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Adult Intimate Relationships: Linkages Between Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory and Adult Attachment Theory

Karen Ripoll-Núñez
Universidad de Los Andes - Colombia, kripoll@uniandes.edu.co

Sonia Carrillo
Universidad de los Andes - Colombia

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the contributions of two lifespan–development theories to the study of adult intimate relationships. These are interpersonal acceptance–rejection theory (IPARTheory) and attachment theory. First, we focus on four major points of convergence and four points of divergence between theories in their understanding of intimate relationships in adulthood. Following this, we discuss each theory's contributions to theoretical and empirical knowledge about adult intimate relationships, their modes of assessment, and the development of clinical interventions. Finally, we suggest possible future developments that could help to enrich both theories.

Introduction

Individuals' physical health and psychological well-being rely to a great extent on the nature of intimate relationships (Adams & Blieszner, 1995). The study of individuals' affective relationships throughout the life cycle has caught the attention of numerous researchers within the area of social and emotional development. An interpersonal relationship exists to the extent that people exert strong, frequent, and diverse effects on one another over an extended period of time (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In other words, when people are in a relationship, each person's actions affect the other's behaviors, feelings, and sense of overall well-being (Berscheid, 2004).

Relationships with significant figures – such as friends and romantic partners – during adulthood provide emotional support and affirmation of one's identity, buffer the effects of stressful events, help structure time, and provide continuity in important roles (Blieszner, 2000). In particular, affective relationships with others who are close to one's age, i.e., intra-generational relationships, offer the advantages of shared understandings about life experiences as well as role models for socialization to new aspects of life (Blieszner, 2000). Close relationships in adulthood provide opportunities for individuals to affirm their sense of self and, at the same time, learn and practice new skills to cope with new stages of life.

Both attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969-1982) and interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory; Rohner, 1986) emphasize the importance of love, acceptance, and close relationships in individuals' healthy social, emotional, and personality development. These theories attempt to account for the formation and maintenance of close relationships with attachment figures throughout life, as well as for the effects of the quality of such relationships on individuals' psychological functioning. Although both theoretical perspectives initially focused on the development of affective bonds in childhood, they have more recently been applied to the study of attachment relationships in adulthood (attachment theory: Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Thompson, 2008; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2008; IPARTheory: Rohner, 2008). In the last few decades, researchers from both IPARTheory and attachment theory have investigated the development and characteristics of adult intimate relationships and have explored the implications of these relationships for the individuals' social and psychological adjustment.

These two theories make strong empirical contributions to the study of adult intimate relationships but are rarely considered together, as researchers mostly subscribe to only one of them. The goal of this paper is to compare these two theoretical perspectives. Such comparison may initiate a dialogue among scholars that could lead to important theoretical and empirical developments in the future. Accordingly, the purpose of this manuscript is threefold; first, we reflect on the main theoretical assumptions or postulates of IPARTheory and adult attachment theory; second, we compare these two theories. More specifically, we focus on four theoretical principles that we consider to be major points of convergence between IPARTheory's and attachment theory's explanations of adult intimate relationships. These principles pertain to: (1) the evolutionary perspective of both theories; (2) their interest in cross-cultural similarities; (3) the importance of mental representations; and (4) the impact of disruption or loss of significant relationships. The comparison also includes four points of divergence between these theories: (1) their explanation of cultural differences; (2) the

conceptualization of attachment; (3) multiple internal working models versus a single internal working model with contradictory elements; and (4) the long-term effects of infancy experiences on individuals' socio-emotional development. Thirdly, in the last section of the paper, we discuss major contributions of both theories with regard to theoretical and empirical knowledge about adult intimate partnerships, the development of assessment instruments, and their clinical applications. We also offer suggestions for future developments in each of these areas.

Theoretical Postulates of IPARTheory and Attachment Theory

IPARTheory

IPARTheory is an evidence-based theory of socialization and life span development that aims to predict and explain major consequences, causes, and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance and rejection worldwide (Ali, Khaleque, & Rohner, 2015; Rohner, 1986; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). Initially – in the 1970s through the early 1990s – IPARTheory (then called PARTheory) focused almost exclusively on perceived *parental* acceptance-rejection (Rohner, 1975, 1986; Rohner & Rohner, 1980). In more recent years, however, the theory has expanded to include issues of acceptance-rejection in all important attachment relationships throughout the life span (e.g., Rohner & Carrasco, 2014; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010; Rohner & Melendez, 2008). Hence, the theory's original name of parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) was changed in 2014 (Rohner, 2016) to *InterPersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory* (IPARTheory).

IPARTheory's main postulate regarding adult intimate relationships asserts that adults who perceive themselves to be rejected by their intimate partners or other attachment figures tend to develop the same cluster of negative psychological dispositions as do children who perceive themselves to be rejected by their parents. Such dispositions include problems with: 1) anger, hostility, aggression, passive aggression, or problems with the management of hostility and aggression; 2) dependence or defensive independence depending on the form, frequency, intensity, and timing of perceived rejection; 3) negative self-esteem; 4) negative self-adequacy; 5) emotional instability; 6) emotional unresponsiveness; and 7) negative worldview (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002, 2012a, 2012b; Rohner, 2004; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010). According to the theory, individuals who feel rejected by attachment figures and other important people in their lives are also likely to feel anxious, insecure, and develop negative mental representations about themselves, others, and the world around them, which will be discussed later.

IPARTheory focuses on five classes of questions that are grouped into three subtheories: personality subtheory, coping subtheory, and sociocultural systems subtheory (Rohner, 2016). As will be discussed later, questions in each of these subtheories seek to understand cross-cultural similarities in the ways that individuals' need for warmth and love and the experiences they have in close relationships across the lifespan influence their behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and their overall psychological adjustment. Thus, IPARTheory

places a strong emphasis on the role of culture as it pays special attention to universal aspects of human development and psychological functioning. However, questions in sociocultural systems subtheory also focus on idiosyncratic aspects of interpersonal relationships, that is, on variations across and within cultures in the expression of acceptance-rejection and the meanings individuals attribute to such behaviors. As will be explained later, sociocultural systems subtheory attempts to explore complex interactions between different maintenance systems (e.g., family and community) and institutionalized meaning systems that shape individuals' development and their interactions with others in close interpersonal relationships (Rohner, 2016).

Adult Attachment Theory

Adult attachment theory emerged within the general framework of attachment theory originally proposed by Bowlby (1969-1982), Ainsworth (1967), and by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). In recent decades, there has been an increased interest in expanding attachment theory beyond childhood and adolescence. Numerous researchers have focused on the conceptualization of adult attachment and on the study of characteristics and mechanisms that explain attachment relationships in this stage of life (Ainsworth, 1989; Berlin, Cassidy, & Appleyard, 2008; Feeney, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Hazan and Shaver (1987), for example, presented an initial attempt to conceptualize adults' intimate relationships as an attachment process. Based on Bowlby's and Ainsworth's main claims, these authors proposed that adult romantic love is governed by the attachment behavioral system, and that romantic partners become attachment figures who are used as targets for proximity maintenance, a safe haven, and a secure base (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Following this initial conceptualization, Sperling and Berman (1994) defined adult attachment as

> "the stable tendency of an individual to make substantial efforts to seek and maintain proximity to and contact with one or a few specific individuals who provide the subjective potential for physical and/or psychological safety and security" (p. 8)

Additionally, other researchers have proposed that the formation of an attachment relationship between two adults follows a developmental process with four distinct phases: pre-attachment phase, attachment-in-the-making phase, clear-cut attachment phase, and goal-corrected partnership phase (Zayas, Günaydin, & Shoda, 2015; Zeifman & Hazan, 1997).

In a recent review of romantic relations under attachment principles, Shaver and Mikulincer (2014) underlined the idea that romantic relationships during adulthood can be recognized as an attachment process and that romantic partners are some of the most important attachment figures in this stage of life. These authors cited ample evidence showing that close intimate relationships among adults fulfill three of the main criteria that define attachment figures as construed in attachment theory: a) romantic partners represent a safe haven that provide protection, care, and comfort in stressful or threatening circumstances; b) they act as a secure base that offers security and facilitates exploration;

and c) separation from the romantic partner elicits anxiety, distress, grief, or psychological devastation.

Additional support for the view of adult intimate relationships as attachment relationships was recently highlighted by Pietromonaco and Beck (2015) who pointed out both normative processes as well as individual differences in close relationships during adulthood. Normative processes are related to the influence of early experiences in the way individuals understand and represent relations with romantic partners, and in the process of establishing, maintaining, and reacting to separation or loss in those relationships. Close relationships show typical features (attachment functions, behavioral systems, affect regulation processes, and internal working models) from infancy through adulthood. However, the style or pattern that reflects the nature of individuals' romantic relationships may vary depending on the content of individuals' specific working models (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). Thus, individual differences in adult attachment behavior may be understood as a reflection of differences in expectations and beliefs individuals form on the basis of their attachment histories. Two categorizations of attachment styles have emerged in the literature of attachment in adulthood. First, a typology that comprises three attachment styles (secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant) proposed by Hazan and Shaver (1987) based on the same classification in early childhood, and second, a four-category model that identified secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) as combinations of positive and negative views of the self and others based on the internal working model.

Points of Major Convergence Between Theories

Evolutionary Perspective: The Need for Positive Response, and the Correlates of This Need.

The influence of the evolutionary perspective is evident in both IPARTheory and attachment theory. Adopting an evolutionary perspective implies two main assumptions. First, both theories propose that a phylogenetic need or propensity is the starting point in the formation of close affectional bonds with others. Other concepts such as adaptation and human evolution, although equally important, are emphasized in different ways in these theories.

According to IPARTheory, for example, individuals are born with a biologically based need or desire for a special positive contact with significant others. From the moment of birth, children experience an emotional need for love, care, comfort, and nurturance from parents and other close adult figures. Significant caregivers' positive responses play a determinant role in individuals' functioning across the life cycle (Rohner, 1999). IPARTheory emphasizes individuals' subjective perceptions of parenting behaviors. The perception of interpersonal warmth and acceptance has been found to be associated worldwide with psychological and behavioral adjustment, whereas perceived interpersonal rejection is linked worldwide to behavior problems and maladjustment (Khaleque & Rohner 2002, 2012a, 2012b; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

Attachment theory also proposes a biologically rooted propensity to establish long-lasting relationships with significant others. According to this theory, individuals develop a phylogenetically based, species-wide behavioral system whose main function is to seek proximity and contact with their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969-1982). According to Bowlby (1969-1982), this system evolved within what he called "the environment of evolutionary adaptedness." Within their particular environments, individuals look for protection and care from attachment figures in times of danger, stress, or illness. This protection promotes the process of becoming attached and leads to a predictable outcome, i.e., reproductive fitness, which guarantees the survival of the species (Simpson & Belsky, 2008).

The second assumption from the evolutionary approach requires further analysis. A significant amount of theoretical literature as well as compelling empirical evidence tends to support the universality postulate. As Rohner and colleagues (2012) state, evidence from this literature "confirms that perceived interpersonal acceptance-rejection by itself is universally a powerful predictor of psychological and behavioral adjustment" (p. 1) in both children and adults. In addition, IPARTheory researchers have empirically tested the theoretical postulate that adults in different cultures who perceive themselves to be rejected by their intimate partners or other attachment figures at any point in life tend to develop the same cluster of psychological dispositions as do children who perceive themselves to be rejected by their parents (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012a, 2012b; Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

The universality hypothesis has also been part of attachment theory since its origins. Attachment researchers have sought to empirically test Bowlby's theoretical propositions regarding the biological nature of the child's ties to primary caregivers, as well as individuals' phylogenetically-acquired need to seek protection and care (Bowlby, 1969-1982). Evidence accumulated over the past five decades in numerous cultures around the world (e.g., United States, Germany, Israel, Africa, and China) has led attachment theorists to draw the following universalist conclusions about the nature of attachment: a) children everywhere become attached to their primary caregivers; b) the quality of attachment relationships depends on the caregivers' sensitivity and responsiveness to children's needs; c) there are specific cultural dimensions in the normativity of the three attachment patterns (secure, anxious, avoidant) in different contexts. Based on her studies (in Uganda and Baltimore), Ainsworth (1967, 1978) claimed that secure attachment was the normative and optimal attachment style. However, studies in other sociocultural contexts showed other dominant patterns (e.g., avoidant style in Germany and ambivalent-resistant style in Israel and Japan) (Grossmann, Grossmann, Spangler, Suess, & Unzner, 1985; Grossmann & Grossmann, 2005; Quinn & Mageo, 2013; Sagi, van IJzendoorn, Aviezer, Donnell, & Mayseless, 1994); and d) attachment relationships experienced early in life have a significant influence on social and personality development during adulthood (Grossmann & Grossmann, 2005; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008).

Interest in Cross-Cultural Similarities

Another similarity between the theories – a similarity that is closely related to their evolutionary perspectives on close relationships – has to do with their interest in the cross-cultural universality of individuals' responses to being loved by those to whom they are emotionally close. More specifically, IPARTheory seeks to empirically demonstrate that both

children and adults everywhere whose needs for positive response from their significant others are not satisfied are likely to exhibit specific emotional and behavioral reactions in their intimate relationships (e.g., anxiety, insecurity) (Rohner, 2016). As noted in Rohner (2016), 11 metanalyses have supported IPARTheory's postulates regarding the worldwide association between acceptance-rejection in interpersonal relationships and individuals' psychological adjustment or maladjustment. One such metanalysis evaluated this association specifically in adult intimate relationships, based on a sample of 17 studies conducted in several different cultures (Rohner & Khaleque, 2010). Results from this metanalysis suggest that there is probably a universal association between adults' experiences of acceptance in adult intimate relationships and their psychological adjustment. More specifically, experiences of acceptance in adult intimate relationships are associated with a set of personality dispositions such as difficulties in managing anger, dependence, negative self-esteem, and negative worldview, among others (Rohner & Khaleque, 2010).

Similarly, attachment theory states that the secure base phenomenon is universal. Since Ainsworth's (1967) original work with infants in Uganda, attachment theorists have been interested in testing Bowlby's hypothesis that the secure base phenomenon is observed in all cultures. There is now an abundant amount of evidence regarding the secure base behavior in infant-mother relationships in different cultures (Posada et al., 1995). Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) and van IJzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz (1999, 2008) have conducted extensive analyses of the literature and found supportive evidence about the cross-cultural validity of attachment theory's postulates regarding the secure base phenomenon. Despite the emphasis on cross cultural similarities, these researchers have also pointed out that cross cultural research should also focus on differences in attachment-related behaviors within and between cultures.

Internal Working Models and Mental Representations

Both theories attribute an important role to individuals' cognitive representations of themselves and their attachment relationships when explaining the influence of significant relationships during childhood on adult intimate relationships. Attachment theorists, for example, use the term *internal working models* to refer to representational models of attachment figures and of the self. Such models are thought to derive from individuals' prior experiences with attachment figures (Cassidy, 2000). Similarly, IPARTheory proposes that individuals form *mental representations* based on their experiences in relationships with significant figures during childhood and adulthood. Both theories postulate that such cognitive representations guide individuals' expectations, feelings, behaviors, and other cognitive processes in significant interpersonal relationships.

Two theoretical issues regarding attachment theory's concept of internal working models are worth discussing here because they have caused misunderstandings within the attachment theory literature (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). More importantly, however, they are particularly relevant to the comparison between attachment theory and IPARTheory. These two issues refer to (a) whether internal representations are relationship-specific or general strategies; and (b) whether mental representations are stable or do they change over time?

Relationship-Specific vs. General Internal Representations

A point that is debated among attachment theorists could be formulated as follows: Do individuals develop internal working models that are specific to each significant relationship, or do individuals' prior experiences in such relationships lead to the formation of more general internal representations? According to attachment theory, internal working models formed during infancy are based on daily interactions between children and their parents (caregivers). Therefore, those early mental representations are said by some attachment theorists to be relationship-specific (Bowlby, 1988). Also, because internal models are constructed in interpersonal relationships, representations of the self and attachment figures are said by some to be complementary (e.g., the parent is loving, therefore the self is thought to be lovable) (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). However, other researchers (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) have proposed a four-category model of attachment styles in which both internal working models of the self and others may coincide (e.g., positive models of the self and others characterize a secure attachment style) or not (e.g., a positive model of the self and a negative model of others is typical of a dismissive attachment style).

Bowlby (1988), however, suggested that internal working models of the self with specific attachment relationships in infancy become a property of individuals themselves. In other words, Bowlby argued that that those initially relationship-specific internal representations become more general strategies of relating that guide individuals' behavior throughout their lives. Research showed that attachment relationships established during early stages were predictive of attachment behaviors in childhood (Kaplan, 1987) and to parents' state of mind evaluated in adulthood (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Based on Bolwby's theoretical assumption about the influence of early experiences, other researchers developed the Adult Attachment Interview (George, et al., 1996), which focused on the analysis and interpretation of the content, organization, and coherence of adults' representations and verbalizations of their early relationship experiences with their own parents (Main & Golwyn, 1994; Sochos, 2013).

In addition, Bowlby (1988) proposed that individuals form attachment bonds with different figures throughout their lives and that such relationships form what he called a person's hierarchy of attachment figures. Because people may form different mental representations in their relationships with different attachment figures, an important question becomes which attachment working models will become accessible in a given situation (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2008). It has been proposed in the attachment literature that the accessibility of an attachment working model depends on various factors such as the amount of experience on which it is based, the number of times it has been applied in the past, and the issues made salient in a particular situation (Baldwin, 1992). Collins and Read (1994) suggested that the appraisal of events play a key role in the process of setting and achieving an attachment goal. In a study conducted by Collins and Allard (2003) results indicated that the appraisal of the expectations about the partners' intentions – either in favor or against the goal – was related to the individual's emotional reactions to a particular situation (as cited in Bartz, Baldwin & Lydon, 2015).

The question about the specificity of mental representations has also been an issue of interest to IPARTheory. There are at least two ways in which IPARTheory coincides with attachment theory in this regard. On the one hand, IPARTheory recognizes that children's

emotional security is dependent on the quality of their relationship with their parents and other attachment figures. Also, IPARTheory postulates that the experience of interpersonal acceptance and rejection during childhood has a significant and unique effect on the development of individuals' personality over time (Rohner et al., 2012).

On the other hand, IPARTheory's postulates that perceived interpersonal rejection during childhood is associated with the development of more or less stable social, emotional, and cognitive dispositions to respond in particular ways in various contexts and relationships in adulthood (Rohner et al., 2012). In terms of mental representations, these stable dispositions – in the absence of counter experiences – are likely to be related to the individuals' ideas about the self and others that are formed in parent-child interactions and influence more general strategies of relating. Thus, similar to attachment theory, IPARTheory proposes that mental representations that were initially formed in early relationships often become integrated into more general models of functioning in adulthood. However, as will be explained later in this article, IPARTheory differs from attachment theory with regard to the long-term impact of early childhood experiences of acceptance-rejection on adults' functioning in intimate relationships. IPARTheory postulates that early experiences of rejection will be more influential on adults' psychological functioning if they have not been exposed to counter developmental experiences with other significant persons in their lives such as teachers, friends, or romantic partners.

Stability vs. Change of Mental Representations

According to attachment theory, the consolidation of a regularly available and stable working model is the most important psychological process that explains the enduring effects of attachment experiences in childhood on attachment-related behaviors in adulthood (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2008). Therefore, most attachment theorists conceive of mental representations formed in early relationships – as well as their influence on adult attachment – as fairly stable and enduring. However, there are at least two ways in which attachment theory also recognizes changes in such mental representations over time.

First, Bowlby (1969-1982) stressed that attachment working models formed during infancy undergo developmental revisions as individuals' social, communicative, and cognitive competencies develop in childhood and adolescence (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Second, Bowlby (1969) also considered that changes in the nature of the parent-child relationship (e.g., a formerly loving parent who becomes rejecting or neglectful) could lead to revisions of the working models, because they no longer yield adequate predictions of the parent's behavior. This type of discontinuity in attachment internal working models was named "affective discontinuity" (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). In sum, attachment theory postulates that the stabilizing processes that maintain individuals' confidence in attachment figures' emotional availability and that allow for fairly consistent internal working models may give way to revisions when individuals realize that current models no longer predict their interactions with major attachment figures.

The issue of stability of mental representations has also received attention in IPARTheory, as discussed in the preceding section. More specifically, IPARTheory postulates that perceived rejection by any attachment figure at any point in life is likely to compromise the healthy social-emotional functioning of individuals (Rohner et al., 2012). This statement is made to account for those individuals who are rejected by their adult

partners—despite having grown up with loving parents—and tend to display a similar constellation of psychological problems typically shown by rejected children. In order to account for this empirical observation, IPARTheory argues that individuals' mental representations of themselves may change as a result of rejection by an attachment figure at different moments throughout the lifespan. Therefore, it may be argued that both IPARTheory and attachment theory recognize the possibility of an enduring influence of early attachment mental representations, as well as the fact that both developmental (e.g., cognitive, social, and communicative processes) and relationship-related changes (e.g., rejection by an attachment figure) are likely to lead to revisions in such mental representations.

Reactions to Loss of Attachment Relationships

Both IPARTheory and attachment theory argue that individuals – children and adults – resist the disruption or loss of relationships with significant persons with whom they have established an attachment bond. More specifically, according to IPARTheory, attached individuals usually seek or yearn for emotional closeness with their attachment figures, experience distress upon inexplicable separation from them, and experience grief at their loss (Rohner, 2005). Similarly, in his description of children's and adults' reactions to separation and loss of an attachment figure, Bowlby (1980) makes reference to a phase of protest characterized by anxiety, anger, and denial, followed by a phase of despair in which the predominant feelings are sadness and hopelessness (as cited in Shaver & Fraley, 2008).

Beyond each theory's descriptions of the reactions to the loss of an attachment figure, both theories adopt an evolutionary perspective to understand enduring emotional bonds of attachment. This conceptualization of grief reactions has been more explicitly described in the attachment literature than in IPARTheory's. Bowlby (1980), for example, viewed grief reactions at the loss of an attachment figure (e.g., anger, disbelief, searching) as natural responses that are understandable from an ethological or evolutionary perspective (as cited in Shaver & Fraley, 2008). In particular, infants' attempts to prevent at all costs the loss of attachment figures and to be reunited with them after inexplicable separation substantially increases their chances of survival. Although little has been written in IPARTheory literature on the loss of an attachment figure, it is clear that IPARTheory's evolutionary perspective on attachment bonds recognizes the adaptive value of individuals' need for positive response from their primary attachment figures throughout life as well as their reactions to maintain and reestablish contact with attachment figures when such relationships are disrupted.

Possible Disagreements Between Theories

Explanation of Cultural Differences

As mentioned above, both theories have prompted research on cross-cultural similarities of attachment and acceptance-rejection as based on evolutionary emotional needs. However, while IPARTheory proposes a comprehensive model to explain the influences of different

systems in creating cultural variations in the experience of acceptance-rejection, attachment theorists have not formulated an integrated model to account for cultural differences in attachment patterns.

IPARTheory's sociocultural systems model recognizes that interpersonal acceptance-rejection occurs within an ecological context that comprises the natural environment and different maintenance systems, including the family and educational and political institutions that work together to ensure individuals' survival in a specific environment (Rohner, 2016). In addition, the sociocultural systems model emphasizes the role that symbolic creations – cultural beliefs, traditions, artistic expressions— formed over time in each society shape the ways in which individuals interact with each other in that particular group. More specifically, they shape the expression and experience of interpersonal acceptance-rejection in each society. Those symbolic creations are referred to as *institutionalized expressive systems and expressive behaviors* in IPARTheory's sociocultural systems model (Rohner, 2016). This postulate regarding the correlation between institutionalized expressive systems and culturally specific expressions of interpersonal acceptance-rejection has been empirically supported in several research studies (e.g., Rohner, 1975, 1986; Rohner & Chaki-Sircar, 1988; Rohner & Frampton, 1982). For instance, research studies derived from the sociocultural systems model have found that children living in societies whose institutionalized religious belief systems consider God as less fully loving tend to report more experiences of rejection from their caregivers (Rohner, 1975, 1986). It is worth mentioning here that, while the sociocultural systems model has originated research on cross cultural variations in parenting behaviors, it has not yet been empirically tested with regard to other types of interpersonal relationships, including adult intimate partnerships.

As mentioned before, attachment theorists have sought to empirically prove the universality of the secure base phenomenon across cultures. However, the explanation of cross-cultural differences in attachment behaviors has been a subject of controversy among different researchers who question the inclusion of a specific model to account for cultural variations. More specifically, some authors have argued that there is a lack of theory regarding the contextual character of close relationships that allows for an analysis of cultural variations of attachment behaviors. As a result, some authors insist on identifying attachment theory as a Western theory of relatedness (Rothbaum et al., 2000; LeVine, 2014), while others question the culturally-specific nature of core concepts in attachment theory, such as sensitive parenting, secure base, and child competency (Ivey Henry et al., 2005). Recently, Keller (2015) highlighted the lack of information in the attachment literature on the contextual character of children's social development and the need to explicitly incorporate contextual variations in the study of attachment relationships. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the discussion around the universal versus specific character of attachment theory has focused primarily on affectional bonds during early stages of development. Studies on these particular issues in adult romantic relations are still limited.

Differences in the Definition of Attachment

The concept of attachment is critical to both IPARTheory and attachment theory. However, the definition and specific features of this construct are distinctive in each theory. Attachment theory defines attachment as "a long-lasting and special bond in which the attachment figure

(e.g., a significant other) is important as a unique and noninterchangeable other" (Ainsworth, 1991, p. 38). Because of this affectional bond, "there is a need to maintain closeness and proximity with this figure which represents care, protection, and security to explore the environment. Contact and closeness with this figure generates trust and happiness, while separation from it causes anxiety and sadness" (Ainsworth, 1991, p. 38). On this point, IPARTheory and attachment theory agree. However, in IPARTheory, this affectional bond defines a *significant other*, not an attachment figure per se.

To identify an adult attachment figure in IPARTheory, an individual must also respond affirmatively to some degree to the query "Is your overall sense of emotional security, comfort, and well-being affected by your feelings about your relationship with your partner?" (Rohner, 2005, 2008). In other words, the individual acknowledges that the quality of such an emotional bond and the feelings the individual experiences as a result of the interaction with that figure significantly influence his mood, overall sense of security, and psychological well-being. Perhaps IPARTheory's conception of attachment is best summarized in a short poem written by R. P. Rohner (personal communication, November 15, 2011):

Attachment: The Emotional Moon Phenomenon
Sometimes I'm happy
Sometimes I'm blue
My mood all depends
On my relationship with you.

In other words, IPARTheory is more interested in how the quality of the relationship with an intimate partner is associated with the extent to which individuals perceive his/her intimate partner to be an attachment figure. Also, while attachment researchers focus on evaluating individuals' attachment style (or attachment dimensions) and its impact on the quality of their relationship with an intimate partner, IPARTheory research focuses on the quality of the relationship with an adult intimate partner that may or may not constitute an attachment figure to the individual.

Another fundamental difference between attachment theory and IPARTheory focuses on the notion of attachment styles. According to attachment theorists, the specific nature of early social exchanges between the caregiver and the child results in differences in the quality of attachment relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Thompson, 2008). Based on Ainsworth's original works, the quality of relationships with caregivers in early childhood could give rise to two main attachment styles: secure and insecure attachment. The term attachment security refers to the child's perception of the caregiver's behaviors and availability to appropriately care for and protect the child in dangerous or stressful situations. According to attachment theory, attachment styles that develop in early childhood significantly influence adult attachment styles. Similar to attachment styles in childhood, individual differences in adult attachment relationships are described in terms of security and insecurity or, more specifically, in terms of attachment styles (Belsky, 2002). However, it is worth mentioning here that other adult attachment researchers have taken a dimensional approach – rather than a style typology approach – to conceptualize and assess adults'

attachment functioning (e.g., Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000 refer to Avoidance and Anxiety dimensions).

IPARTheory, on the other hand, does not focus on the notion of attachment *style* to explain individual differences in adult attachment. In fact, rather than classifying individuals on the basis of their attachment styles, IPARTheory focuses on the extent to which individuals' feelings and mood are affected by – or dependent on – the perceived quality of the relationship between themselves and their intimate partners. However, IPARTheory explicitly takes the position that all individuals fall somewhere along a continuum of being weakly attached to profoundly attached. That is, IPARTheory endorses a dimensional perspective on the evaluation of the overall strength of individuals' attachment to an intimate partner.

Additionally, IPARTheory's conceptual definition of adult attachment involves two major points. First, individuals may be more or less strongly attached to another person depending on the perceived quality of their relationship. For example, an individual may be weakly attached to one person and strongly attached to another, or individuals may be powerfully attached to their partner at one point in time and weakly attached or even detached at another.

Second, while attachment theorists identify the following six criteria as essential to an attachment bond: "should be persistent not transitory; should involve a specific person (a figure that is not interchangeable with anyone else); the relationship with that person is emotionally significant; the individual wishes to maintain proximity to or contact with that person; the individual feels distress at involuntary separation from the person, and, the individual seeks security and comfort in the relationship with that person" (Cassidy, 2008, p. 12), IPARTheory considers these features as correlates of the quality of close relationships rather than as essential parts of the concept of attachment figure per se.

Multiple Internal Working Models (IWM) Versus a Single IWM with Contradictory Elements

Advances in the "cognitive revolution" in psychology during the 1960s provided Bowlby with new tools to propose a different theoretical approach to Freud's ideas about the dynamic unconscious and repression (Betherthon & Munholland, 2008). Bowlby (1969-1982, as cited in Betherthon & Munholland, 2008) contended that incoming information is subjected to many stages of unconscious analysis and synthesis before becoming conscious. Information that is most relevant to current goals is selectively retained, whereas less relevant information is discarded. A type of exclusion – named "defensive exclusion" – has the specific goal of preventing individuals from "becoming aware of events or thoughts that are unbearable if they were accepted as true" (Betherthon & Munholland, 2008, p. 105).

Bowlby (1969-1982) postulated that defensive exclusion can have an effect on attachment working models. He particularly studied situations in which such an effect was evident, for instance, when the parent persistently rejected, neglected, or punished the child's intense attachment behavior. In such cases, the child faces a representational conflict that may be resolved by developing two conflicting sets of working models. One set, which represents the child's adverse experiences with the attachment figure, is defensively excluded from consciousness, whereas the other remains consciously accessible. Based

on observations of emotionally troubled adults in therapy, Bowlby (1969, 1982) concluded that: a) defensively excluded working models developed earlier in life may still influence individuals' behaviors in adulthood (e.g., cognitive disconnection between an individual's affective and behavioral responses and the anxiety-provoking situations that caused them) and b) such defensively excluded models are usually in conflict with consciously accessible working models. In sum, Bowlby (1969-1982) appeared to propose that incompatible working models of a single attachment figure can develop concurrently, and that defensively excluded models may influence individuals' behavior at different stages in their lives.

Following Bowlby's ideas, Bartz and colleagues (2015) suggested an analysis of multiple attachment figures under the expectancy-value approach. They claimed that individuals may form two or more attachment working models. As they stated, multiple models "are recruited for social cognition depending on situational factors and internal influences ... the ability to form distinct attachment relationships indicates that we are sensitive to attachment dynamics and informed by specific relational experiences" (p. 42). An information processing mechanism provides individuals feedback on their relationship experiences and this information confirms or affects the expectancies to update them in a secure or insecure way (Bartz et al., 2015; Pierce & Lydon, 2000).

In contrast with this idea, IPARTheory argues that it is probably rare for individuals to create two radically different and incompatible internal working models of an attachment figure. Rohner (1999), for example, thought that it is not unusual for individuals to have inconsistent or conflicting sets of cognitions and feelings about their parents and other attachment figures. However, this does not ordinarily mean that people have two radically different and incompatible internal working models of a relationship. Rather, individuals may sometime create a single internal working model with inconsistent or contradictory elements, as can happen when one feels ambivalent, approach-avoidant, or "being of two minds" about an attachment relationship or an attachment figure. As the quality of the relationship changes through time, individuals may develop contradictory feelings about their adult intimate partner at one point that are susceptible to diminish as the relationship improves.

Long-Term Effects of Infancy Experiences

Historically, a point of divergence between IPARTheory and attachment theory has been the postulated role of infancy experiences on long-term socio-emotional development. Although attachment theorists today do not make deterministic claims about the influence of early experiences on individuals' development, IPARTheory has always disagreed with attachment theory's original assumptions about the primacy of infant and earliest childhood experiences (R. P. Rohner, personal communication, November 15, 2011).

More specifically, attachment theory originally emphasized the importance of the quality of early attachment relationships and assumed an essential stability and continuity of attachment styles from infancy to adulthood. As Bowlby (1969-1982) stated, the "principal determinants of the pathway along which an individual's attachment behavior develops, and of the pattern in which it becomes organized, are the experiences he has with his attachment figures during his years of immaturity" (p. 62). Although Bowlby (1969, as cited in Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004) thought of attachment styles formed in infancy as changeable in response to new relationship experiences, he also postulated that attachment

representations tend more toward assimilating rather than accommodating to later experiences. As he stated, as time passes and children continue to develop "whether it be favorable or unfavorable, whatever organization exists becomes progressively less easily changed" (Bowlby, 1969-1982, p. 348).

Recent conceptualizations and research contributions of attachment theory have transformed this disagreement between theories to another point of convergence between theories. That is, despite the importance accorded to early attachment experiences, many current attachment theorists argue that the development of attachment should not be thought of as a unique, linear trajectory. Instead, they propose a tree-like metaphor in which an initial stem is formed from early experiences, and from it various paths (branches) may emerge based on the individual's characteristics, the type and quality of their relations with significant others, and the specific environmental circumstances in which those relationships evolved (Bowlby, 1969-1982; Sroufe, 1995). Particular experiences with romantic partners in adulthood may either consolidate an initial pattern of attachment relationship or result in a different path with specific and more complex characteristics (Thompson, 2008).

Similarly, IPARTheory has postulated from its beginnings that individuals' psychological adjustment later in childhood can improve "if the forms of parenting (e.g., parental rejection) producing these effects (e.g., insecure attachment) are turned around post-infancy (e.g., to become acceptance)" (Rohner, 1999). In addition, Rohner's (2008) observation that many adults who experience rejection by their intimate partners also tend to report the same cluster of psychological dispositions found among children who perceive themselves to be rejected by their parents has led IPARTheory researchers to focus on the specific and independent contributions that intimate partnerships make to adults' psychological adjustment (Rohner & Melendez, 2008). In sum, IPARTheory postulates that as individuals get involved in new significant relationships across their lifespan, such relationships may have positive or negative effects on their psychological adjustment that may be as important as the influence of previous relationships (including those experienced during childhood). Thus, intimate relationships with attachment figures during adulthood could provide experiences that may counter the effects of childhood experiences of acceptance or rejection on adults' patterns of relating and their psychological functioning in close intimate partnerships. Although these theoretical postulates of IPARTheory need to be further researched, there is already evidence from attachment theory research that supports them. For instance, different authors have found that positive experiences within a secure attachment relationship (e.g., within a client-therapist relationship) can turn around the effects of negative childhood experiences and positively influence individuals' psychological functioning in adult intimate relationships (Johnson, 2011; Johnson, LaFontaine, & Dalgleish, 2015).

Contributions and Future Developments

In this paper, we discussed central similarities and differences between IPARTheory and attachment theory. In particular, we focused on agreements and disagreements between these theories' explanations of the development and characteristics of affectional bonds in

adult intimate relationships. Moreover, we discussed these similarities and differences bearing in mind that both theories initially focused on the quality of parent-child relationships, but that both have progressively expanded over the decades to explain close adult relationships. As both theories continue to generate research and further refine their understanding of adult intimate relationships, it is very likely that other similarities and differences will emerge. In concluding this comparison between theories, we would like to refer to the contributions that both theoretical perspectives have made to the study of adult intimate relationships, as well as to their potential for future development. We especially focus on three areas: a) theoretical and empirical knowledge; b) assessment; and c) clinical interventions.

Contributions to Theoretical and Empirical Knowledge, and Future Developments

Both IPARTheory and attachment theory have made significant contributions to the understanding of the nature, characteristics, and dynamics of adult intimate relationships. More specifically, the conceptualization of romantic love as an attachment process (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) led investigators to evaluate the basic assumptions of attachment theory within the development of couple relationships. Some attachment theory-derived research has assessed the nature and dimensions of adult attachment relationship, and the functions of adult attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Empirical studies have shown that, although relationships during adulthood are characterized by dimensions also identified in the caregiver-child relationship (Ainsworth, 1989; Sperling & Berman, 1994), adult intimate relationships also contain the interplay between three systems: attachment behavioral, caregiving, and sexual systems (Cassidy, 2000). Another empirical contribution of attachment theory to the study of adult partnerships is the identification of forms or types of relationships, which depend on the characteristics and affective history of individuals (Cassidy, 2000). These forms of relationships depict different pathways that are associated with different psychological and social outcomes. One pathway leads to healthy, self-fulfilled, and adaptive relationships, which are related to higher levels of psychological functioning. The other pathway leads to unhealthy, maladaptive, and problematic relationships – and more generally, to negative social and psychological outcomes (Lopez & Brennan, 2000).

IPARTheory has also made contributions to the study of intimate relationships during adulthood. First, it has generated research studies across cultures to test its theoretical postulate regarding the association between perceived acceptance-rejection by an adult intimate partner and individuals' psychological maladjustment (Rohner, 2008). Although IPARTheory's research has advanced existing knowledge about the effects of romantic relationships on individuals' psychological adjustment in adulthood, it has also investigated non-romantic adult relationships such as peer relationships and friendships (Ahmed, Rohner, & Carrasco, 2012). Furthermore, IPARTheory has motivated researchers in many cultures around the world to empirically evaluate similarities and differences in the relation between adult psychological adjustment and perceived acceptance-rejection in adult intimate relationships.

Despite these contributions, both theoretical perspectives face important challenges that require further theoretical and empirical development. On the one hand, with regard to

attachment theory, further research is needed on the meaning of being attached during adulthood, the identification of normative processes in the ontogeny of adult attachment, and the underlying mechanisms that explain the specific associations between the three behavioral systems in adult attachment relationships (Hazan, Gur-Yahish, Campa, 2004). On the other hand, with regard to IPARTheory, there is a need to further develop and empirically test theoretical propositions regarding both individual and dyadic processes that mediate and moderate the association between perceived partners' acceptance-rejection and individuals' psychological adjustment. A significant number of empirical studies have appeared in diverse disciplines, e.g., cognitive psychology and the neurosciences, that promise to enrich Bowlby's theoretical propositions regarding the role of internal working models in the development of attachment relationships (see Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Therefore, one area in which both attachment and IPARTheory researchers might collaborate has to do with understanding the role of bio-psychological processes as mediators or moderators of the effects of early experiences of acceptance-rejection on personality dispositions in adulthood. Kuyumcu, Csizmadia, and Rohner (2016) have started this IPARTheory-related work in their research on the relation between partner acceptance-rejection, dyadic coping, and marital satisfaction among Turkish couples.

Another area of future collaboration between attachment and IPARTheory researchers should be the study of cross-cultural differences in adult intimate relationships. As both theoretical perspectives are interested in exploring the role of adult intimate partners' attachment and the quality of their intimate relationship in their individual psychological functioning, future research must explore the meanings attributed in different cultural settings to adult intimate partnerships, to attachment-related behaviors, and, more generally, to the patterns of interaction that take place within the couple to establish emotional intimacy. A deeper understanding of such meanings, as well as of the cultural beliefs associated with being in an intimate relationship, may contribute to explain variations across cultures in the influence of adult intimate relationship dynamics on individuals' psychological functioning. Also, it may help scholars from both theoretical approaches to answer questions regarding cross-cultural differences in hierarchies among significant attachment figures in adulthood (e.g., parents, adult intimate partner, friends) and the differential influence of such relationships on adults' psychological adjustment.

Contributions to Assessment, and Future Developments

The methodological contributions of IPARTheory and attachment theory to the assessment of adult intimate relationships are notable. There are a variety of measures developed under each framework to study different aspects of adult intimate relationships. For example, adult attachment researchers have developed self-report measures that include descriptive paragraphs that reflect salient aspects of adult attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), as well as Likert-type scales that measure two specific dimensions of attachment relationships, i.e., anxiety and avoidance, or positive and negative aspects of the internalized images of the self and others. Examples of these scales are the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ; Simpson, 1990), the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990), and the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994). Simultaneously, the development of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main et al.,

1985) introduced another way to approach the assessment of attachment in adulthood, based on individuals' answers to questions related to their relationship with their parents, attachment strategies used in particular situations, experiences of separation, and their meaning in the person's life (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

IPARTheory researchers have been particularly interested in issues of perceived acceptance-rejection in adult attachment relationships. Several closely related IPARTheory-based self-report instruments have been developed in the last ten years. These instruments are: the Intimate Partner Attachment Questionnaire (IPAQ), the Intimate Partner Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire (IPAR/CQ), and the Intimate Adult Relationship Questionnaire (IARQ). Each of these measures contains a set of questions developed to evaluate characteristics attributed to an adult intimate partnership based on the theoretical distinction made in IPARTheory between a *significant other* and an *attachment figure*. Particularly, both the IPAQ and the IARQ ask respondents to reflect on the extent to which they feel close to their partner; feel a sense of comfort, security, or well-being in their relationship; feel anxious or insecure in their relationship; have mixed emotions toward their partner, i.e., ambivalence; want to avoid or ignore their partner; and, would feel a sense of sadness, grief, or sorrow if the relationship were to end.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) highlighted two issues with regard to self-report measures of adult attachment. First, they discussed the pertinence of conceptualizing and measuring adult attachment as categorical (types of attachment) versus a continuous variable (described in dimensional terms), and concluded that some researchers emphasize greater benefits using the dimensional approach to assess adult attachment. Second, the use of dimensional self-report instruments leads to the question of what is the best conceptualization of the two major dimensions of adult attachment. According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2008), some authors suggest that dimensions should be conceptualized based on individuals' beliefs about themselves and about others (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), while others define attachment dimensions based on specific functions of the attachment system (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Alternatively, Mikulincer and Shaver (2008) propose an integrative model to evaluate adult attachment. This model includes emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components, and is based on two specific dimensions of the attachment behavioral system (avoidance and anxiety). This model assesses the individual's tendency to hyperactivate or deactivate the attachment system in the presence or absence of the attachment figure. The level of avoidance or anxiety experienced by individuals in a particular situation influences the specific strategy they use to approach that situation. Further investigation on methodological strategies to assess adult intimate relationships based on these ideas is needed.

A limitation to IPARTheory's assessment of attachment in adult intimate relationships has to do with the empirical validation of its measures. In this regard, it is essential that research efforts to establish reliability and validity of attachment-related items continue. As empirical evidence continues to support the convergent and discriminant validity of attachment-related items in IPARTheory measures of adult attachment, such measures will become psychometrically sound alternatives to the evaluation of attachment bonds in adulthood in both research and clinical contexts.

In addition, IPARTheory's theoretical and operational distinction between "attachment figure" versus "significant other" has the potential to further advance existing knowledge on the differential effects of different types of adult intimate partnerships on individuals' psychological functioning. More specifically, IPARTheory researchers should examine differences in the association between individuals' psychological adjustment and perceived acceptance-rejection by an intimate partner when such partner is regarded either as an attachment figure or as a significant other.

Finally, it would be helpful if both attachment and IPARTheory researchers could develop instruments that can be used in observations of intimate partners in laboratory and natural settings. Such developments would further advance our knowledge of adult intimate partnerships, making it possible to gather evidence from both insiders' (self-report) and outsiders' (behavior observation) perspectives.

Contributions to Clinical Intervention, and Future Development

Clinical intervention for individual and relationship issues in adulthood is a growing area in the attachment research literature. Some authors have focused their work in the evaluation of attachment correlates of different psychopathologies in adulthood, for example, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders (Dozier, Stovall-McClough, & Albus, 2008). This work encompasses the development of psychotherapy strategies based on attachment theory as well as the empirical validation of these strategies (Slade, 2008). Similarly, IPARTheory's theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of adult intimate relationships have recently been used in the development of clinical interventions with couples that are experiencing personal and interpersonal difficulties associated with perceived rejection within their intimate relationships (Donoghue, 2010; Rigazio-DiGilio & Rohner, 2008, 2015). Attachment theory and IPARTheory researchers and practitioners could benefit from exchanging experiences and collaborating in the development of empirically validated intervention protocols that are supported by existing research findings regarding the nature of adult attachment relationships.

To conclude, we hope that our reflections in this paper will help motivate scholars in the field of close relationships to develop research that takes into consideration the major points of convergence between theories, and the possibilities for collaboration between IPARTheory's and attachment theory's conceptualizations of adult intimate relationships. Moreover, it is our hope that scholars will find in our discussion of possible disagreements between these perspectives, an invitation to initiate a dialogue that results in further theoretical and empirical evaluation of these theories' postulates about the development and maintenance of intimate relationships in adulthood.

Suggested Links

About Attachment Theory

Penn State University: http://www.prevention.psu.edu
University of Minnesota: http://cnbd.umn.edu/bio/cnbd-faculty-staff/dante-cicchetti
The New School for Social Research- New York City:
http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/centers-special-programs/?id=104444
Cambridge Center for Attachment- Cambridge: http://www.attachment.services
The Bowlby Center – Psychotherapy training and referrals organization – London:
http://thebowlbycentre.org.uk
Adult attachment research: https://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/links.htm

About IPARTheory

Center for the Study of Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection: http://csiar.uconn.edu
Books and Special Issues related to IPARTheory: http://csiar.uconn.edu/resources/
International Society for Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection: http://www.isipar.org

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Discussion Questions

1. Discuss in small groups the ways in which close intimate relationships contribute to the development and well-being of young adults. Could you think of other positive influences of intimate relationships on individuals' lives?

2. Both theoretical approaches discussed in this paper rely on an evolutionary perspective on the importance of intimate relationships. Discuss in small groups how intimate relationships throughout life are conceived from an evolutionary perspective.

3. Both attachment theory and IPARTheory are interested in the role that culture plays in the experience of warmth or rejection in intimate relationships. In what ways could these

theories complement each other to understand similarities and differences in adult intimate relationships across cultures?

4. According to each theory, what characterizes a healthy, well-functioning adult intimate relationship?

5. Imagine that you are invited to speak at your high school class annual reunion about what is an attachment figure and the importance of such figures to individuals' socio-emotional development. How would you explain this concept to your friends who do not have much background in psychology?

6. You are invited to a discussion panel to talk about the importance of early childhood experiences on individuals' psychological functioning in adulthood. Some of the panelists think that early childhood experiences have a strong and irreversible effect on individuals' personality and emotional development, while other panelists consider that the effects of early childhood experiences may be countered by experiences in other significant relationships later in life. Which arguments would you present to the panelists as you join the discussion? Would you support the arguments from either of the two groups?

7. Imagine you have to advice public-policy makers about how to strengthen psychological well-being in adults. Which recommendations would you give to them with regard to developing intervention programs, based on what you have read in this paper?

8. Discuss in small groups IPARTheory's definitions of "attachment figure" and "significant other." What is the difference between those two figures? Remember the close relationships (e.g., friends, romantic partners) you have had during your adolescence and young adulthood. Would you consider those individuals to be attachment figures to you? Discuss with your team members whether the criteria proposed by IPARTheory helps you to differentiate them. Would you add any other criteria to the definition of attachment figure?

About the Authors

Karen J. Ripoll-Núñez received her master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Syracuse University in 2000 and her doctorate in human development and family studies from the University of Connecticut in 2005. She is an associate professor in the psychology department at Universidad de los Andes, in Bogotá, Colombia. Her research interests focus on parenting, issues of acceptance-rejection in parent-child and couple relationships, and the quality of couple relationships in different family structures including biological and stepfamilies.

Sonia Carrillo received her master's degree in developmental, social, and personality psychology in 1994 and her doctorate in human development and education from the University of Texas at Austin in 1999. She in an associate professor in the psychology department at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. Her research interests focus

on family relations, particularly on parent-child and siblings relationships throughout the life cycle. She is also interested in the characteristics and relationship dynamics in different family structures and in the role of fathers and other caregivers such as grandparents in children's development and well-being.