rejection and abandonment from her child and partner. Thus, the children of mothers who are anxiously attached to their spouses might find themselves kept in a 'golden cage' and overprotected. Therefore, the mother's oversensitivity resembles her motivation of seeking for and providing care (Feeney & Collins, 2001).

On the other hand, it was found that mothers with avoidant spouse attachment tend to be distant caregivers, while they were also found to be unresponsive in the study of Feeney &

Collins (2001). The findings suggest that mothers who are avoidant in relation to their spouses are distant in their relationship with their children and might be limited in responding to their children's emotions and needs, as indicated by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Walls (1978). As found by Feeney & Collins (2001) an avoidant mother may not perform well in giving emotional comfort and support, and she may be less available (compared to less avoidant mothers) to her child. Thus, they tend to be distant in caregiving. The findings support the suggestion that maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse *is* related to maternal caregiving oversensitivity, while maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse *is* related to maternal caregiving distance as hypothesised. Thus, the findings play a significant role in predicting child attachment as well as helping to improve the caregiving behaviours of mothers.

Relationship Between Maternal Caregiving Quality and Child Attachment

The results showed that maternal caregiving behaviour *is* related to child attachment. It was found that maternal caregiving distance is related both to child anxiety and avoidance. Contrary to the expectations of the study, maternal caregiving oversensitivity was *not* found to be related to child anxiety. The reason why only maternal caregiving distance is related to both child attachment anxiety and avoidance might be that avoidant behaviours (such as distance) are more easily visible and observable. In comparison, anxious behaviours such as oversensitivity stays on the level of emotions and emotion regulation of mothers, and thus might be less visible to children. Therefore, children might observe and learn to imitate the avoidant behaviours of their mothers (Main & Goldwyn, in press). Distant caregiving behaviours such as lacking emotional attachment to a child and having little involvement in the child's life may be interpreted by children as signifying a neglectful and unresponsive mother (Feeney & Collins, 1998). Therefore, it may result in the self-reliance and independence of a child, who may avoid too much closeness and intimacy and not feel

comfortable to discuss his/her emotions (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters&Walls, 1978). Moreover, child attachment anxiety might form because the child is not supported emotionally and cannot learn emotion regulation from the mother's distant caregiving behaviour (Main & Hesse, 1990). The findings are demonstrations of a transmission of caregiving behaviour reflecting upon child attachment, as supported previously by many other studies (Millings et al., 2013; Mills-Koonce et al., 2011; Edelstein et al., 2004; Rholes et al., 2011).

Relationship Between Adult Attachment to the Spouse and Child Attachment

Contrary to the expectations of the study, only maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse was found to be related to child attachment anxiety and avoidance. The reason why maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse was not found to be related to child attachment might be that anxious attachment behaviours could not be observed on the behavioural level and it is instead manifested in the mother's thoughts and feelings of herself, the world and others. Child attachment anxiety and avoidance seems to occur when the availability and responsiveness of the mother is questionable to the child, which leaves him/her frustrated, confused and emotionally hungry because his/her needs are not satisfied. In the case of avoidant mothers, on the other hand, their emotional hunger continues to be present in their intimate relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters&Walls, 1978). They are likely to find it difficult to feel safe in their relationships and be sure of their partners' feelings, which may result in demanding behaviours towards their spouses (Millings, Walsh, Hepper, O'Brien, 2013).

This is an important finding, which suggests not only that adult attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse is transmitted to the next generation through child-to-mother attachment (Ijzendoorn, Kranenburg, 2018) but also that it is related to child attachment anxiety in relation to the mother.

Maternal Caregiving Distance as a Mediator Between Maternal Attachment Avoidance to Spouse and Child Attachment

The study revealed that maternal caregiving distance plays a mediator role between maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and child attachment. Two results should be highlighted here. Firstly, it was found that maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse is directly related to child attachment anxiety. This relation was not mediated by maternal caregiving distance. Secondly, the relation between maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and child attachment avoidance was found to be partially mediated through maternal caregiving distance. This finding supports the idea that child attachment avoidance might be formed through the observation and imitation of maternal attachment avoidance behaviours (in her relationship with the spouse) reflected onto her caregiving distance (Main & Goldwyn, in press). Given the relation between maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse and child attachment avoidance, there seems to be a transmission of attachment quality from the intimate relationship of the mother to her child's attachment through maternal caregiving behaviour. It might, therefore, be possible that the children who participated in this study will carry their current child attachment styles into their future intimate relationships and later transmit it to their own children through their caregiving behaviours. Given that the characteristics of insecure child attachment styles outlined above (such as insecure feelings about the self, the world and others) tend to be viewed as less desirable attachment quality, it could be viewed as important to break this 'vicious circle' of trans-generational attachment insecurity.

In order to advance our understanding of and possible responses to this 'vicious circle', further studies that incorporate broader perspectives of attachment-related change may be necessary. From these, it might be possible to identify longer-standing implications of this study. There are a significant number of studies contradicting the general belief that

attachment orientations stay stable throughout a lifespan (Allen, McElhaney, Kuperminc, & Jodi, 2004; Bai-Haim, Sutton-Fox & Marvin, 2000; Moss, Cyr, Bureau, Tarabulsky & Dubios-Comtois, 2005). Previous findings suggest that there are important factors allowing for a change from insecure attachment to secure attachment. It is possible that the relationship and the mediation found in this study is reversible and could be worked on towards secure child attachment as long as the relationship satisfaction in the family increases, greater emotional openness is succeeded and the family experiences fewer negative life events (Egeland & Farber, 1984; Vondra et al., 1999). However, further investigations into this matter are required to support this causality.

In summary, this study provides a unique contribution to the relationship between maternal attachment in relation to the spouse and child attachment. Moreover, the study discovered that maternal caregiving distance acts as a mediator upon child attachment avoidance, while it was also found that maternal attachment avoidance in relation to the spouse has a direct effect on child attachment anxiety. The findings clearly show that maternal spouse attachment as well as maternal caregiving behaviours are important to consider in child insecure attachment outcomes. With this study, an emphasis was put on the importance of maternal spouse attachment and maternal caregiving quality.

These conclusions are cautious, considering the limitations of the study. Self-report measures were used and the sample was only of one nationality (Polish). Given more resources, a bigger sample size would have been desirable. Moreover, the reliability of maternal attachment anxiety in relation to the spouse and maternal caregiving distance had a low but acceptable level in the current study. It will be important for future research to investigate the findings using a bigger sample and with a cross-cultural design. However, the sample was cautiously recruited to gain diversity in terms of social background. Despite these

limitations, the findings provide significant and valuable findings regarding maternal spouse attachment and caregiving behaviours on child attachment patterns.

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Appendix A

Example Questions for ECR-R Avoidance Subscale

1. Pomaga mi zwrócić się w potrzebie do mojego partnera/partnerki.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

3. Chcę zbliżyć się do mojego partnera/partnerki, ale ciągle się powstrzymuję.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

5. Zwracam się do mojego partnera w wielu sprawach, w tym po pocieszenie i otuchę*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

7. Staram się unikać zbytniego zbliżania się do mojego partnera/partnerki.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

9. Zwykle rozmawiam o moich problemach i troskach z moim partnerem/partnerką.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

Appendix B

Example Questions for ECR-R Anxiety Subscale

2. Potrzebuję wielu zapewnień, że jestem kochana/kochany przez mojego partnera/partnerkę.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

4. Sądzę, że mój partner/partnerka nie chcą być tak blisko jak ja bym tego chciał/a

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

6. Moje pragnienie by być bardzo blisko czasem odstrasza ludzi

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

8. Nie martwię się zbyt często, że zostaną porzucony/a.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

10. Czuję się sfrustrowany/a kiedy partnerka/partner nie jest dostępna/y kiedy ją/jego potrzebuję.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

11. Czuję się niekomfortowo, kiedy mój partner/partnerka chce być bardzo blisko.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

12. Martwię się, że mój partner/partnerka nie będzie troszczyć się o mnie tak jak ja o nich/o nie.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

Appendix E

Example Questions for ECR-RC Avoidance Subscale

1. Nie lubię mówić mojej mamie, jak naprawdę się czuję.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

3. Nie jest mi łatwo opowiadać o sobie mojej mamie.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

4. Wolę nie być zbyt blisko mojej mamy.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

6. Zazwyczaj opowiadam mojej mamie o swoich problemach i zmartwieniach.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

7. Gdy źle się czuję, pomaga mi rozmowa z moją mamą.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

8. Mówię mojej mamie prawie o wszystkim.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

Appendix F

Example Questions for ECR-RC Anxiety Subscale

2. Martwię się, że moja mama mogłaby chcieć mnie opuścić.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

5. Kiedy okazuję mojej mamie, że ją kocham, boję się, że ona nie kocha mnie tak bardzo, jak ja ją.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

9. Czasami myślę, że uczucia mojej mamy do mnie zmieniają się bez powodu.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

10. Boję się, że chcę być zbyt blisko mojej mamy, a ona tego nie lubi.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

11. Martwię się, że moja mama tak naprawdę mnie nie kocha.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się

12. Martwię się, że moja mama nie kocha mnie tak bardzo, jak ja kocham ją.*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Zdecydowanie nie zgadzam się	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Zdecydowanie zgadzam się