Original Papers

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Attachment style, relationship status, gender and relational competences among young adults

The seeking of a lifetime partner/spouse, establishing and maintaining close relationships are central developmental tasks in young adulthood. In successful achievement of these tasks relational competences may play a crucial role, thus making it reasonable to study their conditions. This article provides a theoretical and empirical analysis of the relationship between relational competences and attachment style, relationship status, and gender. It presents a study of a normal sample of 423 young adults, aged 20-35, who completed The Questionnaire of Relational Competences in Intimate Relationships, Revised Adult Attachment Scale, and Demographic Questionnaire. The analysis of the data revealed that in the description of various relational competences all three factors play an important role. It has also turned out that the association between relational competences and attachment style is influenced by the circumstances pertaining to relationship status.

Finding a partner who is suitable for starting a family with is one of the most important decisions (Janicka & Niebrzydowski, 1994) and a lasting, successful relationship has an important, often central, position in people's system of values (Beisert, 1991). Despite the heterogeneity of marital and family life observed today (Slany, 2006), and an increasing acceptance of its alternative forms, the issues connected with searching for a lifetime partner are an area of significant interest and commitment for people in early adulthood (Erikson, 2004; Havighurst, 1981). A successful realization of developmental tasks in the scope of marriage and family requires young adults to undertake certain actions connected with searching for a lifetime partner and to present their resourcefulness, i.e. certain features and skills (Adelman & Ahuvia, 1991; Argyle & Domachowski, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1988). These features and skills constitute the so-called relational competences, defined as "the ability to build emotional bonds with other people, including: defining relations, creating, developing and sustaining relationships" (Jakubowska, 1996, p. 31). An adequate level of relational competences increases the chances of developing satisfying close relations and allows for building a network of social support (Armistead, Forehand, Beach, Steven & Brody, 1995). However, their deficiencies, shortages, schematicness or inadequacy are connected with having interpersonal difficulties in relationships and a sense of loneliness (Klaus, Hersen, & Bellack, 1977; Kozielecki, 1988; Prisbell, 1988).

Undertaking new social roles of a partner/spouse is a significant factor and criterion of individual development in early adulthood (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003) and the effectiveness of actions in this area is connected with having particular relational competences. Therefore, it seems important to learn about the factors determining their level in an individual. A review of literature allows for assuming that among these factors are: the attachment style, gender and being in a relationship.

Relational competences

Social competences, including relational competences, are patterns of social behaviors which make individuals effective in social situations in which they aim at reaching particular goals (Argyle, 1994, 1998). Referring to establishing and maintaining bonds, bonding behaviors, which ''function as a social signal, the aim of which is the

initiation or maintenance of bonds by causing particular reactions of the receiver: attracting his/her attention, reducing aggressiveness, satisfying his/her vital needs, maintaining closeness, sense of security and pleasure, sense of support in the face of danger and the possibility of having offspring and experiencing sexual pleasure'' (Kuczyńska, 1998, pp. 19-21), are such patterns. Therefore, relational competences may be perceived as an ability to undertake behaviors in the social situation of establishing or maintaining bonds by (1) increasing the will of establishing a relation (2) arousing mutual sympathy, interest, facilitating mutual disclosure and (3) increasing the readiness to continue the relationship (Kuczyńska, 1998).

Relational competences and attachment style in adulthood

Taking John Bowlby's (2007) assumption, that attachment relations accompany people throughout their lives as the continuation of the bonds with their parents and an element of adult partnership relations, as the starting point, Cindy Hazan and Philipp R. Shaver (1987) were the first to refer the attachment theory to the research on romantic relations during adolescence and adulthood. They identified three prototypical attachment patterns of adults, i.e. secure, avoidant and ambivalent. Kim Bartholomew and Leonard M. Horowitz (1991) added two types of the avoidant attachment style, i.e. fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant to these patterns. The classification of attachment styles proposed by the mentioned authors is based on the content of the internal working models constituting mental, cognitive-affective representations of self and others and interactions existing between them (Bowlby, 2007). Their dichotomisation into a positive and negative perception of self and others allows for perceiving them as poles of two dimensions – fear (a positive vs. a negative model of self) and avoidance (a positive vs. a negative model of others). Mutual combinations of the mentioned dimensions allow for distinguishing four styles of attachment in adulthood which in a fixed manner describe the way of thinking, feeling and acting in relationships with others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins, Cooper, Albino, & Allard, 2002).

Secure attachment is characterized by a positive image of self and others and is determined by the sense of one's own value and of an accepting attitude and responsiveness of other people (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 2007; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Securely attached individuals feel well in close and intimate contact, trust they are loved and are willing to use help from others when they are in need (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1993). Secure attachment favors practicing social skills in the scope of relations (Malina, 2011) and proves to be a good predictor of their high level, e.g. in the scope of emotional and social expressiveness or social control (DiTomasso, Brannen-

McNulty, Ross, & Burgess, 2003; Deniz, Hamarta, & Ari, 2005; Dereli & Karakuş, 2011).

Preoccupied attachment is defined by low self-esteem (feeling unloved) and a positive perception of others. The effect of the configuration of these characteristics is reaching self-acceptance by looking for approval from the significant others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Fearful attachment is described by low self-esteem and the expectation of a negative (rejecting) attitude from others. Individuals characterized by this attachment style have an elevated need for closeness and approval from others. However, at the same time they are afraid of abandonment and remain prone to experiencing extreme emotions and conflicts in romantic relations (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Dismissive attachment is connected with a positive image of oneself and negative expectations regarding the responsiveness of others. Such individuals feel uncomfortable in too close relationships, need independence from their partner, have difficulties in sharing problems with others and reject support (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Some research indicate that the negative aspects of perceiving self and/or others present in insecure attachment styles may limit the competences connected with establishing and maintaining relations (Deniz et al., 2005). At the same time it appears that this relationship is not so obvious. For example, individuals with preoccupied attachment prove to be characterized by high emotional sensitivity and social control, which are probably connected with their dependance on approval from others (DiTommaso et al., 2003). However, low levels of emotional sensitivity were observed in individuals with fearful attachment what can be regarded as a consequence of their increased concentration on their own attachment fears rather than on the emotions of the partner they are in relation with (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Relational competences and relationship status (having a lifetime partner vs. being single)

The social development of humans can be characterized among all by the act of gaining new interpersonal competences and learning to function in qualitatively differentiated relations with other people (Beisert, 1991). Establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations (with significant persons and/or social groups such as family or peers) are the source of qualitatively differentiated social experiences and at the same time the basis for the development of interpersonal competences (Kowalik, 2002). These social and relational competences allow for establishing and building close relationships (Argyle, 1994, 1998). This relation of mutual coupling describes the social development from childhood to late adulthood (Kowalik, 2002). Therefore, we may assume that the developmental tasks connected with looking for a permanent partner, choosing a spouse and learning to

coexist with him/her, having a family, all of which are typical for early adulthood (Beisert, 1991; Havighurst, 1981), are sources of gaining miscellaneous social and relational competences. However, undertaking these tasks by an individual requires the possession of certain competences and skills. The existence of such a relation is suggested for example by the studies of adolescents carried out by Marshall Prisbell (1988). Their results show that the lack (or a low level) of social competences is connected among others with a fear and avoidance of dating. Avoidance limits the contact with the opposite gender peers what leads to a further decrease in social skills, which are important in the scope of contacts with the opposite gender, including the risk of their atrophy (Prisbell, 1988).

Relational competences and gender

The tasks of women are traditionally defined in reference to relations with other people (Mandal, 2004). Among the skills that girls and women are taught, interpersonal skills and feelings like commitment, closeness, empathy, care and responsibility for relationships, have a central role. Independence and aggressiveness receive less attention. This is not the case when it comes to men – the development of skills essential for forming interpersonal relationships is less important than developing the focus on professional life and providing for their family (Brannon, 2002; Mandal, 2004). In consequence, the need of establishing close relations is not as strong in men as in women (Brannon, 2002; Mandal, 2004; Plopa, 2002), what results in the fact that women invest more in romantic relationships than men (Cavanagh, 2007; Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999).

The research on the differences in social behaviors among opposite genders fundamentally confirm the above information and show that men have better results in scales of assertiveness, whereas women score higher in scales of empathy and cooperation, are more rewarding, have better verbal skills and a better non-verbal expression (Argyle, 1998; Myers, 2003). During conversations, men more often focus on tasks while women focus on social relationships and are willing to share their own feelings with others, help and give support at the same time (Myers, 2003). The research also show that, on the general level, maintaining physical closeness and undertaking behaviors to the benefit of the community and their partner are more typical for women than for men, and sexual, conciliatory and impressive behaviors are more typical for men (Kuczyńska, 1998). Also evolutionary psychologists indicate the existence of differences among genders in this sphere, highlighting the fact that women present themselves as being healthy and increase their physical attractiveness, while men demonstrate their physical strength and resources (Clark, Shaver & Abrahams, 1999).

Taking the above considerations into account, a verification of relationships between the level of relative competences, attachment in adulthood, gender and having *vs*. not having a lifetime partner in a group of young adults was determined as the goal of the research. Considering the theoretical and empirical findings, it was assumed that (a) secure attachment will be connected with a higher level of relational competences in comparison to insecure attachment styles; (b) women will present a higher level of relational competences than men; (c) individuals who have a lifetime partner will present a higher level of relational competences in comparison to individuals who are single.

Method

Participants and procedure

The research involved 423 individuals, aged from 20 to 35 (M = 25.72 yrs; SD = 3.60 yrs). They were university students and post-graduate students. All of the participants were heterosexual and none of them had children. Two hundred and forty eight individuals were in a relationship (for at least 6 months), which they declared to be free (not formalized). The other 181 persons were single (they had not had a partner for at least 6 months). They declared they wanted to have a lifetime partner in the future. Eighty one individuals who had a partner and 78 who were single, were living with their parents at the time (what constituted 37.6% of the sample). One hundred and sixty one individuals who had a partner and 103 who were single lived on their own (what constituted 62.4% of the sample).

The research was conducted in groups with a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality of data. The participants were informed about the aim of the research and had the possibility to resign at any time.

Measures

Adult attachment

In order to measure romantic attachment in adulthood, the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) questionnaire, designed by Nancy L. Collins (1996), in its Polish adaptation by Katarzyna Palus (2010), was used. This tool consists of three subscales covering 18 questions referring to feelings connected with romantic relations. The questions were graded on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from *not at all characteristic of me to very characteristic of me*) and the participants were asked to refer to their romantic relations in general, not to a particular relationship. The three mentioned RAAS subscales are: (1) the CLOSE subscale which measures the level of comfort connected with closeness and intimacy in romantic relations felt by and individual, (2) the DEPEND subscale which measures the level of comfort connected with depending on

Table 1

Examples of items from the Relational Competences in Intimate Relationships Questionnaire.

The scale of competences in the area of physical and emotional closeness behaviors
Give support in matters important for the partner.
Cuddle the other person.

The scale of competences in the area of impressive behaviors
Manifest one's material goods, wealth.
Look coquettishly and seductively at the other person.

The scale of competences in the area of behaviors for one's own benefit in a relationship
Seek support from the other person.
Solve problems together with the partner.

The scale of competences in the area of behaviors for the benefit of the partner in a relationship
Console the other person in difficult moments.
Always find time for the other person, even at the expense of my own affairs and duties.

The scale of competences in the area of conciliatory behaviors
Ask the other person out for a walk, a coffee, to the cinema.
Complement the other person.

The scale of competences in the area of sexual behaviors
Initiate sexual contact.
Confess my desire to the other person.

a partner while being in need, and (3) the ANXIETY subscale which measures the level of fear of being rejected or not loved in romantic relations. The subscales are used as the basis for classification of individuals into one of the four attachment styles described in K. Bartholomew and L. M. Horowitz's (1991) classification[1]. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for

[1]   The classification is based on the comparison of an individual's raw subscale scores against the cut-off points (theoretical mean which always reaches the value of 3), with the CLOSE and DEPEND subscales scores being combined into one indicator called CLOSEDEP. This rule allows for assigning an individual: (a) secure style, if he/she achieves a score higher that the cut-off point in the CLOSEDEP subscales and a score below the cut-off point in the ANXIETY subscale; (b) the preoccupied

the Polish version of the scale replicate the values obtained in the research in which the original version was used and are completely satisfying. They are: $\alpha = .75$ for the CLOSE subscale; $\alpha = .76$ for the DEPEND subscale and $\alpha = .87$ for the ANXIETY, respectively.

Relational competences

The *Relational Competences in Intimate Relationships Questionnaire* developed by K. Palus (2010) was used to measure relational competences. The theoretical bases for the questionnaire are: (1) the notion of competences / social skills as defined by M. Argyle (1994, 1998), and (2) A. Kuczyńska's (1998) concept of bonding behaviors. The questionnaire consists of six scales corresponding to six types of competencies in the scope of bonding behaviors, including five types of behaviors distinguished by A. Kuczyńska (1998) i.e. (1) physical and emotional closeness behaviors (PECB), (2) impressive behaviors (IB), (3) behaviors for the benefit of the partner and the relationship (BBPR), (4) conciliatory behaviors (CB), (5) sexual behaviors (SB), and (6) behaviors for one's own benefit in the relationship (BOOBR) i.e. behaviors aimed at fulfilling one's individual needs within a relation, isolated by means of a factor analysis by the author of the questionnaire.

The participants were asked to answer the following question: *"How difficult is and/or was it for you to undertake the following actions?"*. The question referred to 54 behaviors mentioned in the questionnaire, to which a 10-point Likert scale was added (ranging from *definitely difficult to definitely easy*). Table 1 presents examples of

style, if he/she achieves a score higher than the cut-off point in both subscales; (c) the dismissive style if he/she achieves a score below the cut-off point in both subscales and (d) the fearful style if he/she achieves a score below the cut-off point in the CLOSEDEP subscales and above the cut-off point in the ANXIETY subscale.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations and numbers for all variables.

Relational competences	Total sample		Females		Males		Partnered Individuals		Single Individuals	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
PECB	67.69	12.00	68.73	11.52	65.44	12.75	70.77	11.23	63.57	11.80
IB	55.27	14.07	55.99	14.09	53.73	13.95	57.45	13.12	52.36	14.79
BOOBR	66.62	12.08	68.62	11.26	62.31	12.69	69.46	11.37	62.82	11.99
BBPR	61.76	12.87	61.84	12.76	61.60	13.16	63.69	12.89	59.18	12.42
CB	63.34	13.69	63.99	13.20	61.93	14.63	66.98	11.64	58.47	14.69
SB	53.48	14.95	54.67	15.07	50.90	14.42	57.35	13.23	48.30	15.58
Attachment style	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Secure	260	61.5	175	60.6	85	63.4	172	71.1	88	48.6
Preoccupied	67	15.8	46	15.9	21	15.7	26	10.7	41	22.7
Dismissve	35	8.3	28	9.7	7	5.2	23	9.5	12	6.6
Fearful	61	14.4	40	13.8	21	15.7	21	8.7	40	22.1

Note. PECB = competences in the scope of physical and emotional closeness behaviors, IB = competences in the scope of impressive behaviors, BOOBR = competences in the scope of behaviors for one's own benefit in the relationship, BBPR = competences in the scope of behaviors for the benefit of the partner and the relationship, CB = competences in the scope of conciliatory behaviors, SB = competences in the scope of sexual behaviors.

Table 3
Means and standard deviations for relational competences in the groups distinguished by attachment style, gender and relationship status.

Attachment style	Total		Females				Males			
			Partnered Individuals		Single Individuals		Partnered Individuals		Single Individuals	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
PECB										
Secure	68.96	0.76	74.11	8.85	66.66	10.76	68.83	11.93	66.26	9.40
Preoccupied	68.31	1.44	75.59	8.80	65.00	11.36	67.33	14.14	65.33	16.76
Dismissve	60.64	2.49	61.78	13.03	62.30	9.87	57.00	13.64	61.50	6.36
Fearful	60.63	1.53	67.50	9.71	57.65	11.46	64.71	12.38	52.64	10.44
IB										
Secure	57.91	0.92	58.53	12.82	58.77	12.57	59.07	10.61	55.26	10.50
Preoccupied	54.39	1.56	61.06	11.59	51.10	14.21	59.89	14.64	45.50	19.21
Dismissve	47.42	3.03	57.78	15.69	53.40	19.67	39.00	9.93	39.50	19.09
Fearful	45.53	1.86	46.64	13.15	45.27	13.78	48.57	15.03	41.64	12.77
BOOBR										
Secure	67.39	0.75	74.21	8.76	67.44	9.96	65.47	11.15	62.44	10.81
Preoccupied	66.46	1.42	68.76	12.76	64.76	9.78	65.67	12.62	66.67	15.63
Dismissve	59.17	2.44	63.78	14.35	61.80	8.31	57.60	8.85	53.50	9.19
Fearful	58.11	1.50	66.21	9.12	58.31	12.01	61.43	13.54	46.50	9.39
BBPR										
Secure	63.75	0.87	66.36	11.19	61.11	11.21	63.55	12.88	63.96	11.28
Preoccupied	62.10	1.65	60.59	17.16	58.97	11.35	63.78	13.36	65.08	14.83
Dismissve	55.70	2.85	55.61	16.50	56.90	6.49	56.80	6.76	53.50	14.85
Fearful	55.91	1.75	61.00	12.45	54.42	13.94	60.00	12.14	48.21	11.78
CB										
Secure	66.00	0.85	70.46	9.88	64.15	10.76	66.66	9.13	62.74	11.78
Preoccupied	62.96	1.61	67.82	8.90	58.17	12.95	65.78	14.66	60.08	20.65
Dismissve	57.30	2.77	59.50	13.50	54.60	8.90	49.60	21.37	65.50	9.19
Fearful	53.03	1.71	59.93	12.13	48.19	16.21	58.43	17.93	45.57	16.96
SB										
Secure	55.64	0.95	59.53	13.08	55.44	13.27	57.05	9.63	50.52	12.67
Preoccupied	52.15	1.81	60.18	14.18	48.52	13.30	53.00	16.03	46.92	18.64
Dismissve	48.05	3.11	57.11	15.82	46.00	18.09	41.60	12.30	47.50	3.54
Fearful	42.79	1.92	50.43	12.79	38.81	15.51	48.86	18.50	33.07	13.25

Note. PECB = competences in the scope of physical and emotional closeness behaviors, IB = competences in the scope of impressive behaviors, BOOBR = competences in the scope of behaviors for one's own benefit in the relationship, BBPR = competences in the scope of behaviors for the benefit of the partner and the relationship, CB = competences in the scope of conciliatory behaviors, SB = competences in the scope of sexual behaviors.

statements from particular subscales. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales are: $\alpha = .83$ for PECB; $\alpha = .84$ for IB; $\alpha = .82$ for BOOBR; $\alpha = .84$ for BBPR; $\alpha = .84$ for CB and $\alpha = .80$ for SB.

Results

A basic statistical description of all variables was carried out in the first stage of the analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

In order to establish if the attachment style significantly differentiates the levels of particular relational competences and to what extent do gender and the fact of having a partner moderate the relation between attachment styles and relational competences, an analysis of variance in the following pattern was carried out: 4 (attachment style) x 2 (gender) x 2 (having vs. not having a partner)[2]. The results of the statistical analysis for particular relational competences are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

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2   The Kołmogorow-Smirnow test analyses indicate the compliance of variables with the normal distribution.

Table 4
Effects of attachment style, gender and relationship status on relational competences. A three-factor analysis of variance.

Source	ANOVA					
	PECB	IM	BOOBR	BBPR	CB	SB
Style (S)	10.44***	14.01***	12.56***	7.00***	16.97***	12.89***
Gender (G)	4.06*	7.34**	12.25***	0.01	0.32	5.02*
Relationship status (RS)	8.71**	6.06*	10.07**	2.78ᵃ	6.89**	13.27***
S x G	0.06	1.93	1.54	1.02	0.23	0.09
S x RS	1.97	2.32ᵃ	2.07ᵃ	1.36	2.75*	1.54
G x RS	1.30	0.32	0.01	0.01	3.04ᵃ	0.91
S x G x RS	0.57	0.19	1.02	0.80	1.00	1.06

Note. PECB = competences in the scope of physical and emotional closeness behaviors, IB = competences in the scope of impressive behaviors, BOOBR = competences in the scope of behaviors for one's own benefit in the relationship, BBPR = competences in the scope of behaviors for the benefit of the partner and the relationship, CB = competences in the scope of conciliatory behaviors, SB = competences in the scope of sexual behaviors. ***$p \leq$ .001, two-tailed. **$p <$ .01, two-tailed. *$p <$ .05, two-tailed. ᵃ $p \leq$ .10, two-tailed.

The results of the analyses carried out for competences in the scope of physical and emotional closeness indicated a significant main effect of attachment styles ($F(3, 407) = 10.44, p < .001, \eta2 = .07$). Post-hoc comparisons show that individuals with secure and preoccupied styles have a significantly higher level of competence in the scope of physical and emotional closeness in comparison to individuals with dismissive and fearful styles. Also, significant main effects of gender ($F(1, 407) = 4.06, p < .05, \eta2 = .01$) and having a partner ($F(1, 407) = 8.71, p < .01, \eta2 = .02$) were obtained. The pattern of means indicated that women (in comparison to men) and individuals having a partner (in comparison with individuals who are single) have higher levels of relational competences in the discussed areas. The influence of factors described above has an isolated character.

Analyses reveal a significant main effect of attachment style in the area of impressive behaviors ($F(3, 407) = 14.01, p < .001, \eta2 = .09$). Post-hoc comparisons inform that individuals who are fearfully attached score significantly lower than individuals with other styles. Also, the main effects of gender ($F(1, 407) = 7.34, p < .01, \eta2 = .02$) and having a partner ($F(1, 407) = 6.06, p = .05, \eta2 = .02$) proved to be significant. The pattern of means indicates that women (compared to men) and individuals who have a partner (compared to those who are single) possess a higher level of relational competences in the discussed area. Moreover, the effect of interaction between the attachment style and having a partner proved to be marginally statistically significant ($F(3, 407) = 2.32, p = .07, \eta2 = .02$). The analysis of simple effects showed that having a partner has a significant effect on the level of the discussed relational competences. However, it is the case only with individuals with preoccupied attachment. In this group, individuals who are in a relationship present a significantly higher level of relational competences than those who are single. Additional comparisons of the groups distinguished by having (vs. not having) a partner indicate that in the group of people who have partners, the individuals with secure and preoccupied attachment styles

have a higher level of relational competences in the area of impressive behaviors than the individuals with dismissive and fearful styles. Among the individuals who were single, the ones with secure attachment have a significant advantage over people with other styles.

The results of the analysis carried out for competences in the area of behaviors towards oneself in a relationship indicated a significant main effect of attachment styles ($F(3, 407) = 12.56, p < .001, \eta2 = .09$). Post-hoc comparisons reveal a pattern of differences in which the individuals with a secure style present a higher level of competences than the ones with dismissive or fearful styles. A significant difference is also observed between individuals with preoccupied and fearful styles. Significant main effects of gender ($F(1, 407) = 12.25, p \leq .001, \eta2 = .03$) and having a partner ($F(1, 407) = 10.07, p < .01, \eta2 = .02$) were also obtained. Women (compared to men) and individuals who have a partner (compared to those who are single) present a higher level of relational competences in the discussed area. The effect of interaction of attachment style and having a partner may be regarded as marginally significant ($F(3, 407) = 2.07, p = .10, \eta2 = .02$). Tests of simple effects show that having a partner significantly affects the level of the analyzed competences in individuals with secure and fearful attachment styles. In these groups, individuals who are in relationships present a significantly higher level of relational competences than those who are single. Comparisons between groups distinguished by having a partner indicate that individuals who have a partner and at the same time are securely attached have significantly higher indicators of the discussed relational competences than persons with dismissive and fearful styles. In the group of single individuals, the ones who are fearfully attached have a significantly lower level of the analyzed relational competences compared to those with secure and preoccupied styles.

In reference to the competences in the area of behaviors towards the partner and the relationship a significant main effect of attachment styles was observed ($F(3, 407) = 7.00$,

$p < .001$, η2 = .05). Post-hoc comparisons reveal a pattern of differences in which individuals with a secure style have a higher level of the analyzed competences than the ones with dismissive and fearful styles. In addition, individuals with a preoccupied style present a higher level of these competences than the ones with a fearful style. The main effect of having a partner may be regarded as marginally significant ($F(1, 407) = 2.78$, $p = .10$, η2 = .01) and suggest that individuals who are in relationships achieve higher indicators of the discussed relational competences in comparison to individuals who are single. The influence of both factors has an isolated character here.

The results of an analysis carried out for competences in the field of conciliatory behaviors indicated significant main effects of attachment style ($F(3, 407) = 16.97$, $p < .001$, η2 = .11) and having a partner ($F(1, 407) = 6.89$, $p < .01$, η2 = .02). Post-hoc comparisons reveal that individuals with a secure style achieve significantly higher results than the ones from any other group. Individuals with a preoccupied style reach a significant advantage in comparison to the ones with a fearful style. Moreover, individuals who are in relationships achieve significantly higher indicators of the discussed relational competences than those who are single. Also, two interaction effects proved to be significant: between the attachment style and having a partner ($F(3, 407) = 2.75$, $p < .05$, η2 = .02) and between gender and having a partner ($F(1, 407) = 3.04$, $p = .08$, η2 = .01). In reference to the first one, an analysis of simple effects showed that having a partner significantly affects the level of the discussed relational competences in all groups except the one with individuals with dismissive attachment in which advantages of individuals who are in relationships over those who are single are not observed. Additional comparisons between groups distinguished by having a partner indicate that among individuals who have a partner, those with secure and preoccupied styles present a higher level of relational competences in the period of conciliatory behaviors than individuals with fearful and dismissive styles. In the group of single people, those who are attached fearfully present a significantly lower level of the analyzed relational competences in comparison to individuals with other attachment styles.

Tests of simple effects referring to the interaction of gender and having a partner show that having a partner significantly affects the level of relational competences in the area of conciliatory behaviors. However, this is only the case with women. Women who have a partner present a higher level of the discussed relational competences than women who are single. Comparisons between groups distinguished by having a partner indicate that among people who are in a relationship women have an advantage over men (a difference significant on trend level). Whereas in the group of single people, significant differences between women and men are not observed.

An analysis carried out for competences in the area of sexual behaviors showed a significant main effect of attachment styles ($F(3, 407) = 12.89$, $p < .001$, η2 = .09). Post-hoc comparisons show that people with a fearful style present a significantly lower level of these competences in comparison to other groups. Moreover, individuals who are attached securely have an advantage over those with a preoccupied style. Significant main effects of gender ($F(1, 407) = 5.02$, $p < .05$, η2 = .01) and having a partner ($F(1, 407) = 13.27$, $p < .001$, η2 = .03) were also obtained. The pattern of means shows that women (compared to men) and people in relationships (compared to single people) present a higher level of relational competences in the discussed area. The influence of the factors described above has an isolated character.

Discussion

The results of the research indicate significant relations between the level of relational competences and attachment styles in young adulthood. Thus, they confirm previous theoretical and empirical findings which suggest the existence of emotional and behavioral patterns of functioning in close relationships, which are different and typical for particular attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mayseless & Scharf, 2007). On the general level, the obtained results show that people who are attached securely are characterized by readiness and ease in undertaking a series of bonding behaviors aimed at establishing and maintaining intimate relations, whereas people with insecure attachment styles present difficulties in this area more often. These observations correspond with the results of other research proving the existence of a relation between secure attachment and a higher level of social competences in close relationships (DiTommaso et al., 2003; Deniz et al., 2005; Dereli & Karakuş, 2011), as well as presenting a wider repertoire of pro-social behaviors which maintain relations, such as assuring the partner of one's involvement in the relation and demonstrating romantic feelings (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006).

It is worth mentioning that from the perspective of relational competences, people with insecure attachment styles do not constitute a uniform group. The results show that only in the area of such aspects of competences like conciliatory and sexual behaviors, people who are securely attached have a significant advantage over people with a preoccupied style. However, it seems that while in the case of people who are securely attached the ability to build emotional bonds and the ease of undertaking behaviors aimed at their establishing and maintaining can be connected with positive feelings in the area of closeness with others and receiving care (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006),

in reference to people with a preoccupied style, higher relational competences may be a result of an excessive commitment in a relation and serve to seek approval from the significant others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). It would be connected with an intensive monitoring of the partner's actions and a constant search for closeness with him/her and a manifestation of one's own helplessness and dependency aimed at drawing his/her attention and receiving help (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

People with dismissive attachment have relatively low indicators of relational competences. This corresponds with such characteristics assigned to them as denying attachment needs, relying on oneself and refusing support from others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Competences in the area of impressive and sexual behaviors are a kind of an exception, as in these cases people with dismissive attachment have a significant advantage over people who are fearfully attached. The results seem understandable if we assume that the manifestation of one's self-esteem and independence may be a sign of avoiding dependence and a way of protecting oneself from disappointments in a relation (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

People with fearful attachment are characterized by the lowest relational competences compared to people with other styles. It seems that the fear of abandonment and the tendency to avoid close relations, which are characteristic for these people, may generate significant limitations and difficulties in undertaking and developing behaviors which determine establishing and developing relations or reaching intimacy. They may also favor a high intensity of defense mechanisms or distancing strategies (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; DiTommaso et al., 2003; Deniz et al., 2005; Locke, 2088; Thelen, Vander, Wal, Thomas, & Hormon, 2000).

The results of the analysis indicate significant relations between having vs. not having a lifetime partner and the level of all relational competences. They also confirm the findings from other research about higher levels of social competences in people who are in relationships (Deniz et al., 2005). The observed effect may be explained by referring to two mechanisms coexisting in social development of humans, which are pointed out in the introduction. On one hand, higher abilities to undertake bonding behaviors and their diverse repertoire may increase the chances of establishing and maintaining relations with a partner (Argyle, 1993, 1998; Armistead et al., 1995). On the other hand, a higher level of relational competences in people who have a partner may be a result of the possibility to train these competences which is created by functioning in a close relationship (Beisert, 1991; Kowalik, 2002). Similarly, a lower level of relational competences which characterizes people who are single may be perceived as an impeding factor for establishing and/or maintaining bonds with a partner. It may also be perceived as a consequence of the lack of a

partner and commitment in a relationship.

The obtained relations between the level of relational competences and gender are a confirmation of previous research on gender differences and social competences which indicate their higher level among women (Argyle, 1994; Brannon, 2002; Mandal, 2004). The results which reveal a higher level of competences in the scope of sexual behavior observed in women deserve particular attention. In literature, these competences are considered to be more typical for men than women (Kuczyńska, 1998). It seems important to point out that the items in the scale of competence in the scope of sexual behavior from the *Relational Competences in Intimate Relationships Questionnaire* referred fundamentally to seductive behaviors which highlight physical attractiveness and manifest sensuality. The ease with which women assessed the actions they undertake in this area may therefore, at least to some extent, reflect the specific character of sexual behaviors represented in the method.

It is worth to emphasize that in the analyzed research, gender did not differentiate the level of competence in the area of behaviors towards the partner and relationship as well as competences in the scope of conciliatory behaviors. The similar ease with which men and women declare undertaking behaviors for the benefit of the partner and the relationship seems understandable if we assume that the broadly understood notion of giving support to the partner and acting to the benefit and protection of the relationship may have various forms. Therefore, men and women may vary in terms of the character of the behaviors they demonstrate their concern for the partner and the relationship with (Brannon, 2002; Kuczyńska, 1998), however, they reach similar results on the general level. It is similar in the case of conciliatory behaviors which aim at initiating and maintaining bonds. Although the active role in initiating contacts is stereotypically assigned to men, women are also active in this area often by undertaking seductive behaviors or other ways of indirect manifestation of their interest in a man. A man who takes initiative in man-woman relationships often does it in response to a signal of interest from a woman (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999).

The results indicating the interaction of the analyzed factors i.e. attachment style, having a partner and gender in determining the level of relational competences deserve attention. It turns out that the importance of the attachment style for relational competences in the area of impressive behaviors, behaviors towards oneself in a relationship and conciliatory behaviors is influenced by the circumstance of having a partner. In these areas, the dependency of relational competences on the attachment style is different in the group of people who have a partner than in the group of single people. To be precise, preoccupied attachment is connected with a significant increase of relational competences in

the area of impressive behaviors in individuals who are in a relationship, whereas the ones with the same style but who are single, present deficiencies in this area. It appears that together with commitment in a relation, people with the preoccupied style gain an object they intensively seek interest and approval of (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Presenting impressive behaviors which aim at drawing the receiver's attention may be considered to be a means of achieving these goals.

In reference to competences in the area of behaviors towards oneself in a relationship, people who are securely and fearfully attached have significantly higher scores when they are in a relationship than when they are single. In the case of people who are attached securely, it appears that the belief they are important and loved by their partner and a high level of trust and commitment in a positively perceived relationship they experience, pave the way to undertaking behaviors to one's own benefit (Collins et al., 2002; Mayseless & Scharf, 2007; Shaver & Clark, 1994). In the group of people with fearful attachment, the observed increase of the level of the discussed competences together with the change of their relationship status may be explained by referring to a strong need of being in a relationship with simultaneous fears of intimacy, abandonment and frustration while being separated, which are characteristic for people with this style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The uncertainty of the partner's presence in a situation of distress may lead people who are fearfully attached to developing competences connected with relying on themselves and presenting behaviors aimed at fulfilling their individual needs within the relation.

In the area of competences connected with conciliatory behaviors, the interaction of attachment styles and having a partner revealed itself in results which indicate that people with all attachment styles, except a dismissive style, present a higher level of these competences when they have a partner. It seems understandable that with these people, commitment in a relationship favors undertaking behaviors aimed at initiating and maintaining bonds and soothing aggressiveness. This is not the case with people with dismissive attachment what corresponds with their description as ones who do not feel the need of establishing and maintaining social bonds (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006), denying their importance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), manifesting defensibility, cynicism, criticism and distance towards others (Tyszkiewicz-Bandur & Kozińska, 2009).

In reference to the competences in the area of conciliatory behaviors, interaction between having a partner and gender was also observed. Women who have a partner present a higher level of the discussed competences compared to women who are single as well as to men who have partners (a marginally significant difference). Taking into account one of the functions of this kind of bonding behaviors,

namely soothing aggressiveness or negotiating conflicts, the advantage of women in this area seems to reflect the difference of gender (Brannon, 2002; Mandal, 2004), as well as the fact that the development in this aspect of conciliatory behaviors may occur thanks to functioning in a close relation (Kuczyńska, 1998).

Conclusions

The aim of the presented research was to verify the dependencies between attachment styles and the level of relational competences among young adults in the context of gender and relationship status. The results of the discussed research confirm previous theoretical and empirical findings which present the importance of attachment styles, gender and commitment in a relationship for various aspects of interpersonal functioning and social competences. The results which indicate the interaction between attachment style and having a partner in determining readiness and ease to undertake behaviors which initiate and maintain a relation deserve particular attention.

The presented research is not free from limitations. The provided analyses leave causal oriented questions without answers. Although it is theoretically justified to assume that attachment style determines the level of relational competences, we can not exclude the possibility that the presented bonding behaviors, which constitute the indicator of relational competences, influence such elements of internal working models as the sense of comfort from intimacy in a relation, depending on the partner and fear of abandonment (Collins, 1996). As research show, the sense of certainty and security in a relationship increases when a person experiences many prosocial behaviors from the partner (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Similarly, the relation between relational competences and having a partner has probably a bilateral character. Longitudinal research might give a better insight into the nature of the analyzed relationships in the future. It would be also worth to include a wider range of factors which may determine the level of relational competences in future research. Among them personality, family and relational factors, especially the partner's attachment style, may be pointed out (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Despite the indicated limitations and the preliminary character of the presented results, they may have theoretical value – they are a starting point for further exploration of the relation between attachment styles, having a partner and gender, and relational competence. They may also have practical value – they give the possibility of therapeutic work on the internal working models in people with insecure attachment styles, of training relational competences in people who are single and of modifying the stereotypical beliefs on bonding behaviors typical for women and men.

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