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

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INTRODUCTION

Attachment theory deals with the effects of experiences in close relationships on the development of both favorable and (in the case of nonoptimal relationships) unfavorable personality characteristics. In his exposition of attachment theory, John Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982, 1988) explained why the availability of caring, supportive

relationship partners, beginning in infancy, is so important to developing a sense of attachment security (confidence that one is competent and lovable and that caregivers will be available and supportive when needed), which in turn fosters the development of stable self-esteem, constructive coping strategies, maintenance of emotional stability, and formation of mutually satisfying relationships throughout life. In our research, we have consistently found that a dispositional sense of security as well as experimentally augmented security (based on priming mental representations of security) contributes to a “broaden-and-build” (Fredrickson, 2001) cycle of attachment security that has beneficial effects on mental health, social judgments, and interpersonal behaviors (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003, 2005, 2007; Shaver and Mikulincer, 2002, 2006).

In other chapters of the present volume, there is much additional evidence for the broadening and building effects of attachment security. For example, links are established between attachment security and self-esteem (Chapter 5), a more prosocial focus of attention during social interactions (Chapter 8), relationship commitment (Chapter 9), less competitive relationships with siblings (Chapter 14), restraint of aggression during couple conflicts (Chapter 16), less antisocial reactions to ostracism (Chapter 18), and less distraction from attractive alternative relationship partners (Chapter 19).

This chapter moves beyond the well-researched correlates of attachment security to propose a broader relational model of psychological change. According to this model, repeated and influential interactions with security-enhancing relationship partners, and not only romantic partners, beneficially alter a person's mental representations of self and others, attachment patterns, and psychological functioning. We review prospective longitudinal findings from our laboratories showing that being involved in a relationship with a sensitive, responsive, and supportive romantic partner, military officer, manager, residential staff member, team coworker, or therapist creates long-term beneficial changes in attachment-related cognitions and feelings as well as broader psychological functioning. The findings provide strong support for Bowlby's ideas about the plasticity of the attachment system across the life span and the growth-enhancing consequences of secure attachments (see also Chapter 11 in this volume).

ATTACHMENT THEORY: BASIC CONCEPTS

Attachment theory is based on the fundamental idea that human beings are born with an innate psychobiological system (the attachment behavioral system) that motivates them to seek proximity to protective others (attachment figures) in times of need (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). According to Bowlby (1982), these attachment figures (whom he called “stronger and wiser” caregivers) provide a “safe haven” in times of need (i.e., they reliably provide protection, comfort, and relief) and a “secure base” (i.e., the support that allows a child or adult relationship partner to pursue non-attachment goals, with confidence, in a relatively safe and encouraging environment). This protection and support from attachment figures creates an inner sense of attachment security, which normally terminates proximity-seeking

behavior and allows a person to function better in a wide array of life domains such as exploration, learning, interpersonal behavior, and sexual mating.

During infancy, primary caregivers (e.g., parents) are likely to serve as attachment figures. In later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, a wider variety of relationship partners can serve as attachment figures, including not just parents but other relatives, familiar coworkers, teachers and coaches, close friends, and romantic partners (see Chapter 11 in this volume). There may also be context-specific attachment figures—real or potential sources of comfort and support in specific milieus, such as organizational leaders and psychotherapists or counselors. Moreover, groups, institutions, and symbolic personages (e.g., God) can become safe havens and secure bases. (See Chapter 10 in this volume for an analysis of connections and differences between the dyadic-relational and collective levels of social behavior.) In addition, adults can obtain comfort and protection by calling upon mental representations of relationship partners who regularly provide a secure base (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2004).

In addition to conceptualizing the normative aspects of attachment-system functioning, Bowlby (1973; see also Ainsworth et al., 1978) identified major individual differences in attachment security and various forms of insecurity, which arise in response to the behaviors of particular attachment figures. Interactions with attachment figures who are available and responsive in times of need promote a sense of attachment security and lead to the formation of positive working models (mental representations of the self and others). When attachment figures are not supportive, however, negative working models are formed and attachment insecurities become salient and persistent. In extensions of the theory to adolescents and adults, researchers have conceptualized these attachment insecurities in terms of two major dimensions: attachment anxiety and avoidance (e.g., Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998). The first dimension, anxiety, reflects the degree to which a person worries that a partner will not be available in times of need; the second dimension, avoidance, reflects the extent to which a person distrusts relationship partners' goodwill and strives to maintain emotional distance from partners. People who score low on both dimensions are said to be secure or securely attached. An adult's location on these insecurity dimensions can be assessed with either self-report questionnaires or coded clinical interviews (Crowell, Fraley, and Shaver, 1999).

THE BROADEN-AND-BUILD CYCLE OF ATTACHMENT SECURITY

Based on an extensive review of adult attachment studies, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) summarized the adult attachment literature in terms of a three-component model of attachment-system activation and dynamics. The first component concerns the monitoring and appraisal of threatening events and is responsible for activation of the attachment system. The second component involves the monitoring and appraisal of the availability and responsiveness of attachment figures and is responsible for the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. The third

component concerns the monitoring and appraisal of the viability of interpersonal proximity seeking as a means of coping with attachment insecurity and is responsible for variations in attachment anxiety or avoidance.

Here, we focus on the second component of this model—the effects of attachment-figure availability on the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. This cycle is a cascade of mental and behavioral events that enhances emotional stability, personal and social adjustment, satisfying close relationships, and autonomous personal growth. According to attachment theory, interactions with available and supportive attachment figures, by imparting a pervasive sense of safety, assuage distress and evoke positive emotions (e.g., Mikulincer and Florian, 2001). Experiences of attachment-figure availability also contribute to a reservoir of cognitive representations and emotional memories related to successful distress management, one's own value and competence, and other people's beneficence. Interactions with supportive attachment figures sustain a background sense of hope and optimism, heighten a secure person's confidence in relationship partners' goodwill, and strengthen one's sense of self-worth—thanks to being valued, loved, and viewed as special by caring attachment figures.

The broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security is renewed every time a person notices that an actual or imaginary caring and loving attachment figure is available in times of stress. In our experimental studies, for example, we have consistently found that priming thoughts of an available and supportive attachment figure has positive effects on mood, mental health, compassionate and pro-social feelings and behaviors, and tolerance toward outgroup members, and this happens even in the case of otherwise insecure or insecurely attached people (e.g., Mikulincer and Shaver, 2001; Mikulincer, Shaver, and Horesh, 2006; Mikulincer et al., 2001, 2005). Similar positive effects of the priming of security-related mental representations have been found in self-concept, appraisals of romantic partners, and openness to new information regardless of dispositional attachment style (e.g., Baccus, Baldwin, and Packer, 2004; Green and Campbell, 2000; Rowe and Carnelley, 2003, 2006). These findings encourage us to believe that even the preconscious activation of mental representations of attachment-figure availability can, at least temporarily, instill a sense of security even in an otherwise attachment-insecure mind.

Based on these laboratory findings, we suspect that the positive effects of attachment-figure availability might be even stronger, more pervasive, and more resistant to change within relational contexts in which an actual relationship partner's supportive behaviors are clear-cut, personally significant, and repeated over time and situations. Such behavior on the part of a relationship partner, therapist, or leader may counteract insecure people's dispositional tendencies to doubt the availability and responsiveness of their social interaction partners and therefore set in motion a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. In other words, a relationship partner who acts as a reliable secure base can help an insecure person function more securely, both temporarily and chronically. Subsequent sections of this chapter review evidence showing that the actual presence of a supportive relationship partner in different kinds of relationships (i.e., romantic, leader-follower, group, and therapeutic) can have long-term positive effects on

a person's attachment security and more general psychological well-being and mental health.

THE BROADEN-AND-BUILD CYCLE OF ATTACHMENT SECURITY IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

In adulthood, romantic relationships and marriages are the sites of some of the most important emotional bonds (see Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume). In fact, adopting a life-span perspective, attachment researchers (e.g., Fraley and Davis, 1997; Hazan and Zeifman, 1994) have consistently found that romantic partners are often an adult's primary attachment figure. Therefore, one can expect that the availability of such a partner in times of need and his or her sensitivity and responsiveness to bids for proximity, protection, and security will have enduring effects on a person's attachment organization and ability to sustain a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security.

Research supports this prediction. For example, the mere physical availability of a romantic partner has soothing, distress-alleviating effects. Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson (2006) scanned the brains (in a functioning magnetic resonance imaging [fMRI] scanner) of married women who were undergoing a laboratory stress-induction (threat of electric shock) while either holding their husband's hand, holding the hand of an otherwise unfamiliar male experimenter, or holding no hand at all. Coan et al. found that spousal handholding reduced physiological stress responses in the brain (e.g., in the right anterior insula, superior frontal gyrus, and hypothalamus). There is also evidence that a supportive romantic partner or spouse contributes notably to a person's successful coping with stressful events and decreases the probability of developing emotional problems (For reviews and meta-analyses see Cohen, Gottlieb, and Underwood, 2000; Finch et al., 1999; Schwarzer and Leppin, 1989).

Besides mitigating distress, interactions with available, caring, and loving romantic partners or spouses facilitate prorelational behaviors that enhance relationship quality and satisfaction. This kind of positive relational process begins with appraising a partner's sensitivity and responsiveness and continues in the form of stable positive beliefs and expectations about this person's good qualities and intentions. These beliefs allow partners to become more deeply involved in their relationship.

The process fits with Reis and Shaver's (1988) intimacy model, which portrays intimacy as a dynamic process that begins when one person reveals personally significant aspects of himself or herself to a partner. Subsequent steps in the process are then shaped by the partner's responses. A sensitive, accepting, and supportive response facilitates the expression of deeper personal needs and concerns, which gradually leads to the development of a stable intimate relationship. In contrast, a disinterested, disapproving, or rejecting response discourages and interferes with intimacy and interferes with relationship development. Reis and Shaver (1988) contended that sensitive, accepting responses engender three kinds of feelings that

encourage more intimate interactions: a feeling of being understood (i.e., feeling that the partner understands one's needs and feelings), a feeling of being validated (i.e., feeling that one is appreciated and respected by the partner), and a feeling of care (i.e., sensing that the partner is responsive to one's needs). These three kinds of feelings are important components of the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security and allow a person to develop more secure emotional bonds. The Reis-Shaver model has been extensively supported by research (For a review see Reis, 2006).

So far, however, research has not provided detailed information about the extent to which positive interactions in adulthood lead to long-term changes in attachment organization or move a person toward a more secure attachment orientation. Fortunately, Lavi (2007) recently conducted a prospective eight-month study of young couples who had been dating for no more than three to four months. The main question was whether one partner's sensitivity and supportiveness, as assessed at the beginning of the study, was capable of reducing the other partner's insecurities within the relationship four and eight months later.

At the beginning of the study, Lavi (2007) randomly selected one partner in each of 100 couples to serve as the study "participant" and the other member as the "attachment figure." From the participants Lavi (2007) collected self-reports of relationship satisfaction, global attachment anxiety and avoidance in relationships generally, and attachment insecurities within the specific relationship under study. With respect to the other couple member (the attachment figure), Lavi (2007) collected information about his or her sensitivity and supportiveness. Measures of sensitivity included (1) self-reports of dispositional empathy, (2) accuracy in decoding emotional facial expressions, and (3) accuracy in decoding negative and positive emotions that participants displayed in a nonverbal communication task. Measures of supportiveness included (1) self-reports of support provision within the current relationship and (2) actual supportive behaviors, coded by independent judges, during a videotaped dyadic interaction in which participants disclosed a personal problem. Four and eight months later, participants who were still dating the same romantic partner (73%) once again completed self-report measures of relationship satisfaction and global and within-relationship attachment security.

The findings revealed long-term positive effects of partner sensitivity and supportiveness. First, participants' reports of within-relationship attachment anxiety and avoidance gradually decreased over the eight-month period, implying that maintenance of a dating relationship contributed to a decrease in relationship-specific attachment insecurities. However, these positive changes depended greatly on the attachment figure's sensitivity and supportiveness, as assessed by behavioral measures (but not self-reports) at the beginning of the study. Partners who were more accurate in decoding facial expressions and nonverbal expressions of negative emotions and were coded by judges as more supportive toward participants in a dyadic interaction task brought about a steeper decline in within-relationship attachment anxiety and avoidance across the eight-month period. In fact, participants showed no significant decrease in within-relationship attachment insecurities if their partners scored relatively low on behavioral measures of sensitivity and supportiveness at the beginning of the study. Interestingly,

these long-term positive changes in within-relationship attachment organization were not explained by variations in baseline relationship satisfaction and were independent of participants' global attachment orientations at the beginning of the study. That is, a partner's (i.e., attachment figure's) sensitivity and supportiveness predicted prospective decreases in within-relationship attachment insecurities in both chronically secure and chronically insecure participants.

An analysis of prospectively predicted changes in global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships yielded interesting results. Whereas behavioral indicators of a partner's sensitivity and responsiveness at the beginning of the study predicted a significant decrease in global attachment anxiety over the eight-month period, there was no such effect on global avoidant attachment. Moreover, the slope of the change in relationship-specific attachment anxiety was significantly associated with the slope of the change in global attachment anxiety, but there was not a significant association between the slopes of change in relationship-specific and global avoidant attachment. That is, a partner's sensitivity and responsiveness seemed to cause a gradual decrease in relationship-specific attachment anxiety and avoidance, which in turn brought about a more general reduction in attachment anxiety. However, these qualities in the partner, although they helped to reduce relationship-specific avoidant attachment, were not sufficient to reduce a more general avoidant orientation.

Overall, these new findings highlight the importance of a sensitive and supportive romantic partner as a transformative agent who can move a person toward greater security in a specific romantic relationship and reduce global attachment-related anxieties for at least eight months. The results also suggest that is not so easy to induce change in a globally avoidant attachment style, even when a person is fortunate enough to have a loving and caring partner.

BOOSTING ATTACHMENT SECURITY IN LEADER–FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

Organizational leadership provides another situation in which one person can act as a security enhancer for others. Popper and Mayseless (2003) proposed that there is a close similarity between leaders (e.g., managers, political and religious authorities, teachers, supervisors, and military officers) and other kinds of security-enhancing attachment figures. Leaders can occupy the role of “stronger and wiser” caregiver and thereby provide a secure base for their followers. In fact, descriptions of leaders in the psychological literature (e.g., House and Howell, 1992; Shamir, House, and Arthur, 1993; Zaleznik, 1992) suggest that especially effective leaders are ones who are available and responsive to their followers' needs; provide advice, guidance, and emotional and instrumental support to group members; enhance and develop followers' autonomy, initiative, and creativity; build followers' sense of competence and mastery; and bolster their motivation to take on new challenges and acquire new skills. In other words, leaders can be responsive caregivers

(“good shepherds”) who provide their followers with a sense of security, courage, and desire for personal growth (Mayseless and Popper, in press).

In line with this conceptualization of leader–follower relations, a sensitive and responsive leader, like other security-enhancing attachment figures, can have a strong effect on followers’ well-being, personal and team functioning, and personal development. Just as well-parented children become high-functioning adults, followers can become better, stronger, and wiser adults under the guidance of a talented and effective leader who exhibits mature judgment and prosocial values (suggesting his or her own attachment security and skill as a caregiver). According to Popper and Mayseless (2003), creating a sense of having a safe haven and a “secure base for exploration” (Ainsworth et al., 1978) in followers is a leader’s most effective method of increasing the followers’ self-esteem, competence, autonomy, creativity, and psychological growth. Moreover, providing a sense of security is the key to the beneficial changes a good leader can sometimes effect in maladjusted or troubled followers.

As in other cases of unavailable, insensitive, and unresponsive attachment figures, a leader’s inability or unwillingness to respond sensitively and supportively to followers’ needs can magnify followers’ anxieties, feelings of demoralization, or inclination to rebel (“protest,” in attachment-theory terms). Moreover, an unavailable, insensitive, or selfish leader can fuel followers’ attachment insecurities and hence either increase childish, anxious dependence on a destructive (e.g., totalitarian) figure or compulsively self-reliant dismissal of the leader’s support and assistance. In either case, a leader’s lack of concern and support can radically alter the leader–follower relationship and transform what began with the seeming promise of a safe haven and a secure base into a destructive, conflicted, irrationally hostile relationship that is self-defeating for leader, followers, and the organization to which they belong.

In two recent studies, Davidovitz et al. (in press) found strong evidence for the positive effects that a sensitive and supportive leader can have on followers’ performance and adjustment during military service. In these studies, we focused on leaders’ attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and the extent to which these insecurities impaired their functioning as security-enhancing attachment figures and contributed adversely to followers’ performance and mental health. In one study, 549 Israeli soldiers in regular military service, from 60 different military units that were participating in a leadership workshop, rated their instrumental and socioemotional functioning within their unit. Soldiers also rated (1) the extent to which their direct officer used power to serve and empower soldiers’ needs and aspirations and respected the soldiers’ rights and feelings—a style of leadership Howell (1988) called “socialized”—and (2) the extent to which their direct officer was an effective provider of instrumental and emotional support in demanding and challenging situations, a core qualities of a security-enhancing attachment figure. The 60 direct officers also completed ratings describing their performance as a socialized leader and an effective support provider for their followers. They also completed the Experiences in Close Relationship (ECR) Inventory, providing ratings of their own attachment anxiety and avoidance.

The data indicated that soldiers’ perceptions of their officers matched the officers’ self-reports. More avoidant officers scored lower on socialized leadership and were less able to deal effectively with their soldiers’ emotional needs. More

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attachment-anxious officers were less able to provide effective instrumental support, which had a detrimental effect on the accomplishment of group tasks.

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

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We also found that an officer's attachment anxiety has a negative effect on soldiers' instrumental functioning, an association that is mediated by anxious officers' lack of ability to provide instrumental support to followers in task-focused situations. We suspect that a leader's attachment anxiety interferes with effective provision of a secure base for exploration and learning, which in turn erodes followers' confidence in their own instrumental functioning. However, we also noted an unexpected positive effect of officer's attachment anxiety on soldiers' socioemotional functioning. It seems that an anxious officer's emphasis on emotional closeness and interdependence helps soldiers become emotionally involved and interpersonally close. Alternatively, soldiers' attempts to maintain good morale may be a defensive reaction of the group to the self-preoccupied anxieties of an attachment-anxious officer, a possibility that needs to be studied further (perhaps using some of the methods discussed in Chapter 8 in this volume). In any case, soldiers' socioemotional benefits under these conditions seem to be achieved at the expense of deficits in instrumental functioning.

In a second study, Davidovitz et al. (in press) approached 541 Israeli military recruits and their 72 direct officers at the beginning of a four-month period of intensive combat training and asked them to report on their attachment styles. At the same time, soldiers completed a self-report scale measuring their baseline mental health. After two months, soldiers reported on their mental health again and provided appraisals of their officer as a provider of security (i.e., the officer's ability and willingness to be available in times of need and to accept and care for his or her soldiers rather than rejecting and criticizing them). Two months later (four months after combat training began) soldiers once again evaluated their mental health.

The results indicated that the more avoidant an officer was, the less **his soldiers** viewed him as sensitive and available and the more they felt rejected and criticized by him. More importantly, an officer's avoidant attachment style and his **lack** of sensitivity and availability seemed to cause undesirable changes in soldiers' mental health during combat training. At the beginning of training, baseline mental health was exclusively associated with soldiers' own attachment anxiety. However, officers' avoidant orientation and their lack of sensitivity and availability produced significant changes in soldiers' mental health over the weeks of training (taking the baseline assessment into account). The higher the officer's avoidance score and the lower his sensitivity and availability, the more his soldiers' mental health deteriorated over two and four months of intensive combat training. **These**

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findings support the metaphor of leaders as parents and highlight the importance of a leader's secure attachment for the maintenance of followers' mental health and emotional well-being during stressful periods.

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

Unfortunately, this buffering effect of soldiers' security was evident mainly when mental health was assessed only two months after combat training began. After four months of combat training, an officer's avoidance had negative effects on soldiers' mental health regardless of the soldiers' attachment orientation. In other words, as time passed and problems continued, the negative effects of an officer's avoidant style on soldiers' mental health overrode the initial buffering effects of soldiers' attachment security. It is important to remember that these findings were obtained during a highly stressful period in which soldiers were under the complete control of their officer and in a situation where their physical welfare depended on their obedience to the officer's commands. Future studies should examine how leaders' and followers' attachment orientations interact in less extreme and less demanding situations and in other kinds of organizational contexts.

Overall, these studies highlight the important effects that leaders' attachment orientations and correlated abilities to serve as security providers have on followers' performance, feelings, health, and adjustment. We should emphasize, however, that our studies were conducted in military settings. Future studies are needed to compare the findings with ones obtained in other organizational settings, including ones where there are more women. Systematic longitudinal research is also needed to address a host of unanswered questions, such as whether and how insecurely attached followers can benefit from the advantages of a secure leader; whether and how insecurely attached followers may resist, to their own detriment, a secure leader's beneficial influences; and how secure leaders foster individual followers' socioemotional well-being, relations among followers, and the success of the collectives to which they belong. A deeper understanding of these processes can help organizational psychologists create better leadership development programs and better interventions aimed at improving leader–follower relations.

GROUPS AS SECURITY-ENHANCING ATTACHMENT FIGURES

Supportive interactions in the context of groups can also bring about positive changes in group members' attachment systems and thereby contribute to

their well-being, psychological functioning, and task performance. According to Mayseless and Popper (in press), emotional connections with a group or a network of group members can also be viewed as attachment bonds, and a group can serve attachment functions by providing a sense of closeness and of having a safe haven and a secure base (e.g., De Cremer, 2003; Simon and Stürmer, 2003; Sleebos, Ellemers, and de Gilder, 2006; Tyler and Blader, 2002). That is, people can use a group as a symbolic source of comfort, support, and safety in times of need and as a secure base for exploration, skill learning, and task performance. There is evidence that groups, like individual attachment figures, can be effective providers of emotional support, comfort, and relief in demanding and challenging times (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Mullen and Cooper, 1994); they can also encourage and support exploration and the learning of new social, emotional, and cognitive skills (e.g., Forsyth, 1990).

Following Mayseless and Popper's (in press) reasoning, we propose that people can construe a group as a symbolic security-enhancing attachment "figure," can form secure attachment bonds with the group, and can thereby benefit from the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security made possible by these bonds. As with individual attachment figures, however, appraising a group as a security provider can be distorted by a group member's global attachment insecurities. Insecure individuals may have difficulty construing their groups as available, sensitive, and responsive attachment figures. Indeed, Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) constructed a self-report scale to measure group-oriented attachment anxiety and avoidance and found that group-oriented insecurities were positively associated with global attachment insecurities in close relationships.

However, Smith, Murphy, and Coats's (1999) correlations were only moderate in size (see Chapter 10 in this volume), indicating that although group attachment insecurities may be reflections, or special cases, of global insecurities, they are also influenced by other factors, such as past and current experiences with specific groups. As in other relational contexts, the quality of actual group interactions probably moderates the projection of previously established attachment working models onto a particulate group, with more comforting and supportive group interactions favoring the formation of a more secure attachment to the group. In other words, it seems likely that comforting and supportive group interactions can provide a relational foundation for beneficial psychological and organizational transformations.

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

by its members as a security provider: The greater the group's cohesiveness, the more its members feel comforted, supported, respected, accepted, and encouraged by the group. In other words, cohesive groups can definitely be viewed as security-providing symbolic attachment figures.

Pursuing this idea, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) conducted two studies (Studies 3 and 4) of new recruits in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), whose performance in combat units was evaluated in a two-day screening session. On the first day, participants completed a self-report scale tapping global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships. On the second day, the recruits were randomly divided into small groups of five to eight members, and they performed three group missions. Following each mission, they rated their socioemotional and instrumental functioning during the mission. In addition, they rated the cohesiveness of their group. External observers also provided ratings of each participant's socioemotional and instrumental functioning during the three group missions, and participants completed an additional measure at the end of the second screening day to register their anxiety and avoidance toward their group.

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

Rom and Mikulincer (2003) also found that group cohesiveness (operationalized as a group-level variable created by averaging the appraisals of all group members) improved the socioemotional and instrumental functioning of group members and reduced the detrimental effects of global attachment anxiety on instrumental functioning during group missions. Moreover, group cohesion significantly attenuated group-specific attachment insecurities, whether anxious or avoidant, and weakened the projection of global attachment anxiety onto the group. This finding supports the hypothesis that group cohesion enhances group members' sense of security, facilitates emotional well-being and more optimal functioning during group interactions, and mitigates chronically attachment-anxious people's typical worries (e.g., about being rejected or disliked). A sense of group cohesion signals that closeness, support, and consensus—prominent goals of attachment-anxious people—have been attained, thereby freeing mental resources for exploration, learning, and task performance.

Interestingly, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) also found that, although group cohesion had an overall positive effect on functioning and group-specific attachment security, it failed to improve the functioning of avoidant military recruits. Some of the findings even suggested that a cohesive group exacerbated avoidant people's poor instrumental functioning. As reviewed already, global avoidant attachment seems to be more resistant than attachment anxiety to the presence of

sensitive and supportive romantic partners. This imperviousness seems to hold up even during group activities. Interdependent relations with group members may be so threatening or distasteful to avoidant people that they fail to benefit from a potentially available group-specific sense of security. Alternatively, group cohesion, which implies a very high level of interdependence among group members, may exacerbate rather than calm avoidant people's attachment-related fears of closeness, thus threatening their sense of self-reliance.

Overall, Rom and Mikulincer's (2003) findings provide preliminary evidence that cohesive group interactions, characterized by support, cooperation, respect, and acceptance between group members, can foster a group-specific sense of attachment security, can improve group functioning, and can have healing, ameliorative effects on attachment-anxious people. More research is needed on the psychological and interpersonal processes through which groups could help insecure adults revise their working models of self and others. Future studies should include prospective longitudinal designs, examining the extent to which group cohesion has long-term effects on group-specific attachment orientations and either is or is not capable of overriding previously established global attachment insecurities.

THE THERAPIST AS A SECURE BASE

According to Bowlby (1988), psychotherapy provides another relational context capable of supporting a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. In the therapy setting, as in other interpersonal contexts, the prerequisite for a client's development is the therapist's ability to function as a security-enhancing attachment figure. Bowlby drew an analogy between a psychotherapist and a primary caregiver: Just as an adequately sensitive and responsive mother—a "good enough" parent, in Winnicott's (1965) well-known designation—induces a sense of attachment security in her child and facilitates the child's exploration of the world, a "good enough" therapist serves as a safe haven and a secure base from which clients can explore and reflect on painful memories and experiences.

In this way, a good therapist becomes a security-enhancing attachment figure for the client (i.e., a reliable and relied upon provider of security and support). Clients typically enter therapy in a state of psychic pain, frustration, anxiety, or demoralization, which naturally activates their attachment system and causes them to yearn for support, comfort, encouragement, and guidance. Attachment needs are easy to direct toward therapists, because therapists, at least when a client believes in their healing powers, are perceived as "stronger and wiser" caregivers. Of course, clients' appraisals of the therapeutic relationship as involving an attachment bond and of the therapist as an attachment figure can also turn the therapist into a focus for attachment-related worries, defenses, and hostile projections. These projections sometimes disrupt therapeutic work, but they also provide an opportunity for a therapist to make useful observations and interpretations, for the client to have corrective emotional experiences, and for the client to understand himself or herself better.

There is preliminary evidence that clients treat their therapist as a safe haven in times of distress. For example, Geller and Farber (1993) found that clients tended to think about their therapists mainly when painful feelings arose, and Rosenzweig, Farber, and Geller (1996) found that such thoughts produced feelings of comfort, safety, and acceptance in the clients. Parish and Eagle (2003) also found that clients rated their therapist as a stronger and wiser caregiver as well as a sensitive and supportive figure.

There is also evidence that a therapist's functioning as a security-providing attachment figure has beneficial effects on therapy outcome. In a three-session career counseling study, Litman-Ovadia (2004) found that counselees' appraisal of their counselor as a security-enhancing attachment figure (following the second session) was a significant predictor of heightened career exploration following counseling (as compared with baseline career exploration), even after controlling for counselees' attachment orientations. This appraisal of the therapist as a security-enhancing attachment figure also mitigated the detrimental effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance on career exploration. In another study based on data from the multisite National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Program, Zuroff and Blatt (2006) found that a client's positive appraisals of his or her therapist's sensitivity and supportiveness significantly predicted relief from depression and maintenance of therapeutic benefits 18 months later. Importantly, the results were not attributable to patient characteristics or severity of depression.

The importance of forming a secure bond with therapeutic attachment figures is also evident in a recent study that examined the effectiveness of residential treatment of high-risk adolescents. Gur (2006) examined the course of emotional and behavioral problems of 131 Israeli high-risk adolescents during their first year in residential treatment centers. Four meetings were held with each participant, 1 week after beginning treatment and 3, 6, and 12 months later. At Time 1, participants completed a self-report attachment scale; they also completed measures of emotional and behavioral adjustment. In the three subsequent waves of measurement, participants completed the adjustment scales and rated the extent to which targeted staff members functioned as a secure base. The targeted staff members also rated participants' adjustment and their own functioning as a secure base in the second, third, and fourth waves of measurement. In the fourth wave of measurement, adolescents again completed the self-report attachment scale to examine possible changes in their attachment insecurities.

The findings confirmed the theoretically predicted association between attachment insecurities and adjustment problems at the beginning of residential treatment. More importantly, findings indicate that staff members serving as a secure base contributed to positive changes in emotional and behavioral adjustment across the four waves of measurement and notably weakened the detrimental effects of baseline attachment insecurities. Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower rates of anger, depression, and behavioral problems as well as higher rates of positive feelings across the study period. Moreover, the functioning of staff members as a secure base was also associated with positive changes in the adolescents' attachment representations.

Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower scores on attachment anxiety and avoidance after their first year of residential treatment. Overall, the findings support the theoretical proposition that attachment security has healing effects even in the case of abnormally insecure, institutionalized youngsters.

Although these preliminary findings are encouraging, we need more controlled research that examines the long-term effects of security-enhancing therapeutic figures on clients' working models of self and others and the extent to which changes in these representations are associated with therapy outcomes. More research is also needed on the temporal course of revisions in insecure working models during therapy and on the way particular features of therapist–client relations contribute to these revisions in the case of different kinds of emotional disorders.

CONCLUSIONS

In our previous research, we went to great lengths to test experimentally, in adults, the core claim of attachment theory that increasing a person's sense of security can have personally and socially desirable effects on creativity, compassion, altruism, intergroup tolerance, and humane values (see the review in Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). In another subdiscipline, developmental psychologists who focus on parent–child relationships in decades-long prospective longitudinal studies have shown that security-enhancing relationships with parents and other caregivers have extensive and long-lasting beneficial effects on the personality development of children, adolescents, and adults (see Grossmann, Grossmann, and Waters, 2005; see also Chapter 11 in this volume).

Here, we have focused on similar processes that occur naturally, and sometimes deliberately, in romantic relationships, groups, leader–follower relationships, dyadic psychotherapy, and group-treatment contexts. Research findings indicate that security-enhancing romantic partners, leaders, and therapists and cohesive, high-functioning groups play a role in shaping individuals' and groups' effective functioning, well-being, and improvement over time. Much of the research reviewed here is preliminary, so many questions remain to be answered. We have noticed, for example, that avoidant attachment seems resistant to change. We suspect that this is because avoidant individuals deliberately resist the influence of loving, considerate potential attachment figures, having found in the past that reliance on others opens a person to disappointment, neglect, and psychological pain. But more research is needed to determine the validity of this speculation and learn how avoidant individuals might be made more amenable to constructive change.

The kinds of research and theoretical issues discussed here point to new possibilities for applicable research in personality and social psychology. Pursuing these lines of thinking and research should be beneficial to both the science of psychology and humanity at large. Psychologists have had a difficult time bringing their independent findings about personality, social contexts, development, and therapeutic processes together. Yet real personality development occurs in

social contexts, and social contexts have their effects through the personalities of parents, romantic partners, leaders, followers, therapists, and groups. Attachment theory provides a foundation for a truly integrative understanding of the relational contexts and processes that bring about positive changes in individuals, groups, and societies.

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