

**EMOTIONAL MATURITY, SELF-ESTEEM AND
ATTACHMENT STYLES: PRELIMINARY
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN
ADOLESCENTS WITH AND WITHOUT
DELINQUENT STATUS***

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Abstract : The current article is investigating the associations and differences between the attachment styles, emotional maturity and self-esteem of two adolescent groups from Romania: delinquents and non-delinquents, aiming to further identify the predictive value of these variables. For this purpose, the correlation indexes between the scores to the following instruments corresponding to the target-variables were calculated: Questionnaire for the assessment of the attachment style (Collins and Read, 1990), Survey for the evaluation of Emotional Maturity Friedman (questionnaire available online) and the Self-Esteem Rosenberg Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). At the same time, the mentioned dimensions were compared based on the personal status of the participants (delinquents and non-delinquents). The research was carried out on a sample of 117 adolescents from Romania (Arad), boys

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and girls, ages between 13 – 17 years, with the average age $m = 15.97$, and a standard deviation of $SD = 0.9$. The results indicated a series of correlations and significant differences between the target variables (attachment styles, the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level) on the two groups of adolescents (delinquents and non-delinquents).

Our data revealed that the anxious-ambivalent attachment style was associated with a low self-esteem level, regardless of the adolescent's status (with or without delinquency). However, the non-delinquent adolescents with a high level of emotional maturity showed a higher level of self-esteem. Also, the comparison of the results between the two groups showed that non-delinquent adolescents had a higher level of emotional maturity and self-esteem than the delinquent adolescents.

Key words: juvenile delinquency, attachment, emotional maturity, self-esteem

I. Introduction

1.1 Juvenile delinquency

Juvenile delinquency represents an illegal behavior attributed to minors, i.e. individuals that are younger than the legal age of majority (Siegel & Welsh, 2011).

The juvenile delinquency in Romania is considered a major social problem that our society is confronting with, this being viewed as a component connected to the functioning mode of the society, including family, school, education, religion, interpersonal relationships, society's values and norms, chance deprivation, resource deprivation, marginalization and social anomie (Murzea, 2015; Rădulescu & Dâmboianu, 2003). Anomie is "a condition in which society does not offer enough moral guidance for individuals" (Gerber & Macionis, 2010).

Juvenile delinquency is a phenomenon which contemporary researchers are studying and trying to understand, but in order to have an in depth knowledge of the phenomenon, they have to take into consideration the biological, psychological and social dimensions associated with delinquency, as well as the predictors or triggers of this

phenomenon. In this work, the studied aspects of the delinquency are grounded in the psychological dimension of, as it follows: self-esteem (assessed with the Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale Rosenberg, 1965), emotional maturity (assessed with the Emotional Maturity Scale Friedman) and attachment styles (assessed with the Adult Attachment Scale, Collins & Read, 1990).

The delinquent act, as such, represents the expression of actions and behaviors that strongly contrast with the norms of cohabitation existent in families, institutions and society (Rădulescu & Banciu, 1996).

Seen from another perspective, delinquency appears as a disturbance of the structure of social relations of the individual, most probably because of the insufficiency of social maturity (Preda, 1998). Any delinquency-related behavior is generally considered as a result of the interactions of individual and bio-physiological factors with the social ones, that are being part of the environment in which the child grows and develops (Marica, 2007).

Merton (1957) suggests that social deviant behaviors usually result out of structural tensions and the break appears when society focuses upon desired and socially accepted goals, while at the same time it offers inadequate opportunities for the attainment of those goals. To sum it all up, the members of society that find themselves in a position of financial tension and want to obtain material success might rely on anti-social acts to attain the desired social objective. Agnew (1992) considers that this assumption is correct, although he also believes that, in relation to adolescents, there are also other factors that encourage criminal/ socially deviant behavior, such as negative experiences that could induce a high level of stress.

1.2. Self-esteem

In Allport's belief (1991), the ontogenetic basis for the formation of self-esteem are configured during early childhood, i.e. the beginning of this process is taking place around the age of two, at the same time with the autonomous exploration and with the manifestations of negativism of the child, which are manifested and perceived as an opposition, refusal and countering the efforts of adults to restrain their undesirable behaviors. Kohut (1971, 1977) considers that, in order to have a healthy evolution, the baby and child need ample experience to reflect the self and idealize it. The mirroring experiences of the self are those in which the child recognizes itself, feels appreciated and empathized by a person that represents the extension or a partial one of its own self (Kohut, 1971, 1977).

Băban (2001) considers that self-esteem is in a tight relationship with the self-image, being thus a fundamental dimension for every living being. This refers to the mode in which a person auto-evaluates itself and compares itself with its own expectations or of those of other people. Hence, self-esteem represents the evaluative and affective dimension of the self-image (Băban, 2001).

Bențea (2016) defines self-esteem as being an important dimension of personality of the affective-attitudinal manner. In this light, the self-assessing component of the self refers to opinions and feelings that we have towards our own person. It is also named self-appreciation, self-respect or self-acceptance and it denotes the way in which we assess ourselves, how much we value ourselves or how good (in terms of socially relevant aspects) we consider ourselves compared to others.

Croker & Knight (2005) consider that high self-esteem is seen as a Holy Grail of psychological sanity and the key to happiness, success and popularity, while low self-esteem is at the same time blamed for socially related problems, varying from low school performances to alcohol and drug abuse.

Mayzer (2004) indicates that low self-esteem in adolescents exposed to risk factor can be associated with an aggressive behavioral escalation pattern and also with many other social issues. Studies on delinquency describe the adolescent that faces a large number of risk factors as being vulnerable to risky behavior (Ahem et al., 2008).

In the current study, the instrument used for assessing the self-esteem was conceived by Rosenberg (1965) and it consists of 10 items; the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale became in time a reference point for the evaluation of self-esteem at the international level. The Rosenberg Scale was developed as an instrument of one-dimensional and global evaluation of self-esteem. Because of the very good psychometric properties of this scale, it is widely utilized in domains such as social psychology, work psychology, health psychology, clinical psychology, counseling etc. The scale possesses a good internal consistency, the α -Cronbach coefficient having a value of 0.89. Also the testing-retesting fidelity varies between 0.85 and 0.88 (Rosenberg, 1965).

1.3. Emotional maturity

The ambiguity around the term emotional maturity results out of the fact that although the term is being frequently used, a number of different connotations exist in the literature (Dwight, 1964). In psychology, maturity represents the ability of an individual to respond to the neighboring environment in an optimal way, which implies more than an instinctual response (Talukdar & Das, 2013). Also, maturity comprises

the awareness of the adequate time and space in which to enact a behavior and to take into account the appropriate time for action, depending on the surroundings and societal culture (Wechsler, 1950). For Shoben, 1957, (apud Allport, 1991), maturity means "*Self-control, personal responsibility, social responsibility, social-democratic interest and ideals*". Tillich, 1960, (apud Allport, 1991) also includes in the concept of maturity the gain of meaning and responsibility, as well as self-acceptance and "the daring to be".

Emotional maturity is generally defined in the literature as the abilities of an individual to optimally respond to situations, control the emotions and behave in a manner accordingly to the level of individual development (Srivastava, 2005).

Davidson & Gottlieb (1955) investigated the relation of the sexual maturation process and emotional maturity. The nature of this relationship is especially significant during adolescence, while at same time the physical development has such a direct impact upon the individuals' adjustment to the environmental stimuli, including the social norms. Taking this into account, adolescent females that experienced and those that have not experienced the menarche were compared in terms of emotional maturity. The results indicate that a higher level of emotional maturity is registered in the group of those female adolescents experiencing the menarche, compared to the group that did not experience the menarche having the same biological age. Jones & Bayley (1950) have discovered that adolescent boys that are physically more developed are considered to be more socially matured.

Another study has investigated if self-esteem is associated to emotional maturity, based on the correlation of obtained scores in the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Survey (Ryden, 1978) and the Washburne Social Adjustment Survey (Korzi, 1962), on a sample of 200 male and female college students. The results of the study indicate the fact that the students with a high level of self-esteem proved to be more emotionally mature compared to the students that had a low self-esteem level (Leung & Sand, 1981).

In our study, the instrument for the evaluation of emotional maturity was the Emotional Maturity Scale Friedman. Friedman scale is available online and it is composed out of 25 affirmations; for each one of these statements, the participants were asked to respond with either "Yes" or "No".

1.4. Attachment Styles

Bowlby (1969) defines the attachment as being a dynamic behavioral system, identifying the objectives and functions of the system in a natural

selection context; he observed the interdependence between the attachment system and the aspects related to the exploration and the origin of behavioral systems (Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby's researches constituted the starting point for the studies conducted by other theorists, like Mary Ainsworth, a psychologist specialized in the developmental psychology, who analyzed the individual differences pertaining to the attachment patterns and maternal behaviors of the caretaker, in the child's first year. Ainsworth pointed out important aspects for the attachment theory research (Vaughn & Bost, 1999).

After studying the specialty literature, it was ascertained that one of the most appreciated methods for the evaluation of the attachment models is the Mary Ainsworth and Barbara Wittig's *Strange Situation* method (1969). The *Strange Situation* method is based on creating situations that are gradually more stressful, while the specialists observe and analyze the children's behavior towards their attendants. Following the analysis, three attachment patterns between child and caretaker were designed based on the information revealed by the Strange Situation method (Ainsworth et al., 1978), as it follows:

1. Children's secure attachment from the classification of the Strange Situation (1978) is characterized through the wish to interact with the caretaker, even if he or she is not nearby. In case the caretaker leaves the playground and the children become agitated because of it, their equilibrium will rapidly restore itself and they will be capable to come back to the initial exploration.
2. The avoidant attachment of the children from the classification of the Strange Situation (1978) is characterized by the refusal to interact with the caretaker, or, more than that, the children manifest indifference in the case of separation, ignoring the caretaker, looking in another direction and having the tendency to interact with strangers.
3. The resistant-anxious attachment towards strangers is characterized by the development of some fears regarding strangers, but keeping the exploratory behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The children with this type of attachment have a particular complexity, because they have an ongoing wish to be near their caretaker, but this wish is combined with a furious resistance towards the closeness between the two, in terms that the children appear to be incapable of accepting affectivity coming from the caretaker.
4. After studying the specialty literature a disorganized category of attachment was introduced in the classification (Main & Solomon, 1990), that was based on the identification of wrong guidance,

stereotypes, insensitivity, contradictions and behavioral modifications in the Strange Situation method (Jacobvitz, 1999). The category of disoriented individuals is a combination of two types of behaviors described earlier, the avoidant one and the resistant one. This way, a confusion is made when it comes to the level of avoiding or approaching of the caretaker. The identified strategy in this case is too unclear and confusing to be able to cope with separation. In other words, the people from this category appear to be the most unsure ones, with a high pressure at the psychological level (Hertsgaard et al., 1995).

Suzuki & Tomoda (2015) demonstrates that the attachment style and self-esteem mediates the mental health aspects (e.g. depression in children), noticing a strong connection between an anxious attachment style and a low level of self-esteem. Other researchers (Mills & Frost, 2007) highlight the protective role of the secure attachment and that of self-esteem by offering opportunities to strengthen the social relations, which leads to an adaptive functioning.

In this study, the instrument with which the attachment style will be assessed is the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS), which was developed by Collins & Read (1990). AAS consist of 18 items, 6 for each attachment type: secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment.

II. Methods

2.1 Study objective

This study aims to investigate the associations between attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), the level of emotional maturity and the level of self-esteem, as well as the differences regarding these target variables in two adolescent groups from Romania: delinquents and non-delinquents.

2.2 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There will be associations between the individual values at the subscales for the attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level in the two adolescent groups: delinquents and non-delinquents.

Hypothesis 2: There will be differences between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents pertaining to the categories of the three attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), emotional maturity level and self-esteem level.

2.3 Study design

For the first hypothesis (hypothesis 1) a correlational design was used, having as dependent variables the three categories of attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level.

For the second hypothesis (hypothesis 2) a comparative non-experimental design was used, having as independent variables: the personal status of the participants with 2 possibilities: 1. delinquents, 2. nondelinquents, and the three categories of attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level as dependent variables.

2.4 The presentation of the studied sample

117 adolescents from Romania (Arad county) participated in this study, with the ages between 13 and 17 years (average age = 15.97, SD = 0.9). 34,2% from the whole sample, (40 persons), were delinquents and 65,8%, (77 persons), were not delinquents. The delinquencies consisted of deviant behavior (37 participants), robbery (3 participants) and drug possession (1 participant). None of the delinquent adolescent was in detention at the moment of data collection.

2.5 Used instruments

- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).
- Friedman Emotional Maturity Evaluation Scale (a scale available online for public usage).
- Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990).

2.6 Procedure

The scales for assessing the attachment styles, emotional maturity and self-esteem were introduced to the participants through pen and paper examination, while informing them that they are participating in a study about adolescents. The participants were also given a guarantee of the confidentiality of the data confidentiality, based on written informed consent. The participation was done on voluntary base.

III. Results

Hypothesis 1: There will be associations between the individual values at the subscales for the attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level in the two adolescent groups: delinquents and non-delinquents.

The correlation and determination indices were calculated between the score values on the following instruments corresponding to the target-variables (Table 1, Table 2): Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), Friedman Emotional Maturity Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

Table 1. The values of the correlations between the individual scores at the subscales for the attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and ambivalent-anxious attachment), emotional maturity level and self-esteem level of the two adolescent categories: delinquents and non-delinquents.

D		A			N		A		
		SA	AA	AAA			SA	AA	AA A
EM	r	.191	.032	-.107	EM	r	.148	-.104	-.197
	p	.238	.844	.512		p	.200	.369	.085
	r ²	.036	.001	.011		r ²	.022	.011	.039
SE	r	.093	-.075	.332*	SE	r	-.210	.069	.290*
	p	.570	.647	.036		p	.066	.549	.011
	r ²	.009	.006	.110		r ²	.044	.005	.084

Note: D - delinquents, N - non-delinquents, A - attachment, SA - secure attachment, AA - avoidant attachment, AAA - ambivalent-anxious attachment, EM - emotional maturity, SE - self-esteem, r - correlation coefficient, p - signification threshold, the correlations are significant to $p \leq .05$, r² - determination coefficient

Table 2. Correlation values between the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level of the two adolescent categories: delinquents and non-delinquents.

D		SE	N		SE
EM	r	-.193	EM	r	-.352**
	p	.232		p	.002
	r ²	.037		r ²	.124

Note: D - delinquents, N - non-delinquents, EM - emotional maturity, SE - self-esteem, r - correlation coefficient, p - signification threshold, the correlations are significant to $p \leq .05$, r² - determination coefficient

Table 1 indicates a positive and statistically significant correlation between the self-esteem level and the ambivalent-anxious attachment, with a coefficient of correlation $r = 0.332$ ($p < 0.05$) for delinquents, and a coefficient of correlation $r = 0.290$ ($p < 0.05$) for the non-delinquent adolescents. Among the non-delinquent adolescents (table 2), a negative correlation has been noticed between the level of emotional maturity and the self-esteem level with a correlation coefficient of -0.352 ($p < 0.05$). It is specified that a low score for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) represents a high level of self-esteem.

High values of the determination coefficient were obtained, indicating a high intensity of the association effect between variables and a high practical value of the study, as it follows: the anxiety attachment and the level of self-esteem for delinquent adolescents ($r^2 = 0.110$), the anxiety attachment and the level of self-esteem for non-delinquent adolescents ($r^2=0.084$), and the level of self-esteem and the level of emotional maturity for non-delinquent adolescents ($r^2=0.124$).

Hypothesis 2: There will be differences between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents pertaining to the categories of the three attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment), emotional maturity level and self-esteem level.

A series of descriptive and dispersing statistical indices have been calculated for the scores obtained in all the subscales of the instruments (table 3) for the two categories of adolescents (delinquent, non-delinquent), allowing for the comparison between the two categories of adolescents.

Table 3. Styles of attachment, emotional maturity and self-esteem: descriptive indices for the two categories of adolescents

	S	NR	M	SD
SA	D	40	19.32	3.92
	N	77	18.18	4.06
AA	D	40	19.25	8.59
	N	77	18.15	4.20
AAA	D	40	17.17	4.16
	N	77	18.11	4.74
EM	D	40	17.38	2.16
	N	77	18.32	2.25
SE	D	40	22.27	5.18
	N	77	18.72	4.66

Note: D - delinquents, N – non-delinquents, SA - secure attachment, AA - avoidant attachment,

AAA - ambivalent-anxious attachment, EM - emotional maturity, SE - self-esteem, S - status, NR - number of subjects, M = average, SD = standard deviation

In a brief examination of the average values obtained for the subscales, one can observe that there are tendencies towards differences of attachment styles between the two categories of adolescents (Table 3). Thus the delinquent adolescents have obtained higher scores at two of the three attachment styles: secure (MD = 19.32, MN = 18.18) and avoidant (MD = 19.25, MN = 18.15). On the other hand, the non-delinquent adolescents have obtained higher scores at the anxious-ambivalent attachment styles (MN = 18.11, MD = 17.17), at the emotional maturity level (MN = 18.32, MD = 17.38) and at the self-esteem level (MN = 18.72, MD = 22.27), with the specification that a low score at the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Evaluation Scale (1965) represents a level of high self-esteem.

Through the usage of inferential statistical analysis, it can be seen whether these differences are statistically significant or if they are only maintained at the studied sample's level. Therefore, a parametric inferential test was performed (t test for independent samples).

Table 4. Attachment styles, emotional maturity and self-esteem – comparisons between the two categories of adolescents

	t value	p	Effect size (Cohen's d)
SA	1.459	.147	.285
AA	.926	.356	.162
AAA	-1.061	.291	.210
EM	-2.159	.033	.426
SE	3.757	.000	.720

Note: SA - secure attachment, AA - avoidant attachment, AAA - ambivalent-anxious attachment, EM - emotional maturity, SE - self-esteem, t value - coefficient t for the differences of the averages, p - signification threshold, the averages' differences are significant at $p \leq .05$

The results of the inferential t test for the independent samples (table 4) demonstrates that the differences between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents are statistically significant for the emotional maturity level with a coefficient $t = -2.159$ ($p < 0.05$), and for the self esteem level with a coefficient $t = 3.757$ ($p < 0.05$).

The average value (.04 - .07) of the determination coefficient for the statistically significant averages differences indicate a good practical value of the study.

IV. Discussions and conclusions

The present study aims to highlight the associations between the attachment styles, the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level of two adolescent groups from Romania: delinquents and non-delinquents, as well as to identify differences for these dimensions between the two adolescent categories, in order to further explore their predictive values. Following the descriptive statistical and inferential analysis, a series of associations and significant differences between the attachment styles, emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level of the two studied adolescent groups were revealed.

Positive significant correlations were obtained from both adolescent categories (delinquent and non-delinquent), between the level of self-esteem and the ambivalent-anxious attachment style. On the non-delinquent category, a significant negative correlation between the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level was observed. Also, the high values of the determination coefficient emphasizes a high intensity of the association effect between the variables. Consequently, the data analysis suggests the fact that an ambivalent-anxious attachment style is associated with a low level of self-esteem, regardless of the adolescent status (with or without delinquency). However, the non-delinquent adolescents with a high level of emotional maturity also manifested a higher level of self-esteem.

The attachment styles, emotional maturity and self esteem were compared based on the personal status of the participants (delinquents and non-delinquents). Following the inferential testing with the t test for independent samples, statistically significant differences for the emotional maturity level and the self-esteem level between the two groups were obtained. The results indicate that the non-delinquent adolescents had a higher level of emotional maturity and self-esteem compared to the delinquent adolescents. The effect size values (Cohen's d) support the differences between the two categories on the above mentioned aspects and offer a good practical value to our study. Also, a close examination of the obtained averages shows that the delinquent adolescents obtained higher scores on two out of the three attachment styles: secure and avoidant, but the differences were not statistically significant.

Following the analysis of the data, we can conclude that the high level of self-esteem and emotional maturity of the non-delinquent adolescents could be explained based on the fact that these variables are most probably in a directly proportionate bond, meaning that if the emotional maturity level is high, then the self-esteem level is also high, or if the self-esteem level is high, then the emotional maturity level is also high. In our Romanian sample, the non-delinquent adolescents have

the self-esteem and emotional maturity levels higher than the delinquent adolescents, who do not manifest a high level of self-esteem or a high level of emotional maturity.

One of the important limitations of the study is the low number of delinquent adolescents that expressed their desire to participate to the research, in comparison to the non-delinquent adolescents. This aspect almost lead to the usage of some inferential nonparametric tests (Mann-Whitney, 1947). Even so, the homogeneity of the variable dispersion that was researched allowed us to perform the inferential analysis (i.e. the parametric test t for the independent samples). This fact enforces as a future research direction, a detailed analysis on large adolescent samples with social problems extracted from the Romanian population.

Another limitation of our study is that the sample of Romanian delinquent adolescents consisted of adolescents coming from recovery centers or from the probation service. None of the adolescents from this category was in detention at the moment of data collection. For the category of delinquent adolescents, the felonies where the following: deviant behavior (37 participants), robbery (3 participants) and drug dealing (1 participant). As future research direction, detailed examinations can be made in the Romanian penitentiary system, measuring several factors regarding delinquency throughout the severity of the crime and the duration of the criminal punishment. Also, our findings could help clinical psychologists in the penitentiary system to optimally design personalized treatments for the delinquent adolescents in the direction of prevention of recurrent socially non-desirable behaviors.

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