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Augmenting the Sense of Security in Romantic, Leader-Follower, Therapeutic,
and Group Relationships: A Relational Model of Psychological Change

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Running Head: ATTACHMENT SECURITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE

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Attachment theory deals with the effects of experiences in close relationships on the development of both favorable and (in the case of nonoptimal attachment relationships) unfavorable personality characteristics. In his exposition of attachment theory, John Bowlby (1982/1969, 1973, 1980, 1988) explained why the availability of caring, supportive relationship partners, beginning in infancy, is so important to developing a sense of attachment security (confidence that one is competent and lovable and that caregivers will be available and supportive when needed), which in turn fosters the development of stable self-esteem, constructive coping strategies, maintenance of emotional stability, and formation of mutually satisfying relationships throughout life. In our research applying attachment theory to adolescents and adults, we have consistently found that a chronic (dispositional) sense of security as well as experimentally augmented security (based on priming mental representations of security) contributes to a “broaden and build” cycle of attachment security that has beneficial effects on mental health, social judgments, and interpersonal behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2005, 2007; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002, 2006).

In this chapter we propose a relational model of psychological change, according to which repeated and influential interactions with security-enhancing relationship partners positively alter a person’s mental representations of self and others, attachment patterns, and psychological functioning. Specifically, after presenting basic concepts of attachment theory and key findings from attachment research, we review prospective longitudinal findings from our laboratories showing that being involved in a relationship with a sensitive, responsive, and supportive romantic partner, military officer, manager, residential staff member, team co-worker, or therapist has long-term beneficial effects on attachment-specific cognitions and feelings as well as broader psychological functioning, and that these benefits occur among both healthy and high-risk children, adolescents, and adults. The findings provide strong support for Bowlby’s ideas about the plasticity of the attachment system across the life span and the growth-enhancing consequences of secure attachments.

Attachment Theory: Basic Concepts

Attachment theory is based on the fundamental idea that human beings are born with an innate psychobiological system (the *attachment behavioral system*) that motivates them to seek proximity to protective others (*attachment figures*) in times of need (Bowlby, 1982/1969, 1973). According to Bowlby's (1982/1969), these attachment figures (whom he called "stronger and wiser" caregivers) provide a "*safe haven*" in times of need – i.e., they reliably provide protection, comfort, and relief – and a "*secure base*" – i.e., the kinds of support that allow a child or adult relationship partner to pursue non-attachment goals, with confidence, in a relatively safe and encouraging environment. This protection and support from attachment figures creates an inner sense of attachment security (called by Sroufe & Waters, 1977, "felt security"), which normally terminates safety- and proximity-seeking behavior and allows a person to function better in a wide array of life domains such as exploration, learning, interpersonal behavior, and sexual mating.

During infancy, primary caregivers (usually one or both parents, but also grandparents, older siblings, daycare workers, and so on) are likely to serve as attachment figures (e.g., Ainsworth, 1973). In later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, a wider variety of relationship partners can serve as attachment figures, including other relatives, familiar co-workers, teachers and coaches, close friends, and romantic partners. There may also be context-specific attachment figures – real or potential sources of comfort and support in specific milieus, such as therapists in therapeutic settings or leaders in organizational settings (e.g., business organizations or the military). Moreover, groups, institutions, and symbolic personages (e.g., God) can become safe havens and secure bases. In addition, adults can obtain comfort and protection by calling upon mental representations of relationship partners who regularly provide a safe haven and a secure base or even self-representations associated with these partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). These mental representations help people deal successfully with threats and allow them to continue pursuing non-attachment goals without having to interrupt those goal-directed activities to engage in actual proximity bids. Of course there are times – during painful illnesses or in the

midst of traumatic events – when these strategies are insufficient, and then adults often seek immediate, actual proximity to an attachment figure, more or less the same ways in which children do.

In addition to conceptualizing the normative (species universal) aspects of attachment-system functioning, Bowlby (1973) identified major individual differences in attachment security and various forms of insecurity, which arise in response to the behaviors of particular attachment figures. For example, interactions with attachment figures who are available and responsive in times of need facilitate the optimal functioning of the attachment system, promote a sense of attachment security, and lead to the formation of positive *working models* (mental representations of the self and others). When attachment figures are not supportive, however, negative working models are formed, attachment insecurities become salient and persistent, and all of the adaptive and growth-promoting benefits of secure attachment are placed at risk.

In extensions of the theory to adolescents and adults, researchers have conceptualized attachment insecurities in terms of two major dimensions, attachment-related anxiety and avoidance (e.g., Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The first dimension, *avoidance*, reflects the extent to which a person distrusts relationship partners' goodwill and strives to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from partners. The second dimension, attachment-related *anxiety*, reflects the degree to which a person worries that a partner will not be available in times of need. People who score low on these two dimensions are said to be secure or securely attached. An adult's location on these orthogonal insecurity dimensions can be assessed with either self-report questionnaires or coded clinical interviews (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999).

People's positions on the attachment dimensions are fairly stable over time and tend to result from interactions with primary caregivers during early childhood, as a large body of research has shown (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), but Bowlby (1988) claimed that meaningful interactions with others throughout life can alter attachment-system

functioning and move a person from one region of the two-dimensional space to another. Moreover, although attachment style is often conceptualized as a single global orientation toward close relationships, and can definitely be measured as such, a person's attachment orientation is actually rooted in a complex cognitive and affective network that includes many different episodic, context-related, and relationship-specific, as well as fairly general attachment representations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In fact, research shows that attachment style can change, subtly or dramatically, depending on context and recent experiences (e.g., Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh Rangarajoo, 1996; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001).

The Broaden-and-Build Cycle of Attachment Security

Based on an extensive review of adult attachment studies, we (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2007; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002, 2006) have summarized the adult attachment literature in terms of a three-phase, or three-component, model of attachment-system activation and dynamics. The first component concerns the monitoring and appraisal of threatening events and is responsible for activation of the attachment system. The second component involves the monitoring and appraisal of the availability and responsiveness of attachment figures and is responsible for variations in the sense of attachment security. The third component concerns the monitoring and appraisal of the viability of interpersonal proximity-seeking as a means of coping with attachment insecurity and is responsible for variations in attachment anxiety or avoidance. The three components can be summarized in three if-then propositions. First, if threatened, seek proximity and protection from an attachment figure (or some temporarily equivalent stronger, wiser, and supportive other). Second, if an attachment figure is available and supportive, relax, enjoy and appreciate the feeling of being loved and comforted, and confidently return to other activities. Third, if an attachment figure is unavailable or unresponsive, either intensify efforts to achieve proximity and comfort (anxious attachment) or deactivate the attachment system, suppress thoughts of vulnerability or need, and rely on oneself (avoidant attachment).

In the present chapter, we focus on the second component of this model – the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects of the availability of attachment figures. In this component, an

affirmative answer to the question “Is an attachment figure available?” contributes to a sense of attachment security, which implies that one’s attachment system is functioning well and that one can place trust in other’s good intentions and helpful responses. Attachment-figure availability also fosters what we, following Fredrickson (2001), call a “broaden and build” cycle of attachment security, which increases a person’s resilience and expands his or her perspectives, coping flexibility, and skills and capabilities. When developed to the fullest extent, this process is equivalent to what early humanistic psychologists (e.g., Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1961) called personal growth and self-actualization.

The broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security is a cascade of mental and behavioral events that enhances emotional stability, personal and social adjustment, satisfying close relationships, and autonomous personal growth. The most immediate psychological effect of attachment-figure availability is effective management of distress and restoration of emotional equanimity. According to attachment theory, interactions with available and supportive attachment figures, by imparting a pervasive sense of safety, assuage distress and arouse positive emotions (relief, satisfaction, gratitude). Secure people can therefore remain relatively unperturbed in times of stress and experience longer periods of positive affectivity, which contribute to sustained mental health (e.g., Mikulincer & Florian, 2001).

Experiences of attachment-figure availability also contribute to a reservoir of cognitive representations and emotional memories related to successful distress management, one’s own value and competence, and other people’s beneficence. Interactions with available and supportive attachment figures sustain a background sense of personal value, hope, and optimism, making it relatively easy for a person to believe and feel that most of life’s problems are solvable and most distress is manageable. These interactions also heighten a secure person’s confidence in most relationship partners’ sensitivity, responsiveness, and goodwill. In addition, secure individuals learn to view themselves as competent, valuable, lovable, and special – thanks to succeeding at emotion regulation and being valued, loved, and viewed as special by caring attachment figures.

A relatively secure person's possession of rich resources for dealing with stress makes it less necessary to rely on psychological defenses that distort perception, limit coping flexibility, and generate interpersonal conflict. Such a person can devote mental resources that otherwise would be employed in preventive, defensive maneuvers to other behavioral systems and to growth-oriented activities. Moreover, being confident that support is available when needed, a person can take calculated risks and accept important challenges that contribute to the broadening of his or her perspectives and facilitate the person's pursuit of self-actualization.

The broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security is renewed every time a person realizes that an actual or imaginary caring and loving attachment figure is available in times of stress and is sensitive to the person's needs. Of course, this appraisal of attachment-figure availability depends on the person's attention and sensitivity to an attachment figure's responses and the person's interpretation of the attachment figure's intentions. The appraisal can therefore be destructively biased by persisting attachment insecurities. For example, attachment anxiety that has become dispositional in nature tends to increase the likelihood of detecting real or imagined signs of distance, rejection, and unavailability, because an attachment figure cannot always be immediately available and totally at the disposal of a needy person (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). In addition, an avoidant attachment orientation favors inattention to and cynical or skeptical dismissal of cues concerning the availability of attachment figures, and this reduces the likelihood of detecting a partner's genuine expressions of interest and affection. As a result, both attachment-anxious and avoidant people may dismiss or misinterpret a partner's sensitive and supportive behaviors and thereby forego the potential benefits of the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security.

Despite these cognitive biases, however, reality is still quite important in the appraisal of attachment-figure availability and the initiation and maintenance of a broaden-and-build cycle. In our experimental studies, for example, we have consistently found that priming thoughts of an available and supportive attachment figure has almost immediate positive effects on mood, mental health, compassionate and pro-social feelings and behaviors, and tolerance toward

outgroup members, and this happens even in the case of otherwise insecure or insecurely attached people (e.g., Mikulincer, Gillath, et al., 2001; Mikulincer, Hirschberger, et al., 2001; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Horesh, 2006). Similar positive effects of the priming of security-related mental representations have been found in self-views, appraisals of romantic partners, and openness to new information regardless of dispositional attachment orientations (e.g., Baccus, Baldwin, & Packer, 2004; Green & Campbell, 2000; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Rowe & Carnelley, 2003, 2006). These diverse research findings encourage us to believe that even the preconscious activation of mental representations of attachment-figure availability has soothing, protective, and growth-promoting effects and can, at least temporarily, instill a sense of security even in an otherwise attachment-insecure mind.

Based on these experimental findings, we suspect that the soothing and growth-enhancing effects of attachment-figure availability might be even stronger, more pervasive, and more resistant to change within relational contexts in which an actual relationship partner's supportive and comforting behaviors are clear cut, personally significant, and repeated over time and situations. Such behavior on the part of a relationship partner, therapist, or leader may counteract insecure people's dispositional tendencies to doubt the availability, sensitivity, and responsiveness of their social interaction partners, and can therefore set in motion a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security that gradually produces stable and widespread changes in the beneficiaries' working models of self and others. In other words, a relationship partner who acts as a reliable provider of a safe haven and a secure base can help an insecure person to function more securely, both temporarily and chronically. In subsequent sections we review evidence concerning the positive effects of the actual presence of an available and supportive relationship partner in different kinds of relational settings (romantic, leader-follower, group, and therapeutic relationships). We also present new evidence showing that such relationship partners can have long-term positive effects on a person's psychological wellbeing and mental health and can move a person toward increasing attachment security.

The Broaden-and-Build Cycle of Attachment Security in Romantic Relationships

In adulthood, romantic relationships and marriages are the sites of some of the most important emotional bonds and can therefore be some of the most important relational contexts in which to sustain a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security and produce long-term changes in a person's attachment orientation. In fact, adopting a life-span perspective, attachment researchers (e.g., Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Fraley & Davis, 1997; Mayseless, 2004) have consistently shown that romantic partners often become an adult's principal attachment figure. According to Hazan and Zeifman (1994), proximity seeking in adulthood is often directed toward a romantic partner or spouse, and these people are perceived as the main providers of a safe haven and a secure base. If in fact romantic partners or spouses occupy the topmost rung in most people's attachment hierarchies during adulthood, one can expect that the availability of these partners in times of need and their sensitivity and responsiveness to bids for proximity, protection, and security will have enduring effects on a person's attachment organization.

Research on romantic and marital relationships has clearly documented the positive effects of the availability and supportiveness of a romantic partner on a person's positive mood, physical and mental health, cognitive appraisals of the partner, pro-relational attitudes and behaviors, and growth-promoting behaviors. To begin with, the mere physical availability of a romantic partner has been found to have soothing, distress-alleviating effects. For example, Gump, Polk, Kamarck, and Shiffman (2001) recorded blood pressure at least once per hour during study participants' waking hours for a week and found that blood pressure was lower when participants were interacting with their romantic partner than when they were interacting with other people or were alone. In a recent study, Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson (2006) scanned the brains (in an fMRI scanner) of married women who were undergoing a laboratory stress-induction (threat of electric shock) while either holding their husband's hand, holding the hand of an otherwise unfamiliar male experimenter, or holding no hand at all. The findings indicated that spousal handholding reduced physiological stress responses, as seen in brain regions associated with distress (e.g., right anterior insula, superior frontal gyrus, and hypothalamus).

There is also extensive evidence indicating that a supportive romantic partner or spouse contributes notably to a person's successful coping with stressful events and decreases the probability of developing emotional and somatic problems (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Finch, Okun, Pool, & Ruehlman, 1999; and Schwarzer & Leppin, 1989, for reviews and meta-analyses). Moreover, supportive interactions with a romantic partner or spouse can attenuate stress-related activation of the autonomic nervous system and of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis during stressful experiences (see Cohen et al., 2000, for a review). Such interactions can also mitigate physical pain, such as pain stemming from the labor of childbirth or postoperative pain (see MacDonald & Leary, 2005, for a review). In an observational study of dating couples, Collins and B. C. Feeney (2000) found that people whose romantic partner provided more responsive support (as judged by independent coders) while they disclosed a personal problem felt better than they had beforehand. Moreover, couples who experienced more supportive interactions (as judged by both the couple members and by independent coders) reported higher relationship satisfaction.

Besides mitigating distress, interactions with available, caring, and loving romantic partners or spouses can facilitate pro-relational behaviors that are conducive to relationship quality and satisfaction. This kind of positive relational process begins with appraising a partner's sensitivity and responsiveness and continues in the formation of stable positive beliefs and expectations about this person's good qualities and intentions. As a result, people gradually become convinced that such a good and caring partner is unlikely to betray their trust, will not react negatively or abusively to expressions of need and vulnerability, and will not reject bids for proximity. With such confidence, people can become more deeply involved in a romantic or marital relationship and expend more time and energy establishing or maintaining an intimate and deeply interdependent relationship.

This positive exchange of relational feelings and behaviors fits Reis and Shaver's (1988) intimacy model, which portrays intimacy as a dynamic process that begins when one person reveals personally significant aspects of him- or herself to a partner. Subsequent steps in the

process are then shaped by the partner's responses. A sensitive, accepting, and supportive response facilitates the expression of deeper personal needs and concerns, which gradually leads to the development of an intimate relationship. In contrast, a disinterested, disapproving, or rejecting response discourages and interferes with intimacy and inhibits the development of an intimate relationship. Reis and Shaver (1988) contended that responsive and accepting responses engender three kinds of feelings that strengthen a person's confidence in a partner's good intentions and encourage more intimate interactions: a feeling of being understood (i.e., feeling that the partner accurately perceives and understands one's needs and feelings), a feeling of being validated (i.e., feeling that one is appreciated and respected by the partner), and a feeling of care (i.e., sensing that the partner is concerned about one's welfare and is responsive to one's needs). These three kinds of feelings are important components of the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security and allow a person to develop more secure emotional bonds. The Reis-Shaver model has been extensively supported by research (see Reis, 2006, for a review of empirical findings).

Similar ideas can be found in Murray, Holmes, and Collins's (2006) control-system model of risk regulation in romantic relationships. The basic assumptions of this model are that engaging in intimate and interdependent behavior (e.g., self-disclosing, seeking support) can activate worries about rejection and disapproval ("How I can be sure my partner will accept my bid for support?"), and of course most people do not want to be humiliated or rejected, damaging their sense of self-worth. Therefore, they carefully assess a partner's regard and responsiveness before engaging in intimate or interdependent behavior and rely on the following if-then rule: "If I am feeling a partner's regard and acceptance, then I can increase interdependence; but if I am experiencing or expecting the partner's rejection, I should retreat from interdependence." As a result, interactions with an available, caring, and loving partner increase a person's feelings of acceptance and self-regard and lead him or her to openly express needs and confidently engage in intimacy-promoting behavior. Although this model is more focused on the risk of rejection than on the benefits of a partner's availability and responsiveness, Murray et al. (2006) conclude

that interactions with available and responsive partners are crucial for forming warm, stable, and satisfying romantic relationships.

There is both correlational and experimental evidence for the surge of positive relational feelings and behaviors produced by the availability, sensitivity, and responsiveness of a romantic partner or a spouse (see Murray et al., 2006; Reis, 2006; and Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004, for reviews). For example, daily diary studies verify that people experience stronger feelings of closeness and intimacy on days when their partner is accepting and responsive to their bids for intimacy (e.g., Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005; Lin, 1992). Reis (2006) also reviewed a series of correlational studies of dating and married couples in which appraisals of a validating partner (e.g., “Because of the way my partner acts with me, I am able to be my true self”) or an affirming partner (e.g., “My partner treats me in a way that indicates I am close to the person I would ideally like to be”) are closely associated with relationship quality and satisfaction. In addition, there is evidence that marital interactions in which partners are sensitive and responsive to each other’s bids for proximity and support encourage both partners’ emotional openness and self-disclosure (Gottman, 1994).

The supportiveness of a romantic partner during dyadic interactions can also encourage cognitive openness and exploration of personal goals, skills, and perspectives, thereby promoting self-expansion and personal growth. In a study of romantic couples discussing one partner’s personal goals, B. C. Feeney (2004) found that participants were more likely to discuss personal goals openly and explore alternative ways to achieve those goals when their partner was coded by independent observers as more supportive and responsive. In addition, participants who perceived their partner to be supportive and encouraging during the discussion reported a more positive mood and higher self-esteem following the discussion. B. C. Feeney (2004) also found that participants performed better in a computerized puzzle game and felt better after the game if their partner provided emotionally supportive messages during the game (as compared to a control condition in which no message was delivered at all).

The evidence clearly indicates that interactions with available, sensitive, and supportive romantic partners or spouses contributes to a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security and has positive consequence for mental health, relationship quality, and psychological functioning. However, these studies do not provide direct information about the extent to which these interactions lead to long-term changes in attachment organization or move people toward a more secure attachment orientation. Fortunately, Lavi (2007) recently conducted a prospective longitudinal study of young couples who had been dating for no more than 3-4 months. She followed these couples up 4 and 8 months later. The main question was whether one partner's availability, sensitivity, and supportiveness, as assessed at the beginning of the study, was capable of reducing the other partner's insecurities within the relationship as well as his or her global attachment insecurities over the 8-month study period.

At the beginning of the study, Lavi (2007) randomly selected one partner in each of 100 couples (half men and half women) to serve as the study "participant" and the other member as the "attachment figure." The two members of the couple then completed a series of self-report scales, performed some computerized tasks, and were videotaped while engaged in a series of dyadic interactions. From the "participants," Lavi (2007) collected self-reports of relationship satisfaction, global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships (based on the Experience in Close Relationships scale, or ECR; Brennan et al., 1998), and attachment insecurities within the relationship (using a relationship-specific version of the ECR scale). For the other couple member (the "attachment figure"), Lavi (2007) collected information about his or her sensitivity and supportiveness. Measures of sensitivity included (a) self-reports of dispositional empathy based on the Interpersonal Reactions Inventory (Davis, 1994), (b) accuracy in decoding emotional facial expressions (based on the Japanese and Caucasian Brief Affect Recognition Task; Matsumoto et al., 2000), and (b) accuracy in decoding negative and positive emotions that participants displayed in a non-verbal communication task (Noller & J. A. Feeney, 1994). Measures of supportiveness included (a) self-reports of support provision within the current relationship, based on Kunce and Shaver's (1994) Caregiving Scale, and (b)

supportive behaviors, coded by independent judges, during a videotaped dyadic interaction in which participants disclosed a personal problem. Following 4 and 8 months, participants who were still dating the same romantic partner (73%) once again completed self-report measures of relationship satisfaction and global and within-relationship attachment orientations.

The findings revealed long-term positive effects of partner sensitivity and supportiveness. First of all, participants' reports of within-relationship attachment anxiety and avoidance gradually decreased over the 8-month period, implying that the mere maintenance of a dating relationship contributed to a decrease in relationship-specific attachment insecurities. However, these positive changes depended greatly on the "attachment figure's" sensitivity and supportiveness, as assessed by behavioral measures (but not self-reports) at the beginning of the study. Specifically, partners who were more accurate in decoding facial expressions and participants' nonverbal expressions of negative emotions and were coded by judges as more supportive toward participants in a dyadic interaction task brought about a steeper decline in within-relationship attachment anxiety and avoidance across the 8-month period. In fact, participants showed no significant decrease in within-relationship attachment insecurities if their partners scored relatively low on behavioral measures of sensitivity and supportiveness at the beginning of the study. Interestingly, these long-term positive changes in within-relationship attachment organization were not explained by variations in baseline relationship satisfaction and were independent of participants' global attachment orientations at the beginning of the study. That is, a partner's (i.e., attachment figure's) sensitivity and supportiveness predicted prospective decreases in within-relationship attachment insecurities in both chronically secure and chronically insecure participants.

An analysis of prospectively predicted changes in global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships revealed an interesting pattern of results. Whereas behavioral indicators of a partner's sensitivity and responsiveness at the beginning of the study predicted a significant decrease in global attachment anxiety over the 8-month study period, there was no such effect on global avoidant attachment. Moreover, the slope of changes in relationship-

specific attachment anxiety was significantly associated with the slope of changes in global attachment anxiety, but there was no significant association between the slopes of change in relationship-specific and global avoidant attachment. That is, a partner's sensitivity and responsiveness seemed to cause a gradual decrease in relationship-specific attachment anxiety and avoidance, which in turn brought about a more general reduction in attachment anxiety. However, these qualities in the partner, although they helped to reduce relationship-specific avoidant attachment, were not sufficient to reduce a more pervasive avoidant orientation.

Overall, these early research findings highlight the importance of a sensitive and supportive romantic partner as a transformative agent who can move a person toward greater security in a specific romantic relationship and reduce global worries about rejection, separation, and abandonment for at least 8 months. The results also suggest some boundaries of these positive effects: Evidently it is not so easy to induce change in a globally avoidant attachment style, even when a person is fortunate enough to have a loving and caring partner.

Boosting Attachment Security in Leader-Follower Relationships

Organizational leadership provides another situation in which one person can act as a security enhancer for others. Theoretically speaking, a leader's availability, sensitivity, and responsiveness should be able to contribute to followers' broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security, improve their wellbeing and psychological functioning, and promote personal growth. In a seminal article, Popper and Mayseless (2003) proposed that there is a close similarity between leaders (e.g., managers, political and religious authorities, teachers, supervisors, and military officers) and other kinds of security-enhancing attachment figures. "Leaders, like parents, are figures whose role includes guiding, directing, taking charge, and taking care of others less powerful than they and whose fate is highly dependent on them" (p. 42). That is, leaders can occupy the role of "stronger and wiser" caregiver and thereby provide a safe haven and a secure base for their followers. In fact, descriptions of leaders in the psychological literature (e.g., Bass, 1985; House & Howell, 1992; Howell, 1988; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Zaleznik, 1992) suggest that especially effective leaders are ones who are available,

sensitive, and responsive to their followers' needs; provide advice, guidance, and emotional and instrumental support to group members; enhance and develop followers' autonomy, initiative, and creativity; build followers' sense of competence and mastery; and bolster their motivation to take on new challenges and acquire new skills. In other words, leaders can be sensitive and responsive caregivers ("good shepherds") who provide their followers with a sense of security, courage, and desire for personal growth (Mayseless & Popper, in press).

According to Popper and Mayseless (2003), when followers seek a leader's assistance, support, and protection in stressful or dangerous circumstances, they enter a role that shares certain features with that of a dependent, needy, and vulnerable "child." Thus, their wish for a "stronger and wiser" leader may reflect the activation of the attachment system and attachment-oriented behaviors (such as proximity- and support-seeking). Under these conditions, a symbolic attachment bond may be formed with the leader. Just as proximity seeking is activated by threat appraisals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), desire for a strong leader tends to arise in times of personal or collective crisis or trauma. Worried followers want to feel close to a leader who can protect and guide them (e.g., Mayseless & Popper, in press; Popper, 2001; Shamir, 1999). Without the activation of the attachment system, which can sometimes seem irrational, infantile, or regressive, a security-enhancing leader would not be so able to inspire a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security and thereby contribute to group performance and followers' personal growth.

In line with this conceptualization of leader-follower relations, a sensitive and responsive leader, like other security-enhancing attachment figures, can have a strong impact on followers' wellbeing, personal and team functioning, and personal development. Just as well-parented children become high-functioning adults, followers can become better, stronger, and wiser adults, and in some cases effective and sensitive leaders in their own right, under the guidance of a talented and effective leader who exhibits mature judgment and prosocial values (suggesting his or her own attachment security and skill as a caregiver). According to Popper and Mayseless (2003), creating a sense of having a safe haven and a "secure base for exploration" in followers

is a leader's most effective method of increasing the followers' self-esteem, competence, autonomy, creativity, and psychological growth. Moreover, providing a sense of security is the key to the beneficial changes a good leader can sometimes effect in maladjusted or troubled followers. Like a parent who provides a secure base for exploring the world, a leader can provide a secure base for initiating and sustaining adaptive changes in personal and social behavior (Hill, 1984; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

As in other cases of unavailable, insensitive, and unresponsive attachment figures, a leader's inability or unwillingness to respond sensitively and supportively to followers' needs can magnify followers' anxieties, feelings of demoralization, or inclination to rebel ("protest," in attachment-theory terms). Moreover, an unavailable, insensitive, or selfish leader can fuel followers' attachment insecurities and hence either increase childish, anxious dependence on a destructive (e.g., totalitarian) figure or compulsively self-reliant dismissal of the leader's support and assistance. In either case, a leader's unavailability and lack of supportiveness can radically alter the leader-follower relationship and transform what began with the seeming promise of a safe haven and a secure base into a destructive, conflicted, irrationally hostile relationship that is self-defeating for both leader and followers. In our view, the key factor in these troubled relationships is the development of an insecure attachment bond.

In two recent studies, Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Ijzak, and Popper (under review) collected preliminary evidence concerning the positive effects that a sensitive and supportive leader can have on followers' adjustment during military service. In these studies, we (Davidovitz et al., under review) focused on leaders' attachment insecurities (ECR anxiety and avoidance) and the extent to which these insecurities impaired their functioning as security-enhancing attachment figures and contributed adversely to followers' performance and mental health. In one study, 549 Israeli soldiers in regular military service, from 60 different military units that were participating in a leadership workshop, rated their instrumental and socio-emotional functioning within their unit. Soldiers also rated (a) the extent to which their direct officer used power to serve and empower soldiers' needs and aspirations and respected the soldiers' rights

and feelings (a style of leadership that Howell, 1988, called “socialized”) and (b) the extent to which their direct officer was an effective provider of instrumental and emotional support in demanding and challenging situations, a core qualities of a security-enhancing attachment figure. The 60 direct officers also completed ratings describing their performance as a socialized leader and an effective support provider for their followers. They also completed the ECR scale, providing ratings of their own attachment anxiety and avoidance. This allowed us to examine (a) the effects of officers’ attachment insecurities on their performance as sensitive and supportive security providers and (b) the effects of these insecurities and leadership patterns on soldiers’ instrumental and socio-emotional functioning.

The data indicated that soldiers’ perceptions of their officers matched the officers’ self-reports. More avoidant officers scored lower on socialized leadership and were less able to deal effectively with their soldiers’ emotional needs. More attachment-anxious officers were less able to provide effective instrumental support, which had a detrimental effect on the accomplishment of group tasks. Thus, both insecurely attached officers and their soldiers noticed the same problematic patterns of leadership.

The study also revealed negative influences of an officer’s avoidant attachment style on his soldiers’ socio-emotional functioning in their unit. These negative effects were mediated by avoidant officers’ lack of a socialized leadership style and lack of efficacy in dealing with soldiers’ emotional needs. It seems likely, therefore, in line with an attachment-theoretical perspective on leader-follower relations, that a leader’s avoidance is associated with low sensitivity and supportiveness, which adversely affects followers’ socioemotional functioning. We believe it is likely that avoidant leaders alienate and demoralize followers, reduce the followers’ enthusiasm for group tasks, and leave followers feeling dissatisfied with and detached from each other.

We also found that an officer’s attachment anxiety has a negative effect on soldiers’ instrumental functioning, an association that is mediated by anxious officers’ lack of ability to provide instrumental support to followers in task-focused situations. We suspect that a leader’s

attachment anxiety interferes with effective provision of a secure base for exploration and learning, which in turn erodes followers' confidence in their own instrumental functioning. However, we (Davidovitz et al., under review) also noted an unexpected positive effect of officer's attachment anxiety on soldiers' socio-emotional functioning. It seems that an anxious officer's emphasis on emotional closeness and interdependence helps soldiers become emotionally involved and interpersonally close. Alternatively, soldiers' attempts to maintain good morale may be a defensive reaction of the group to the anxieties and uncertainties of an attachment-anxious officer – a possibility that needs to be studied further. In any case, soldiers' socio-emotional benefits under these conditions seem to be achieved at the expense of deficits in instrumental functioning. Perhaps anxiously attached officers divert their followers' attention and resources away from instrumental task completion and toward socio-emotional needs.

In a second study, Davidovitz et al. (under review) approached 541 Israeli military recruits and their 72 direct officers at the beginning of a 4-month period of intensive combat training and asked them to report on their attachment styles (using Hazan & Shaver's, 1987, three prototype ratings: anxious, secure, and avoidant). At the same time, soldiers completed a self-report scale measuring their baseline mental health (Mental Health Inventory; Veit & Ware, 1983). After 2 months, soldiers reported on their mental health again and provided appraisals of their officer as a provider of security (i.e., the officer's ability and willingness to be available in times of need and to accept and care for his or her soldiers rather than rejecting and criticizing them). Two months later (4 months after combat training began) soldiers once again evaluated their mental health. In this way, Davidovitz et al. (under review) assessed the effects of officers' attachment orientations on their ability to serve as security-providing attachment figures, which might affect soldier-followers' mental health during a highly stressful period, when an officer's attachment security and performance as a security provider might be of crucial importance for soldiers' emotional wellbeing.

The results indicated that the more avoidant an officer was, the less his soldiers viewed him as sensitive and available, and the more they felt rejected and criticized by him. More

important, an officer's avoidant attachment style and his lack of sensitivity and availability seemed to bring about undesirable changes in soldiers' mental health during combat training. At the beginning of training, baseline mental health was exclusively associated with soldiers' own attachment anxiety. However, officers' avoidant orientation and their lack of sensitivity and availability produced significant changes in soldiers' mental health over the weeks of training (taking the baseline assessment into account). The higher the officer's avoidance score and the lower his sensitivity and availability, the more his soldiers' mental health deteriorated over 2 and 4 months of intensive combat training. Analyses also revealed that the detrimental effect of a leader's avoidance was mediated by his functioning as a security provider. That is, an officer's avoidance impaired his functioning as a security-providing attachment figure, which in turn had negative effects on his soldiers' mental health during combat training. These findings support the metaphor of leaders as parents and highlight the importance of a leader's secure attachment for the maintenance of followers' mental health and emotional wellbeing during stressful periods.

The findings also indicate that soldiers' attachment orientations moderated the effects of their officers' avoidant attachment scores on changes in mental health. Officers' avoidance brought about a significant deterioration in soldiers' mental health during the initial 2 months of combat training mainly among insecurely attached soldiers. More secure soldiers were able to maintain a relatively stable and high level of mental health despite being under the command of an avoidant officer. That is, soldiers who had either internalized a secure base earlier in development or were able to bring one with them, mentally, from home were able to escape the detrimental effects of an avoidant officer's lack of nurturance and failure to serve as a safe haven and secure base.

Unfortunately, this buffering effect of soldiers' security was evident mainly when mental health was assessed only 2 months after combat training began. After 4 months of combat training, an officer's avoidance had negative effects on soldiers' mental health regardless of the soldiers' attachment orientation. In other words, as time passed and problems continued, the negative effects of an officer's avoidant style on soldiers' mental health overrode the initial

buffering effects of soldiers' attachment security. It is important to remember that these findings were obtained during a highly stressful period in which soldiers were under the complete control of their officer and in a situation where their physical welfare depended on their obedience to the officer's commands. Future studies should examine how leaders' and followers' attachment orientations interact in less extreme and less demanding situations and in other kinds of organizational contexts (e.g., manager-subordinate relations in a work place, mentor-student relations in a university laboratory).

Overall, these studies highlight the important impact that leaders' attachment orientations and correlated abilities to serve as security providers have on followers' performance, feelings, health, and adjustment. Moreover, they suggest that leaders' sensitivity and supportiveness – their ability and willingness to provide a sense of attachment security in their followers – can affect the followers' performance and wellbeing even under highly demanding and challenging circumstances. We should emphasize, however, that our studies were conducted on people in military contexts. Future studies are needed to compare these findings with those for other organizational settings and should include women. Systematic longitudinal research is also needed to address a host of unanswered questions, such as whether and how insecurely attached followers can benefit from the advantages of a secure leader; whether and how insecurely attached followers may resist, to their own detriment, a secure leader's beneficial influences; and whether and how a secure leader can provide corrective experiences and move insecure followers toward increased security and personal growth. A deeper understanding of these processes can help organizational psychologists create better leadership development programs and better interventions aimed at improving leader-follower relations.

Groups as Security-Enhancing Attachment Figures

Supportive interactions in the context of groups can also bring about positive changes in group members' attachment systems and thereby contribute to their wellbeing, psychological functioning, and personal growth. According to Maysless and Popper (in press), emotional connections with a group or a network of group members can also be viewed as attachment

bonds, and a group can serve attachment functions by providing a sense of closeness and of having a safe haven and a secure base (e.g., De Cremer, 2003; Simon & Stürmer, 2003; Sleebos, Ellemers & de Gilder, 2006; Tyler & Blader, 2002). That is, people can use a group as a symbolic source of comfort, support, and safety in times of need and as a secure base for exploration, learning, and personal development. Research on group dynamics indicates that people prefer their own groups over other groups, feel comfortable and safe in the midst of their own groups, seek to be accepted and respected by group members, and react to rejection, social exclusion, and group marginalization with increased seeking of proximity to and support from their groups (see Devine, 1995; Dovidio & Gartner, 1993; Tajfel, 1982; Tyler & Blader, 2000, for reviews). Moreover, there is evidence that groups, like individual attachment figures, can be effective providers of emotional support, comfort, and relief in demanding and challenging times (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Mullen & Cooper, 1994); they can also encourage and support exploration and the learning of new social, emotional, and cognitive skills (e.g., Forsyth, 1990).

Following Maysless and Popper's (in press) reasoning, we propose that people can construe a group as a symbolic security-enhancing attachment "figure," form secure attachment bonds with the group, and thereby benefit from the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security made possible by these bonds. As with individual attachment figures, however, appraising a group as a security provider can be distorted by a group member's global attachment insecurities. Secure adults are likely to feel confident of the group's support and emotionally open and self-assured when engaging in group activities, but less secure individuals may have difficulty construing their groups as available, sensitive, and responsive attachment figures. Indeed, Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) constructed an ECR-like self-report scale to measure group-oriented attachment anxiety (e.g., "I often worry that my group will not always want me as a member") and avoidance (e.g., "Often my group wants me to be more open about my thoughts and feelings than I feel comfortable being") and found that group-oriented insecurities were positively associated with global attachment insecurities in close relationships (measured by the original ECR).

However, the Smith et al.'s (1999) correlations were only moderate in size, indicating that although group attachment insecurities may be reflections, or special cases, of global insecurities, they are also influenced by other factors, such as past and current experiences with specific groups. As in other relational contexts, the quality of actual group interactions probably moderates the projection of previously established attachment working models onto a particular group, with more comforting and supportive group interactions favoring the formation of a more secure attachment to the group, despite some members' chronic general insecurity. In other words, it seems likely that comforting and supportive group interactions have a substantial moderating influence that resembles the positive effects of secure and security-enhancing romantic partners and group leaders. Therefore, despite biases due to global attachment insecurities, comforting and supportive group interactions can instill a group-specific sense of attachment security that contributes to the wellbeing and personal growth of group members. These experiences in groups can, in other words, provide a relational foundation for beneficial psychological transformations.

As explained by Rom and Mikulincer (2003), although research on group dynamics literature was not influenced by attachment theory and research, studies focused on group cohesion or cohesiveness, the best-researched group-level construct (e.g., Evans & Dion, 1991; Mullen & Cooper, 1994), provided indirect evidence concerning the security-promoting effects of supportive and encouraging group interactions. In these studies, group cohesion (or team spirit and solidarity), defined as the extent to which group members support, cooperate with, respect, and accept each other, was consistently shown to improve group members' emotional wellbeing and promote learning and effective team performance (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Levine & Moreland, 1990; Mullen & Cooper, 1994).

From an attachment perspective, the group-cohesion construct refers to the extent to which a group is appraised by its members as a security provider: The greater the group's cohesiveness, the more its members feel comforted, supported, respected, accepted, and encouraged by the group. Hence, cohesive groups can increase even chronically insecure group

members' secure group attachments, which contributes to their broaden-and-build cycles and provides a solid foundation for taking productive risks, responding to challenges, exploring new ideas and environments, and expanding perspectives and skills. In other words, cohesive groups can definitely be viewed as security-providing symbolic attachment figures.

Pursuing this idea, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) conducted two naturalistic studies (Studies 3 and 4) with new recruits in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), whose performance in combat units was evaluated in a 2-day screening session. On the first day, participants completed the ECR as a measure of global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships. On the second day, the recruits were randomly divided into small groups of 5-8 members and they performed three group missions (e.g., mounting a rubber boat, assembling a large military tent). Following each mission, they rated their socioemotional and instrumental functioning during the mission. In addition, they rated the cohesiveness of their group (e.g., "In my group, we worked well together," "In my group, we helped each other"). External observers also provided ratings of each participant's socioemotional and instrumental functioning during the three group missions, and participants completed an additional measure (Smith et al.'s, 1999, scale) at the end of the second screening day to register their anxiety and avoidance toward their group.

In both studies, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) documented the theoretically predicted projection of global attachment insecurities onto group-specific attachment orientations and the resulting effects on performance. Greater global attachment anxiety (in dyadic relationships) was associated with poorer instrumental performance in group missions (as assessed by both self-reports and observers' ratings) and with higher self-ratings of group-specific attachment anxiety. In addition, global attachment avoidance was associated with lower levels of both instrumental and socioemotional functioning during group missions (again, as assessed by both self-reports and observers' ratings) and higher ratings of group-specific attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Rom and Mikulincer (2003) also found that group cohesiveness (operationalized as a group-level variable created by averaging the appraisals of all group members) improved the socioemotional and instrumental functioning of group members and reduced the detrimental

effects of global attachment anxiety on instrumental functioning during group missions. Moreover, group cohesion significantly attenuated group-specific attachment insecurities, whether anxious or avoidant, and weakened the projection of global attachment anxiety onto the group. This finding supports the hypothesis that group cohesion enhances group members' sense of security, facilitates emotional wellbeing and more optimal functioning during group interactions, and mitigates chronically attachment-anxious people's typical worries (e.g., about being rejected or disliked). A sense of group cohesion signals that closeness, support, and consensus – prominent goals of attachment-anxious people – have been attained, thereby freeing mental resources for exploration, learning, and growth.

Interestingly, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) also found that, although group cohesion had an overall positive effect on functioning and group-specific attachment security, it failed to improve the functioning of avoidant military recruits. Some of the findings even suggested that a cohesive group exacerbated avoidant people's poor instrumental functioning. As reviewed above, global avoidant attachment seems to be more resistant than attachment anxiety to the presence of sensitive and supportive romantic partners or leaders. This imperviousness seems to hold up even during group activities. (This resistance to influence is especially interesting in light of the fact that there is no documented influence of genetic factors on avoidant attachment, whereas there is a genetic contribution to attachment anxiety, which nevertheless seems to be more malleable. See Crawford et al., in press). Interdependent relations with group members may be so threatening or distasteful to avoidant people that they fail to benefit from a potentially available group-specific sense of security. Alternatively, group cohesion, which implies a very high level of interdependence among group members, may exacerbate rather than calm avoidant people's attachment-related fears of closeness, thus threatening their sense of self-reliance.

Overall, Rom and Mikulincer's (2003) findings provide preliminary evidence that cohesive group interactions, characterized by support, cooperation, respect, and acceptance between group members, can foster a group-specific sense of attachment security, improve group functioning, and have healing, ameliorative effects on attachment-anxious people. This supports

McCluskey's (2002) contention that "failures in early attachment relationships can be revisited within the context of therapeutic groups and that groups can provide the context for supporting authentic connection with one's own affect and encourage resonance with the affect of other people" (p. 140). More research is needed on the psychological and interpersonal processes through which groups could help insecure adults revise their working models of self and others and enhance their sense of attachment security. Future studies should include prospective longitudinal designs, examining the extent to which group cohesion has long-term effects on group-specific attachment organization and either is or is not capable of overriding previously established global attachment insecurities.

The Role of a Therapist as a Secure Base

As implied by the quotation from McCluskey (2002) and as explicitly elaborated by Bowlby (1988), psychotherapy provides another relational context capable of supporting a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security, which in turn facilitates a client's personal growth and self-actualization. In the therapy setting, as in other interpersonal contexts, the prerequisite for a client's development is the therapist's ability to function as a security-enhancing attachment figure. According to Bowlby (1988), a therapist who functions as a safe haven and secure base allows a client to muster the courage for self-exploration, to delve deeply into partially occluded memories and distorted wishes and feelings, and to develop greater self-understanding, revise working models of self and others, and get back on the path to personal growth. Only with the support and encouragement of a skillful and caring therapist (a stronger and wiser caregiver), can clients confront the sources of their distress, remember painful experiences, allow strong emotions to arise, and explore perplexities they have not been able to face, manage, or understand alone.

Bowlby (1988) drew an analogy between a psychotherapist and a primary caregiver: Just as an adequately sensitive and responsive mother (a "good enough" parent, in Winnicott's, 1965, well-known designation) induces a sense of attachment security in her child and facilitates the child's exploration of the world, a "good enough" therapist serves as a safe haven and a secure

base from which clients can explore and reflect on painful memories and experiences. In this way, a good therapist becomes a security-enhancing attachment figure for the client – i.e., a reliable and relied-upon provider of security and support. Clients typically enter therapy in a state of psychic pain, frustration, anxiety, or demoralization, which naturally activates their attachment system and causes them to yearn for support, comfort, encouragement, and guidance. Attachment needs are easy to direct toward therapists, because therapists, at least when a client believes in their healing powers, are perceived as “stronger and wiser” caregivers. Therapists occupy the dominant and caregiving role in the relationship and can easily become the primary target of the client’s unmet needs for a safe haven and secure base. Of course, clients’ appraisals of the therapeutic relationship as involving an attachment bond and of the therapist as an attachment figure can also turn the therapist into a focus for attachment-related worries, defenses, and hostile projections. These projections sometimes disrupt therapeutic work, but they also provide an opportunity for a therapist to make useful observations and interpretations, for the client to have corrective emotional experiences, and for the client to understand him- or herself better.

There is preliminary research evidence that clients treat their therapist as a safe haven in times of distress. For example, Geller and Farber (1993) found that clients tended to think about their therapists mainly when painful feelings arose, and Rosenzweig, Farber, and Geller (1996) found that such thoughts produced feelings of comfort, safety, and acceptance in the clients. In a study of adults who had been involved in therapy for at least six months, Parish and Eagle (2003) asked clients to complete a self-report scale (Components of Attachment Questionnaire, or CAQ), tapping the extent to which they appraised the therapeutic relationship as a secure attachment bond. Specifically, clients were asked about the extent to which they sought proximity to their therapist; felt strong emotions toward the therapist and distress upon separation from him or her; and viewed the therapist as a safe haven, a secure base, a stronger and wiser person, an available and sensitive figure, and a unique relationship partner who could not easily be replaced. Clients also completed the same scale with regard to the relationship

partner to whom they felt closest (a primary attachment figure). Although most of the CAQ scores were higher for the primary attachment figure than for the therapist, all of the therapists' scores were above the scale midpoint. Moreover, clients rated their therapist higher on the stronger/wiser and availability/sensitivity aspects of attachment than they rated their primary attachment figure, and there was not a significant difference between the two figures in clients' ratings of the extent to which they served as a secure base. These findings suggest that clients do tend to view their therapists as security providers.

There is also initial evidence that a therapist's functioning as a security-providing attachment figure has beneficial effects on therapy outcome. In a 3-session career counseling study, Litman-Ovadia (2004) asked counselees after the second counseling session to complete a 25-item scale assessing the extent to which their counselor functioned as a secure base (the extent to which he or she was an available, sensitive, supportive, and accepting figure and provided safety and comfort during the counseling process). Counselees also completed the ECR scale before they entered counseling and a scale measuring career exploration both before and after counseling. Litman-Ovadia (2004) found that more avoidant counselees were less likely to perceive their counselor as a security-enhancing attachment figure. More important, counselees' appraisal of their counselor as a security-enhancing attachment figure was a significant predictor of heightened career exploration following counseling (as compared to baseline career exploration), even after controlling for counselees' attachment orientations. This appraisal of the therapist as a security-enhancing attachment figure also mitigated the detrimental effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance on career exploration. That is, even insecurely attached counselees who appraised their counselor as a secure base displayed an increase in career exploration; in fact, their post-counseling level of exploration did not differ from that of more secure counselees.

In a study based on data from the multi-site NIMH Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Program (TDCRP), Zuroff and Blatt (2006) assessed patients' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their therapist and its impact on the outcome

of interpersonal therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, imipramine (medication) plus clinical management, and placebo plus clinical management. Perceived quality of the therapeutic relationship was measured early in therapy with a self-report scale assessing the therapist's accurate empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness. Scores on this measure significantly predicted relief from depression and maintenance of therapeutic benefits during an 18-month follow-up period, regardless of the type of therapy administered, and the results were not attributable to patient characteristics or severity of depression. Zuroff and Blatt (2006) concluded that a positive therapeutic relationship has a transforming effect on patients' mental representations of self and others, which in turn have a healing effect on depression.

The importance of forming a secure bond with therapeutic attachment figures if change and personal growth are to be achieved is also evident in studies examining the effectiveness of residential treatment of high-risk adolescents. For example, Born, Chevalier, and Humblet (1997), Fritsch and Goodrich (1990), and Shealy (1995) found that institutionalized adolescents who formed more secure relationships with staff members displayed better adjustment following residential treatment. Moretti, Holland, and Peterson (1994) evaluated the effectiveness of the Response Program, which emphasizes secure attachment bonds as the main therapeutic agent in residential treatment of high-risk adolescents. They found that both parents and staff members noted a significant decrease in adolescents' conduct disorders during treatment.

Recently, Gur (2006) conducted a prospective study examining the course of emotional and behavioral problems of 131 Israeli high-risk adolescents during their first year in residential treatment centers. Four meetings were held with each participant, 1 week after beginning treatment and 3, 6, and 12 months later. At Time 1, participants completed the ECR scale to record their levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance; they also completed measures of emotional and behavioral adjustment. In the three subsequent waves of measurement, participants completed the adjustment scales and rated the extent to which targeted staff members functioned as a secure base (the extent to which staff members were available, sensitive, responsive, and supportive). The targeted staff members also rated participants'

adjustment and their own functioning as a secure base in the second, third, and fourth waves of measurement. In the fourth wave of measurement, adolescents again completed the ECR in order to examine possible changes in their attachment insecurities.

The findings revealed the theoretically predicted association between attachment insecurities and adjustment problems at the beginning of residential treatment. However, attachment insecurities did not necessarily interfere with the subsequent perception of staff members as security providers. More important, findings indicate that staff members serving as a secure base contributed to positive changes in emotional and behavioral adjustment across the four waves of measurement and notably weakened the detrimental effects of baseline attachment insecurities. Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower rates of anger, depression, and behavioral problems as well as higher rates of positive feelings across the study period. Moreover, the functioning of staff members as a secure base was also associated with positive changes in the adolescents' attachment representations. Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower scores on the ECR anxiety and avoidance scales after their first year of residential treatment. Overall, the findings support the theoretical proposition that attachment security has healing effects even in the case of abnormally insecure, institutionalized youngsters.

Although these preliminary findings are encouraging, we need to be cautious in interpreting them as support for the idea that the functioning of therapeutic figures as security providers can cause beneficial changes in clients' attachment organization and restore mental health and foster personal growth. We do not yet have controlled research that examines the long-term effects of security-enhancing therapeutic figures on clients' mental representations of themselves and their relationship partners or the extent to which changes in these representations are associated with therapy outcomes. More research is also needed on the nature, strength, and temporal course of revisions in insecure working models during therapy and on the way particular features of therapist-client relations contribute to these revisions in the case of different kinds of emotional and behavioral disorders. Researchers should examine how client

characteristics and other (nonprofessional, not specifically therapeutic) relationship partners (e.g., family members, spouses) can interfere with or facilitate the effects that a security-enhancing therapist has on psychotherapeutic changes in emotional experience and social behavior.

Conclusions

We have previously gone to considerable lengths to test experimentally, in adults, the core claim of attachment theory that increasing a person's sense of security (see summaries in Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, 2007, in press; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002, 2006) can have personally and socially desirable effects on creativity, compassion, altruism, intergroup tolerance, and humane values. We have shown that short-term security inductions, whether administered consciously or subliminally, definitely have the predicted good effects. In another subdiscipline, developmental psychologists who focus on parent-child relationships in decades-long prospective longitudinal studies have shown that security-enhancing relationships with parents and other caregivers have extensive and long-lasting beneficial effects on the personality development of children, adolescents, and adults (see summaries in the volume edited by Grossmann, Grossmann, & Waters, 2005).

Here, we have focused on similar processes that occur naturally, and sometimes deliberately, in romantic relationships, groups, leader-follower relations, dyadic psychotherapy, and group treatment contexts. Once again, research findings indicate that both chronic attachment insecurities and particular, theoretically predictable contextual factors – including security-enhancing romantic partners, leaders, and therapists and cohesive, high-functioning groups – play a role in shaping individuals' and groups' effective functioning, wellbeing, and growth over time. Much of the research reviewed here is fairly preliminary, so there are many questions remaining to be answered. We have noticed, for example, that avoidant attachment seems resistant to change. We suspect that this is because avoidant individuals deliberately resist the influence of loving, considerate potential attachment figures, having found in the past that reliance on others opens a person to disappointment, abuse, and pain. But much more research is

needed to determine the validity of this speculation and learn how avoidant individuals might be made more amenable to constructive change.

We have suggested that leaders with an anxious attachment orientation may be attractive to followers while nevertheless contributing to their nonoptimal performance on instrumental tasks. Interestingly, anxiously attached followers seem to be able to perform better than usual if they find themselves in cohesive groups. Much more needs to be discovered about how to find the best matches between leaders and followers and between both kinds of people and particular social conditions that allow them to function optimally. It will also be important to explore the possibility that security-enhancing leadership styles can be taught in management schools and other such institutions. It would be tremendously useful if we could find ways to assess the aptitude and performance of leaders and the potential for socially beneficial versus destructive matches between leaders and followers of particular kinds. Sadly, history and the current daily news provide many examples of distressingly poor, highly destructive leadership and misguided, painfully damaged followers.

The kinds of research and theoretical issues discussed here point to new possibilities for applicable research into personality and social psychology. Pursuing these lines of thinking and research should be beneficial to both the science of psychology and humanity at large. Psychologists have had a difficult time bringing their independent findings about personality, social contexts, development, and therapeutic processes together. Yet real personality development occurs in social contexts, and social contexts have their effects through the personalities of parents, romantic partners, leaders, followers, therapists, and groups. Attachment theory provides a useful starting point for creating a truly integrative understanding of the interactions of personal and social factors that bring about positive changes in individuals and societies.

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