EMOTION DISCOURSE AND ATTACHMENT IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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Abstract

of

EMOTION DISCOURSE AND ATTACHMENT IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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Past attachment research has shown that early interactions between caregivers and children form the foundations for children’s future relationships (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Secure attachment is built around sensitive caregiving styles that promote children’s use of emotion discourse. Research on family emotion discourse has shown that the frequency of mothers’ emotional references and explanations within these interactions is positively related to children’s emotion understanding as well as their frequency of emotion discourse (Laible & Thompson, 2000; Raikes & Thomspson, 2006). Few studies have concurrently examined children’s attachment and emotion discourse, and those that have been published have largely focused on early childhood. The present study examined children’s emotion discourse and attachment in middle childhood. It was expected that children with more secure attachments and whose parents frequently discussed emotion would show more emotion discourse during an emotion-eliciting task. Twenty children between the ages of 8- and 12- years and their parents came to a laboratory where children viewed a 30-minute video of pictures paired with stories that contained emotional themes. Children and parents then engaged in a parent-child conversation. Emotion discourse was measured by summing the total amount of emotion
words used during the parent-child conversation. Both parents’ and children’s attachment were also assessed. Results showed a significant positive correlation between children’s and parents’ emotion discourse. These results indicate that parents who used more emotion discourse had children who also used more emotion discourse. No other significant relations were found between children’s attachment security and emotion discourse (parents and children). Implications of the present findings are discussed in addition to suggestions for future research.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Kristen Weede Alexander

_______________________
Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Research on attachment shows that early childhood attachment between a mother and child form lasting relational models that guide future attachment and relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/82; Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001). An attachment is a bond formed through repeated interactions between a parent and child. Because attachment is stable throughout an individual’s life (Ammaniti, Speranza, & Fedele, 2005; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000), it may interact with other components of development. More specifically, attachment has been shown to relate to children’s emotion understanding, communication style and emotion discourse (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim, 2000; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Ontai & Thompson, 2002; Raikes & Thompson, 2006). The present thesis examined the role of attachment and emotion discourse in middle childhood. Although some studies suggest that attachment contributes to the development of children’s emotion understanding, few studies have explored the role of attachment in regards to children’s emotion discourse in middle childhood.

The unfolding of children’s ability to talk about emotion is associated with a host of other developmental factors. Emotion discourse is defined as parents’ or children’s references to emotions, including emotion words (e.g., happy, sad, angry) referring to
emotional states (Raikes & Thompson, 2006). Children’s emotion discourse is influenced by parent socialization of emotions. Parents socialize children’s emotion discourse through the discussion of emotions (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998) which predicts how children learn and talk about emotions. Specifically, the present study examines this factor, the discussion of emotions, through parent-child discourse, to gain an understanding of children’s frequency of emotion discourse. Many studies have revealed that the frequency and characteristics of parent-child emotion discourse relates to children’s emotion understanding and attachment (Mcquaid, Bigelow, McLaughlin, &MacLean, 2007; Ontai & Thompson, 2002; Raikes & Thompson, 2006). Emotion understanding is a complex process that includes the recognition of emotions, understanding the role of external causes, desires, beliefs and reminders, controlling an expressed or experienced emotion, and understanding mixed emotions and of moral or social emotions (Pons & Harris, 2005). Further literature suggests that parent-child emotion discourse may affect attachment security (Goldberg, MacKay-Soroka, & Rochester, 1994; Laible, 2004; Ontai & Thompson, 2002) and the way children understand and talk about emotions (Denham, Zoller,& Couchoud, 1994; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991) but other components may also affect this.

There are different factors that contribute to the variation in frequency of parent-child emotion discourse, which in turn affects children’s emotion discourse. First, studies have found that children’s frequency of emotion references during a joint conversation with their mother positively correlated with mothers’ frequency of emotion references (Denham & Auerbach, 1995; Leibowitz, Ramos-Marcuse & Arsenio, 2002; Martin &
Green, 2005). Second, researchers have found gender differences in the ways that parents discuss emotions with their children (Cervantes & Callanan, 1998) as well as social class and differences in this talk (Eisenberg, 1999; Fivush & Wang, 2005). Third, the context of parent-child discourse may affect what kinds of emotions are socialized. Some studies indicate that when mothers discuss past events (one positive and negative emotional experience) with children, more negative emotions are used (Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002; Laible, 2004) whereas other studies found that mothers use more positive emotion language (Laible & Song, 2006). These studies indicate that a variety of discourse factors contribute to children’s emotion discourse.

Although gender, social class, cultural and situational contexts may affect children’s emotion discourse, other studies have linked attachment to emotion discourse as well. Studies examining attachment and emotion discourse have all concluded that children with secure attachments were able to verbally express a full range of emotions with mothers (Goldberg, MacKay-Soroka, & Rochester, 1994) and were more likely to reference feelings during a reminiscing task (Laible & Thompson, 2000). Such findings have been useful in understanding the factors that affect parents and young children’s emotion discourse, but little attention has been given to children in middle childhood.

Children in middle childhood experience developmental changes, specifically cognitive (Piaget, 1971), emotional (Holodynski, 2009) and attachment (Kerns, Tomich, & Kim, 2006). During this period, children shift their attachment needs from parents to peers (Kerns et al., 2006; Lieberman, Doyle & Markiewicz, 1999) and begin to rely on peers more than parents (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). Because of this transition, the quality
of conversations between children and parents may change, as well as the attachment relationship. Examining parent-child emotion discourse in middle childhood may present different findings than previous studies that examined parent-child emotion discourse at younger ages.

The present study sought to examine the relation between attachment style and emotion discourse of parents and children in middle childhood. Literature in this area has mainly examined this link in preschool-aged children (Raikes & Thompson, 2006). The current research builds upon previous studies by providing insight into the relationship of emotion discourse and attachment for middle childhood. It was hypothesized that children with more secure attachments would use more emotion words with parents and that parents who used more emotion words would have children who used more emotion words during discussions of the emotion-eliciting task.

Methodology

The data from this study were collected from a larger study at the University of California at Davis Laterality Laboratory under the direction of Kristen Weede Alexander, Karen O’Hara, and Rosemarie Kraft. Using local community events and flyers, 20 parent-child dyads volunteered to participate in the study. Child participants were between 8- and 12- years old.
Measures

As part of the larger study, the first session in the laboratory assessed parent and child attachment and emotion discourse. Child participants watched a 30-minute video of pictures paired with emotionally themed stories. After the video, the parent was invited to join the child to discuss what the child saw. The discussion between the child and parent was videotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for emotion discourse.

During the second session, both child and parent attachment were assessed. Child attachment was assessed using the Security Scale (Kerns, Aspelmeier, Gentzler, & Grabill, 2001), a 15-item questionnaire that measures the relationship between the child and his/her attachment figure, specifically the child’s perception of the availability of the attachment figure, the tendency to rely on him/her, and the desire to communicate with the attachment figure. Parent attachment was assessed via two measures. First, the parent completed a self-report measure of attachment (i.e., Experiences in Close Relationships, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) that assessed adult attachment anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships. Second, the Adult Attachment Projective (AAP; George & West, 2001) was administered. The AAP contains a series of drawings with attachment related themes designed to elicit a deep-rooted attachment. The AAP yields an attachment classification into one of four groups: secure, dismissing, unresolved, and preoccupied.
Attachment

Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that an individual’s early attachment to a caregiver would provide that individual with a schema for relationships in general. In particular, he hypothesized that children create internal working models of attachment through repeated interactions with a caregiver and these working models provide the basis for future attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Based on these repeated interactions, children would develop a style of attachment to the caregiver, which later Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) were able to identify.

Although Bowlby hypothesized that children’s early attachment plays a significant role in relationships with others, he also theorized that as children age, their attachment to their caregiver changes as well. He believed that older children become less physically dependent upon the caregiver and depend more on the availability of the caregiver. Furthermore, relying on less physical proximity to parents, children may begin to rely more on physical proximity to friends. This transition from parents to peers may affect the way children attach to parents in middle childhood.

If early attachment provides an individual the knowledge of how attachment relationships work, that individual may continue using that knowledge in future attachments. Based on these assumptions, adult attachment may be similar to child attachment. Attachment stability may exist from early childhood to adulthood, which
research has been able to support (Ammaniti, Speranza & Fedele, 2005; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell & Albersheim, 2000).

**Attachment and Emotion Discourse**

Attachment theory plays a significant role when examining emotion discourse. Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) proposed that sensitive mothers respond to their children’s signals sensitively. In doing so, mothers convey the message to children that their needs are important and valued. Because of these interactions, children with secure attachments are willing to express a full range of emotions and needs because their mothers are accepting of those needs and emotions (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim, 2000). In the current study, it is hypothesized that children with secure attachments will engage in more emotion discourse than children with less secure attachment.

Based on these assumptions, researchers further hypothesized that children with secure attachments have mothers who are more likely to discuss both positive and negative emotions with their children (Laible & Thompson, 1998; Laible & Thompson, 2000). These mothers are thought to also be highly elaborative in discussions about past events with their children. Highly elaborative mothers talk frequently about the past, provide details, and engage in longer conversations (Fivush, 2007). If secure children are exposed to responsive caregiving, open conversations about positive and negative emotions, and highly elaborate discussions about past events, they may also discuss positive and negative emotions openly because of past interactions.
Alternatively, children with insecure attachments (avoidant or ambivalent) may have different responses to expressed emotions. Children with avoidant attachment have mothers that ignore their distress signals, conveying the message that their needs and emotions are not welcomed. Children with ambivalent attachment have mothers that respond to their signals inconsistently, conveying the message that highly negative emotions may receive attention from their mother (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Based on these types of interactions, children with avoidant attachment will focus on a discussion of positive emotions and ignores negative emotions while children with ambivalent attachment may discuss only negative emotions (Laible & Thompson, 1998; Laible & Thompson, 2000).

Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

The generalizability of the current study’s findings is limited by the size and particular characteristics of sample. First, the number of participants was limited because participation was strictly on a volunteer basis and it involved a 2-visit commitment. Second, this study was also conducted in a university town, which consists of families in middle to high socio-economic status. In addition, many parents of these families held university degrees. Thus, the generalizability of these findings is limited. Despite this, this study offers insight into emotion discourse and attachment in middle childhood that current literature lacks. The findings from this study could provide future support for
investigating the role of attachment and emotion discourse during middle childhood in a larger and more diverse population.

Organization of the Thesis

In the proceeding chapter (Chapter Two), literature regarding adult attachment, parent-child attachment, emotion understanding and emotion discourse is reviewed. This chapter argues that children have similar attachment styles as parents and that parents’ emotion talk predicts children’s emotion talk. In Chapter Three, the methods used in this study are described. In Chapter Four, results of the study are presented along with tables. Finally, in Chapter Five, the results are discussed along with suggestions for future research regarding attachment as a predictor of emotion discourse.
Early attachment plays a pivotal role in children’s development of relationships throughout the lifespan. The interactions between a parent and child provide the child with knowledge of how relationships generally work (Bowlby, 1969/1982). These interactions determine the type of attachment style children possess and help facilitate their learning about the world. A child’s attachment style suggests that the parent interacts with the child in ways that effects how the child attaches to the parent. Parents who respond to their children sensitively and consistently have children who are more likely to show a secure attachment, whereas parents who respond inconsistently more likely have children with an insecure attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Parents socialize children in many aspects of development, and most relevant to the current study, parents socialize children’s emotions. Children learn about emotions through parents’ reactions to their emotions, parent-child discussions of emotions and both parents’ and children’s emotional expressivity (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). These methods of socialization have been linked to children’s understanding and use of emotion words, among other areas of emotional development (Garner, Jones, Gaddy, & Rennie, 1997; Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Studies examining child attachment and emotion discourse have revealed that children with secure attachments have better emotion understanding (Laible & Thompson, 2000;
Raikes & Thompson, 2006), and they use both positive and negative emotion words equally compared to children with insecure attachment (Farrar, Fasig, & Welch-Ross, 1997). From this, it is apparent that emotion discourse is influenced by other factors (e.g., attachment security and parental socialization) that need to be examined more closely. Because attachment plays an important role in an individual’s life and is shown to influence emotion discourse, both children’s and parents’ attachment need to be examined for their relationships with emotion discourse.

The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of research supporting the links between attachment and emotion discourse in parents and children. This review will first discuss attachment theory, then applications of attachment theory to children and adults. Next, emotion discourse and middle childhood is examined and finally, a discussion of the present study will conclude this review.

Attachment

Attachment theory proposes that early childhood attachment can have long-term effects on relationships (e.g. Bowlby, 1969/1982). According to Bowlby (1969/1982), patterns of interactions and relationships with key-others provide lasting mental representations of the self and other in relationships (i.e., internal working models). Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that internal working models provide the basis upon which all other relationships are based. Insofar as internal working models provide the
backdrop for how relationships work in general, it is important to develop a healthy
attachment relationship with the primary caregiver.

Although children develop attachment through repeated interactions, children
likely play an active role. For example, some studies have found that children’s
temperament relates to attachment security (Belsky & Rovine, 1987). Thus, ongoing
parent-child interactions and child factors together form enduring internal working
models of relationships.

Child Attachment

To measure attachment behaviors, Ainsworth et al. (1978) developed the Strange
Situation. The Strange Situation consists of several separation and reunion episodes
between a child and mother. The child’s behaviors upon separation and reunion
determine attachment style. In their study, they identified three primary attachment
patterns: secure, avoidant and ambivalent. Mothers of children with secure attachment are
responsive and available, thus they provide a secure base for their children. Using their
mothers as a secure base, securely attached children freely explore an unknown area.
These children are upset when their mother leaves the room during the Strange Situation
task, but are happy upon the mother’s return.

Under the category of insecure attachment, two attachment styles exist: avoidant
and ambivalent. Ambivalent children are upset when mothers leave the room and
continue to be distressed when mothers return and cannot be comforted by her. Avoidant
children do not protest when mothers leave the room and do not even acknowledge the
mother’s return to the room (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Although these two forms of insecure attachment are widely used, disorganized attachment became an additional insecure attachment style (Main & Soloman, 1986). The Strange Situation quickly became the “gold standard” for measuring attachment and later studies have explored attachment bonds and changes in relational styles with development.

According to Bowlby (1969/82), internal working models are created from early childhood attachment and are present throughout an individual’s life. In other words, early attachment and related mental representations show stability throughout a lifetime. To examine this theoretical stability, Main, Kaplan and Cassidy (1985) conducted a longitudinal study. They measured children’s attachment using the Strange Situation when children were 12 and 18 months old and a modified version at six years old. Both mothers’ and fathers’ attachment was also assessed using the Adult Attachment Interview, a projective measure (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985). Findings showed that children’s secure attachment to mothers showed significant stability ($r = .76$) from 12 months old to six years old and similar correlations were also found for security with fathers (Main et al., 1985). More recently, Ammaniti, Speranza and Fedele (2005) found that using the secure and insecure classification system, 23 out 31 children remained in the same attachment category from infancy through middle childhood. These findings provide some evidence that attachment can be stable in an individual’s life, and support the idea that early attachment relationships can affect an individual beyond childhood and possibly interact with other aspects in development.
Adult Attachment

More recently, researchers have begun to examine the continuity of attachment through adulthood. The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) has been used mainly to assess adult attachment. The AAI is a projective measure involving a semi-structured interview consisting of 20 questions. Participants discuss their childhood relationships with their parents, specifically their memories of separation, loss and rejection. Trained coders analyze the responses and place individuals in one of three attachment categories. Secure-autonomous adults are able to evaluate their experiences whether negative or positive, with great ease. Dismissing individuals distance themselves from the interview by normalizing memories. Individuals with a preoccupied classification discuss their experiences but are overwhelmed when discussing them. Finally, an individual is classified in an unresolved category when the discourse about experiences of loss and rejection is disorganized (George et al., 1985).

To investigate the idea that attachment is stable from infancy to adulthood, Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, and Albersheim (2000) conducted a longitudinal study. Sixty 12-month-olds participated in the Strange Situation with their mothers and were contacted 20 years later to participate in the AAI. At Time 2, 50 participants agreed to participate and were between the ages of 20 to 21 years. A majority of participants (64%) were assigned to corresponding attachment classifications from infancy through adulthood. When using the secure/insecure classification, 72% of participants remained in the same category (Waters et al., 2000). These results indicate that attachment shows stability from infancy through early adulthood. This suggestion has been further
supported using complex mathematical models, which show that attachment security is stable in the first 19 years of life (Fraley, 2002).

Further research has been able to show that attachment shows stability and carries over to other relationships (Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe & Collins, 2001). The participants in this study were in an ongoing longitudinal study from birth to age 25. At age 13, a parent-child interaction was used to assess 11 dyadic behaviors (i.e., anger, conflict, conflict resolution, confrontive –attacking, emotional engagement, hostility, negative affect, positive affect, and balance). Participants completed the AAI at age 19 and one year later at age 20, participants were invited to the laboratory with their romantic partner to complete an observation for dyadic behaviors similar to the parent-child interaction. Analyses showed that adult attachment was associated with higher mean level ratings of the parent-child observation and with romantic relationship. There was a correlation between the parent-child process and the romantic relationship process, indicating that an earlier relationship is correlated with later romantic relationship (Roisman et al., 2001). This study suggests that an individual’s earlier attachment exists across time and transfers into another relationship. If attachment transfer can occur across other relationships, it also suggests that this attachment transfer can be made between parent and child, a link the present study examines.

Although the AAI was among the first attachment measures for adults, other measures have been found to be reliable at measuring adult attachment. The Adult Attachment Projective (AAP; George & West, 2001) uses pictures to assess attachment patterns in adults. Participants are shown a series of seven black and white line drawings
depicting characters experiencing an attachment theme and are asked to create a story about each drawing. Based on the participants’ responses, four attachment classifications exist: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and unresolved. Attachment classification is judged according to the coherency of responses. Coherency is based on evaluating violations in quality, quantity, relation and manner (George & West, 2001). Violations in quality include vagueness in character and having two or more storylines. Quantity violations include stories with too much information or going beyond the description of the drawing. Relation violations include referring to personal history in the story and responses not related to the drawing. Finally, manner violations are problems with assembling the narrative. Violations in the stories are combined to create coherence of stories. Secure adults create coherent stories expressing connectedness to others, reciprocal interactions and portray characters that use attachment figures to alleviate attachment stress. Adults with dismissing attachment completely avoid the use of attachment in their stories and use social scripts as a way of creating a story. Preoccupied adults identify the resolution to attain attachment equilibrium but do not use attachment as a way to resolve attachment stress and have split story lines. Finally, unresolved attachment stories are incoherent and present a failure to resolve attachment distress.

Because this measure of adult attachment was developed relatively recently, few studies have used this measure to examine adult attachment (West & George, 2002). The present study uses the AAP to measure adult attachment as well as a self-report measure.

In addition to the aforementioned projective attachment measures for adults, a growing body of literature suggests measuring attachment via self-report is a viable
Self-report measures such as the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR; Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) are aimed at measuring adult attachment in the context of romantic relationships, yielding measures along two dimensions: avoidance and anxiety. Attachment avoidance is defined as an individual who finds discomfort in closeness and depending on others, whereas individuals with attachment anxiety fear abandonment and rejection. Vorria and colleagues (2007) used the ECR to assess adult attachment avoidance and anxiety in romantic relationships and an Adjective Checklist to measure adults’ description of their relationship to their parents and romantic partners. Their study concluded that adults’ relationship with their parents was associated with their attachment avoidance or anxiety. Vorria et al. (2007) also found that attachment avoidance/anxiety to a romantic partner was related to adjectives used to describe that relationship. If the adjectives used to describe relationships (with parents and romantic partners) were associated with attachment avoidance or attachment anxiety, it suggests that the ECR and other self-report measures are valid instruments to measure adult attachment. Furthermore, using a self-report questionnaire to explore adult attachment in a nationally representative sample, Mickelson, Kessler and Shaver (1997) found that the distribution of adult attachment was similar to that of infant attachment, suggesting infant attachment may extend into adulthood.

Before exploring the relation between parent and child attachment, it is important to understand that this relation can be influenced by parent’s attachment and caregiving. Using self-report measures, Rholes, Simpson, Blakely, Lanigan, and Allen (1997) sought to measure adult attachment in relation to caregiving practices in their first study.
Overall, Rholes and colleagues (1997) found that adults who were rated as avoidant and ambivalent were predisposed to have less positive parental behavior (i.e., stricter/harsher with discipline, less warmth, and easily aggravated with children). Using similar self-report measure in their second study, they found that adults with avoidant attachment expected higher levels of avoidant behavior in children (Rholes et al., 1997). In another study using self-report measures of adult attachment, Edelstein, Alexander, Shaver, Schaaf, Quas, Lovas, and Goodman (2004) examined parental responsiveness to children’s distress during an inoculation. They found that parents who were rated high on avoidance were less responsive when children were distressed than parents rated as secure. These results suggest that adult attachment can relate to the caregiving style they have with children. If avoidant and ambivalent adults are more predisposed to have less positive interactions with children, then it may affect the way that parents interact and talk (i.e., emotion discourse) with their children.

Although a variety of measures have been used in the previously reviewed studies, they collectively show stability in attachment security from early childhood to adulthood and suggest that adult attachment may affect the way parents interact and talk with their children. Despite answering questions about attachment stability, these studies raise the question about the relationship of parent-child attachment. The role of parent-child attachment in the context of emotion discourse will be explored in the present study.
Parent-Child Attachment

Family Systems theory posits that individuals cannot be examined out of the family context (Bowen, 1978). Within the family systems theory, intergenerational transmission theory further explains that family relational patterns are continued across generations. Williamson and Bray (1988, as cited in Harvey, Curry & Bray, 1991) argue that social modeling provides the basis for which intergenerational transmission occurs. These theories provide insight into the possibility of transmitted behaviors in relationships, especially in parent-child attachments.

In an attempt to understand attachment patterns between parents and children, Miljkovitch, Pierrehumbert, Bretherton, and Halfon (2004) explored the patterns of child and parent attachment representations. They examined 31 families (3-year-old children and both of their parents) for similarities in representations of attachment. Representations of attachment were measured through an Attachment Story Completion Task (ASCT), in which children were asked to complete stories based on themes of attachment. Parental attachment was measured using the Adult Attachment Interview that yielded three attachment classifications: autonomous/secure, dismissing, and preoccupied. Miljkovitch et al. (2004) discovered that mothers (but not fathers) and children had similar strategies of representational attachment. In their measures of attachment and autonomy, they found that mothers with greater autonomy had children with more secure attachments. This study showed a connection between attachment patterns in mothers and young children. Although this study is useful in understanding
the attachment relations between mothers and young children, it does not address whether such results are true for older children.

Similarly, Obegi, Morrison and Shaver (2004) conducted a study in which they explored patterns of attachment in mothers and their adult children. This study specifically examined the transmission of attachment between mothers and female daughters. Through a series of questionnaires, Obegi and colleagues (2004) found that there is transmission of attachment organization between mothers and adult children. Mothers’ attachment organization was related to daughters’ attachment organization; that is, if a mother was rated as having an avoidant attachment, her daughter would very likely have an avoidant attachment as well, and if a mother was rated as secure, her daughter would very likely be secure as well. This study showed that similarities in attachment organization exist between a parent and a child in adulthood, but does not examine this similarity in attachment organization in middle childhood which the present study explores.

To explore attachment similarities between mothers and adolescents, Sabatier and Lannegrand-Willems (2005) examined attachment organization between grandmother-mother and mother-adolescent dyads. Their results showed that the adolescents’ working models of attachment were associated with their mothers’ working models of attachment. Further analyses showed that adolescent’s anxiety and dependence were correlated with their mothers’ anxiety and dependence (Sabatier & Lannegrand-Willems, 2005). These results further support the idea that attachment style and characteristics related to attachment are similar between mother and child.
To further support the idea that similarities in attachment organization between a parent and child exist, Benoit and Parker (1994) examined grandmother-mother and mother-child attachment styles. Both grandmother and mother attachment were assessed using the AAI. The mothers’ attachment was assessed twice, during pregnancy and once after birth but before the child was 12 months old and the grandmother’s attachment was assessed during any point of the study. When children were 12 months old, both mothers and children were invited to a laboratory to complete the Strange Situation to measure children’s attachment. Analyses showed great concordance (81%) between mothers and children’s attachment classification. Further analyses showed that when attachment classifications across three generations were examined, almost two thirds of the sample had matching attachment styles in all three groups (Benoit & Parker, 1994). Results from this study provide more support for the idea that attachment organization between a parent and child show similarities, and suggests that similar attachment organization exists beyond the current parent and child attachment relationship. Although these studies have found supporting evidence of similarities in parent and child attachment organization, they give little attention to parent-child attachment in middle childhood, which the present study does. One potential source of transmission is the manner of interaction between parents and children, which is significant because parents socialize children during these interactions through imitation and contagion. If parents socialize children, it is important to examine the different areas in which parents socialize children, specifically emotion discourse.
Family Emotion Discourse

Through repeated interactions, parents socialize children’s emotion discourse. Emotion discourse in this study is any parent or child talk about emotions, including words referring to emotional states (e.g., happy, sad, bored) and emotion behaviors (e.g., smile, cry) referring to emotional states (Raikes & Thompson, 2006). Because parents’ emotion discourse can influence children’s emotion discourse, it is important to examine parent-child emotion discourse more closely. First, the significance of parent-child emotion discourse is examined. Then the impact of parental emotion discourse on children’s emotion discourse and emotion understanding is discussed. Third, the variation in parent-child emotion discourse is reviewed and finally, links between attachment, emotion discourse, and children’s emotion understanding are discussed.

Significance of Parent-Child Emotion Discourse

Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad (1998) propose that there are three forms of parents’ socialization of children’s emotional competence: parents’ reactions to children’s emotions, parent-child discussion of emotions, and both parents’ and children’s emotional expressivity. Although all three methods combined provide extensive insight into the ways that children learn about emotions, examining one method, the discussion of emotions, can provide valuable knowledge of how children learn about emotions and use emotion words.
Studies examining parental emotion discourse and children’s emotion understanding have revealed that parental emotion discourse does contribute to children’s emotion understanding (Denham et al., 1994; Dunn et al., 1991; Dunsmore & Karn, 2001). These findings are significant because they suggest that children’s emotion understanding may be affected by the amount and type of emotion discourse parents engage with children. Although children’s emotion understanding is linked with parental emotion discourse, other factors may also relate to children’s emotion understanding, such as attachment.

This connection between parent-child emotion discourse and children’s emotion understanding is meaningful because when parents and children are able to discuss emotions, it provides children the opportunity to ask and evaluate emotions; thus, giving children the opportunity to learn about emotions and increasing their emotion understanding. The ability to talk about emotions is a component of emotion understanding. It is important to keep in mind that children’s emotion discourse may be affected by the amount and ways parents use emotion discourse.

Impact of Parental Emotion Discourse on Children’s Emotion Discourse

The amount of parents’ emotion references in conversations with children can affect the amount of emotion references children make as well. Studies examining the relationship between maternal emotion references and children’s emotion references have found a positive correlation. For example, Martin and Green (2005) showed that the amount of emotion talk mothers exhibited during a Lego storytelling task (Cervantes &
Callanan, 1998) predicted the amount of emotion talk children used during this task. This suggests that children’s emotion discourse is sensitive to mothers’ emotion discourse.

Other studies have demonstrated that children’s emotion discourse is positively related to mothers’ emotion discourse (Denham & Auerbach, 1995). Specifically, Leibowitz, Ramos-Marcuse and Arsenio (2002) measured children and parents’ emotion talk. Preschoolers and their mothers were given four labeled pictures of children expressing happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Children and mothers discussed an event in which the child expressed the target emotion. Analyses on emotion words used in the task showed that mothers who use more child-referenced emotion words had children who also use more self-referenced emotion words. Children with lower avoidance scores (i.e., higher attachment security) also used more self-referenced emotions. This study and others (e.g., Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky & Braungart, 1992; Denham & Grout, 1993; Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1992) all support the idea that children’s emotion discourse may relate to parents’ emotion discourse. Furthermore, a goal of the current study was to show that children’s use of emotion discourse could be linked to attachment security. The current study will explore these relations in middle childhood.

**Impact of Parental Emotion Discourse on Children’s Emotion Understanding**

Parents’ emotion discourse not only influences children’s emotion discourse, but children’s emotion understanding as well. Dunn et al. (1991) examined family patterns of talk and children’s emotion understanding. At Time 1 (33 months old), children were observed in their home twice during their interactions with their sibling and parents. At
Time 2 (40 months old), children were assessed for emotion understanding using the false belief task, affective perspective-taking task, and the affective labeling task. Results showed that children in families where there was discussion of emotions, and particularly discussion of causes and consequences of emotions, had better emotion understanding at Time 2. These findings indicate that the discussion of emotions may aid in the development of emotion understanding.

Similarly, Denham and colleagues (1994) examined maternal emotion discourse and children’s emotion understanding. At Time 1, preschoolers and their mothers were observed during a visit to the laboratory where they looked at and discussed photographs of infants expressing emotions. Children’s emotion labeling was also assessed by identifying four emotions (happy, sad, angry, and afraid) on puppets. A year later at Time 2, causes of emotions was assessed by identifying the emotions of four puppets and explaining why the puppets felt that way. Regression analyses revealed that mothers who used more emotion language also used more positive emotion words. These mothers also had children with better emotion understanding. Collectively, these studies indicate that children’s emotion understanding is sensitive to parental emotion discourse. Although these studies indicate the importance of parental emotion discourse, other factors must be considered that may affect the type of emotion discourse children are exposed to.

Variation in Parent-Child Emotion Discourse

Gender. Various factors contribute to the variation in frequency of parent-child emotion discourse. One factor that contributes to this is child gender. Cervantes and
Callanan (1998) explored mothers’ and children’s emotion talk during a free play and semi-structured task. Children were 2-, 3-, and 4- years old. A Lego Dacta Duplo house and six family figures were used to elicit emotion talk. Mothers were instructed to create a story with the child (using the Lego props) about pretend parents going away overnight and the child remained with a caregiver. All transcripts were coded for emotion labels and emotion explanations. Gender differences emerged during analyses. Mothers used more explanations than labels with boys, but used similar amounts of explanations and labels with girls. These findings indicate that there could be gender differences that arise when examining parent-child emotion discourse.

Furthermore, other studies have also found supportive evidence of gender differences in emotion discourse. Fivush (1989) examined young preschoolers and their mothers. Mothers and children engaged in a conversation about past events that children were most likely to remember. Emotion coding (positive and negative emotion words) and frequency of causal explanations were coded. Findings showed that in conversations with sons, mothers equally used both negative and positive emotion words, whereas in conversations with daughters, mothers used slightly more positive than negative emotion words. In addition, when causal explanations were analyzed, Fivush (1989) found that mother-daughter dyads did not discuss the causes or consequences of emotion whereas mother-son dyads did. These findings indicate that gender differences in parent-child emotion discourse do exist. Although gender differences exist, other variations in emotion discourse could interact with parent-child emotion discourse.
Conversational Context. The context in which parent-child emotion discourse occurs also affects the type of emotion discourse parents and children have. Many studies use the context of a reminiscing task to elicit the discussion of emotions. According to Fivush (2007), when reminiscing about positive events, mothers try to focus on creating a shared history and creating an emotional bond, whereas when reminiscing about negative events, mothers try to help their children understand the event. This suggests that different types of emotion discourse occur during different contexts of conversations.

Lagattuta and Wellman (2002) recorded conversations of children, ages 2 to 5 years, during routine daily practices. All conversations were coded for emotion causes, emotion consequences, and mind-emotion connections. When parents and children talked about the past, negative emotions were used more than positive emotions. Conversations about present emotional experiences contained more positive emotions than negative. Such findings suggest that the context of parent-child discourse may be sensitive to different use of emotions.

Examining parent-child emotion discourse in two different contexts, Laible and Song (2006) studied children between 3- and 5 years old and their mothers. Mothers and children read a wordless storybook and were told to create a story while reading the book. A reminiscing task was used to elicit emotion talk. Mothers were instructed to discuss about two events in the past week when their child experienced a positive and negative emotion. It was more likely that mothers and children used positive emotions during the reminiscing task than the storybook reading. When mothers’ elaboration (use of open-ended questions and detailed description) during the tasks was measured, mothers who
elaborated during the storybook reading frequently discussed negative emotions during
the reminiscing task, which contradict Lagattuta and Wellman’s (2002) results. Because
these findings are inconsistent, it is useful to examine further the role of context in
parent-child emotion discourse. The current study examines one context of emotion
discourse, a reminiscing task, in which children discuss with parents about a video (with
emotion-laden themes) they watched alone. By examining emotion discourse in a
different context than previously studied, the current study seeks to provide further
knowledge in emotion discourse.

*Attachment, Emotion Discourse, and Children’s Emotion Understanding*

The current study examines attachment and emotion discourse. More specifically,
this study examines both parent and child attachment and emotion discourse for children
in middle childhood. It is important to understand that there is a connection between
attachment and emotion discourse.

Because attachment style is theoretically predictive of communication style, it is
important to examine emotion discourse. Attachment theory explains that sensitive
mothers respond to children’s signals appropriately (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Because
mothers respond to children appropriately, they communicate to children that children’s
needs are valued. Because of this, children may learn to express emotional needs openly
with their mothers and receive appropriate responses (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim,
2000). Insecure mothers respond inconsistently to children’s needs, telling the child that
their needs are not important. Therefore, children with secure attachments should be able
to express emotions openly, whereas insecure children would restrict emotion expressiveness.

To understand the relationship between attachment and communication, 4.5-year-old children and their mothers participated in a longitudinal study (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim, 2000). Children’s attachment was assessed earlier at 12 months via the Strange Situation. Mothers and children were separated for 45-minutes and upon reunion, mothers and children had 3 minutes to discuss what happened during their time apart. The mother-child conversation was assessed for open and non-open communication. Open communication included mothers’ genuine interest, sharing what happened, talked about topics that children were interested in and children felt free to express needs with their mothers. Non-open communication included mothers’ lack of attunement to children, insensitively expressing boredom or showing hostility to children and these children did not cooperate with their mothers’ requests or showed anger towards their mother. Mother-son dyads showed that secure dyads had open communication and disorganized dyads had non-open communication. Overall, associations between secure attachment and open communication and between disorganized attachment and non-open communication existed (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim, 2000). These findings indicate that the type of communication style is associated with attachment style. Attachment appears to interact with communication style, which results in the type of discourse children may have about emotions. Even though this study did not directly examine attachment and emotion discourse, it provides a framework for predicting communication styles according to attachment style.
Examining attachment and emotion expressiveness, Goldberg et al., (1994) found emotion expressions were related to different attachment styles. Children’s attachment was measured using the Strange Situation, which also served as the task for examining maternal responsiveness. Mothers of secure infants attended and responded to the full range of affective displays and in turn, secure infants expressed the full range of emotions. Mothers of avoidant infants were unresponsive to negative affect that infants expressed, these infants were the least expressive, and negative affect expression was rare. Moreover, mothers of resistant infants responded more to negative affect but minimally to positive affect and these infants showed a high level of fussing and crying. Children’s attachment style interacted with the way mothers responded to children’s emotions and in turn affected the way children expressed emotions. Although this study examined infants and emotion expression, it provides a useful framework for understanding the progression of emotion expression to emotion discourse in older children relative to attachment.

Laible (2004) examined attachment and emotion discourse in children 3 to 5 years old. In this study, discourse between mothers and children in secure dyads was emotionally open, elaborative and coherent in the storybook reading and reminiscing task. Secure dyads also discussed more negative emotions during the reminiscing task which supports previous findings (Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002). Children’s attachment security related to the ways both mothers and children talked about emotions, suggesting that the types of emotion discourse children have with parent could be affected by attachment security. Although these studies have found that attachment influences
emotion discourse, other studies have examined this in conjunction with emotion understanding.

Ontai and Thompson (2002) sought to understand the effects of parent-child discourse and attachment on children’s emotion understanding. At Time 1, 3- year old children and their mothers read five stories together and were asked to discuss a recent past event when the child displayed a negative emotion. Children’s emotion understanding was assessed using puppets that acted out vignettes and by then asking children how the puppet felt. Children’s attachment was measure via the Attachment Q-Sort. At Time 2, 5-year olds and their mothers participated in the same emotion understanding and attachment assessments as Time 1. Results showed securely attached children had more emotion understanding than insecure children. These results also showed that securely attached children had a stronger understanding of negative emotions than insecure children. When mothers’ elaborative style of discourse (i.e., descriptions and questions about event details) was examined during the reminiscing task at Time 1 for secure children, secure children had higher positive emotion understanding scores at Time 2. These findings indicate that emotion discourse also influences emotion understanding and it appears that attachment is related to the understanding of negative emotions. Furthermore, elaborative emotion discourse is related to the understanding of positive emotions.

In a similar study examining mother-child emotion discourse and attachment, Raikes and Thompson (2006) conducted a longitudinal study. At Time 1, children were between the ages of 2- and 3- years old and at Time 2, children were 3- and 4- years old.
Children’s attachment was assessed using the Attachment Q-Sort and emotion understanding was measured by the affective perspective taking task using puppets. The Center for the Epidemiological Study-Depression inventory measured maternal depression. Mother-child emotion discourse was assessed using a conversation about the child’s past incidents when the child felt angry, happy, and sad. All the same assessments were used at both Time 1 and Time 2. Analyses showed that frequency of mother-child references to emotion positively correlated with children’s emotion understanding and mother-child references to emotion were positively associated with children’s attachment security. Moreover, children’s attachment security was positively correlated with children’s emotion understanding (Raikes & Thompson, 2006). Collectively, these studies show that an association among mother-child emotion discourse, attachment and children’s emotion understanding does exist.

Although the previously reviewed studies found correlations between parent-child emotion discourse and children’s emotion understanding, these studies measured both parents’ and children’s emotion discourse during a joint conversation, therefore the measures of emotion discourse of the mother and child were not independent of one another. To solve this problem, Mcquaid, Bigelow, McLaughlin, and MacLean (2007) examined preschool-aged children and their mothers in two conversation tasks. The conversation tasks measured mental state language (e.g., comments about knowledge, mental processes, levels of emotional engagement, manipulation of people’s beliefs, desires and interests). Children and mothers were involved in a play scenario that included 11 episodes which also included separation and reunion episodes of children and
mothers. Children’s attachment was based on these separation and reunion episodes using the Preschool Assessment of Attachment (PAA; Crittenden & Claussen, 1993). Mothers and children were reunited after the play scenario and mothers were instructed to talk about what happened in the play scenario with their children (co-construction task). A separate conversation (consolidation task) occurred between the child and experimenter, where the experimenter asked the child what happened in the play scenario. During the co-construction task, children with secure attachments showed higher mental state language and emotion understanding than children with insecure attachment. Similar results were found for children’s consolidation conversation. Further analyses with maternal mental state language revealed that it positively correlated with children’s emotion understanding and attachment security during the co-construction task but not the consolidation task. Because this study used emotion references as a part of overall mental state language, these findings cannot be generalized to parent-child discourse of emotions. Despite this, these studies indicate that there appears to be a connection between parent-child discourse about emotions and children’s emotion understanding and attachment security.

There is a body of literature that highlights the relationship between attachment and emotion discourse (Goldberg et al., 1994; Laible & Thompson, 1998; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Laible and Thompson (2000) found that secure children were more likely to reference feelings in conversations about the past (reminiscing task) than insecure children did. Other studies have been able to find similar results (Farrar et al., 1997) using reminiscing tasks. Collectively, these studies show that some unique
interaction moderates attachment and emotion discourse. Although all of these studies have found this link, they have either examined this link in infancy or in early childhood (preschool-aged). The impact of attachment on emotion discourse for children in middle childhood remains unknown. For this reason, the present study examines the effects of attachment on emotion discourse in middle childhood.

Middle Childhood

When children reach middle childhood, some developmental shifts occur, including cognitive (Piaget, 1971) and emotional (Holodynski, 2009). Because of these changes, there is a corresponding need for changes in parental support at middle childhood. Bowlby (1982) hypothesized that attachment between children and parents change over time as children age. For young children, proximity seeking behavior with the attachment figure in times of distress is more prevalent than it is for older children. Older children rely on the availability of the attachment figure during times of distress rather than proximity seeking behavior. Older children rely less on attachment figures than younger children do (Kerns, Tomich, & Kim, 2006; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999). For example, Lieberman and colleagues (1999) examined two groups of children, 9- to 11-year olds and 12- to 14- year olds. Children reported on the availability of their attachment figure and how often they used their attachment figure during times of distress. Older children reported that they relied less on their mothers and
fathers than younger children did. Similar findings were found in a different study that examined younger children in middle childhood (Kerns et al., 2006).

Because they rely less on attachment figures in middle childhood, children may begin relying on others outside the home instead of parents and transition from parents to peers. Hazan and Zeifman (1994, 1999; as cited in Kerns et al., 2006) interviewed children between 6- to 17- years old for proximity maintenance of parents and peers. They found that the majority of children preferred to spend time with their peers rather than with their parents. These findings suggest that proximity seeking behavior might be transferred from parents to peers during middle childhood. Because of this, the quality of conversations between children and their parents may change and it is possible this transition plays a role in the relation between parent-child interactions and attachment in middle childhood. These developmental changes may affect this study because emotion discourse and attachment are assessed in for children in middle childhood.

Present Study

Early childhood attachment creates mental representations of current attachment and future attachment relationships. Research shows there is stability in attachment from infancy through adulthood. Stability of attachment not only exists within the individual, but also can be seen across generations. The literature suggests that transmission of attachment patterns between parents and children exist and play a critical role in attachment.
Stability is not only present in attachment, but also in emotion talk and understanding. Over time, children learn to use these emotion labels from parents. Furthermore, children who have greater emotion understanding tend to have secure attachments with parents, possibly because parents in secure dyads talk more about emotions than insecure dyads. Children with secure attachments learn to label emotions and discuss emotions, generating a transmission of overall emotion talk and understanding from parents to children. This suggests that a consistent pattern of stability in attachment and emotion talk exists in young children and it would be safe to assume that this stability still exists for older children.

Most of the research reviewed has focused on young children and early parent-child attachment and none on the parent-child attachment in middle childhood. Although emotion understanding has been extensively explored in young children, few studies have examined emotion discourse. It is because of the lack of research in these areas that the current study will examine parent-child patterns of attachment and emotion discourse for children in middle childhood.

Past studies have suggested that attachment may play a role in emotion discourse for parents and children. Based on these findings, there were two hypotheses in the present study. First it was expected that more secure children would produce more emotion discourse than insecure children. Second, parents with more emotion discourse would have children who used more emotion discourse. Findings from this study may be different from previous literature because the children are older so there may be differences in the number of securely attached children. In addition, the emotion-eliciting
task is different from other studies, which may result in less emotion discourse than previous studies.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Research Question

The present study sought to explore the relation between attachment patterns and styles of emotion discourse in parents and their children. Previous research has indicated that attachment styles are related to emotion discourse in young children. This study seeks to further elucidate these findings by examining this relationship in middle childhood.

The data in this study were taken from a larger quantitative study on memory, psychobiology, and emotion, conducted by Kristen Weede Alexander and Karen Davis O’Hara with Rosemarie Kraft at the UC Davis Laterality Laboratory. The design of the larger study is primarily correlational and included the use of electroencephalogram (EEG), attachment, memory, and temperament measures from parents and children. The present study was based on a portion of data from the larger study and the methods discussed in the following sections pertain only to the current thesis. Child attachment was measured with a questionnaire (Security Scale) and parent attachment was measured with a projective measure and a self-report (Adult Attachment Projective and
Experiences in Close Relationships). Emotion discourse was measured by the frequency and valence of emotions during an emotion-eliciting task between parents and children.

Participants

Twenty parent-child dyads with children between the ages of 8 and 12 years participated in this study ($M = 8.8, SD = 0.95$). Sixteen of the parents were mothers, two were fathers, and two were classified as other (e.g., stepmother). Thirteen of the children were female and seven were male. The families lived in a northern California university town, and the majority of the families were of Euro-American descent and of middle to upper socioeconomic status. Participants were recruited through community events, flyers at elementary schools, and through involvement of previous studies. All participation was on a voluntary basis and children received a small prize at the end of their participation. All children were native English speakers and had no known learning disabilities.

Procedure

As part of a larger study, children and parents were invited to come into a university laboratory for two sessions. In the first session, child attachment was assessed and one measure of parent attachment was assessed. Emotion discourse was also assessed. In the second session, a second measure of parent attachment was assessed.
In the first session, parents entered the laboratory with their children, were presented a consent form. Children were administered an assent form. After signatures were obtained, a copy of the consent form was given to the parent. After ensuring that the child was willing to participate in the study, the child was prepared for electroencephalogram (EEG) measurement by placing an electrode cap on his or her head. The EEG measurement was part of the larger study and was not used in the present study. When the equipment was set up, children then sat in front of a television and watched a 30-minute video of pictures paired with stories. The picture-story pairs children watched were used in the present study as part of the emotion-eliciting task used to measure emotion discourse.

While the child watched the video, the parent was in a separate room completing a series of questionnaires. The questionnaires included demographic information and one measure of parent attachment (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Once the child finished watching the video, parents were invited to reunite with their child to discuss what the child saw. Parents were told that they should discuss what the child saw because they would not be allowed to discuss it later. The length of the discussions were dependent on how much parents and children wanted to discuss. These parent-child discussions were used to analyze emotion discourse. After the parent-child interaction, dyads were dismissed and reminded that they would return to the laboratory in approximately a week.

During the second session, the child and parent were separated in different rooms to assess both adult and child attachment. To assess parent attachment, an experimenter
administered the Adult Attachment Projective (AAP). A second experimenter administered the Security Scale. To ensure that the child received privacy and answered the questionnaire honestly, child attachment was assessed in a separate room. Before administering the questionnaire, the experimenter showed and explained an answer board to the children. The board contained the two responses to the questions: “sort of true of me” and “really true of me.” Once the answer board was explained, the experimenter verbally administered the questionnaire. Children responded non-verbally by indicating their answer on the board and the experimenter recorded the response. After both assessments were completed, the child received a small prize for their participation in the study.

Measures

Attachment was measured for both parents and children. Parent attachment was assessed with two questionnaires (Adult Attachment Projective and Experiences in Close Relationships). Two questionnaires were used to assess adult attachment because the sample size was small when only one questionnaire was used. Child attachment was measured with one questionnaire (Security Scale). These measures are further described next.
Adult Attachment Measures

Adult Attachment Projective. The Adult Attachment Projective (George & West, 2001) contains a series of seven black and white line drawings, one with a neutral theme and six with attachment related themes. The drawings consist of people experiencing the attachment related themes and were used to elicit the discussion of deep-rooted attachment. The drawings were shown one at a time and adults were asked to create a story about the drawing, giving details about the kinds of emotions that the character felt and what had happened immediately before and what will happen next. If there was not sufficient detail, a few standardized probe questions were used to obtain more detail such as, “What do you think might happen next?” or “Anything else come to mind?” If the participant indicated that there was nothing else to discuss, the assessment continued with the next drawing.

These adult attachment projectives were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were scored by a coder trained by and reliable with Carol George, one of the authors of the measure. Reliability from the coder was not established, but the coder was reliable (Cronbach $\alpha = .80$) with the author of the measure before coding. The scoring yielded a classification into one of four categories: secure, dismissing, preoccupied, or unresolved. Secure adults use attachment figures to solve attachment distress and show the importance of relationships through staying connected with others. Dismissing adults do not directly mention attachment figures and have storylines with characters that take action themselves instead of using others to help solve attachment distress. Preoccupied adults do not use any form of attachment figure and characters of the stories are passive.
and do not take action. Finally, unresolved adults provide incoherent stories and avoid the problem presented in the drawing (George & West, 2001). Attachment classifications were collapsed into two categories, with 1 = secure, and 2 = insecure, with the insecure category including dismissing, preoccupied and unresolved attachment. Because of the small sample size, it was beneficial to use a two-category system for a greater likelihood of finding significant results. Because of missing data, only 14 participants were included in data analyses utilizing this measure.

Experiences in Close Relationships. The Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) is a self-report that measures adult attachment avoidance and anxiety in close relationships. The measure contained 36 statements which participants ranked themselves on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Half of the statements measured attachment anxiety and the other half measured attachment avoidance. Rankings of statements were summed separately for both avoidance and anxiety items, resulting in a continuous scale for attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. Lower scores on attachment avoidance and anxiety indicated that the individual had a more secure attachment. In the current sample, this scale was reliable for both the avoidance measure (Cronbach α = .92) and the anxiety measure (Cronbach α = .84). One participant did not complete the measure and thus there are only data for 19 participants for this measure.
Child Attachment Measure

The Security Scale (Kerns et al., 2001) is a 15-item questionnaire that measures attachment security in middle childhood about a specific attachment figure. This measure mainly focuses on the child’s perceptions of the availability of the attachment figure, the child’s tendency to rely on that individual, and the child’s desire to communicate with that attachment figure (Kerns et al., 2001). Children were asked to respond to statements in the form of Harter’s (1982) “Some kids… Other kids…” format and then further indicate whether the statements were, “really true of me” or “sort of true of me.” This yielded a 4-point scale, with answers to all questions averaged, and with higher scores indicating a more secure attachment. In the current sample, this scale was reliable (Cronbach $\alpha = .75$).

Emotion Discourse

To elicit a discussion of emotions, children watched a 30-minute video of pictures paired with narrated stories made in the UC Davis laboratory. There were 24 pictures, each paired with a story describing what was happening in the picture, lasting approximately 30 seconds per story. The stories contained themes of happy, sad, fear-inducing, neutral, separation and reunion. These parent-child discussions were videotaped. The discussions were transcribed verbatim and coded for emotion discourse. Emotion discourse was calculated by summing the total amount of emotion and behavior words (boring, happy, sad, cry, smile, etc.) that both parents and children used in their interaction. There were two emotion discourse scores, one for parents and one for
children. Emotion discourse first was scored on a numeric scale, with a higher score indicating more emotion discourse. Emotion discourse was further coded for positive (e.g., happy), negative (e.g., sad) and neutral (e.g., do not care) valence. Parents and children each received a score for positive, negative and neutral emotion words on a numeric scale, with a higher score indicating more use of the emotion words in each of the three categories (positive, negative, and neutral). The author scored the coding of emotion discourse and used a list of emotion words before coding transcripts. Because the sample size was small, only the author coded and scored the transcripts.
RESULTS

The current study examined attachment and emotion discourse in middle childhood. Both parents’ and children’s attachment were assessed using self-reports. Emotion discourse was assessed by coding a conversational transcript between parents and children. The first hypothesis was that children higher in secure attachment would engage in more emotion discourse with parents than children reporting less secure attachment. The second hypothesis posited that parents who engaged in more emotion discourse would also have children who engaged in more emotion discourse. The following chapter will first discuss descriptive statistics and then correlational and regression analyses examining the links between emotion discourse and attachment.

Descriptive Statistics

_Descriptive Statistics for Attachment Measures_

Child security of attachment, measured on a continuous scale, ranged from 2.6 to 3.93 ($M = 3.49, SD = .31$), indicating that on average, the children in the current sample had relatively secure attachments. Parent attachment, as measured with the AAP, showed that there were also more insecure (57.1%) than secure (42.9%) parents in the sample.
Parent attachment measured by the ECR revealed that attachment avoidance ($M = 2.22, SD = .904$) and attachment anxiety ($M = 2.91, SD = .819$) were moderate.

**Descriptive Statistics for Emotion Discourse Measures**

Children’s emotion discourse ranged from zero emotion words per conversation to seven emotion words ($M = 1.95, SD = 1.98$). When means by gender were calculated, girls used a mean of, 1.84 emotion words ($SD = 1.51$) whereas boys used a mean of, 2.14 emotion words ($SD = 2.79$). Parents’ emotion discourse ranged from zero emotion words to 14 emotion words per conversation ($M = 3.70, SD = 4.13$). When emotion talk was categorized by valence, parents on average had .900 positive words ($SD = 1.25$), 1.85 negative words ($SD = 2.25$) and 1.05 neutral words ($SD = 1.43$). Children on average had .30 positive words ($SD = .656$), 1.05 negative words ($SD = 1.53$) and .65 neutral words ($SD = .875$).

Further inspection of the emotion discourse revealed that there were specific emotion words children and parents used more frequently than others were. For children, the most common emotion words used were *boring, scared, good*, and *sad*. Parents commonly used words such as *boring, scared, happy, tired, good*, and *sad*. Overall, both children and parents generally used a wider variety of negative emotion words than positive emotion words during the emotion-eliciting task.
Analyses of Emotion Discourse and Attachment

Correlational Analyses of Attachment and Emotion Discourse

Several sets of correlational analyses were conducted. First, parent attachment measure by self-report (ECR) and four other variables (child attachment, parent emotion talk, child emotion talk, and child’s age in months) were analyzed. Second, correlational analyses were conducted between parent attachment as measured by the projective (AAP) and the four other variables.

Correlations among all predictor variables are presented in Table 1. A significant positive correlation \( (r = .569, p < .01) \) was found between child emotion talk and parent emotion talk: that is, children with more frequent emotion talk had parents with more frequent emotion talk. Further correlational analyses of positive, negative and neutral emotion talk provided significant results. Parents’ positive emotion discourse was positively correlated with their negative emotion discourse \( (r = .554, p < .05) \), their neutral emotion discourse \( (r = .649, p < .01) \) and children’s negative emotion discourse \( (r = .577, p < .01) \). Parents’ negative emotion discourse was positively correlated with their neutral emotion discourse \( (r = .508, p < .05) \) and children’s negative emotion talk \( (r = .518, p < .05) \). Finally, parents’ neutral emotion discourse was positively correlated with children’s negative emotion discourse \( (r = .572, p < .01) \). All other correlations of variables were not significant.
Table 1

Correlations among Predictor Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Child Attachment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.482</td>
<td>-.298</td>
<td>-.252</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parent Attachment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.193</td>
<td>-.331</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>-.268</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parent Emotion Talk</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.569*</td>
<td>-.253</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.312</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Child Emotion Talk</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>-.229</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Parent Avoidance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>-.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Parent Anxiety</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>-.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Age (in months)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gender</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01

Regressions of Attachment and Emotion Discourse

Next, two sets of linear regressions were conducted predicting child emotion discourse from parent attachment, child attachment security, and parent emotion discourse. The first regression using anxiety and avoidance as measures of parent attachment (N = 19) was not significant, $F(4, 14) = 2.70$, $R^2 = .45$, $p = .073$ (see Table 2). In this analysis, only parent emotion discourse significantly predicted child emotion
discourse, such that parents engaging in more emotion discourse had children who did the same. The regression did not yield significant results for parent attachment (avoidance and anxiety) or child attachment security.

The regression using secure or insecure categories of parent attachment (\(N = 14\)) was not significant, \(F(3, 9) = 2.36, R^2 = .44, p = .139\) (see Table 3). Again, no predictors were significant.

Additional linear regressions were conducted to examine specific valences of emotion words (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral emotion words). Results from these analyses showed significant results only for the negative emotion discourse. Predictor variables for the following regressions included the child’s attachment, parent’s attachment, and parent’s emotion discourse. Linear regressions predicting children’s negative emotion discourse using predictor variables with the ECR, \(F(4, 14) = 2.60, R^2 = .426, p = .081\) (see Table 4), and the AAP, \(F(3, 9) = 3.22, R^2 = .518, p = .075\) (see Table 5) were not significant. Additional linear regressions predicting children’s positive emotion discourse using predictor variables with the ECR, \(F(4, 14) = .507, R^2 = .127, p = .732\) (see Table 6), and with the AAP, \(F(3, 9) = .489, R^2 = .14, p = .699\) (see Table 7), were also not significant. Finally, two more linear regressions predicting children’s neutral emotion discourse using predictor variables with the ECR, \(F(4, 14) = 1.23, R^2 = .261, p = .340\) (see Table 8), and with the AAP, \(F(3, 9) = .161, R^2 = .051, p = .920\) (see Table 9), were also non-significant.
Table 2

Regression Predicting Child Emotion Talk Using ECR (N = 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.598</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Avoidance</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>.645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Anxiety</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Security</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td>.803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Regression Predicting Child Emotion Talk Using AAP (N = 14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Security</td>
<td>-.301</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Attachment</td>
<td>-.032</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>.912</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Regression Predicting Child Negative Emotion Talk Using ECR (N = 19)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Attachment</td>
<td>-.329</td>
<td>-.158</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Negative Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.423</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Avoidance</td>
<td>-.132</td>
<td>-.618</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Anxiety</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.982</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Regression Predicting Child Negative Emotion Talk Using AAP (N = 14)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Attachment</td>
<td>-.376</td>
<td>-1.37</td>
<td>.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Attachment</td>
<td>-.292</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
<td>.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Negative Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.184</td>
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</table>
Table 6

*Regression Predicting Child Positive Emotion Talk Using ECR (N = 19)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Attachment</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Avoidance</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td>.425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Anxiety</td>
<td>-.317</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Positive Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.536</td>
<td>.601</td>
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</table>

Table 7

*Regression Predicting Child Positive Talk Using AAP (N = 14)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Attachment</td>
<td>-.176</td>
<td>-.496</td>
<td>.631</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Positive Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td>.564</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Attachment</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

*Regression Predicting Child Neutral Emotion Talk Using ECR (N = 19)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Neutral Emotion Talk</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.702</td>
<td>.494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Attachment</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Avoidance</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Anxiety</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

*Regression Predicting Child Neutral Emotion Talk Using AAP (N = 14)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Neutral Emotion Talk</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.956</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Attachment</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>-.305</td>
<td>.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Attachment</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the relationship between child emotion discourse and two other key factors, attachment (parent and child) and parent emotion talk. Correlational analyses were conducted with predictor variables (child attachment, parent attachment, parent emotion talk, child emotion talk, parent avoidance, parent anxiety, age, and gender) that yielded only one significant result, child emotion discourse and parent emotion discourse. No other significant results were found for the correlational analyses with predictor variables. Significant correlations were found when analyzing the valence of emotion discourse. Parents’ negative emotion discourse positively correlated with parents’ own neutral emotion discourse and with children’s negative emotion discourse. Parents’ positive emotion discourse positively correlated with parents’ negative and neutral emotion discourse and children’s negative emotion discourse. Finally, parents’ neutral emotion discourse correlated with children’s negative emotion discourse.

Linear regressions predicting children’s emotion discourse using parent attachment, child attachment and parent emotion discourse were non-significant. Additional linear regressions predicting children’s positive, negative, and neutral emotion discourse...
discourse using predictor variables (child attachment, parent attachment, and parent emotion discourse) were also non-significant.

In this chapter, findings of the present study are presented in regards to the hypotheses, in addition to a discussion of possible reasons why this study yielded such findings. Next, limitations of the study are discussed and finally suggestions for future research are given.

Child Emotion Discourse and Child Attachment

The first hypothesis stated that more securely attached children would engage in more emotion talk with parents than less securely attached children. Although correlational analyses did not provide significant results, the correlation suggested a negative relationship between child attachment security and emotion discourse, with more securely attached children using less emotion talk. Past studies that examined child attachment and emotion discourse have found that more securely attached children engaged in more emotion talk than less securely attached children (Laible & Thompson, 2000; Ontai & Thompson, 2000; Raikes & Thompson, 2006).

Although past studies (Laible & Thompson, 2000; Raikes & Thompson, 2006) have mainly examined children’s attachment and emotion discourse in early childhood, the present study examined this relationship for children in middle childhood. It is possible that the amount of emotion talk children use changes as children get older because their attachment to parents shifts to peers. Another explanation for the negative
relationship between child attachment security and emotion discourse could be that more secure children know that their parents are emotionally available and for that reason, they felt no need to discuss as many emotions as children who were less secure. In addition, children who are less insecure may have used this opportunity to discuss more emotions to compensate for the fact that their parents do not listen to them. Although these are all plausible explanations for the findings, there is no definitive answer and a larger sample yielding more reliable findings is needed to draw conclusions.

Child Emotion Discourse and Parent Emotion Discourse

The second hypothesis posited that parents using more emotion discourse would have children that used more emotion discourse. The findings showed a significant positive correlation between children and parents’ emotion discourse. Parents who used more emotion talk had children who used more emotion talk. The hypothesis was supported by the findings, which are also supported through past research. Past studies examining emotion discourse has found that children and mothers’ use of emotion talk were similar with one another (Cervantes & Callanan, 1998; Martin & Green, 2005). Although past studies examined this relationship, they have mainly studied young children and have not expanded their research to include older children. Findings from the present study further support that idea that the amount of children’s emotion discourse relates to the amount of mothers’ emotion discourse can extend beyond early childhood and into middle childhood. Because the present study had both mothers and
fathers participate, the findings also allude to the idea that both mothers’ and fathers’ use of emotion discourse can affect children’s use of emotion discourse.

Although the hypothesis was supported, children and parents’ emotion discourse frequency was measured during a joint conversation. The problem with measures like this is that there is no way of knowing the direction of effect—whether parents discuss emotions more frequently because their children do or the other way around. It is important to examine children’s emotion discourse frequency in a task that does not involve the parent. Another problem with this study was that there was only one person who coded the transcripts. This could cause a positive correlation between children and parents’ emotion discourse. A suggestion for future research could be that when examining emotion discourse, paying more attention to who initiated the emotion discussion could be useful in determining overall emotion discourse. Another suggestion could be that using multiple people to code emotion discourse could help obtain more accurate results.

Child Emotion Discourse and Parent Attachment

No hypothesis was made about children’s emotion discourse and parents’ attachment although data analyses were conducted to investigate if interactions between these variables exist. A linear regression concluded that no significant relationship exists between children’s emotion discourse and parents’ attachment as measured with the AAP. Although results were not significant, the correlation was near significance,
consistent with previous literature. In addition to this, a second linear regression found no relationship with children’s emotion discourse and parents’ attachment with the ECR. One explanation is that the type of attachment style parents’ had did not affect the amount of emotion discourse children used. Another possible explanation is that the sample size using the AAP to measure adult attachment was too small to provide reliable results. Although no studies explored the relation of parents’ attachment (using the ECR and AAP) with children’s emotion discourse, the current study explored this relationship and found no significance, suggesting that no direct relationship may exist between these two variables.

Positive, Negative, and Neutral Emotion Discourse

No hypothesis was posited about both children’s and parents’ positive, negative and neutral emotion discourse. Linear regressions indicated that no significant relationship for positive and neutral emotion discourse exists. One explanation is that there may not be predictors for positive and neutral emotion discourse. Another possible explanation is that the sample size was too small to provide significant results.

One significant relationship was discovered for negative emotion discourse. Parents’ negative emotion discourse predicted children’s negative emotion discourse. One explanation for this is that when negative emotions are discussed, both parents and children continue to focus the discussion on negative emotions. A second explanation is that negative emotions are easier to discuss, so when parents initiate negative emotion
discussion, children continue discussing about negative emotions. A third explanation is that when discussing about a past event (emotion-eliciting task), parents and children engage in more negative emotion discourse which is consistent with previous research (Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002). Although the findings on negative emotion discourse are significant, they should not be generalized because the sample size was small and homogenous.

Correlational analyses for both parent and children’s emotion discourse indicated that some significant positive correlations exist between parents and children’s emotion discourse. Parents’ positive emotion discourse was positively correlated with parents’ negative and neutral emotion discourse, and with children’s negative emotion discourse. A possible explanation for these relationships is that parents who engaged in more positive emotion discourse are more willing to discuss emotions in general, thus discussing more negative and neutral emotions as well. As for the significant correlation with children’s negative emotion discourse, it is possible that parents who engaged in more positive emotion discourse had children who wanted to discuss more negative emotions than positive or neutral. Another significant correlation found that parents’ negative emotion discourse was positively correlated with children’s negative emotion discourse and parents’ neutral emotion talk. An explanation is that when parents engaged in negative emotion talk, children also continued to discuss negative emotions during the conversation, thus the discussion of negative emotions is ongoing once initiated. As for the correlation between parents’ negative and neutral emotion discourse, an explanation for this is that parents who are more willing to discuss negative emotions may also be
more willing to discuss neutral emotions. Finally, parents’ neutral emotion discourse was positively correlated with children’s negative emotion discourse. It may be that when parents discussed neutral emotions (e.g., do not care) more frequently, thus avoiding the discussion of emotions, children wanted to focus on the discussion of emotions and chose to engage in negative emotions. Although these are all plausible explanations for the results, it is important to note that the sample size was small and homogeneous, thus generalizing these results is not possible. Future studies examining emotion discourse should examine larger and more diverse populations.

Limitations of the Present Study

The small sample size limited the present study. Because this study did not provide monetary compensation, all participants in the study came on a voluntary basis, which greatly limited the number of participants. Also, for this reason, most participants in the study resided in the surrounding area, which made the sample homogeneous. Most participants were of European-American descent, middle to higher socio-economic status, and were highly educated. Because the sample was homogeneous, the effects of culture and class differences are not represented in this study. Past research has found that culture and class differences may influence the amount of emotion talk individuals engage in (Eisenberg, 1999; Fivush & Wang, 2005). The sample size and homogeneity limit the ability to generalize these findings.
Another limitation of this study was the emotion-eliciting task. There is a possibility that using a different task to elicit the discussion of emotions may have produced attachment-related variations. Past studies using a reminiscing task, where mothers and children discussed about a negative and positive event the child experienced, have found attachment-related variations in the discussion of emotions (Laible & Song, 2005; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Raikes & Thompson, 2006). Other studies also have used a storybook reading task where mothers and children read a story together and then discussed it afterwards (Laible, 2004; Laible & Song, 2005) and were also able to find a relationship between emotion discourse and attachment. These tasks differed from the emotion-eliciting task because children were the only ones to view the video and the discussion of emotions was based on the parent’s willingness to ask what the child saw. Therefore, if children did not want to discuss what they saw, parents were not able to initiate a conversation about the emotion-related events. The task itself created a limitation in that emotion discourse was based on the child’s willingness to discuss what they saw and parent’s willingness to ask what the child saw.

Finally, another limitation of this study was the emotion discourse coding. Only emotional states (e.g., happy, sad) and emotion behavior words (e.g., smile, cry) were considered as emotion discourse. Perhaps extending the emotion discourse coding to include emotional explanations, emotional references to self or others, and elaborative emotion talk, could have resulted in significant results that related to attachment categories.
Future Research

Future studies can further elucidate the link between parent and child emotion discourse. This research can be extended into different age groups (adolescence and adulthood) to examine if the same patterns of emotion discourse exist in older populations. In addition to examining older individuals, future studies should include a more diverse population. Using a more diverse population that includes individuals from different socio-economic classes and cultures may better represent a general population.

Although the present study did not find significant results associating child emotion discourse and child attachment, future research should examine this relationship in middle childhood. Because of sample limitations of the present study, future studies should examine this with a larger and diverse population. Expanding this research into a larger population could perhaps reveal if child emotion discourse relates to attachment in middle childhood.

Future research should examine the relationship between child emotion discourse and parent attachment in middle childhood. No past studies have examined this link, and the present study failed to find significant results. It would be interesting to know if parent’s attachment is associated with the amount of children’s emotion discourse. A greater understanding of children’s emotion discourse in conjunction with child and parent attachment in middle childhood will result if future studies are able to find significant results in these areas.
Conclusion

The present study provides preliminary support for a relationship between children’s emotion discourse and parents’ emotion discourse. Although the sample size of the study small, these findings indicates that, the amount of parents’ emotion discourse is linked to the amount of children’s emotion discourse. To date, no other studies to the author’s knowledge have linked parents’ and children’s emotion discourse in middle childhood. This finding provides a new area of study which future studies could examine children and parents’ emotion discourse in adolescence and adulthood.
REFERENCES


