Attachment hierarchies for Spanish adolescents: family, peers and romantic partner figures

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Abstract

Background: Attachment Theory has become one of the leading theories in human development. Nonetheless, empirical studies focusing on how attachment unfolds during adolescence are still scarce particularly in Spain, due to the lack of adequate measures. Objective: This study aims to validate the Important People Interview (IPI, Rosenthal & Kobak, 2004; 2010) in a shorter questionnaire version (Important People- Questionnaire; IP-Q); to analyse the changes in different affiliative bonds to multiple figures -family, peers, romantic partners– over the course of adolescence; and to identify boys' and girls' hierarchical ordering of their specific attachment bonds. Method: 1025 Spanish adolescents, aged 12-17 years old completed the IP-Q. Results: The results showed that the IP-Q has convergent and divergent validity. Moreover, this measure indicated that peers overtake some family members in proximity-seeking and support-seeking, but not in the overall hierarchical ordering of the attachment bond during adolescence. Conclusions: The bond with the romantic partner increases in terms of scoring on the affiliative subscales as adolescence progresses. There are significant gender differences among the hierarchy patterns of attachment for boys and girls. Developmental changes in adolescent attachment are discussed.

Keywords: Adolescence, Affiliative bonds, Attachment hierarchies, Important People-Questionnaire; Ex-post facto study

Introduction

Since Bowlby (1969) formulated his Attachment Theory, it has become one of the leading theories in human development. As Bowlby noted, attachment is an important aspect of human relationships across the lifespan. Adolescence is a period during which young people spend increasing amounts of time with peers and as such their relationships with peers may take on some affiliative functions (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). There is a considerable and growing body of research that has highlighted the importance of attachment relationships during adolescence (Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle & Haggart, 2006). However, to date there is limited research examining the development of attachment relationships with various attachment figures across adolescence within a Spanish context. The current study adds to this literature by exploring the differences in attachment bonds and other related constructs in relationships with family, peers, and romantic partners among a sample of adolescents in Spain, with a particular focus on age and gender differences.

Attachment behaviour has been defined as a series of different *affectional bonds*, whose activation, manifestation and intensity depend on both individual and contextual factors (Fearon, Shmueli-Goetz, Viding, Fonagy, & Plomin, 2014; Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016; Verhage et al., 2016). Ainsworth and Bowlby (1965) identified three different styles of attachment: secure attachment (corresponding to a clear and stable style of intimate relationship, and stable social personality); avoidant attachment (related to an unstable style of affective bonding); and labile and unstable attachment (related to an ambivalent social personality). These traits characterize the style of interpersonal relationships when the individual faces new social situations, especially in the field of interpersonal relations of proximity, support-seeking, affiliation and intimacy (Groh, Fearon, et al, 2014; Soares & Dias, 2007).

Individuals form attachment bonds with multiple figures, and these are hierarchically organised, often (especially during infancy) with a demonstrable preference for the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). In parallel, Bowlby (1979; 1982) hypothesised that the characteristics of attachment bonds evolve over time, undergoing variations in the way they manifest themselves relative to the original attachment figure across the different stages of the human life cycle. The attachment figure assigned to fulfil such needs also undergoes changes throughout the lifespan, not only in terms of *who* fills this position but also the importance they take on as opposed to other potential attachment figures. Thus, it is the personal needs and preferences across one's lifetime that modulate this ordering (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Groh, Roisman, et al, 2014; Seibert & Kerns, 2009).

According to Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle and Haggart (2006), adolescence is an important transitional period during which attachment relations undergo further development. Some authors point out that during adolescence, when formal thought arises and the adolescent gives more logical and reasoned responses, he/she produces more complex thoughts and their mental representations expand and diversify (Allen, 2008; Coan, 2016). This leads to a wider social context that openly recognises the value of other potential attachment figures; including peers. Cassidy and Shaver (2008) pointed out that when adolescents start to spend more time with the peer group, peers become more important figures to them from a socialising perspective and evolve into an affiliation system. In contrast to childhood, where efforts are directed towards gaining parental approval, adolescence is more focussed on pleasing one's peers and seeking them out to fulfil attachment needs (Delgado, Oliva & Sánchez-Queija, 2011). Together with their preference to seek support from a figure closer than parents, someone who recognizes and understands their needs and daily problems, this could lead to the formation of new attachment bonds with peers.

However, it has been suggested that peer attachments may not be as strong as attachments to others (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010). The extant literature is mostly consistent in noting that parents, not peers, are typically retained as primary attachment figures through late adolescence and even early adulthood, especially among secure adolescents, or those who are not in long-term romantic relationships (Julal, Carnelley & Rowe, 2017; Pinquart, FeuBner & Ahnert, 2013; Umemura, Lacinová & Macek, 2014). Friends assume functions such as safety or proximity seeking, although this does not imply that all characteristics of attachment are transferred from the family context to the peer context; nor do friends become true attachment figures. Generally, friends assume other types of social ties such as affiliation, proximity or support (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010; Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Seibert & Kerns, 2009). In support of this, Rosenthal and Kobak (2010) emphasise that mothers remain the primary attachment figures during adolescence.

Many studies address the possible effects of the gender of those involved as a key variable related to attachment during adolescence (Mesman et al., 2016; Shulman & Scharf, 2000). Gorresse and Ruggiere (2012) reported in their meta-analysis that girls were more attached to their peers than boys, perhaps due to their typical experiences of relationships; girls' friendships are usually more interdependent than are those of boys, who tend to look for congenial and cooperative companionship. Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) pointed out that attachment relationships during adolescence are not only influenced by the gender of the adolescent, but also by gender of the attachment figure. Regarding parents and siblings as attachment figures, it appears that there are differences between same-sex attachments -which are higher in quality- and different-sex attachments (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010). Nonetheless data on this topic are still scarce and results have been inconclusive (Buist, Dekovic, Meeus, & VanAken, 2002).

In line with previous studies, Julal et al., (2017) noted that over the course of adolescence, another attachment figure emerges: the romantic partner. It has generally been shown that whereas basic survival needs are met only by the parents, who in turn become the primary attachment figures during childhood and early adolescence (particularly the mother) (Jones, Fraley, Ehrlich, Stern, Lejuez, Shaver & Cassidy, 2017; Pinquart et al., 2013), the peer group enters into the attachment circle during mid to late adolescence (Allen, 2008; Rubin et al., 2004), while this circle is subsequently opened to the romantic partner starting in early adulthood and continuing across the lifespan (Pascuzzo, Cyr & Moss, 2013; Ratto, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2016).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first to consider adolescent romantic love as an attachment process, arguing that the same behaviours observed with earlier attachment figures occur. Moreover, Hazan, Zeifman and Middleton (1994) and Hazan and Zeifman (1999) suggested that certain attachment characteristics shift directly from the parents to the romantic partner, without friends ever performing these functions. This bypassing of friends within the development of attachment relationships finds some support in the literature. It has been suggested that relationships with friends do not usually demonstrate all of the characteristics of an attachment relationship and thus peers have been argued as not being true attachment figures (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010; Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Seibert & Kerns, 2009). Furthermore, individuals who placed friends highly within their attachment hierarchies during adolescence tended to be those who showed greater signs of maladjustment, which may indicate that this is non-normative (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010; Umemura, Lacinová, Kraus, Horská, & Pivodová, in press). Research has indicated that romantic partners increase in importance within the attachment hierarchy towards later adolescence (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010). Young people who had been in a dating relationship for at least two years reported that their partner met the four primary attachment characteristics, whereas for those who had not

been in a dating relationship for this length of time, family members continued to fulfil some of these characteristics (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999; Hazan, Zeifman & Middleton, 1994; Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Umemura et al., 2014).

Other authors have pointed out that Hazan and Shaver's (1994) hypothesis regarding the transfer of attachment from family to friends and romantic partners during adolescence requires more empirical data analysis. While companionship, support-seeking and affiliation-seeking may be important for adolescents and their social relationships, these factors alone are not sufficient for these relationships to be considered attachments (Kerns, Schlegelmilch, Morgan & Abraham, 2005; Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010). The question of when one is considered an attachment figure is different to their position in an attachment network. A friend could be preferred for proximity seeking/maintenance, and affiliative support, but not for safe haven and felt security, which may indicate the friend is not a "clear cut" attachment figure, or that the friendship is a subsidiary or secondary/tertiary/etc. attachment relationship (Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Friedlmeier & Granqvist, 2006; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997).

The present study

Despite the insights gained from this research, empirical studies focusing on how attachment and affiliative bonds change during late childhood and adolescence are still scarce (Jones et al., 2017). It is likely that one of the reasons for this is that there are few valid and robust instruments for this purpose (Madigan, Brumariu, Villani, Atkinson & Lyons-Ruth, 2016). Different narrative instruments and questionnaires have provided empirical data on the development of the attachment bond during adolescence, however, they have several disadvantages when assessing a large sample in order to compare the results quantitatively (Balluerka, Lacasa, Gorostiaga, Muela, & Pierrehumbert, 2011), and few have enabled the analysis of the hierarchy of attachments during adolescence. Moreover, in Spain there are relatively few measures which have been translated and validated (ECR-R, Fernández-Fuertes,

Orgaz, Fuertes & Carcedo, 2011; CaMir-R, Balluerka, et al., 2011) and, as far as we know, none which allow for the exploration of the attachment hierarchy.

Rosenthal and Kobak (2010) highlight the value of studies that, by considering hypothetical situations designed to activate attachment behaviours, make it possible to identify and distinguish attachment figures other than parents during adolescence. Markiewicz, et al., (2006), in a replication and extension of Hazan et al.'s 1994 study (addressing some of its limitations), found that there is a clear need for new studies that build on this body of research, and which provide data from large samples and acknowledge gender differences. This is the approach taken in the present study: designed as a cross-sectional descriptive study, we examined the developmental changes in adolescents' attachment hierarchies and other affiliative bonds; specifically, we aimed to (1) validate the Important People Interview with Spanish adolescents in the form of a questionnaire (IPI-Q) to assess attachment and other affiliative bonds; (2) analyse the differences in multiple figures –family, peers, romantic partner– among adolescents of different ages in relation to the attachment bond and other related constructs (support-seeking and affiliation), and (3) identify boys' and girls' hierarchical ordering of these attachment figures at different ages during adolescence taking into account gender differences. We hypothesized that (1) IPI-Q is a valid measure to assess attachment and affiliative bonds, thus the results related to the hierarchical ordering of the attachment figures will be similar to those from previous studies; (2) It is also expected that, in all cases, the figures related to the peer context will increase in importance during adolescence and (3) best friends and romantic partners will appear among the affiliative and attachment figures, but not as "clear cut" attachment figures.

Method

Participants

A sample comprising 1025 Spanish adolescents (50.75% boys; 49.3% girls) ranging in age from 12 to 17 years, with a mean age of 14.06 years (*SD*= 1.36), was recruited from four public middle-class Secondary Schools in Córdoba city and province in Spain. Most students were living in two parent families with siblings; almost 13% were living in single parent families (mother only), and approximately 12% living without siblings. Most of the parents of the participants (89.3% fathers; 91.3% mothers) had at least elementary level education (Table 1). Adolescent romantic status is shown in Table 2. Their romantic experiences increased during adolescence: a high percentage of students had never had a romantic partner at 12 years old (43.4% boys; 47% girls), but most of them had, or had had one at 17 years old (76.2% boys; 100% girls).

Instruments

Socio-demographic data scale: A questionnaire including socio-demographic questions was prepared in which adolescents were asked about their age, the school they attended, their gender, their family characteristics and their dating relationship status.

Important People Interview (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010): The original version of IPI featured two main sections: the first, made up of open questions, required participants to nominate the most important people in their lives; in the second section, participants were asked to choose which of the aforementioned nominees they would seek out first in each of the hypothetical situations, ranking these in order of preference, first, second, third and fourth, listing up to 4 people for each situation.

Some slight changes were made to this version (Important People Questionnaire –IP-Q. See Annex 1), translating the instrument into Spanish and turning it into a self-report measure, thus

optimising the possibility of obtaining a larger sample of participants and enhancing the transfer of results.

To achieve this, we altered the first part of the original IPI by providing 7 fixed identification options for adolescents; "nobody" and 6 figures (father, mother, sibling, best friend, someone else from your group of friends, and romantic partner). These 6 figures were chosen as they have been identified as the closest members of an adolescent's social circle and also provided a balance between the number of family and peer figures. This pre-selection limits the possibility of exploring in depth hierarchies which could include other family members, teachers, etc. However, in most Western and non-Western cultures, although many children grow up with a network of attachment figures, the parent or caregiver who takes care of the child becomes the main figure for attachment behaviours (Mesman et al., 2016). Accepting this limitation, this change makes the IP-Q a good option as a shorter questionnaire version for the assessment of attachment hierarchies, gaining convenience and simplicity in terms of completing the survey and making it possible to combine it with other questionnaires in a more complex battery of instruments.

Based on this pre-selection of figures and following the format of the original instrument, participants were then asked to rank in order of preference up to four of those people they would turn to in 9 different hypothetical situations, ranking them as first, second, third or fourth choice for each scenario. As in Rosenthal and Kobak (2010), the numbers given to the responses were reversed for the purposes of analysis. For each situation, the highest number now corresponded to the primary attachment figure, the second highest score to the secondary figure, and so on. For example, if an individual nominated their mother as their first choice, their mother would be given a score of 4, their second choice figure within that scenario would be assigned a score of 3, their third choice figure would receive a score of 2 and their fourth choice figure would be given a score of 1. Those not nominated in a particular scenario were

given a 0. Trinke and Bartholomew (1997) pointed out that ranking methods could be problematic for those participants who have difficulties in ranking only one figure in each position for each situation; nonetheless, there were no participants in this situation in the current study, probably due to the very specific and clear instructions given to participants regarding this before starting the questionnaire.

In line with the original measure, these situations covered three scales: attachment bond (AB), support-seeking (SS), and affiliative proximity-seeking (APS), thus the average scores for each figure on these scales were calculated after the validation of the questionnaire.

To translate the questionnaire into Spanish, a backtranslation process was followed. It was piloted with a small group of volunteers only to check the language. Only minor errors were identified (i.e. "emergency room" was changed for "hospital" due to common Spanish Health System terms). An individual bilingual in Spanish and English checked the final version.

Procedure

The self-report measures used in this study were administered to participants during school hours. Prior permission was sought from the lead University's Research Ethics Committee and written consent was obtained from each of the schools' Directors as the individual with legal responsibility for the young people during school hours. In advance of the study commencing, participants were informed that all information would remain confidential and anonymous and that participation was voluntary; no one decided not to participate.

Factor analysis was run to measure the IP-Q validity, and basic descriptive analyses with means and ANCOVAs were performed, all of them using SPSS version 21. Effect sizes were calculated using eta-squared $\eta2$ (Field, 2009).

Results

IP-Q: Validation of Important People Questionnaire

Some minor changes were made to the original IPI as described above resulting in a 9-item questionnaire. Each item represents a situation where the different proposed figures should be selected in a hierarchical order according to the participant's preferences.

Following the method employed by Rosenthal and Kobak (2010) convergent and discriminant validity were measured. It was predicted that adolescents would prefer the same figure in the three situations which formed each scale (convergent validity), and that this attachment figure may differ from the one selected in the other scales (discriminant validity). Based on the ranking of figures for each situation, a primary attachment figure was identified for each participant. New variables were computed on this basis, thus each of nine situations received a score depending on the first figure selected.

A Principal Component Analysis was conducted on the 9 items with Promax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis (KMO=.866). An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Although only two components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1, the scree plot suggested a three-component solution. Given the large sample size, and the convergence of the scree plot and the original structure of the scale, 3 components were retained in the final analysis. Cumulatively, these 3 components explained 67.98% of the variance. Table 4 shows the pattern matrix and the structure matrix. Only factor loadings greater than .30 have been displayed.

Component 1 represents Affiliative Proximity-seeking and accounted for 44.34% of the variance. Component 2, Support-seeking Behaviours, accounted for 14.57% of the variance. Component 3 represents the Attachment Bond and explained 9.06% of the variance. The correlation between factors was also measured to assess discriminant validity: Affiliative

Proximity-seeking and Support-seeking Behaviours had a medium association (.529); in contrast, the correlations with the Attachment Bond were lower (.38 and .32 respectively).

Affiliative bonds during adolescence: age differences.

The first aim of this study was to analyse how children and young people of different ages rank the importance of figures in their lives related to the affiliative bonds identified (AB, SS, and APS). Thus, the average scores for each figure in each scale (AB, SS, and APS) were obtained. Then, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the average score obtained for each of the figures chosen at the different ages. The results are presented separately for each affiliative bond.

Figure 1 shows the results obtained for AB. Adolescents assigned the highest scores to family figures (father, mother and sibling) in all cases, followed by peers and romantic partner. However, only father [$F_{(34.895, 1045.406)} = 6.462$; $p=.000$; $\eta2= .032$], mother [$F_{(18.858, 727.773)} = 5.017$; $p=.000$; $\eta2= .025$], someone from the group of friends [$F_{(11.043, 526.581)} = 4.060$; $p=.001$; $\eta2= .021$] and romantic partner [$F_{(61.615, 1129.122)} =10.564$; p=.000; $\eta2= .052$] yielded significant age-related differences, although in all cases the effect size was small or medium. The father and mother scores decreased significantly with advancing age. Specifically, the post hoc analyses revealed differences between the youngest age groups (12–13 years) and the older age groups (15, 16 and 17 years in the case of father; 16–17 years for mother). In contrast, the scores increased with advancing age for someone from the group of friends and romantic partner, where differences were equally found between the ages at opposite ends of the sample: at 12–13 years compared with 15-year-olds in the case of someone from the group of friends, and compared with 14, 15, 16 and 17-year-olds in the case of the romantic partner.

Regarding the SS scale**,** the results are shown in Figure 2. Mothers and best friends are identified as the primary figures to meet the need for support. However, father [$F_{(49.157, 1162.499)}$

= 8.136; $p=.000$; $\eta2= .041$], mother [$F_{(45.673, 1212.861)} = 7.245$; $p=.000$; $\eta2= .036$], someone from the group of friends [$F_{(20.254, 1279.992)} = 3.0094$; $p=.010$; $\eta2= .016$] and romantic partner [$F_{(93.943, 1682.331)} = 10.744$; $p=.000$; $\eta2= .053$] show significant differences over the course of the adolescent ages under consideration. In the post hoc analyses, these differences, when referring to family figures, were found to occur progressively, with scores decreasing with increasing age (father: differences between 12, 13 and 14-year olds compared with 15, 16 and 17-year-olds; mother: 12 and 13-year-olds compared with 15, 16 and 17-year-olds, and 14, 15 and 16-year olds compared with 17-year-olds). As for someone from the group of friends, differences were observed between 12–13 and 15 years, with a peak in the score which then fell again in later years. In terms of romantic partner, the scores increased significantly from the youngest (12–13) to the oldest (15, 16 and 17) groups.

Finally, Figure 3 shows the results obtained for APS. The ANOVA analyses revealed that father [$F_{(26.227, 1035.616)} = 4.842$; $p=.000$; $\eta2= .025$], mother [$F_{(18.526, 1122.765)} = 3.155$; $p=.008$; $\eta2= .016$], sibling [$F_{(19.494, 1236.458)} = 3.014$; $p=.010$; $\eta2= .016$], someone from the group of friends [$F_{(28.334, 1679.719)}= 3.225$; $p=.007$; $\eta2= .017$] and romantic partner [$F_{(92.616, 2085.376)}= 8.492$; p=.000; $\eta2= .043$] underwent significant changes over the course of adolescence. As in the case of the previous affiliative bonds, here the scores for father and mother decreased significantly between the early years (12, 13 and 14) and the later years (15–16 years for father; 15 and 17 years for mother). In terms of sibling, whose scores were stable in the other two scales, a significant decrease was observed by late adolescence (17 years) compared with all other ages. Regarding someone from the group of friends, and consistent with the pattern observed in SS scale, a peak in scores occurred (at age 15), differing significantly from the scores obtained in early adolescence (13 years) and from those obtained towards the end (17 years). Once again, romantic partner experienced a score increase with advancing age;

significant differences were identified between the early years (12–13) and the later years (15, 16 and 17).

Hierarchical ordering of attachment figures during adolescence by gender.

In order to meet the third objective of this study, namely to identify boys' and girls' hierarchical ordering of multiple attachment figures at different adolescent ages, a descriptive analysis was performed based on the position of each figure across the different ages. All subscales were collapsed into a total attachment figure ranking. All the figures were ranked according to average scores they received. Data pertaining to boys and girls were analysed separately.

Table 4 shows the results obtained. Girls and boys aged between 12 and 16 rank their family figures in higher positions: the mother is the primary figure, followed by the father as the secondary figure and siblings as tertiary figures. Figures belonging to the peer context, namely the romantic partner and someone from the group of friends, occupy lower positions in the hierarchy. Preference is shown for best friend in contrast to someone else from the group of friends or the romantic partner. Romantic partner, however, assumes greater importance across all the ages for girls than for boys (except at 12-years).

Finally, by the ages of 16 (for girls) and 17 (for both), changes are noted regarding the relative positions of family and peer attachment figures. Within the 16-year-old group, the romantic partner occupies the fourth position for girls, replacing the best friend. At 17 years, boys retain their parents as their main attachment figures but best friend appears as the tertiary figure replacing siblings. The romantic partner is still in fifth position. In contrast, at age 17, girls retain their mothers as their primary attachment figure but their romantic partner is their secondary figure, followed by father and best friend.

Discussion and conclusions

The first aim of this study was to validate the Important People Interview (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010) with a Spanish population. Narrative instruments have been widely used (Balluerka et al., 2011) however, they have several disadvantages when assessing a large sample. In this regard, moving from the interview to a questionnaire format represented an opportunity to reach larger samples and to compare the results quantitatively. Thus, the IP-Q is a useful tool in studying attachment hierarchies and other affiliative bonds among adolescents with proven convergent and divergent validity.

The second goal of this study was to analyse the differences in multiple attachment figures – family members, peers and romantic partner– over the course of adolescence in relation to each of the affiliative bonds (AB, SS, APS) identified in the IP-Q. The importance of family figures decreased in all of these affiliative bonds with advancing age, although the AB scale evidenced a less dramatic decrease. The peer and romantic partner figures, however, showed the reverse pattern, with scores increasing with age, significantly so on APS and SS. These findings concur with those of previous studies with peers overtaking family members during adolescence on some affiliative bonds but not on the attachment bond (Rosenthal & Kobak, 2010). Furthermore, mothers were found to serve as the primary attachment figure over other family figures such as fathers (Julal et al., 2017; Ratto et al., 2016).

From this perspective, it is noted that while there is relatively little difference in the AB scores given to parents by adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 years, there is a substantial movement toward peers on the SS and APS scales over the same period. This could make developmental sense, as SS and APS scales are likely to be precursors of developing a fully-fledged attachment bond with a friend or romantic partner in later years. Nonetheless, longitudinal studies or research across wider age ranges are needed to confirm these data.

Nevertheless, the patterns followed differ slightly according to the affiliative bond under consideration. Even though they follow a general common trend, the attachment bond seems to be slightly different from support- and affiliative proximity-seeking bonds, meaning that these findings can be interpreted in line with Gorrese and Ruggieri (2012), who viewed family and peer attachments as being different and complementary. Thus, rather than just being a transfer of attachment functions from one context to another, we could be talking about changes to this bond in both contexts as boys and girls grow older. Perhaps, in accordance with Zeifman and Hazan (2008), it may be that during adolescence young people expand their attachment contexts and enrich their potential emotional and intimacy givers; thus peers become a potential attachment figures (Groh et al., 2014).

It has been argued that the secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachments, as expressed by Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999), lead to individuals building an *internal working model* of themselves and their relationship partner which influences their subsequent behaviour (Ainsworth, 1978). This interplay between the internal working model and behaviour has been considered to be a key aspect of personality related to intimate relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; 1994). Hazan and Shaver (1987) noted that, romantic experiences in a way that parallels the classic typology of attachments, is a matter of mental models of self and social life; it is to say, it extends to security versus insecurity in the presence or absence of the other as well as accessibility and emotional nuances derived from intimate contact. In this regard, the affiliative proximity-seeking and support-seeking bonds relating to their romantic partner provide young people–-, with the opportunity to deepen their relationships with these 'new' partners and build new attachment links which progressively gain solidity and stability in a clear, but not universal, way. That is to say, there may be developmental changes in individuals' affective, emotional and social lives that are possibly closely related to the attachment style of each individual; in psychoanalytic terms this could be considered as their particular way of

establishing their secondary attachment bonds (Freud, 1925). Although personality factors related to the primary attachment style have not been examined within the current study, personality could account for the somewhat varied individual development of these bonds. Although, in general, as has been found here, there is a progression towards the consolidation of bonds of intimacy and support seeking with peers and the first romantic relationships, it is possible that there is some individual variation related to the general style of attachment and personality. This relates to relationships with peers (Seibert & Kerns, 2009), but also those romantic partners with whom they could establish an erotic-sexual relationship, consistent with new developmental goals.

The final aim of this study was to identify boys' and girls' hierarchical ordering of multiple attachment figures at different ages. In this respect, the results for the most part are consistent with those reported in the meta-analysis conducted by Gorrese and Ruggieri (2012). Family members continued to fulfil primary functions well into late adolescence; the findings support the fact that peers do not replace family bonds during adolescence (even if they increase their scores), given that adolescents continue to seek out mothers as their primary figure in emergency situations, meeting their attachment bond (Gorrese & Ruggieri, 2012; Ratto et al., 2016; Umemura et al., in press).

Gender was found to be an important variable that introduces significant differences among the patterns followed by girls and boys. While boys generally scored fathers higher, girls scored best friends and romantic partners higher than did boys, especially during the first half of adolescence. Even though the literature addressing gender differences is scarce, some authors found adolescence to be a time when girls form closer relationships with their peers than boys, which may impact on the importance they give to the affiliative bond generated (Hay & Ashman, 2003; Mesman et al., 2016). However, from the ages of 16 to 17, boys increased their scores towards best friends, reaching the scores given by their female counterparts. Yielding

similar results, some authors justify this pattern positing that boys possibly develop at a slower rate than girls, which would postpone the acquisition of competencies required to strengthen bonding with friends (Delgado et al., 2011; Oliva, 2011). This explanation is reinforced by the perspective offered by Markiewicz et al. (2014), who further found that girls at these ages start to seek out best friends less frequently when they become involved in romantic relationships.

It is important to recognise the increasingly important role of the romantic partner during this stage; even becoming secondary figures for girls. Friends, and even siblings, are relegated (mainly by girls) to positions below the romantic partner as adolescence progresses. In line with Hazan et al. (1994), it seems that certain attachment characteristics shift directly from the parents to the romantic partner, without friends ever performing these functions. Once more, it seems that the hierarchical ordering is heavily impacted by the affiliative needs examined. And as for the explanation Hazan and Shaver (1987) give about including the romantic partner as an attachment figure in adolescence, it could be perceived that this type of relationship offers a pattern comparable to that of the caregiver in the early years, and that it is necessary to meet various attachment needs. Thus suggesting that the relationship with the romantic partner may be at the early stages of attachment formation at this stage. However, this could not be concluded from this study alone.

Nonetheless this work is not free of limitations that should be considered for future studies. The first limitation relates to the instrument. Even though it offers advantages over the interview version; it is also a more limited and general measure. It is limited because it provides predetermined choices for important people (instead of open ended questions used in the original IPI) which will not allow adolescents to identify any other important people who could enter in their attachment hierarchy, particularly in single parent households. It is also more general as participants are no longer thinking about specific individuals but general categories of individuals. This may have led participants to consider different individuals within different

scenarios, for example if they had more than one sibling or were thinking about different people from their group of friends. It is not clear whether this was an issue for participants and if it may have affected the findings. However, this could be overcome in the future by specifying in the instructions to participants that they should consider only one sibling or one particular person from their group of friends when responding to the scenarios. Furthermore, research could explore this in more depth in order to understand *how* individuals are interpreting these questions and to which specific or general relationship(s) they are responding, much in the way that Karabenick et al. (2007) describe the process of examining cognitive validity in surveys, which they define as being 'assessed by how a respondent population interprets an item' (p.147). Participants in the current study were under 18 years and their experience of romantic partners was still very limited, constraining those analyses that sought to investigate the role of the romantic/dating relationship in adolescent attachment. It was not possible to measure the effect that the length of the relationship had on the attachment hierarchies for young people which would be of interest as it has been suggested that this may have an influence on the formation of the attachment bond. In relation to the hierarchical ordering of attachment figures, it should be noted that variation in rankings was not examined and so it is not possible to state with certainty that a hierarchical order is present across all age groups and both genders. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of this study is an additional limitation.

In sum, this work represents a considerable step forward in the field of adolescent attachment. It is the first study to examine the developmental stages in adolescent attachment hierarchies in a large non-English speaking sample. The large sample recruited provides a robust test for the newly developed questionnaire, as well as for gender differences that support existing literature. Future research should explore the development of attachment relationships longitudinally across adolescence and into early adulthood and explore other factors (such as personality) which may have an influence on attachment development.

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Table 1

Sample Characteristics

			Percentage (N)
Level	*1 level of Secondary School (~13 years-old)*		28.2% (289)
	2 level of Secondary School (~14 years-old)		28.8% (295)
	3 level of Secondary School (~15 years-old)		21.6% (221)
	4 level of Secondary School (~16 years-old)		21.5% (220)
School	*School 1*		23.9% (254)
	School 2		16.4% (168)
	School 3		23.6% (270)
	School 4		34.3% (342)
Family structure	*Both parents*		84.58% (867)
	Single-parental (mother)		12.39% (127)
	Single-parental (father)		1.26% (13)
	Other members		1.75% (18)
	No siblings		12.09% (124)
	At least one sibling		87.9% (901)
Parent's studies	*None*	*Father*	10.7% (110)
		Mother	8.7% (89)
	Elementary	*Father*	53.4% (547)

	Mother	54.4% (558)
Secondary	*Father*	10.5% (108)
	Mother	11.3% (116)
Professional	*Father*	12.4% (127)
	Mother	12.7% (130)
Universities	*Father*	8.9% (91)
	Mother	10.9% (112)

N=1025

Table 2

Romantic experience: percentage (N)

Age	12		13		14		15		16		17	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
	N=76	*N=66*	*N=125*	*N=118*	*N=123*	*N=127*	*N=115*	*N=117*	*N=58*	*N=59*	*N=22*	*N=16*
I have a romantic partner right now	15.8% (12)	16.7% (11)	14.4% (18)	21.2% (25)	13.8% (17)	34.6% (44)	23.5% (27)	39.3% (46)	31% (18)	50.8% (30)	28.6% (6)	58.3% (9)
I do not have a boy/girlfriend right now, but have had one within the last 6 months	40.8% (31)	36,4% (24)	38.4% (48)	39.8% (47)	48% (59)	38.6% (49)	47.8% (55)	41.9% (49)	44.8% (26)	27.1% (16)	47.6% (10)	41.7% (7)
I have never had a romantic partner	43.4% (33)	47% (31)	47.2% (59)	39% (46)	38.2% (47)	26.8% (34)	28.7% (33)	18.8% (22)	24.1% (14)	22% (13)	23.8% (5)	---
N=1025												

Table 3

Pattern matrix and (Structure matrix) for the IP-Q

	Affiliative Proximity-seeking	Support-seeking Behaviors	Attachment Bond
Choose for fun	**.837 (.844)**	(.456)	(.321)
Enjoy being together	**.815 (.855)**	(.473)	(.398)
Shared activities	**.768 (.791)**	(.504)	
School presentation	(.442)	**.822**	
Party	(.472)	**.797 (.824)**	
Dreadful day	.315 (.631)	**.547 (.737)**	(.367)
Accident	-.400		**.847**
Feel the closest	(.446)		**.764 (.804)**
Miss the most			**.683 (.757)**
N=1025			

Table 4

Hierarchical ordering of attachment figures during adolescence: boys and girls.

Age	12 Boys	12 Girls	13 Boys	13 Girls	14 Boys	14 Girls	15 Boys	15 Girls	16 Boys	16 Girls	17 Boys	17 Girls
1	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
$\overline{X}$	3.35	3.62 (.73)	3.40	3.46	3.13	3.33	3.22	3.27	3.05	3.16	2.96	2.81
(s.d.)	(.71)		(.71)	(.82)	(.91)	(.90)	(.86)	(.94)	(1.06)	(.97)	(.93)	(1.17)
2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	RP
$\overline{X}$	2.78	2.53 (.93)	2.87	2.25	2.75	2.10	2.42	2.07	2.40	1.82	2.29	1.80
(s.d.)	(.95)		(.89)	(.95)	(.98)	(1.07)	(1.08)	(1.01)	(1.03)	(1.11)	(1.26)	(1.44)
3	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	RP	BF	F
$\overline{X}$	1.78	1.69 (.90)	1.66	1.85	1.73	1.62	1.52	1.65	1.74	1.34	1.40	1.72
(s.d.)	(.99)		(.96)	(.95)	(.98)	(.98)	(1.04)	(.99)	(.94)	(1.50)	(1.22)	(1.35)
4	BF	BF	BF	BF	BF	BF	BF	BF	BF	BF	S	BF
$\overline{X}$	.84	1.27 (.84)	.95	1.36	1.01	1.37	1.12	1.27	1.31	1.18	1.09	1.44
(s.d.)	(.83)		(.83)	(.92)	(.94)	(1.05)	(.91)	(.99)	(1.05)	(.98)	(1.24)	(.95)
5	GF	GF	GF	GF	GF	RP	GF	RP	RP	S	RP	S
$\overline{X}$	.50	.53 (.76)	.42	.54	.54	.88	.85	.99	.81	1.17	.80	1.41
(s.d.)	(.58)		(.57)	(.70)	(.69)	(1.21)	(.92)	(1.20)	(1.23)	(1.08)	(1.15)	(1.23)
6	RP	RP	RP	RP	RP	GF	RP	GF	GF	GF	GF	GF
$\overline{X}$	.50	.31 (.77)	.33	.48	.49	.59	.72	.69	.59	.64	.78	.55
(s.d.)	(.89)		(.68)	(.95)	(.98)	(.74)	(1.15)	(.81)	(.79)	(.78)	(.75)	(.57)

M= mother; F= father; S= siblings; BF= best friend; GF= someone from the group of friends; RP= romantic partner

Annex 1

Important People Questionnaire (IP-Q).

A continuación, se presentan una serie de situaciones. Junto a ellas, aparece una serie de personas a las que podrías recurrir en cada momento. Enumera,

de 1 a 4 por orden de preferencia, a quien elegirías en cada ocasión. Recuerda:

1= elección en primer lugar

2= si 1 no estuviera, elección en segundo lugar

3= si no estuvieran 1 ni 2, elección en tercer lugar

4= si no estuvieran 1, 2, ni 3, elección en cuarto lugar

(You can find some sentences below regarding different situations. There are also different people you could choose for each situation. Please, rank from

1 to 4, who you would choose in each situation. You must remember:

1= this your first choice

2= if 1 wasn't available, this is your second choice

3= if neither 1 nor 2 were available, this is your third choice

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4= if neither 1, 2, nor 3 were available, this is your fourth choice							
	Padre (Father)	*Madre (Mother)*	*Hermano/a (Siblings)*	*Mejor amigo/a (Best Friend)*	*Alguien del grupo de amigos (someone from your group of friends)*	*Pareja (Romantic Partner)*	*Nadie (Nobody)*
1. ¿A quién te sientes más cercano/a? (To whom do you feel closest?)							
2. Imagina que tuvieses que viajar solo a otra cuidad durante 2 semanas, ¿a quién echarías más de menos? (Imagine that you must travel by yourself to another city for two weeks, who would you miss the most?)							

3. *Imagina que estás cruzando la calle y de pronto te pilla un coche. Lo siguiente que sabes es que estás en un hospital, ¿a quién llamarías primero? (Imagine that you are crossing the street by yourself and you are suddenly hit by a car. The next thing you know is that you are waking up in a hospital room, who do you call first?)*							
4. *Imagina que estás teniendo un mal día. Has tenido muchos problemas que se han acumulado y te están agobiando. ¿A quién recurrirías en primer lugar para que te ayudara a sentirte mejor? (Imagine that you are having a bad day. A lot of things have built up and are bothering you. To whom would you go to first to help you feel better?)*							
5. *Imagina que vas a hacer una presentación ante tus compañeros de clase. Empiezas a ponerte muy nervioso y te preocupa equivocarte. ¿Quién podría darte seguridad y apoyarte para que sintieras más confianza? (Imagine you are going to make a presentation in front of your class. You start to get really nervous and*							

worry that you will mess up. Who would make you feel most confident that you could do a good job?)							
6. Te has enterado de que alguien que tú conoces va a celebrar una fiesta y no te ha invitado. Te sientes marginado y dolido. ¿Con quién hablarías primero para sentirte mejor? (You heard that someone you know is having a party and you are not invited. You feel left out and hurt. Who would you talk to first to make you feel better?)							
7. ¿A quién escogerías si quisieras divertirte y pasar un buen rato?(Who would you most choose to be with if you wanted to have fun and have a good time?)							
8. ¿Quién disfruta contigo y tanto como tú de las cosas que más te gustan? (Who most likes to do the things that you enjoy?)							
9. Cuándo dispones de tiempo libre, ¿con quién prefieres compartirlo? (When you have free time, which person do you most enjoy being with?)							