Reviewer’s report

Title: Standard values and relationship specific validity of the Bielefeld Relationship Expectations Questionnaire (BFPE)

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Reviewer: Angelo Picardi

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This paper reports about the psychometric properties and the convergent validity of a new adult attachment measure, the Bielefeld Relationship Expectations Questionnaire (BFPE). A distinctive strong point of the study is the use of a large, nationally representative sample, which is not common in the attachment literature. I have some suggestions that may further improve the paper.

Major Compulsory Revisions

(1) The Introduction, in its current version, is difficult to follow and does not clearly convey the study rationale and aims. It should be reorganized to give the readers a clearer picture of the topic and of the specific aim of the study. Starting with a short description of attachment theory would be useful. Also, the reasons behind the decision to develop a new adult attachment measure should be presented in greater detail. Given that there is really a wide array of measures available to researchers, from interviews (e.g., Adult Attachment Interview, Current Relationship Interview) to questionnaires (e.g., Adult Attachment Scale, Experiences in Close Relationships) to short self-descriptive measures (e.g., Relationships Questionnaire), it would be important to specify what issues not adequately covered by existing measures the BFPE intends to address. This is not a trivial point, as there are indeed many instruments available to measure attachment in adults. In the sole field of romantic attachment, already a decade ago Brennan, Clark and Shaver (Brennan, K.A., Clark, C.L., & Shaver, P.R. (1998). Self-report measurement of adult attachment: an integrative overview. In J.A. Simpson & W.S. Rholes (Eds.), Attachment theory and close relationships (pp. 46-76). New York: Guilford Press) were able to factor analyze over 320 items drawn from existing self-report measures.

(2) After introducing attachment theory and clarifying the reasons behind the decision to develop a new measure, it would be important to provide a more detailed description of the BFPE. While I imagine that it has been described in previous papers, it is nevertheless essential to make this paper completely understandable in its basic features by the readers without having to consult other articles. In particular, it would be useful to clarify what is the object of the assessment (parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, all close relationships including best friends, etc.), and to further elaborate on statements such as ‘the attachment patterns are operationalized as defined patterns of behavior in attachment-relevant situations’. In this regard, some examples of
BFPE items would be extremely useful to give the readers an idea of what is new in this measure with respect to existing questionnaires, many of which do ask respondents about their behavior and experience in specific situations (e.g., with their romantic partner, or their parents). The subscales should also be briefly described.

(3) The Introduction contains a description of five attachment patterns identified by cluster analysis of BFPE scores. A minor problem is the use of the term ‘avoiding’, when the term used in the literature to describe the patterns characterized by high avoidance is ‘avoidant’. A more serious issue is the statement that these five patterns correspond to the classical attachment classification, such as those of Ainsworth, Main, and their colleagues. First, it should be noted that the patterns identified by these authors relate to the parent-child relationship, either in the form of actual behavior in infants (the Strange Situation) or as in the form of an ‘attachment state of mind’ in adults (the AAI), whereas it seems (judging from the names of the subscales) that the BFPE focuses on romantic relationships or close friendships, which suggests that Bartholomew and Horowitz model (Bartholomew, K. & Horowitz, L.M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61, 226-244) should be taken as a more appropriate reference for comparison of patterns. However, this model, as well as Ainsworth’s and Main’s models, postulates four main categories, rather than five. It would be important to devote effort to reconcile the finding of the cluster analysis with mainstream attachment literature, as the statement that the patterns identified by the cluster analysis of BFPE scores correspond to the usual patterns seems to be open to criticisms.

(4) In the Introduction, it is stated that ‘it is still unknown how attachment patterns relate to specific patterns of social support in relationships’. In a similar vein, it is stated that studies of attachment and life satisfaction are lacking. However, this is not correct. Many studies have examined the relationship between attachment and social support (e.g., Collins NL, Feeney BC: A safe haven: an attachment theory perspective on support seeking and caregiving in intimate relationships. J Pers Soc Psychol 2000;78:1053-1073. Moreira JM, Silva MD, Moleiro C, et al: Perceived social support as an offshoot of attachment style. Pers Individ Dif 2003;34:485-501) and between attachment and life satisfaction (e.g., Merz EM, Consedine NS. The association of family support and wellbeing in later life depends on adult attachment style. Attach Hum Dev 2009;11:203-221; Hinnen C, Sanderman R, Sprangers MA. Adult attachment as mediator between recollections of childhood and satisfaction with life. Clin Psychol Psychother 2009;16:10-21). The cited references are only examples, as there are many relevant papers. It would be appropriate to mention these and other related papers and to discuss the study findings with reference to the extant literature.

Minor Essential Revisions

(5) In the Introduction, the authors state that attachment theory was developed to explain psychopathology, that most assessment instruments were developed exclusively based on healthy samples, and that the BFPE has an advantage as it
was developed using both healthy and clinical samples. On one hand, it would be useful to give some more details about the BFPE development in order to enable the reader to better understand this point. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that, although Bowlby did extensively wrote about anxiety and depression (in reaction to separation and loss, respectively), many attachment theorists would agree that attachment theory was first and foremost developed to understand normative development, although it does represent an excellent theoretical framework for psychiatry and clinical psychology.

(6) In the Methods and Results section, the authors use the term ‘sensitivity’ to refer to a psychometric property of the BFPE. This term may puzzle the readers, because in the literature this term is usually used to indicate either the ability of a screening instrument to identify the diseased individuals as positives, or to indicate the ability of an instrument to detect a small but clinically meaningful change in health status (sensitivity to change or responsiveness). The authors should explain what they mean with ‘sensitivity’ in the context of this manuscript.

(7) Some parts of the Discussion, i.e., those devoted to the intercorrelations between BFPE scores and the other measures collected in this study, should be further developed to discuss the study findings in the context of the large literature in the field of personality and social psychology, which needs to be examined and cited in more detail.

(8) On page 15, last paragraph, it is stated that, as compared with other attachment self-report measures, a specific feature of the BFPE is that ‘attachment dimensions as well as attachment patterns can be analyzed’. This seems to be an overstatement, as there are other questionnaires (e.g., the ECR) that can be used to provide continuous measures of attachment dimensions (such as attachment-related avoidance and anxiety) and to classify individuals into the 4-category model of Bartholomew and Horowitz on the basis of commonly used cut-offs or of published discriminant functions. Indeed, the literature contains many examples of the use of continuous measure of attachment style to classify individuals into attachment categories. This point would need to be toned down.

(9) On page 9, 8th line, ‘prognostic validity’ may be better substituted with the more common ‘predictive validity’.

(10) On page 14, third paragraph, 1st line, ‘received’ seems to be a typo and it should likely be substituted with ‘perceived’.

Discretionary Revisions

(11) In table 2, the authors chose to present only correlations exceeding a cut-off of .30. While this improves the readability, in this way the readers cannot see the whole pattern of the results. A possibly better alternative would be to present all the results, highlighting (e.g., in bold) the more significant ones.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests