An Attachment Perspective on the Tribal Mind:

Secure and Insecure Forms of Tribalism

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Abstract

Attachment theory addresses the innate tendency to react to threats and challenges by seeking social sources of safety and support (referred to in the theory as a "safe haven" and "secure base"). Beginning in infancy, when the search is typically directed at parental figures and continuing throughout life, when attachment figures can include close friends, romantic partners, professionals in helping roles, as well as groups of various kinds, a person's history of experiences with attachment figures can shape his or her sense of safety, security, and self-worth. In this chapter, we focus on the role that a person's history of attachment-related *security dynamics*, embodied in an attachment style or orientation, plays in determining how he or she relates to a primary tribe or social group (in-group). That is, we offer an attachment-theory perspective on tribalism – being emotionally connected to and loyal to an in-group. We review the basic concepts of attachment theory and present ideas and evidence regarding what we consider secure and insecure forms of tribalism. Specifically, we show that the sense of attachment security fosters genuine appreciation of one's group and its members that does not necessarily entail blind in-group favoritism and loyalty or hostility to out-groups and out-group members. We also show that attachment insecurities measured along the attachment-anxiety dimension (doubting one's value and lovability and excessively needing and demanding others' care and attention) fosters a more defensive form of tribalism, which can result in identity fusion with the in-group and hostile, discriminatory reactions to out-groups. (249 words)

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) is one of the leading frameworks for understanding the anxiety-buffering and growth-promoting effects of comforting interactions with a supportive relationship partner, social group or institution, or religious/spiritual figure (e.g., God). At the heart of the theory is a conception of *security dynamics*, a set of psychological processes involved in the search for social sources of security and the consequences of security attainment or nonattainment for emotional stability and personal growth (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023a). Simply stated, actual or anticipated dangers, threats, and challenges motivate a person to seek the proximity and support of competent and benevolent others and rely on them to help restore emotional balance and confidently pursue personal goals. Being well cared for by attachment figures, a person develops a sense of attachment security or what Sroufe and Waters (1977) called *felt security*, confidence that one is worthy and lovable, and that other people will be supportive when needed. This inner sense of security facilitates effective emotion regulation, contributes to mental health and personal growth, sustains harmonious relationships, and favors the endorsement of constructive means of conflict resolution at both interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup levels (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, 2023a). Failure to attain felt security leaves distress unresolved and interferes with effective emotion regulation and the quality of personal and social relationships.

In this chapter we focus on the relevance of the security-dynamics construct for understanding individual differences in what Clark et al. (2019) called *tribalism* – the tendency to express strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social groups (in-groups); to exalt and identify with their values, norms, and beliefs; and to engage in behaviors that promote the group's effectiveness and sustainability (pro-group behaviors). We first review basic concepts of attachment theory, focusing on what we, following Frederickson (2001), call the "broaden-and-

build" cycle of attachment security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). We then review research showing that enhancing a person's broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security contributes to what we consider secure forms of tribalism (in-group "love"; Brewer, 2017) – identification with, and commitment and loyalty to, in-groups while holding a curious, open, and constructive attitude toward members of other groups. We also review evidence that possessing and displaying negative emotions, prejudice, and discriminatory attitudes toward out-groups (out-group "hate"; Brewer, 2017) indicates that a person suffers from serious doubts about his or her value and lovability and others' kindness. This kind of attachment-anxious person joins and clings to an in-group in hopes of satisfying safety and security needs.

The Construct of Security Dynamics

The Search for Social Sources of Protection and Support

One of the core tenets of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) is that human beings are born with a psychobiological system (the *attachment behavioral system*) that motivates them to seek proximity to significant others (*attachment figures*) in times of need. According to Bowlby (1982), the goal of this system is to maintain adequate protection and support, which is accompanied by a subjective sense of safety and security. This goal of seeking proximity to an attachment figure becomes especially salient when a person encounters actual or symbolic threats or challenges and notices that an attachment figure is not sufficiently near, interested, approachable, or responsive (Bowlby, 1982). In such cases, a person's attachment behavioral system is up-regulated and the person is motivated to increase or reestablish proximity to an attachment figure until felt security is attained.

In Bowlby's (1982) view, attachment figures are special individuals or social entities that are perceived as competent and benevolent and as potential sources of protection and support

when needed. People turn to these supportive figures for two main provisions: a physical and emotional *safe haven* (i.e., mitigating worries and distress) and a *secure base* from which to explore, learn, and thrive in a confident manner (Ainsworth, 1991). The goal of proximity seeking is twofold – to feel appreciated, protected, and comforted by an attachment figure when threatened and to feel that one's strivings for competence and autonomy are approved, supported, and empowered by this figure.

Although the search for a safe haven and secure base is critical early in life, it remains active across the life span, as indicated by adults' needs for support and encouragement, especially when facing threats or challenges (Bowlby, 1988). However, proximity-seeking bids may operate somewhat differently at different ages. For example, the nature of targeted attachment figures tends to change with development. During infancy, primary caregivers (usually parents or parent substitutes) occupy the role of attachment figures (Ainsworth, 1991). However, during adolescence and adulthood, other relationship partners also become potential attachment figures, including close friends and romantic partners (Zeifman & Hazan, 2016). In addition, other people, social entities, and supernatural figures (e.g., teachers, therapists, managers, social groups and institutions, God) can occupy the role of what Bowlby (1982) called a "stronger" and "wiser" caregiver in particular contexts. Research indicates that any of these figures, depending on circumstances, can be perceived as a potential source, in context, of a safe haven and secure base (e.g., Granqvist, 2020; Mayseless & Popper, 2019; Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

In-Groups as Attachment Figures

A person's in-groups, including his or her family, peer group, sports team, political party, ethnic group, nation, or culture, offer possibilities for safety and security in times of need (Brewer, 2007). From an attachment perspective, in-groups possess the two characteristics that

define a potential attachment figure – benevolence and competence (Mayseless & Popper, 2007). People tend to perceive favorable in-groups as benevolent contexts (in which something beneficial and nothing harmful might occur). In-group members tend to share common values and goals and feel a sense of solidarity or community of interests (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a result, they naturally tend to perceive each other as cooperative, helpful, and trustworthy (e.g., Tracy et al., 2020), and they may perceive their group as a benevolent social entity that enhances their identity and security (my group, my team, my church, etc.).

In many situations, groups are perceived as more resourceful and powerful than single individual members in coping with threats and challenges. According to the *defensive aggregation* principle (Hamilton, 1971), tight clustering of conspecifics (e.g., flocking in birds, schooling in fish, huddling in mammals) reduces the probability of predation and diminishes the adverse psychological effects of stressors. For these reasons, people facing threats and challenges may seek to feel close to their in-groups in order to feel safe and secure. Of course, they can also turn to in-groups for non-attachment reasons (e.g., accomplishing group tasks, having fun), but during times of need, such groups may be perceived mainly as possible sources of a safe haven and secure base. Indeed, research indicates that adolescents and adults tend to rely on in-group members for support in times of need (Butler et al., 2019), to 'huddle' with these members when facing natural or man-made disasters (Mawson, 2005), and to heighten identification with and endorsement of the in-group's values, beliefs, and symbols during threatening times (e.g., Barth et al., 2018; Sibley et al., 2020; Uhl et al., 2018).

Attachment-Figure Responsiveness, Felt Security, and Insecure Forms of Attachment

Although all human beings are born with the capacity to seek proximity to and rely on attachment figures in times of need, important individual differences arise in the context of

relationships with these figures from birth on. According to Bowlby (1973), these individual differences are shaped by reactions of attachment figures to one's bids for proximity and support in times of need and from storing memories of these reactions in the form of mental representations of self and others (*internal working models*). Interactions with relationship partners or in-groups that are responsive to one's bids for proximity and can provide the needed safe haven and secure base foster felt security and contribute to positive working models of self and others. When these figures are not reliably available and supportive, however, the person's sense of lovability and worth is shaky or absent; others' kindness and caring are in doubt; and the person feels less safe and secure in relational contexts.

Pursuing these theoretical ideas in adulthood, many researchers have focused on a person's *attachment orientation* or *style*, a systematic pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and behaviors that results from a particular history of interactions with attachment figures (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). These orientations can be conceptualized as regions in a continuous two-dimensional space (e.g., Brennan et al., 1998). One dimension, *attachment-related avoidance*, reflects the extent to which a person distrusts others' benevolence and defensively strives to maintain independence and emotional distance within personal and social relationships. The other dimension, *attachment anxiety*, reflects the extent to which a person worries that others will not be available or responsive in times of need and engages in overly demanding, intrusive, and even coercive bids for proximity and support.

Attachment orientations can be conceptualized as the top node in a hierarchical network of attachment-related mental representations (e.g., Overall et al., 2003). This network also includes more specific attachment-related representations that apply only in certain relational contexts and can be activated by the actual or symbolic presence of a relationship partner or in-

group, even if they are not congruent with the dominant attachment orientation. This activation can then temporarily shift a person's cognitions and behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). For example, the presence of a supportive figure can infuse a momentary sense of security (what Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, called *security priming*) even among chronically insecure people and lead them to think and behave more like a secure person (Gillath et al., 2022).

We (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) have proposed that individuals' location in the two-dimensional anxiety-by-avoidance space reflects both their sense of attachment security and the ways in which they deal with threats and challenges. People who score low on both dimensions have a positive history of interactions with sensitive and responsive attachment figures and enjoy a strong sense of security. Those who score high on either attachment anxiety or avoidance, or both, suffer from attachment insecurities and tend to use secondary attachment strategies that we, following Cassidy and Kobak (1988), characterize as attachment-system "hyperactivation" or "deactivation" in the context of threats, frustrations, rejections, and losses. People who score high on attachment anxiety rely on hyperactivating strategies – energetic attempts to achieve a safe haven and secure base combined with lack of confidence that these desired resources will be provided and with feelings of anger and despair when they are not provided (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). In contrast, people who score high on attachment-related avoidance tend to use deactivating strategies, attempting not to seek proximity to others when facing threats or challenges, denying vulnerability and a need for other people, and avoiding closeness and interdependence in relationships.

The Broaden-and-Build Cycle of Attachment Security

According to our model of security dynamics (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023a), felt security includes both declarative and procedural knowledge organized around a relational prototype or

secure-base script (Waters & Waters, 2006). This script contains something like the following if-then propositions: "If I encounter an obstacle and/or become distressed, I can approach a significant other for help; he or she is likely to be available and supportive; I will experience relief and comfort as a result of proximity to this person; I can then return to other activities." Having many experiences that contribute to the construction of this kind of script makes it easier for an attachment-secure person to hold optimistic expectations and to feel relatively calm and resolute when dealing with threats and challenges. Indeed, adolescents and adults who possess a stronger sense of security are more likely to include elements of the secure-base script (support seeking, support provision, and distress relief) when creating stories from word prompts (e.g., Steele et al., 2014) and even when dreaming about stressful events (Mikulincer et al., 2009).

The activation of the secure-base script has proliferating effects on a person's motives, cognitions, feelings, and behaviors, which we call the *broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security*. This cycle emanates from the set of positive beliefs embedded in the secure-base script. First, adhering to the script makes it easy to believe that most of life's threats and challenges are manageable, because the script implies that approaching an attachment figure is likely to result in comfort and empowerment. Second, the secure-base script includes positive beliefs about others' benevolence and kindness because others have usually been responsive to one's support-seeking bids. Third, interactions with responsive attachment figures lead people to perceive themselves as valuable, lovable, and special – thanks to being valued, loved, and viewed as special by caring figures. Fourth, the secure-base script implies that relational dependence and closeness are rewarding (approaching others and relying on them in times of need results in comfort and support). Research has consistently shown that an optimistic outlook and positive views of self,

others, and relationships are more characteristic of people who possess a stronger sense of attachment security (e.g., Caldwell & Shaver, 2012; Collins et al., 2006; Schmitt & Allik, 2005).

The secure-base script also includes a fund of useful procedural knowledge concerning emotion regulation and coping with stress. During interactions with sensitive and responsive figures, people learn that they can confidently and openly express their vulnerability and need while relying on others' support, and that these actions will yield positive outcomes. They also learn that they can often deal effectively with setbacks themselves, seeking help only when needed, and that turning to others is an effective way to bolster their own considerable coping ability without endangering their sense of autonomy and competence. Indeed, people holding a stronger sense of security have been found to rely on more effective emotion-regulation and coping strategies (e.g., Berant et al., 2001; Winterheld, 2016).

The most immediate psychological effect of activating the secure-base script is distress management. The optimistic appraisals and constructive ways of regulating emotion embedded in the script can assuage distress, activate positive emotions (anticipatory relief and comfort), and thereby maintain emotional balance. Over time, relying on the script contributes to sustained psychological well-being and mental health. Hundreds of studies have shown that adolescents and adults who possess a stronger sense of attachment security score higher on measures of well-being and score lower on measures of emotional problems and psychiatric symptomatology (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, for a review).

Besides contributing to emotional stability, adherence to the secure-base script contributes to a dual transformation in a person's motives. Instead of being exclusively focused on self-protection, the person can also focus on (a) other people's needs and interests and (b) one's own possibilities for learning and thriving. At the relational level, positive beliefs about

others' benevolence makes it easier for a secure person to appreciate and value the adaptive benefits of personal and social relationships, feel comfortable with relational intimacy and commitment, and engage in behaviors that promote relationship quality and stability. At the personal level, feeling safe and empowered, secure people can be less afraid of novelty and uncertainty and open themselves more confidently to explore new things, people, and ideas. Moreover, their authentic and stable sense of personal value and lovability make it unnecessary to resort to reality-distorting defenses that can exacerbate interpersonal and intergroup tensions and conflicts. In the next section, we review evidence concerning how these security-based transformations are manifested in what we call secure forms of tribalism.

Secure Forms of Tribalism

Several social psychological theories claim that tribalism is guided by self-protection or self-enhancement motives. For example, Hobfoll (2018) argues that tribalism reflects a primal instinct to protect oneself from those who are perceived as a threat to one's existence. Social identity theorists (e.g., Rubin & Hewstone, 1998) assume that group membership is an important source of self-esteem and that in-group positivity biases (exaltation of one's in-group's good qualities and denial or dismissal of its weaknesses and wrongs) allow members to include their in-group's positive qualities within their self-concepts and boost their self-esteem. In a related account, Hogg (2007) claimed that social groups are particularly effective in reducing uncertainty (they provide a set of consensual rules, norms, and beliefs that prescribe how group members ought to feel and behave); hence, people may strive to be loyal to a group and adhere to its values and beliefs as a means of maintaining certainty about themselves and the world.

Although self-protection and self-enhancement motives might contribute to tribalism, we believe they are less relevant for explaining attachment-secure people's positive, approach

orientation toward in-groups. As noted above, comforting interactions with responsive attachment figures allow secure people to feel good about themselves even under threatening circumstances. Therefore, they do not need to derive further self-esteem from inflated, glorifying, unrealistic perceptions of their groups or to deny or dismiss any deficiencies or weaknesses the group may have. Moreover, felt security can bolster and shield a group member's self-concept to the point where it is possible to seek accurate information about one's group's problems and liabilities, which can be addressed constructively. In addition, with confidence that social support will be available when needed, attachment-secure people might be able to move outside their comfort zone and open themselves to novel beliefs and perspectives even if these differ from the in-group's consensual beliefs. Such confidence might also allow them to tolerate any ambiguity or uncertainty that arises while exploring and experimenting with new ideas, and to do so without needing to defensively adhere to their in-group's prescriptive rules and norms.

For attachment-secure people, interacting with protective and empowering relationship partners or in-groups constitutes the primary source of stable senses of safety, security, and self-worth. Moreover, felt security is a default inner resource that supersedes self-protection and self-enhancement motives and renders them less relevant for explaining tribalism. This view should not be interpreted, however, as implying that felt security interferes with in-group identification or encourages an individualistic ideology. This interpretation would contradict Bowlby's (1988) portrayal of attachment security as promoting a sense of togetherness and Smith et al.'s (1999) finding of a positive association between attachment security and in-group identification.

In our view, attachment-secure people's form of tribalism is a natural consequence of their positive models of others and pro-relational tendencies that allow them to genuinely appreciate and value the adaptive benefits of group membership and to derive intrinsic pleasure

from being part of a supportive group and contributing to its welfare and sustainability. In other words, secure people's tribalism involves (a) not being driven by urgent, unmet needs for approval, protection, and support, and (b) the ability to enjoy group relationships as an intrinsically pleasurable state. Paraphrasing one of Erich Fromm's (1956) statements about mature love, secure people may want to be part of a group because they love the group.

We expect this kind of intrinsic in-group love to be manifested in secure group members' (a) engagement in pro-group behaviors aimed at promoting other members' welfare, enhancing group cohesion, and helping the group attain its goals, and (b) tolerant, open attitudes toward out-groups. In other words, secure people's tribalism might have positive implications for both intragroup processes (improving group cohesion and effectiveness) and intergroup relations (reducing intergroup hostility and prejudice).

Felt Security and Pro-Group Tendencies

There is evidence that group members' felt security is associated with a positive, approach orientation toward their in-groups, which can facilitate full engagement in pro-group behaviors. Secure individuals have been found to hold more positive attitudes toward group membership, more positive beliefs about other group members, and more optimistic expectations about group interactions and outcomes (e.g., DeMarco & Newheiser, 2019; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003; Smith et al., 1999). Moreover, their adoption of the secure-base script alleviates or at least reduces concerns about rejection, exclusion, and other hurtful group member behaviors (Ferenczi & Marshall, 2016), thereby reducing the need for self-protective defenses during group activities.

Most of the research on pro-group effects of felt security has been conducted in the context of group counseling and group therapy (although see DeMarco & Newheiser, 2019, and Leach et al., 2008, for exceptions). These studies have assessed dispositional attachment

orientations in close relationships and provided evidence that dispositionally secure group members are more likely to be responsive to other members' concerns and to expend greater effort than others in pro-group behaviors (see Marmarosh et al., 2013, for a review). For example, Shechtman and Dvir (2006) found that adolescents who were more secure with respect to attachment were more likely to share personal experiences during a group session and more likely to appreciate and validate other members' disclosures. In another group counseling study, Shechtman and Rybko (2004) found that counselors rated more secure members as working more constructively during group sessions.

A conceptually similar pattern of findings was reported by Chen and Mallinckrodt (2002): Group members' felt security was associated with more pro-group behaviors during group psychotherapy (e.g., the secure group members were more attentive and responsive to other members' disclosures). There is also evidence that more secure group members are more likely to react positively to other members' desire for greater intimacy (Illing et al., 2011) and to have more accurate knowledge about other members' traits and attitudes (Mallinckrodt & Chen, 2004), indicating a lack of self-preoccupation. Moreover, groups whose members are more secure with respect to attachment tend to establish more positive working relationships during the counseling process (e.g., Lo Coco et al., 2016).

Felt Security and Intergroup Relationships

Secure people's genuine interest in others and their positive beliefs about others' benevolence may even extend to out-groups. Whereas the social identity approach views in-group love as necessarily implying out-group hate (although see, Brewer, 2017, for an important exception), secure people's positive orientation toward in-groups might not necessarily lead to out-group derogation and hostility. As noted above, felt security strengthens authentic feelings of

self-worth, and this makes it unnecessary to derogate out-groups as an additional way to boost or maintain self-esteem. Moreover, besides being associated with greater empathy and generosity, attachment security has been shown to foster a more open and tolerant attitude toward unfamiliarity and novelty (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), which may allow a secure person to curiously explore potential commonalities and shared interests with people from out-groups. In addition, attachment-secure people tend to rely on effective emotion-regulation strategies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016); so, they can remain calm and unperturbed while engaged in challenging discussions about ideological differences and rivalries with out-group members.

Unlike researchers who adopt a social identity approach, we do not characterize typical intergroup relationships in terms of antagonism, hostility, and conflict. Rather, the quality of these relationships may depend on group members' felt security. In our view, felt security can sustain both love of in-groups and genuine openness to out-groups. As a result, people can explore potential commonalities with out-groups and hold a more cooperative and sympathetic attitude toward these groups without compromising their strong affection for their in-group. They can work toward peaceful coexistence with out-groups without renouncing their group membership and identification. Of course, the open and cooperative attitude derived from attachment security does not require blindness to the existence of dangerous and hostile out-groups or denial of real threats posed by these groups. In such cases, we would expect attachment-secure people to defend their in-group from an external attack but would still attempt to search for peaceful ways to resolve the intergroup conflict.

There is some evidence linking felt security with less prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors toward out-groups. In three studies conducted with young adult Italians, for example, Boccato et al. (2015) found that, as compared with insecure individuals, secure ones

reported less prejudicial attitudes toward immigrants and were more interested in creating connections with them. Similar findings have come from studies examining Dutch adults' attitudes toward immigrants' integration into Dutch society (e.g., Van Oudenhoven & Hofstra, 2006); Israeli young adults' prejudice toward elderly people and people with a disability (Bodner & Cohen-Fridel, 2010; Vilchinsky et al., 2010); American heterosexuals' prejudice against gay individuals (Gormley & Lopez, 2010); and white Americans' openness to people from other racial groups (Han, 2017).

In a series of five laboratory studies involving secular Israeli Jewish college students, we (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001) found that, as compared to neutral priming, experimentally activating mental representations of attachment security (*security priming*) promoted more tolerant and accepting attitudes toward people from a variety of out-groups: Israeli Arabs, Ultra-orthodox Jews, Russian immigrants, and homosexuals. This security-priming effect was found even when study participants were led to believe that their own group had been insulted by an out-group member. That is, experimentally augmented security minimized the tendency to derogate out-group members even when derogation would have been an understandable reaction. In subsequent studies, security priming has been found to increase white American participants' empathy and positive attitudes toward racially different others and to reduce British undergraduates' prejudice and discriminatory behavior towards immigrants and Muslims (Boag & Carnelley, 2012, 2016; Mallinckrodt et al., 2013). Security priming has also been found to inhibit Israeli Jews' actual aggression toward an Israeli Arab (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and to reduce American undergraduates' hostile attitudes toward Arabs (Saleem et al., 2013).

Felt security not only reduces prejudice, but it may also lead a person to openly explore and reflect on less conscious (more implicit) intergroup biases, which is an important step in

acknowledging and working toward the elimination of prejudice (Kendi, 2019). Comforting interactions with responsive others contribute to heightened “mentalization” (Fonagy et al., 2002) of one’s wishes, feelings, and thoughts (e.g., Fuchs & Taubner, 2019), perhaps thereby improving self-understanding of one’s own prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior toward out-groups. Moreover, feeling loved and accepted, secure people may be less defensively guarded and thus more prone to notice and disclose unwanted prejudicial inclinations. In support of this view, Davis et al. (2016) found that, as compared to neutral priming, security priming led Israeli Jewish participants to admit holding more negative attitudes and having committed more discriminatory behaviors toward Israeli Arabs.

Overall, considering the findings reviewed here, we can conclude that the sense of attachment security, either dispositional or contextually or experimentally activated, increases people’s awareness of their own discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and reduces prejudice, hostility, and discrimination toward people different from themselves and members of their own social group. These findings provide an encouraging impetus for applying attachment theory and research to interventions aimed at fostering more harmonious intergroup relations (see Tropp, 2021, for a recent illustration of this approach).

Insecure Forms of Tribalism

From an attachment perspective, tribalism might imply out-group hate mainly when people are constantly preoccupied with their own value and lovability and react with defensive, hostile responses to any sign of criticism of, disrespect for, or attack on their group-level source of safety and security. These attachment-related concerns and defenses could be due either to a person’s own history of troubled interpersonal or group relationships or to actual hurtful interactions with the current in-group or some of its members. This is the case of attachment-

anxious group members who hold serious doubts about their lovability and value and may identify with a group and become loyal to its values, norms, and beliefs as compensatory means to satisfy unmet needs for protection and support. For attachment-anxious people, tribalism is not derived from a genuine appreciation of group members' kindness and value but from a defensive inclusion of the group's desirable qualities in their self-concept in order to experience these qualities, to some extent, as their own, allowing them to feel somewhat safe, secure, and worthy.

Although attachment-avoidant people also harbor doubts about others' benevolence and kindness, they may refrain from using in-groups as compensatory sources of safety and security. Avoidant people hold negative working models of others and feel uncomfortable with relational closeness, interdependence, and commitment (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990). At the group level, these avoidant tendencies may be manifested in reluctance to become part of a group and expressions of disdain, disrespect, and hostility toward others, whether they are in-group members or belong to other groups (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023a). As a result, avoidant people might display out-group derogation without feeling in-group love or displaying positive signs of tribalism (e.g., in-group loyalty, in-group positivity biases). Indeed, avoidant attachment has been found to be associated with lower levels of identification with social groups and undifferentiated hostility toward other people regardless of group membership (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003; Smith et al., 1999).

Attachment Anxiety and Identity Fusion

Attachment anxiety is characterized by senses of helplessness, vulnerability, and worthlessness and a tendency to overly depend on others in times of need (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). Attachment-anxious people tend to press for greater attention and care, to express an excessively strong desire for closeness (sometimes including enmeshment or merger) and to

engage in clinging, demanding, or controlling behavior aimed at attaining others' reliable protection and support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). At the group level, these anxious tendencies are likely to be manifested in a desire to merge with a potential collective source of felt security and rely on its benevolence in times of need (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023a). Such a desire might result in people's over-identification and total alignment with the values, beliefs, and norms of their in-group.

This extreme kind of group identification is what Swann et al. (2012) called *identity fusion*, a powerful form of group alignment that involves a visceral sense of "oneness" with a group and complete devotion to it (e.g., "I am one with my group," "I am strong because of my group"; Gómez et al., 2011.) To date, no study has examined links between anxious attachment and identity fusion. However, identity fusion seems to underlie two behavioral tendencies that do characterize attachment-anxious people's tribal mind: willingness to sacrifice personal interests and even life in behalf of the in-group and to actively fight against threats to this group coming from deviant members or external enemies.

Identity fusion has been linked to willingness to sacrifice wealth, time, and energy for a group. For example, more fused individuals are more willing to donate money to a political party (Misch et al., 2018) or aid in-group members (Whitehouse et al., 2017). According to Swann al. (2014), these pro-group tendencies are driven by worries about the loss of a collective source of personal value and identity. We suspect that they may also be driven by unmet needs to be accepted, understood, and cared for by others. These are the main needs and worries of attachment-anxious people, who may try to fuse with a collective source of felt security, thereby sacrificing themselves for an in-group.

Two studies show that attachment anxiety is associated with endorsement of pro-group behaviors, even at the price of sacrificing one's life. In a correlational study, Ferenczi et al. (2016) found that more attachment-anxious participants were more willing to engage in pro-group actions (e.g., "I would sacrifice my life if it gave my group status or monetary reward," "I would be willing to donate money to organizations promoting interests of my group"). Importantly, this association was mediated by feelings of in-group rejection: More attachment-anxious participants felt more rejected by their in-group, which in turn led to stronger endorsement of compensatory pro-group actions. In three experiments, Caspi-Berkowitz et al. (2019) found that more attachment-anxious participants were readier to die for a cause or their in-group (as assessed with Bélanger et al.'s, 2014, Self-Sacrifice Scale, e.g., "I would be ready to give my life for this cause/group"). It's worth noting that this association was observed mainly after personal mortality was made salient. This implies that attachment-anxious people's tendency to self-sacrifice for a group might, ironically, be a way of obtaining safety and security when threatened by existential concerns.

According to Ein-Dor et al. (2010), attachment-anxious people's pro-group tendency is manifested in their adoption of a *sentinel* role – early and accurate detection of threats and alacrity in alerting others to threats (i.e., keen risk assessment ability) and staying with them until the dangerous situation ends. Indeed, when asked to write about a frightening scenario based on a Thematic Apperception Test-style prompt, participants higher in attachment anxiety were more likely to compose stories that included noticing danger quickly and warning others about the danger (Ein-Dor et al., 2011). This sentinel attitude and behavior might contribute to a group's survival and organizational sustainability and thereby increase the likelihood that an anxious person would be embraced as a valued member of a group.

Ein-Dor and Orgad (2012) conducted a creative study to assess attachment-anxious people's tendency to warn other group members about a looming danger. Participants were led to believe that they had accidently activated a computer virus, and they were asked to alert the department's computer technicians about the incident. Along the way to the technicians' office, they were presented with four decision points at which they could choose either to delay their warning or continue directly to the office. As expected, more attachment-anxious participants were less willing to be delayed on their way to deliver a warning message to others. In another study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lozano and Fraley (2021) found that people who scored higher on attachment anxiety were more likely to warn others about the risks of the virus and to remind them to engage in safe practices (e.g., hand washing, wearing a face mask).

Beyond promoting pro-group behavior, identity fusion has repeatedly been found associated with hostility, discrimination, and violence toward outgroups (see Whitehouse, 2018, for a review). These reactions might be common among attachment-anxious people, who try to defensively merge or fuse with their in-group. They may perceive anyone who threatens their group as a danger to their own safety and value and hence react to them with derogatory, hostile, or even aggressive responses. Moreover, the mere existence of out-groups implies that these groups might be better or stronger than their in-group and so might threaten the fragile security and value that attachment-anxious people get from identifying with in-group's positive qualities. Indeed, Marchlewska et al. (2022) have recently shown that attachment anxiety is associated with collective narcissism, a grandiose image of one's group that is contingent on the external recognition of its worth and can result in out-group hatred (de Zavala et al., 2009).

The hypothesized link between attachment anxiety and out-group hate received direct support in a series of five studies we conducted with secular Israeli Jewish college students

(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). We found that more attachment-anxious participants were more likely to report hostile and discriminatory responses toward a variety of out-groups – Israeli Arabs, Ultra-orthodox Jews, Russian immigrants, and homosexuals – and toward an out-group member who insulted participants' in-group. In a subsequent study assessing out-group violence (amount of hot sauce allocated to an outgroup member who did not like spicy food), we (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) found that Israeli Jewish students who scored higher on attachment anxiety gave more hot sauce to an Israeli Arab. These findings were conceptually replicated and extended in studies assessing discriminatory attitudes, prejudice, and aggressive behavior toward other groups, such as immigrants, homosexuals, or people with a disability (e.g., Ciocca et al., 2015; Van Oudenhoven & Hofstra, 2006; Vilchinsky et al., 2010). However, as reviewed in the previous section, these destructive social responses can be reduced by security priming, which can, at least in the short run, reduce the insecurity of attachment-anxious people, reduce their need for identity fusion, and encourage more tolerant attitudes toward out-groups.

Concluding Remarks

We hope this chapter and the studies we have reviewed will inspire social-psychology researchers who are interested in the study of group and intergroup processes to systematically examine attachment-related processes in the formation of secure and insecure forms of tribalism. Findings from such studies could contribute to the development of attachment-based interventions aimed at increasing people's felt security and secure forms of tribalism, thereby mitigating intergroup hostility and violence. (See Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023b, for a review of a range of interventions already developed for other purposes.) Relevant interventions could be designed for use by parents, teachers, group counselors, social, political, and religious leaders, and the mass media. Ideas for possible interventions could be taken from various experimental

and field interventions that have already proved useful in enhancing felt security (e.g., security-priming experiments, the Circle of Security intervention). To date, the effects of these interventions on insecure, defensive forms of tribalism have barely been explored.

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