

Maternal Mind-Mindedness and Its Association with Attachment: The Case of Arab Infants and Mothers in Israel

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Abstract : Introduction: Mind-Mindedness (MM) focuses on mothers' attunement to their infant's mental states as reflected in their speech to the infant. Appropriate MM comments are associated with attachment security in individualistic Western societies where parents value their children's autonomy and independence, and may therefore be more likely to engage in mind-related discourse with their children that highlights individual thoughts, preferences, emotions, and motivations. Such discourse may begin in early infancy, even before infants are likely to understand the semantic meaning of parental speech. Parents in collectivistic societies, by contrast, are thought to emphasize conforming to social norms more than individual goals, and this may lead to parent-child discourse that emphasizes appropriate behavior and compliance with social norms rather than internal mental states of the self and the other. Therefore, the examination of maternal MM and its relationship with attachment in Arab collectivistic culture in Israel was of particular interest. Aims of the study: The goal of the study was to examine whether the associations between MM and attachment in the Arab culture in Israel are the same as in Western samples. An additional goal was to examine whether appropriate and non-attuned MM comments could, together, distinguish among mothers of children in the different attachment classifications. Material and Methods: 76 Arab mothers and their infants between the ages of 12 and 18 months were observed in the Strange Situation Procedure (49 secure (B), 11 ambivalent (C), 14 disorganized (D), and 2 avoidant (A) infants). MM was coded from an 8-minute free-play sequence. Results: Mothers of B infants used more appropriate and less non-attuned MM comments than mothers of D infants, with no significant differences with mothers of C infants. Also, mothers of B infants used less non-attuned MM comments than both mothers of D infants and mothers of C infants. In addition, Mothers of B infants were most likely to show the combination of high appropriate and low non-attuned MM comments; Mothers of D infants were most likely to show the combination of high non-attuned and low appropriate MM comments; and a non-significant trend indicated that mothers of C infants were most likely to show a combination of high appropriate and high non-attuned MM comments. Conclusion: Maternal MM was associated with attachment in the Arab culture in Israel with combinations of appropriate and non-attuned MM comments distinguishing between different attachment classifications.

Keywords : attachment, maternal mind-mindedness, Arab culture, collectivistic culture

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