

this does not mean that their parenting is authoritarian. Another pillar of Latino cultural beliefs is **familismo**, which emphasizes the love, closeness, and mutual obligations of Latino family life (Harwood et al., 2002). This hardly sounds like the aloofness and hostility characteristic of the authoritarian parent, and in fact studies confirm the positive effects of familismo on Latino adolescents (Fulgini et al., 1999; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1996).

## Attachments to Parents

*[My parents are] always there and I feel I can always go to them and they always say something that will make me feel better.*

—17-year-old girl (Konopka, 1985, p. 71)

*“It’s like if I get in some really, really bad trouble then my friends might get afraid, you know, and go away. But my parents will always be there.”*

—Devon, African American adolescent (Jeffries, 2004, p. 120).

We have noted that adolescents consistently state that their parents are among the most important figures in their lives, and that most young people maintain a sense of emotional closeness to their parents throughout adolescence and emerging adulthood. An influential theory describing the emotional relationships between parents and children is **attachment theory**. This theory was originally developed by British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), who argued that among humans as among other primates, attachments between parents and children have an evolutionary basis in the need for vulnerable young members of the species to stay in close proximity to adults who will care for and protect them. Bowlby’s colleague, American psychologist Mary Ainsworth (1967, 1982), observed interactions between mothers and infants and described two general types of attachment: **secure attachment**, in which infants use the mother as a “secure base from which to explore” when all is well, but seek physical comfort and consolation from her if frightened or threatened; and **insecure attachment**, in which infants are wary of exploring the environment and resist or avoid the mother when she attempts to offer comfort or consolation.

Although most of the early research and theory on attachment focused on infancy, both Bowlby and

Ainsworth believed that the attachment formed with the **primary caregiver** (usually but not necessarily the mother) in infancy forms the foundation for attachments to others throughout a person’s life. Bowlby quoted a phrase from Sigmund Freud to describe this, in which Freud stated that the relationship with the mother is “the prototype of all [future] love relations” (Freud, 1940/1964, p. 188). According to Bowlby (1969), in the course of interactions with the primary caregiver, the infant develops an **internal working model** that shapes expectations and interactions in relationships with others throughout life. This implies that in adolescence and emerging adulthood, the quality of relationships with others—from friends to teachers to romantic partners to the parents themselves—will all be shaped, for better or worse, by the quality of the attachments to parents experienced in infancy.

This is a provocative and intriguing claim. How well does it hold up in research? First, abundant research indicates that a secure attachment to parents in adolescence is related to a variety of favorable outcomes. Secure attachments to parents are related to a variety of aspects of adolescents’ well-being, including self-esteem and psychological and physical health (Allen & Kuperminc, 1995; Allen & Land, 1999; Juang & Nguyen, 1997). Adolescents who have secure attachments to parents tend to have closer relationships with friends and romantic partners (Allen & Bell, 1995; Laible, Carlo, & Rafaelli, 2000; Roisman, Madsen, Henighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001). Security of attachment to parents in adolescence also has been found to predict a variety of outcomes in emerging adulthood, including educational and occupational attainment,



Secure attachments to parents are related to adolescents’ well-being in a variety of respects.

psychological problems, and drug use (Allen et al., 1998; Cooper et al., 2004; O'Connor et al., 1996).

Another prediction of attachment theory involves the compatibility between autonomy and **relatedness** in adolescence. According to attachment theory, autonomy (being capable of self-direction) and relatedness (feeling close to parents emotionally) should be compatible rather than opposing dynamics in relations with parents. That is, in infancy as well as in adolescence, if children feel close to their parents and confident of their parents' love and concern, they are likely to be able to develop a healthy sense of autonomy from parents as they grow up (Allen & Bell, 1995). Rather than promoting prolonged dependence on parents, a secure attachment gives children the confidence to go out into the world, using the comfort of that attachment as a "secure base from which to explore."

This prediction from attachment theory is supported by research. Adolescents who are the most autonomous and self-reliant also tend to report close, affectionate relationships with their parents (Allen et al., 1994; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Adolescents who have trouble establishing autonomy in adolescence also tend to have more difficulty maintaining a healthy level of relatedness to parents. An imbalance between autonomy and relatedness (i.e., too little of one or both) tends to be related to a variety of negative outcomes, such as psychological problems and drug use (Allen et al., 1994; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

However, these studies do not really test the heart of attachment theory, which is the claim that attachments *in infancy* form the basis for all later relationships, including those in adolescence and emerging adulthood. What do studies indicate on this crucial issue? Because the infants in the earliest attachment studies have only recently grown into adolescence, there are limited data available so far. Studies of college students have attempted to reconstruct the students' early attachments by having them recall various aspects of their childhood relationships with their parents (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001; Kobak & Cole, 1994; Kobak et al., 1993). These studies have found that college students who remember having secure attachments in childhood also report (in the present) lower rates of depression (Kobak & Cole, 1994), more stable romantic relationships (Davis & Kirkpatrick, 1998), and closer friendships (Kerns, 1994) compared with students who report having insecure attachments in childhood. This seems consistent with the prediction

of attachment theory that a secure attachment in infancy provides a solid foundation for later development. However, this research approach relies on having people recall memories from childhood, which other research has found to be an unreliable enterprise, often distorted by failures of memory and by the quality of present relationships.

A handful of longitudinal studies on attachment have by now followed samples from infancy to adolescence, and they provide mixed support for the predictions of attachment theory. Waters and colleagues (2000) reported that 72% of the children in their sample received the same attachment classification at age 21 as they did at one year of age. One study found that a prolonged separation from parents during infancy or early childhood predicted a less secure attachment to parents in adolescence, in accord with attachment theory, which asserts that early separation from parents can result in long-term difficulties in emotional development (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000).

Another study found that attachment classification in infancy predicted the quality of interactions with others at ages 10 and 15 (Sroufe, Carlson, & Schulman, 1993). When the children in the original infancy study reached age 10, the researchers invited them to attend a summer camp where their relations with peers could be examined. At age 10, the children who had been securely attached in infancy were judged to be more skilled socially, more self-confident, and less dependent on other campers. Five years later, the researchers arranged a camp reunion where the children could again be evaluated. At age 15, adolescents who had been securely attached in infancy were more open in expressing their feelings and were more likely to form close relationships with peers. However, in a more recent follow-up, these researchers found no continuity between security of attachment to parents in infancy and at age 19 (Weinfield, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2000). Similar results were reported in a longitudinal study by Lewis and colleagues (2000).

In recent years, some attachment researchers have modified the claim that infant attachment is the foundation of all later relationships (Egeland & Carlson, 2004). Instead, they view infant attachment as establishing tendencies and expectations that may then be modified by later experiences in childhood, adolescence, and beyond. This view of attachment is also more bidirectional, viewing the quality of attachment as due not only to the behavior of the parent but the temperament and behavior of the child as well.