

CHAPTER 2

An Outline of the Expanded Theory

In this chapter we provide an outline of our expanded adult attachment theory, which is then elaborated in subsequent chapters. Our aim is to extend the conceptualization of security dynamics in Chapter 1 beyond close dyadic relationships with primary attachment figures (parents, siblings, close friends, romantic/marital partners). The expanded theory is based on noticing that security dynamics also underlie people's relationships with experts or leaders in particular domains (e.g., teachers, managers, therapists), and with pets, informal and formal groups, sociopolitical entities (e.g., large organizations, social institutions), and supernatural figures (e.g., God). Although not usually serving as *principal* or *primary* attachment figures, these people, animals, social entities, and symbolic personages can nevertheless promote or undermine felt security in particular contexts and thus have important effects on mental health, personal development, and the success or failure of social relationships and organizations. Moreover, the combination of benefits and dangers of relying on an attachment figure or security provider is similar across the various kinds of relationships, as are the qualities of beneficial and harmful attachment figures.

Security Dynamics in the Context of Multiple Attachment Figures

A major point of our expanded theory is that people typically rely on more than one attachment figure to provide their sense of security. This means that a person's sources of security can be quite diverse and may be relatively independent of each other. Even during infancy, although proximity seeking is usually directed toward a primary caregiver (often the mother), most children have other relationship partners who can be and are used as attachment figures (e.g., father, grandparents, older siblings, day care workers). Of course, the size and diversity of this network of figures (which Bowlby, 1980, and Ainsworth, 1989, called a *hierarchy of attachment figures* and we call an *attachment network*, because of the possible diversity of kinds of attachment figures) differs as a function of family size, cultural values, and other ecological factors (Howes & Spieker, 2016). For example, the strong preference for one particular caregiver over others, which Bowlby (1969/1982) called "monotropy," is more evident in Western nuclear families than in collectivist societies in which multiple individuals are responsible for an infant's welfare (Schmidt et al., 2021).

A person's attachment network typically increases in size and diversity during later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Gillath et al., 2019; Kobak et al., 2005, 2007). Beyond parents and other family members, people seek protection and support from close relationship partners whom they choose (friends, spouses), as well as people who are experts in particular domains and who occupy the role of stronger and wiser caregiver and guide in those domains (e.g., teachers, managers, therapists). Pet owners may also seek proximity to their pet in times of need and feel comforted by the pet's calming presence (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). (The psychological importance of these relationships can be inferred from the intense grief experienced by some pet owners when their pet dies.) During old age, proximity seeking can be directed to one's adult children, as well as social workers, nurses, doctors, and therapists of various kinds (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). More broadly, felt security can be sustained or disrupted by groups and organizations to which a person belongs or identifies with, institutions that are expected to provide a safety net in times of need (e.g., welfare agencies), and supernatural figures and their earthly representatives (e.g., Granqvist, 2020; Mayseless & Popper, 2007; Smith et al., 1999).

Any of these human and nonhuman figures can become part of a person's attachment network, and security dynamics can then occur in relation to them. In the following sections we examine the adaptive benefits of relying on multiple attachment figures and discuss the major pathways through which attachment or attachment-like relationships are formed with close relationship partners, people who are experts or leaders in particular domains, pets, social groups, organizations, and supernatural figures. We also deal with the psychological processes underlying the formation of attachment to places, objects, and substances (e.g., hometowns, foods, drugs) associated with felt security.

The Adaptive Benefits of Pursuing Multiple Pathways to Security

Observations of infants' behavior in moments of threat or need reveal that many of them prefer to seek proximity to one primary caregiver over other available caregivers (e.g., Ainsworth, 1982). At least during infancy, the attachment network is often organized as a hierarchy (Bretherton, 1985), with a particular caregiver (in Western nuclear families) or a group of caregivers (in collectivist societies) acting as the principal security provider, and other individuals probably serving as subsidiary attachment figures in the absence of the principal figure. According to Cassidy (2016), this monotropic tendency has two adaptive advantages: (1) It increases the likelihood that the targeted caregiver(s) will assume primary responsibility for the child's welfare, and (2) it allows the child to quickly seek proximity when threatened, without losing precious time deciding which person should be approached in a given situation.

A hierarchy of attachment figures is also evident in adolescence and adulthood, with a close friend, romantic partner, or spouse often occupying the role of the principal figure (Zeifman & Hazan, 2016). However, this does not mean that the principal figure has full responsibility for meeting all of the person's needs for security. Rather, adolescents and adults, although perhaps preferring to seek and derive comfort from a principal figure, also rely on other figures in particular contexts in which those figures are more capable than the principal figure of delivering needed provisions. In many cases, parents continue to be relied upon as "attachment figures in reserve" (Weiss, 1982). Moreover, of special relevance in certain cases, support seekers may rely on other figures, if necessary, to minimize the cost of relying solely on a frustrating, unreliable, abusive, or absent principal figure.

With age, cognitive development, and engagement in more diverse and complex social activities, roles, and relationships, the advantages of strict monotropy decline, and having

a larger attachment network becomes beneficial for maintaining felt security. During adolescence and adulthood, the adaptive principle of not putting “all your eggs in one basket” seems to apply to attachment-system functioning. First of all, adolescents and adults face a variety of personal and collective threats and challenges in different social contexts and different life domains (e.g., health, interpersonal, occupational), and they seek different kinds of security-related provisions in the different domains (e.g., physical protection, emotional comfort, cognitive guidance). As a result, a principal attachment figure, even if generally responsive, can optimally sustain security only in some of these contexts. Moreover, this figure can effectively supply only some but not all of the diverse provisions a person might desire or require in a given context. For example, a spouse can be an effective provider of emotional support when a person returns home from a frustrating day at work. But this spouse may be less effective in providing instrumental support or guidance when one is performing a challenging task in the workplace itself. In this case, a responsive and supportive manager may be a more effective secure base for acquiring and improving job skills.

Of special interest to us, putting all of one’s eggs in a single basket (a principal attachment figure) can be counterproductive for the broaden-and-build cycle of security. Hoping that one individual can and will provide felt security across all contexts and life domains is risky and likely to result in episodes of disappointment and frustration (see Finkel et al. [2014] for a similar analysis of unrealistic expectations of marital partner’s support). It’s generally more adaptive to rely on a domain expert, group, organization, or institution that is better equipped than a principal attachment figure to sustain felt security in a given context. For example, a responsive teacher can more effectively provide a secure base for learning within the classroom than can a loving parent who is not present. Similarly, a social in-group can provide better protection in the face of attacks from a rival or enemy group. A romantic or marital partner may not have the strength or resources to provide protection from a hostile out-group.

Having multiple security providers allows a person to minimize the risks incurred in being solely dependent on a single figure. Not all friends, romantic partners, or spouses are as responsive as one might wish, expect, or need them to be. In fact, it’s likely that one or more of them will sometimes fail to provide felt security and may even betray one’s trust. Some of these figures may also become temporarily or chronically distressed, weak, tired, or ill, thereby losing the ability to provide adequate protection and support. At worst, one might become entrapped in a painful attachment relationship and feel unable to disengage from a hurtful or harmful partner because of having no alternative sources of protection and support.

A large attachment network allows a person to spread the risks of relying on a single attachment figure over a number of different security providers. It also allows one to move adaptably from one attachment figure to another depending on the differential ability and willingness of each figure to provide felt security in a given context. In adolescence and adulthood, this flexibility reduces the cost of losing precious time when there is an urgent need for protection and support. Unlike infants, adolescents and adults have the cognitive ability to deal with a diverse attachment network and quickly decide which figure to approach in a particular situation. Moreover, a large attachment network facilitates the search for alternative sources of security after the loss of a principal attachment figure (resulting in what Bowlby, 1980, called *reorganization* of the attachment-figure hierarchy).

There is some evidence for the notion that having multiple attachment figures during adolescence and adulthood is associated with greater felt security. For example, single adults who have a larger network of friends score lower on the ECR Avoidance scale (Brumbaugh, 2017). Gillath et al. (2017) found that reports of greater closeness with multiple

network members were associated with lower attachment anxiety, and reports of greater network *multiplexity* (diversity of provisions offered by different network members) were associated with lower attachment-related avoidance. However, because these studies assessed only young adults' friendship networks and relied on cross-sectional, correlational research designs, further studies are needed to confirm the causal hypothesis that having multiple attachment figures contributes to felt security.

Social Baseline, Natural Cues of Safety, and Unlearned Formation of Attachments

The initial stage of becoming attached to a particular person (or group, as we will see) is a natural, unlearned process that depends on two biologically evolved predispositions: (1) staying close to other people and (2) watching for signs of others' *warmth* (or *benevolence*) and *competence* (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Fiske et al., 2007). The first tendency causes us to direct attention to other people and consider approaching them; the second tendency encourages us to quickly assess their warmth and competence. From an attachment perspective, a person who is perceived to be both warm and competent is a *natural cue of safety* (indicating that something beneficial and nothing harmful is likely to happen in his or her presence) and is therefore a likely target of proximity seeking in times of need. Such a person is what Hornstein and Eisenberger (2018) called a *prepared safety stimulus*, a stimulus that has historically enhanced survival and well-being, and is therefore able to reduce fear and defensive fight-flight or freeze responses.

According to social baseline theory (SBT; Coan & Sbarra, 2015), a theory closely related to attachment theory's core principles, the human brain is "designed" (by evolution) to expect, as a default, the presence of social conspecifics and to operate more efficiently when these conspecifics are available. This theory builds on Proffitt's (2006) "economy of action" principle, according to which organisms need to take in as much or more energy than they consume and economize energy expenditure in order to enable survival and reproduction. According to SBT, being with others is a basic energy-saving strategy, because it decreases the energetic cost of engaging with the environment alone. By being with others, risks posed by the environment (e.g., predation) can be spread over multiple individuals (*risk distribution*), and these individuals can be helpful in dealing with environmental demands (e.g., finding food, locating a safe hiding place), and reducing the cost of many of life's metabolically expensive activities (by *load sharing*). As a result of these social benefits, being alone is a natural threat to energy conservation. In short, humans are built to seek the presence of others and maintain a comfortable, efficient social baseline state (Beckes & Coan, 2011).

Unfortunately, this innate inclination to approach others can be counterproductive if the available conspecifics have malevolent intentions and the ability to inflict harm. It is therefore essential to be able to quickly assess others' likely intentions before approaching them. And evolution has constructed the human brain so that it not only seeks contact with others but also quickly assesses them with respect to the two key attributes mentioned earlier: *warmth* and *competence* (Fiske et al., 2007). In other words, humans tend to quickly determine the extent to which unfamiliar others have benevolent intentions (i.e., are warm, helpful, and trustworthy) and the extent to which they have the ability to act on these intentions (i.e., are competent, strong, and wise). These judgments are crucial for survival: Encountering competent and malicious others arouses flight-flight or freeze (i.e., self-protective) responses; encountering competent and benevolent others encourages approach behavior and allows the brain to maintain its comfortable social-baseline state.

These two dimensions explain most of the variance in person perception and group perception across cultures (Koch et al., 2021). Moreover, people of all ages, beginning in

early childhood, are more interested in cues about others' warmth and competence than in any other kind of information (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Baccolo et al., 2021; Cogsdill et al., 2014). For example, signs of behavioral and neural discrimination of computer-generated faces varying in the level of expressed trustworthiness (benevolence) have been observed even among 7-month-old infants (Jessen & Grossmann, 2016, 2019). And 5- and 9-month-olds tend to look longer at and are more likely to approach animated characters that are kind and benevolent toward others than characters that hinder or cause harm to others (e.g., Hamlin & Wynn, 2011). In addition, there is suggestive evidence that 12-month-olds are able to decipher cues about others' competence and expertise: They are more likely to attend to an adult who appears to possess specific knowledge about a particular unfamiliar object than to others who do not seem to possess such knowledge (Stenberg, 2009; Stenberg & Hagekull, 2007).

Interestingly, these are the same two features most relevant for infants and young children in assessing which people to approach as possible attachment figures. Basically, in the terms used by attachment theorists (following Bowlby, 1969/1982), children are "designed" to seek others who are (1) *sensitive and responsive* and (2) *stronger and wiser* than them. Therefore, this innate, evolution-based inclination to rely on others who are sensed as willing (benevolent) and capable (competent) of addressing our needs for a safe haven and a secure base is usually the motivation for forming new attachments (Mayseless & Popper, 2019). Throughout life, a person, pet, group, organization, or supernatural figure that is perceived as both benevolent and competent can be noticed and remembered as a potential attachment figure, and such a figure may engender a "leap" of courage or faith on the part of a security seeker. This is the initial, formative phase of an attachment relationship, which Bowlby (1969/1982) called *attachment-in-the-making*. Interestingly, Keren and Mayseless (2013) found that if the relationship continues and is strengthened by responsive gestures and behaviors, the care provider may become more central in the care recipient's attachment network (or may move up in the attachment hierarchy, to use Bowlby's metaphor).

Imagine, for example, a 6-year-old boy meeting his teacher for the first time. He will monitor the teacher for cues relevant to warmth and competence. If the teacher appears to have benevolent intentions and the skills needed to provide a secure base for learning in the classroom, the child will begin to trust the teacher and regard him or her as a potential attachment figure. Days later, when encountering a problem in a reading assignment, the child will optimistically, but perhaps still cautiously, approach the teacher and ask for assistance. The child's confidence in the teacher's warmth and competence will, of course, be strengthened if the teacher proves to be warmly supportive and skillful in solving the problem, which will not only strengthen the relationship (moving toward what Bowlby [1969/1982] called *clear-cut attachment*) but also build the child's social and academic skills as he moves toward autonomous competence.

As explained in Chapter 1, the formation and consolidation of new attachments is often biased by past interactions with other attachment figures who have influenced the construction of a particular attachment style or orientation (including working models of self and others). Although hoping and expecting to feel safe in the presence of a warm and competent-seeming person, group, or organization is natural, it is also natural for a non-optimally treated individual with an insecure attachment history to be wary, doubtful, and defensive in seeking support (see Chapter 4 for a review of evidence). Moreover, these attachment-insecure people may be less able to trust others and accurately detect cues of their benevolence (see Chapter 6 for evidence). This doesn't mean that new attachments will not be formed, but the formative period may be longer, and more confirming evidence may be needed before a new person, group, or organization is comfortably relied upon for felt security (Zhang & Hazan, 2002).

Natural Cues of Safety across Different Relationships

Signs of warmth and competence tend to be automatically used when evaluating others as potential security providers in times of need. In the following sections, we show that these two natural cues of safety (warmth and competence) appear across different kinds of relationships, making it possible to view specific persons, pets, groups, organizations, and supernatural figures as potential attachment figures.

Dyadic Relationships

Beginning with parents, every person who is an expert in a particular domain and occupies the role of a “stronger and wiser” caregiver in a formal hierarchy (e.g., teacher, leader, therapist) can be sensed as competent and benevolent and may therefore be tagged as a potential source of a safe haven and a secure base in times of need. Naturally, parents are perceived by young children as strong and omnipotent figures who know better than they do how to deal with life’s frustrations, adversities, and challenges. Parents are also automatically perceived as well-intentioned, unless they neglect, mistreat, or abuse the child, because they are perceived to care for their children’s welfare and growth. Similarly, a teacher, by being an expert in the academic domain, better emotionally regulated than anxious and uncertain students, and trained to protect and promote students’ welfare, is naturally perceived as a competent and benevolent figure in learning contexts. Therefore, students expect a teacher to serve as a safe haven when they are sick, distressed, or afraid during school hours and a secure base for learning and developing new knowledge and skills (Verschuere & Koomen, 2012).

Natural cues of safety are also involved in the transformation of therapists, physicians, and other health providers into potential sources of felt security and hence potential attachment figures. Take, for example, the case of clients entering psychotherapy. They typically arrive in a state of frustration, anxiety, or demoralization, which naturally causes them to yearn for relief, comfort, support, 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, possessing the hallmarks of a “good enough” parent (Winnicott, 1973). Therapists are expected to know better than their clients how to deal with the clients’ problems, and they occupy the dominant and caregiving role in the relationship. Similar expectations can lead patients to direct attachment-like proximity-seeking behavior to a physician or nurse when ill and view them as potential providers of protection, comfort, and support in addition to healing. This is the significance of “bedside manner” in medical practice.

At a higher level of social organization, in an elaboration and extension of Freud’s (1930/1961a) metaphor of the leader as a father, Popper and Mayseless (2003) proposed that leaders (e.g., managers in the workplace, officers in the army, political and religious authorities) are “stronger and wiser” figures who are presumed and trained to care about followers’ welfare (see also Haslam et al., 2015). “Leaders, like parents, are figures whose role includes guiding, directing, taking charge, and taking care of others less powerful than they and whose fate is highly dependent on them” (Popper & Mayseless, 2003, p. 42). Hence, a leader can be perceived by followers as a competent and benevolent figure on whom they can rely in times of need (Mayseless & Popper, 2019). Indeed, studies of people’s implicit leadership theories indicate that leaders are prototypically characterized by traits signaling competence (intelligence, strength, charisma) and benevolence (sensitivity, dedication) (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). In addition, Nichols and Cottrell (2014) found that people portray the ideal leader as highly intelligent and trustworthy.

Although in equalitarian relationships, such as friendships and romantic relationships, there is usually no formal hierarchy of care seeker and caregiver, each partner is expected to informally occupy the role of a “stronger and wiser” caregiver when the other partner is distressed and seeking a safe haven and secure base (Zeifman & Hazan, 2016). Hence, actual or perceived signals of warmth and competence are important cues underlying the formation of a long-term friendship or romantic relationship with a specific person. Indeed, research indicates that trustworthiness, warmth, and supportiveness are ranked as the most desired characteristics in close friends (Wagner, 2018). Lewis et al. (2011) asked participants to design their ideal same-sex friend using a limited “budget” that forced them to make trade-offs among the traits they desire in such a friend and found that both men and women prioritized warmth and dependability in their choices. It seems that people generally choose benevolent others to be their friends, thereby providing a basis for developing an attachment bond with them.

A similar pattern has been observed in romantic relationships. In studies examining ideal romantic partner preferences, both men and women rate “kind,” “helpful,” and “understanding” as the most desirable traits in a potential long-term mate or spouse (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1999). Moreover, studies using experimental vignettes describing hypothetical partners have revealed that both men and women who are interested in forming a long-term romantic relationship prefer a warm and kind mate, and rate such a mate in the most positive terms (e.g., Barclay, 2010). In a recent study conducted in a live speed-dating setting, Valentine et al. (2020) found that people were more attracted to potential mates who were rated as warm. In addition, some studies that have explored the tradeoff between physical attractiveness and warmth during dating decisions found that both women and men looking for a long-term romantic relationship prioritize warmth over physical attractiveness (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2004).

In attachment research, attachment security appears to be a valued resource that people, regardless of their own attachment style, look for in romantic partners. Specifically, single participants who read descriptions of attachment-style qualities of potential romantic partners are more attracted to secure than to insecure partners, and they report more positive emotions when imagining dating a secure rather than an insecure partner (for a review, see Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Attachment-secure people are warm and supportive in close relationships and convey a strong sense of competence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Therefore, these findings converge with other findings on ideal mate standards suggesting that people are inclined to choose warm and helpful people to be their long-term mates, expecting them to be willing and able to act as security providers when needed.

Of course, this research doesn't mean that the choice of a close friend or romantic partner is based exclusively on warmth and helpfulness. In fact, other traits, such as sense of humor, physical attractiveness, and social status, can influence such choices (Brumbaugh et al., 2014). We are saying only that a person chosen to be a long-term friend or romantic partner is typically perceived as benevolent and helpful, and therefore is viewed, consciously or unconsciously, as a potential attachment figure.

Beyond forming close friendships with fellow human beings, pet owners often view their pet as one of their best friends and as a potential source of a safe haven and secure base (Kurdek, 2008). Of course, a pet, unlike a human attachment figure, cannot provide advice and guidance in dealing with one's anxieties (although a pet might be imagined to do this: “Yes I know, honey, you are sorry to see me so sad”). In addition, a pet is not usually “stronger and wiser” than its owner. Rather, like a child, the pet needs its owner's attention and care if it is to survive. However, pets tend to be naturally perceived as benevolent and kind, and as capable of providing comfort in times of need. Research shows that pet owners often describe their pets as loving, accepting, warm, helpful, trustworthy, authentic, and

nonjudgmental (e.g., Hoffmann et al., 2018). Therefore, even in human–pet relationships, pets are sensed as natural safety cues, and pet owners tend to view these benevolent creatures as potential providers of felt security.

Group Relationships

The groups to which a person belongs (*in-groups*), such as a peer group, sports team, political party, ethnic group, nation, or culture, also tend to be perceived in terms of warmth and competence (Cuddy et al., 2008). In-group members tend to have similar personal characteristics and share common values and goals. They typically feel a sense of solidarity or community of interests (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a result, in-group members naturally perceive each other as cooperative, friendly, helpful, and trustworthy (e.g., Tracy et al., 2020), and perceive their group as providing a potentially benevolent social context in which to pursue common interests and goals. Moreover, according to the *defensive aggregation* principle (Hamilton, 1971), groups are typically perceived as more resourceful and powerful than a single individual, and congregating with conspecifics can diminish the adverse psychological effects of stressors. For these reasons, in-groups offer the potential of felt security in times of threat and challenge, making them natural candidates for the role of attachment figure. Indeed, Ponsi et al. (2016) found that people tend to categorize an unknown person as an in-group member mainly if the person is rated as being warm and competent.

From an evolutionary perspective, social groups are viewed as evolved adaptations that have played a critical role in the evolution of the human species (Wilson, 2012). Belonging to and maintaining proximity to a social group enabled our ancestors to hunt effectively, protect their settlements against intruders and, later, get better results from their culturally evolving agricultural economy (Caporael, 2001). In social psychology, several scholars have proposed that social groups can be viewed as fulfilling basic psychological needs. For example, in line with our reasoning, Brewer (2008) emphasized the sense of safety and security that a group can provide. In addition, group membership can buffer existential threats (injury and mortality; Castano & Dechesne, 2005), sustain self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988); restore one's sense of personal control (Fritzsche et al., 2008), and reduce unpleasant uncertainty (Hogg, 2007).

Different social-psychological frameworks offer different perspectives on the nature of the resources provided by a social group (security, control, certainty). However, they all agree that a group can provide important emotional and instrumental resources for dealing with threats and challenges. In our view, personal fortification (strengths-building), heightened sense of agency and control, and uncertainty reduction are inherent aspects of the safe haven and secure base that a competent and benevolent group can provide. As explained in Chapter 1, these provisions enhance felt security, which sustains self-esteem and improves emotion regulation (emotional stability) and goal pursuit and attainment.

Sociopolitical Relationships

The organizations to which people belong (e.g., workplace, social clubs) and the social institutions with which they interact (e.g., government, police), although somewhat impersonal compared with close dyadic relationships, can also be viewed as natural safety cues and thus play attachment-like roles in a person's life. These sociopolitical entities often have the power and resources to provide protection and support, and people usually expect to be well treated by them as valued and respected organization members or citizens. In fact, people are typically dependent on these organizations for safety and security, and having their basic needs met is implied by theoretical terms such as *trust in organizations* (Kramer, 1999)

or *trust in government* (Chanley et al., 2001). For example, people may rely on a workplace for economic security and a sense of worth; they may depend on police for physical protection; and they may seek a material safety net provided by welfare agencies in cases of economic strain or crisis. Moreover, courts are expected to be attentive and responsive in dealing with personal or relational problems (e.g., bankruptcy, divorce), and the government is expected to provide guidance and helpful information for confronting collective threats (e.g., a pandemic, climate change) and to set regulations that guarantee citizens' rights, autonomy, and thriving.

This dependence makes people feel as though organizations have significantly more power (both to reward and to punish) than they themselves do, which predisposes them to choose to belong to and interact with benevolent organizations that, like in-groups, can provide protection and support. For example, people may choose to be employed by an organization that they believe will care about their welfare, and citizens may prefer to interact and comply with social institutions that are responsive to their needs and interests (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Tyler, 2006). As a result, in times of need, people may increase their emotional connection with, and reliance on, what they perceive to be a benevolent and powerful sociopolitical entity.

In the first volume of his trilogy on attachment, Bowlby (1969/1982) raised the possibility that adolescents and adults seek protection and support in times of need from not only close relationship partners but also informal social groups and more formal organizations:

During adolescence and adult life a measure of attachment behavior is commonly directed not only towards persons outside the family but also towards groups and institutions other than the family. A school or college, a work group, a religious group or a political group can come to constitute for many people a subordinate attachment "figure," and for some people a principal attachment "figure." In such cases, it seems probable, the development of attachment to a group is mediated, at least initially, by attachment to a person holding a prominent position within that group. Thus, for many, a citizen's attachment to his state is a derivative of and initially dependent on his attachment to its sovereign or president. (p. 207)

This view of social organizations and institutions as natural candidates for attachment-like relationships is in line with many philosophical, sociological, and psychological analyses that stress the supportive and empowering roles of the many social and governmental institutions that humans have created throughout history to furnish them with better protection of their rights and livelihood (e.g., Durkheim, 1973; Fromm, 1941; Stagner, 1988). Similar arguments were made by Feshbach (1991) in his discussion of political ideology: "The nation-terrain, government, customs, with its connotation of father as protector and mother as source of nurturance, offers a socially acceptable context in which early attachment needs can be expressed and analogous reinforcement obtained" (p. 211).

Religious/Spiritual Relationships

The idea that core aspects of religious experience and behavior can be understood within an attachment framework was pioneered by Kirkpatrick (1994, 2005) and further elaborated and extended by Granqvist (2020) in what they called a *religion-as-attachment model*. In particular, they proposed that believers are most likely to perceive God as a powerful, infallible, and benevolent force and expect God to provide a safe haven ("Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me"; Psalm 23:4) and a

secure base in times of need (e.g., “On the day I called, you answered me and made me bold with strength in my soul”; Psalm 138:3). According to Granqvist (2020), God is perceived as a natural cue of safety, and believers are therefore likely to form an attachment relationship with this supernatural figure.

There are several phenotypic resemblances between parent-child and God-believer relationships that underlie the formation of an attachment relationship with God. In most theistic faith traditions, being a religious person or believer implies that one has a “personal relationship” with God (Granqvist, 2020). This relational connotation corresponds with how people evaluate their own faith. For example, when asked to answer a survey question about what is most central to their view of “faith”—“a set of beliefs; membership in a church or synagogue; finding meaning in life; or a relationship with God”—the majority of a representative sample of Americans chose “a relationship with God” (Gallup & Jones, 1989).

In addition, like parents, God is perceived by believers to be a “stronger and wiser” figure who has created everything, has the power to solve any problem, and is capable of protecting and supporting them when they face threats and challenges. This idea is central to theological doctrines in which God is described as omnipotent (able to do anything), omniscient (knows everything), and omnipresent (is everywhere). As Kaufman (1981), an important American theologian, wrote, “The idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment-figure. . . . God is thought of as a protective parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need” (p. 67). God’s omnipotence converts “him” into the perfect cue of safety. God, unlike parents, is perceived as infallible, perfectly trustworthy, not affected by physical ailments that can weaken “his” power, and immune to decay and death.

In most theistic faith traditions, religious people also believe that when they are facing threats and difficulties, God will not just be able to help but will also want to help. In other words, God is expected to be omnibenevolent (all good)—a kind and loving figure who is willing to protect and support believers in times of need. This is the most common image of God that appears in religious texts. Wenegrat (1989) noted, for example, a remarkable degree of this kind of imagery in the Psalms of the old testament (e.g., Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”). Factor-analytic studies of believers’ God images consistently reveal a large main factor laden with descriptors of a benevolent figure, characterized by words such as *comforting*, *loving*, *protective*, and *caring* (see Granqvist, 2020, for a review). For example, Tamayo and Desjardins (1976) found that the major factor underlying images of God contains items such as “who gives comfort,” “always ready with open arms,” and “who will take loving care of me.”

Of course, neither the proponents of the religion-as-attachment model, nor we, claim to have invented the idea that images of God and images of parents are similar. This was one of Freud’s (1927/1975) legacies to the psychology of religion. However, rather than viewing God as an exalted *father* figure, as Freud did, we concur with Kirkpatrick (2005) that it is more reasonable to view God as an exalted attachment figure, partly because God images contain just as many traditionally “maternal” as traditionally “paternal” attributes (Granqvist, 2020).

Some Theoretical Clarifications

Overall, across relationships, parents, friends, romantic partners, people who are experts or leaders in particular domains, pets, in-groups, sociopolitical entities we depend on for safety and support, and supernatural figures, can be categorized as warm and competent

and therefore be viewed as possibly serving attachment functions. However, although we can form attachment-like relationships with this wide variety of human and nonhuman figures, it is important not to equate security dynamics too readily with all kinds of social relationships and not to assimilate all of the different kinds of relationships to a single construct. We therefore need to provide some theoretical clarifications before applying our model of security dynamics to different kinds of relationships.

Our expansion of attachment theory does not imply that every interaction with a close relationship partner, expert or leader, pet, group, sociopolitical entity, or supernatural figure is an attachment-based interaction. In fact, people can turn to these figures for many non-attachment reasons. Romantic or marital partners can go to dinner together or take a walk in the park, laugh at each other's jokes and pranks, clean house together, and so forth, without attachment issues necessarily coming to the fore (although these kinds of positive interactions might help to cement or maintain a bond between the partners, because they provide evidence of benevolence, affection, trustworthiness, and special attention). Moreover, in relations between an athlete and his or her coach, many of the interactions may be concerned with teaching, criticism, and so on, without the potential attachment aspects of the relationship being salient. Even in a therapeutic relationship, where one person is officially coming to the other for support and guidance, there are moments of information exchange (e.g., about vacations or movies or bus lines) or mutual joking and kibitzing that do not necessarily serve attachment functions. Similarly, people can approach social groups for non-attachment reasons (e.g., learning, accomplishing group tasks, having fun).

We are saying only that during times of insecurity and need, all of these warm and competent figures can be approached and experienced as potential sources of a safe haven and secure base. And once a person comes to rely on a particular such figure, it creates conditions for possible pain, anger, or grief if the relationship ends or doesn't work out as desired.

We're also not saying that all of the different kinds of relationships possess identical characteristics or serve exactly the same functions. We are saying only that although these relationships cannot all be placed in the same narrow category, all provide opportunities for sustaining and reinforcing felt security in times of need. Take, for example, the client-therapist relationship and compare it with the relationship that clients have with their romantic partner. The client-therapist relationship is more delimited, less sexualized (we hope), and less broadly emotionally involving than a romantic relationship. And it is characterized by unique temporal, financial, logistical, and ethical boundaries (Farber et al., 1995). Moreover, although each client clearly does and should matter to the therapist as a valuable human being, a therapist's investment in any particular client is not likely to be as intense or prolonged as romantic partners' investment in each other. This difference is likely to be important in allowing the therapist to maintain an objective, therapeutic stance. However, despite these important differences, clients tend to perceive both a therapist and a romantic partner as warm and competent figures and to form attachments or attachment-like relationships with them.

Turning to higher levels of social organization, whereas a close dyadic relationship partner can provide personalized support that is tailored to one's specific emotional needs, groups and organizations are better equipped to provide depersonalized resources, cooperation, and aid, and to protect all of its members from major collective threats and natural and human-made disasters (Brewer, 2007). Still, both of them can function as a safe haven and secure base for a person in need. Moreover, whereas in a dyadic relationship there is an identifiable unique person (e.g., friend, spouse, teacher) to whom one can turn in times of need, no *personification* of an attachment figure exists in many group and sociopolitical

relationships, unless attachment is focused on the leader. Similarly, in religious/spiritual relationships, believers do not have a corporeal, visible, and audible figure that can physically hug or touch them in times of need, but believers sense the immanent presence of a loving and caring supernatural force that can soothe and fortify them (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

According to Granqvist (2020), attachment-like relationships with groups, organizations, or supernatural figures are possible due to the development of two cognitive capacities: symbolic thought and what developmental psychologists call “theory of mind” (an ability to imagine and conceptualize mental states). These capacities jointly allow adolescents and adults to attribute agency, intentions, and social-interaction capacities to abstract entities and unseen others (e.g., government, God); that is, they can anthropomorphize these figures and assign human-like qualities to them (e.g., reliable, supportive, rejecting). They can then react emotionally to these abstract entities in the same way they react to human relationship partners (e.g., feeling good when their needs for safety and security are met).

Another developmental process that may underlie the extension of security dynamics beyond intimate dyadic relationships is the shift from physical proximity to psychological closeness as the primary attachment strategy. Whereas infants need to be physically close to their caregiver in order to feel safe and secure, older children, adolescents, and adults can sustain felt security by experiencing feelings of emotional connection with, or creating accessible images, thoughts, or memories of, a supportive attachment figure, even if the figure is not physically present. Once this shift has been made, attachment needs can be targeted to an image of a security provider rather than to a concrete person, although often some concrete figure is associated with or is the subject of that image. Just as an image of the mother may comfort a child suffering from a stomachache, the image of a responsive, dependable government may comfort a citizen facing the disaster wreaked by a tornado. Therefore, even if people do not always have a corporeal person toward whom to direct their attachment behavior, we need not refrain from applying the term *security dynamics* to groups, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships.

Our reasoning also does not imply that the neurophysiology involved in attachment-like processes is the same across all of the different kinds of relationships we are considering. It seems likely that the same brain processes underlying threat detection, arousal, proximity seeking, and relief are involved across relationships (see Chapters 4 and 6). However, there are probably particular brain and hormonal processes that are not common to all forms of attachment. Take, for example, the case of romantic love. This kind of relationship involves brain processes underlying infatuation, sexual drives, and romantic/sexual jealousy that are probably absent in other kinds of attachment-like relationships. Furthermore, the case of “attachment” to sugary foods and mind-altering drugs, which can be viewed in terms of addiction as well as attachment, might involve unique, domain-specific brain processes that go beyond the basic distress-relief cycle that characterizes all kinds of attachment relationships (see Chapter 7, for a review of relevant evidence). These issues remain to be clarified by research.

It’s also important to note that not all of the different kinds of attachment-like relationships are equally important in a person’s network of attachment figures. Rather, as explained earlier, these figures are likely organized roughly in a mental hierarchy (Bretherton, 1985), with close relationship partners being the principal or central attachment figures, and other people, pets, groups, sociopolitical entities, and supernatural figures occupying subsidiary or secondary roles. However, the relative importance of an attachment figure may vary depending on the threats and challenges a person is currently facing and the resources he or she seeks in order to maintain felt security. Specifically, the relative importance of an attachment figure depends on the extent to which this figure is appraised

as having the expertise and resources (i.e., being wise and strong) to provide the support a person needs in a given context. It also depends on the extent to which a figure is trusted and perceived as benevolent in a given context. Therefore, although people typically address their attachment needs to their principal attachment figure or figures, they can still seek proximity to other attachment figures that are better equipped to provide the needed safe-haven and secure-base resources in a given context. Addictive drugs, once again, are a special case. Once addicted, a person can elevate acquisition and use of a drug to a point where all other considerations, perhaps life itself, are pushed aside.

Finally, we should be aware that interpreting a person, pet, group, organization, or supernatural force as a natural safety cue only encourages people to turn to this figure for the sake of protection and support, and to form an attachment-like relationship with him, her, or it. It does not necessarily imply that feeling close to or thinking about this figure automatically results in felt security. Only when people learn during interactions with a potentially warm and benevolent figure that he or she is actually responsive to their proximity-seeking bids and effectively provides safe-haven and secure-base support do they gradually increase their confidence that the figure will be available when needed. Only then can people feel safe and secure when the figure is physically or symbolically available. In the next section, we elaborate on this learning process (*safety conditioning*), which not only transforms potential attachment figures into actual sources of felt security but also provides a basis for becoming attached to otherwise neutral objects or places that are associated with felt security.

In summary, we are not saying that being attached to an expert or leader, pet, group, organization, or supernatural force is identical to being attached to a close dyadic relationship partner. We are arguing only that the construct of security dynamics, based on attachment theory, can explain some of a person's most important thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in all of these different kinds of relationships. Focusing on security dynamics, and on what we have learned about them while studying primary attachment relationships, gives us a useful set of concepts, foci, and research tools to explore and understand attachment-like processes. Moreover, attachment theory's central constructs of safe haven and secure base alert us to consider the quality of attachment and attachment-like relationships in terms of the extent to which both outcomes are or are not being attained. And they encourage us to consider how well a given attachment figure contributes to both outcomes. A leader who cares only about frightening followers into becoming dependent on or attached to him or her, or an object or substance (e.g., opioid) to which a person becomes addicted, does not provide what attachment theory refers to as a "secure base for exploration" (see Chapter 7, for a more extended discussion).

Safety Conditioning: Associating Initially Unfamiliar People or Objects with Felt Security

Besides attachments forming "naturally" or automatically, as we have described thus far, new attachments to individuals, groups, or other entities (God, a nation), objects (a pacifier, drugs), or places can be formed through a *safety conditioning* process (Bosmans et al., 2020). In a typical safety conditioning experiment, participants experience an aversive stimulus (e.g., electric shock) on a particular trial unless the trial is immediately preceded by a particular neutral stimulus (e.g., a blue light). Over trials, the fear reaction to an upcoming shock trial is reduced in the presence of the blue light, which becomes a safety cue. Through classical conditioning, the fear reaction can also be reduced in the presence of other stimuli that are repeatedly paired with the safety cue (e.g., a specific sound that appears together

with the blue light). In this way, any stimulus repeatedly associated with threat prevention becomes a learned safety cue.

In the attachment domain, a responsive person, pet, group, or organization that repeatedly provides safe-haven and secure-base support in times of need can become a learned safety cue and can produce anticipatory felt security. Similarly, consuming a drug such as heroin or sensing the presence of a loving God, if this consistently produces feelings of relief and comfort, can become a learned safety cue that a person turns to when threatened. In fact, any object (e.g., a particular commercial brand, a particular food) or place (e.g., one's car, parents' home) that is repeatedly associated with a responsive attachment figure or some other form of distress alleviation can become a target of proximity seeking in times of need; that is, they become *secure objects* or *places*. Similarly, any nostalgic memory of positive social interactions or close relationships that consistently alleviates distress can become an intrapsychic source of safety and security which a person reactivates mentally in times of need (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019).

In this way, certain objects, commercial brands, foods, places, and substances that are not natural cues of safety can become learned safety cues. This kind of safety conditioning is evident even in early childhood in the form of strong attachment to blankets, soft objects, and pacifiers (Winnicott [1953] called these *transitional objects*). From a psychoanalytic perspective, a transitional object is a symbol of the parent, "which has a soothing and/or comforting effect primarily at bed time and times of anxiety, illness, etc." (Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974, p. 382). Ainsworth (1979) noted that proximity-seeking bids may be redirected from mother to an inanimate object (e.g., a favorite "blankie") when the mother is unavailable. In Ainsworth's view, attachment to inanimate objects originates in their associations with mother; and the objects' positive characteristics, such as softness and warmth, may enhance their desirability as sources of comfort. The reexperiencing of comfort originally supplied by mother in times of need reinforces the use of a transitional object as a distress buffer, especially when a child is alone.

Using a classical conditioning procedure, Beckes et al. (2010) provided support for the hypothesis that a responsive stranger who repeatedly appears supportive in times of need can be associated with measures of felt security. Specifically, they tested whether participants would be more likely to develop security-related associations to faces of strangers who displayed signs of responsiveness (genuine Duchenne smiles) if those faces consistently appeared following threatening stimuli (e.g., a subliminally presented picture of a striking snake) rather than a neutral stimulus. As compared to smiling faces paired with neutral stimuli, smiling faces paired with a snake produced faster lexical decision response times (RTs) to security-related words such as "love" (the faster the RTs, the stronger the association between a particular face and mental associates of security), but not for attachment-irrelevant words.

Safety conditioning occurs as part of a distress-relief cycle (Beckes & Coan, 2015), one in which a person faces distressing threats and challenges, and experiences relief and comfort in the actual or imagined presence of a particular stimulus that signals threat termination. In the attachment domain, this conditioning process can strengthen the seeking of proximity to naturally perceived warm/competent people, animals, groups, social organizations, or supernatural figures that effectively provide a safe haven and secure base. But it can also convert formerly neutral people, objects, or places into learned sources of felt security.

The distress-relief cycle has a well-mapped neurobiological basis (e.g., Sangha et al., 2020). Perception of a threat initiates a cascade of activity in a network of brain regions (e.g., amygdala, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex), which acts as a neural alarm bell, activating

areas in the prefrontal cortex associated with problem solving and self-regulation and leading to the subjective experience of distress. This neural network also engages the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis via projections to the hypothalamus, which triggers bodily responses aimed at coping with the stressor (e.g., cortisol release). The perception of a safety cue inhibits HPA-axis activity, leading to the subjective experience of relief and the strengthening of preferences for the comforting stimulus (LeDoux, 1996).

According to Nelson and Panksepp (1998), this distress-relief cycle also engages what they called the *social-reward/contact-comfort* neural system, by which threats not only elicit cortisol release but also the release of oxytocin, which reinforces and sustains the seeking of proximity to attachment figures. In addition, the actual or anticipated presence of a responsive and supportive attachment figure initiates the release of endogenous opioids in the brain that counteract HPA-axis activity and underlie felt security (Beckes & Coan, 2015). In Chapters 4 and 6, we review evidence concerning the role of oxytocin and endogenous opioids in mediating the distress-relief cycle involving proximity seeking and others' responsiveness.

It's important, however, not to try to incorporate all of the various components of the distress-relief cycle exclusively into our security-dynamics construct. Oxytocin, for example, is released not only in reaction to threats but also during lactation and sexual orgasm, and it is a common hormonal response to physical touch (Ross & Young, 2009). Similarly, endogenous opioids can be released during positive, enjoyable interactions with warm and affectionate others even in the absence of a threat or challenge (Gerrits et al., 2003). In short, all of the component processes of security dynamics also play roles in other, non-attachment processes; they are not restricted to their roles in attachment. We are saying only that beyond having other psychological functions, these neural and hormonal processes underlie the seeking of proximity to security-enhancing people and social entities in times of need, and they play a part in strengthening and stabilizing felt security in relation to a responsive attachment figure.

Summary

Adolescents and adults can and do rely on multiple sources of security. We have noted the adaptive advantages of an expanded and diverse attachment network and have examined two pathways that underlie the formation of new attachments: (1) perceiving natural cues of safety and support (warmth and competence) and (2) social safety conditioning. We can now move from the classical version of attachment theory, which focuses exclusively on close dyadic relationships, to an expanded version of the theory that includes multiple sources of security.

Extending the Construct of Security Dynamics Across Relationship Types

In our expansion of attachment theory, we are proposing that the construct of security dynamics outlined in Chapter 1 with regard to close relationships can also be reasonably and productively applied to relationships with experts or leaders, pets, groups, sociopolitical organizations, and supernatural figures that act as natural or learned safety cues. We remain open to the possibility that people might also become attached to places, objects, or substances.

In this chapter, we first decompose the construct of security dynamics into four components (attachment-system activation, security attainment, broaden-and-build effects of

attachment security, and security thwarting) and eight postulates (see Figure 2.1). Then, in the remainder of the book, we examine the applicability of each postulate to different kinds of relationships and the research evidence for this applicability.

The first two postulates concern attachment-system activation. Postulate 1 deals with the primary attachment strategy, seeking physical proximity or psychological closeness to a natural or learned safety cue in times of need in order to obtain protection and support. Postulate 2 deals with the affective and motivational costs of relying on an attachment figure in times of need: Any sign of attachment-figure unavailability or cues regarding his or her unwillingness or inability to provide a safe haven and secure base (*attachment-related threats*) can cause distress and motivate coping efforts aimed at restoring proximity and renewing the sense of safety and security.

Postulates 3 and 4 concern the attainment of feelings of safety and security during interactions with responsive and supportive attachment figures. Seeking proximity and support does not always result in safety and security; it sometimes ends in frustration, anxiety, and grief. As described in Chapter 1, the likelihood that a person's proximity-seeking bids will result in relief, empowerment, and felt security depends on an attachment figure's willingness and ability to understand, validate, and care for the person's needs and feelings (*responsiveness*) and to provide prompt, appropriate, and satisfying safe-haven and secure-base forms of support. Therefore, according to Postulate 3, interacting with a responsive and supportive attachment figure in times of need assists people in reducing distress and opening themselves to new experiences, knowledge, and opportunities. Moreover, provision of a safe haven and secure base by a responsive and supportive attachment figure can move even an attachment-insecure person toward increased felt security (Postulate 4).

Postulates 5–7 concern the broaden-and-build effects of felt security: the long-term intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of forming secure attachments. Specifically, the consolidation of a sense of attachment security in a supportive relationship with a responsive attachment figure enables effective means of coping with stress and managing distress, and therefore promotes psychological well-being and mental health (Postulate 5). In addition, a sense of attachment security can encourage a less egoistic, more mature, other-oriented form of love, characterized by pro-relational and prosocial attitudes and behaviors (Postulate 6). This sense of security can also promote a positive, cohesive sense of self and sustain personal growth and a flexible balance between relatedness and autonomy (Postulate 7).

Postulate 8 deals with the psychological consequences of security thwarting. Interacting with unresponsive attachment figures who fail to provide a safe haven and secure base in times of need fosters reliance on secondary attachment strategies (hyperactivation or deactivation of the attachment system) and the consolidation of insecure attachment orientations or styles (anxious, avoidant, or both). These insecurities influence a person's feelings, cognitions, and behaviors in a particular relationship and affect both attachment-system activation and security-attainment processes. Whereas attachment-related avoidance reduces proximity seeking and denies or downplays the importance of attachment-related threats, attachment anxiety leads to overly eager, ambivalent, or coercive forms of proximity seeking that increase the likelihood of rejection.

These forms of attachment insecurity can also negatively bias the perception of a responsive and supportive attachment figure, which interferes with the calming, empowering, and security-enhancing effects that usually follow from interacting with such a figure. On a more positive note, however, as mentioned in Chapter 1, if an insecure person does experience a steady, substantive series of interactions with a responsive and supportive attachment figure, this can reduce the application of old insecure working models and

allow the person to experience security and all the benefits that flow from it (Postulate 4). In short, beneficial change is possible.

In Chapters 4–11, we present arguments and empirical evidence supporting our contention that the postulates presented in Figure 2.1 can be extended to many kinds of dyadic, group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships. In addition, in Chapters 4 and 7, we review evidence showing that people seek proximity to security-enhancing inanimate objects, substances, and places in times of need, although the comfort that these symbolic “figures” provide may not result in the kind of security that supports broaden-and-build processes.

In the remainder of this chapter, we show how the core components of security dynamics (proximity seeking, attachment-related threats, attachment-figure responsiveness, felt security and its broaden-and-build implications, insecure patterns of relating) can be conceptualized and operationalized with respect to different kinds of relationships. These components have usually been conceptualized and studied in the context of close dyadic relationships. In order to expand attachment theory to other kinds of relationships, we borrow related concepts from other research domains (e.g., group processes, intergroup relationships, organizational behavior, psychology of religion and spirituality).

Proximity Seeking in Different Kinds of Relationships

When facing threats, people tend to increase physical proximity and psychological closeness to an attachment figure and seek this person’s protection and support (Postulate 1). As described in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.2), psychological closeness is manifested in emotional connection with a relationship partner; associated feelings of affection, togetherness, and interdependence; and inclusion of the partner in the self (e.g., perceiving that one shares characteristics, feelings, beliefs, and inclinations with a partner). In other words, when experiencing psychological closeness, one’s self is represented as part of a relationship and a partner’s resources are experienced, to some extent, as one’s own (Aron & Aron, 2006).

People can also maintain physical proximity and psychological closeness to a social group or organization and rely on it in times of need. In group and sociopolitical relationships, maintaining physical proximity is manifested in engagement in activities with other group members and *buddling* with them when facing threats and challenges. Moreover, people can explicitly ask for assistance and support from a group or organization to which they belong or from the social or governmental institutions they depend on (e.g., for guidance, material support, emotional reassurance). These requests for protection and support also include seeking what Cutrona and Russell (1990) called *social network support*—messages that enhance feelings of being included, accepted, and appreciated by a group or organization.

As in dyadic relationships, psychological closeness to a social group or organization has emotional, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations. At the emotional level, psychological closeness to these social entities is experienced as feelings of belonging and inclusion and a sense of community. Hagerty et al. (1992) defined *feelings of belongingness* as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (p. 173). Sarason (1974) defined the *sense of community* as “the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (p. 157). These definitions incorporate some of the key aspects of psychological closeness—the feeling that one is part of a larger and interdependent human aggregate.

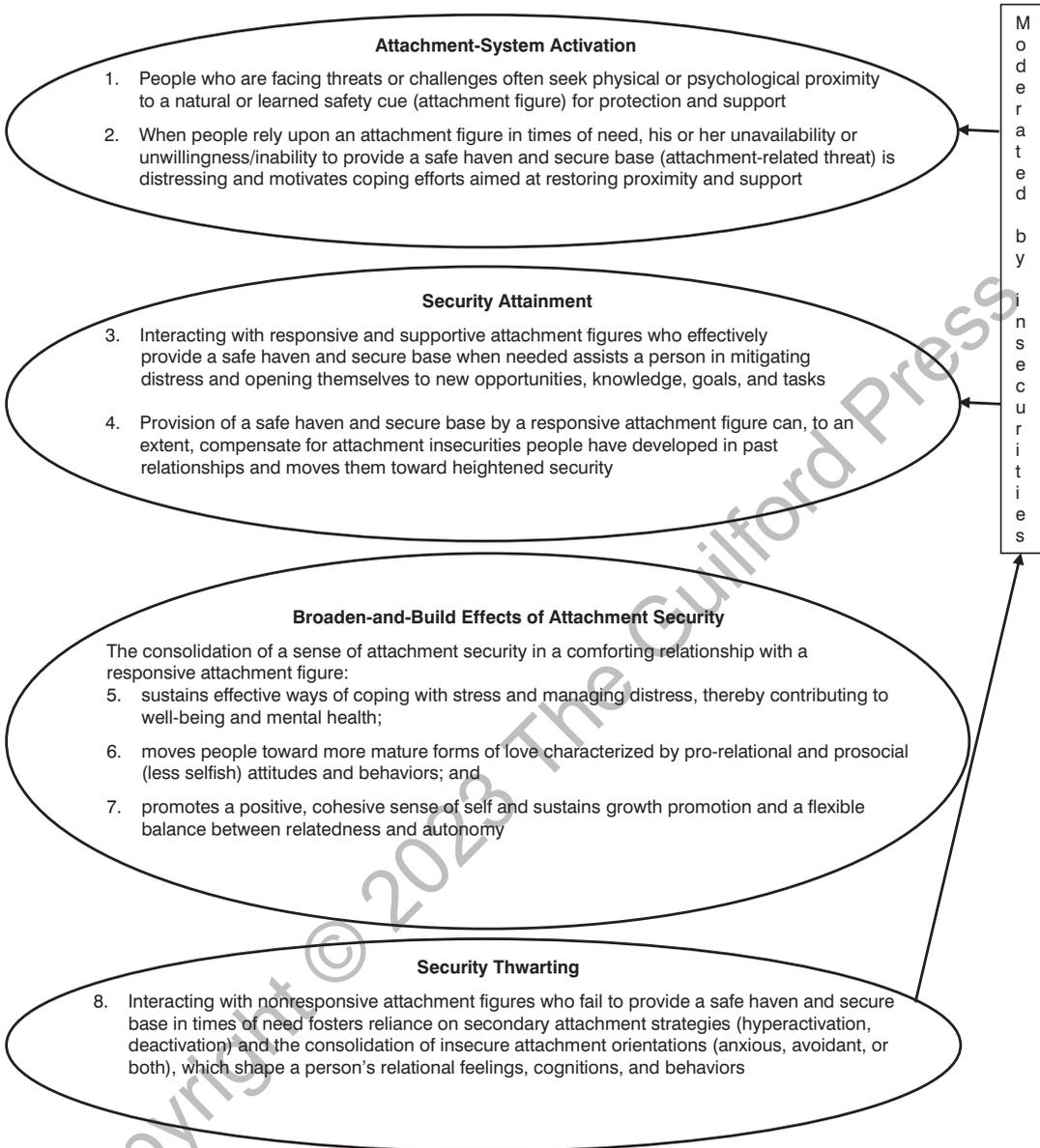


FIGURE 2.1. A schematic representation of the eight postulates concerning the construct of security dynamics.

At the cognitive level, psychological closeness in group and sociopolitical relationships can be achieved by mentally calling upon comforting representations of a group or organization or memories of positive interactions with these social entities (Gabriel [1993] called this *organizational nostalgia*, and Wildschut et al. [2014] called it *collective nostalgia*). According to Wildschut et al., engaging in collective nostalgia strengthens feelings of belonging to a group or organization and a sense of connection with fellows. Similarly, Brown and Humphreys (2002) argued that collective nostalgia binds group members together, unifies them, and distinguishes them from other groups.

People can seek psychological closeness to a group or organization by heightening their identification with the values and beliefs of this social entity and perceiving it as an important, central part of their self-concept (what Doosje et al. [1995] called *social identification*). A person can experience different kinds of identification depending on the social entity with which he or she identifies; for example, in-group identification (e.g., Leach et al., 2008), organizational identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989), national identification (e.g., Huddy, 2001), and ethnic/racial identification (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Despite differences, however, all of these forms of identification refer to a person's emotional connection to a particular social entity, the satisfaction and pride he or she derives from membership, and a sense of unity between his or her self and the social entity (e.g., Jackson & Smith, 1999). (This is another example of “inclusion of the other in the self”; Aron & Aron, 2006). Social identification is captured in questionnaire items such as “Being a member of this [group/organization] is very important to me,” “I am pleased to be a member of this [group/organization],” and “Being part of this [group/organization] is central to the way I see myself” (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Leach et al., 2008).

Social identification has additional cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations. It means valuing and endorsing the goals, beliefs, and values of a group or organization (Ellemers et al., 2004). Categorizing oneself as a member of a group also increases positive attitudes toward fellow members, heightens preference for in-group over out-group members (i.e., in-group favoritism), and fortifies group loyalty—“the willingness to exert effort, pay costs, or sacrifice personal benefits on behalf of the group as a whole” (Brewer & Silver, 2000, p. 162). Behavioral enactments of social identification include selecting, wearing, or using objects (e.g., clothes, flags, pens) that are visible reminders of one's group/organization membership (Trice & Beyer, 1993). For example, new employees often try to fit into a new workplace by adorning their office spaces with company posters and paraphernalia bearing their company's logo. All of these behavioral enactments seem to heighten psychological closeness to a group or organization.

In religious/spiritual relationships, believers cannot be literally (physically) close to a non-corporeal God, but they can feel psychologically close to this supernatural safety cue by mentally rehearsing comforting images of a loving God. Moreover, as in the case of in-group and sociopolitical relationships, believers can identify themselves as a member of a religious faith and endorse its values, beliefs, and behaviors (e.g., going to church, confessing), and wear or use faith-related objects and symbols (e.g., crucifixes, ornamental Star of David). This heightened religious identification can also be manifested in loyalty to the religious community, respect for religious institutions, and behavior enacted on behalf of these institutions.

Prayer is probably the most popular means of feeling close to God and requesting “his” support. (We use conventional male pronouns for God because that is clearly the norm, even though, as mentioned earlier, contemporary images of God have as many “feminine” as “masculine” traits.) Although prayer can also serve non-attachment functions (Spilka & Ladd, 2012), it seems to provide believers with a sense of relatedness to God (“The man

who prays feels himself very close to this personal God"; Heiler, 1932, p. 356). Hood et al. (1996) pointed out that the three most common and oldest types of prayer—contemplative ("attempts to relate deeply to one's God"), meditational ("concerned with one's relationship to God"), and petitionary or help-seeking—reflect believers' desire to feel close to God and protected by him. In Granqvist's (2020) terms, these forms of prayer seem "largely analogous to social referencing and secure base behaviors in young children—an intermittent checking back to make sure the attachment figure has a reason to be attentive and accessible" (p. 50).

Beyond prayer, Pargament (1997) noted that proximity to God is also manifested in what he called *positive religious coping*—feeling strongly connected to God, relying on God's power, working with God as a partner, and feeling confident that God will provide comfort and strength. These feelings and coping inclinations are captured in questionnaire items such as "I experience God's love and care," "I realize God is trying to strengthen me," and "I let God solve my problems for me" (Pargament et al., 1998). Moreover, seeking proximity to God can include *sudden religious conversions* (Strickland, 1924), surrendering oneself to God and placing one's problems in God's hands, and an increased *sense of oneness*, the belief that everything that exists, including oneself and God, is part of a unified whole (Diebels & Leary, 2019). In this way, people can incorporate the power of both God and their religious group and institution into their self-concept and enjoy the protection offered by these resources. They can also enjoy the sense of meaning that comes from seeing themselves as part of an important cosmic process.

With regard to *secure objects and places*, proximity seeking does not involve requests for responsive attention or support of the kind people request from relationship partners, groups, organizations, or God. Rather, this kind of proximity seeking involves wanting to hold, purchase, use, or consume *secure* objects, brands, foods, and substances, or a decision to return to or stay in a *secure* space or place. It also involves mental activation of comforting images of secure objects and places; that is, people seek to reexperience the felt security they have previously experienced in the presence of the object, substance, or place—another form of nostalgia. But unlike responsive human attachment figures, these physical safety cues, which can be used as safe havens, do not provide encouragement and guidance for personal development along the lines of the broaden-and-build cycle (see Chapter 7).

According to our expanded version of attachment theory, proximity seeking can encompass a wide variety of feelings, cognitions, and behaviors, such as feeling close and similar to a relationship partner, identification with a group or organization, intense prayer and reliance on religious coping strategies, and an urgent desire to purchase or consume *secure* objects or stay in *secure* places (see Figure 2.2). In Chapter 4, we review studies showing that threats and challenges activate these different forms of proximity seeking.

Attachment-Related Threats across Relationships

When a person relies on an attachment figure in times of need, any threat to the availability and responsiveness of this figure (*attachment-related threat*) can be distressing (*separation-related distress*) and motivate efforts to restore felt security (Postulate 2). As described in Chapter 1, these threats emerge within close relationships (1) when a partner behaves in a rejecting, hurtful, or abusive manner (i.e., lacks warmth and benevolence); (2) when he or she is weak, ill, or distressed (i.e., lacks desired competence); or (3) when experiencing an unwanted separation from or loss of a loved partner. These threats trigger coping efforts to prevent further hurtful behavior, provide care to and fortify a weak or distressed partner, or find alternative sources of felt security when the separation or loss is irremediable

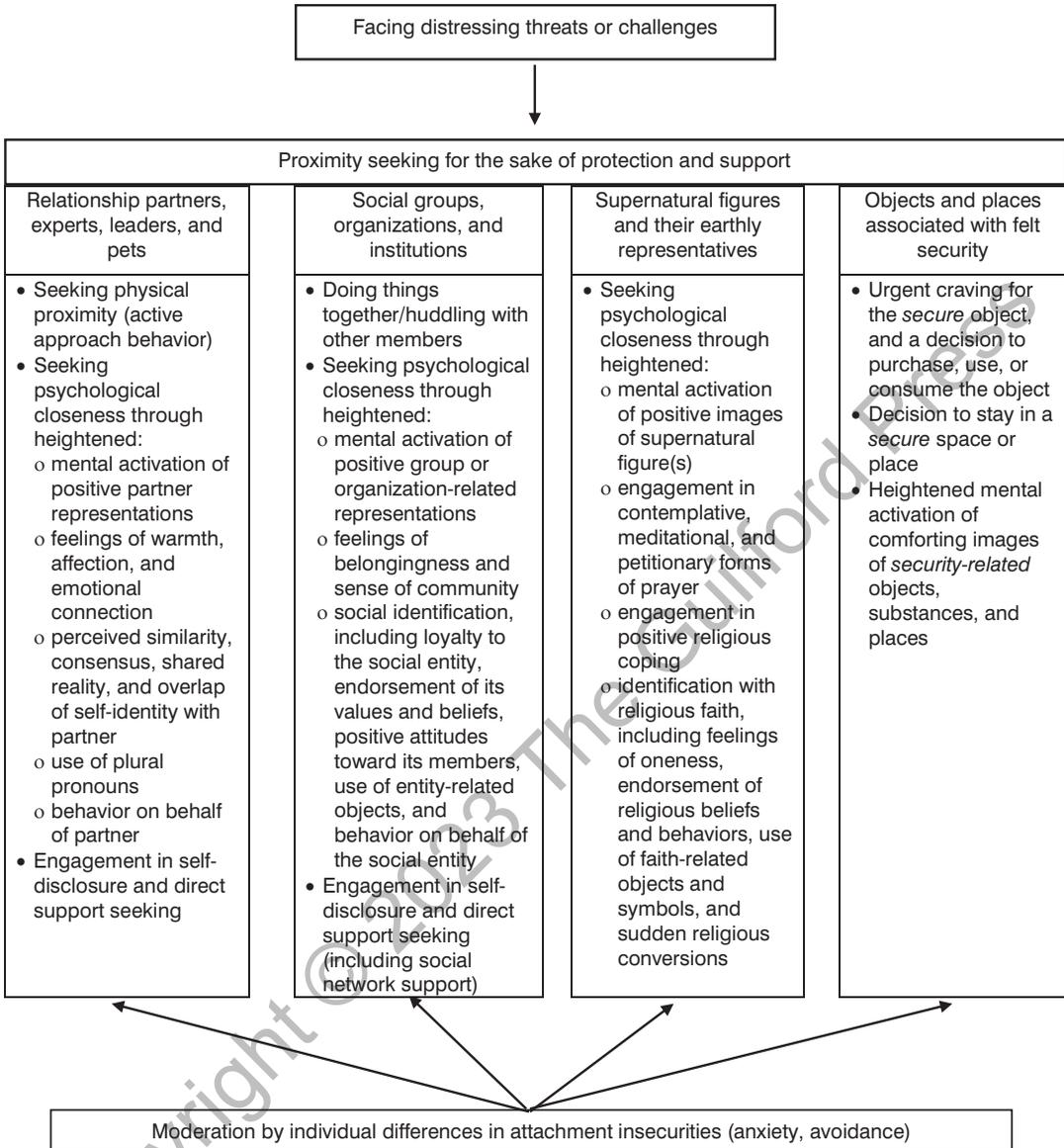


FIGURE 2.2. Expanded proximity seeking across different kinds of attachment figures.

(see Figure 1.3). According to our expanded theory, these attachment-related threats and responses are apparent in other kinds of relationships as well; for example, when a person becomes attached to a social group, organization, supernatural figure, or a *secure* (safety signaling) inanimate object or place.

Signs of Lack of Benevolence

When members or leaders of a group or organization to which a person is attached disrupt the person’s feelings of belongingness, safety, or value, this is likely to be appraised as an

attachment-related threat. The nature of the appraisal depends on the extent to which the hurtful episode shatters a person's confidence in the willingness of the group or organization to provide a safe haven and secure base when needed. A wide variety of hurtful interactions with group or organization members can challenge such confidence.

First, there are instances of ostracism, rejection, exclusion, ignoring, and shunning, when group or organization members or leaders fail to acknowledge, include, select, or invite a person to take part in group or organizational activities (Williams, 2001). In the laboratory, researchers have used the Cyberball paradigm—a computer-based ball-tossing game—to induce brief (2- to 3-minute) experiences of being excluded by a group (Williams et al., 2000). While playing the game comfortably with two other supposedly real players, a participant is suddenly and unexpectedly excluded from the game by the other two.

There are also instances of incivility, a low-intensity and non-physical form of maltreatment committed by group or organization members or leaders (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Typical uncivil behavior includes disrespectful comments, gossiping, violating privacy, or glaring, which are generally seen as minor malicious acts that carry only an ambiguous intention to harm but can still challenge the appraisal of a group or organization as a safety cue. Of course, there are also severely hostile and destructive behaviors of group and organization members, such as coercive physical intimidation, bullying, sexual harassment, and grave and abusive humiliation (Hershkovis et al., 2007). This kind of maltreatment includes behaviors with clearly malevolent intent that are easily appraised as attempts to hinder a person's standing, value, and safety within the group or organization (Duffy et al., 2002). In the workplace, these hurtful behaviors can also be enacted by an abusive supervisor, who engages in public ridicule, scapegoating, and humiliating subordinates, taking credit for subordinates' work, and angrily blaming subordinates for his or her own mistakes (Tepper, 2000).

Another instance of lack of benevolence in sociopolitical relationships is what Smith and Freyd (2014) called *institutional betrayal*, wrongdoing perpetrated by a social institution upon a person who is dependent on it for protection and support. Such wrongdoings include not only the commission of maltreatment and abuse but also failure to protect and support a person when needed (e.g., insufficient legal protection, inadequate services following sexual abuse or domestic violence, systemic difficulties in service provision for people with a physical disability or chronic illness). All of these wrongdoings can be viewed as attachment-related threats, because the social institution is not being as benevolent or protective as expected.

In religious/spiritual relationships, it may be difficult to experience episodes of God's lack of benevolence, because God presumably does not actually reject or offend a person in the same way that people can do (although in the Book of Job, God seems to do this to an extreme). However, believers sometimes feel that their prayers have been ignored or rejected by God (Pargament, 1997) and that they have been injured as a punishment from God (Exline et al., 2014). This would be a case of God not being (or seeming not to be) as caring and benevolent as expected, which might shatter believers' confidence in God's love and support. Moreover, believers can certainly feel rejected, excluded, or abused by their clergy or religious community.

With regard to objects and places associated with felt security, episodes of lack of benevolence are difficult to conceptualize, because objects and places are not intentional agents. However, some kind of lack of benevolence might be experienced when a person feels physically ill or distressed while consuming a *secure* substance or staying in a *secure* place, with resulting feelings of frustration and disappointment in relation to the object or place.

As in dyadic relationships, group-based, organizational, institutional, and religious/spiritual signs of lack of benevolence may evoke separation-related distress and trigger coping attempts to restore felt security. When these adverse experiences are perceived as temporary and reversible, people are likely to engage in relational reparative actions aimed at preventing further hurtful episodes and renewing feelings of belonging, value, and safety. These reparative inclinations might be manifested in willingness to excuse and forgive the hurtful group, organization, or supernatural figure. In religious/spiritual relationships, this tendency might also be manifested in attempts to repent and ask God for forgiveness as a means of once again feeling loved and accepted by God.

Signs of Lack of Competence

Attachment-related threats can also emerge when a group or organization is appraised as weak or deteriorating, or when its values, strength, or vitality are threatened by external forces (usually another group or organization). According to Stephan et al. (2009), these collective threats include (1) *realistic threats*, such as actual competition and conflict with another group or organization over political, economic, or material resources, and (2) *symbolic threats*, incompatibility of values and beliefs between one's group or organization and alternative social entities. Whereas realistic threats endanger the vitality or power of one's group-based or sociopolitical attachment figure, symbolic threats endanger the validity of the beliefs and values that this figure or entity endorses and with which members identify. In our view, both of them are collective attachment-related threats, because they interfere with the provision of felt security by an attachment figure that has or may become devalued, weakened, or endangered. Moreover, due to the inclusion of the group or organization in one's self-concept, these threats can be appraised as imminent dangers to one's personal identity and existence.

Similar violations of an attachment figure's competence can occur in religious/spiritual relationships. Viewed from an intergroup perspective, believers may feel that the value and strength of their religious faith is under siege when God and God's earthly representatives are attacked by atheists or adversarial religious groups (Pasek & Cook [2019] called these *religious threats*). According to the Pew Research Center (2019), religious threats are common around the world and have dramatically increased during the last 20 years. From our theoretical perspective, believers might appraise religious threats as challenging the ability of God, religious institutions, and clergy to provide an effective safe haven and secure base. With regard to objects and places associated with felt security, this kind of attachment-related threat is not common but might be experienced when facing attacks against a *secure* object or substance (e.g., campaigns against drug use or against smoking) or threats to the mere existence of a *secure* place (e.g., one's childhood house being in danger of demolition).

As in dyadic relationships, some people may attempt to care for and fortify their weak and threatened group, organization, or religious faith in order to restore its ability to function as a security provider. These caregiving efforts include behavior on behalf of the threatened group, organization, or religious faith. They might also include what terror management theorists (e.g., Solomon et al., 2015) call *worldview validation*, affirming the strength and value of one's group, organization, or faith; upholding its beliefs and norms; and rejecting and devaluing alternative, competing worldviews. In addition, as a means of protecting their own group, organization, or religious faith, people may depreciate, discriminate against, and even attack members of potentially threatening groups, organizations, or faiths.

Overall, these defensive efforts, although previously conceptualized within other, diverse theoretical frameworks, can be viewed as accomplishing attachment functions by preventing or repairing imagined or actual injuries to one's group-based, sociopolitical, or religious/spiritual attachment figures. Moreover, of special interest here, these defensive efforts can be moderated by a person's attachment orientation or style. In Chapter 3, we elaborate on the intersection and integration of these theoretical frameworks with an expanded adult attachment theory.

Separations and Losses

Unwanted separation from or loss of an attachment figure is also apparent in relationships with groups, organizations, supernatural figures, and *secure* objects, substances, and places. These instances include, for example, unwanted exit from a group, organization, or religious community, job loss, the dissolution of a group or religious community, or what Bell and Taylor (2011) called *organizational death* (complete closure or termination of an organization). Also, people are sometimes unable to get hold of or consume *secure* substances, or may find themselves far away from a place to which they are attached. As in dyadic relationships, these separations and losses can trigger grief reactions, leave a person temporarily bereft, and motivate him or her to replace the lost group, organization, supernatural figure, or object with others perceived to be approachably benevolent and competent (see Chapter 5).

Summary

Figure 2.3 is a schematic representation of attachment-related threats and coping responses as they occur across different kinds of relationships. In Chapter 5, we review studies examining the affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences of attachment-related threats in different kinds of relationships.

Attachment-Figure Responsiveness and Security Attainment

In Chapter 1, we discussed the calming, empowering, and security-enhancing effects of attachment-figure responsiveness in close relationships. However, responsiveness and supportiveness are not exclusive characteristics of security-enhancing parents, friends, romantic partners, or spouses. In fact, researchers tend to refer to these characteristics, though under other names, when describing reactions of experts and leaders (e.g., teachers, psychotherapists, managers), social groups and organizations, and religious/spiritual figures to care seekers' proximity-seeking bids.

For research in educational settings, Pianta and colleagues (e.g., Pianta, 1993; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992) developed the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) to assess teachers' ratings of the extent to which they have a close and supportive relationship with an individual student. Originally, the STRS was administered to teachers rather than students because studies were conducted with preschoolers or first graders who couldn't respond meaningfully to complex self-report scales. However, in subsequent studies conducted with older children and adolescents, students rated their teacher's responsiveness (e.g., Al-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2006). In these studies, students either completed the STRS (e.g., Spilt et al., 2010) or directly rated their teacher's emotional availability in times of need, his or her provision of autonomy (secure-base) support, or the extent to which the student felt accepted and appreciated by the teacher (e.g., Davis, 2001; Gurland & Grolnick, 2003; Lynch

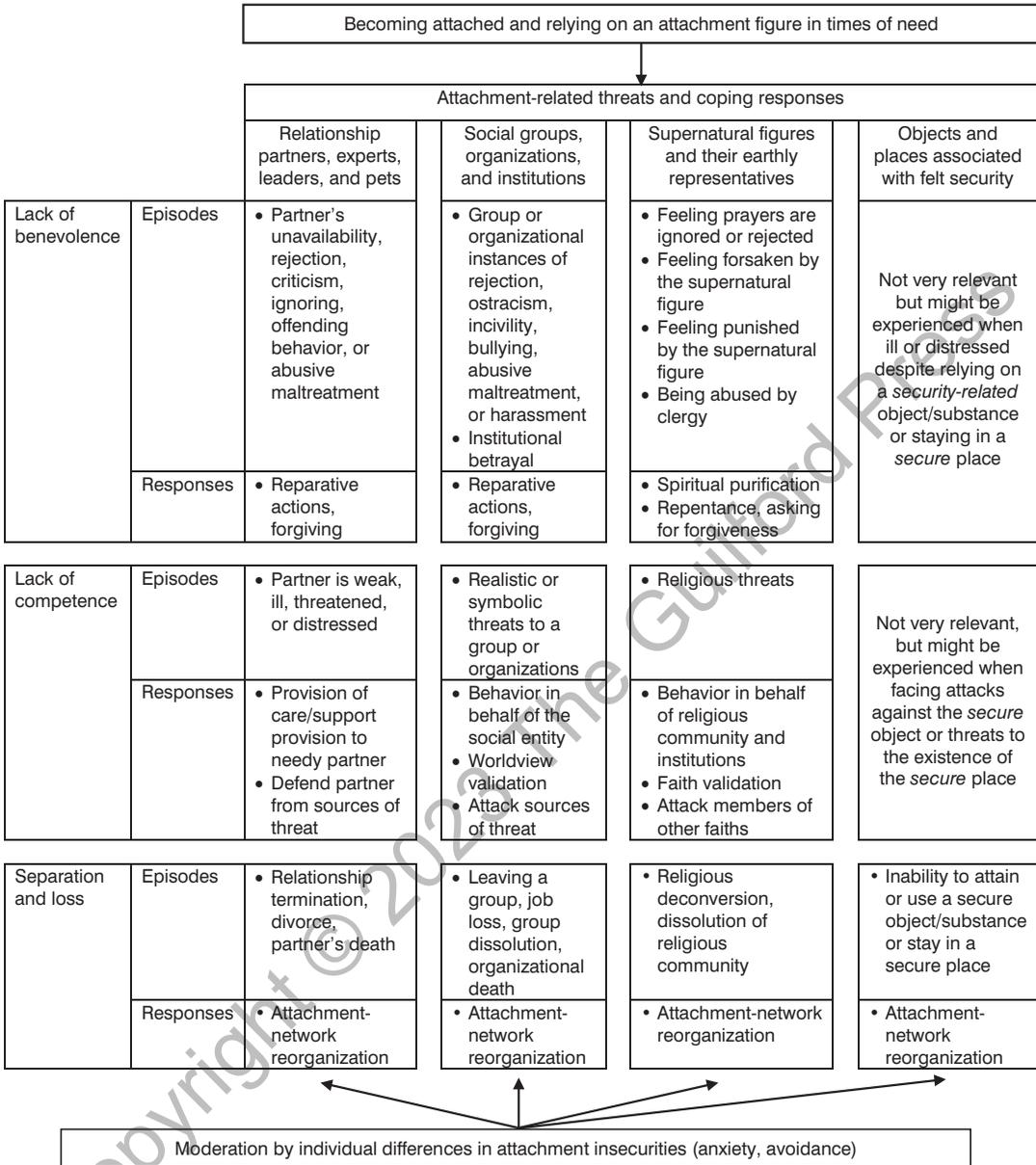


FIGURE 2.3. Expanded attachment-related threats and responses across different kinds of attachment figures.

& Cicchetti, 1997). Others researchers have relied on behavioral observations of teacher–student interactions and asked trained observers to code the extent to which a teacher supports (and does not interfere with) a student’s coping efforts during a challenging task (e.g., Spilt et al., 2018).

Still other researchers have assessed (through observational methods) the extent to which a teacher is capable of creating a comforting and empowering climate for the class as a whole (e.g., Cash et al., 2019). The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2007) is the most frequently used instrument for assessing the quality of teachers’ interactions with students in the classroom. This instrument assesses three broad domains of teacher behavior: classroom organization, emotional support, and instructional support. Classroom organization involves a teacher’s intentional efforts to provide children with learning opportunities, prevent unnecessary distractions in the classroom, and facilitate their engagement with learning materials. Emotional support is indicative of a teacher’s overt expression of warmth and affection and his or her sensitivity and responsiveness to students’ needs and feelings. Instructional support refers to a teacher’s provision of a solid scaffold for children’s development of higher-order thinking and problem skills, opportunities to generate new ideas, and constructive feedback that expands children’s understanding and sustains task persistence.

The emotional support domain naturally maps onto the construct of teacher responsiveness. This domain includes three dimensions—positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for students’ individuality and autonomy—which converge to create comforting and supportive within-classroom interactions. Positive climate refers to the teacher’s encouragement of affection and cooperation within the classroom. Teacher’s sensitivity includes noticing students’ difficulties, acknowledging their emotions, being responsive to their problems, and providing them with support and guidance when needed (safe-haven support). Regard for students’ individuality and autonomy involves teachers’ encouragement of students’ personal ideas and opinions and respect for students’ own voices during the learning process (secure-base support). Classroom organization and instructional support can be seen as additional effective ways of providing a secure base for students’ exploration and learning.

In psychotherapy research, therapists’ responsiveness is measured in terms of several different constructs and measures. Hundreds of studies have assessed a therapist’s expression of positive regard, acceptance, and non-possessive warmth, or what Ornlinsky et al. (1994) called *therapist affirmation*. In a classic filmed session with the client “Gloria” (Shostrom, 1965, Carl Rogers said that the therapist’s positive regard is “real spontaneous praising; you can call that quality acceptance, you can call it caring, you can call it a non-possessive love. Any of those terms tend to describe it.” Several measurement rating scales, completed by therapists, clients, or external observers, have been developed to tap this construct, including the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (Barrett-Lennard, 1986), the Relationship Questionnaire (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967), and the Psychotherapist Expressions of Positive Regard scale (Suzuki & Farber, 2016). For example, clients have rated the extent to which a therapist “listened carefully to what I was saying” or “almost always seems very concerned about me.”

Other researchers have assessed a therapist’s accuracy in identifying and addressing a client’s emotions (empathic sensitivity) by indexing the level of congruence between therapists’ ratings and clients’ own ratings of their in-session feelings (e.g., Kwon & Jo, 2012). Still others have assessed clients’ ratings of a therapist’s provision of autonomy (secure-base) support (e.g., “I feel that my therapist has given me choices and options”; “My therapist conveys confidence in my ability to make changes”; Zuroff et al., 2012).

In leadership research, leaders' responsiveness has been directly assessed by asking subordinates to rate the extent to which their leader (e.g., manager, military officer) is an accepting figure who is accessible in times of need and shows concern for their welfare (e.g., Davidovitz et al., 2007). Recently, Wu and Parker (2017) developed the Leader Secure-Base Support (LSBS) scale tapping subordinates' perceptions of a leader's availability in times of need (e.g., "My leader offers to provide advice or assistance when I need help with a difficult task or problem"), encouragement of growth (e.g., "My supervisor encourages me to live up to my potential"), and noninterference (e.g., "My leader delegates to me the authority to make important decisions and implement them without his/her prior approval"). Molero et al. (2019) developed the Leader as Security Provider Scale (LSPS), which assesses subordinates' perceptions of a leader's provision of a safe haven ("When I am under stress at work my leader helps me to remain calm") and a secure base ("I can count on my leader to support me when I propose new ideas or procedures").

Responsiveness is a definitional feature of at least four researched styles of leadership. For example, Howell (1988) defined *socialized leadership* as a leader's use of his or her strength and resources to serve and empower followers' needs and aspirations while respecting their rights and feelings. In defining and describing *servant leadership*, Greenleaf (1977) emphasized a leader's prioritizing of followers' needs and interests, and investing efforts to meet these needs and empower followers. As can be seen in the Servant Leadership Scale (Liden et al., 2008), items refer to a leader's provision of both safe-haven and secure-base forms of support (e.g., "My manager cares about my personal well-being," "My manager encourages me to handle important work decisions on my own"). A leader's provision of secure-base support is also central to Conger and Kanungo's (1988) definition of *empowering leadership*—supporting followers' motivations and development and then promoting their psychological empowerment and capability. This is illustrated by scale items like "My leader listens to me" and "My leader advises me to look for the opportunities in the problem" (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). The leader as a secure base is also a core theme in Bass's (1985) construct of *transformational leadership*—inspiring trust and respect in subordinates while empowering and encouraging them to "do more than they originally expected to do" (p. 20).

Beyond dyadic relationships, several studies have assessed responsiveness within group contexts by asking people to rate the extent to which members of their social group, community, or work team are willing and able to support them in times of need (e.g., Ladd & Henry, 2000). In these studies, participants are asked about group provision of both safe-haven and secure-base forms of support (e.g., "Help is available from my group members when I have a problem," "My group members are willing . . . to help me perform my job to the best of my ability"). Group responsiveness is also a theme in Edmondson's (1999) conceptualization and operationalization of *team psychological safety*, the extent to which people feel safe from rejection or exclusion during group interactions. Sample scale items include "No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts" and "It is safe to take a risk in this team" (Edmondson, 1999). Because these resemble interactions with a responsive relationship partner, a person belonging to a psychologically safe group feels accepted, understood, and empowered to learn and explore new alternatives without fear of being rejected, excluded, or punished.

Attachment-figure responsiveness in group relationships is also related conceptually to one of the most popular group-level constructs, *group cohesion* (or team spirit and solidarity). The cohesiveness of a group, as rated by group members or external observers, is defined as "the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (Carron et al., 1998, p. 213). Several scales have been designed during the past 40 years to assess work-team

cohesion (e.g., the Group Environment Questionnaire; Carron et al., 1985), the cohesion of a psychotherapeutic group (e.g., Group Climate Questionnaire; MacKenzie, 1983) and community-level cohesion (e.g., Social Ties Scale; Cutrona et al., 2000). Sample items include “Group members get together to deal with problems” and “Group members are willing to help each other.” From an attachment perspective, these scales assess the extent to which a group as a whole cares for each member’s needs for protection and support.

Organizations, like relationship partners and groups, can also be more or less responsive to organization members’ needs. This kind of responsiveness is a core component of Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) definition of *perceived organizational support*, the extent to which people believe that their organization meets their needs, supports their aspirations, values their contributions, and cares about their well-being. Eisenberger et al. constructed the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support, which includes items concerning both safe-haven and secure-base forms of support (e.g., “Help is available from the organization when I have a problem,” “The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work”). Compatible with our attachment perspective, Eisenberger et al. claimed that people’s sense of personal value, well-being, and need satisfaction are strengthened when their organization is responsive to their needs and provides supportive work conditions.

Another construct related to attachment-figure responsiveness within sociopolitical relationships is the perception of *procedural justice* in an organization, the extent to which people feel they are treated fairly by the organization (e.g., Greenberg, 1990; Thibault & Walker, 1975). According to Tyler and Blader (2003), these perceptions are based on four features of people’s interactions with their organization: (1) whether they are treated with dignity and respect; (2) whether the organization sensitively attends to their needs (i.e., whether they are given voice) within decision-making procedures; (3) whether the organization’s procedures and decisions are neutral and transparent; and (4) whether these responses convey benevolent and trustworthy motives. It’s obvious that these features are highly compatible with an attachment perspective. Perceptions of procedural justice have been assessed in a wide variety of organizational settings (e.g., workplace, legal system) and have been found critical for building trust and confidence in organizational support (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2012; for a meta-analysis, see Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

In the case of religion, sensing or imagining the presence of a loving, accepting, and supportive God can provide a form of attachment-figure responsiveness in religious/spiritual relationships. This perception is operationally defined as the “psychological working internal model of the sort of person that the individual imagines God to be” (Lawrence, 1997, p. 214) and can be derived from religious writings or parents’ religion-related messages that present God as a caring and loving figure (Granqvist, 2020). According to Davis et al. (2021), believers can also form an image of a responsive God through comforting interactions with responsive religious leaders (e.g., priests, rabbis) and supportive fellow members of their faith community.

Figure 2.4 presents a schematic representation of the manifestations of attachment-figure responsiveness across different kinds of relationships. As can be seen, responsiveness and supportiveness are indicated by a relationship partner’s attitudes and actions, teachers’ and therapists’ practices, and particular leadership styles, as well as by well-defined group, organizational, and religious/spiritual phenomena (e.g., group cohesion, organizational support, God image). According to our expanded version of attachment theory, all of these phenomena have calming and empowering effects in times of need and can therefore increase a person’s felt security within a particular relationship. In Chapters 6 and 7, we review studies examining these hypothesized effects of attachment-figure responsiveness in different kinds of relationships.

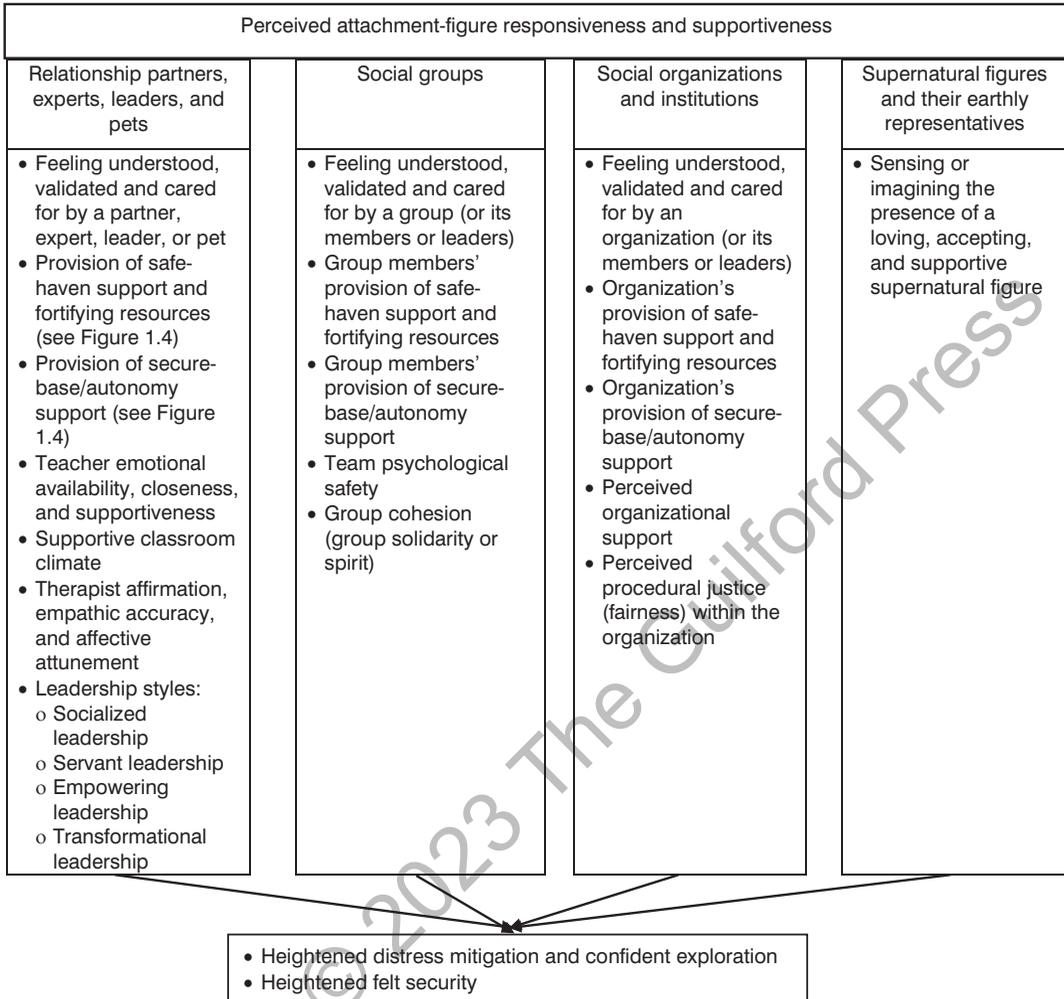


FIGURE 2.4. Expanded manifestations of attachment-figure responsiveness across different kinds of attachment figures.

Felt Security and Its Broaden-and-Build Implications

The sense of attachment security a person develops in a relationship with a responsive attachment figure supports his or her psychological well-being and mental health (Postulate 5); results in more mature, other-oriented love (Postulate 6); and allows him or her to maintain a flexible balance between relatedness and autonomy (Postulate 7). According to our expansion of attachment theory, these security-based broaden-and-build processes are evident when a person forms a secure attachment with a relationship partner, expert or leader, group, organization, or religious/spiritual figure. However, before reviewing relevant evidence in Chapters 8–10, we need to consider how felt security, mature forms of love, and a balance between relatedness and autonomy can be conceptualized and studied in each kind of relationship.

The Measurement of Relationship-Specific Attachment Orientations

As described in Chapter 1, all of the self-report scales designed to assess individual differences in attachment security and insecure patterns of attachment (avoidant, anxious, or both) were originally developed to assess a person's global feelings and attitudes in close and romantic relationships; that is, the scale items do not refer to a specific close relationship or relationship partner but rather to a person's typical relational feelings and attitudes. Initially, these scales included a separate set of items assessing felt security (rather than forms of insecurity). However, following Brennan et al.'s (1998) factor-analytic study of self-report attachment scales and those authors' construction of the ECR scale, attachment security is now usually indexed by low scores on the Attachment Anxiety and/or Avoidance subscales (see Appendix B). In terms of these subscales, a person who feels secure with respect to attachment in close relationships finds it easy to be emotionally close to and dependent on close relationship partners (indicated by low Avoidance scores) and does not worry excessively about his or her lovability or partners' availability and responsiveness (indicated by low Anxiety scores).

With the progress of attachment research, researchers adapted the ECR instructions and some of its items to assess attachment orientations with respect to a specific dyadic, group, sociopolitical, or religious/spiritual relationship. In 2011, for example, Fraley et al. constructed the ECR-Relationship Structures measure (ECR-RS; see Appendix D) to assess attachment orientations within a particular dyadic relationship. They chose nine items from the ECR scale that were not explicitly focused on romantic relationships and instructed participants to answer the items with respect to a specific relationship partner. Six items on the ECR-RS assess within-relationship attachment-related avoidance (e.g., "I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person") and three items assess attachment anxiety in relation to a specific partner (e.g., "I often worry that this person doesn't really care for me"). As in the original ECR scale, attachment security is represented by low scores on the Anxiety and Avoidance subscales.

Originally, Fraley et al. (2011) used the ECR-RS to assess attachment orientations with respect to each of four relationship partners—mother, father, a close friend, and a romantic partner or spouse. However, the ECR-RS appears to be a promising instrument for also capturing relationship-specific attachment orientations to other partners, such as teachers, mentors, or managers.

In applying attachment theory to psychotherapy, Mallinckrodt et al. (1995) developed the 36-item Client Attachment to Therapist Scale (see Appendix E). Its items were generated by a panel of experienced therapists who were provided with Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) descriptions of infant attachment patterns. A factor analysis revealed three main factors corresponding with the secure, avoidant, and anxious patterns. The Secure factor (14 items) reflects clients' appraisals of a therapist as a safe haven and secure base (e.g., "My therapist is sensitive to my needs"). The Avoidant factor (12 items) reflects clients' within-session deactivation of proximity seeking (e.g., "Talking over my problems with my therapist makes me feel ashamed or foolish"). The Anxious factor (10 items) taps clients' hyperactivation of attachment needs and behaviors with respect to the therapist (e.g., "I wish my therapist could be with me on a daily basis").

Zilcha-Mano et al. (2011) applied attachment theory to human-pet relationships and constructed the 26-item Pet Attachment Questionnaire to assess pet owners' attachment orientations to their pet (see Appendix F). Some of the items were adapted from the ECR scale and some from other scales measuring human-pet relationships. Other constructed items were based on semistructured interviews with pet owners, who were asked to describe

their relationship with their pet. Thirteen items tap avoidant attachment to a pet (e.g., “I try to avoid getting too close to my pet”), and 13 items tap anxious attachment to a pet (e.g., “I’m often worried about what I’ll do if something bad happens to my pet”).

Individual differences in attachment to a social group can be assessed with Smith et al.’s (1999) 25-item Group Attachment Scale (see Appendix G). Eleven items assess anxious attachment to a group (e.g., “I often worry my group will not always want me as a member”), and 14 items tap avoidant attachment to groups (e.g., “I prefer not to depend on my group”). Two versions of the scale were created: one referring to a person’s most important social group and the other referring to social groups in general.

Several self-report scales have been developed to assess attachment orientations within organizational settings (e.g., Neustadt et al., 2011; Quick et al., 1992; Richards & Schat, 2011). However, all of these scales assess a person’s orientation toward other organization members (e.g., coworkers) rather than feelings and attitudes toward the organization itself. But in 2020, Feeney et al. adapted the ECR scale to measure organizational attachment, considering the organization as a whole as an attachment figure. They removed items that did not fit the organizational context and adapted the remaining items. For example, “I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me” was changed to “I often worry that my organization will not want me to remain as a member.” The result of this effort is the 7-item Organizational Attachment Scale (see Appendix H), which contains four items that assess anxious attachment and three items that assess avoidant attachment to an organization.

Two different but related scales modeled on the ECR were constructed to assess attachment orientations in relation to God (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). The 28-item Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald 2004; see Appendix I) includes 14 items assessing anxious attachment (e.g., “I often worry about whether God is pleased with me”) and 14 items assessing avoidant attachment (e.g., “I just don’t feel a deep need to be close to God”). The nine-item Attachment to God Scale (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002; see Appendix J) includes six items assessing avoidant attachment to God and three assessing anxious attachment to God.

These relationship-specific attachment scales have been used in hundreds of studies, with reliability analyses corroborating their good psychometric properties and confirmatory factor analyses validating their factor structure (for reviews, see Frías et al., 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In addition, there is consistent evidence that relationship-specific attachment scores on each of these scales (1) have only mild-to-moderate, though statistically significant, associations with the corresponding global attachment ECR score, and (2) are more powerful than the global ECR scores in predicting relationship-specific cognitions, feelings, and behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In other words, although a person’s global attachment orientations formed in past relationships have important effects on a given relationship, they are not fully transferred to a new attachment figure and do not completely determine a person’s relationship-specific attachment orientation to this figure. This implies, we believe, that the responsiveness and supportiveness of the new attachment figure can contribute to the formation of a relationship-specific secure attachment and the occurrence of broaden-and-build processes within the relationship (see Chapter 7 for a review of relevant studies).

Mature, Other-Oriented Love

People who feel secure in a close relationship tend to endorse a pro-relational and prosocial orientation within that relationship and perhaps beyond it as well (see Chapter 1). This

security-based, mature form of care, or love, is also evident in group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships. Within a cohesive and supportive group, pro-relational and prosocial orientations are manifested in authentic wishes to promote group members' welfare, help the group attain its goals, and foster group sustainability. Feeling secure with regard to a group, members can fully enjoy group membership, appreciate and respect other group members, and realize the importance of belonging to groups. Moreover, attachment-secure members can reach an optimal balance or compromise between their own and the group's needs, empathically care for the well-being and growth of other group members, and initiate cooperative and trust-building behaviors that enhance group cohesion and effectiveness.

A similar mature, other-oriented form of care is evident in sociopolitical relationships when people feel secure with regard to a supportive and procedurally fair organization. In such cases, secure individuals realize how their own and their organization's values and goals are aligned, and they can appreciate the societal and personal benefits of having ethical and effective organizational structures, authorities, and regulations. Moreover, their prosocial orientation is likely to be manifested in what Organ (1997) called *organizational citizenship behaviors*, volunteer activities that assist in maintaining and enhancing organizational effectiveness and sustainability. These behaviors include, among others, inhibition of behaviors that might interfere with the fulfillment of organizational goals, respecting other organization members' needs and rights, and being involved in organizational tasks or community-oriented services.

In religious/spiritual relationships, a security-based mature form of love is manifested in a move from an egoistic form of spirituality, narrowly defined by the extent to which one is loved and protected by God, to a broader view of God and religion as providing a humane philosophy of life and a guiding vision for one's personal and social actions. When believers feel secure with regard to God, they may be freed, to some extent, from control by self-interested motives (Allport, 1950). This makes it easier to accept and express the prosocial attitudes and behaviors prescribed by major religious/spiritual traditions, such as compassion, kindness, generosity, gratitude, and forgiveness (Benson et al., 1993). This is part of an authentic and devout religious commitment that believers may develop from a coherent integration of doctrinal writings and their own personal relationship with a loving God (a stance that Davis et al. [2021] called a *healthy theistic relational spirituality*).

Personal Growth and the Relatedness–Autonomy Balance

The move from self-protection to growth promotion derived from felt security, discussed in Chapter 1, can be observed across all the kinds of relationships we are considering. We contend that people who feel secure with respect to responsive relationship partners, groups, organizations, social institutions (e.g., judicial system, government), or supernatural and clerical figures can confidently engage in exploratory and challenging ventures and pursue and attain important goals on their own (without necessarily seeking help from others). In our view, felt security within dyadic, group, sociopolitical, or spiritual/religious relationships contributes to the formation and consolidation of a comfortable and cohesive self-structure, which in turn sustains further personal development and puts secure people on a track toward what Maslow (1971) called self-actualization.

The security-based balance between relatedness and autonomy within close relationships (see Chapter 1) is also evident in the other kinds of relationships we have been discussing. Within group and sociopolitical relationships, attachment-secure members may feel so comfortable with being a member of a responsive, dependable group or organization that

they freely choose to incorporate the core beliefs, values, and goals of this social entity into their self-identity. (This is similar to the concept of “epistemic trust” [Fonagy & Allison, 2014], which occurs in secure child–parent relationships.) In this case, identification and compliance with a group/organization are not desperate means of trying to obtain love and care from this social entity but reflect secure members’ autonomous decisions and choices.

As a result, secure members can enjoy a feeling of belonging without worrying about threats to their autonomy and uniqueness. And they can view the group/organization as a platform for expanding their skills and interests, expressing their individuality, exploring new perspectives, and taking leadership roles that both highlight their personal talents and contribute to group and organizational effectiveness. Their sense of autonomy can also be manifested in proactive attempts to improve or expand what social identity theorists (e.g., Hogg, 2006) call *group prototypes* (beliefs and norms that define a group), to experiment with alternative social identities (e.g., being a member of another group), and to calmly explore potential compatibilities with out-groups without compromising affection for and commitment to the in-group.

We cautiously believe that this comfortable, productive balance between relatedness and autonomy in secure relationships with well-functioning groups can weaken or eliminate the commonly presumed equation between in-group love and out-group hate (Brewer, 2008). Feeling secure with regard to a group can support both identification with the in-group and genuine openness toward out-groups, thereby encouraging the exploration of more effective and peaceful ways of resolving intergroup conflicts. This implies that secure people can enjoy being a member or even a leader of a group and still maintain a cooperative and sympathetic attitude toward other groups. Needless to say, this optimal pattern often falls victim to other powerful forces pressuring groups to compete for resources, territory, or power.

A security-based balance between relatedness and autonomy can also be seen in what Allport (1950) called *mature religiosity*—a balance between believers’ devout religious commitment and their courage to question religious doctrine. Believers who feel secure with respect to God and God’s earthly representatives might genuinely enjoy a close spiritual/religious relationship and fully engage in religious rituals and traditions. Moreover, they are likely to autonomously choose to endorse religious tenets and view religious commitment as part of self-expansion (Allport & Ross’s [1967] *intrinsic religiosity/spirituality*). At the same time, they may feel secure enough to engage in *religious quest*—“open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential questions raised by the contradictions and tragedies of life” (Batson et al., 1993, p. 169)—without relinquishing their religious beliefs.

Security-Thwarting and Secondary Attachment Strategies across Relationships

With regard to Postulate 8 of our security dynamics model (reliance on secondary attachment strategies and consolidation of insecure attachment orientations following failure to attain security), we propose that both anxious attachment (hyperactivation of proximity seeking) and avoidant attachment (deactivation of proximity seeking) are manifested similarly in dyadic, group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships. In the following section, we outline our expanded view of secondary (insecure) attachment strategies.

Proximity-Seeking Hyperactivation and Anxious Attachment

Proximity-seeking hyperactivation in dyadic relationships is characteristic of people who develop an anxious attachment to a frustrating or unreliable partner (see Chapter 1).

Within group and sociopolitical relationships, this kind of insecure attachment is often manifested in intense craving to be accepted and valued by a group or organization and overdependence on this social entity for dealing with threats and challenges. As a result, attachment-anxious people are likely to be extremely concerned with being rejected or excluded from a group or organization, and they may attempt to prevent such attachment injuries by fully merging or fusing with the social entity (what Swann et al. [2012] called *identity fusion*); glorifying it; and complying with its expectations, beliefs, and norms even if this involves suffering severe personal costs or sacrificing personal interests.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these responses are normative responses to threats of rejection or exclusion. However, in the case of attachment-anxious people, these responses tend to be more intense and less closely tied to the actual presence of attachment-related threats. Anxious individuals may chronically worry about their standing in a group or organization and may silence their unique voice and relinquish personal interests, being ready to engage in any behavior, sometimes even extreme and destructive behavior, that the glorified social entity explicitly or implicitly demands from them.

Similar processes can be observed when a person forms an anxious attachment to God. In this case, proximity-seeking intensification is manifested in constant prayer and insatiate seeking oneness with God, which can end in a subjective sense of self-dissolution (Haidt & Morris, 2009), loose boundaries between the natural and spiritual worlds (Levy-Bruhl's [1926] *mystical participation*), and adherence to beliefs in unusual supernatural and paranormal experiences. The desperate craving for God's acceptance and love can also result in extreme cases of religious or spiritual purification, such as *scrupulosity*—obsessional fear of thinking or behaving against one's religious beliefs (Greenberg & Huppert, 2010). In addition, attachment-anxious people may be prone to defending and validating their religious/spiritual worldview, as well as actively fighting against others who do not accept the dogmas of their faith. In other words, anxious attachment to God may be a fertile ground for religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.

Proximity-Seeking Deactivation and Avoidant Attachment

Proximity-seeking deactivation in dyadic relationships is characteristic of people who develop an avoidant attachment to a nonresponsive partner (see Chapter 1). This kind of insecure attachment (avoidance) is evident across the different kinds of relationships we have been discussing. People who develop an avoidant attachment to a group, organization, or God tend to minimize their emotional connection and identification with the frustrating figure and emphasize their personal rather than their collective identity. Moreover, people who are avoidant with respect to attachment may feel no need to be loyal to other members of their group, organization, or religious faith; or to comply with their demands; or to sacrifice personal interests on their behalf. In addition, they may not react to threats of rejection or exclusion with defensive attempts to restore acceptance and love on the part of a group, organization, or God.

As in dyadic relationships, avoidant individuals may construe their group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships around desires for safe distance and self-reliance. They may feel discomfort with, and withdraw from, social and religious/spiritual groups and organizations that encourage emotional engagement and commitment and emphasize consensus, closeness, and interdependence among members. Attachment-system deactivation in group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships might also be manifested in reluctance to disclose personal thoughts and feelings within a group or organization or to share intimate thoughts or experiences with God or clergy. This defensive deactivation

might also be manifested in avoidant people's disinterest in, and inattention to, others' feelings and needs, which might increase the likelihood of being marginalized by their group or organization. Many of these hypotheses remain to be tested.

While thinking about these issues, it is important to remember that avoidant attachment is still a form of attachment. Infants who are avoidantly attached to mother are attached; adults who are avoidantly attached to a romantic or marital partner are attached; and people who are avoidantly attached to an organization or God are nevertheless voluntarily participating in and continuing the relationship despite putting up self-protective barriers to full engagement with it.

Concluding Remarks

Having explained the theoretical background and basic propositions of attachment-related security dynamics in Chapter 1, in this chapter we have outlined the major concepts and tenets of adult attachment theory that apply to a wide variety of dyadic relationships (with close relationship partners, experts or leaders on a given domain, and pets) and to group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships. The theoretical expansion focuses on the ways in which the search for protection and support in times of need and the soothing, empowering, and security-enhancing effects of a responsive attachment figure are manifested in different kinds of relationships. It also focuses on the ways in which the sense of security contributes to a broaden-and-build cycle that can lead, over time, to positive self-development and self-expansion in different relational and social contexts. The expanded theory explains how attachment insecurities, measured along the dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance, are formed in dyadic, group, sociopolitical, and religious/spiritual relationships; how they work in each kind of relationship; and how they moderate within-relationship forms of proximity seeking and broaden-and-build-cycle activation. The expanded theory also addresses relationships with safety-associated objects, substances, and places, although these objects present us with special cases in which an inanimate "safe haven" is not usually accompanied by a "secure base" for exploration or by healthy personal development. We keep an eye on this issue throughout the remainder of the book.

After elaborating on the intersection and integration of the expanded adult attachment theory with other related social-psychological theories in Chapter 3, in Chapters 4–11 we consider the various components of the expanded theory and the evidence available to support it and the kinds of studies still needed to fully test it. The book as a whole is meant to be a useful foundation for future research on the expanded theory and its clinical, educational, and social applications (see Mikulincer & Shaver [2023] for a review of applications based on the expanded theory).