

The development of attachment styles

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There are vast individual differences in the ways in which people relate to significant others in their lives. For example, some adults are relatively secure in their relationships with friends, family members, and romantic partners. They are able to provide support for others, resolve conflict effectively, and, more generally, they find their relationships satisfying and rewarding. Other people, in contrast, are relatively insecure in the way they relate to others. They are uncomfortable opening up to others and being dependent on them. They may also worry that, if push comes to shove, significant others will not be there for them.

Attachment researchers refer to these kinds of individual differences as “attachment patterns” or “attachment styles.” A large body of research has accumulated over the past 30 years that examines the implications of attachment patterns for psychological and interpersonal functioning (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016). Research has shown, for example, that people who are relatively secure in their attachment styles report fewer depressive symptoms, adapt to stressful events in constructive ways, and report more commitment and satisfaction in their romantic relationships (Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993; Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001; Simpson, 1990).

Many of the enduring questions in attachment theory and research concern the origins of individual differences in attachment. Specifically, what makes some people more secure than others? How are those differences sustained across time? And what leads people to change? The purpose of this chapter is to review briefly theory and research on how attachment patterns develop and the processes that give rise to continuity and change.¹

¹ We note from the outset that attachment theory is a theory of lifespan development: it focuses on individual differences in both children and adults and attempts to explain how those differences emerge. But, as with research on temperament and personality, research on attachment in early childhood and adulthood is typically conducted in different research traditions (e.g., developmental and social/personality), and these traditions are more likely to intersect in theory than in practice. In this chapter, we review theory and work that is relevant to child and adult domains, but, due to space constraints, we deliberately blur the lines and do not always do justice to important theoretical distinctions.

The basics of attachment theory

Attachment theory was originally developed by the British psychologist, John Bowlby (1907–90), as a way to understand the intense distress expressed by young children who had been separated from their primary caregivers (e.g., their mothers). Bowlby observed that infants would go to extraordinary lengths (e.g., crying, clinging, frantically searching) to prevent separation from their caregivers or to reestablish proximity to a missing parent (Bowlby, 1969/1982). To explain these responses, Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that infants are equipped with an *attachment behavioral system*—a motivational system designed by natural selection to keep immature infants in close proximity to people who can provide them with care. He argued that the attachment system would be adaptive for species, such as humans, who are born without the ability to feed or protect themselves. He reviewed a broad array of research suggesting that infants of altricial species are more likely to die to predation when they lack the protection of a caregiver (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

How does the attachment system work? According to the theory, the system essentially “asks” the following question: Is the attachment figure nearby, accessible, and attentive? If the child perceives the answer to this question to be “yes,” he or she feels loved, secure, and confident, and, behaviorally, is likely to explore his or her environment and be sociable. If, however, the child perceives the answer to this question to be “no,” the child experiences anxiety and is likely to exhibit proximity seeking behaviors ranging from simple visual searching for the attachment figure on the low extreme to active following and vocal signaling on the other extreme. These behaviors are often referred to as *attachment behaviors* because they reflect the operation of the attachment system and function to maintain proximity between the child and his or her attachment figure.

The way a child regulates his or her attachment behavior is driven largely by exogenous factors (e.g., physical separation) early in life. But as infants develop, the way they come to regulate their affect and behavior is based increasingly on the mental representations they construct concerning themselves and their caregivers. These representations, often referred to as *internal working models* (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008), are theorized to reflect the child’s experiences with primary caregivers. That is, when primary caregivers are available and responsive to a child’s needs, the child learns that he or she can count on others to be there. In short, the child develops a *secure* attachment pattern. In contrast, when the attachment figure is unresponsive or inconsistently available, the child develops *insecure* attachment representations. In short, the quality of the experiences that the child has with his or her primary caregivers is believed to shape the representations that the child develops about him or herself and the social world. These working models are assumed to underlie individual differences in the ways in which people (both children and adults) relate to important people in their lives (i.e., the attachment patterns or styles they exhibit).²

²The way researchers conceptualize individual differences in attachment patterns is more nuanced than what is implied here by a simple secure versus insecure distinction. There is not adequate space in this chapter, however, to review these taxonomies carefully and how they have evolved across time. We refer interested readers to the following: Crowell, Fraley, and Shaver (2008), Solomon and George (2008).

Although there are different ways of partitioning individual differences in attachment patterns in childhood and adulthood, one common approach conceptualizes individual differences within a two-dimensional space. One axis in this space is referred to as *attachment anxiety* (or “anxious attachment”) and captures the extent to which people (children or adults) are insecure versus secure in their perceptions of the availability and responsiveness of close others. The other axis is sometimes referred to as *attachment avoidance* (or “avoidant attachment”) and refers to the extent to which people are uncomfortable opening up to others, depending on them, and using them as a secure base. A prototypically secure person is low on both of these dimensions; he or she is not worried about the responsiveness of others and is comfortable using others as a safe haven and secure base.

This particular taxonomic system has been useful for a number of reasons. First, it provides a way to ground individual differences in attachment in childhood and adulthood in a common framework (see Fraley & Spieker, 2003). Second, it emphasizes the notion that individual differences can vary continuously. Finally, it recognizes that security and insecurity are multidimensional constructs. A highly avoidant person, for example, could be motivated to avoid close relationships either because he or she fears being hurt (is also anxious; what Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) referred to as *fearful-avoidance*) or because he or she is compulsively self-reliant (is not anxious; what Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) referred to as *dismissing-avoidance*).³

How do individual differences develop in early childhood? Theory and research

One of the important goals of developmental research is to uncover the antecedents of attachment patterns (see Belsky & Fearon, 2008, for a review). One of the most significant studies in the history of attachment theory is Mary Ainsworth’s (1913–99) observational research on a sample of approximately 25 infants and their caregivers in Baltimore in the 1970s (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Although this sample size seems small in light of modern standards, what made Ainsworth’s research unique was her emphasis on in-depth, naturalistic behavioral observations. Specifically, Ainsworth and her team visited the homes of the parents and their children multiple times over the course of the child’s first year. They were able to take careful, detailed notes of the interactions between parents and children in their lived environments and not merely in laboratory visits. These interactions were coded on a number of dimensions, most notably the extent

³ Attachment styles, as studied among adults, tend to correlate with other dispositional variables, such as those captured by the Big Five (see Nofle & Shaver, 2006). Attachment-related anxiety tends to correlate moderately with Neuroticism. Attachment-related avoidance tends to correlate weakly (and negatively) with Agreeableness and Extraversion. Despite empirical overlap, most scholars tend to treat attachment styles as being relational, psychodynamic, or social-cognitive dispositional variables rather than traditional trait-like dispositional variables (John, Robins, & Pervin, 2008).

to which the parent provided what has come to be known as *sensitive responsive* caregiving—being in tune with a child’s needs and responsive in ways that were appropriate in light of the situation (see Colin, 1996).

When the children were 12 months of age, they visited the laboratory for task called the *strange situation*. In the strange situation, infants and their primary caregiver (most often, mothers) are brought to the laboratory and, systematically, separated from and reunited with one another. In the strange situation, most children (i.e., about 60%) become upset when the mother leaves the room, but, when she returns, they actively seek the parent and are easily comforted by her. Children who exhibit this pattern of behavior are often called *secure*. Other children (about 20% or less) are ill-at-ease initially, and, upon separation, become extremely distressed. Importantly, when reunited with their parents, these children have a difficult time being soothed, and often exhibit conflicting behaviors that suggest they want to be comforted, but that they also want to “punish” the parent for leaving. These children are often called *anxious-ambivalent*. The third pattern of attachment that Ainsworth and her colleagues documented is called *anxious-avoidant*. Avoidant children (about 20%) do not appear overly distressed by the separation, and, upon reunion, actively avoid seeking contact with their mother, sometimes turning their attention to play objects.

Ainsworth and her colleagues found that children who had a history of sensitively responsive care in the first year of life were more likely than those who did not to be classified as secure in the strange situation. Children who were classified as anxious-ambivalent or avoidant were more likely to have mothers who were inconsistently responsive, intrusive, or negligent in the months leading up to the strange situation.

Ainsworth’s classic findings have been replicated by Grossmann, Grossmann, Spanger, Suess, and Unzner (1985) who studied parent–child interactions in the homes of 54 families, up to 3 times during the first year of the child’s life. Grossmann et al. found that children who classified as secure in the strange situation at 12 months of age were more likely than children classified as insecure to have mothers who provided sensitive and responsive care to their children in the home environment. Experimental research on nonhuman primates (Suomi, 2008) and intervention research on children also indicate that sensitive responsiveness may shape attachment security. van den Boom (1990, 1994), for example, developed an intervention that was designed to enhance maternal sensitive responsiveness in mothers whose infants had been identified as irritable. At 12 months of age, children in the intervention group were more likely to be classified as secure than insecure (anxious or avoidant) in the strange situation compared with the control group (see Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003, and van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Duyvesteyn, 1995, for an in-depth discussion of intervention research).

The early research conducted by Ainsworth and her students has been important for a number of reasons. First, their work led to a procedure, the strange situation, for studying individual differences in attachment behavior that could be (and was) widely adopted by investigators across the world. Second, the observational system led to the development of a taxonomy (secure, ambivalent, and avoidant) of

individual differences in child attachment. Although this taxonomy has been modified and elaborated over the years (see Solomon & George, 2008), this system, much like the Big Five in personality research, provided a useful way to organize individual differences in child behavior. Moreover, it provided a common language with which to discuss attachment patterns. Finally, Ainsworth's research revealed some of the developmental antecedents, such as sensitive responsiveness, of individual differences in attachment, thereby facilitating our understanding of the factors that promote and inhibit secure attachment.

We should note that although attachment theorists focus on the quality of the relationship between infants and their primary caregivers as being one of the reasons why some children are more secure than others, researchers have studied a number of etiological factors, including temperament and genetics (Roisman & Fraley, 2006, 2008), maternal depression (Teti, Gelfand, Messinger, & Isabella, 1995), family conflict (Davies & Cummings, 1994), and economic well-being (van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988). We emphasize sensitive responsive caregiving here partly because it is one of the factors that is emphasized the most in the attachment literature and because of space limitations; we encourage interested readers to consult Belsky and Fearon (2008) for broader coverage.

Processes that promote continuity: Theory and research

One reason that researchers have invested so much attention in studying the development of attachment in the context of infant–caregiver relationships is that, theoretically, those early attachment bonds serve as the *foundation* for subsequent interpersonal experiences. That is, early caregiving experiences help to seed the way in which interpersonal interactions unfold. As children navigate new social relationships (e.g., relationships with siblings, peers, teachers), they draw upon the experiences they have had in previous attachment relationships. Thus when a secure child enters into a relationship with a new person (e.g., a teacher), the child may assume that this new person will be warm and encouraging rather than threatening or punitive. In short, although socialization processes are thought to help give rise to whether children construct secure or insecure working models, those developing models are thought to play a self-sustaining role in shaping the interpersonal environment itself through selection effects.

Bowlby (1973) called attention to two broad pathways through which people may construct or shape their environments. The most salient of these are psychodynamic in nature. Namely, individuals are likely to interpret the behavior of others in ways that are consistent with the expectations they already hold. A secure person, for example, may be more likely to give others the benefit of the doubt. An insecure person, in contrast, may be more likely to construe ambiguous social signals as signs of exclusion. This dynamic process is likely to lead people to have interpersonal experiences that confirm, rather than disconfirm, the assumptions they hold about themselves and their social worlds (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011).

Collins (1996) conducted a study on adult attachment which illustrates these processes nicely. In her research, people were asked to imagine a variety of scenarios in which the behavior of a loved one was potentially ambiguous—the behavior could be harmless or could represent a threat to the relationship. Although each participant read identical scenarios, the way participants reacted to the scenarios differed dramatically. Some people, for example, believed that the ambiguous behavior of their partner represented an attempt to make them feel jealous; other people wrote the behavior off as if it represented the partner's friendly and outgoing disposition. Importantly, Collins (1996) found that how people responded—the attributions they made about their partner's behavior—was a function of their attachment styles. People who were relatively insecure, for example, were more likely than those who were secure to construe the partner's ambiguous behavior as a threat to the relationship.

Collin's research shows that, even when different people are exposed to the same information, the way they interpret that information is biased by their working models. Thus what people "see" and what they experience tend to reinforce rather than challenge the assumptions they already hold about the world. This dynamic provides one potential mechanism of continuity. It is difficult for people to modify their assumptions about the availability and responsiveness of other people in their lives if they are predisposed to view the behavior of others as negligent or insensitive.

The second broad pathway that Bowlby highlighted is person-driven effects on social context (e.g., selection effects, niche picking, and interpersonal influence). In short, people are likely to select themselves into environments that are consistent with their existing dispositions. For example, Frazier, Byer, Fischer, Wright, and DeBord (1996) demonstrated that adults who were secure were more likely to be attracted to potential mates who were also secure (see also Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994). Research also suggests that insecure people may drive secure partners away in dating contexts. In a striking demonstration of this process, McClure and Lydon (2014) studied people in a speed-dating paradigm and found that individuals who were insecure-anxious with respect to attachment were more likely to come across in undesirable ways, expressing greater verbal disfluencies and interpersonal awkwardness. These interpersonal behaviors, in turn, have the potential to undermine the formation of intimate relationships, potentially reinforcing the insecurities that highly anxious people already have.

Processes that promote change: Theory and research

On the surface, the presence of selection effects would seem to suggest that attachment patterns established in early childhood would be relatively enduring—that secure infants would also be highly likely to be secure in adolescence or as young adults. And, although there is some evidence for continuity in attachment patterns across time (see Fraley, 2002), the overall stability from infancy to early adulthood is relatively weak (see Groh et al., 2014; Pinquart, Feußner, & Ahnert, 2013).

It is important to keep in mind that attachment theory emphasizes both selection and socialization effects. That is, part of the explanation for why some children are more secure than others has to do with the quality of their caregiving experiences. But these influences do not necessarily remain homogenous over time (Pianta, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1989). Thus, to the extent to which working models capture variation in people's interpersonal experiences, those working models should change to some degree. The consequence of such processes, when considered over long periods of time, is that those changes should gradually diminish the stability of individual differences in attachment styles (see Fraley, 2002; Fraley & Roberts, 2005).

What kinds of factors lead to change in attachment patterns? There has been an enormous amount of work on this topic over the decades and, as such, there is not adequate space to review it here (see Gillath et al., 2016). Suffice to say, there are multiple factors that have been linked to changes in attachment organization in adulthood alone, including the transition to parenthood (Feeney, Alexander, Noller, & Hohaus, 2003; Simpson, Rholes, Campbell, & Wilson, 2003), relationship break-ups (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Sbarra & Hazan, 2008), the experience of war-related trauma (Mikulincer, Ein-Dor, Solomon, & Shaver, 2011), intimate relationship conflict and support (Chow, Ruhl, & Buhrmester, 2014; Green, Furrer, & McAllister, 2011; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000), the meaning or construal of life events (Davila & Sargent, 2003), stable vulnerability factors (Davila, Burge, & Hammen, 1997), and therapy (Taylor, Rietzschel, Danquah, & Berry, 2015).

One of the big questions in the literature concerns the extent to which various experiences have the potential to lead to enduring versus transient changes in attachment patterns (Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004; Fraley & Roisman, 2015; Fraley, Roisman, & Haltigan, 2013). It is possible, for example, that the experience of a breakup has the potential to undermine a person's sense of security, at least temporarily. But, with a bit of time and some corrective experiences, it is likely that the person will return to his or her prebreakup attachment pattern. Researchers are currently trying to tackle these kinds of issues by examining how early experiences might shape social adaptation (Fraley et al., 2013) and how transitions in adulthood shape state- and trait-level forms of security (Karantzas, Deboeck, Gillath, & Fraley, 2017).

New directions

We have provided a broad overview of theory and research on some of the factors that shape a person's attachment style and the mechanisms that might promote both continuity and change across time. Many of the themes emphasized in the attachment literature mirror those that are emphasized in the broader literature on personality development, such as the interplay of socialization and selection effects (see Caspi & Roberts, 2001). We close this chapter with a brief discussion of some themes (i.e., canalization, differentiation) that are pertinent to the study of

individual differences in attachment that, in our view, have not received much attention in the recent literature on personality traits (cf. Murphy, 1947). We also discuss some recent work on age-related changes in attachment—research that fits well with recent efforts in personality psychology to understand mean-level changes in personality traits (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). We hope this discussion will be useful not only for inspiring future research on attachment, but in calling attention to some of the ways in which developmental models on attachment and personality can mutually inform one another.

Canalization

Bowlby believed that the transactions that take place between children and their social environments have a reinforcing effect on the working models that children construct. Drawing on Waddington's (1957) ideas about cell development (see Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004, for a review), Bowlby argued that an individual's developmental pathway becomes increasingly canalized or buffered over time, such that experiences that are incompatible with a person's working models are likely to nudge the individual off his or her developmental course, but only temporarily; the individual will gradually revert to the trajectory that was previously established.

There are two implications of this process that researchers have only recently begun to explore. First, this dynamic suggests that the "same" experience can have a more enduring effect on a person when it takes place early in development rather than later in development. Second, this dynamic suggests that the stability of individual differences in attachment may be weaker in childhood than they are in adulthood. We review each of these points in more depth below.

Developmental timing: Early versus later

The canalization model implies that specific experiences that take place early in development have the potential to leave a greater mark on personality functioning than similar experiences that take place later in time (Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004).

Fraley and Heffernan (2013) examined parental divorce as a case in point. Parental divorce is a prototypical example of the disruption of family and attachment relationships, one that has the potential to have complex and negative consequences for child development. Does the timing of parental divorce matter in shaping interpersonal functioning? Namely, are the downstream consequences of parental divorce greater if the divorce takes place early in a child's life as opposed to later? A traditional way of addressing this question is to study a sample of children of a common age (e.g., 14–16 years old) and split children from divorced families into two groups: those whose parents divorced when the child was under the age of 5, and those whose parents divorced when the child was 5 or older. The key limitation of this approach is that the two groups not only differ in the age at which their parents divorced (i.e., the *timing* of parental divorce), but the amount of time that has transpired since the divorce. The first group, for example, has had more time for the potential negative consequences of divorce to manifest and

accumulate. Although the accumulation of negative consequences is a legitimate pathway through which early parental divorce could have its effects on developmental outcomes, one might expect such effects to exist regardless of whether the divorce took place early or later in the child's life. The evidence for canalization effects per se would be stronger if the timing of the event (age of parental divorce) could be separated from the effects of time per se (i.e., the amount of time that has transpired since the event).

One way to untangle these distinct effects is by studying people who vary in the age at which their parents divorced (i.e., developmental timing) and the length of time that has transpired since the divorce took place (i.e., time). Fraley and Heffernan (2013) examined this issue by assessing the attachment security of adults in their current relationships with their parents. They found that people who reported their parents had divorced when they were younger were more insecure in their parental relationships than people whose parents had divorced when they were older. Importantly, this association was observed when statistically controlling the amount of time that had passed since the divorce. This suggests that the same event (i.e., parental divorce) has the potential to leave a stronger mark on attachment security when it takes place early rather than later in development.

Is stability weaker in childhood than adulthood?

Yes. There are now a variety of longitudinal studies that have examined the stability of attachment patterns across a variety of ages and varying test–retest intervals. These studies were meta-analyzed by Fraley (2002) and, more recently, by Pinquart et al. (2013). What these meta-analyses reveal is that, when the length of the test–retest interval is held constant, the overall test–retest stability of attachment is higher in adulthood than it is in childhood. Fraley and Brumbaugh (2004), for example, estimated that the test–retest of attachment over a 10-year period in childhood was approximately 0.30, whereas for adults the test–retest over a 10-year period is approximately 0.50 (see Fig. 17.1).

Differentiation

Historically, attachment researchers have treated attachment style as a trait-like or **global** variable—one that captures the way people think about themselves and others across relationships. One reason for this emphasis is that researchers studying adult attachment dynamics have been interested in the ways in which interpersonal experiences, such as those that take place in childhood and adolescence, are generalized and applied to novel experiences, such as those that take place in romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

But attachment theory also posits that people develop *relationship-specific attachment representations* for important people in their lives (Collins & Read, 1994; Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2004). Collins and Read (1994) formalized these ideas in their *hierarchical model* of attachment representations (see Fig. 17.2). Specifically, they argued that attachment representations vary within a

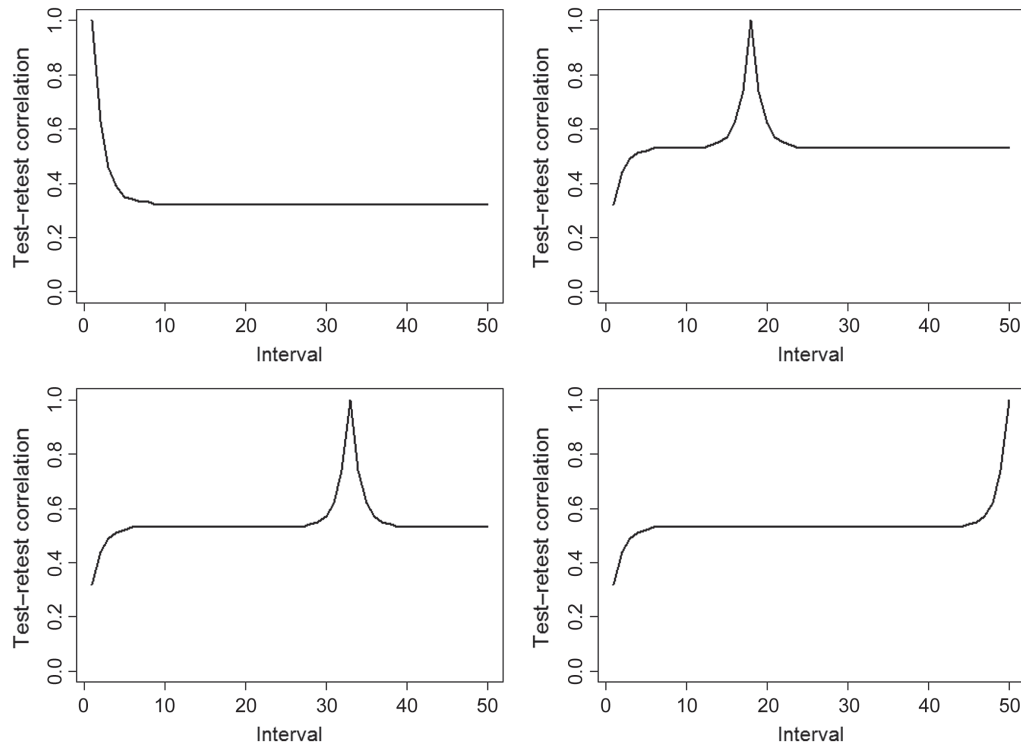


Figure 17.1 Model-predicted test–retest correlations in attachment security across varying temporal intervals. The first panel shows the predicted stability from age 1 to all subsequent ages (1–50). The second panel shows the predicted stability between age 18 and all ages that precede it (1–17) and all ages that follow it (19–50). Likewise, the third panel shows the predicted stability between age 33 and all prior and subsequent ages. The last panel shows the predicted stability between age 50 and all ages that precede it. What these graphs demonstrate is that the overall degree of stability expected in childhood is lower than that expected in adulthood.

person in at least two crucial ways. First, attachment representations vary in their *generality versus specificity*. Thus people have attachment models that are relevant to how they see themselves and others in general (e.g., “People are trustworthy”). But people also have models that represent the way they understand and relate to specific people in their lives (e.g., “My spouse is trustworthy”). Although it is assumed that general and specific attachment representations tend to be aligned in most individuals, there is no theoretical requirement that they be perfectly aligned.

Second, attachment representations can vary in quality and content *across specific relational domains*. That is, the way a person relates to her mother might be different than the way she relates to her best friend. Because each relationship has the potential to have its own unique history and interpersonal signature, the expectations a person constructs about whether her romantic partner is likely to be available and supportive might differ in important ways from the expectations she has constructed about whether her parents will be available and supportive.

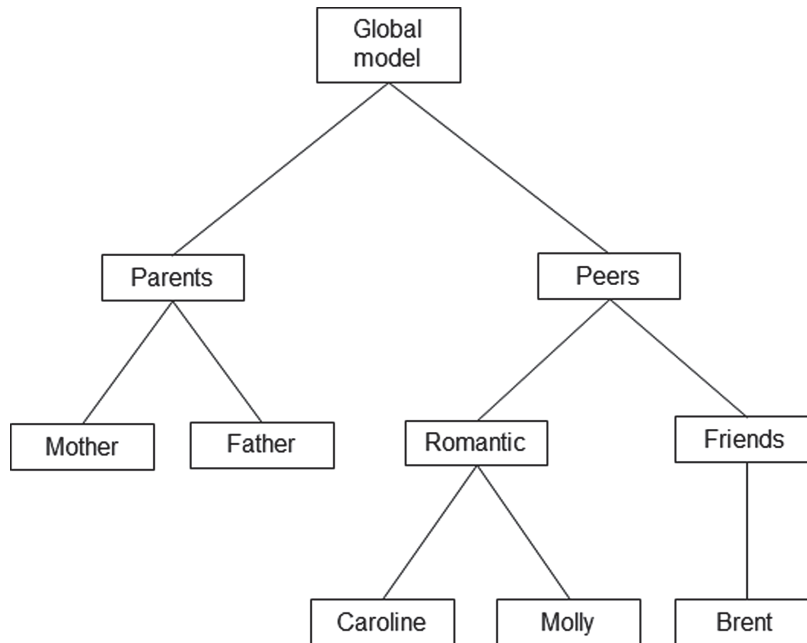


Figure 17.2 The hierarchical model of attachment (Collins & Read, 1994). According to this model, attachment representations vary both in terms of their (1) generality versus specificity (as aligned vertically in the figure) and (2) their relational domain (e.g., parents vs peers, as aligned horizontally in the figure).

Recent research has emphasized the value of these distinctions. Global attachment security, for example, tends to correlate 0.30 to 0.50 with attachment security measured in specific relationship domains (i.e., relationships with mothers, fathers, romantic partners, and best friends) (Fraley, Hudson, Heffernan, & Segal, 2015). Thus although people who are secure in general also tend to be secure across various relationships (i.e., there is a general factor), there are exceptions to this trend. Recent research also reveals that there is considerable heterogeneity across specific relationships. Although people who are secure in their parental relationships are also more likely to be secure in their romantic relationships, these associations are relatively modest, typically averaging around $r = 0.20$ (Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011; Klohnen, Weller, Luo, & Choe, 2005; Sibley & Overall, 2010). Taken together, these data suggest that, although there are commonalities in the attachment patterns that people experience across their relationships, there can also be discontinuities in the way in which an individual relates to important people in his or her life. Stated differently, not everyone who is secure in their relationship with their spouse is also secure in their relationships with their parents (even if they are secure more generally).

According to attachment theory, differentiation in working models should be a function of interpersonal experience. Unfortunately, there has been little empirical research designed to directly examine these issues. We outline some specific ideas here in an effort to help set the tone for future research in this area.

One way to pursue this theme from a developmental angle is to examine the ways in which working models in different relationships diverge across time. Because the socialization assumption in attachment theory holds that attachment representations are a function of people's interpersonal experiences (e.g., repeated experiences of feeling accepted and secure vs unloved or misunderstood), the representations that people construct of specific relationship partners should come to diverge from the representations of other people (e.g., parents) over time. This is not to say that security across relational contexts should dramatically diverge, nor is it to say that such divergence will continue unabated across time.

Another way to examine these themes is by studying the ways in which changes to representations in one domain affect representations in other domains. When people experience breakups in their romantic relationships, it appears that they become more insecure (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Ruvolo, Fabin, & Ruvolo, 2001; Scharfe & Cole, 2006). But do they become more insecure specifically in the romantic domain? Or does that experience also undermine—even temporarily—the sense of trust they have in others more generally, including, for example, their parents?

Age-related shifts in attachment

Up to this point, our discussion of continuity and change has largely concerned the stability of individual differences—whether people who are relatively secure at one point in time are also likely to be relatively secure at another point in time. This is often referred to as “rank-order stability” in the personality literature because the primary concern is whether the relative ordering of people is the same across time. Another important form of stability, however, concerns mean-level or absolute stability. This is relevant to understanding whether, on average, people tend to increase (or decrease) in security across time. These two forms of stability are conceptually and mathematically independent of one another because people could preserve their rank-ordering perfectly across two time points even if everyone became more secure, on average. And, similarly, even if the average levels of security were the same across two time points, if the people who were most secure at time 1 became the least secure at time 2 (and vice versa), mean-level stability could be perfect despite rank-order stability being zero.

Several studies have now examined the ways in which attachment varies across the lifecycle, using cross-sectional methods (Chopik, Edelstein, & Fraley, 2013; Konrath, Chopik, Hsing, & O'Brien, 2014; Magai et al., 2001). One recent study has examined both global and relationship-specific attachment in the ways discussed previously (Hudson, Fraley, Chopik, & Heffernan, 2016). Hudson and his colleagues assessed people's general attachment pattern in addition to attachment in the context of relationships with parents, romantic partners, and best friends. They found that people generally became less anxious with respect to attachment across time. That is, younger adults reported greater attachment anxiety than older adults. In contrast, there were few age differences in avoidance. For the most part, global avoidance tended to be relatively stable across age groups.

The patterns of age-related differences varied across specific relational contexts, however. Younger people, for example, were generally more anxious in romantic and friendship relationships than older people. But the reverse was true in parental relationships: in parental relationships, younger people were less anxious than older people. Why might this be the case? One possibility is that, as people's parents age, people become less confident in the availability and responsiveness of their parents, potentially heightening the sense of anxiety people feel in those relationships.

In both peer (romantic and friendship relationships) and parental relationships, people seemed to become more avoidant across time. That is, older people were more avoidant toward their partners, friends, and parents than younger adults. One potential reason for this shift is that role norms for adults typically emphasize a greater need for autonomy and independence as people make the transition from young to middle adulthood. It is also possible that the increase in avoidance in romantic relationships mirrors shifts in marital satisfaction that are commonly observed in long-term marriages. It is important to note that global avoidance, however, did not show systematic, replicable age differences across time. This suggests that, as a general rule, people do not become more avoidant across time, but the dynamics of specific relationships may create a press for greater degrees of independence with age.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review briefly theory and research on what makes some people more secure in their attachment patterns than others. We highlighted some of the classic work that has examined the role of sensitive responsiveness as an antecedent to infant attachment patterns. We also reviewed some of the processes that may lead early attachment patterns to be sustained across time. However, we also emphasized the fact that attachment theory is not only a theory of selection, but a theory of socialization and, as such, attachment representations should be open to change over time. The consequence of this emphasis is that continuity in attachment should be considered an empirical issue rather than a strong assumption of the theory *per se*. Having said that, we should note that there is evidence of weak stability from infancy to adulthood (Fraleigh, 2002; Pinquart et al., 2013). And, as expected on the basis of canalization principles, there is evidence of higher levels of stability in adulthood than childhood. We believe that some promising research directions include examining canalization processes in more detail and exploring the implications of the hierarchical model of attachment for how we understand the dynamics of stability and change.

There were many issues we did not have space to discuss. For one, we know that individual differences in adult attachment styles are multidetermined. In other words, what makes someone secure is not simply a matter of what his or her early experiences were like with caregivers. There is a growing body of work suggesting that working models are sensitive to ongoing experiences and that the cumulative

history—not just the origins—of a person’s interpersonal experiences is important for understanding who they become (Fraley, Roisman, Booth-LaForce, Owen, & Holland, 2013). We believe that there is still a lot of work that remains to be done at the interface of personality development and attachment theory.

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