

THE IMPACT OF
TEMPERAMENT ON ATTACHMENT



A Study investigating the
interaction of Parent and Toddler
Temperament

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ABSTRACT.

The role of temperament in the development of attachment with both mothers and fathers was investigated in a sample of 27 toddlers. In line with expectations prior to the research, neither parental characteristics nor infant temperament, individually, were significantly related to attachment outcome. However, the interaction of maternal characteristics and toddler temperament (measured using the Toddler Temperament Scale) was found to be significantly related to attachment outcome. Contrary to expectations, father-toddler relationships evidenced different trends in the effect of the interaction of toddler temperament (TTS) and paternal characteristics. Parental characteristics were assessed using a total of nine factors drawn from the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and the Dimension of Temperament Survey (DOTS) and referred to collectively as the Global Temperament Rating (GTR). When the toddler's temperament and the parental characteristics (GTR) were rated in a similar direction (i.e. above or below the mean for the sample) these dyads were described as 'matching' while those dyads where the toddler's temperament (TTS) was in a different direction from the parental characteristics (GTR) were described as 'mismatched'. Both positive and negative 'matches' achieved a high proportion of 'core-secure' attachment outcomes among mother-toddler relationships. 'Mismatched' mother-toddler relationships were all rated as having 'insecure/borderline secure' attachment outcomes. The 'match/mismatch' concept was not

found to differentiate between attachment outcomes for father-toddler relationships. The implications of the different outcomes for fathers and mothers is discussed in terms of the toddler's attachment to each parent following different developmental pathways. Even though these clear differences emerged between mothers and fathers on the impact of temperament 'match/mismatch' quality to attachment outcome, the toddler's attachment to the mother and to the father was found to be significantly correlated. Such findings have implications for the attachment-temperament debate. An unexpected result observed in the study was that neither attachment outcome, temperament (GTR or TTS), nor 'match/mismatch' classification were related to the synchronisation of the parental-toddler interaction in a semi-structured play procedure (Kangaroo Box assessment). This result is seen as a challenging outcome for the underlying assumptions of the study. However, inherent characteristics of this procedure (such as the demands of the assessment as well as the measures used to tap the relationship quality) are highly likely to have contributed to the lack of significance between attachment, temperament or 'match/mismatch' with interaction rating.

The small sample size and their predominantly middle class nature reflect the difficulties of conducting such research in a country town. Despite this, clear trends emerged in a sample that consistently achieved distributions closely paralleling normative data on all measures. However,

because of these limitations, a number of the findings are only able to be considered as tentative, requiring further research to confirm the trends obtained. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the study has made significant gains in the area of understanding the role of toddler temperament in attachment through operationalising a 'goodness of fit' model.