

# Associations of Parental Behavior with Children's Attachment Strategy

Griffin Newell, Abby Yates, Dr. Shari L.  
Kidwell, Mentor. Morehead State University,  
Department of Psychology, College of Science.

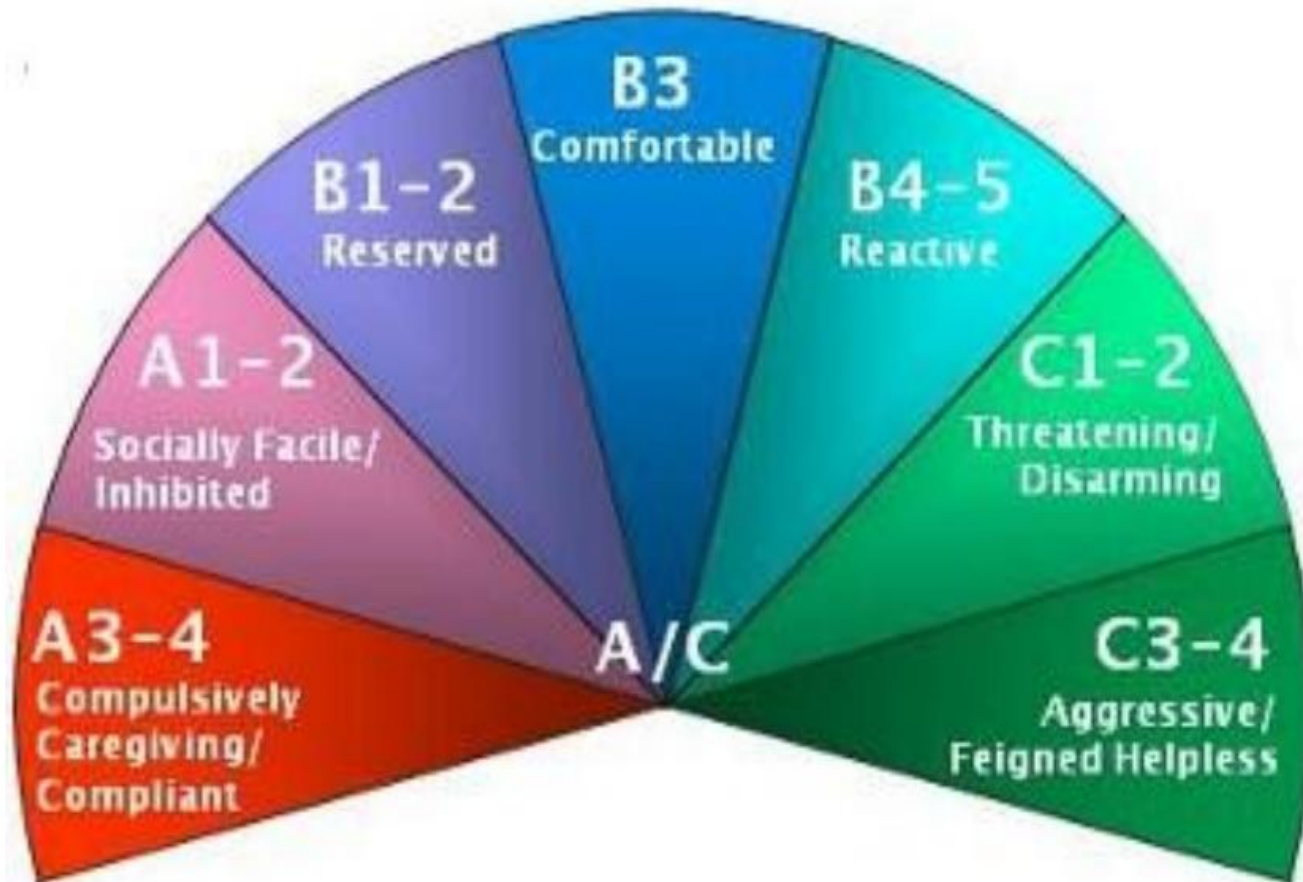
# Background Information

- Parental attachment is critical to a child's socioemotional adjustment.
- Parenting quality is a consistent predictor of child attachment. With high quality parenting being associated with secure attachment styles (Fraley & Hudson, 2017).

# Attachment Figures

- Attachment refers to the relational bond between a child and their primary caretaker.
- Ainsworth (et al., 1978) was the first to categorize into 3 general groups:
  - Secure
  - Ambivalent
  - Avoidant

# Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment and Adaptation DMM



- A classification system of attachment-based strategies.
- Derived from Ainsworth's original attachment model.
- Towards the top are A1-2, B1-5, and C1-2 secure, low risk, attachment styles.
- A3-A4 and C3-C4 are insecure, high risk, attachment styles.

# Parenting Behaviors

- Parent-child interactions vary greatly.
- High quality parenting is often assumed to have higher rates of sensitive behaviors with their child.
- Low quality parenting is assumed to have higher rates of both covertly and overtly hostile interactions.

# Parental Sensitivity

- The parents' ability to comprehend and react synchronously to their child's emotional needs (Ainsworth et al, 1978).
- Including accurate, attuned, prompt, and consistent responsiveness (Ainsworth et al., 1978).
- Sensitive parents are less likely to be hostile toward their children, and their children tend to be more responsive (Mäntymaa, 2009).

# Covert Hostility

- Encompasses an array of subtle behaviors with an apparent lack or disregard for the child's feelings (Biringen et al., 2014). Examples of covert hostility include eye rolls, scoffs, intrusively touching, and ignoring.
- This includes more overt instances of hostility. Such as yelling, creating unnecessary rules, belittling, or scolding the child.

# Our Hypothesis

- The present study examines the relationship between parenting behaviors during a frustration task and children's attachment.
- Our first hypothesis is parents who show more sensitive behaviors towards their child, will have children with more secure (B1-5, A1-2, & C1-2) attachments styles.
- Our second hypothesis is parents who showed more covert hostile parenting behaviors towards their child, will have children who show more insecure (A3-4, & C3-4) attachment styles.



# Our Participants

- Are a part of a larger, longitudinal study.
- 35 parent-child dyads.
- Children were an average age of 6.
- Majority of the parents had some degree of higher education.
- All families were living within or around the Appalachian area.

# Strange Situation

- Child Attachment was assessed via the strange situation (Ainsworth et al, 1978).
- The dyads were subject to a series of mini separations and reunions over the course of 25 minutes.
- Based on how the child responded to parental reunions, they were classified into the following 3 DMM (Crittenden, 2004) categories:
  - B/Secure. A secure attachment style, characterized by emotional and cognitive balance.
  - A/Avoidant. An insecure attachment style, characterized by inhibition.
  - C/Ambivalent. An insecure attachment style, characterized by emotional outbursts.

# The Cookie Task

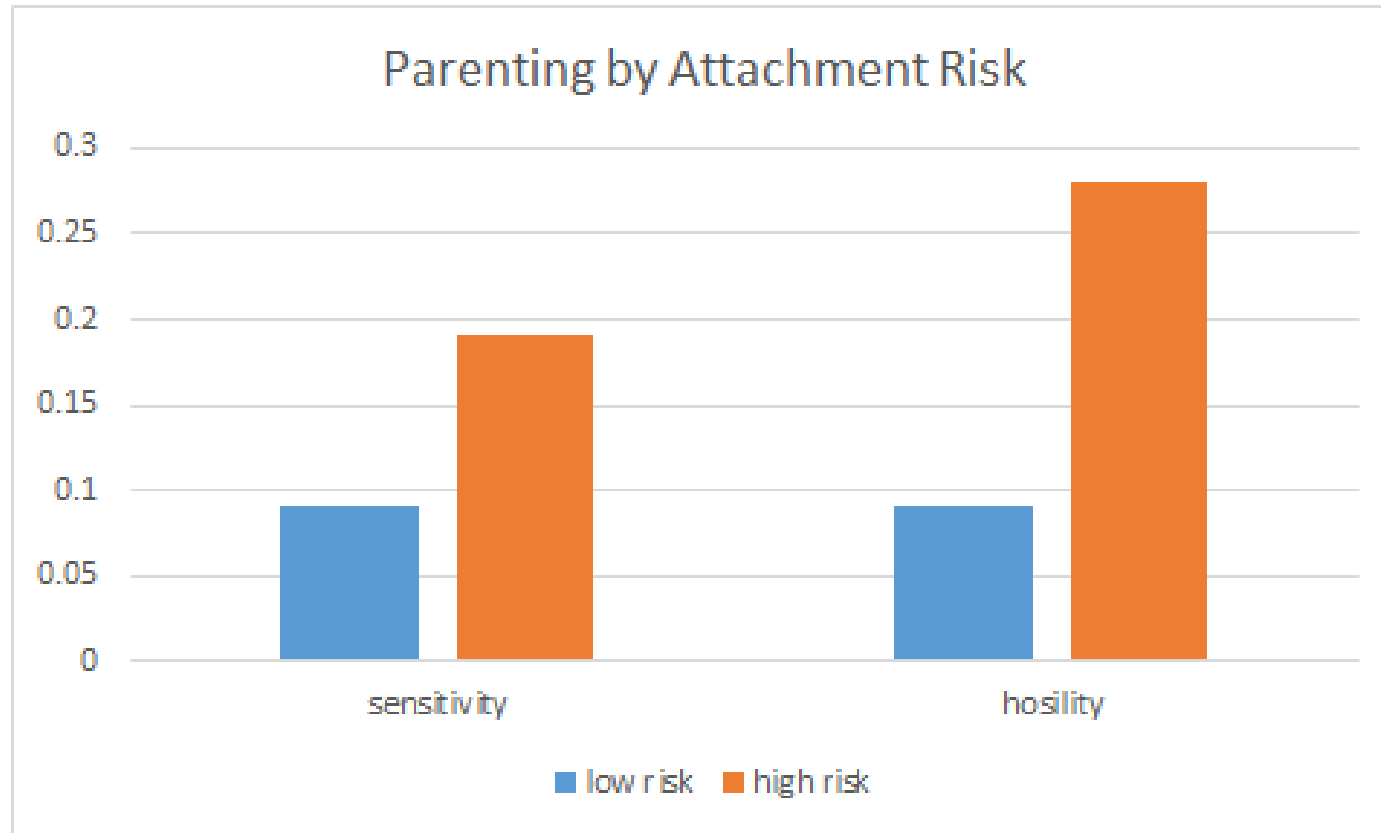
- The Cookie Task was used to elicit mild feelings of frustration in the participants.
- The parent-child pairs were left alone in a room with a transparent prize bag.
- Parents were asked to fill out a series of questionnaires and not to allow their child open the prize bag until a 7-minute period had passed.
- The task was video recorded.

# How the Cookie Task was coded

- The recorded tasks were subsequently broken down into 15 second intervals and coded for sensitive and covertly hostile parenting behaviors.
- Coding's were based off the Emotional Availability Scale (Biringen, 2000).
- Coders were blind to the child's attachment and had high interrater reliability.

# Results

- Sensitivity was not associated with attachment [ $t(1, 33) = 0$ , NS]
- Covert hostility was marginally related to attachment [ $t(1, 33) = -1.68 = .10$ ]

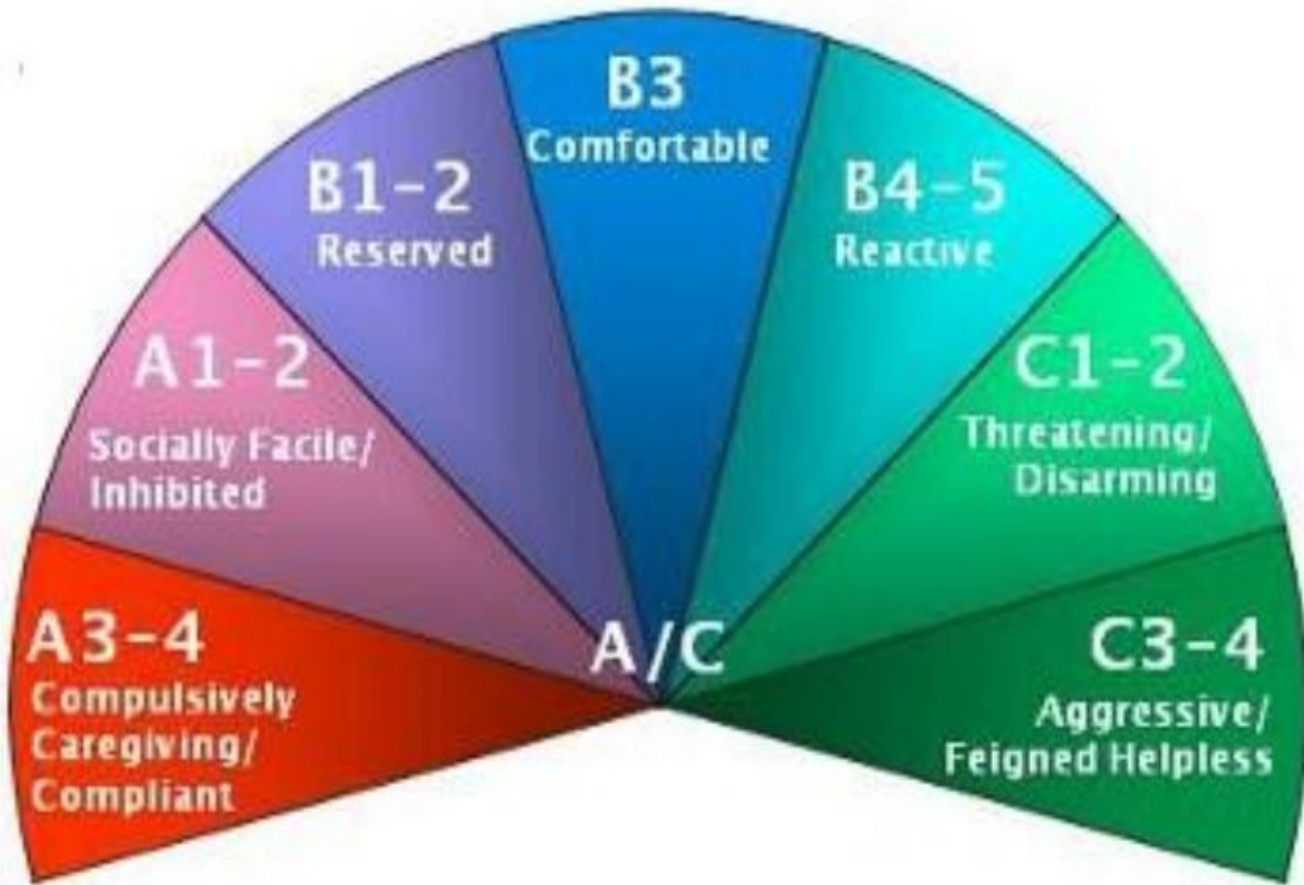


# Results

# Discussion

- In the future, a larger sample size ( $N = 35$ ) could help determine if there is truly no association between sensitivity/covert hostility and attachment style.
- Living in the Appalachian area, our sample could be subject to high amounts of stress and consequently show less sensitivity.

# Theoretical Limitations



- Combining A1-2, B1-5, and C1-2 all into a single "low risk" group.
- Combining A3-4, and C3-4 into the same "high risk" group.



# Citations

- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Walls, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychology study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Biringen, Z., Derscheid, D., Vliegen, N., Closson, L., & Easterbrookes, M. A. (2014). Emotional availability (EA): Theoretical background, empirical research using the EA Scales, and clinical applications. *Developmental Review*, 114-167.
- Biringen, Z., Robinson, J. L., & Emde, R. N. (2000). Appendix B: The emotional availability scales (3rd ed.; an abridged infancy/early childhood version). *Attachment and Human Development*, 2(2), 256-270.
- Crittenden, P.M. (2004). *The Preschool Assessment of Attachment. Coding manual*. Family Relations Institute, Miami, Florida: December, 2004.
- Hudson, N. W., & Fraley, C. R. (2016, November 28). *Adult Attachment and Perceptions of Closeness*. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Mäntymaa, M., Puura, K., Luoma, I., Vihtonen, V., Salmelin, R. K., & Tamminen, T. (2009). *Child's behavior in mother-child interaction predicts later emotional and behavioral problems*. *Infant and Child Development*, 18(5), 455-467.