

Proposal

Title – Effects of a Pregnant Mother’s Temperament on Prenatal Attachment: A Correlational Design

Program of Study – M.A., Clinical Mental Health Counseling

Presentation Type – Print Poster

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Category – Experimental (Applied)

Abstract

The bond between a mother and child can form both during gestation and after birth. A mother’s attachment to her child influences the child’s subsequent bond with the mother. This research poster resolves to address the potential effects of an expectant mother’s temperament, especially anger, on mother-infant attachment. Research has been completed regarding attachment from the viewpoint of a child; however, research on the attachment from the position of the mother is lacking. Attachment theory asserts that the attachment relationship between caregiver and child, formed during the child’s first months and years, largely affects later social interactions in the child’s life. Early life experiences are not the only contributing factor to a healthy attachment relationship. The mother’s temperament, experience, and mental health during pregnancy may influence her own attachment with the infant. Temperament, in this proposal, is defined as fairly stable emotional tendencies that influence emotional and behavioral reactions. An angry temperament can affect an expectant mother’s reaction to and view of stressful events, such as unplanned pregnancy. If the mother is unable to bond with her unborn

child due to her temperament, then the child may have a higher chance of developing attachment related issues. Maternal-infant attachment will occur, though, when the mother is able to emotionally connect with her baby during gestation. One research question was created for this poster. Is there a correlation between a pregnant mother's increased angry temperament and decreased mother-infant attachment? The researcher hypothesizes that an expectant mother's angry or poor temperament during pregnancy negatively influences mother-infant attachment after the child is born. If research were conducted, the researcher would use convenience sampling to obtain a sample group of expectant mothers who would be assessed four different times using the Navaco Anger Scale (NAS) once, the Prenatal Attachment Inventory (PAI) three times, and the Mother-Infant Bonding Scale (MIBS) once throughout their pregnancy and after the child is born. After the clients receive the PAI and MIBS in each trial, the NAS score would be correlated with the scores on the other assessments to show the influence of an angry temperament. If a pregnant client presented with these problems, counselors could benefit from findings in this type of research as well as the instruments used. Counselors could assist the mother in offsetting the negative effects of this temperament and in seeing the long-term benefits of connecting with her unborn child, even if she plans to give the child up for adoption. This poster will provide an overview of the literature surrounding attachment and temperament as well as describe potential methods for conducting research. Application of this potential research will be discussed along with possible benefits to the counseling field.

When a Christian worldview is applied to this topic, potential controversy could emerge. The mindset behind presenting this information assumes that attachment begins while the baby is in utero, as supported by research on attachment. Individuals who believe that first trimester and even late term abortion are acceptable alternatives to pregnancy may take issue with information

presented in this proposal. These individuals may see the unborn as not yet living, so they may find it difficult to believe attachment could begin before birth. As a Christian, this researcher believes that God has intricately woven each individual in the womb, and it is understandable how attachment can begin so early (Psalms 139, ESV). When conducting research involving a potentially sensitive topic, it is important to communicate results factually and without bias.

Though this researcher is a Christian, not all people reading information presented on the poster or the results of actual conducted research would be Christian. This researcher's belief that all life is sacred, however, has influenced her interest in this topic. Attachment in utero can shape a child's social life and their experience with other people. If a mother is unable to attach to her child, the child may not form a healthy attachment either. While the mother is pregnant with the child, the child only can become attached through certain actions from the mother. If the mother cannot attach, she will not perform those actions. After the mother has the baby, she may choose to give it up for adoption. Even if the baby is placed in a new home as a newborn, the child may have attachment issues concerning the pregnancy. The Bible often places emphasis on parents loving their children, the proper way to raise children, and the significance of adoption. This instruction influences my interests in parenting and attachment. If this research were conducted, it could be influential in North American culture. Though future mothers would legally have the choice to abort their fetus, they may have the opportunity to be better educated about the development of the baby in the womb. Adoptive parents may be able to understand more about their child as well.