

ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT FORMATION, SATISFACTION, COMMITMENT, AND
SOCIAL SUPPORT IN EARLY ADULT
DATING RELATIONSHIPS

by

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PREVIEW

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ABSTRACT
ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT FORMATION, SATISFACTION, COMMITMENT, AND
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Diana M. Robbins, B.S., M.S.

Marquette University, 2008

Attachment theory is a socioemotional developmental theory developed by John Bowlby that examines the central role of close relationships in human development. According to Bowlby, individuals' beliefs and expectations about the self and others are developed through a series of interactions and exchanges with important persons in their lives. These beliefs and expectations are believed to be operative throughout the lifespan and to be related to the way in which individuals seek out and provide care to others.

Attachment processes have been studied extensively in infancy and childhood; however, these same phenomena are less understood in adulthood, especially among unmarried romantic dating partners. The present study explored romantic attachment relationships in early adulthood. It investigated the impact that interactions between romantic partners, with their distinct attachment histories and life experiences, had on dyadic attachment formation, attachment change, relationship satisfaction, commitment, social support, and longevity in the current relationship.

One hundred and forty six college students (73 couples) from Marquette University participated in the present study. Participants were assessed at baseline and again 6 months later. Each participant completed a packet of questionnaires assessing romantic attachment, relationship commitment, satisfaction, attachment transfer, and parent and peer attachment. Participants also engaged in two 10-minute social support discussion tasks.

Findings demonstrated that attachment formation to romantic partners was not related to length of time together or individuals' romantic attachment anxiety. However, as predicted,

attachment formation was negatively related to romantic attachment avoidance. In addition, attachment security did not directly predict relationship outcomes; however it was indirectly related to outcomes through its association with relationship satisfaction. Relationship partners did not differ in their social support behaviors; however, couples who broke up differed from those who remained together in their use of negative social support. The findings of the present study suggest that relationship partners' reported level of satisfaction and enacted negative social support behaviors are stronger predictors of whether a couple remains together or breaks up than attachment characteristics or other types of support behaviors. Results are discussed in the context of the empirical literature and attachment theory. Areas for future research are discussed.

PREVIEW

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CHAPTER I

Review of the Literature

The most significant relationships that are experienced in a lifetime are the bonds that are formed with attachment figures. Through these relationships people learn what to expect from others as well as their self-perceived worthiness to be cared for and loved. This dissertation explores the nature and function of romantic attachment relationships in early adulthood. It further investigates the impact that interactions between romantic partners; with their distinct attachment histories and life experiences, might have on dyadic attachment formation, attachment change, relationship satisfaction, commitment, social support, and longevity in the current relationship.

Overview of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a socioemotional developmental theory developed by John Bowlby that examines the central role of close relationships in human development. Bowlby, who was strongly influenced by evolutionary theory, sought to understand the mechanisms underlying infants' ties to their caregivers. He named this bond "attachment."

Proximity as the Set Goal of the Attachment System

According to Bowlby (1969/1982), the attachment system has the goal of promoting safety in infancy and childhood through children's relationships with attachment figures. The attachment system is activated in times of danger, stress, uncertainty and novelty, and serves to keep the child in proximity to an attachment figure (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999). The evolutionary roots of attachment theory are well grounded in the notion that it was this aspect of attachment relationships that encouraged the survival and ability for the individual to thrive. It motivated the seeking out of the attachment figure, especially in times of stress, for protection and care. Due to the early emphasis that Bowlby placed on physical proximity, many researchers

have interpreted this to mean that the “set goal” of the attachment system is promoting proximity. However, given that Bowlby believed that the attachment system was operative from the “cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1979), this conceptualization created some significant problems for the intended developmental scope of attachment theory.

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) voiced concern that defining attachment behavior rigidly in terms of seeking physical proximity was inadequate to describe the attachment behaviors of a 1-year-old child let alone that of an adolescent or adult. Ainsworth et al. argued that the attachment system is much more complex and provides a multiplicity of functions throughout development. The attachment system can and does provide protection in a physical sense but also provides emotional and psychological security. In fact, it appears that it is towards these more internal functions that attachment behavior is transformed through development. One-year-olds, like adults, are in need of their attachment figures, but as they mature, the need to be physically close to that figure tends to lessen.

Bowlby recognized that with development and the increasing cognitive complexity that accompanies it, changes in the display, function, and need for various attachment behaviors occurred. Like Ainsworth and her colleagues, Bowlby observed significant variability even in the attachment behaviors of very young children. At times children would be importunate on securing close physical contact with their caregivers. Sitting on a caregiver’s knee would be the only thing that would satisfy their attachment needs. However, at other moments, these same children would be content simply watching the caregiver from a distance. The notion that more distal communications could at times serve to provide reassurance and comfort to children suggested that the set goals for the attachment system are flexible and must include more than simple proximity or physical contact with the caregiver. Given these observations and Bowlby’s (1979) notion that the attachment system was a lifelong phenomenon, revisions in the conceptualization of its function to something more expansive were made.

The Attachment System Set Goal Revised: Accessibility and Responsiveness

Recognizing the limitations that a set goal of physical proximity created for his theory, Bowlby revised the conceptualization of attachment system functions in subsequent work. In Bowlby's second volume of his three-part series exploring attachment, he stated that the "set goal" of the attachment system was the maintenance of the caregiver's accessibility and responsiveness (Bowlby, 1973). In addition, he theorized that attachment security was derived from a person's appraisal of an attachment figure's availability. Feelings of security are derived from appraisals of an attachment figure's availability, and feelings of anxiety are tied to perceived threats to this availability (Kobak, 1999). With availability and responsiveness as the goal, not only could a greater range of factors be shown to influence the activation of the attachment system (e.g., internal cues such as one's mood or experience of illness and external cues such as preceding events and context; Kobak, 1999), but also this broader conceptualization of attachment function allowed for flexibility in its changing manifestations throughout the developmental life course. This shift in conceptualization of function was critical in making attachment theory as developmentally expansive as Bowlby had intended.

Confidence in Protection

Other attachment researchers, seeing the promise that a conceptualization beyond physical proximity offered for attachment theory, brought forth notions that were seemingly narrowly conceptualized, but stated expansively enough for attachment theory's developmental scope. Goldberg, Grusec, and Jenkins (1999) went back to the original writings of Bowlby and suggested that it is "confidence in protection" that defines the "set goal" of the attachment system. Goldberg et al. argued that a definition of attachment which emphasizes Bowlby's (1969) ideas about the central role of protection provided a distinction between the attachment construct and more general models of social development. It focused on ensuring one's survival through protective needs and behaviors versus examining how good parenting in general leads to a

multitude of positive developmental outcomes. In addition, Goldberg et al. (1999) argued that focusing on protection encouraged a more specific examination of the parenting role and would therefore distinguish parental behavior relevant to attachment security from general qualities such as warmth and general responsiveness.

The goal of the attachment system as defined by Goldberg et al. (1999) was not overly narrow to exclude all that the protection function of attachment was designed to encapsulate. Bowlby had not only emphasized protection from predation among attachment system functions, but also included illness, injury, and emotional upset (Bowlby 1969/1982). Given that Bowlby had indicated a function beyond protection from predation, Goldberg et al. (1999) explained that “confidence in protection” provided the flexibility needed for the scope and complexity of the attachment system across the developmental lifespan. From childhood to adulthood attachment figures are relied upon for protection against the threats individuals encounter. Children may require greater physical protection, but adults also depend on the safety that their attachment figures provide against perceived threats to their well-being (e.g., periods of emotional distress, self-doubt, depression, etc.). Confidence in protection applied equally well to children and adults in describing the solace individuals seek from attachment figures whether they are those figures they acquired in childhood, their parents, or later in their lives, such as romantic partners and friends.

Confidence in Protection versus Availability and Responsiveness

The lines of argument for both “confidence in protection” and “availability and responsiveness” have garnered significant support in the theoretical and research literature on attachment (Goldberg et al., 1999; MacDonald, 1999; Bowlby, 1973). Both conceptualizations are accurate according to Bowlby’s own theorizing on the subject. However, it appears that the perceived difference between the two conceptualizations or “set goals” is simply a matter of different descriptive terminology and not of different phenomena. Both terms refer to perceptions

of the attached individual that his or her attachment figure will provide what is needed when it is needed. People want to be able to have confidence that their attachment figures will provide “protection” when it is needed and they want to trust that these figures will be available and responsive during the conditions of threat they are facing. According to Bowlby, it is from this confidence in responsiveness to protect whenever and wherever that attachment security is derived. This conceptualization, whether one refers to it as “confidence in protection” or “availability and responsiveness,” encompasses the breadth and richness of attachment expressions throughout the lifespan.

Internal Working Models

Bowlby (1969/1982) clearly recognized the importance of the attachment system in physical protection and survival; however, he also believed that the early relationship between infants and their caregivers had an important influence on infants’ social, emotional, and personality development. He theorized that this growth occurred through the development of internal working models. Bowlby proposed that children’s early experiences of sensitive or insensitive care in their early attachment relationships contributed to the development of broader representations concerning a caregiver’s accessibility and responsiveness, as well as to beliefs about how deserving one is of such care. These representations, or internal working models, not only enabled the infant to anticipate the caregiver’s responses, but also guided future choices and expectations in relationships, their self-appraisals, as well as their interpersonal behavior (Cassidy, 1999). Bowlby portrayed working models as primarily unconscious interpretive filters through which relationships and other social experiences are construed and self-understanding is constructed. The term “working model” also reflected Bowlby’s ideas about the semi-plastic nature of these representations. Bowlby theorized that because attachment relationships are dynamic interactions, “working models” provided enough flexibility to assimilate and/or accommodate information as a function of significant attachment-related experiences. However,

as one grew older, it would become increasingly likely for information to be assimilated than accommodated. This tendency resulted from the way in which working models were proposed to function.

Internal Working Models: A Guide for Expectations, Attributions, Attention, and Memory

The mechanisms through which attachment experiences earlier in life are thought to influence subsequent relationship functioning and development appears to occur through a three-fold process. First, they are thought to guide expectations regarding the availability and likely responsiveness of others. Second, they are thought to guide attributions concerning the behavior of others in ambiguous situations. Third, they are thought to guide attention and memory which, in turn, structure incoming information and experience so that they match existing models (Cassidy, 2000). Internal working models (IWMs) influence the information to which one chooses to attend, the encoding and retrieval of that information, and the inferences that are drawn on the basis of that information (Collins & Read, 1994). As a result, they provide implicit decision rules for relating to others that may, for better or for worse, help to confirm and maintain expectations about others and oneself. These internal representations are self-perpetuating, both because of confirmation biases inherent in their functioning and because they cause people to elicit complementary responses from others which are consistent with their relational expectations. It also explains how the development of IWMs of self and relationships may be a source of continuity between early attachment and later psychosocial functioning (Cassidy 2000, Thompson, 1999). The unique histories that contribute to the development of one's IWMs are the focus of the next section of this review.

Individual Differences in Attachment

Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that since attachment serves a survival-enhancing function, infants will develop attachments to their caregivers as long they are there to serve as attachment figures and to interact with them. The individual differences that are observed in

attachment relationships, however, are dependent on and reflective of differences in the history of care provided to the individual. These differences in attachment relationships emerge over time, built out of a history of bids and responses within the dyad. It is the patterns of interaction between infants and their caregivers, rather than individual behaviors or personal traits that are the windows through which the underlying character of the relationship is revealed (Weinfeld, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999; Ainsworth et al., 1978).

The Strange Situation

The study of individual differences in attachment began in the 1970's through the work of Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969). Ainsworth and her colleagues observed and assessed individual differences in the mother-infant attachment relationship by developing a laboratory procedure known as the Strange Situation. The Strange Situation was designed to assess the balance between attachment and exploratory behavior under mild to moderately stressful conditions (Solomon & George, 1999). In the Strange Situation, Ainsworth et al. (1978) presented infants with stimuli which were unfamiliar to them, namely a novel setting and person ("stranger") with whom they had not previously had contact. During infants' encounters with these unfamiliar situations, mothers would be instructed to leave the room and return some moments later at two prescribed periods during the procedure. Ainsworth et al. (1978) believed that the characteristics of the Strange Situation, its novelty coupled with the momentary absences of the attachment figure, would produce enough stress to activate the infant's attachment behavioral system. With the attachment system activated, they hypothesized that individual differences regarding the infant's expectations about the caregiver's availability would be revealed (Weinfeld et al., 1999).

On the basis of various observed patterns of interaction across the session and the two reunion periods, Ainsworth et al. (1978) described three types of attachment relationships: secure, anxious-resistant (referred more commonly today as anxious-ambivalent), and avoidant. The

terms not only provided descriptions of infants' perceptions of their caregivers' availability to provide comfort or protection when needed, but also the organization of infants' responses to their caregivers in light of those perceptions of availability (Weinfeld et al., 1999).

Infant Attachment Categories

Secure. According to Ainsworth and her colleagues, secure individuals tended to behave in ways that indicated that they held perceptions of an available and responsive caregiver. These infants appeared comfortable exploring the novel stimuli in the Strange Situation with their mothers nearby because they possessed confidence that when she was needed, mother would be there. They would explore the novel situation by monitoring the environment through their mothers. When these infants were uncertain about something they encountered, they would check in with their mothers to make sure it was safe to proceed further and would continue to explore upon her reassurance, which is referred to as the "secure base phenomenon." During the separation components of the procedure, these infants would be distressed by their mothers' absence, but were easily comforted upon their mothers' return.

Anxious-Ambivalent. Infants who were identified as anxious-ambivalent did not display the same confidence as those classified as secure. These infants were noticeably distressed by the novel environment and would not engage in the exploratory behavior that was observed in their securely classified peers. In the Strange Situation, these infants were distressed when their mothers were absent and often inconsolable when they returned. The anxious infants also would demonstrate dualities in their emotions and goals. They would display anger alongside a desire to have contact with the parent. At times they were so upset by their mothers' absence that they would not signal or make contact with their mothers. Generally, these infants did not seem to be able to find comfort in their mothers.

Avoidant. The third classification, avoidant infants, explored the novel environment of the Strange Situation easily, but they did not seem to use their mothers as a secure base as was

characteristic of their secure counterparts. During the separation periods of the procedure, these infants would display little overt distress. When the mothers of these infants returned, the infants would actively avoid them and instead focus on the toys in the room. If their mothers sought contact with them by picking them up, they would often stiffen and lean away. It appeared that these infants would actively avoid their mothers and seek distance from them.

Caregiving Characteristics

Ainsworth et al. (1978) then explored the source of individual differences in Strange Situation behavior by observing parent-child interactions. The differences they observed fell on four highly intercorrelated dimensions: sensitivity (defined as timely and appropriate responsiveness to infants' signals), acceptance (vs. rejection), cooperation, and psychological accessibility (Solomon & George, 1999).

Secure Caregiving. Ainsworth et al. (1978) discovered that mothers of secure infants scored high on all four caregiver dimensions. These mothers were sensitive to their infants' signals and were appropriately responsive and communicative with them. They encouraged physical contact and interacted warmly and interestedly with their infants.

Anxious-Ambivalent Caregiving. Unlike the mothers of secure infants, the mothers of anxious-ambivalent infants appeared to possess a general insensitivity to the signals and communications of their infants. This insensitivity would either be manifested in inconsistently responding to signals or being entirely unresponsive to these signals. In fact, Ainsworth (1979) stated that the insensitivity displayed by the mothers of these infants results in an inability for them to feel confident that their mothers will be there when they want or need them or will be responsive even when they are nearby. As a result, these infants develop a working model of a mother who is inconsistently accessible and responsive; she is unpredictable and therein their anxiety lies. They develop feelings of unworthiness of love and care and seek out their caregivers for approval and validation. However, the caregiver is unresponsive to this need which results in

anger at the caregiver and further bolstering of the child's negative model of self. The anxiety is especially pronounced when these infants become alarmed or some other significant event occurs in which their attachment behavioral system is activated at a more intense level. The anxiety that anxious-ambivalent infants experience when their attachment systems are activated is compounded by the fact that they are unable to trust the accessibility and responsiveness of their caregivers. As a result, anxious-ambivalent infants have difficulty using their mothers as a secure base from which to explore the world even in the mildest of stressful conditions (Bowlby, 1973).

Avoidant Caregiving. Mothers of avoidant infants differed from the anxious and secure mothers in two major ways, both of which contributed to a tendency for the mother to reject the baby; aversion to close bodily contact with the baby, and unpleasant/painful experiences within the context of physical contact (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ainsworth, 1979) explained that these mothers exhibit a general rigidity and compulsiveness in their caregiving which in turn leads them to feel impatient, resentful, or angry and hostile when their infants interfere with their plans and activities. Mothers of avoidant infants not only displayed aversion to close physical contact, but also admitted having this aversion with their infants significantly more frequently than anxious-ambivalent or secure mothers. Whereas mothers' unpredictable availability and responsiveness is tied to the development of an anxious attachment pattern in their infants, it is their predictable rejection, especially in the context of physical contact, which contributes to infants' approach-avoidance conflict. It is this conflict that is held responsible for these infants' avoidance of their mothers in situations that activate the attachment system at a high level of intensity (Ainsworth, 1979).

IWMs and Subsequent Relationship Development and Functioning

Relationship characteristics of secure individuals. As noted earlier, securely attached individuals had caregivers who were available and responsive to their signals, warm, and caring. These individuals learned, because of this sensitive care, that they were worthy of care and love.

As a result, secure individuals tend to develop models of themselves as being loveable and of significant others as being generally well-intentioned, reliable, and trustworthy (Simpson, 1990). They view relationships in general as providing pleasant experiences and satisfying of their needs. As a result of these beliefs and expectations, secure individuals are able to strike and actively seek a balance of closeness and autonomy in their relationships with others. Bowlby believed that as a result of their histories of care and the expectations and beliefs generated from those histories, individuals with secure relational representations seek and come to expect supportive, satisfying interactions with current and future partners. In addition, it appears that the guidelines for relating to others that are implicit in their working models cause them to behave in a positive, open manner that tends to elicit such support (Thompson, 1999).

Relationship characteristics of anxious-ambivalent individuals. Based on their histories of unpredictable or inconsistent care, anxious-ambivalent individuals develop representations of others as inconsistently available and responsive. They develop representations of the self as unworthy of care and only able to gain it through exaggerated signals of need. The consequences of experiencing caregivers who were either unavailable or undependable result in a tendency for these individuals to view significant others as being unreliable and either unwilling or unable to commit themselves to long-term relationships. As a result, these individuals often desire extreme intimacy in their relationships with others in an effort to validate the self's worthiness and reduce the anxiety posed by separations. They also tend to fear rejection and abandonment because this strengthens their own feelings of unworthiness and also amplifies the anxiety regarding the availability of attachment figures in times of need (Simpson, 1990).

Relationship characteristics of avoidant individuals. Avoidant individuals, because of generally negative experiences with caregivers, become suspicious and skeptical of others and view them as unreliable or untrustworthy (Simpson, 1990). According to Shaver and Hazan (1988) since avoidant individuals have experienced unpleasant and painful interactions with significant others; they tend to avoid intimate interactions, both in the form of care-seeking or

care-giving. Avoidant individuals desire maintaining distance in their relationship and will often limit intimacy in order to satisfy their needs for autonomy.

Romantic Attachment in Adolescence and Adulthood

Bowlby explained that because attachment relationships are internalized or represented, those early experiences and subsequent expectations are taken forward to serve later behavioral and emotional adaptation, even in totally new contexts and with different people. In particular, internal working models (IWMs) are a foundation not only for expectations regarding the self, but also for later relationships with caregivers and noncaregivers alike. However, despite stating the importance of the attachment system across the lifespan, Bowlby provided relatively little information regarding the specific function and expression of the attachment system later in life. This lack of theoretical exploration by Bowlby has placed a significant burden on adult attachment researchers. Not only must they provide evidence that adult romantic relationships qualify as attachment bonds, but they must also link this in meaningful ways to development as well as the information that has been canonized in the attachment literature.

Features and Functions of Attachment Relationships

Bowlby (1969/1982) took care in defining the specific type of socioemotional bond to which his theory applied and to distinguish it from other types of interpersonal relationships. Although other social relationships may hold some of these characteristics in common, it is the presence of all four that distinguish attachment relationships from other social relationships. According to Bowlby, attachment bonds have four defining features: proximity maintenance (seeking proximity to the attachment figure), separation protest (resisting separation), secure base (using the attachment figure as a base from which to explore the environment), and safe haven (turning to the attachment figure for comfort in times of threat). These features are easily observable in the overt behaviors of infants towards their attachment figures. Caregivers serve as the base of security from which infants engage in interactions with the social and physical world.

Infants continuously monitor the proximity and availability of their caregivers. If infants sense danger or feel anxious for any reason, they will retreat to their caregivers as a source of comfort and a haven of safety. Since separations from their caregivers signal potential danger, infants will object to and be distressed by these situations. However, if caregivers are perceived to be sufficiently near and responsive, infants will be motivated to explore and learn about the environment around them.

Features and Functions of Attachment Relationships in Adolescence and Adulthood

Adolescent and adult attachment researchers have utilized the defining features of infant-caregiver attachment bonds to differentiate attachment from nonattachment relationships beyond childhood. In a cross-sectional study conducted by Hazan, Hutt, Sturgeon, & Bricker (1991, as cited in Fraley & Davis, 1997), self report and interview methods were created to identify individuals' attachment figures as well as the process that individuals undergo in transferring attachment-related functions from parents to peers. Hazan and her colleagues hypothesized that the transfer of attachment-related components follows an orderly sequence, with proximity seeking being transferred from parents to peers first, followed by the transfer of the safe haven component, and then by the transfer of the secure base component.

In order to determine the degree of transfer of these attachment components and individuals' current attachment figures, Hazan et al. (1991) instructed participants of various ages to nominate one or more individuals whom they use as (a) a target for proximity maintenance (e.g., "Whom do you like to spend time with, be near to?"), (b) a safe haven (e.g., "Whom do you turn to when you're upset, feeling down?"), and (c) a secure base (e.g., "Whom do you feel you can always count on, know would do almost anything for you?"). Hazan et al. (1991) found that children primarily nominated their parents for these roles or functions, but that adolescents and adults also tended to nominate their peers (e.g., close friends or romantic partners). Hazan and her colleagues found that people who had transferred one or more of these functions to their peers

(friends or romantic partners) had peer relationships characterized by more caring, trust, and intimacy. The transfer of these components also occurred in the expected sequence with proximity maintenance being transferred first and secure base being transferred last. They also found that the transfer of the secure base component was likely to have been made only within the context of close relationships and took 2 years, on average, to complete in romantic relationships.

Fraley and Davis (1997) conducted a study based on the model of attachment formation proposed by Hazan et al. (1991). Fraley and Davis modified some of the measures utilized in the previous study to determine the extent to which young adults ($M = 20.42$ years, $SD = 3.82$) had transferred attachment-related functions from parents to peers. Like Hazan and her colleagues, Fraley and Davis (1997) postulated that attachment-related components would be transferred in an orderly sequence such that “subordinate components,” such as proximity seeking, would be transferred before “superordinate components” such as use of an individual as a secure base. In addition, they sought to assess whether the degree of transfer of various attachment-related components increases as a function of the duration of the peer relationship. Finally, they sought to replicate Hazan et al.’s finding that romantic attachment relationships take, on average, 2 years to fully develop.

In order to assess the transfer of attachment-related functions, Fraley and Davis used a revised version of the WHOTO measure used in the Hazan et al. study (see Table 1). Participants were instructed to write the names of the individuals from whom they sought proximity, whom they used as a safe haven, and whom they used as a secure base. Two items were used to assess each attachment-related component.

Table 1

WHOTO Questionnaire Items Assessing Targets of Attachment-Related Functions

Attachment-related functions	Questionnaire Items
Proximity-seeking	<i>Who is the person you most like to spend time with?</i> <i>Who is the person you don't like to be away from?</i>
Safe-haven	<i>Who is the person you want to be with when you are feeling upset or down?</i> <i>Who is the person you would count on for advice?</i>
Secure-base	<i>Who is the person you would want to tell first if you achieved something good?</i> <i>Who is the person you can always count on?</i>

Note. From "Attachment Formation and Transfer in Young Adults' Close Friendships and Romantic Relationships," by R. C. Fraley and K. E. Davis, 1997, *Personal Relationships*, 4, p. 136.

Although the majority of participants in the study (60%) listed their parents as primary attachment figures, Fraley and Davis found that these individuals were in the process of transferring attachment-related functions from parents to peers. The transfer also occurred in the expected direction with subordinate components being transferred before superordinate components. For example, participants were more likely to use peers, rather than parents, as targets for proximity maintenance. The tendency for adolescents to use peers as targets for proximity is consistent with other findings regarding this period of development. Adolescents are more likely to desire being close to and spending time with their friends than their parents since it is during this period of development when individuals make significant attempts to gain greater personal autonomy. There is a desire to connect with the world outside of the family. It is likely

that a behavior such as proximity maintenance is transferred earlier than higher order attachment behaviors such as utilizing peers as a secure base because the lower order nature of the component allows it to be transferred earlier on in relationships. Due to the relative inexperience of using peers as attachment figures it is safe to experiment transferring these lower order behaviors first because, should an attachment need arise, there are other more established attachment figures (parents) to take care of this need. The adolescent can use their parents as a secure base from which to experience these new relationships without relinquishing the support necessary to do so. It also does not overwhelm peers with an attachment behavior that is too advanced for their socio- emotional and cognitive capacities.

Fraley and Davis (1997) also found that the transfer of various attachment components increased as a function of the duration and quality of the peer relationship. Perhaps over time, the experiences that partners and friends share together create a deepening of the relationship. On the basis of these experiences, adolescents develop beliefs and expectations regarding the capacities of their peers as attachment figures as well as the availability and responsiveness of those individuals. Provided that those experiences have been favorable, or at least consistent with their current internal working models, trust builds and further experimentation with higher order attachment behaviors can occur.

The findings of Hazan et al. (1991) and Fraley and Davis (1997) indicate that with development and the greater intimacy in relationships that accompanies it, attachment functions begin to be transferred to individuals outside of the family. These findings provide some support for the notion that full-blown attachment relationships may develop between peers as one ages and gains increasing independence from the attachment figures of one's family of origin. Current evidence from studies on attachment transfer indicates that full-blown attachments to peers usually first occurs around middle to late adolescence: ages 15-17 (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999).

To further bolster evidence that romantic relationships can qualify as attachment bonds, other researchers have explored reactions to the loss of a romantic partner. Their reasoning is that