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Primary attachment to parents and peers during adolescence: Differences by attachment style

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Abstract: This study examines the nature of adolescent attachemnt to parents and peers during adolescence. A projective measure was used to classify 99 11th and 12th grade students into secure, insecure dismissing, and insecure preoccupied attachment groups.

Full text: Headnote This study examines the nature of adolescent attachment to parents and peers during adolescence. A projective measure was used to classify 99 11 th and 12th grade students into secure, insecure dismissing, and insecure preoccupied attachment groups. Respondents identified their primary attachment figure by nomination and by rating the level of attachment support they received from mothers, fathers, best friends, and boy/girlfriends. On average, parents and peers were equally likely to be identified as primary attachment figures but individual preference was strongly tied to attachment style. Secure adolescents significantly favored mothers over best friends, boy/girlfriends, and fathers. Although secure adolescents with romantic partners rated mothers lower on attachment support, none of the adolescents from this group nominated a boy/girlfriend as their primary attachment figure. In contrast insecure adolescents indicated a strong preference for boy/girlfriends and best friends as their primary target for attachment and nearly a third of dismissing adolescents identified themselves as their primary attachment figure. Findings are discussed in terms of individual differences in attachment during adolescence. INTRODUCTION According to attachment theory, children, adolescents, and adults benefit greatly from having a principal source of emotional security, a "primary attachment figure" to count on no matter how difficult life's circumstances. Mothers typically fulfill the role of primary attachment figure during childhood, but what about during adolescence? Social support research has consistently documented that by early to middle adolescence peers are valued as equal or greater sources companionship and intimacy (Buhrmester, 1996; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985; Hunter and Youniss, 1982; Wintre and Crowley, 1993). Yet, it is unclear if a shift in attachment also takes place during this time. This study examines the extent to which best friends, boy/girlfriends, mothers, and fathers serve as attachment figures during late adolescence. In addition, this study examines whether attachment preference for parent or peer is associated with attachment style. Although a person typically has more than I attachment figure, a hierarchy of attachment exists such that attachment behaviors are usually directed toward a principal or primary attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1969; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1990; Colin, 1996; Weiss, 1991). Attachment behaviors may be classified under 3 behavioral/affective features: proximity seeking, secure base effect, and separation protest. Proximity seeking captures the degree to which the attachment figure is sought for emotional support and accurately understands the emotional needs of the attached. The second feature, separation protest, captures the degree to which physical separation from the attachment figure produces anxiety and protest in the attached. The third attachment feature, secure base effect, captures the degree to which the attached feels confident to explore knowing the attachment figure is committed and available to provide support when needed (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 1999). By assessing the degree to which these 3 features apply to various close relationships an attachment hierarchy can be identified from a network of support figures. Leading attachment theorists speculate that a close peer will eventually replace a parent at the top of the emotional support hierarchy (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Rothbard and Shaver, 1991; Weiss, 1991). Only 1 study to date has directly compared attachment features in adolescent relationships with parents and

close peers. Hazan and colleagues (Hazan et al., 1991) examined changes in attachment to parents and peers among subjects ranging in age from 5 to 17 years. The authors found that by 17 years of age peers were valued over parents by 75% of the sample for proximity seeking and separation protest. For secure base effect, indexed by questions such as, "Who is the person you know will always be there for you," parents were favored slightly over peers (55% vs. 45% respectively). Some might interpret this as evidence that adolescents have different attachment figures for various attachment support functions, but this interpretation violates a cardinal principle of attachment theory, namely, that the 3 behavioral features are complementary components of the same attachment organizational system, and function together to maintain proximity to the attachment figure (Cassidy, 1999; Sroufe and Waters, 1977). The authors concluded from their findings that the process of relinquishing parents as attachment figures begins early in adolescence and is mostly complete by the time the adolescent leaves high school. This view is consistent with Weiss's statement (Weiss, 1991), "By the end of the summer following high school most adolescents seem fairly along in this process of relinquishing parents as attachment figures" (p. 71). Research on intimate relationships also supports the notion that parents lose most favored status during the adolescent years. A number of studies have compared adolescent feelings of intimacy in parent and peer relationships, most of which have found peers to rate higher on this provision by the 13 or 14 years of age (Buhrmester, 1990, 1996; Buhrmester and Furman, 1987; Hunter and Youniss, 1982; Larson and Richards, 1991; Monck, 1991). Buhrmester (1996) examined the development of intimacy with parents, friends, and romantic partners from 5th grade to young adulthood and found that by middle school, friends and romantic partners were confided in more often than parents and this trend continued through high school. By the 12th grade, romantic partners were viewed as the most important intimate targets, followed by best friends, mothers, and then fathers. Similarly, Monck (1991) found, in an all female sample, that romantic partners move to the top of the social support hierarchy by the end of high school. Consistent gender differences in studies on intimacy with parents and peers are worth noting. Both boys and girls tend to confide in mothers to a much greater degree than fathers (Larson et al., 1996; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Daughters, more than sons, experience less intimacy with fathers during adolescence, but, at the same time, girls describe their best friend and romantic relationships as more intimate than do boys (Berndt, 1982; Berndt and Perry, 1986; Monck, 1991; Shulman et al., 1997). Intimate support, however, is not the same as attachment support. In a review of the research on intimate relationships, Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990) concluded that peers are more often the intimate targets for day-to-day concerns (e.g., fashion, relationships) and parents are more often the intimate targets for long-term plans and moral or personal issues. This latter area seems closer to the construct of attachment support, which is called upon in distressing times and taken for granted during most other times (Weiss, 1991). Hence, although peers may be utilized more often, parents may be turned to when the attachment system is activated, that is, in times of distress. The present study examines the primary attachment figures during the last 2 years of high school, the period in which (according to previous research) adolescents should be actively transitioning from parents to peers as primary attachments. The study extends upon previous work in 2 important ways. First, it presents a new instrument that indexes attachment as a single construct comprised 3 interrelated features: proximity seeking, separation protest, and secure base effect. Hazan et al.'s measure of proximity seeking is questionable because items on the scale (e.g., "Who do you like to be with?) appear to index companionship and intimacy more than attachment. This might explain why peers were sought more often for this feature. A second, and perhaps more important extension of Hazan et al.'s study (Hazan et al., 1991) is an examination of individual differences as a function of attachment style. It may be that normative findings with regard to whom adolescents typically seek for emotional support are misleading, because they fail to capture important individual differences related to attachment quality. According to findings reported in studies on adolescent attachment to parents, less than half of the adolescent population is securely attached (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Kobak and Sceery, 1988). If insecure attachment quality is associated with primary attachment to a peer, then it would follow that normative findings would show that boy/girlfriends or best

friends are typically represented at the top of adolescents' attachment hierarchy. In this case, however, normative findings would not reflect appropriate or healthy attachment patterns during adolescence. By comparing patterns of attachment among secure and insecure adolescents the question of what is normative and what is appropriate can be teased apart. Adolescent and adult attachment research primarily distinguishes between 2 types of insecure attachment, insecure dismissing and insecure preoccupied (Crowell et al., 1999). Dismissing attachment is characterized by emotional selfreliance, marked by a reluctance to seek intimacy or affection from others and an active dismissal of the need for emotionally close relationships. In contrast, emotional overreliance and preoccupation on others characterize adolescents and adults classified with preoccupied attachment style. Hypotheses In keeping with previous research on the development of intimacy in parent and peer relationships, we hypothesized that adolescents, on average, will identify best friends and boy/girlfriends as primary attachment figures as often or more often than mothers and fathers. We also expected that mothers will be considered a stronger source of attachment support than fathers and romantic partners will be rated significantly higher than best friends. Attachment Style Differences Adolescent attachment hierarchies are expected to be specific to their attachment style, secure and insecure. Hypotheses are presented as within-group differences, since it is of primary interest to understand the hierarchy of attachment figures within secure, dismissing, and preoccupied attachment groups. Among secure adolescents, mothers are expected to rate higher than all other support network figures, including best friends, boy/girlfriends, and fathers. No predictions are made concerning the ranking of fathers versus best friends and boy/girlfriends. It is predicted that insecure adolescents will identify peers more often than parents as primary attachment figures, indicated by rating boy/girlfriends and best friends as significantly stronger sources of attachment support than mothers and fathers. Although dismissing and preoccupied attachment groups are expected to choose the same hierarchy of attachment figures, the 2 insecure groups are expected to differ in the degree of attachment support they receive from parents and the degree to which they nominate themselves as an attachment figure. Compared to preoccupied adolescents, dismissing adolescents are expected to rate mothers and fathers as less significant sources of attachment support and to nominate themselves more often as primary attachment figures. METHOD Sample and Procedures Forty-seven male and 52 female juniors and seniors (n = 99) were recruited from 2 Midwestern public high schools. The high schools were in the same school district but drew students from largely working class and middle class neighborhoods. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years (M = 17.3). Over 85% of the participants identified themselves as European American, while about 6, 4, and 3% identified themselves as African American, Asian, and Hispanic, respectively. Most respondents (n = 82) were recruited from required English classes; the remainder came from study hall classrooms. Of the students present in the English classes, 84% agreed to participate. This percentage was somewhat lower in the study halls, about 70%. Criteria for inclusion stipulated that all respondents had contact with 2 parents, (biological or stepparent). The sample was composed of 64 respondents from never-divorced households, 18 respondents from single parent households (15 of which were mother-custody) and 17 respondents from stepparent households. Adolescents from single-parent households were asked if they currently had some contact with the other parent; the extent of contact was not assessed. Participation was obtained through an informed consent procedure that required active consent from both students and parents. As an incentive, respondents were given $5 for their participation. Each respondent was interviewed individually at the school by members of the research team (the author and 2 trained assistants) in the spring of 1996. Immediately following the interview respondents completed a brief questionnaire. Measures Attachment Style Leading attachment theorists argue that attachment style cannot be adequately assessed from paper-and-pencil questionnaires (Crowell et al., 1999; Main, 1991; Main et al., 1985), because socially or personally desirable answers may interfere with internal representations of attachment relationships (George et al., 1985). In this study, adolescent attachment style was assessed using the Adolescent Separation Anxiety Test (ASAT; Resnick, 1989; Resnick and Haynes, 1995), a semistructured projective interview measure of attachment style during early to middle adolescence.

George et al. (1985) argue that it is necessary to "surprise the unconscious" in order to capture internal representations that may otherwise be hidden or held back from conscious processing. The ASAT, like all projective measures, is designed for this purpose. The ASAT consists of a series of 6 line drawings depicting separations from either friends or parents, or both. Since the drawings depict separations from both parents and peers the attachment construct being measured reflects a global style of emotional regulation rather than being specific to parents. Hence, the term attachment style is used in place of parental attachment. This usage is consistent with other research examining adolescent attachment (see Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). Interviews present each picture and its caption (for the sample picture in Appendix A the caption is The parents are going away for 2 weeks and leaving the teenager with a sitter, then ask respondent "How does the teenager in the picture feel?" Interviewers probe until the respondent provides a feeling and a justification. Following the "How feels" question, respondents are asked for a solution to the separation situation: "What will the teenager do next?" The separation situations are designed to activate that subject's attachment system thereby eliciting attachment representations. ASAT coding is adapted from coding procedures used in the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1985), and the revised childhood version of the SAT (Kaplan, 1985). Interviews were taped and transcribed and respondent answers were rated along 9 subscales: emotional openness, coherency, dismissing/devaluing, self-blame, resistance/withholding, preoccupied anger, displacement of feelings, and anxiety, and a solution score. Each scale is coded from 1 to 9 for each separation drawing and then a global rating from I to 9 is given for each scale across the 6 line drawings. Based on global ratings, classifications are made into 1 of 3 primary attachment groups: secure, preoccupied, or dismissing (see Resnick, 1989 for a detailed description of the coding procedure). Secure attachment is characterized by subject responses that exhibit easy access to vulnerable feelings (i.e., high emotional openness scores and low resistance/withholding scores), coherent connections between feelings and justifications (i.e., high coherency scores, low anxiety scores), valuing the support of others (low dismissing/devaluing), and low anger toward self and others. Dismissing attachment is characterized by particularly high scores on resistance/withholding, low scores on emotional openness, and a lack of support seeking in the solution question. Preoccupied attachment is characterized by heightened and unregulated anxiety, low coherence, and consistent anger directed toward self or others. ASAT classifications are based on global scores (across the 6 pictures) for each scale. The current study classified about 44% of the respondents as secure, 26% as dismissing, and 28% as preoccupied. Although less than half the sample was classified as secure, this ratio of secure to insecure is consistent with previous studies using the AAI or other adult attachment measures with late adolescent populations (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Crowell et al., 1999; Kobak and Sceery, 1988). The coding and classification procedures for the ASAT is highly consistent with childhood and adult measures of attachment quality and, as such, reflects strong content validity as a measure of adolescent attachment quality. The design and administration of the ASAT is adapted from the childhood version of the SAT (Kaplan, 1985) and its coding is modeled after the coding procedures used for the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George et al., 1985). The use of the separation situations to capture adolescent views of distressing events is consistent with what Main et al. (1985) call "a move to the level of representation" during adolescence and adulthood, where internal models may be best captured through person perceptions rather than behavioral observations. Unfortunately, the adolescent period represents a measurement gap in attachment research and a concurrent validity study is therefore difficult to carry out. Although studies have used the AAI with late adolescent populations, adolescence represents to lower age limit for this instrument. A concurrent validity study between the AAI and ASAT would be highly beneficial; however, it is unlikely due to the extensive time required for administering and coding both instruments. A number of recent studies using the ASAT Resnick (Martin and Austin, 1995; Resnick and Haynes, 1995) have reported high interrater reliability (kappa = 0.90) for the three attachment classifications. The author was trained by Resnick, the author of the ASAT, in the coding of the ASAT and obtained 85% agreement with Resnick (kappa = 0.72) on a randomly selected sample of 20 transcripts.

Nomination of Primary Emotional Support Figure After completing the ASAT, Respondents were asked "Thinking about the important people in your life right now, who would you say that you rely on most for emotional support and closeness? Your answer could be a friend, a parent, a boy/girlfriend, yourself, or anyone you feel is most important to you for emotional support." Answers to this interview question were coded as the respondent's nomination of primary attachment figure. Background Data On the questionnaire, respondents provided information on their gender, age, household composition (biological mother/father or stepmother/father), their parent's education level, their family income, and their ethnic identification (African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, non-Hispanic White, and other). Based on current recommendations for measuring socioeconomic status (SES) (Entwisle and Astone, 1994; Hauser, 1994), this variable was calculated by combining the education level for the mother figure and father figure with the family's estimated yearly income. Respondents were asked to indicate the highest level of education completed by their mother or stepmother and their father or stepfather. Eight response choices ranged from "Some grade school" to "Professional or graduate degree." Adolescents were also asked to estimate their family's yearly income. Four response choices ranged from "less than 20,000" to "greater than 80,000." The median family income was reported as between $40,000 and $60,000 (SD = 1) and the median education level was reported as "4-year college graduate." Only 15 respondents were classified as working class, determined by a family income of less than $20,000 or an average education level of high school or less. An SES score was calculated by combining parents' education score with the income score (income score was multiplied by 2 for equal weighting); (M = 11.90 and SD = 2.85). SES was entered as a continuous variable for comparisons with attachment style, attachment support, and attachment nomination. Findings indicated that SES was not significantly related to any of the study variables, possibly due to its restricted range. Attachment Support in Parent and Peer Relationships The questionnaire featured a new instrument developed for this study, the Attachment Support Inventory (ASI). Respondents rated mothers, fathers, best friends, and boy/girlfriends on 3 attachment behavioral features: separation protest, proximity seeking, and secure base effect. A pilot of the ASI was conducted with 35 12th graders, using a set of 25 Likert scaled items on a 5 point scale. The current inventory was reduced to 17 items listed in Appendix B. The higher the score, the higher the rating of attachment support for each figure rated. The 3 attachment behavioral features are not intended to represent distinct factors but 3 necessary and interrelated components of the attachment system (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Sroufe and Waters, 1977). A principle component analysis was employed to examine 24 items measuring each of the 3 attachment features. Items were retained with communalities greater than 0.60 (see Stevens, 1992). Seventeen items were retained as strong indicators of attachment support, including 4 items measuring separation protest, 5 items measuring proximity seeking, and the remaining 8 items measuring secure base effect. Using an oblique rotation, eigenvalues on the 17 item inventory ranged from 10.5 to 11.2 across the 4 rated support figures with the mean communality ranging from 0.65 to 0.72. Internal consistency alphas for the ASI ranged from r = 0.93 for boy/girlfriends to r = 0.97 for mothers. Respondents provided background information on each of the 4 figures rated on the ASI. Respondents who had more than 2 parents (i.e. stepmother or stepfather and a living biological mother and father or both) were asked to rate the 2 parents who provided the most emotional support. This distinction was made to obtain the most valid comparison of parent versus peer support. For ratings of best friends, respondents were asked to "Think of a friend who is most imortant to you." A stipulation was made that this person should be someone with whom they regularly spend time and who is not their boy/girlfriend. In regards to romantic relationships, respondents were asked "Do you currently have a boy/girlfriend?" No qualifiers were provided for what constituted a romantic relationship. PLAN OF ANALYSIS The principal aim of this study was to better understand whom adolescents consider to be their primary emotional target, or attachment figure, and whether a hierarchy of attachment existed within each of the attachment groups, Whom adolescents consider to be their primary emotional target was derived from 2 measures: (1) a "nomination" measure that forced adolescents to choose a single support provider (e.g., mother, father, self, best friend); and

(2) the Attachment Support Inventory (ASI) that asked respondents to provide separate ratings of the support they received from mothers, fathers, best friends, and boy/girlfriends. Within group analyses on the nomination variable was conducted using a series of Chi-Square Goodness of Fit procedures, and between group analyses was conducted using chi-square procedures. ASI ratings of each support figure were entered as 4 levels (mother, father, best friend, boy/girlfriend) of a within-subject factor in a Repeated Measure Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure to determine if ratings of the 4 figures were significantly different. A separate Repeated Measure ANOVA. was conducted for each attachment group (secure, insecure dismissing, and insecure preoccupied). As discussed earlier, analyses of within group differences took precedence over an examination of between group differences since this study is more interested in whether adolescents perceive a hierarchy of attachment figures within each attachment group. That is, we are interested in knowing if secure adolescents rely upon a parent for primary support and if insecure adolescents perceive a peer as more important source of attachment than mothers and fathers. It would be less interesting and less relevant to this study's research question to note if insecure adolescents, compared to their secure counterparts, rated parents as less supportive. Two Repeated Measure ANOVA procedures were employed for each attachment group. In the first procedure ratings of boy/girlfriends were excluded from the analysis in order to include respondents who reported not having a romantic partner. The second procedure included boy/girlfriends and was limited to respondents who reported having a romantic partner. To avoid redundant analysis of the data, this second analysis was used strictly for comparisons between ratings of boy/girlfriends and ratings of the other 4 figures in the ASI. RESULTS Descriptive Statistics A series of one way ANOVA procedures were conducted to examine if attachment style classifications, as indexed by the Separation Anxiety Test (ASI), were related to 4 background variables: gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family structure. None of the background variables were found to be associated with attachment style. Secondly, simple linear regression procedures were used to examine if the 4 background variables were associated with attachment support inventory ratings (ASI scores). A significant gender effect was found for father ratings on the ASI. Fathers were rated higher as a source of attachment support by males (m = 55.26) than females (m = 48.34), t(98) = 2.3, p <0.05. This finding is consistent with previous research on gender differences in perceptions of father support during adolescence (see Hunter and Youniss, 1982; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). No other effects were found by gender, SES, or family structure; consequently, these variables were dropped from further analyses. Nomination of Primary Attachment Figure, Main Effects Adolescents' nominations fell under 9 categories, including mother, father, both parents, sibling, other relative, best friend, friends, romantic partner, and self. Compared to any other category, mothers were the preferred choice, chosen 10 times more often than fathers and twice as often as the next closest category, best friend. Ironically, an adult is named in the most frequently nominated category (e.g., mothers), and adults comprise the 2 least frequently nominated categories, relatives and friends, which make up 5% of the nominations. Parents were also infrequently nominated together (9%). Interestingly, when nominations were collapsed into 3 categories-parents (includes relatives), peers (includes siblings), and self, the results indicated no significant difference between the number of adult and peer nominations (see Table I). This finding suggests that parents and peers are equally likely to be considered a primary source of support, albeit mothers more than fathers, and boy/girlfriends more than best friends. Nomination by Attachment Style It was expected that adolescents' nomination of primary support figure would differ significantly within each attachment group. Results from Chi-Square Goodness of Fit analyses confirmed these expectations, revealing that nearly 90% of secure adolescents reported a parental preference over that of peers, X2(44, 1) = 17.81, p <0.001. In direct contrast, over 90% of adolescents in the dismissing attachment group nominated either peers or themselves as primary attachment figures. A comparison of parent to peer nominations indicated that best friends and boy/girlfriends were chosen significantly more often than parents, X2(19, 1) = 16.2, p <0.001. Findings among adolescents classified as preoccupied indicated a preference for peer support over parent support, albeit not as robust as the dismissing group, x2(27, 1) = 3.85, p <0.05. Two chi-square procedures

were conducted to examine group differences related to boy/girlfriend- and self-nominations. Consistent with expectations, dismissing adolescents were considerably more likely to nominate themselves as primary support figures compared to secure and preoccupied attachment groups, 7 times as often as secure and more than 3 times that of preoccupied youth, X 2(99, 2) = 11.19, p <0.01. Interestingly, among adolescents with romantic partners (n = 48) more than half of insecure preoccupied adolescents (55%) chose their boy/girlfriend as their primary source of emotional support compared to only 21 % of dismissing and none of the adolescents in the secure group, X2(48, 2) = 16.77, p <0.001. Ironically, preoccupied adolescents were the less likely to report having a boy/girlfriend (35%) compared to dismissing (54%) and secure adolescents (54%). The nomination findings provide an initial indication of distinct attachment hierarchies within each attachment group. The single-choice format, however, fails to describe relative spacing between support figures, a limitation that is addressed in the next section, using the ASI data. Attachment Support Inventory (ASI) Ratings, Main Effects The ASI assesses the extent to which 4 figures in the adolescent's support network serve as sources of attachment support. In keeping with previous research on the development of intimacy in parent and peer relationships, it was

Table I. Frequency Distribution of Who Adolescents Nominated as Their Primary Support Figure

Group	Primary support figure		
	Parents	Peer	Self
Secure [$n = 45$]	36 (80)	8 (18)	1 (2)
Dismissing [$n = 26$]	1 (4)	18 (69)	7 (27)
Preoccupied [$n = 28$]	9 (32)	17 (61)	2 (7)
Total [$n = 99$]	46 (47)	43 (43)	10 (10)

Note. Percentages are given in parentheses.

expected that adolescents would describe their peer relationships, especially with boy/girlfriends, as more supportive than their parent relationships. Planned paired t-test comparisons revealed that adolescents rated mothers and best friends equally, and both significantly higher than fathers, mother versus father t(98) = 4.52, p <0.05; best friend versus father t(98) = 2.85, p <0.05 (refer to Table II for mean scores). Contrasts generated from the subsample of 47 respondents who reported having a boy/girlfriend indicated that adolescents reported significantly stronger attachment support from romantic partners (m = 64.57) than mothers (m = 57.66), t(46) = 2.81, p <0.01 , or fathers (m = 53.28), t(46) = 4.01, p <0.01. Overall findings mostly supported expectations that adolescents would describe their peer relationships as more supportive than their parent relationships, this was especially true for adolescents involved in romantic relationships. The next section looks at ASI ratings within attachment groups.

Table II. Ratings of Support Figures by Attachment Group[a]

	Support figures			
	Mother	Father	Best friend	Mean rating
Secure [$n = 45$]	66.02 (13.92)	60.31 (14.60)	59.71 (15.55)	59.95 (9.35)
Insecure	54.39 (14.49)	46.73 (17.83)	61.53 (14.84)	54.21 (15.71)
Dismissing [$n = 26$]	53.42 (15.63)	46.00 (13.66)	60.23 (14.48)	53.88 (9.38)
Preoccupied [n=28]	56.64 (13.00)	53.00 (14.38)	61.82 (15.30)	55.65 (10.64)
Total [$n = 99$]	60.05 (15.07)	54.48 (15.62)	60.44 (15.08)	57.14 (10.00)

Note. Figures are mean ASI ratings; standard deviations are given in parentheses.
[a]Does not include ratings of boy/girlfriends.

Table III. Ratings of Support Figures by Attachment Group for Adolescents With Boy/girlfriends

	Support figures				
	Mother	Father	Best friend	Boy/girlfriend	Mean rating
Secure [$n = 24$]	61.33 (15.38)	57.29 (16.45)	60.50 (14.17)	64.38 (13.06)	58.87 (9.21)
Insecure	52.95 (15.79)	48.66 (12.79)	58.22 (13.55)	65.58 (11.62)	56.31 (13.43)
Dismissing [$n = 14$]	52.14 (17.99)	47.29 (14.54)	59.14 (14.41)	62.71 (10.47)	54.56 (9.40)
Preoccupied [$n = 10$]	56.44 (11.26)	51.89 (10.01)	56.00 (13.34)	68.00 (12.11)	56.00 (6.14)
Total [$n = 47$]	57.66 (15.76)	53.28 (15.24)	59.23 (13.89)	64.57 (12.05)	57.04 (8.82)

Note. Standard deviations given in parentheses.

Attachment Support Inventory Ratings Within Each Attachment Group Secure Findings mostly support expectations that secure adolescents would rate parents, especially mothers, higher than peers as a source of attachment support (see Table II). Planned orthogonal contrasts (per contrast error rate = 0.05; see Marascuilo and Serlin, 1988) indicated that mothers were rated significantly higher than best friends, $t(44) = 3.0$, $p < 0.05$, and fathers $t(44) = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$. No main effects or interactions were found by gender. The second analysis, limited to the 24 secure respondents with boy/girlfriends, revealed no differences in support ratings between mothers, best friends, and boy/girlfriends (see Table III). Interestingly, ratings of mothers were significantly lower among secure respondents with a romantic partner (M = 61.33) compared to those without (M = 71.38); $t(44) = 2.57$, $p < 0.05$. This drop effectively washed out differences that were apparent in the first analysis. This finding is surprising given the strong preference for maternal support and the lack of preference for romantic figures indicated by the nomination findings presented earlier. In summary, secure adolescents without boy/girlfriends rated mothers higher than best friends as a source of attachment support. For secure adolescents with boy/girlfriends, no difference was found between ratings of parents and peers. Insecure Dismissing and Preoccupied Findings supported expectations that adolescents identified as insecure would describe peers as stronger sources of attachment support than parents (see Table II). Best friends rated significantly higher than both mothers, $t(55) = 2.98$, $p < 0.01$, and fathers, $t(55) = 5.04$, $p < 0.001$. Among the sample of 24 insecure respondents with romantic partners, ratings of boy/girlfriends were considerably higher than those of mothers, $t(23) = 3.12$, $p < 0.01$, and fathers, $t(23) = 3.38$, $p < 0.01$. Boy/girlfriends rated higher than best friends, but contrary to expectations, the difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.18$). No main effects or interactions were found by gender. When insecure group (insecure dismissing and insecure preoccupied) was entered as a between subjects factor no differences were found between the 2 attachment groups. Although preoccupied adolescents rated boy/girlfriends considerably higher than best friends (see Table II), this difference was not statistically significant. Given a small sample size (n = 24) there is considerably less power to reject the null hypothesis for this analysis. Mothers were perceived as less supportive (m = 44.40) by dismissing adolescents compared to preoccupied ratings (m = 48.89). Similarly, dismissing youth rated fathers (m = 52.85) lower than did preoccupied youth (m = 55.82). Although in the expected direction, these differences were not statistically significant. In summary, the nomination findings and the ASI findings indicated the following attachment hierarchies for each attachment group. Among the figures rated on the attachment support inventory, secure adolescents tended to view mothers as their primary attachment figure, best friends as secondary sources, and fathers the least likely source of attachment support. Among secure adolescents with romantic affiliations the ASI ratings revealed no significant difference among ratings of mothers, boy/girlfriends, and best friends. When the ASI findings are viewed in conjunction with the nomination findings mother preference becomes even stronger, with this choice favored by 90% of this attachment group and not a single nomination going to romantic partners. Among insecure adolescents the ASI data and nomination data indicated a consistent hierarchy of attachment, where boy/girlfriends were considered the primary source of attachment support, best friends secondary, mothers third, and fathers the least relied upon figure for

attachment support. Interestingly, the only consistency between attachment groups is the position of fathers at the bottom of the attachment hierarchy. DISCUSSION Bowlby (1969/1982) and Ainsworth (1989) speculated that during adolescence attachment to peers may become as prominent as parental attachments, suggesting the possibility that adolescents may equally distribute attachments across multiple close relationships, or that a peer may replace a parent the top of the emotional support hierarchy. The third possibility is that peers will remain secondary to parents, particularly mothers, as a source of attachment support. In fact, findings from this study supported all 3 conditions, primary attachment to a parent, primary attachment to a peer, and distributed attachment across parents and peers. Two factors, attachment style and the presence of a boy/girlfriend, significantly influenced which condition was most likely to be expressed. Findings suggest that among adolescents with secure attachment styles, mothers are likely to remain primary attachment figures through the school-age years. When asked why they chose their parent for primary support, many secure youth discussed the committed nature of their relationship to their parents, such as in the response below. I can go to [my mom] with my problems, I can rely on her to be there for me, I know that she won't get mad at me for you know, for like a mistake or something like that, um, if I have problems, whatever, she, I don't know, she's, she's always there for me (#41). In Ainsworth's words (Ainsworth, 1969, p. 971), our most supportive relationships "bridge gaps in time and space, . . . [and] are durable, even under the impact of adverse conditions." Compared to parental relationships, adolescent friendships, and to a greater extent romantic relationships, are unstable (Berndt, 1982), and quickly erode in the face of conflict or decreasing contact (Laursen, 1993). Instability and high maintenance are relationship qualities that are antithetical to a sense of felt security. According to Weiss (1991), our primary attachment relationship are "taken-for-granted" during most times as the result of the felt security that assures support will available when needed. Secure adolescents appeared to recognize and benefit from the enduring quality of their parental relationships. Although secure adolescents who had a boy/girlfriend exhibited diminished maternal support-seeking compared to their nonromantically involved counterparts, none of the adolescents from the secure group nominated a romantic partner as their most important source of emotional support. Based on the relative instability of peer relationships, it appears that an attachment to a best friend or boy/girlfriend is an unlikely event before young adulthood, but only for secure youth. Insecure attachment patterns suggest that the search for an attachment figure outside the family is often completed during or before the high school years. Among adolescents with insecure attachment styles, best friends and particularly boy/girlfriend were the preferred attachment target. Past studies on adolescent attachment have indicated that greater than half of the adolescent population have insecure attachment, a finding that was replicated in the present study. Ironically, relinquishing mothers before leaving high school may be a normative event for these adolescents, but, at the same time, may put adolescents at risk for adjustment problems. Elicker et al. (1992), in a study of attachment and friendship quality among youth attending a summer youth camp, noted that insecure youth tended to have less harmonious- and fewer reciprocated friendships and a greater frequency of antisocial behavior. The influence of a friend may be compounded if that friend becomes a primary attachment figure and, possibly contributing to higher susceptibility to antisocial peer pressure and sexual coercion. Adult attachment research has noted that insecure attachments in romantic relationships have been associated with unhealthy patterns of commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction (Morgan and Shaver, 1999; Simpson, 1990). Understanding how attachment patterns affect the nature and course of adolescent romantic relationships deserves important consideration for future research. Individual differences between the 2 insecure attachment styles also emerged in this study's findings. Among dismissing youth, peers seemed to be preferred over parents by default, as a consequence of negative or indifferent perceptions of parental support. It must be noted that almost a third of this attachment group nominated themselves as their most important source of support. To be sure, many dismissing adolescents expressed a general mistrust of others and preferred to be alone with their problems. This pattern of support seeking conforms to the prototypic dismissing style, characterized by negative internal representations of others as support figures and perceptions

of self as invulnerable to emotional needs (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Kobak and Sceery, 1988). Like dismissing adolescents, preoccupied adolescents indicated a significant preference for peer support. However, the 2 insecure groups may have opted for peer support for different reasons. The social isolation particular to dismissing adolescents is more likely to be a consequence of a conscious choice to distance themselves from others. In contrast, the preoccupied adolescent may have difficulty establishing close relations due to perceptions of low self-worth and low social agency. Such attitudes were expressed by preoccupied youth when discussing their close relationships with parents and friends. Respondent: ... my friends kind of take me to unwanted areas, like where it's not safe and all that, like there isn't like the, [parents] take me back and keep me secure and tries to, so I'll be better and safe, and my friends don't really like last that long (#99). Interviewer: "What does emotional supports mean to you?" Respondent: "Pick up the pieces for you and take care of you, something that helps hold you up." (#42) For preoccupied youth, parents may remain the most viable source of support until a close friendship or sexual relationship is found, upon which the adolescent may readily switch allegiances hoping for greater security. The tendency for preoccupied individuals to form quick romantic bonds has been reported in adult studies (see Morgan and Shaver, 1999). Effects of Background Variables Few differences in study findings were related to background variables. In fact, adolescent scores on study scales did not significantly differ by socioeconomic status, family structure, or ethnicity. A single gender difference indicated that females reported lower ratings of father-support than did males. This finding is consistent with previous research (Youniss and Smollar, 1985), which has shown females to grow emotionally distant from fathers from early to late adolescence. The relatively inconsequential influence of background variables may be due to a relatively homogeneous sample with respect to ethnicity and SES. Furthermore, gender differences have not been consistently reported in attachment research on children or adolescents. Limitations and Future Directions The data was gathered from a relatively small and homogeneous sample, thus limiting the external validity of findings. The extensive time required for interviews and coding of the projective measure placed constraints on the number of possible participants. Nonetheless, given the small sample, the statistically significant differences point to moderate to large effect sizes. This research was largely exploratory in that no previous study has examined the same questions. As such, an important next step is extending the research questions to more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse samples. The present study was limited to data gathered from a single source, adolescent reports. The single source method, however, has been defended by other researchers (see Steinberg, 1990; Wintre et al., 1995), who argue that adolescent perceptions are valid representations of their experience, whether or not their perceptions are accurate with respect to actual behaviors. In fact, social desirability has been found to be most problematic when using parents as the data source to assess aspects of filial relations. Furthermore, this study's use of a projective measure to assess attachment style mitigated the negative impact of socially desirable answers or defensive strategies. An important next step in this line of research is gathering longitudinal data that can track the process of parental support seeking during middle adolescence to young adulthood. Longitudinal studies could examine if the addition of a close friend or a boy/girlfriend results in immediate or gradual changes in support-seeking behaviors with parents. Similarly, they could indicate whether or not adolescents resume their previous level of support seeking with parents upon the dissolution of critical peer relationships. In particular, it would be important to assess the timing of the shift from parent to peer as a primary attachment figure. At what age is this shift normative and adaptive, and does this depend upon attachment style. The findings from this study highlight individual pathways in attachment during adolescence. Of the many pathways discovered, the normative pathway among secure adolescents may serve as a focal point since this group has shown the healthiest social adjustment patterns through the high school years (Elicker et al., 1992; Kobak and Sceery, 1988; Simpson, 1990). For the secure group, mothers tended to fulfill the role of primary attachment figure, even among secure adolescents with boy/girlfriends. This finding underscores the critical importance of parental support through adolescence. In keeping with the ethological roots of attachment theory, it is interestingly to note that most

animal offspring leave the protection and security of their parents within the first few years of life. In contrast, among human offspring the relinquishing of parents as primary attachment figures may be considered a precocious event if occurring much before 17 years of age.

Note: Drawings pictured female teens for use with female participants. Captions were read to participants but were not visually displayed.

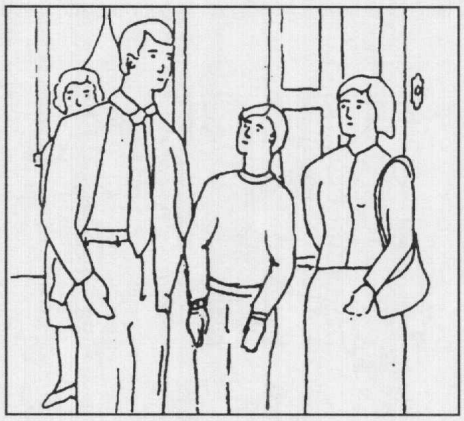

Fig. 1. The parents are going away from home for 2 weeks and leaving the teen with a sitter.

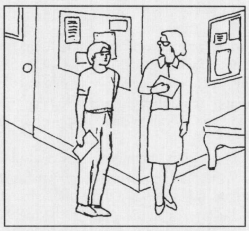

Fig. 2. The teenager is being transferred to a new school.

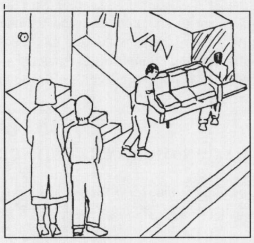

Fig. 3. The family is moving to a new neighborhood.

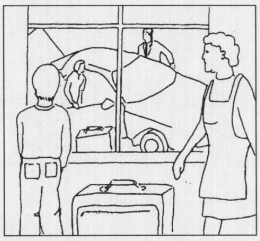

Fig. 4. The teenager will live permanently with his grandparents and without his parents.

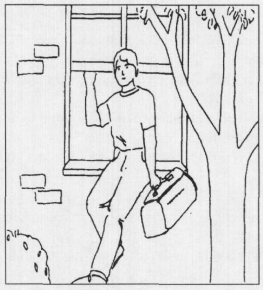

Fig. 5. The teenager is running away from home.

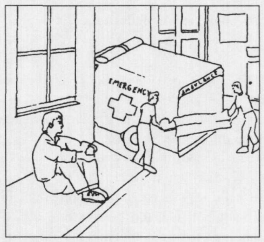

Fig. 6. The teenagers parent is being taken to the hospital in an ambulance.

APPENDIX B: ATTACHMENT SUPPORT INVENTORY (ASI)

No, of items = 17

Sample Response Set

	Little or none	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely much	The most
Mother	1	2	3	4	5
Father	1	2	3	4	5
Best friend	1	2	3	4	5
Boy/girlfriend	1	2	3	4	5

Separation protest

1. How hurt would you feel if this person was unavailable when you needed to see him/her?
2. How much would it bother you if you knew couldn't see or talk to this person for 2 months?
3. How sure are you that this person will continue to be an important part of your life in the future?
4. How sure are you that this relationship will last no matter what?

Support seeking

5. How important is this person to you when you are experiencing extremely difficult times?
6. How important is this person when you are deciding what to do with your life?
7. How much do you share secrets and private feelings with this person?
8. How much do you seek this person's point of view on things that most concern you?
9. How much does this person understand you?

Secure base effect

10. How much does this person make your life feel more secure and manageable?
11. How much does just knowing this person is available make you more confident in the things that you do?
12. How much security does this person provide just knowing this person is available to you when you need him/her?
13. How much effect does this person have on your life?
14. How much do you consider this person to be available to you?
15. How important are the things that this person provides you that nobody else can (not including sexual behaviors with boy/girlfriend)?
16. How much does this person really care about you?
17. How much does this person have a strong feeling of affection (love or liking) toward you?

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