

ATTACHMENT HIERARCHIES AMONG AT RISK TEENS ACROSS DEVELOPMENT

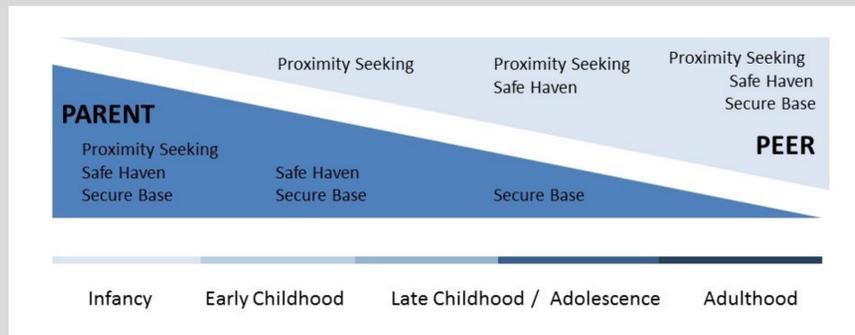
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INTRODUCTION

In adolescence, attachment bonds expand to include peers and romantic partners. The relative reliance on various attachment figures changes over time (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Figure 1. The shift of attachment functions during development.



Mothers continue to be the primary or secondary attachment figures in high school and college age samples (Rosenthal and Kobak, 2010); however, youth who have experienced disruptions in their attachment relationships turn to peers and romantic partners to meet their attachment needs (Dangaltcheva, 2014).

HYPOTHESIS

It was hypothesized that the attachment functions will shift from parents to peers much earlier in this high-risk population compared to previously published results based on normative samples. It was also hypothesized that attachment functions will remain stable between time one and time two.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 158 adolescents (82 males, 76 females) between the ages of 12 and 18 ($M = 15.45$, $SD = 1.50$) recruited from youth custody settings and a mental health facility.
- The sample was predominantly Caucasian (66%), with a substantial minority of youth self-identifying as Aboriginal (23%).
- At time two, 91 participants were retained ($M = 17.86$).

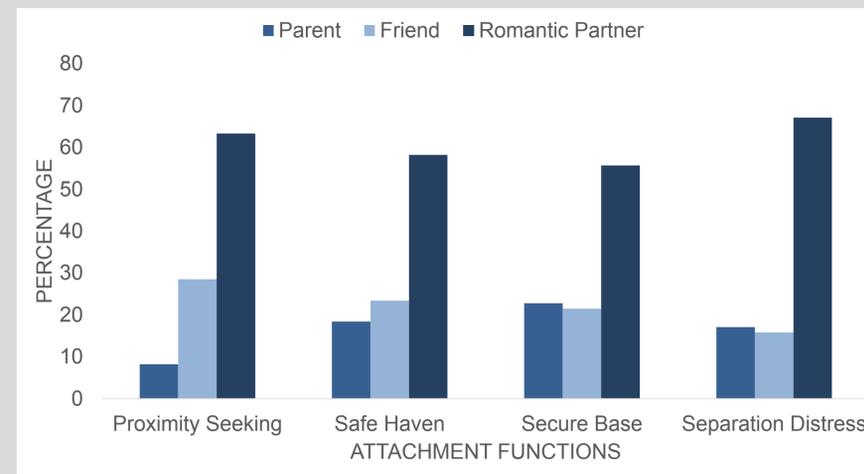
MEASURES

Parent and Peer Attachment Function (PPAF; Moretti, 2003)

- Based on the Whoto questionnaire (Hazan & Shaver, 1991).
- One item for each of the four attachment functions.
- Coefficient alphas range from .72 to .86 in the current sample.

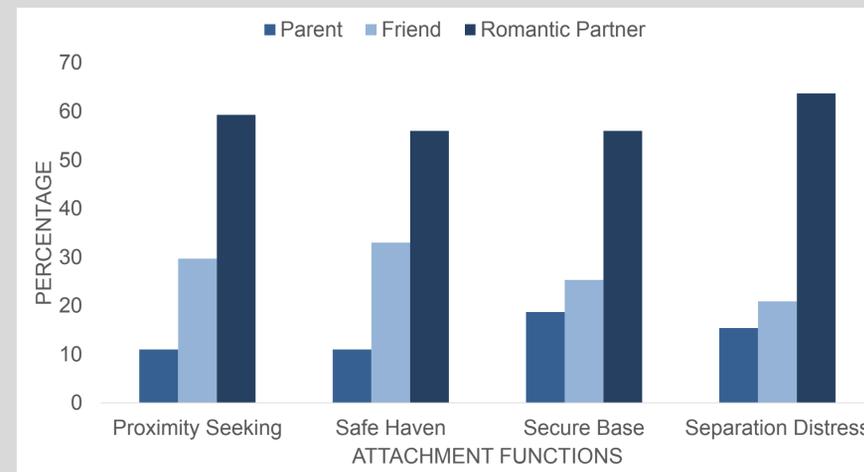
RESULTS

Figure 2. Attachment figures for each attachment function at time one.



- Only 8% of participants preferred their parents for proximity seeking, 18% for safe haven, 23% for secure base, and 17% for separation distress.

Figure 3. Attachment figures for each attachment function at time two.



- Approximately two years later, only 11% of participants preferred their parents for proximity seeking, 11% for safe haven, 19% for secure base, and 15% for separation distress.

Although attachment hierarchies appear to have remained stable across time, at the individual level, only 62% of participants identified the same figure at time two for proximity seeking, 53% for safe haven, 54% for secure base, and 62% for separation distress.

DISCUSSION

Study	Sample	Percentage Turning to Parents vs. Peers		
		Proximity Seeking	Safe Haven	Secure Base
Fraley and Davis (1997)	237 young adults	14% vs. 86%	46% vs. 54%	62% vs. 38%
Nickerson (2005)	303 elementary school students	49% vs. 51%	54% vs. 46%	69% vs. 31%
Rosenthal and Kobak (2010)	212 high school and 198 college students	Combined Attachment Functions: 64% vs. 25%		

Rosenthal and Kobak (2010) suggested that adolescents who turn to their peers for safe haven and secure base do so to compensate for poor attachment bonds with their parents. This explanation may very well apply to teens in the current study, especially given the high levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance documented in this sample (Moretti, Obsuth, Craig, & Bartolo, 2015).

Turning to friends or romantic partners for fundamental attachment needs does not confer the same advantages for teens as turning to parents, because these relationships tend to be less stable and less enduring. Adolescence who rely on their friends or romantic partners rather than their parents are at risk for internalizing and externalizing issues (Dangaltcheva, 2014; Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adolescents in this study turned to their friends and romantic partners much earlier to meet their attachment needs.
- Attachment based interventions that increase security in the parent-teen relationship may be effective in reducing internalizing and externalizing symptoms because they increase the likelihood that adolescents will turn to their parents for secure base and safe haven, reducing the need to precociously turn to friends or romantic partners.

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