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Attachment Theory, Individual Psychodynamics, and Relationship Functioning

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Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973) has been extremely successful at stimulating research on the formation and quality of emotional bonds and the complex interplay between individual-level and relationship-level processes in all phases of the lifespan (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). In this chapter, we review and assess some of the empirical findings and propose integrative ideas concerning both normative and individual-difference aspects of personal relationships in adulthood. First, we present a theoretical model of the activation and psychodynamics of the attachment behavioral system in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) and describe the intrapsychic and interpersonal manifestations of the sense of attachment security and the regulatory strategies of hyperactivation and deactivation. Next, we focus on romantic relationships, the site of some of the most important emotional bonds in adulthood, and explore implications of variations in attachment-system functioning for the formation and maintenance of these relationships. Specifically, we discuss (a) the contribution of these variations to relationship quality in different stages of a romantic relationship (initiation, consolidation, and maintenance) and (b) the interpersonal processes that explain this contribution. Finally, we extend our theoretical analysis to other kinds of relationships, such as relationships within family systems, friendships, therapeutic relationships, and both intra- and intergroup relations.

Attachment Theory: Basic Concepts

In his classic trilogy, Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) conceptualized the attachment behavioral system as an innate psychobiological system that motivates human beings of all ages (although most obviously so in infancy) to seek proximity to significant others (attachment figures) in times of need as a means of protecting oneself from threats and alleviating distress. Bowlby (1973) also described important individual differences in attachment-system functioning. 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 (a feeling or sense – “felt security” (Sroufe & Waters, 1977) – based on expectations that key people will be available and supportive in times of need), and

lead to the formation of positive *working models* of relationships (mental representations of the self and others during attachment-related interactions). When attachment figures are not reliably available and supportive, however, a sense of security is not attained, negative working models of self and/or others are formed, and strategies of affect regulation other than appropriate proximity seeking are adopted.

In the late 1980s, Hazan and Shaver (1987; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) suggested extending Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982), which was designed to characterize human infants' love for and emotional attachments to their caregivers, to create a framework for studying romantic love in adulthood. The core assumption was that romantic partners become most adults' primary attachment figures in adulthood, such that proximity maintenance to these partners in times of need becomes a crucial source of support, comfort, and reassurance (Zeifman & Hazan, 2000). The attachment behavioral system discussed by Bowlby (1969/1982) is often highly activated during couple interactions, separations, and losses; hence, individual differences in the functioning of that system are important for understanding variations in the quality of romantic relationships. It is important to remember that Hazan and Shaver (1987) did not *equate* romantic love with attachment, but argued that romantic relationships involve a combination of three innate behavioral systems: attachment, caregiving, and sex. The three systems often influence each other and work together to determine relationship characteristics and outcomes.

In order to study individual differences in attachment-system-functioning within romantic relationships, Hazan and Shaver (1987) created a simple categorical measure of what has come to be called "attachment style." The three relational styles assessed by that measure – avoidant, anxious, and secure – were modeled after the three major patterns of infant-mother attachment described by Ainsworth et al. (1978). Infants and adults with a secure attachment style are ones who find it relatively easy to trust others, open up emotionally, and feel confident about their partner's goodwill. Those with an anxious style are uncertain about being loved,

worthy of love, or likely to be supported by a partner. This causes them to be unusually vigilant, dependent, intrusive, and excitable. Those with an avoidant style have learned to prefer to rely heavily on themselves and not openly seek support from a partner, even when (especially in the case of infants) such support is necessary for survival and optimal development. In adulthood, this "compulsively self-reliant" stance (Bowlby, 1969/1982) is often bolstered by self-glorification and disdain for others' neediness and weaknesses.

For a number of years, attachment researchers used the three-category measure of adult attachment style (see Shaver & Hazan, 1993, for a review). However, subsequent studies (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) indicated that attachment styles are more appropriately conceptualized as regions in a continuous two-dimensional space, an idea compatible with early dimensional analyses of infant attachment reported by Ainsworth and her colleagues (e.g., 1978, p. 102). The first dimension, attachment *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 *anxiety*, reflects the degree to which a person worries that a partner will not be available in times of need, partly because of doubts the person harbors about his or her own lovability and value. People who score low on both dimensions are said to be secure or to have a secure attachment style. Throughout this chapter we refer to people with secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles, or people who are relatively anxious or avoidant. Although the categorical shorthand can mistakenly foster typological thinking, we will always be referring to fuzzy regions in a two-dimensional space, a space in which people are continuously distributed.

Attachment styles are formed initially during early interactions with primary caregivers (as documented in an anthology edited by Cassidy and Shaver, 1999), but Bowlby (1973) contended that impactful interactions with others throughout life have the effect of updating a person's working models. Moreover, although attachment style is often conceptualized as a global orientation toward close relationships, there are theoretical and empirical reasons for believing that this style is part of a hierarchical cognitive network that includes a complex,

heterogeneous array of episodic, relationship-specific, and generalized attachment representations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Overall, Fletcher, & Friesen, 2003). In fact, research indicates that (a) reports of attachment orientations can change, subtly or dramatically, depending on context and recent experiences (see Pietromonaco, Laurenceau, & Barrett, 2002, for a review), (b) people possess multiple attachment schemas (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1996), and (c) actual or imagined encounters with supportive or non-supportive others can activate congruent attachment orientations (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001), even if they are incongruent with a person's global attachment style.

Based on an extensive review of adult attachment studies, we (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002) proposed a model of the dynamics of the attachment system in adulthood. Following Bowlby's (1969/1982) analysis, we assumed that the monitoring of unfolding events – both in the world and in a person's imagination – results in activation of the attachment system when a potential or actual threat is encountered. This activation is manifest in efforts to seek and/or maintain actual or symbolic proximity to external or internalized attachment figures. Once the attachment system is activated, a person, in effect, asks whether or not an attachment figure is sufficiently available and responsive. An affirmative answer results in the appropriate functioning of the attachment system, characterized by reinforced mental representations of attachment security and consolidation of security-based strategies of affect regulation (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). These strategies are aimed at alleviating distress, forming comfortable, supportive intimate relationships, and increasing personal adjustment. These strategies also set in motion a "broaden and build" cycle of attachment security (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002), which facilitates other behavioral systems and broadens a person's perspectives and capacities.

Security-based strategies consist of declarative and procedural knowledge about the self, others, and affect regulation. The declarative knowledge consists of optimistic beliefs about distress management, optimistic and trusting beliefs about others' goodwill, and a sense of self-efficacy about dealing with threats. The procedural knowledge is organized around three

main coping strategies: acknowledgment and display of distress, support seeking, and instrumental problem solving. Acknowledging and expressing feelings and seeking emotional support work in the service of down-regulating distress so that problem-focused coping attempts can proceed effectively. These tendencies are the ones Epstein and Meier (1989) called constructive ways of coping – active attempts to remove the source of distress, manage the problematic situation, and restore emotional equanimity without generating negative side effects. Security-based strategies are characteristic of people who score relatively low on attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Perceived unavailability of an attachment figure results in attachment insecurity, which compounds the distress arising from an appraised threat. This state of insecurity forces a decision about the viability of proximity seeking as a protective strategy. The appraisal of proximity as viable or essential – because of attachment history, temperamental factors, or contextual cues – can result in energetic, insistent attempts to attain proximity, support, and love. These intense attempts are called *hyperactivating strategies* (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988), because they involve constant vigilance, intense concern, and prodigious effort until an attachment figure is perceived to be available and a sense of security is attained. Hyperactivating strategies, when used habitually, include overdependence on relationship partners as a source of protection; attempts to elicit a partner's involvement, care, and support through clinging and controlling responses; and cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at minimizing distance from partners (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

According to Shaver and Mikulincer (2002), hyperactivating strategies also involve increased vigilance to threat-related cues and a reduction in the threshold for detecting cues of attachment figures' unavailability – the two kinds of cues that activate the attachment system (Bowlby, 1973). They also intensify negative emotional responses to threatening events and heighten rumination on threat-related concerns, keeping these concerns salient in working memory. Since signs of attachment-figure unavailability and rejection are viewed as important threats, hyperactivating strategies foster anxious, hypervigilant attention to relationship partners

and rapid detection of possible signs of disapproval, waning interest, or impending abandonment. As a result, minimal threat-related cues are easily detected, the attachment system is chronically activated, and psychological pain related to the unavailability of attachment figures is exacerbated. These concomitants of attachment-system hyperactivation account for many of the psychological correlates of attachment anxiety (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for a review).

Appraising proximity seeking as unlikely to alleviate distress results in the inhibition of the quest for support and active attempts to handle distress alone. These secondary approaches to affect regulation are called *deactivating strategies* (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988), because their primary goal is to keep the attachment system deactivated in order to avoid frustration and further distress caused by attachment-figure unavailability. These strategies involve denial of attachment needs; avoidance of closeness, intimacy, and dependence in close relationships; and maximization of cognitive, emotional, and physical distance from others. They also involve the dismissal of threat- and attachment-related cues, and suppression of threat- and attachment-related thoughts and emotions. These aspects of deactivation account for the psychological manifestations of avoidant attachment (again, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for a review).

In summary, each attachment-related strategy has a regulatory goal, which shapes cognitive and affective processes related to goal attainment. We believe these strategies are extremely relevant for understanding individual differences in the functioning and quality of romantic relationships in different stages of their development – initiation, consolidation, and maintenance. We also believe, and have preliminary evidence to show, that attachment-related strategies affect the quality of other kinds of relationships in adulthood, such as parent-child relationships, friendships, relationships with group members, and intergroup relations.

Attachment-Related Strategies and the Quality of Romantic Relationships

In this section, we present ideas and review research concerning the role played by attachment-related strategies in the formation and maintenance of long-lasting romantic relationships. Specifically, we focus on three different stages of the development of romantic

relationships (flirtation/dating, consolidation, and maintenance) and examine the contribution of attachment-related strategies (security-based, hyperactivating, and deactivating strategies) to the interpersonal processes that determine relationship stability, quality, and satisfaction at each of these stages. In Table 1, we present a schematic summary of the interpersonal processes that seem to be affected by attachment-related strategies during each of the three relationship stages.

Since the main focus of this section is to delineate the involvement of attachment-system functioning in the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships, we do not discuss the contribution of attachment-related strategies to the termination of these relationships. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that there is accumulating evidence regarding important attachment-style differences in the process of coping and adjustment with separation and loss. For example, whereas securely attached persons tend to cope constructively with the termination of a romantic relationship and maintain emotional equanimity during and after termination, less secure persons are more likely to rely on self-defeating strategies and become overwhelmed by distress and despair (e.g., Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, & Florian, 1997; Simpson, 1990). Research also indicates that security-based strategies allow people to satisfy their attachment needs with alternative or new social ties without totally severing their previous emotional bonds. In contrast, hyperactivating strategies perpetuate emotional investment in ex-partners and distort, hasten, or impede the formation of new relationships, and deactivating strategies foster detachment from the former partner and denial of the importance of the lost relationship (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003; Fraley & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Florian, 1996).

The Initial Stages: Flirting and Dating

Attachment-related strategies are active even at the very beginning of a romantic relationship, shaping the interpersonal processes that determine the quality of flirting and dating interactions and thereby affecting the chances of forming a more long-lasting emotional bond with a new romantic partner. Flirtatious interactions and first-dates, mainly when their goal is more than sexual gratification, can activate the attachment system. These interactions

are emotionally charged and can arouse fears of failure and rejection that can damage a person's sense of self-worth and activate habitual attachment-related strategies of affect regulation (Zeifman & Hazan, 2000). As a result, partners' cognitions, feelings, and behaviors during the initial stages of their relationship can be a direct reflection of their attachment working models and their methods of regulating the activation of their attachment systems. At this stage, one can observe the "purest" effects of chronic working models on relational behavior, because one has minimal information about a new partner's traits, and no unique pattern of relatedness has been formed between the partners.

Attachment-related strategies influence the emotional tone of flirtatious and dating interactions. Security-based strategies are constructive means of managing distress and transforming threats into challenges (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). As a result, secure individuals can effectively manage the threats involved in flirtatious and dating interactions, enjoy and savor the positive aspects of these interactions, and contribute to the creation and maintenance of a relaxed, positive emotional atmosphere. In contrast, the secondary attachment strategies, hyperactivation and deactivation, not only may fail to promote such an atmosphere; they may generate relational tension and distress that results in early break-ups. During flirtation and dating, attachment anxiety can be directly manifested in needy, intrusive, "hungry" displays, exaggeration of the possibility of rejection, reactivation of memories of past rejections, and rumination on rejection-related thoughts, which in turn can intensify distress and lead to inappropriate and unsuccessful interactions. Attachment avoidance can be directly manifested in the adoption of an emotionally detached, purely sexual, or initially rejecting stance toward a potential partner, designed (perhaps unconsciously) to protect against potential threats to self-worth as well as engulfment in intimacy or threats to independence. As a result, these interactions may be emotionally shallow and lack the excitement and emotional involvement that otherwise characterize flirtatious and dating interactions.

Although adult attachment research has yet to provide a systematic examination of attachment-style differences in emotional reactions to flirting and dating, there are a few

important pieces of evidence concerning associations between attachment orientations and the experience of positive emotions. For example, research has consistently shown that secure individuals score higher on self-report measures of joy, happiness, interest, love, and affection than do insecure individuals (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for a review). More important, in week-long diary studies in which participants completed the Rochester Interaction Record every time they engaged in a social interaction lasting 10 minutes or longer, anxious and avoidant participants experienced fewer positive emotions than secure participants (e.g., Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996; Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997). Interestingly, the anxious participants were chronically worried about being disapproved of and rejected, whereas the avoidant participants felt bored and unengaged.

Attachment-related strategies are also involved in two important interpersonal processes that occur during the initial stages of a romantic relationship – self-presentation and self-disclosure. Self-presentation refers to the way people present themselves, which is likely to influence a potential partner's decision about whether to continue or end a budding relationship (Schlenker, 1980). Self-presentation involves a tactical choice concerning which aspects of the self to reveal to a partner, and it can be biased by secondary attachment strategies. On the one hand, anxious people's urgent desire to achieve some sort of closeness, protection, support, or love can cause them to emphasize personal weaknesses and present themselves as helpless and needy in an effort to elicit a partner's compassion and sympathy. On the other hand, avoidant people's desire to keep their attachment system deactivated can cause them to communicate to a dating partner that they do not need anything and can handle life's threats and challenges alone, to present only personal strengths, and to inflate their self-image in the eyes of the partner even at the risk of diminishing the partner's own self-image.

There is empirical evidence concerning attachment-related biases in the process of self-presentation. In a series of four laboratory studies, Mikulincer (1998a) found that avoidant participants reacted to threats with more explicit and implicit positive self-presentation. However, this self-inflation tendency was inhibited by a message that broke the link between a

positive self-view and self-reliance. Findings also revealed that persons scoring high on attachment anxiety reacted to threats with more explicit and implicit negative self-presentations, and this tendency was inhibited by a message that broke the link between self-devaluation and others' positive responses. These findings imply that (a) avoidant people tend to present themselves in a self-inflated manner in order to convince others of the avoidant person's strength and self-sufficiency, and (b) anxious people tend to present themselves in a self-devaluing manner in hopes of eliciting others' compassion and love. Interestingly, secure individuals in Mikulincer's (1988a) study evinced no notable bias of either kind in their self-presentations.

A second interpersonal process that facilitates the formation of intimate bonds is self-disclosure – the proneness to disclose and share personal information and feelings with a partner (Altman & Taylor, 1973, Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, this volume). Obviously, the inhibition of such a process during flirtation and dating can hinder the transition to a more committed and long-lasting relationship. However, premature and undifferentiated disclosure of highly personal information may also place a developing relationship in jeopardy. According to Altman and Taylor (1973), optimal self-disclosure should be regulated appropriately for each stage of a developing relationship. Very early in a new relationship, disclosure is typically limited to relatively superficial public information, and the rapid disclosure of very intimate concerns and feelings is perceived as a sign of maladjustment. However, as a relationship progresses, partners begin to exchange more personal information, including fears, secrets, and stories of painful experiences. At this stage, the inhibition of intimate disclosure is experienced as a sign of lack of trust or trustworthiness, or lack of commitment to the relationship, which can obviously disrupt and endanger the emerging relationship.

Adult attachment research has consistently shown that attachment avoidance is associated with low levels of self-disclosure in dating relationships (e.g., Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002; Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991) – a direct reflection of avoidant individuals' reluctance to engage in intimate interactions. Mikulincer and

Nachshon (1991) also documented the ways in which attachment anxiety shapes self-disclosure. For anxiously attached individuals, self-disclosure can be a means of quickly merging with others, enlisting their help or support, and reducing their fear of rejection rather than enhancing reciprocal intimacy. As a result, although anxious people were found by Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) to be highly disposed to self-disclose, they tended to disclose indiscriminately to people who were not yet prepared for intensely intimate interactions and tended to be unresponsive to their partner's disclosure. In fact, Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) found that anxious people did not usually deal with a partner's disclosed information in their own disclosures, thereby endangering the formation of reciprocal intimacy.

Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) also described the typical pattern of self-disclosure that characterizes securely attached persons – "responsive self-disclosure." Secure participants in their studies scored relatively high on measures of self-disclosure and responsiveness to a partner's disclosure. They disclosed more personal information to a high than a low disclosing partner; they were attentive to the issues raised in the partner's disclosure and expanded upon them in their own discourse. This combination of self-disclosure and responsiveness to partner's disclosure is likely to be the best strategy for forming intimate, long-lasting relationships – those based on the kind of emotional bonds that secure individuals wish to create and maintain.

The attachment-style differences in the emotional tone of flirtatious and dating interactions, and in self-presentation and self-disclosure during these interactions, help to explain the recurrent finding that people, regardless of their own attachment style, report more positive emotions when imagining a relationship with a secure rather than an insecure partner (e.g., Chappell & Davis, 1998; Klohnen & Shanhong, 2003; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994). In fact, several investigators who have constructed vignettes of potential partners differing in their attachment orientations have found that secure partners are preferred over insecure partners (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1996; Frazier et al., 1996). This fits with our suspicion that the

positive emotional tone and responsive self-disclosure of secure people make them generally the most attractive partners for people who are hoping to form intimate, emotional bonds.

The same interpersonal processes can explain the bulk of data documenting a positive association between attachment security and the perceived quality of dating relationships. More than thirty studies using different measures of attachment style and different scales measuring relationship satisfaction have found that secure individuals have higher levels of satisfaction with their dating relationships than their insecure counterparts (see Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002, for a detailed review of these studies). This finding has been replicated repeatedly using both cross-sectional and prospective research designs, and cannot be explained by other personality factors, such as the "big five" personality traits, depression, self-esteem, or sex-role orientation (Mikulincer et al., 2002).

The Consolidation Stage in the Development of a Long-Lasting Romantic Relationship

In the course of a romantic relationship, couples usually make a transition from falling in love to loving each other. Flirtation and dating give way to longer, less-arousing joint activities, and the sharing of intimate information and discussion of personal issues are supplemented or replaced by discussions of the prospect of implementing shared goals in a long-lasting relationship (e.g., Gagne & Lydon, 2001). Accordingly, the importance of emotional supportiveness, nurturance, and intimacy as determinants of relationship quality increases as initial attraction, passion, and sexual satisfaction recede in importance, and partners begin to make changes in their activities and living conditions that reflect their increasing commitment to a long-term relationship (e.g., Bhrem, 1992; Huston & Burgess, 1979). As a result, the relationship partners gradually become primary attachment figures for each other – primary sources of support, reassurance, comfort, and relief in times of need (Zeifman & Hazan, 2000). All of these changes indicate that partners are consolidating their attachment bonds and setting the foundation for what they expect to be a long-lasting, highly committed, reciprocal relationship.

During this transition stage, attachment-related strategies can facilitate or hinder the consolidation of a long-lasting relationship. Specifically, the interaction goals of relatively secure individuals (closeness, intimacy) and their positive working models of self and others favor the formation of optimistic expectations about the prospects of a long-lasting relationship and positive beliefs about the partner's trustworthiness, nurturance, supportiveness, and commitment. Moreover, these goals and beliefs encourage securely attached persons to commit to a long-lasting relationship (Morgan & Shaver, 1999), to treat their partner as a primary attachment figure (a target of support-seeking), and to become a primary attachment figure for their partner (a sensitive and responsive caregiver). In contrast, the interaction goals (self-focused search for security and support; deactivation of intimacy needs), regulatory strategies (rumination about relationship threats and worries; emotional distance, detachment, and self-reliance), and negative working models of insecurely attached (anxious and avoidant, respectively) individuals can negatively bias beliefs about the relationship and the partner, and thus inhibit support seeking, support provision, and commitment. As a result, securely attached partners have more chances of consolidating a long-lasting, reciprocal, and satisfactory relationship than do insecurely attached partners.

Adult attachment studies have provided extensive information about the various interpersonal cognitions that can contribute to individual differences in the consolidation of a romantic relationship. Overall, insecure partners, as compared with more secure partners, hold more negative interpersonal cognitions, such as pessimistic beliefs about romantic relationships (e.g., Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994), negative frames when thinking about these relationships (e.g., Boon & Griffin, 1996), and dysfunctional relational beliefs (e.g., Whisman & Allan, 1996).

There is also extensive evidence concerning the negative influence of insecure attachment strategies on perceptions of a romantic partner. As compared to secure individuals, insecurely attached people (a) hold more negative views of their romantic partner (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1991), (b) perceive their partner as less supportive (e.g.,

Collins & Read, 1990; Ognibene & Collins, 1998), and (c) trust the partner less (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Simpson, 1990). Both anxiety and avoidance are also associated with negative expectations concerning the partner's behavior (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1993; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999) and with relationship-damaging explanations of the partner's negative behaviors (e.g., Collins, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998b). For example, Collins (1996) found that more anxious and avoidant people were more likely to attribute a partner's negative behavior to stable and global causes, and to view these behaviors as negatively motivated.

In a series of five studies, Mikulincer (1998b) systematically examined associations between attachment-related strategies and various aspects of trusting or distrusting one's romantic partner. The constructive nature of security-based strategies was evident in secure persons' tendency to have relatively fast access to memories of trust-validation and to report more trust-validation episodes in their current relationship. Mikulincer (1998b) also found that secure people tend to attach relatively high importance to trust-validation episodes and to appraise them as reflecting their partner's beneficent disposition. The attachment strategies of insecure individuals were evident in their reactions to trust-violation episodes. Avoidant people increased their distance from their partner following a betrayal of trust and dismissed the importance of this threatening occurrence. Anxious people, in contrast, worried and ruminated during a trust-betrayal episode and reacted to it with strong negative emotion.

Attachment-related strategies also affect a person's commitment to a romantic relationship. Numerous studies have documented that secure individuals, compared to those who are insecure, report higher levels of commitment to their dating relationships (e.g., Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Simpson, 1990). In addition, Himovitch (2003) recently found that secure people exhibited faster recall of episodes in which they or their partner strengthened their commitment to the relationship, and they appraised these episodes more positively. In contrast, insecure people emphasized the threats involved in relational commitment and displayed faster recall of episodes that led to a decrease in commitment. However, whereas avoidant individuals more rapidly accessed memories of episodes in which they decreased their commitment to the

relationship, which we interpret as a clear sign of deactivating strategies, anxious individuals more rapidly accessed memories of episodes in which a partner decreased commitment to them, thereby manifesting their hyper-vigilance toward possible rejection.

Adult attachment studies have also consistently documented insecure people's problems with support-seeking and support provision. Several investigators have found that avoidant people are reluctant to appraise their romantic partner as a "safe haven" and seek support from the partner in times of need (e.g., Ognibene & Collins, 1998). The same phenomenon has been reported in studies examining actual support-seeking behavior in stressful laboratory situations (e.g., Collins & B. Feeney, 2000; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Simpson, Rholes, Orina, & Grich, 2002). For example, Simpson et al. (1992) told participants they would be exposed to a frightening, potentially painful laboratory procedure. The investigators then unobtrusively observed and coded participants' behavior while they were interacting with their romantic partner. It was found that avoidant participants, as compared with secure ones, exhibited greater reluctance to seek proximity to, and obtain comfort from, their partner. With regard to anxiously attached individuals, findings reveal a more ambivalent reaction toward support seeking. Whereas anxious people are sometimes reticent about expressing their need for support, especially when they suspect that full revelation of their neediness will result in rejection (J. Feeney, 1999), they are also capable of excessive reassurance seeking from their romantic partner, which can be viewed by the partner as intrusive and demanding (Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2004).

Insecure people's difficulties in providing support to a partner were first documented by Kunce and Shaver (1994), who constructed a self-report scale tapping caregiving behaviors in romantic relationships. They found that insecure individuals were less likely than their secure counterparts to say they provide emotional support. Moreover, whereas avoidant people's deactivating strategies led them to maintain distance from a needy partner, anxious people's hyperactivating strategies led them to report high levels of overinvolvement with partner's problems and a pattern of compulsive, intrusive caregiving. These findings have been

replicated in subsequent, more behavioral studies (e.g., Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1996; J. Feeney, 1996; J. Feeney & Hohaus, 2001).

The link between attachment security and sensitive caregiving has been further documented in observational studies by B. Feeney and Collins (2001), Simpson et al. (1992), Rholes, Simpson, and Orina (1999), and Simpson et al. (2002), who videotaped heterosexual dating couples while one partner waited to endure a stressful task. Overall, as compared with relatively secure participants, those who were less secure offered less comfort and reassurance to their distressed partner. Moreover, participants who were relatively secure and whose dating partners sought more support provided more support, whereas secure participants whose partners sought less support provided less. This finding indicates sensitive responsiveness: Secure participants recognized their partners' worries and tried to be especially warm and supportive, but they also recognized times when the partner was capable of proceeding autonomously and they stood back and honored that autonomy. Compatible findings were obtained by Collins and B. Feeney (2000), who videotaped dating couples while one member of the couple disclosed a personal problem to the other. Insecure participants provided less instrumental support, were less responsive, and displayed more negative caregiving behaviors toward their distressed partner, compared with more secure participants.

A recent study conducted by Cobb, Davila, and Bradbury (2001) suggests that perceptions of a relationship partner's attachment style, not just a person's own attachment style, are important in determining the degree to which supportive caregiving will occur. The authors tested a mediation model in which positive perceptions of partner's security were associated with adaptive support behavior, which in turn predicted increases in relationship satisfaction. The findings supported the model and indicated that positive perceptions of a partner's security resulted in relationship enhancement partly by virtue of its influence on couple members' supportive interactions.

In this consolidation stage of a developing relationship, part of what partners are consolidating is a relationship-specific sense of attachment security (the extent to which each

person feels that the partner will be available and supportive in times of need). This sense can be biased by a person's global working models of attachment relationships, but it can also be affected by a partner's actual supportive behaviors. In fact, the relationship-specific sense of security can become a potent regulator of attachment-system functioning as indicated by interpersonal cognitions and behaviors within the relationship, even if it does not fit a person's global working models. Indeed, Kobak and Hazan (1991) found that partners with a relatively strong relationship-specific sense of security were less rejecting and more supportive during problem-solving and confiding interactions (in the latter case, sharing a disappointment with one's partner). More important, Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, and Bylsma (2000) and Cowan and Cowan (2002) found that reports of secure attachment within a specific romantic relationship were more powerful predictors of satisfaction with that relationship than reports of global attachment security. This difference between global and relationship-specific levels of working models has recently been explored in detail by Overall et al. (2003).

Maintenance of a Long-Lasting Relationship

There is now good evidence that securely attached people maintain more stable romantic relationships than insecure people and report higher levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment (see Mikulincer et al., 2002, for a review). For example, Davila, Karney, and Bradbury (1999) collected data every six months for three years from newlywed couples and found that changes in husbands' and wives' reports of secure attachment predicted concurrent changes in both partners' reports of marital satisfaction. Studies of marriage have also linked attachment security with more marital intimacy (Mayseless, Sharabany, & Sagi, 1997), less marital ambivalence (Volling, Notaro, & Larsen, 1998), and stronger marital cohesion (Mikulincer & Florian, 1999). Not surprisingly, secure individuals are less likely to be divorced (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Attachment-related strategies seem to be involved in several interpersonal processes that facilitate or hinder the maintenance of a satisfactory long-lasting relationship. One such process is marital communication. Several studies have found attachment security to be

associated with more constructive, mutually sensitive patterns of dyadic communication and negatively associated with the demand-withdrawal pattern known to be destructive to relationship stability and satisfaction (e.g., J. Feeney, 1994; Fitzpatrick, Fey, Segrin, & Schiff, 1993). Moreover, secure partners have been found to maintain more positive patterns of nonverbal communication (expressiveness, pleasantness, attentiveness) than less secure partners (e.g., Guerrero, 1996; Tucker & Anders, 1998) and to be more accurate in expressing their feelings and coding their partner's nonverbal messages (e.g., J. Feeney, 1994). Especially important is the fact that the association between attachment security and relationship satisfaction is mediated by a constructive, mutually sensitive pattern of communication (e.g., J. Feeney, 1994).

The way couples manage interpersonal conflicts is also an important link between attachment security and the maintenance of a satisfying and long-lasting relationship. Attachment-related strategies influence the methods couples adopt to manage inevitable interpersonal tensions (e.g., Gaines et al., 1997; Scharfe & Bartholomew; 1995). Specifically, secure people rely more heavily on effective conflict resolution strategies – compromising and integrating their own and their partner's positions. They also display greater accommodation when responding to a partner's anger or criticism. In contrast, insecure people tend to rely on less effective conflict resolution strategies, which leave conflicts unresolved and may even lead to conflict escalation. As usual, the different forms of insecurity encourage different ineffective means of dealing with distress: Whereas anxious people's hyperactivating strategies lead them to intensify conflict, avoidant people's deactivating strategies lead them to distance themselves from conflictual interactions and avoid engaging with their partner.

There are also attachment-related variations in people's reactions to a partner's negative behavior (e.g., Collins, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998c, Rholes et al., 1999). On the one hand, secure individuals react to a partner's negative behavior with controlled expressions of anger, without extreme hatred or hostility, and this appears to have beneficial effects on their relationships. On the other hand, insecure people indulge themselves in uncontrolled bouts of anger, hatred,

and/or feelings of resentment and hostility toward a partner. However, because deactivating strategies require the suppression of emotion, avoidant people's anger tends to be expressed only in unconscious or unintended ways and can take the form of nonspecific hostility. In contrast, anxiously attached individuals experience intense bouts of anger toward both the partner and the self, a manifestation of hyperactivating strategies (e.g., intense protest) and negative models of self.

Avoidant individuals' hostile attitudes toward relationship partners were also documented in Shaver and Mikulincer's (2003) recent study of forgiveness. As compared with less avoidant individuals, people who scored high on avoidance were less likely to forgive a partner who had hurt them. Moreover, when avoidant individuals were asked to recall an episode in which they forgave a relationship partner who had hurt them, they revealed a negative construal of these events. Their reactions were characterized by narcissistic wounds, thoughts about relationship deterioration, and lack of understanding of the partner's hurtful actions. Avoidant individuals' disinclination to forgive was also noted in a subsequent daily diary study in which participants reported their reactions to their partner's negative behaviors for a period of 21 days (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003).

The maintenance of a long-lasting relationship also depends on the extent to which partners express affection, respect, admiration, and gratitude to each other and the extent to which they are able to create a climate of appreciation instead of criticism or contempt (Gottman, 1993). We have preliminary evidence that attachment security is related to the formation of such a climate and contributes to what Gottman (1993) called *marital friendship*. Specifically, secure people report more respect, admiration, and gratitude toward their romantic partner (Frei & Shaver, 2002; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003) than insecure persons. In addition, we (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003) found that when avoidant people were asked to recall an episode in which they felt grateful to a relationship partner, they tended to remember more negative experiences, involving more narcissistic threats and distrust, and less happiness and love. People scoring high on attachment anxiety tended to remember more ambivalent

experiences of gratitude-eliciting episodes: They recalled relatively high levels of security-related feelings, happiness, and love together with relatively high levels of narcissistic threats and inferiority feelings. Interestingly, data from a subsequent diary study (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003) revealed that highly avoidant people experienced relatively low levels of gratitude even on days when they perceived a partner's behavior as positive. That is, a partner's positive behavior elicited gratitude mainly among participants who were not avoidant.

Another interpersonal process involved in the maintenance of a satisfying long-lasting relationship is the couple's engagement in novel, arousing activities that break their routines and "expand their selves" (to use the terminology favored by Aron, Norman, Aron, & Lewandowski, 2002). This engagement in shared expanding activities depends, however, on partners' openness to new experiences, their tolerance of novelty and ambiguity, and their inclination to explore. Adult attachment studies have consistently found that secure people are more likely than insecure ones to engage in exploration and exhibit higher levels of cognitive openness (e.g., Green-Henessy & Reis, 1998; Mikulincer, 1997; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). As a result, attachment security is likely to facilitate participation in shared self-expanding activities, which, in turn, will enhance relationship satisfaction.

Attachment security is also involved in the extent to which romantic partners satisfy their sexual needs (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Tracy, Shaver, Albino, & Cooper, 2003). Attachment security is associated with sexual satisfaction and is conducive to genuine intimacy in sexual situations, including sensitivity and responsiveness to a partner's wishes and openness to mutual sexual exploration. In contrast, avoidant individuals tend to remain emotionally detached during sexual activities, another manifestation of their deactivating strategies; and anxiously attached individuals tend to hyperactivate sex-related worries and engage in sex primarily to placate a partner, feel accepted, and avoid abandonment (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, in press; Schachner & Shaver, in press).

Insecure people's approach to sexual activities can also hinder marital satisfaction by fostering relational tensions related to fidelity, betrayal, and jealousy. For example, the

reluctance of avoidant people to get emotionally involved with or committed to any particular sexual partner can foster positive attitudes toward extramarital affairs, which can place a marriage in jeopardy. Indeed, Schachner and Shaver (2002) recently found that attachment avoidance is associated with "mate poaching" – attempts to attract someone who is already in a relationship, and being open to being "poached" by others – and to low scores on a relationship exclusivity scale. In contrast, the tendency of anxious individuals to hyperactivate vigilance and concern regarding the possibility of losing their sexual partner can lead to intense bouts of jealousy, which in turn endanger relationship stability and quality. There is extensive evidence that anxiously attached individuals are prone to jealousy and tend to be overwhelmed by jealous feelings (e.g., Guerrero, 1998; Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997). Furthermore, they tend to report high levels of suspicion and worry during jealousy-eliciting events and cope with them by engaging in intensive partner surveillance (Guerrero, 1998).

Beyond these important interpersonal processes, attachment security can contribute to maintenance of a long-lasting relationship by assisting partners in coping effectively with life difficulties, personal changes, and developmental transitions. The quality of a long-lasting relationship can be jeopardized by a broad array of extra-relational stressors (e.g., illness or injury, financial difficulties, problems at work); changes in a partner's identity, preferences, and values; and normative transitions that demand personal and dyadic readjustment (e.g., parenthood, aging). The optimistic and constructive regulatory strategies associated with attachment security, which facilitate coping with and adjusting to hardships, can facilitate rapid repair of individuals' feelings and relationship damage that may occur in conjunction with stress. In support of this idea, recent studies show that securely attached spouses deal more constructively with the transition to parenthood and are able to maintain high levels of marital satisfaction after becoming parents (e.g., Alexander, J. Feeney, Hohaus, & Noller, 2001; Simpson & Rholes, 2002). Moreover, Vasquez, Durik, and Hyde (2002) found that secure attachment facilitates coping with work-related stressors and inhibits the spread of work-related distress into the domain of marital satisfaction.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that although our theoretical ideas and review of empirical studies are focused mainly on the contribution of a person's chronic attachment orientation to his or her relational cognitions and behaviors, the attachment system is affected by a relationship partner's behaviors, which are partly a function of the partner's attachment system. There is increasing evidence that one partner's attachment orientations add to the prediction of the other partner's relational cognitions and behaviors beyond the contribution made by the partner's own attachment orientation (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & B. Feeney, 2000; J. Feeney & Hohaus, 2001). Moreover, a person's scores on attachment anxiety and avoidance have differential effects on relational cognitions and behaviors depending on the partner's attachment orientation. These studies suggest a need for systemic models of attachment dynamics that characterize and explain the complex ways in which both partners' attachment systems shape the quality of their relationship.

Extending Adult Attachment Theory and Research to Other Kinds of Relationships

Although adult attachment research has focused mainly on dating and marital relationships, the interpersonal manifestations of attachment-related strategies are relevant to other kinds of relationships as well. Variations in attachment-system functioning bias access to specific mental representations of relationship partners and, with time, engender global attitudes toward closeness, support seeking, and support provision as well as recurrent problems in the interpersonal domain. These chronically accessible representations, global attitudes, and recurrent problems tend to crystallize in particular patterns of relatedness and profiles of relationship functioning, which become aspects of personality that can be manifested in different kinds of relationships. Research has shown, for example, that self-reports of attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to specific kinds of interpersonal problems, as measured by the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Cyranowski et al., 2002).

Following this line of reasoning, it has been proposed that attachment-related strategies are relevant to explaining the quality of best friendships that involve intimacy, support seeking,

and support giving. Preliminary evidence suggests that the attachment-style differences observed in romantic relationships are replicated in the realm of close friendship. Specifically, secure, as compared with insecure, individuals have more satisfying friendships (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Markiewicz, Doyle, & Brendgen, 2001), display more intimate patterns of communication with their friends (e.g., Grabill & Kerns, 2000; Mayseless, Sharabany, & Sagi, 1997), and rely on more constructive strategies for resolving conflicts with friends (e.g., Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999). The interpersonal manifestations of attachment-related strategies were also observed in Mikulincer and Selinger's (2001) study of adolescents' same-sex friendships. Whereas secure adolescents flexibly engaged in a wide variety of activities (support seeking, creating opportunities to have fun) with their best friend, anxiously attached adolescents narrowed their interactions to the seeking of support and reassurance, and avoidant adolescents tended to dismiss the importance of friendship and maintain emotional distance even from their best friend.

The interpersonal manifestations of attachment-related strategies should also be evident in every kind of relationship that involves support seeking and support giving, such as parent-child and relationships and relationships between clients and therapists or counselors. With regard to parent-child relationships, Rholes et al. (1997), for example, reported that both avoidance and anxiety were associated with less (self-perceived) ability to relate to their children and less expected warmth in child rearing among a sample of college students who were not yet parents. In observational studies of maternal behavior (e.g., Crowell & Feldman, 1988, 1991), secure mothers were warmer, more supportive, and more helpful toward their child and more attuned to their child's affect than insecure mothers. Similar associations between attachment style and caregiving have also been noted when observing fathers' interactions with their children (e.g., Cohn, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992).

With regard to therapist-client relationships, more securely attached therapists tend to form stronger and more trusting therapeutic bonds with their patients – typically called a *working alliance* (e.g., Sauer, Lopez, & Gormley, 2003), and to respond more empathically to

clients' narratives (Rubino, Barker, Roth, & Fearon, 2000). A client's attachment style also has important effects on the therapeutic relationship. Sauer et al. (2003) found that secure clients established better working alliances with their therapists, and Satterfield and Lyddon (1995) found that clients who felt they could depend on others to be available when needed were more likely to establish a secure personal bond with their therapist. Similar benefits of client security have been noted even in studies involving more severely troubled patients (Dozier, 1990). Greater patient attachment security was associated with better treatment compliance, whereas avoidant tendencies were associated with rejection of treatment providers, less self-disclosure, and poorer use of treatment.

Attachment theory is even useful for understanding intra-group relationships. People often feel attached to groups; they seek proximity with other group members in times of need; and the group as whole can be a source of support, comfort, and relief (e.g., Hogg, 1992). More specifically, Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) found that people can develop feelings of attachment anxiety and avoidance toward a group, and that higher scores on group-specific attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to lower identification with social groups, stronger negative emotions toward groups, and lower perceived support from groups. Recently, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) found that people who are secure in their close relationships, as compared to less secure people, have more positive memories of group interactions, appraise group interactions in more challenging and less threatening terms, react to these interactions with more positive affect, and function well, instrumentally and socioemotionally, during team work.

In a recent study, we (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001) extended attachment theory to the realm of inter-group relationships, focusing on inter-group prejudice and hostility. We reasoned that if the sense of attachment security helps to regulate children's fear of strangers (which it does), it can also regulate adults' reactions to out-group members, perhaps even members of groups that are in conflict with one's own. We hypothesized that the sense of attachment security would attenuate negative reactions to out-groups. In examining this hypothesis, we

measured a person's chronic attachment style, contextually primed attachment security representations, and assessed evaluations and willingness to interact with a variety of out-group members. We found that both the sense of chronic attachment security and the contextual priming of security representations were associated with more positive evaluations of outgroup members and heightened willingness to interact with them. These effects were mediated by threat appraisal and were found even when participants were led to believe they had failed on a cognitive task or their national group had been insulted by an outgroup member.

Conclusions

Attachment theory was originally created to explain the behavior of young children in relationships with their primary caregiver, usually mother, and the long-term personal and social outcomes of early secure or insecure relationships. The theory was broad from the start because Bowlby rooted it in psychoanalysis, primate ethology, control systems theory (an early form of cognitive psychology), and cognitive developmental psychology. He considered a vast amount of evidence related to emotions, attachments (which he conceptualized as emotional bonds), separation experiences, losses (especially through death), psychological defenses, and psychopathology. Amazingly, despite its original breadth, the theory and the evidence it encompasses and continues to generate is enormously greater now than when Bowlby was writing, thanks to the extension of the theory to adult romantic and marital relationships, close friendships, helping relationships, and intra- and inter-group processes. Underlying the continuously branching and expanding body of knowledge is a relatively simple model of the attachment behavioral system and the forms it takes in response to security-enhancing or security-denying relationships. The relational and affect-regulation strategies adopted by people with varying degrees of attachment security and types of insecurity play a huge role in interpersonal relations, are an important target for educational and clinical interventions, and are an endless source of fascination for researchers.

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Table 1
Attachment-Related Strategies and Interpersonal Processes in the Initiation, Consolidation, and Maintenance Stages of Romantic Relationships

	Security-Based Strategies	Hyperactivating Strategies	Deactivating Strategies
Initiation Stage			
Interaction climate	Positive, warm emotional tone	Negative, anxious emotional tone	Emotional shallowness, detachment
Self-presentation	Balanced self-presentation	Self-defeating presentation	Self-inflating presentation
Self-disclosure	Responsive self-disclosure	Indiscriminate, effusive self-disclosure	Low levels of self-disclosure
Consolidation Stage			
Relational cognitions	Positive, optimistic beliefs	Dysfunctional, pessimistic beliefs	Dysfunctional, pessimistic beliefs
Perception of partner	Positive, constructive appraisals	Negative, destructive appraisals	Negative, destructive appraisals
Commitment	Strong commitment; positive appraisal of commitment	Weak commitment; doubts about partner's commitment	Weak commitment; negative attitude toward commitment
Support seeking	Seeking support in times of need	Reluctance to seek support or excessive reassurance seeking	Reluctance to seek support
Support provision	Sensitive, responsive caregiving	Compulsive, intrusive caregiving	Reluctance to provide support
Maintenance Stage			
Dyadic communication	Constructive, mutually sensitive, and positive	Demanding, anxious, and inaccurate	Withdrawn, cool, and hostile
Conflict resolution strategies	Reliance on effective strategies, e.g., compromising, integrating	Reliance on strategies that lead to conflict escalation	Reliance on avoidant strategies that leave the conflict unresolved
Reactions to partner's negative behaviors	Constructive expressions of anger; relationship-repairing reactions; proneness to forgive	Intense, uncontrollable bouts of anger, hatred, and hostility; relationship-destructive reactions	Anger is suppressed, but expressed in nonspecific hostility, revenge seeking, and reluctance to forgive
Positive emotions toward partner	Admiration, respect, and gratitude	Ambivalent emotional reactions	Lack of admiration, respect and gratitude
Expanding activities	Proneness to engage in novel, arousing activities	Reluctance to engage in novel, arousing activities	Reluctance to engage in novel, arousing activities
Quality of sexual activities	Sexual satisfaction and intimacy; sensitivity to partner's needs	Sex-related worries; engagement in sex to feel accepted and loved	Emotional detachment and lack of commitment during sexual activities
Attitudes towards fidelity	Investment in the relationship; no tendency to seek alternatives	Worries about losing partner; intense bouts of jealousy	Openness to relational alternatives; proneness to mate poaching