

Predicting Adolescent Romantic Relations and Peer Attachment

Diane E. Wille

Indiana University Southeast

Introduction

During adolescence, attachment shifts from a focus on parents to include peers. According to attachment theory the child's internal working model of attachment to parents acts as a prototype for relationships with peers; both friendships and romantic relations (Fraley, 2002). However, the effect size between parent and peer attachments is modest (Benson, McWey & Ross, 2006) and suggests that other factors may play a role in the adolescents' relations. It is possible that there may be a modeling effect; adolescents may mirror their parents' relations with romantic others. This study assesses whether the adolescents' attachment to parents or the parents' romantic relations are superior predictors of the adolescents' romantic relations and peer attachment.

Methods

Participants

Fifty-six families participated in a home visit when the target child (26 boys and 30 girls) was 14 years of age ($M = 14.89$, $SD = .36$).

Procedures

Mothers, fathers and adolescents completed the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins, 1996) and the Attachment Relationship Questionnaire (ARQ; Hazan and Shaver, 1990). The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996) consists of 18 items which are responded to using a five point scale ranging from one (*not at all characteristic of me*) to five (*very characteristic of me*). Using the standard procedures three subscales were computed:

Close is a measure of comfort with closeness and intimacy in romantic relations; *depend* assesses feelings about depending on others to be available when needed; and *anxiety* measures feelings about being abandoned or unloved. Higher scores indicate greater comfort with closeness, ability to depend and rely on others to be available when needed and higher feelings of anxiety in romantic relationships. The Attachment Relationship Questionnaire (Hazan and Shaver, 1990) consists of three paragraphs describing avoidant, anxious-ambivalent and secure attachment. Participants rated themselves using a seven point scale ranging from one (*not characteristic*) to seven (*very characteristic*). High scores indicate a rating of self in romantic relationships that is *avoidant*, *anxious-ambivalent* and *secure*.

The adolescents also completed the the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden and Greenberg, 1987). The IPPA consists of 75 items divided into three sections (25 items each) to assess the adolescent's perceived attachment to his/her mother, father and peers. Each item is responded to on a five point scale ranging from one (*almost never or never true*) to five (*almost always or always true*). Higher scores indicate greater attachment relationship to the attachment figure (mother, father and peer).

Results

Pearson correlations were used to assess the relationships between the parents' romantic relationships (RAAS and ARQ) and the adolescents' romantic relationships (RAAS and ARQ) and peer attachment (IPPA - peer; Tables 1 and 2). Only one correlation was significant, fathers and adolescents comfort with closeness and intimacy in romantic relations was negatively related.

Pearson correlations were also used to assess the relationship between the adolescents' attachment relations with parents (IPPA) and their romantic relations (RAAS and ARQ) and peer attachment (IPPA; Table 3). When adolescents report greater attachment to their mother they also report that they are able to depend on others, have less anxious-ambivalent feelings

and greater peer attachment. Adolescents who report greater attachment to their fathers also report that they are able to depend on others, have less anxiety (about being abandoned or unloved) and have greater peer attachment.

A series of Multiple Regression analyses were used to determine whether adolescents' attachment to the parents (mother or father) or the parents' romantic relationships predicted the adolescents' romantic relationships. The adolescents' attachment to parent score and the parents' romantic relations scores were entered into the regression equation to determine if they predicted the adolescents' romantic relations and peer attachment scores independent of the other. These analyses were performed separately for mothers and fathers.

The adolescents' attachment to mothers independently predicted the adolescents' ability to depend on others to be available, $Beta = .36, t = 2.66, p < .05$, anxiety about abandonment, $Beta = -.30, t = 2.18, p < .05$, anxious ambivalent feelings about their romantic others, $Beta = -.36, t = 2.65, p < .05$, and their attachment to their peers, $Beta = .52, t = 3.87, p < .01$.

Adolescents who reported greater attachment to their mothers were more comfortable depending on others and were less anxious about being abandoned and unloved, reported lower anxious-ambivalent attachment feelings about their romantic others and reported greater attachment to their peers.

The adolescents' attachment to their fathers was found to predict the adolescents' comfort in depending on others, $Beta = .49, t = 3.68, p < .01$, anxiety about being abandoned or unloved, $Beta = -.34, t = 2.47, p < .05$, and attachment to peers, $Beta = .57, t = 3.98, p < .01$. Adolescents who reported greater attachment to their fathers also reported that they were more comfortable depending on others and less anxious about being abandoned or unloved in their romantic relations and greater peer attachment.

The only parental romantic relations score to predict adolescents' romantic relations was fathers' report of comfort with closeness. Fathers' report of comfort with closeness

independently predicted the adolescents' report of comfort with closeness, $Beta = -.44$, $t = 3.28$, $p < .01$. Fathers who reported less comfort with closeness had adolescents who reported greater comfort with closeness to others.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if adolescents' relations with romantic others and peers could be explained by a modeling effect; the adolescent may be mirroring parents' relationships. The results of this study does not support this hypothesis. The adolescents' attachment to mother and father was found to predict the adolescents' romantic relations and peer attachment. The internal representation of the adolescents' attachment figures appear to form the basis of the adolescents' relationships to others.

In this study romantic relationships were only assessed using self-reports. It is possible that the parents' perception of their relationship with a romantic other is not the same as their adolescents' perception of the parents' romantic relations. To assess for a modeling effect it may be more useful to measure of the adolescents' perception of their parents' romantic relations and determine whether this perception if related to the adolescents romantic relations.

Only fathers' comfort with closeness of romantic relationships was found to predict the adolescents' comfort with closeness. But this was an inverse relationship. It is possible that fathers' lack of closeness has a wider impact on family relations causing the adolescent to seek out others outside the family for closeness.

References

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Table 1

Correlations between Adolescents' and Parents' Revised Attachment Scale

		Adolescents		
	Close	Depend	Anxiety	
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Mother				
Close	.03			
Depend		-.05		
Anxiety			-.09	
Father				
Close	-.41**			
Depend		.21		
Anxiety			-.03	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Correlations between Adolescents' and Parents' Attachment Relationship Questionnaire

	Adolescent		
	Avoidant	Anxious- Ambivalent	Secure
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Mother			
Avoidant	.05		
Anxious-Ambivalent		-.08	
Secure			-.10
Father			
Avoidant	-.24		
Anxious-Ambivalent		-.13	
Secure			.06

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Adolescents only: Correlations between Attachment to Parent (IPPA) and Attachment to Romantic Others and Peers (RAS, ARQ and IPPA)

	Inventory for Parent and Peer Attachment	
	Mother	Father
The Revised Attachment Scale		
Close	.05	.10
Depend	.36*	.42**
Anxiety	-.26	-.36**
Attachment Relationship Questionnaire		
Avoidant	.13	-.01
Anxious-Ambivalent	-.34*	-.18
Secure	.05	.18
Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment		
Peer	.54**	.59**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.