

**Adolescent Attachment: A Validation of the Inventory of Parental Representations**

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**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Pace University**

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PREVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Although progress has been made recently in recognizing the importance of attachment during adolescence, research is limited because of the lack of convenient and valid methods for assessing attachment to parents during this developmental stage. Self-report measures tend to be the most common and convenient ways to examine attachment during adolescence. However, of the most widely used measures, common criticisms suggest that instruments fail to tap into the dimensions associated with insecure attachments and fail to demonstrate construct validity. Further, few self-reports have specifically looked at parental representations during the high school years, despite research showing that many key changes occur during that time. Seeking to improve upon these limitations, and to expand the field of study of adolescent development, Hart (1992) developed the Inventory of Parental Representations (IPR) as a measure of adolescents' attachment to their mothers and fathers. The IPR is a 71-item self-report measure that consists of seven scales representing varied aspects of parental representations; five of those scales are designed to measure aspects of insecure attachment.

This study examined the validity of the IPR, through a study of its convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. It also evaluated whether the IPR added to the prediction of various adolescent outcome variables above and beyond that of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. Participants were 118 males and 145 females ranging in age from 14 to 18 years from a suburban high school. Participants were administered a packet of materials containing several self-report measures assessing varied dimensions of adolescent development. Demographic information was obtained,

and four self-report measures were used: the IPR, Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), Millon Adolescent Personality Inventory (MAPI), and Erikson's Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI).

Findings revealed support for the establishment of convergent validity of the IPR, which was demonstrated through two separate procedures by examining the relationship between the IPR and the IPPA. In order to further establish construct validity, discriminant validity of the IPR was partially demonstrated by showing that the IPR had low correlations with grade point average. For predictive validity, it was found that parental representations of parents as supportive and encouraging of the adolescent's individuation were strongly related to lower levels of internalizing and externalizing symptoms on the YSR, more adaptive personality styles on the MAPI, and higher levels of identity achievement on the EPSI. When directly comparing the IPR with the IPPA, the IPR was able to add to the prediction of internalizing and externalizing symptoms, stages of identity development, and several MAPI personality styles. Each of the seven scales of the IPR proved useful in predicting varied outcomes of adolescent development.

Having demonstrated the validity of the IPR, it is hoped that it will be a useful tool for psychologists working with adolescents particularly in the school setting. As attachment to parents has been shown to predict important personal and interpersonal outcomes, including psychopathology, personality, and identity development, the IPR could be incorporated into a psychologist's repertoire of social-emotional testing instruments. Interventions could ultimately be designed in order to improve parent-adolescent relationships both during adolescence and beyond.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence has traditionally been regarded as a period of individuation whereby the adolescent gains autonomy from parents and begins to form a more stable and unique sense of identity. In doing this, the adolescent may be conflicted about the simultaneous need to remain connected to one's parents and yet desire to separate from them. Attachment theory is one framework which may help to conceptualize adolescents' ability to successfully navigate this difficult passage from childhood into adulthood. However, unlike in the infant and adult attachment literatures there are no gold standard approaches toward assessing attachment to parents during adolescence.

Several studies have established a need for the development of more convenient and valid methods for empirically examining adolescent attachment to parents. Review of the self-report literature on attachment in adolescence suggests that while existing measures have proven successful in capturing secure attachments, they have been unable to tap into the dimensions associated with insecure attachment styles. Seeking to improve upon these limitations, Hart (1992) developed the Inventory of Parental Representations (IPR) as a measure of adolescent-parent attachments in non-clinical high school-aged populations. The IPR is a 71-item self-report measure that contains seven scales representing varied aspects of parental representations; five of those scales are designed to measure aspects of insecure attachment. The purpose of this study is to

validate this new measure of adolescent attachment. Validation will be shown through a study of its convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. By expanding upon the insecure dimensions of attachment studied via self-report, studying a high school aged population, and by demonstrating construct validity, the IPR improves upon limitations of existing self-report measures of adolescent-parent attachments.

PREVIEW

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence has long been characterized as a period of intense intrapsychic struggle between the dependency needs of childhood and the adolescent's competing desire for independence and autonomy (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1982). Traditional psychoanalytic theorists have written extensively about adolescence as a time of turmoil. Anna Freud (1958) described adolescence as a time whereby the adolescent mourns the loss of childhood and in doing so begins to make progress towards identity formation. Object relational theorists have compared the developmental tasks associated with adolescence, including identity development, to Mahler's (1968) conceptualization of the separation-individuation process that occurs during infancy and early childhood. Specifically, Blos (1967) proposed adolescence to be a "second individuation" process, whereby the adolescent, similar to the toddler, individuates and forms more constant and coherent self and object representations. According to Blos (1967), this negotiation between these two desires results in an "ensuring tension (that) puts an inordinate strain on both ego and drive organization, this strain is responsible for the many and varied distortions and failures in individuation" (p. 169).

The traditional attachment literature, proposed originally by Bowlby (1969), which described the affectional bond between an infant and caregiver, has only recently been applied to the study of adolescent development (Rice, 1990). In his original

description of attachment theory, Bowlby (1977) defined attachment behavior as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser” (p. 203). Bowlby further posited that an attachment system has evolved to maintain proximity between infants and their caretakers under conditions of danger or threat, including prolonged separation from caregivers (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). According to this formulation, the attachment system is “especially prone to activation when the infant is afraid, hurt, ill, or tired, and, under such conditions, the infant will emit attachment behaviors such as crying and clinging to establish contact with the attachment figure” (Bartholomew, 1993, p. 32).

Sroufe and Waters (1977) expanded the notion of the affective component involved in the bond between infants and caregivers. They used the term “felt security” to reflect the goal of the attachment behavioral system. Specifically, they posited that “proximity seeking is not automatically elicited but depends on the infant’s evaluation of a variety of internal and external parameters, in terms of a subjective experience of security and insecurity” (Sroufe and Waters, 1977, p. 1186). During early childhood, the quality of the attachment bond seems to be determined largely by the continuity and the quality of the caregiver’s treatment of the child (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Through the Strange Situation, Ainsworth et al. (1978) demonstrated three distinct patterns of attachment. First, security in infancy and early childhood develops as a result of consistent and positive caregiving. *Secure* infants appear to perceive their caregivers as reliable sources of protection and security. The second classification, *anxious-resistant* or *ambivalent*, is often the result of inconsistent parenting. At times the

caregiver may be intrusive and at other times shows little interest in the child, resulting in the child's ambivalent behavior towards the caregiver. Third, *avoidant* patterns are often the result of a distant caregiver, resulting in infants or children who avoid their caregiver when distressed (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Especially crucial is the degree to which infants learn that they can rely on their attachment figures as sources of security and support (Bartholomew, 1993).

According to Bowlby (1973), over time young children internalize these experiences with caregivers to form mental representations or internal working models of themselves and others. These cognitive structures enable the child to integrate experiences pertaining to the self and self-other relationships (Rice, 1990). In turn, these internal representations then serve as models that "include expectations about the attachment figure's responsiveness and accessibility, as well as the self's deservingness of such care" (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000, p. 46). Internal working models are believed to operate automatically and partly outside of conscious awareness (Bartholomew, 1993). It is further believed that internal working models tend to be self-perpetuating over time (Bartholomew, 1993). Bowlby theorized that attachment behavior "is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave" (Bowlby, 1977, p. 203). Longitudinal research with the Strange Situation has shown that the attachment classifications tend to be fairly stable over time (Levy, Blatt, and Shaver (1998).

Recognizing the stability of attachment over time, Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), which is a semistructured interview where adults are asked to provide autobiographical information regarding early attachment relationships with parents, along with descriptions of their current

relationships with parents. The AAI rests on the theory of internal working models, hypothesizing that “an adult’s evaluation of childhood experiences and their influence on current functioning becomes organized into a relatively stable state of mind” (van Ijzendoorn, 1995). Based on their accounts, adults are classified into four categories, which include autonomous or secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and disorganized. Several studies have found that adult’s accounts of their own childhood experiences could predict their own children’s classification in the Strange Situation with an approximately 80% accuracy rating (van Ijzendoorn, 1995). van Ijzendoorn (1995) hypothesized that “individual differences in the parents’ mental representation of attachment are thought to determine their responsiveness to the child’s attachment signals, and therefore, to direct the child’s socioemotional development, particularly the attachment relationship with the parent” (p. 387).

Building from this work, more recent literature has shown that attachment relationships continue to be important throughout development (Ainsworth, 1989), as the internal representations of childhood continue to shape later relationship development (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Early attachment patterns have been shown to predict the quality of children’s peer relationships through early childhood (Cohn, Patterson, & Christopoulos, 1991). For example, Sroufe (1983) found that children rated as securely attached at 12 months of age had better peer relationships in preschool than children who exhibited insecure patterns of attachment. Recently, Furman and Wehner (1997) proposed a theoretical model of the development of relationships for adolescents that emphasizes a hierarchy of internal working models from parents to close friends to romantic partners. Initially parents are the main source of support and affiliation.

However, as development proceeds, peers become the source of affiliation and support. In early childhood, the behaviors that allow for affiliation are often limited to play. However, during adolescence the role of close friends seems to change once again. Specifically, during adolescence a close friend can serve as an attachment figure, because they provide companionship and comfort (Furman & Wehner, 1997).

However, despite this assertion, the assessment of parent-child attachment beyond infancy and into adolescence has only recently begun to be studied. The progress of this field of study seems to be impeded by a lack of convenient and standard methods for assessing attachment to parents during adolescence (Vivona, 2000). Accordingly, the examination of the link between attachment and psychological disturbances has further been limited by the lack of reliable and valid measures of attachment (Lyddon, Bradford, & Nelson, 1993). A recent metanalysis of the adolescent attachment literature, revealed that there are three primary ways in which adolescent-parent attachment relationships are assessed, which include, structured interviews, observational coding measures, and self-report rating scales, each with respective limitations (Lopez & Gover, 1993).

#### *Measuring Parent-Adolescent Attachment: The Adult Attachment Interview*

Several studies have applied the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) to the study of parent attachment relationships during late adolescence (Allen & Hauser, 1996, Kobak & Sceery, 1988). The Adult Attachment Interview developed by Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) is an attachment history interview that classifies adults into different attachment classifications based upon retrospective accounts regarding childhood relationships with their parents. Vivona (2000) points out that using the AAI with adolescents “requires extensive training and expertise to administer and to code” (p. 317).

Further, when used with adolescents, the AAI has traditionally been conducted with late adolescents (college aged) or with clinical samples (Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996), while rarely used with a younger, non-clinical population.

#### *Observational Measures*

Similar concerns regarding level of training apply to the observational coding systems. For example, Ratti, Humphrey, and Lyons (1996) used an observational system to observe the relationships among parent-daughter dyads. In order to ensure greater reliability, only advance graduate students with over 100 hours of training were used as observers. In other observational research, concerns regarding whether context can alter the participant's behavior has been discussed within the literature as limitations of observational coding systems (Parker & Herrera, 1996).

#### *Self-Report Measures*

Self-report measures are the most frequently used instruments to assess parent-adolescent attachment in non-clinical samples (Lopez & Gover, 1993). Unlike clinical interviews and observational coding systems, very little training is required to administer a self-report instrument. Further, unlike interviews and observational coding symptoms, self reports "have the advantage of capturing the dimensional nature of attachment" (Sund & Wichstrom, 2002, p. 1479). Considering the wide domain of impact that attachment has on adolescent development (Rice, 1990), a self-report is an effective and economical way to simultaneously assess numerous non-clinical adolescents (Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001). It should be noted that self-reports have inherent limitations, including concerns of bias and lack of clinical judgment (Foa, Cashman, Jaycox, & Perry, 1997).