Chapter 2

What Is an Attachment Relationship?

I think that when we were little, we used to be a lot closer. We used to do everything together. Now that we're older we don't do everything together. We have our own lives, so we have become more independent. It's more like the other one is a fall back. Like I can always fall back onto my [twin] and she can always fall back onto me. Before it was always us... and now that we know other people, we are kind of like a fall back.

—Amy, describing her relationship with her identical twin sister.
Quoted in Tancredy and Fraley (2006, p. 81)

An attachment relationship is said to exist when an individual (1) preferentially seeks out and *maintains proximity* to a specific person and protests separations from that individual, (2) uses that person as a *safe haven* during times of distress, and (3) uses the person as a *secure base* from which to explore the world. The passage above captures well some of the elements of this definition. Amy is discussing the nature of the relationship she has with her twin sister and is reflecting on how that relationship has changed across time. She notes that her cotwin is a "fall back" person—someone she can turn to no matter how difficult life becomes. In this respect, her sister serves as a safe haven. But her sister also functions as a secure base. In some respects, Amy has ventured out into the world and has become more independent, but has done so using her sister as a base for such exploration. Again, the "fall back" theme captures this dynamic well: as long as Amy's sister is accessible, Amy can venture forth, knowing that when things become difficult, her sister will be there to back her up, support her, and renew her confidence.

Theorists describe relationships that serve these three functions as *attachment relationships* and refer to the emotional connection that one may feel for the other as an *attachment bond* (eg, Ainsworth, 1991; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). The prototypical attachment bond is that which exists between a child and his or her primary caregiver. For example, young children often maintain proximity to their parents, and, when they sense that a separation is imminent, they may protest the separation by crying, clinging, or grabbing hold of their parents. In

addition, young children use their parents as a safe haven; when distressed they turn to parents for comfort, support, and assurance. And, finally, they use their parents as a secure base from which to explore the world. Young children are much more likely to venture out in an uninhibited manner if they know that they can always fall back to their parent when they need them. Attachment relationships play a role throughout the life course, but *who* people use as their primary attachment figures tends to change as people transition from one phase of life to the next. Although children are likely to use their parents for attachment-related functions, such as secure base functions, adults are more likely to use their romantic partners for such purposes (eg, Doherty & Feeney, 2004).

In this chapter we briefly review what attachment theory says about the development of attachment relationships. We will review what has been learned about how various attachment functions (eg, secure base) transfer from one person to the next over the course of development and how they manifest in the context of adult relationships. We review what is known about how long it takes for adult attachment to develop, what happens to the role of parents as peers (eg, friends and romantic partners) begin to assume the role of attachment figures, and the kinds of factors that facilitate and inhibit the development of an attachment relationship. Finally, we will highlight what we perceive to be open questions in this area in hopes that it will inspire future research on attachment relationships.

We begin by noting that, although psychologists have long been interested in the distinction between close and nonclose relationships (eg, communal vs. exchange relationships; Clark & Mills, 1979), an attachment relationship is believed to be something *more* than just a "close" relationship. For example, a child may enjoy spending time with a playmate and may even protest when those play sessions are brought to a close, but it would be unusual for the child, if frightened, to turn to the playmate instead of a parent for comfort and protection. The relationship may be "close" by traditional definitions (the friends enjoy each other's company, the relationship is satisfying), but, in this example, the child's friend does not serve safe haven functions and would not be construed as an attachment figure. Similarly, a child may be attached to his mother, even if she has a history of being unreliable or inconsistent in the care she provides for him. Nonetheless, the child may turn to her—potentially with trepidation—if things go awry. That is, the child may be attached to the parent, despite not having a secure relationship with her. Although most attachments are, in fact, close relationships, not all close relationships are attachments (see also Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002).

HOW DO ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIPS DEVELOP IN INFANCY?

According to Bowlby (1969/1982), the development of an attachment bond is a gradual process and can be loosely understood as unfolding in a series of stages. In the early months of life, infants are largely indiscriminate in how they direct

attachment-related behaviors. Separation from a primary caregiver might not elicit distress, and proximity-seeking behavior may be directed to any number of available individuals. This phase is sometimes referred to as the *initial preattachment* phase (eg, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982). Although infants are not selectively discriminating among potential caregivers during this phase, they are nonetheless engaged in behaviors, such as crying, sucking, grasping, and rooting that facilitate proximity to potential attachment figures.

Between 2 and 6 months infants begin to discriminate among caregivers and differentially—and preferentially—respond to them. Bowlby (1969/1982) referred to this as the *attachment-in-the-making* phase. During this period the infant's behavior becomes increasingly diverse and organized. The infant may cry selectively to signal a specific adult, for example, or may only be soothed when specific individuals hold him or her.

Around 7 months of age infants begin to crawl and, as a result, they explore the environment in a more active fashion and are able to seek proximity to specific caregivers. Thus, during this period of time they become capable of expressing fully proximity-seeking, safe haven, and secure-base behavior. As such, this period, combined with the selective preference toward a caregiver and the protest of separation from that individual, is sometimes referred to as the phase in which "clear-cut" or "full-blown" attachment is possible (eg, Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Bowlby (1969/1982) also discussed the concept of a *goal-corrected partnership* to characterize the way the attachment bond functions when children are approximately 3 years old. As infants get older, they begin to organize their attachment behavior in ways that reflect their greater cognitive sophistication. They understand, for example, that they can negotiate proximity to the attachment figure at both psychological and symbolic levels rather than physical levels alone (eg, the child may take an object that belongs to the parent on an overnight trip as a way of feeling closer to the parent). And, in turn, the caregiver can communicate with the child in ways that allow them to coordinate their behavior and needs and to take each other's plans and intentions into account (eg, although the parent may not be available to the child at the moment due to other obligations, she may promise the child some dedicated time later in the evening). Although this phase is no more representative of attachment than the previous phase, the way the bond is manifested has the potential to be much more sophisticated, making pure behavioral indicators an imperfect way to gauge the presence of an attachment bond. For example, although separation distress is a clear marker of an attachment bond in 12-month-old infants, a 3-year-old child is much less likely to experience or express distress in the face of brief separations.

Who Serves as the Primary Attachment Figure in Childhood?

It is typically assumed that most infants use a parent, typically the mother, as a primary attachment figure (Colin, 1996). But that does not mean that the child

does not have several potential individuals who may serve attachment-related functions. Bowlby (1969/1982) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) argued that a child could be attached to multiple individuals and, in fact, in many families it is likely that both parents and potentially even an older sibling or nanny could serve attachment-related functions. To capture some of these ideas, Bowlby described children as having a *hierarchy* of attachment figures.

We discuss the concept of the attachment hierarchy in more depth later in this chapter. But one of the core ideas in attachment theory is that children, despite having many potential attachment figures, often behave as if there is someone in particular that they want when distressed. It is not the case that all potential caregivers are treated as interchangeable; more often than not, there is someone in particular that the child selectively seeks when ill, tired, or scared. This individual is often called the *primary attachment figure*. Bowlby introduced the concept of *monotropy* to capture the idea that there may be a privileged place in a child's attachment hierarchy for a specific caregiver and that, in fact, evolution may have crafted the attachment system to lock-in on a specific figure to help organize and focus behavior during emergencies (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Colin (1987; described in Colin, 1996) adopted the classic and widely used strange situation procedure (see chapter: What Is Attachment Theory?) to examine in a systematic fashion to whom infants would direct attachment behaviors when interacting with both their mothers and fathers. Fifty infants between the ages of 12 and 19 months and their parents visited a laboratory playroom and participated in a sequence of 3-min episodes in which the child was with both parents, with parents and a stranger, alone (with and without stranger), and reunited with parents. Infants were more likely to direct attachment behavior, such as vocalizations and proximity seeking, toward the mother than the father. Moreover, in the final separation and reunion episode, 86% of the infants directed attachment behavior toward the mother rather than the father whereas 12% did not show a clear preference. According to Colin's data, preferences for the father were associated with the father having spent a greater amount of time involved in the child's care. In summary, although children often have more than one individual who may serve attachment-related functions, they appear to have a clear preference for specific individuals when distressed.

Howes, Rodning, Galluzzo, and Myers (1988) assessed infants in the strange situation with their mothers and, separately, their fathers. On the basis of their observations, they concluded that children appear to organize their attachment behavior in meaningful ways with both parents. Moreover, they argued that there are potential benefits of having multiple caregivers, such that having a secure attachment with at least one caregiver can compensate for other insecure attachments in the child's social competence. Thus, although children may show a preference for one particular individual, they often have multiple people in their lives who can fulfill important functions when necessary.

HOW ARE ATTACHMENT-RELATED FUNCTIONS TRANSFERRED FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER?

Although Bowlby (1969, 1973) was specifically concerned with the attachment of a child to his mother figure, he conceived of attachments to other figures as approximating the same model—and he clearly stated that attachments continue throughout the entire life span. Attachment to parent figures may become attenuated as adulthood approaches and may become supplemented and to some extent supplanted by other attachments; but few if any adults cease to be influenced by their early attachments, or indeed cease at some level of awareness to be attached to their early attachment figures.

—Ainsworth et al. (1978, p. 28)

A core developmental milestone is passed in late childhood and early adolescence as children begin to explore and construct their identities in more active ways. They are attempting to figure out where they belong in the world of their peers and, indeed, often become more interested in appealing to real or imagined standards set by their peers than their family. As a consequence, some attachment-related functions begin to shift from parents to peers. Adolescents, for example, may seek proximity to friends at the expense of spending time with parents. In addition, they may begin to share their thoughts and concerns—especially those concerning intimacy and dating—with close friends rather than with their parents.

During this phase children appear to be transferring at least some attachment-related functions from parents to peers. Hazan and Zeifman (1994) suggest that this process takes place in a relatively orderly fashion, such that each of the three functions described previously is transferred sequentially. That is, first, children begin to preferentially seek proximity to peers over parents, then they begin to use peers for safe haven functions, and, finally, may begin to use specific peers as a secure base. Of course, these functions may not be fully transferred in the context of any one relationship. For example, adolescents may elect to spend time with a best friend and may even confide in that individual instead of the parents, but, ultimately, the relationship may serve exploration or affiliation purposes rather than attachment functions. Indeed, in some cases, a new relationship may never come to assume all three attachment functions, despite being an important or meaningful relationship for the person in question. In the sections that follow we review empirical research on how these transference processes take place, among both children and adults, and attempt to answer questions about their timing and the factors that facilitate or inhibit the development of attachment relationships.

Empirical Research on Attachment Transfer in Children and Adolescents

Hazan, Hutt, Sturgeon, and Bricker (1991); Hazan and Zeifman (1994) were the first researchers to systematically examine the ways in which children transfer attachment-related functions from parental to nonparental figures. To do so they

TABLE 2.1 Attachment-Related Functions and Features
Proximity seeking
Who is the person you most like to spend time with?
Who is the person you don't like to be away from?
Safe haven
Who is the person you want to be with when you are feeling upset or down?
Who is the person you would count on for advice?
Secure base
Who is the person you would want to tell first if you achieved something good?
Who is the person you can always count on?

developed the WHOTO interview—a structured interview in which individuals of various ages are asked questions designed to identify who best fulfills various attachment functions. Some example questions are provided in Table 2.1. For example, to assess *who* children use for secure-base functions, they are asked "Who is the person you can always count on?" Children are asked to nominate someone in response to each question.

In their initial research using the WHOTO, Hazan and Zeifman (1994) examined a sample of 100 children who varied in age, ranging from 6 to 17 years of age. They classified the children's responses to the WHOTO questions as falling into one of two categories: parents (eg, mothers, fathers, grandparents, stepfathers) and peers (eg, friends, romantic partners). They found that attachment-related functions appeared to be transferred in an orderly way. Proximity seeking, for example, appears to be easily transferred from parents to peers. For example, approximately 50% of children aged 6−7 years were likely to nominate a peer as someone to whom they sought proximity. But this proportion was as high as 75% among 16−17-year-olds. Other functions, such as secure-base functions, were less prevalent among peer relationships. Approximately 45% of children aged 16−17 indicated that their peers functioned as a secure base.

More recent research has continued to support the original findings reported by Hazan and colleagues. Most of this work uses self-report questionnaires that were inspired by the WHOTO—surveys that instruct people to nominate someone who fulfills each of the core attachment functions (eg, Fraley & Davis, 1997) or which ask people to rate or rank the extent to which various important people in their lives fulfill these needs (eg, Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). For example, Nickerson and Nagle (2005) examined attachment processes in a cross-sectional sample of 279 North American children in the fourth, sixth, and eighth grades. They found that older adolescents were more likely to use peers for attachment-related functions, such as proximity seeking, than younger children. But the majority of those sampled reported using their parents for
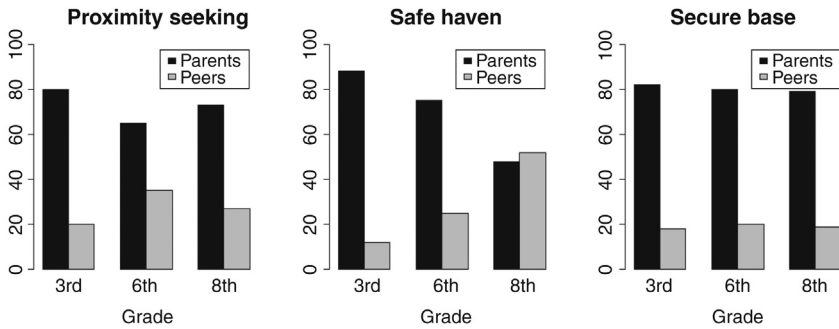
FIGURE 2.1 **Who fulfills various attachment functions in children?** *(Adapted from Nickerson and Nagle (2005).)*

secure-base functions (Fig. 2.1; see Kerns, Mathews, Koehn, Williams, & Siener-Ciesla, 2015; Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010; and Seibert & Kerns, 2009, for similar findings using different kinds of measures).

Mayseless (2004) examined a sample of 143, 18-year-old Israeli males who were leaving home to fulfill military service requirements. Each partici-pant was administered a self-report version of the WHOTO across two time points. Mayseless (2004) reported that many of these males were using peers for attachment-related functions, but nonetheless continued to use parents for secure-base functions.

In one of the first longitudinal studies of attachment transfer, Friedlmeier and Granqvist (2006) examined a sample of Swedish and German adolescents aged 15−16 years of age. They found that many of the adolescents in their sam-ple had transferred their proximity maintenance, safe haven, and secure-base functions to a peer. They also found that adolescents who formed a romantic relationship between assessment waves were more likely to show transfer from parents to peers compared to adolescents who did not enter into a romantic relationship.

In summary, although the methods used across these various studies differ in some ways, they converge on a common theme: Children between the ages of 10 and 18 are likely to begin seeking proximity to peers more so than their parents. However, the majority of them continue to use their parents—and their mothers in particular—as a primary attachment figure (see Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle, & Haggart, 2006; and Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010, for similar findings).

Empirical Research on Attachment Transfer in Early Adulthood

There is a growing body of research on attachment figures in college-aged pop-ulations. Although college students tend to be the "default" population used in psychological research due to convenience, they are an important population for the study of attachment transfer because the majority of college students are between the ages of 18 and 22 and are living away from home for the first

significant period of time in their lives (Larose & Boivin, 1998; Lopez & Gorm-ley, 2002). As such, certain attachment issues may be salient for them (they may miss their parents, they may feel uncertain about being away from home), but they are also meeting new people and exploring new relationships. Much of this research indicates that peers—especially romantic partners—come to play a more salient role in attachment-related behavior in young adult populations.

For example, Fraley and Davis (1997) administered a self-report version of the WHOTO and found that many college-aged students were using their peers (eg, best friends and romantic partners) for attachment-related functions. They found that young adults in their sample were most likely to use parents as a secure base; about 60% nominated "mom" or "dad" in response to two secure-base items. However, young adults were more likely to use peers rather than parents as targets for proximity maintenance (about 78%) and safe-haven functions (81%). Zhang, Chan, and Teng (2011) found similar results in a Chinese college student population.

Trinke and Bartholomew (1997) studied a sample of 240 undergraduates (mean age 21) and found that the individuals who were ranked the highest with respect to attachment-related functions were romantic partners, followed by mothers, fathers, siblings, and best friends. They found that the relative order-ing of nonromantic attachment figures was the same for people who were and were not in romantic relationships. Thus, they concluded "when partners be-come attachment figures, it appears as though they bump the other figures to lower places on the hierarchy, but leave the relative positions of these other attachments unaltered" (p. 619).

Similar findings have been reported by others. Pitman and Scharfe (2010) asked college students in romantic relationships to rank a variety of individuals with respect to attachment-related functions. They found that 55% assigned the highest attachment rankings to their romantic partner (followed by their mother, at 31%). Among those not in a romantic relationship, 55% reported their moth-ers first, followed by friends (35%).

Empirical Research on Attachment Transfer in Adulthood

Doherty and Feeney (2004) conducted one of the largest studies to date on at-tachment transfer in adulthood. Although they sampled individuals of a variety of ages ranging from 16 to 90, they studied a large number of people in early to middle adulthood (mean age 35 years) and were able to investigate the way in which attachment processes varied across age. Doherty and Feeney asked adults to rank-order the extent to which various people in their lives fulfilled attach-ment-related functions. They found that, on average, adults were most likely to be attached to their romantic partners. More importantly, when they defined a "full blown attachment" as one in which a target had a specific score for each of the attachment functions, they found that, among adults who were in romantic relationships, up to 74% were judged to be fully attached to that partner.

Doherty and Feeney also classified a person's primary attachment figure as being the individual who had the highest score among the various rankings of attachment-related functions. Using this method, they found that 96% of the sample had a primary attachment figure (4% had a tie between two or more individuals). Among those who had a primary attachment figure, those figures were (in decreasing order) partners, mothers, friends, children, siblings, and fathers.

Summary of Attachment Functions at Different Points in the Life Course

Young children are most likely to use their parents, and, more often than not, their mothers, as primary attachment figures. As they age, they are more likely to begin transferring attachment-related functions from parents to peers (eg, close friends and romantic partners). Indeed, as young adults transition to college, close to half of them are using peers for attachment-related functions. By the time individuals are married adults, the majority of them are more likely to nominate their spouses as being their primary attachment figures rather than their parents. Uncoupled adults are most likely to nominate their mothers or a best friend for attachment-related functions (Doherty & Feeney, 2004; Schachner, Shaver, & Gillath, 2008).

A Cautionary Note on Using Children as Attachment Figures

Doherty and Feeney (2004) reported that some adults in their sample nominated a child as serving attachment functions. Theoretically, however, it is considered dysfunctional for an adult to be attached to his or her young child (Colin, 1996). There are at least two important things to note in the case of Doherty and Feeney's research, however. First, parents tended to nominate their children for the "proximity seeking/maintenance" and "separation distress" functions in particular. In other words, when asked "Who is the person you don't like to be away from?" many parents nominate their children. Does this mean that young children are attachment figures for parents? Not necessarily. One of the complications in assessing the extent to which a relationship is an attachment relationship is that some of the markers of attachment, such as separation distress and proximity seeking, are not unique to attachment. For example, separation distress and proximity maintenance are also crucial features of the *caregiving system*, as evidenced by the powerful feelings of panic and distress that a parent can experience when he or she loses sight of their child (see Kirkpatrick, 1998, for similar examples). Our intuition is that, in most cases where adults nominate their children as serving proximity maintenance functions, this response may be representative of caregiving rather than attachment processes.

Nonetheless, as adults get older, it is not uncommon for their adult children to provide care for them. As a result, parents may, in fact, come to depend on their adult children as attachment figures. They may begin to rely on the adult

child as a source of comfort and security and to use the child as a secure base from which to explore the world (see Karantzas & Simpson, 2015). Indeed, in the Doherty and Feeney (2004) study, the age of the respondent was positively correlated with the extent to which people nominated their children for serving attachment-related functions. This indicates that their use of the child as an attachment figure was not necessarily dysfunctional.

CAN PEOPLE HAVE MORE THAN ONE ATTACHMENT FIGURE?

One of the most common ways of studying who it is that people use as attachment figures and how attachment-related functions are transferred across time is through the use of the WHOTO and its derivatives (eg, Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). The WHOTO, however, instructs people to nominate a single individual for each attachment-related function. And, although people can usually perform this task with no trouble, this method obscures the fact that some people may, in fact, have more than one person in their lives who function as attachment figures. Thus, although the WHOTO and its derivatives are useful for studying *who* functions as a person's primary attachment figure, it is not ideal for studying the *hierarchy* of attachment figures that a person has. One cannot use the WHOTO, for example, to determine whether adults tend to have one and only one attachment figure or whether people have multiple attachments. And, if people can have multiple attachment figures, the WHOTO cannot be used to estimate how many attachment figures the typical adult has.

   To address some of these issues, Trinke and Bartholomew (1997) developed the Attachment Network Questionnaire (ANQ). Respondents taking the ANQ are first asked to list the "significant people in your life, those people that you currently feel a strong emotional tie to, regardless of whether that tie is positive, negative, or mixed" (p. 609). This name generator is used to make salient for the respondent some of the people they may wish to consider when completing the ANQ. More importantly, however, this listing is designed to emphasize the idea that the quality of the relationship is not necessarily the same thing as its importance. A person can play an emotionally important role in a person's life, even if the relationship is a conflictual one.

   Next, respondents are asked a series of questions designed to assess six components of attachment, including the proximity-seeking, safe haven, and secure-base functions described before, but also emotional connection, conflict and strong emotion, and separation distress.[1] Respondents are asked to think about

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1. Most research on adult attachment defines attachment relationships with respect to proximity-seeking, safe haven, and secure base dynamics (and, as we discuss at the end of the chapter, separation distress). The additional components studied by Trinke and Bartholomew (1997) are not commonly construed as being core features of an attachment relationship but were used by the researchers to help ensure that they were tapping into relationships that were of emotional significance to the respondents.

the people they listed previously and to rank the importance of those people with respect to the items in question. If respondents believe that one or more of the persons listed previously do not pertain to the item in question, they are not required to rank those persons for that item.

Trinke and Bartholomew (1997) administered the ANQ to a sample of 240 undergraduates (mean age 21). They assessed where various targets were placed in people's attachment hierarchies by computing the average ranking for each target across the various components that were assessed. Trinke and Bartholomew found that, on average, partners were ranked 2.1, followed by mothers (2.4), fathers (3.2), siblings (3.7), and best friends (3.9). (Lower numbers indicate greater importance.) Importantly, Trinke and Bartholomew found that adults seem to have approximately 5 attachment figures, on average, and 95% of them seem to have at least one person who emerges at the top of the hierarchy. Thus, although Bowlby's monotropy idea seems to have merit, it is clearly the case that most young adults have a number of secondary attachment figures who may be central in their lives. It is noteworthy that parents tended to be relatively high in the attachment hierarchy, even among subsamples of individuals who were in dating relationships. Thus, although partners were ranked the highest, overall, mothers were ranked a close second.

WHAT KINDS OF FACTORS FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADULT ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIP?

The theory and research we have reviewed up to this point suggest two broad conclusions. First, the majority of children and adolescents are primarily attached to their parents (often their mothers), even if they are beginning to transfer attachment-related functions to peers (eg, romantic partners). Second, most adults tend to use romantic partners as their primary attachment figures. What kinds of factors facilitate the development of an attachment relationship in adulthood?

Bowlby (1969/1982) provided some clues by discussing a few factors that may facilitate bonding in early infancy. For example, he suggested that responsiveness and physical proximity may be key factors that enable a child to target an individual as a primary attachment figure. Theoretically, then, we might expect similar features to facilitate the transfer of attachment-related functions to nonparental targets as adolescents and young adults begin to explore new relationships.

How do Responsiveness and Sensitivity Facilitate the Development of Attachment Relationships?

Fraley and Davis (1997) reasoned that young adults would be more likely to have transferred attachment-related functions from parents to peers to the extent to which those peer relationships were characterized by mutual care,

support, and trust. They asked college students to rate the extent to which their best friendships and romantic relationships reflected these qualities, and administered a version of the WHOTO to examine attachment functions. They found that, to the extent to which romantic relationships were characterized by these features, the more likely it was that people had transferred attachment-related functions from their parents to their romantic partners (see also Feeney, 2004). Importantly, Fraley and Davis (1997) also examined best friendships and found that these relationship features also predicted the extent to which people had transferred attachment-related functions from parents to best friends.

How Does Interdependence Facilitate the Development of Attachment Relationships?

One finding that has emerged repeatedly in the literature is that individuals are more likely to report being attached to individuals when their lives are highly interdependent with them. This interdependence can manifest in a variety of ways, including being in frequent contact with the individual or being in a committed relationship with him or her. Doherty and Feeney (2004), for example, found that adults involved in romantic relationships were more likely to use their romantic partner as an attachment figure if that relationship involved a higher degree of commitment; individuals who were living with and/or raising children with their partner were more likely to use that partner as an attachment figure. In a separate sample, Feeney (2004) found that the greater the relationship length, the more likely the romantic relationship was to be an attachment.

Umemura, Lacinová, and Macek (2014) observed a similar finding in a study of over 1000 young adults (age 21) from the Czech Republic. Specifically, they found that people were more likely to use their romantic partners as attachment figures the longer the relationship had lasted. However, they were not necessarily likely to shift attachment functions away from their parents. Stated differently, partners tended to replace friends rather than replacing parents, who remained important figures throughout participants' lives.

How do Individual Differences in Attachment Security Affect the Development of Attachment Relationships?

There is also a growing body of research indicating that people's general attachment styles (chapter: What Are Attachment Working Models?) predict the ways in which attachment functions are transferred across relationships. Fraley and Davis (1997), for example, administered the Relationships Questionnaire (RQ) and a version of the WHOTO to a sample of college students

and found that individuals who were relatively secure with respect to at-tachment in general were more likely to have transferred attachment-related functions from parents to peers (friends or romantic partners). Interestingly, they also found that individuals with dismissing-avoidant attachment styles were more likely to answer "no one" or "myself" to questions that inquired about secure-base functions, such as "Who is the person you can always count on?"

Feeney (2004) reported that individuals who were more insecure were less likely to be attached to their partners, potentially because they fear the kind of intimacy that comes along with being in a close relationship. Similar find-ings have been reported by Doherty and Feeney (2004) and Mayseless (2004). Rowe and Carnelley (2005), using a measure described in more depth later, found that highly secure people had a greater number of people in their lives who could serve as attachment figures, indicating that a general sense of secu-rity may facilitate people's ability to develop and maintain attachment bonds in adulthood.

Do Compensatory Processes Lead People to Develop New Attachments?

One theme that has been present in early and contemporary research is that people may begin to transfer attachment-related functions from parents to peers if their relationships with their parents are unsatisfactory, conflictual, or insecure (see Keefer, Landau, Rothschild, & Sullivan, 2012, for an inves-tigation of this premise using attachment to objects). There are some sugges-tions in the literature that such compensatory processes can take place. For example, Nickerson and Nagle (2005) found that children who viewed their relationships with their parents as less secure were more likely to select peers to fulfill attachment functions. Friedlmeier and Granqvist (2006) found that self-reports of insecure attachment to mother, combined with high degrees of attachment-related anxiety, were related to a higher degree of attachment transfer from parents to peers. Moreover, Freeman and Brown (2001) found that adolescents who were more generally insecure in their attachment ori-entation were more likely to nominate their boyfriends, girlfriends, and best friends as attachment figures.

It should be kept in mind that attachment transfer is a normative develop-mental phenomenon (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Thus, children who are secure in their relationships with their parents should also transfer attachment-related functions from parents to peers (see Feeney, 2004). What should be addressed more carefully in future research is the timing of these processes. It is probably the case that deviations from the typical trajectory are indicative of whether the transfer process represents adaptive developmental processes or whether the ac-celeration of those processes stems from insecurity.

There is at least one study that speaks to this issue. Fagundes and Schindler (2012) examined longitudinally the timing of romantic attachment formation and its implications for relationship functioning. They found that people who were relatively anxious with respect to attachment concerns began to transfer attachment functions (ie, proximity seeking) to partners earlier than those who were less anxious. Moreover, individuals who began to use their romantic partner as a secure base relatively soon were more likely to break up relative to those who did not. These findings suggest that the timing of attachment processes may be relevant to understanding whether the transference process is a response to an insecure attachment network—an effort at network repair, so to speak—instead of a natural consequence of exploring new relationships from the foundation of a parental secure base.

How Long Does it Take for an Adult Attachment Relationship to Form?

Researchers have concluded that, under normal circumstances, most children have formed an attachment bond to at least one caretaker within the first 7−10 months. And, by the time infants are able to crawl, they are likely to reveal secure-base dynamics in a clear fashion.

Early research on adult attachment, however, suggested that it might take considerably longer for adults to develop an attachment bond toward a nonparental figure. Hazan and Zeifman (1994), for example, suggested that it takes about 2 years, on average, for most young adults to transfer all attachment-related functions from parents to partners. Fraley and Davis' (1997) data supported this claim. They found that among individuals who reported using their romantic partners for proximity-seeking, safe haven, and secure-base functions, those romantic relationships had, on average, lasted 23 months. There are considerable individual differences, however, with some individuals exhibiting all three functions after a few months and some taking as long as 4 years (see also Fagundes & Schindler, 2012).

However, some research is beginning to suggest that romantic attachments can form relatively quickly. For example, Heffernan, Fraley, Vicary, and Brumbaugh (2012) administered a self-report WHOTO measure to a large sample of individuals in romantic relationships and found that people may come to use romantic partners as attachment figures in a much shorter period of time. For example, approximately 50% of respondents (average age 27 years) who had been dating for 3 months reported using their partners as a secure base. Stated differently, a large proportion of adult romantic relationships appear to be attachments when characterized with respect to secure-base functions. And, although people are more likely to use their partner for secure-base purposes as the relationship progresses, they are nonetheless willing or able to do so even in fledgling relationships.

A similar observation was made by Eastwick and Finkel (2008). They noted that one of the core experiential features of falling in love is a preoccupation or fascination with the object of one's affections. This is often accompanied by a sense of anxiety—concern over whether the object is interested in the self or whether he or she will return one's affections. In many ways, these concerns resemble insecurity in the way that it is typically measured in dispositional ways (see chapter: What Are Attachment Working Models?). Eastwick and Finkel argued, however, that this form of insecurity is actually a marker of healthy relationship development in fledgling romantic relationships. Indeed, they showed that individuals who felt more insecure or anxious with respect to a specific partner were more likely to be using that target for attachment-related functions.

WHAT HAPPENS TO PARENTS WHEN NEW ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIPS DEVELOP? DO THEY SHARE THE STAGE WITH NEW ATTACHMENT FIGURES? OR ARE THEY SUPPLANTED?

Unfortunately, we do not have good answers to this question yet. The question is a difficult one to answer because the way these processes work psychologically might be different from the way they work behaviorally. That is, there are constraints on behavior that do not necessarily exist psychologically, and, as a result, it is sometimes difficult to use behavior as a means to understand psychological processes. As a simple analogy, consider the way people think about their favorite restaurants. If asked, people may indicate that there are several places they consider to be their favorite places to eat and they may genuinely consider some of these places to be equally good. But, when dinner time rolls around, they do not dine at three separate restaurants; they choose one place to eat. Given the structure of the situation and the constraints that exist, people are forced to make a choice. But the fact that they chose one place over others does not always imply that the choice made reveals a hierarchical ordering of preferences. A person who has a clear favorite and a person who has several favorites may nonetheless behave in the same way.

Another reason the question is difficult to answer is that most of the methods we have reviewed for studying attachment hierarchies use either nominations (eg, the WHOTO and its derivatives) or rankings of people (eg, the ANQ). The limitation of ranking methods is that the options are necessarily mutually exclusive. To rank a partner at the top of one's hierarchy, one has to rank someone else second—even if those people are on equal footing psychologically. Tancredy and Fraley (2006) used a continuous rating method to try to get a better handle on this issue. Specifically, for several different targets (eg, mother, father, sibling, partner), participants rated the extent to which the person served attachment-related functions. This method allows the relative distance between people's ratings to be studied in a way that is not constrained by ranking systems. They found that romantic partners and friends tended to be rated highly and were relatively close together, with fathers and siblings being considerably
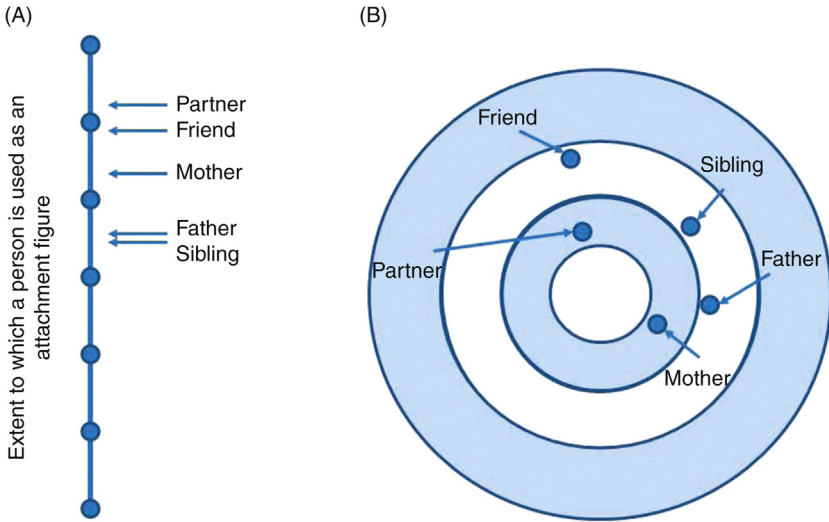
FIGURE 2.2   The relative positioning of individuals in the attachment hierarchy when non-ranking measures are used. Part A illustrates the relative positions of targets in Tancredy and Fraley's (2006) research. Part B illustrates the relative positioning from the center of targets in Rowe and Carnelley's (2005) research. (The distance from the center is of interest; the distance of each target from the others is arbitrary in this particular illustration.)

lower in their ratings (see also Karantzas & Cole, 2011). Fig. 2.2 Part A provides a graphical representation of the average relative location of various individuals in the average person's attachment hierarchy based on these data.

Tancredy and Fraley (2006) also examined age-related changes in attachment. They found that older adults were less likely to use their mothers, fathers, and siblings for attachment-related functions across time. Older participants who had romantic partners were more likely to feel attached to their romantic partners compared to younger participants.

Rowe and Carnelley (2005) also used a method for assessing attachment networks that does not require the use of rankings, thereby allowing for a fine-grained mapping of how similar various targets may be in people's representational hierarchies. They used a bull's eye method in which participants are shown three nested concentric circles. Participants are asked to first nominate up to 10 of their "closest and/or most important relationships" (p. 503) and then place a sticker representing each person within the series of circles. Participants are told that the closer they place the sticker to the center, the more central the person is with respect to their core self, but they are not given any special instruction on how to place the stickers relative to one another. The distance, in millimeters, between the center of each sticker and the center of the diagram, is used to quantify the target's position in the attachment hierarchy. Rowe and Carnelley (2005) used this method in a sample of 129 undergraduates in the United Kingdom. They found that mothers (27 mm) and romantic partners (30 mm)

tended to be placed closest to the center, followed by siblings (37 mm), fathers (41 mm), relatives (52 mm), and friends (56 mm) (Part B of Fig. 2.2). In a second study they used the bull's eye method in a sample of high-school-aged adolescents and a sample of college-aged students. Importantly, they found that although there were no age differences in how close to the center parents were placed, there were age differences in how close friends were placed to the center. Specifically, older adolescents tended to place their friend closer to their core self than did younger adolescents.

Taken together, these data on continuous ratings rather than rankings and nominations suggest a few conclusions. First, they corroborate previous work showing that romantic partners tend to be people's primary attachment figures in adulthood. But they also reveal that there can be more than one person near the top of the hierarchy. Second, when attachment functions are measured in a more continuous way that does not constrain one person's ranking to be dependent upon another person's ranking, some interesting age-related findings emerge among adults. Namely, adolescents do not appear to consider their parents to be less central, but they do begin to rate their peers as more central (Rowe & Carnelley, 2005). But, among adults, people show a clear and steady decline in the extent to which they relate to their parents as attachment figures (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006). But it does not seem to be the case, at least in any obvious way, that using peers as attachment figures requires pushing parents to a lower location in the attachment hierarchy.

These conclusions are based on the cross-sectional data available to date. Without longitudinal data, it will not be possible to determine exactly how the standing of one particular individual in the attachment hierarchy changes (if at all) as a function of how the status of another individual in the hierarchy changes. The gradual decline in the extent to which people use parents as attachment figures may exist independently of whether people are prioritizing romantic partners in their lives. To understand how change in the placement of one individual (eg, parents) is dependent upon change in the placement of another (eg, partners), it is necessary to investigate these processes in tandem and across time. We hope researchers will address this issue in the future.

We should also note that relatively little is known about how these processes may play out in middle to late adulthood. When adult children reach a point at which they are caring for their aging parents, it is possible that attachment concerns (eg, concerns about the availability of the parental attachment figure) become salient, potentially pushing the aging parent to a higher location in the individual's attachment hierarchy. It is also possible that some people come to realize that their parents cannot function as effective attachment figures anymore and, as a result, the parent's role in the attachment hierarchy stagnates or declines. We believe it would be fascinating to study these issues in future research and to identify factors that may determine individual differences in how attachment functions shift. Finally, we should note that with increasing cultural trends for adult children to live with their parents (Fry, 2014), there

could be potential declines in the rate at which children shift attachment-related functions from parents to peers. We hope future work will be able to speak to this question.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A RELATIONSHIP ENDS? FALLING OFF THE LADDER AND CONTINUING BONDS

Much of our discussion up to this point has been concerned with the transfer of attachment-related functions from parents to romantic partners. The research to date seems to indicate that parents do not necessarily become unimportant when a romantic partner emerges as an attachment figure; but parents may no longer be the first people the individual turns to for support.

But what happens when people transition out of a romantic relationship, due to death or a breakup? Although there is not much research on these issues to date, our sense is that different processes are involved in these two kinds of loss. When an attachment figure passes away, people undergo many of the powerful emotions reviewed briefly in chapter: What Is Attachment Theory?. They may cry, feel hopeless and lost, feel restless and despondent, and continue to pine for the lost person. But the lost person does not simply disappear from the attachment hierarchy. The bond still exists, even if the attachment figure is not physically present to serve attachment-related functions. Bereaved individuals often report using the lost person as a safe haven and secure base. For example, they may explore new activities by drawing upon their memories of the deceased as a source of strength or inspiration. They may turn to the deceased for advice, comfort, and solace.

Bereavement scholars refer to this phenomenon as "continuing bonds" to highlight the idea that, although bereaved, many surviving spouses will continue to feel a deep sense of attachment or connection to the lost figure (see Fraley & Shaver, 1999, for an in-depth discussion). Although the process of adaptation to loss may involve coming to terms with living without the loved one, the lost person does not get explicitly removed from the attachment hierarchy. It is possible that another person may come to supersede him or her over time. In this respect, the process may be analogous to the transference process that takes place as adolescents and young adults begin to transfer attachment functions from parents to peers.

Our intuition is that the process of reorganizing one's hierarchy of attachment figures is different for people who break up or divorce. In these situations, some people—especially those who feel scorned—may be taking active steps to remove the former partner from their emotional core. This process may involve a considerable degree of ambivalence and psychological defense. Indeed, this process most closely resembles what Bowlby (1969/1982, 1980) referred to as *detachment*—an active, defensive effort to downplay the emotional significance of an individual. As discussed in chapter: What Is Attachment Theory?, Bowlby and colleagues often observed signs of detachment when children had been

separated from their parents for a prolonged period of time. Upon reunion, they would often treat the parent with emotional indifference. But, as Bowlby observed, this was not a genuine experience of indifference and the pattern could easily break down when the children were distressed.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no research on how attachment networks are reorganized when people lose someone they love or when a relationship ends. Our working assumption is that, when people choose to sever ties with an attachment figure, there may be efforts to demote the individual in the hierarchy by downplaying the emotional significance of the individual and minimizing contact with the person. In the case of loss, however, it seems less likely that the former attachment figure is being demoted per se. It seems more likely that part of the process of adaptation involves finding ways to move on while respecting the nature of the lost relationship and even allowing it to continue as a source of security. As a result, the lost partner may continue to serve attachment functions symbolically even as new people come to play an important role in the attachment network.

ARE ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIPS LIMITED TO PARENTS AND PEERS? WHAT OTHER KINDS OF ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIPS MAY EXIST?

When measures such as the WHOTO are administered to adolescents and adults, the most commonly identified attachment figures are mothers, fathers, romantic partners, and best friends. However, people also nominate other targets as serving attachment-related functions. Many individuals report that a grandparent serves attachment-related functions. Some people even nominate pets and God (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Kurdek, 2008).

God as an Attachment Figure

God is an interesting figure to consider. Indeed, if one examines Christian views on God, it is clear that God is often portrayed as a father-figure—an older and wiser individual. Christians are encouraged to seek proximity to God, through prayer, worship, and devotion. God is viewed as a safe haven to which people can turn in times of distress. And, importantly, God is conceptualized as a secure base from which one can explore the world. People may feel emboldened, for example, by knowing that God is there when needed and that God is watching over them as they endure trying times (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

God, however, presents a challenge for attachment theory. As noted in chapter: What Is Attachment Theory?, one of the ways in which Bowlby positioned himself against the psychoanalytic models of his time was by emphasizing the importance of observable interactions that take place between infants and their caregivers. Although we can bring infants and their parents into the strange situation to observe their interactions, we cannot do so with God.

But one consequence of the nonphysical relationship people have with God is that individual differences in the quality of the relationship cannot be attributed to actual interpersonal experiences people have had with God. Indeed, Kirkpatrick (2005) suggested that part of what drives the way in which people relate to God (eg, whether they view him as loving and forgiving or wrathful and vengeful) is the nature of the relationship that people have with their parents.

There are at least two ways this could play out, according to Kirkpatrick (2005). One possibility is that people may anchor their relationship with God in their relationship with their parents. Thus, people who are relatively secure with their parents may be more likely to also have a secure view of God (what Kirkpatrick refers to as the *correspondence hypothesis*). And, similarly, people who view their parents as cold, punitive, and unloving may be inclined to view God in similar ways. An alternative model, called the *compensatory hypothesis*, is that people may construct their relationship with God in ways that compensate for perceived deficiencies in their relationships with parents. Thus, someone who feels that their primary caregiver is not as accepting as they would like may construct an image of God that fills that gap. They may come to view God as particularly loving, kind, and accepting.

The empirical research on this issue seems to favor the correspondence hypothesis. Namely, people who have secure relationships with their parents are more likely to view God as a loving and accepting entity whereas people who have insecure relationships with their parents are more likely to view God as unreliable or unjust (see Kirkpatrick, 2005, for a review).

These themes will emerge again in chapter: How Do Individual Differences in Attachment Develop? where we review research on the development of attachment styles in adulthood. The general theme is that the security of one's relationships with parents tends to positively, rather than negatively, predict how secure people will feel with others, whether those others are God, romantic partners, or best friends. It is important to note, however, that these patterns are based on averages. That is, these data do not mean that some people do not, in fact, compensate for weaknesses in one relationship by selecting partners who can do so. It is undoubtedly the case that this takes place in human development, and we reviewed some research previously which suggests that people may be more likely to use peers as attachment figures when they view their parents as being inadequate. But, on average, it is more likely to be the case that people end up in the kinds of relationships to which they are accustomed. Secure experiences beget secure experiences, in the family, with God, and in romantic relationships.

Other Attachment Figures

Scholars have proposed that a large number of targets can serve attachment-related functions. For example, some people have proposed that people can feel attached to places (Scannell & Gifford, 2013), their homeland (Ferenczi & Marshall, 2013), products and brands (eg, Proksch, Orth, & Bethge, 2013),

objects (Nedelisky & Steele, 2009; van IJzendoorn et al., 1983), horses (Bachi, 2013), and pets (Kurdek, 2008).

We do not have the space to review all of these possibilities here. Some scholars are skeptical of the idea that *anything*—including pets—could be conceptualized as an attachment figure (eg, Kobak, 2009). In some ways, the concept of "attachment" gets diluted if it is applied to every potential object a person could conceptualize as special or meaningful. But, another way to view the issue is that the drive to form attachments is so powerful that it can permeate many different domains of life. To be clear, it is certainly not the case that everyone is attached to horses. But some people may be. And, to the extent to which that is true, attachment theory may prove to be a powerful framework for understanding the nature of that bond.

WHY DID ATTACHMENT BONDS EVOLVE IN ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS?

It is relatively easy to appreciate why attachment would have evolved in the context of infant–caregiver relationships. Because human infants are born in a highly immature state, their survival depends critically on having someone who can feed them, keep them warm, and protect them from predators. The biological function of attachment in early childhood is protection (see chapters: What Is Attachment Theory? and What Is the Attachment Behavioral System? And, How Is It Linked to Other Behavioral Systems?).

But why would attachment play a role in romantic relationships? Does it serve an obvious evolutionary function? Or is it largely an artifact—what evolutionary biologists sometimes refer to as an *exaptation*—a behavioral and emotional appendage that may have been functional at some point in evolutionary history, but is not necessarily anymore?

At least two functional hypotheses have been articulated in the literature on adult attachment. One is the *paternal care hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, romantic attachment may facilitate inclusive fitness by helping to keep mates together long enough to provide an additional source of protection and care for vulnerable offspring (Fraley, Brumbaugh, & Marks, 2005). Children might benefit by having access to more resources, distributed care, or additional protection. Consistent with this notion, data on humans indicate that offspring are more likely to survive to a reproductive age if they are raised in families in which the mother and father are pair bonded (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2015). Unpaired women may at times forgo the care of their offspring because of the difficulties of raising the child alone (Hrdy, 1992). There is also evidence that the presence of an invested primate male can deter potential threats by other males (van Schaik & Dunbar, 1990). In short, if infants are at greater risk in the absence of care and protection of both parents, there may have been selection pressures that facilitated pair bonding on the part of mates and a greater degree of parental investment on the father's part.

Another hypothesis—and not necessarily one that is exclusive to the first—is that adult romantic attachment is a by-product of humans' prolonged neotenous state (Bjorklund, 1997; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). In fact, humans are unique in having juvenile characteristics that are retained for an extended period of time. Compared with other primates, for example, the human brain takes longer to develop, humans remain relatively hairless, their teeth erupt at a late age, and their sexual maturation is delayed. These kinds of observations have led some scholars to suggest that one of the mechanisms governing human evolution involves variation in the timing of normative maturational processes. Namely, our rate of development is slower than that of other species and, as a result, we retain many infantile traits into adulthood. Bjorklund (1997) highlights human play as being a prototypical behavioral example of this idea. In many species, play tends to be limited to infancy and early childhood, but, in humans, it characterizes our behavior across diverse contexts—including courtship. The *developmental neoteny hypothesis* holds that the attachment system—a motivational system that originally evolved in the context of infancy—does not become dormant as humans age, in part, because maturational processes proceed at a slower rate in humans. As a result, the attachment system may continue to be sensitive to certain cues (eg, danger) and readily activated in contexts that are similar to infant–parent relationships (eg, involving physically intimate exchanges). This may or may not make it functional per se, but offers one potential explanation for why attachment plays a role in romantic relationships.

Fraley et al. (2005) explored some questions about the evolution of adult attachment by conducting a comparative and phylogenetic investigation into attachment in a variety of species. Specifically, they acquired social, developmental, and morphological data from samples of mammals and primates. They found that, on average, species that exhibited signs of adult attachment were more likely than those who did not to have some degree of paternal care. In addition, species that were rated as being more developmentally neotenous, as indicated by the typical gestation time, the age at which offspring leave the family of origin, etc., were more likely to exhibit adult attachment than species that were less neotenous. These comparative data suggest that romantic attachment is not randomly distributed across living species. It is more likely to be observed among species (1) in which fathers play a role in child care and (2) that exhibit signs of prolonged immaturity.

Fraley and colleagues also attempted to test potential functional accounts by using a method of phylogenetically independent contrasts—an approach that is used in phylogenetic research to determine (1) the extent to which a feature (such as adult attachment) has evolved independently across a phylogenic tree and (2) whether the independent emergence of a trait covaries with instances of another trait (such as paternal care). This method is grounded in the assumption that, if a trait is functional, then independent instances of its emergence in evolutionary time should covary. These analyses indicated that there may be a functional relationship between adult attachment and paternal care. Specifically,

on occasions in which adult attachment emerged in species across evolutionary history, it appears that it was more likely than not that paternal care also emerged. However, the covariation between adult attachment and neoteny appeared to be incidental rather than functional. These two attributes appear to covary across species not because they independently coevolved over evolutionary history, but because they happened to coexist in ancestors. Thus, although species that exhibit adult attachment are also more likely to be developmentally immature, it does not appear that these two traits evolved independently across multiple occasions in evolutionary history. Fraley and colleagues also estimated that approximately 26% of mammals and 19% of primates exhibit signs of adult attachment in the context of mating. Adult attachment is not a uniquely human phenomenon and it appears that it may have evolved independently several times in the course of mammalian evolution.

A FEW CAUTIONARY REMARKS

We close by noting a few caveats concerning the definition and measurement of attachment-related features and functions.

Do Attachments Vary in Strength?

Ainsworth et al. (1978) cautioned scholars against thinking about attachment bonds as varying in strength. In the infant attachment literature, there is a tradition of conceptualizing the attachment bond as one that exists or does not exist. This conceptualization has been a useful one because it highlights the distinction between the existence of the attachment bond itself and the quality of that bond (ie, whether it is a secure one or not; chapter: What Are Attachment Working Models?). For example, an infant who would be classified as avoidant in the strange situation may, at first, appear to not be attached to his or her primary caregiver. The infant might not appear to be monitoring the whereabouts of the caregiver in the novel environment and, when he or she leaves the room, the child may not show visible signs of distress. But one would not want to conclude on the basis of these observations alone that the child is not attached to his or her caregiver or that the strength of the bond is lesser than that of a secure child. One can infer the presence of the bond because, as the strange situation progresses, the defensive behavior of the child may give way to visible signs of distress. And although the child may fail to organize his or her behavior in a way that would lead to a secure attachment classification, the child may reveal his or her distress in other ways. Indeed, Sroufe and Waters (1977b) argued that the heart rates of avoidant children in the strange situation are often comparable to those of secure children, suggesting that avoidant children are not merely unaffected by the procedure. They are attached to their caregivers, but organize their behavior to serve different goals.

The other reason Ainsworth and colleagues caution against thinking about the bond as one that varies in strength is that doing so would seem to suggest that anxious-resistant children are "more" attached to their parents than secure children. Behaviorally, anxious-resistant children may engage in more expressions of proximity seeking and separation distress than secure children, creating the impression that they are more strongly attached than secure children. But, theoretically, the intense behavior exhibited by these children reflects secondary strategies for organizing their behavior (chapters: How Stable Are Attachment Styles in Adulthood? and What Is the Attachment Behavioral System? And, How Is It Linked to Other Behavioral Systems?); it does not reflect a "stronger" bond.

Having said that, it is clear that being attached is more than a simple binary affair. Indeed, the way Hazan and Zeifman (1994) and others study attachment in adulthood involves thinking about and measuring the *extent to which a person serves attachment-related functions* (eg, Fraley & Davis, 1997). Thus, although a person who functions as a safe haven and a secure base may be an attachment figure, targets can vary in the extent to which they fulfill these various functions. A peer, for example, may be a target of proximity seeking, but might not function as a secure base. We believe that it is important to take this kind of variation into account, but it is also important to not confuse it with the "strength" of an attachment bond.

Should Separation Distress be Used as a Marker of an Attachment Bond?

It is important to note that the presence of separation distress is often taken to be an indicator of attachment across many species and across many developmental phases. Indeed, Weiss (1975) considered separation distress to be one of the failsafe indicators of an attachment relationship. However, not all researchers use separation distress as a marker of attachment in empirical research (eg, Fraley & Davis, 1997; Nickerson & Nagle, 2005) because, in practice, it is a difficult one to use for assessment purposes. Brief separations are not as stressful for adults as they are for infants in a strange situation. Moreover, sometimes this distress is most obvious following a severe separation (eg, divorce) or loss, making it an impractical way to gauge the nature of the attachment relationship prior to that point. Our point is not to claim that separation distress is not a marker of an attachment bond; it most certainly is. But our impression is that it is more difficult for adults to self-report accurately on how they would feel if they lost someone. Doing so requires individuals to imagine hypothetical outcomes, whereas reporting on who they actually use for safe haven and secure-base functions does not.

There is also the complication that we alluded to before that separation distress is also a marker of caregiving and not attachment alone. Moreover, although it can be said that an attachment figure serves safe haven and secure-base functions, an attachment figure does not serve "separation protest" functions exactly. Separation protest is a marker of the existence of a bond, but is

not a function that an attachment figure serves. Thus, to study the transfer of attachment-related functions, one would not want to include separation protest as a function to be transferred.

To be clear: we are not denying the importance of separation distress in understanding attachment. But we wish to emphasize that it is a difficult criterion to use for assessing the nature of an intact bond in adulthood.

Are All Attachments Alike? Asymmetries Across Relationships

One of the core themes of adult attachment theory is that the attachment system is relevant to adult relationships and personality functioning. And although romantic relationships appear to be the most common kind of attachment in adulthood, there are important differences between the various kinds of attachments that people have across the lifespan. Just because two relationships are classified as "attachment relationships" does not mean that they are equivalent in all possible ways. For example, scholars have highlighted at least two crucial differences between infant–caregiver attachments and adult romantic attachments (see chapter: What Is Attachment Theory?). The distinction between the attached and the caregiver, for example, is clear in infant–caregiver relationships. It is not the parent who is using the infant as a secure base from which to explore the world; it is the child who is using the parent. Moreover, parents do not seek out their children for safety and assurance, but children seek their parents out for these purposes.

In adult romantic relationships, these boundaries are much less clear. At different points in the relationship, one person may function as an attachment figure and the other the attached. And at other times the roles may be reversed (chapter: What Is the Attachment Behavioral System? And, How Is It Linked to Other Behavioral Systems?). It is generally assumed that both individuals in the relationship are mutually attached to one another and that each person is capable of playing either kind of role. (Although their ability to do so competently may vary across individuals.) Second, romantic relationships are rooted in physical attraction and sexuality whereas infant–caregiver relationships are not. Hazan and Zeifman (1994) argued that many romantic relationships are initiated due to feelings of interpersonal attraction and the process of being intimate with others and engaging in persistent physical contact can set in motion the bonding process (see Gillath, Mikulincer, Birnbaum, & Shaver, 2008a). In short, romantic relationships often involve some combination of sexual interest, attachment, and caregiving (Hazan & Shaver, 1994) whereas infant–caregiver relationships lack the sexual component.

Other kinds of attachments in adulthood, of course, may also differ from one another in crucial ways. We discussed attachment to God earlier in this chapter as an example of a potential attachment relationship in adulthood. In fact, this kind of relationship might have more in common with infant–caregiver attachment than it does with adult romantic attachment. The roles of the attached

and the attachment figure are much more compartmentalized, for example. One does not provide care and comfort to God, and God does not use people as a secure base from which to explore the world. Similarly, people do not typically have a sexual connection to God in the Christian tradition. We opened the chapter with an example of a twin who was clearly attached to her sibling. Like adult romantic relationships, the roles of caregiving and attachment in twin relationships are more likely to be mutual than asymmetrical, as they are in infant–parent attachments.

Is There Really a Difference Between a Primary and a Secondary Attachment Figure?

A number of interesting questions can be asked about what does and does not constitute an attachment relationship. For example, one may wonder whether a person can only be construed as an attachment figure if he or she serves proximity-seeking, safe haven, and secure-base functions. Or whether a person who serves two such functions is "less" of an attachment figure than a person who serves all three functions. Or whether two or more people can be "primary" attachment figures if they each serve all three functions. Or, what exactly, makes someone a "secondary" attachment figure if that person, in fact, serves all three-attachment functions.

These are challenging questions to answer definitively because there is not a unified way to conceptualize attachment relationships. In fact, the current literature uses a variety of different terms, models, and measures to conceptualize and study attachment relationships. Some theorists, for example, have conceptualized attachment hierarchies in a way that would only leave room for a single individual at the top—as if a pyramid-like structure captures the psychology of attachment relationships (eg, Bowlby, 1969/1982). If this metaphor is appropriate, then only one person can be at the top and, in order for one person to emerge as a new attachment figure, another one must be "dethroned" (see the previous discussion).

Another way of conceptualizing attachment hierarchies, however, is as gradations of attachment-related processes. Thus, although someone could function as an attachment figure (serving all three functions), that person can easily share that privileged position in the hierarchy with others. In such an approach, there is a quantitative and functional difference between someone who serves as a secure base and someone who does not, but there is no natural threshold at which a relationship becomes an "attachment." Moreover, there is no assumption that a person cannot have multiple attachments.

Importantly, the concept of "primary attachment figure" emerges from a conceptualization that assumes a pyramidal structure rather than a graded hierarchical structure. In a graded hierarchical model metaphor, however, it is easier to conceptualize variations in the extent to which people fulfill certain attachment functions and, as a result, it is easier to accommodate the idea that multiple

individuals could serve as viable attachment figures. In this framework, it still might be the case that one person is favored and, in such situations, it might be sensible to refer to that individual as the "primary attachment figure" and the others as "secondary attachment figures," but, in some ways, those are just labels that are being used to describe in words the significance of the relationship; they do not reflect hard boundaries or binary categories.

We highlight these issues here to make it clear that there is no "correct" way to think about these issues in the context of contemporary attachment theory. Nonetheless, they are important issues to consider and we hope that future work will focus on solving some of these outstanding issues.

Is It Possible to Develop an Attachment Relationship With Someone who Does not Function as an Effective Secure Base?

Throughout this chapter we have defined attachment relationships as relationships with a person to whom the individual maintains proximity, whom the individual uses as a safe haven during times of distress, and uses as a secure base from which to explore the world. In many respects, this definition assumes that the relationship is a reasonably well-functioning one. After all, it is difficult to imagine that an individual would come to rely on someone as a secure base if, in fact, the person in question has repeatedly failed to be available and responsive when needed.

The clinical literature, however, is replete with examples of individuals who develop attachment relationships with others who do not function as ideal attachment figures. One of the most salient examples concerns emotionally and physically abusive relationships (eg, Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997; Milyavskaya & Lydon, 2013). In these situations, people may be fully aware that the relationship is not a healthy one. But the thought of leaving the relationship can generate anxiety—anxiety that, in turn, has the potential to lead the abused individual to seek proximity to the very same individual who is the source of the distress. Indeed, even in nonabusive relationships where partners are electing to separate or divorce, people often report an emotional gravitational force that keeps them from breaking free (Weiss, 1975).

It is difficult to imagine how an attachment bond could have developed in situations where the potential attachment figure is not responsive, understanding, and supportive—and maybe even abusive. Although we do not fully understand how these kinds of attachments may develop, we believe there may be at least two pathways that could enable their development. First, it may be the case that even suboptimal attachment figures are responsive, understanding, and supportive at some point in the development of the relationship. Indeed, one of the things that people sometimes report when they are separating from or breaking up with a partner is that their partner changed over time; the person the individual married was different—much more caring, kind, and giving (eg, Felmlee, 1995; Weiss, 1975). And some research on attachment and interpersonal attraction suggests that even highly insecure individuals —people who may be

unlikely candidates to serve as attachment figures—can be warm, engaging, and charming in initial interactions (Brumbaugh, Baren, & Agishtein, 2014; Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2010).

A second possibility is that, in the absence of an obvious alternative attachment figure, attachment relationships may sometimes develop to whichever individual is most proximate or familiar. The drive to form attachment relationships may be so primal and ingrained that people begin to form attachment bonds even in suboptimal conditions. Indeed, Ainsworth (1991) discussed the ways in which wartime stress has the potential to create enduring and powerful emotional relationships between soldiers—relationships that have many characteristics of an attachment bond. It is possible that suboptimal conditions, such as conditions of danger or risk, may accelerate the proclivity to bond. If so, then people may end up forging attachments to figures who, in many respects, may or may not be ideal attachment figures. They become the person's safe haven and secure base, not because they perform these functions competently, but because no one else is able to do so.