

## A Longitudinal View of Peer-Friendship Relations and their Association with Parental Attachment Bonds

I. Sánchez Queija\*, A. Oliva

Universidad de Sevilla, España

### ABSTRACT

A sample of adolescent boys and girls, 13, 15, and 18 years of age, was interviewed in order to describe the changing emotional relationships with friends during the adolescent years, and the influence of family relationships on relationships with friends. At age 13, the Parental Bonding Instrument, which evaluates recalled attachment history, was completed, as were questionnaires on intimacy to a best friend and peer-group attachment. The latter two instruments were completed again, when the boys and girls became 15 and 18. The results showed higher levels of best-friend intimacy and peer attachment in girls, and an increase in both measures of relational proximity in boys as adolescence progressed. Significant associations between family and peer relations were found showing that adolescents who reported high levels of parental care at age 13 were likely to report healthier peer relationships at ages 13, 15, and 18.

*Key words:* adolescence, peers relationships, family-peers relationships, attachment.

### *Novelty and Significance*

#### *What is already known about the topic?*

- Peer relationships contribute in important ways to adolescents' well-being. During the adolescent years, teen peer groups become increasingly important and adolescents experience more closeness in their friendships.
- There is less consensus about whether we are dealing with a passing phenomenon, due to fulfill emotional distancing from parents as a fundamental requirement for healthy development during adolescence, that loses its impact as boys and girls grow more self-confident; or whether instead, these relations become stronger during adolescence.
- Relations with friends occur in a wider relational network, which includes family relations as the main source of learning.

#### *What this paper adds?*

- Longitudinal data about adolescent peer relationships development in an Spanish context. Results show that peer relations become stronger throughout teens years.
- Care family relationships boost close peer relationships.
- The importance of the father's role to adolescent girl peer relationships and the role of overprotection to be in the side of close peer relationships.

There is a broad consensus among researchers as to the quality increase of peer relations that occurs at the onset of adolescence which implies a high emotional intensity (Brown & Larson, 2009). However, there is less consensus about whether we are dealing with a passing phenomenon, due to fulfill emotional distancing from parents, that loses its impact as boys and girls grow more self-confident, or whether instead, these relations become stronger during adolescence. Although some longitudinal studies on the subject exist (Rice & Mulkeen, 1995), the results are by no means conclusive.

\* Correspondence concerning this article: I. Sánchez Queija, Departamento de Psicología del Desarrollo y de la Educación, Universidad de Sevilla, c/ Camilo José Cela, s/n. 41018 Sevilla, España. Email: queija@us.es. *Acknowledgements:* This study was carried out thanks to the financing granted by Spain's Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, BSO2002-03022, and by Ministry of Education and Science SEJ2006-06433.

Infant-caregiver attachment develops itself in the context of family relationships (Bowlby, 1969). However, in the past three decades, along with the fact that studies on peer friendship relationships have reached its peak, an increasing body of research has appeared to include peer relationships in an attachment theoretical background. This framework allows to set up descriptive and explanatory relationships between both developmental contexts.

The purpose of this article is to provide data that helps to clarify the changes that take place in close relationships with peer throughout adolescence, and to link those changes with parent child attachment set up in childhood. Even though people, from early childhood on, make a distinction between friends and acquaintances (Hartup, 2002), it is during early adolescence that they consciously begin to value aspects of emotional closeness, such as loyalty and intimacy in a friendship, with an increase of confidence and self disclosure to a friend during this developmental stage (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Sullivan, 1953). The increasing importance of establishing close and intimate friendships during adolescence is documented in the work by Buhrmester (1996), who when comparing adolescents with preadolescents, found that the development of intimate and reciprocal friendships was related to socio-emotional adjustment and relational competence in adolescents, but not in pre-adolescents. During this stage of life, this type of friendship is transformed and changes from being fluid and based on activity during childhood, to being based on emotional and more stable bonds during adolescence (Brown, Dolcini, & Leventhal, 1997), which clearly has an influence on the increasing importance of socio-emotional adjustment.

Regarding the evolution of emotional proximity in friendship relations during adolescence, the empirical results are ambiguous. We find works defending stability and intimacy upon reaching adolescence (Shulman, Laursen, Kalman, & Karpovsky, 1997). According to these studies, relational intimacy is very important to adolescents, so they always score high on that aspect. However, other authors found an increase in intimacy between the ages of 12 and 16 years (early and middle adolescence), and a subsequent decrease in late adolescence (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992) as romantic relationships consolidate. A similar finding was reported by Rice and Mulkeen (1995) in their longitudinal study, in which girls constantly show more intimacy than boys do, who clearly increase their intimacy in friendship relations between the ages of 13 and 17 years, until reaching levels similar to that of girls when becoming 21 of age, when both trends even out. We found a similar trend referring to peer attachment. Some studies revealed a positive relationship between age and peer attachment (Gullone & Robinson, 2005), meanwhile other studies have not come across this kind of relationship (Wong, 1998). As we see, there is no clear pattern, which makes it difficult to make a prediction on the behavior of intimacy in friendship relations during adolescence and makes evident the need for more works on this subject, including longitudinal designs.

A general consensus seems to exist about the existence of clear gender differences between boys and girls when confronting personal relationships. These differences already appear at a very early age and continue during adolescence, and many studies show more intimacy in friendship relations among girls than among boys (Black, 2000; Field & Lang, 1995; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Gullone & Robinson, 2005; Rice & Mulkeen,

1995; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981). This difference in intimacy appears not to be only a perception of the girls, nor is it in response to social desirability, whereby girls usually score higher in self-reports in the traditionally feminine questions, since observational studies also reach the conclusion that dyads of female friends feel more comfortable and enjoy relationships more so than dyads of male friends (Lundy, Field, McBride, Field, and Largie, 1998).

Relations with friends and peers do not emerge in a vacuum; rather they occur in a wider relational network, which includes family relations as the main source of learning (see Parke & Ladd, 1992 for family-peer relationships modes of linkages).

On the basis of the framework provided by the attachment theory, the tendency for attachment patterns to remain stable was already described by Bowlby (1969); however, few empirical studies have focused on the generalization of the attachment pattern learned in the family to other relationships, and the studies that did so mainly dealt with babies and preschool children, i.e., few works with samples of middle childhood or adolescence exist (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif, 2001). Among the few studies that have been completed with adolescents, we found an almost 55% overlapping between the type of attachment to parents and the type of attachment to peers that form during adolescence (Furman *et al.*, 2002), and boys and girls with insecure attachments exhibit hostility and lack of social skills in peer relationships (Kobak & Sceery, 1988), those individuals with secure attachments have “higher-quality” friendships (Zimmermann, Scheuerer-Englisch, & Grossmann, 1996), i.e boys and girls classified as secure, based on their recalled childhood experience with parents, scored higher in social skills as reported by friends (Allen, Moore, Kuperminc, & Bell, 1998).

A more recently longitudinal study by Bielefeld and Rogensburg, showed that “young adults thoughts and feelings about close relationships are powerfully influenced by their early as well as their later relationships with mother and father” (Grossmann, Grossmann & Kindler, 2005, pp 98). In this study, the authors show the association between the Adult Attachment Inventory and other measures of relationships outside the family at 22 years old, and measures of attachment in early childhood (Ainsworth Strange Situation) or middle childhood.

This study had three objectives: (1) To compare the levels of adolescents in terms of peer close relationships in early, middle, and late adolescence. We intend to provide data that allows us to clarify the inconsistencies found in the developmental trend of friendship throughout adolescence; (2) To add data about gender differences in adolescent peer relationships. Based on current studies, it is believed that girls show higher levels of peer attachment and intimacy with best friends than those experienced by boys; and (3) To help fill the vacuum that still exists in the empirical study on the continuity in emotional relationships with parents and friends during adolescence from the perspective of the attachment theory. We expected that affection from parents would be related to more affective peer relationships.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

This study involved longitudinal monitoring of a sample comprised of 101 youths throughout their adolescent years. Our research began with a cross-sectional study on a sample of 513 adolescents between 13 and 19 years of age, selected at 9 schools in the province of Sevilla, España (five schools in the city, three schools in rural areas, and one school in the metropolitan area), allowing for criteria such as population size, and public or private ownership of the school. Seventy-four percent of participants lived in urban areas and 26% lived in rural areas. The second phase of the study involved longitudinal monitoring of the 13-year-old youths in the sample, who were re-evaluated on two new occasions. Thus, the participants in the study completed the assessment tools at an early age (13 years), a middle age (15 years), and in late adolescence (18 years); the three periods will henceforth be referred to as wave 1 (W1), wave 2 (W2), and wave 3 (W3). Of the 136 participants 13 years of age in W1, 114 continued in W2, and 101 continued in W3. Therefore, the final longitudinal sample consisted of 101 adolescents (38 males and 63 females) from predominantly two-parent households, with an average age of 13.10 years ( $SD = .44$ ) in W1, 15.40 years ( $SD = .56$ ) in W2, and 17.80 years ( $SD = .52$ ) in W3.

The attrition analysis showed that among participants continuing in the study, there were more females than males ( $\chi^2 = 40.05, p < .05$ ), and fewer children of parents with a low level of professional education ( $\chi^2 = 6.52, p < .05$ ). However, the results were similar in terms of habitat (rural versus urban) and the type of school attended (state school versus private). Finally, adolescents with less peer attachment abandoned the study ( $t_{(131)} = 20.06; p = .01$ ), since no significant differences of intimacy in friendship relation were found between those who continued and those who abandoned the study.

### *Procedure*

The initial step was to select the schools and contact the management to explain the study and request their collaboration. Once they accepted to participate, we selected the classrooms in which to collect the data. We then sent a letter to the parents asking permission for their children to participate in the study. After obtaining permission, we went on administering the questionnaires collectively. In the second and third waves some adolescents were not in school or did not go to the same school as in W1. In those cases, once contacted and accepting to collaborate, we scheduled an appointment for the questionnaire to be completed in the seminary of the Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology at the University of Sevilla.

### *Measures*

Having close friends and belonging to a group of friends appear as two distinct types of experience for adolescents (Brown & Klute, 2003). Thus, despite both being close relationships and being taken as such, in order to assess the development of friendship relations in adolescence, two different measures were taken.

Best friend relationships quality was measured with the *Intimacy Scale*, (Sharabany, 1994) which assesses the relationship with a best friend, male or female, across eight dimensions: 1. Honesty and spontaneity: "If you do something that I don't like, I can always say so"; 2. Sensitivity: "I know when the other is worried"; 3. Attachment: "I feel that we are very close"; 4. Exclusiveness: "I stay with him or her, when he/she wants to do something that others don't"; 5. Give and take: "If the other wants something, I allow him/her, even if I also want it"; 6. Imposition or accessibility: "I can plan how to use our time, without prior consultation"; 7. Shared activities: "I work with him/her on some of the school projects or assignments"; and 8. Loyalty: "I know that whatever you say stays between us." Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .91 in W1 and W2, and .89 in W3. Means and standard deviation are provided in table 1.

Peer group relationships quality was assessed with the *Peer-group Attachment Scale* (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), which is a 24-item scale assessing the relationship of the adolescent boy or girl with his/her group of friends. It includes 3 subscales: 1. Communication: "When we talk, my friends consider my point of view"; 2. Confidence: "My friends accept me for who I am"; and 3. Alienation: "Telling my problems to my friends makes me feel ashamed," Cronbach's alpha indices were .86 in W1, and .90 in W2 and W3.

The *Parental Bonding Instrument* (PBI) described by Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979) assesses the memory of adolescents regarding the attachment bond formed in childhood toward their parents. This questionnaire was completed on two occasions but only in W1: One focused on the father of the adolescents and the other one referred to the mother. From the 25 items that we set up, two dimensions emerged: 1. *Care vs. rejection*: "(My mother/father) spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice", with a Cronbach's alpha of .89,  $M = 29.5$ ,  $SD = 4.9$  by mother;  $M = 27.4$ ,  $SD = 6.2$  by father; and 2. *Overprotection vs. promotion of independence*: "(My mother/father) liked me to make my own decisions," with a Cronbach's alpha of .83;  $M = 16.9$ ,  $SD = 4.9$  by mother;  $M = 16.2$ ,  $SD = 5.1$  by father. PBI was filled in by adolescents at W1 and both peer relationships measures were completed at W1, W2 and W3.

### *Data analysis*

One of the main objectives of this study was to analyze the development of friendship relations during adolescence. For that, we used two different types of analyses. First, we analyzed absolute stability, both regarding intimacy with one's best friend as well as attachment to a group of friends. For that, we used the analysis of ANOVAs of repeated measures with two factors, taking as dependent variables the total intimacy and the total peer-attachment scores. The factors included in each ANOVA were time (intra-individual factor of repeated measures involving three levels) and gender (inter-individual factor involving two levels). In order to check sphericity of the variance-covariance matrix, we did the Mauchly test, while homogeneity was confirmed with the Levene test. When either of these assumptions were not met, we used the statistical  $F$  with one degree of freedom, but after applying the index for epsilon correction of Greenhouse-Geisser (1959). For the second objective, we used hierarchical regression

analysis, and the autoregressive model. This method allowed us to analyze which variables were associated with the change in DV between two points in time.

## RESULTS

Means and Standard Deviation for Peer group relationships quality are provided in Table 1. Figure 1 shows an increase in intimacy toward a best friend in boys ( $F_{(2, 98)} = 90.04$ ;  $p < .001$ ; eta squared = .16), provided by the change in intimacy occurring between W2 and W3 [*Mean Diference (MD)* = 11.34;  $p < .01$ ], and between W1 and W3 ( $MD = 17.58$ ;  $p < .01$ ), having identified no significant differences in the case of girls. Notwithstanding the constant increase in intimacy toward a best friend in boys and the complete stability in this regard in girls, the level of intimacy among boys does not reach the same level as among girls, who always show a more intimate relationship with best friends than boys do. Whenever the gender difference was minor (W3), the significant difference is in the girls' favor ( $t_{(99)} = 3.15$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, a significant interaction effect ( $F_{(2, 98)} = 3.37$ ;  $p < .05$ ) between age and gender appeared, so that we can say that the gender variable moderates the relationship between intimacy and age in adolescents. Thus, intimacy follows different paths throughout adolescence in boys and girls. Boys increase intimacy throughout adolescence while intimacy girls remain stable.

As with intimacy with a best friend, we notice an increase during adolescence in the scores on the scale for peer-group attachment in males ( $F_{(2, 98)} = 7.54$ ;  $p < .001$ , eta squared = .13). In this case, the difference was not significant from wave 1 to wave 2,

Table 1. Means (and standard deviation) of intimacy and peer relationships.

Peer attachment		Intimacy		Peer attachment		Intimacy	
W1		W2		W3			
47.5 (12.2)	177.9 (26.1)	48.8 (11.3)	182.1 (23.8)	50.3 (10.2)	187.4 (19.2)		

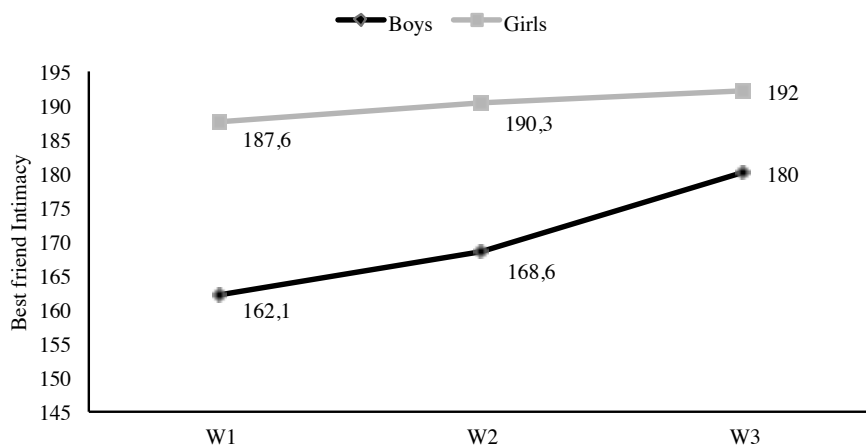


Figure 1. Changes in best-friend intimacy developed throughout adolescence.

or wave 2 to wave 3, but was significant from wave 1 to wave 3 ( $MD= 7.29$ ;  $p <.01$ ). Among girls, no changes were noticed in the averages of peer-group attachment with age.

Figure 2 shows the gender differences. The peer-group attachment is greater for girls than for boys both in W1 and W2 ( $F_{(1,99)}= 14.44$ ,  $p <.001$ ;  $F_{(1,99)}= 6.18$ ;  $p <.05$ ), while these differences disappear in W3. As with intimacy, the data shows that the gender variable moderates the relationship between peer-group attachment and the age of participants, as boys and girls continue on significantly different trends ( $F_{(2, 98)}= 4.7$ ;  $p <.05$ ).

Table 2 shows that the care in the relationship with father and mother in childhood is the variable(s) showing higher correlations both in terms of peer-group attachment and intimacy to the best female friend. This data emphasizes that the history of care to the mother measured in early adolescence correlates to the attachment shown by boys to their group, with higher values both in middle and early adolescence. In fact, care to the mother is also significantly related to the intimacy variable in the second wave of data for girls, though it was not in the first wave.

With the aim of determining which variable related to attachment is the best predictor of intimacy relationship with best friend or peer-group attachment, we set up two regression equations for either of these dependent variables. The first regression equation showed that boys and girls scoring higher in W1 in terms of overprotection by the father during childhood had greater best-friend intimacy at the end of adolescence.

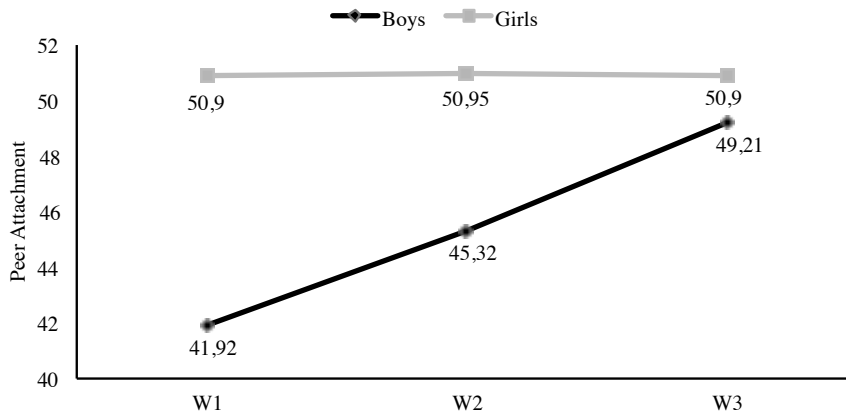


Figure 2. Changes in best-friend intimacy developed throughout adolescence.

Table 2. Pearson correlation between the Attachment History, Peer Attachment, and Intimacy variables in the three waves of data.

	Peer attachment W1		Intimacy W1		Peer attachment W2		Intimacy W2		Peer attachment W3		Intimacy W3	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Maternal overprotection	-.1	-.13	-.16	.09	-.2	-.15	-.06	.003	-.15	.013	.03	.11
Paternal overprotection	-.17	.009	-.09	.22	-.06	-.14	-.18	.31*	-.22	.07	.1	.27*
Maternal care	.29	.4**	.12	.18	.39*	.34**	.005	.26*	.25	.19	.12	.14
Paternal care	.18	.3*	.13	.28*	.41*	.2	.12	.05	.12	.09	-.26	.02

Notes: \*\*= $p <.01$  (bilateral); \*= $p <.05$  (bilateral).

The autoregressive model showed us that boys and girls who increased their intimacy with a best friend during adolescence were those, who in W1 were defined as being more overprotected by their parents during childhood. It is striking that paternal overprotection reported by the adolescent and gender were both a better predictor of intimacy in late adolescence, than is intimacy per se, in early adolescence (Table 3). Gender interaction terms were not significant.

Regarding peer-group attachment, the data for this variable in W2 was used as a variable criterion, since the data in W3 was not significant. The regression equation (Table 4) shows that in middle adolescence greater peer attachment was associate with higher scores on the scale of maternal care. Furthermore, the autoregressive model indicated that these high scores in the recalled maternal care are also related to an increase between W1 and W2 in the scores on the peer-attachment scale. The gender of the adolescents had no effect on this increase. Gender interaction terms were not found neither at the regression nor in the autoregressive model.

Table 3. Regression equation and Autoregressive Model dependent on the Intimacy in W3.

		Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	Δ R <sup>2</sup>
Step 1	Gender	.3*	.08	.08
Step 2	Gender	.3*	.09	.01
	Maternal care	.12		
Step 3	Gender	.25*	.13	.04
	Maternal care	.18		
	Paternal Overprotection	.23*		
Step 4: Autorregressive model	Gender	.2	.13	--
	Maternal care	.16		
	Paternal Overprotection	.21*		
	Intimacy W1	.12		

Notes: \**p* < .05.

Table 4. Regression equation and Autoregressive Model depending on the peer-attachment in W2.

		Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	Δ R <sup>2</sup>
Step 1	Gender	.24*	.05	.05
Step 2	Gender	.23*	.09	.11
	Maternal care	.35**		
Step 3	Gender	.25*	.16	.04
	Maternal care	.18		
	Paternal Overprotection	.23*		
Step 4: Autorregressive model	Gender	.07	.31	.15
	Maternal care	.2*		
	Peer attachment W1	.45**		

Notes: \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study shows that boys and girls presented different trajectories throughout adolescence concerning both the degree of best-friend intimacy and peer-group attachment. Thus, while the majority of girls starts out from a high level of peer closeness, and maintain high scores for these relationship variables, boys go on



increasing their level of attachment and intimacy during adolescence. These levels coincide with the findings of Rice and Mulkeen (1995) in their longitudinal study, which continued until age 21 years, showing that at onset of early adulthood, the proximity and relationship with friends declined or remained stable, i.e., a quadratic effect that may reflect the emergence or importance of another relationship context: the romantic one. Results support that peer close relationships is not a passing phenomenon, but itself is a relational context, with its own identity.

Our data also coincides with other studies by finding that girls maintain closer peer relationships, both in terms of best friend and of a group of friends (Eshel, Sharabany, & Friedman, 1998; Goresse & Rugiere, 2012, Markiewicz, Doyle, & Brendgen, 2001; Sharabany *et al.*, 1981). Some authors have portrayed these gender differences as a reflection of the different way in which boys and girls form relationships. Thus, while boys are more instrumental and relate to one another through shared activities, girls are more emotional relationship-oriented, and share more their intimacies, secrets, desires, and spend more time chatting with one another (Rose, 2007, Steinberg & Morris, 2001). In fact, of the two scales used to evaluate the relationship with friends, peer attachment is the one most loaded with emotional-relational aspects and exhibiting greater gender differences. However, the Sharabany's intimacy scale evaluates not only the most typical relational aspects between girls (e.g., openness and sensitivity), but also the instrumental aspect, which is described as being more characteristic of relations between boys (e.g., shared activities, and give and take), along with providing gender differences, though such differences disappear in late adolescence. The subscales statistical analysis shows that girls have always higher scores where significant differences were found, also in typically male sub-scales, so we can say that our data show a higher level of closeness in peer relationships between girls; this difference in closeness is not due to the different approach to friendship between boys and girls. This difference can reflect different patterns to close relationships by sex, as suggested by the Evolutionary Life History approach (Del Giudice & Belsky, 2011).

Results also shows that intimacy with the best friend and peer attachment show similar patterns in their trend throughout age and in gender differences, probably because both belong to close and horizontal relationships (Hartup, 1989), at least if only the emotional side of relationships is taken into account. Probably skill needed to maintain close relations with peers and with best friends is similar and we need to choose the different characteristics of best friends and peers in other aspects, for instance, using activities done with best friends or group of peers. Anyway previous research found that both types of relationships are related to similar outcomes (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002, Landsford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2003). Further studies have to research deeper into whether the relationship with the best friend and the group are dissimilar (Brown & Klute, 2003) or whether they are not really very different life experiences.

Another important finding was the relationship between the history of attachment as recalled from the onset of early adolescence and the scores concerning best-friend intimacy in late adolescence, and the peer-group attachment in middle adolescence. Furthermore, changes in these variables during adolescence were associated to the

history of childhood attachment. It should be stressed that the two variables based on the history of attachment exerted a different effect on boys and girls. Thus, while paternal overprotection was linked to higher levels of intimacy in girls, but not in boys, maternal overprotection was not associated with intimacy or peer attachment. Likewise, while care received from the father was related to peer attachment among boys in W2, but not in girls, care received from the mother was related to best friend intimacy in girls, but not in boys. These differences are consistent with Updegraff, McHale and Crouter's (2001) research that found more involvement with peers relationships from same-sex offspring and the relationships between parents involvement and positive peer experiences (e.g. intimacy); this point of view opposes the results of Gorrese & Ruggieri's metaanalysis (2012), which reach the conclusion that the attachment to the mother has a stronger influence on peer attachment than the relationship with the father, regardless of the sex of the offspring.

Meanwhile, as other studies have shown (Allen *et al.*, 1998; Brown & Huang, 1995; Furman & Wehner, 1994; Freitag *et al.*, 1996; Shulman *et al.*, 1997), we found that models learned in the family do indeed transfer to other relationships, as boys and girls with a higher level of recalled care from their parents during childhood had greater peer attachment and best friend intimacy. This data validates the results obtained from the transversal sample, which gave rise to this longitudinal study, in which we showed that boys and girls having a positive relationship with at least one parent had better emotional relationships with friends (Sánchez Queija & Oliva, 2003). The analyses showed that the recalled care of adolescents from their mothers in childhood is the best predictor of peer-group attachment during middle adolescence, which also explains the increased peer-group attachment (occurring) between early and middle adolescence. This care from the mother is also a good predictor of the reported best friend intimacy, although it fails to predict the increase in such intimacy. In this sense, the role of paternal overprotection was surprising, and for two reasons: 1) the importance of the role of the father, and 2) because this relationship is a positive one, and so this was unexpected. In fact, the desirable pole of the overprotection is the promotion of independence, and in this case it is the overprotection pole that seems to exert a positive influence on intimacy and its increase between W1 and W3. Overprotection was related to negative outcomes like somatic symptoms (Janssens, Oldehinkel, & Rosmalen, 2009), to less close friendships and to lower levels of perceived support from peers (Pinqart & Pfeiffer, 2011).

Parent-attachment relationships do not have a direct influence on offspring peer relationships. Rather, these relationships are mediated by social information processing that is, in fact, the main intergenerational transmission process (Dykas, Ehrlich, & Cassidy, 2011). Perhaps the promotion-of-independence (the overprotection dimension) may evaluate something other than what it theoretically purports to do. The effects of parental overprotection are delayed rather than simultaneous. Probably with maturity girls understand better the tendency of parents to overprotect them, and as adolescence progresses, that which girls interpret at age 13 years as excessive overprotection is transformed into normal paternal concerns and protection. In fact, our sample completed the attachment-history questionnaire in early adolescence, a time characterized by disengagement from parents, especially in girls, who are more precocious than boys (Oliva & Parra, 2001).

At this period, the interest shown by parents during childhood (and which probably continues during early adolescence) may be interpreted as overprotection, which may not always really be overprotection, but an interpretation influenced by the developmental stage and the search for emotional independence, which is normative at this stage. As time progresses, they begin to interpret the protection by their parents during childhood as something normal and not excessive; their model of close relationships and what can be expected of them may improve and influence their relationship with (female) friends in a positive way.

Our interpretation concerning high paternal overprotection and greater best-friend intimacy affords a positive view of this issue; however, another possible hypothesis perhaps a little less appealing, although still plausible, should be mentioned. Many girls, overprotected by their fathers, end up being overly dependent on emotional relationships. Perhaps the high scores on intimacy imply an emotional best friend dependence, whereby this dependence may have been preceded by a trial or learning period in the paternal relationship, along with dependence and lack of promotion of independence.

The scientific literature describes other unexpected results in the father-son or father-daughter relationship. Thus, for example, in the work of Youngblade and Belsky (1992) on schoolchildren, those with a secure attachment to their mothers were not affected by negative peer relationships; however, no evidence of that was found when the secure attachment was to the father. For decades, the study of mother-son and mother-daughter relationships had obscured the analysis of the relationship between a son and a daughter to their father. However, it appears that not only are both relationships (mother to son and daughter, and father to son and daughter) different, but they also exert a differential influence on the development of boys and girls, which is why scientific analysis should start probing our understanding of this bond (Berlin & Cassidy, 1999).

We prefer not to end this section without a comment on some of the limitations of this study. First, the fact that the sample consisted of merely 101 adolescents makes it difficult to reach general conclusions for the overall population. Second, we have used self-report measures all from the same source. Third, the final sample was not matched in terms of gender participation. This is especially important if we take into account that boys and girls tend to live their relationships differently. Thus, in the analyses that were made without separating both sub-samples, the relative impact of girls was much greater than that of the boys, so that the regression equations reflect more the ways and relations of girls than of boys. However, the obtained results overlap with much of the consulted literature, which supports the validity of the obtained data, as well as the new issues raised by our work. Girls, even today, go on maintaining closer relationships with friends (male or female), than boys do. This relational proximity, perceived as a good personal fit, appears in those with better family relations, while taking into account that the role of the father and mother differs in relation to their sons and daughter.

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