

Reliance on leaders and social institutions: An attachment perspective

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Abstract

The ramifications of attachment processes in adulthood at the societal level are explored, specifically, why and under what circumstances followers form attachment relationships with a leader, and how the variability in these relationships can reflect the followers' internal working models of attachment. It is argued that in crisis situations, individuals tend to form affectional bonds with (mostly charismatic) leaders that function in many respects like an attachment relationship between a child and a parent. Relations between individuals and various social institutions, such as community or state, are likewise portrayed as involving attachment dynamics. The provision of security and protection (the safe haven and the secure base functions) by social structures, institutions, and leaders is seen as needed because of the inherent perceived imperfection and fallibility of “regular” attachment figures in adulthood (e.g., parents, friends, and romantic partners). This reliance on leaders and social institutions is seen as reflecting the normative diversification in attachment dynamics that takes place with development. Cultural and individual variations in these processes are also considered.

Keywords: *Leadership, social institutions, security, attachment, parenting, relationships*

Introduction

As early as the 1930s, Freud (1939, pp. 109–111) likened the leader to a father who cares for his children and satisfies their emotional needs. The simile is apt because both roles, leader and parent, involve at their core protecting and taking care of others who are less powerful than they and whose fate depends on them. This article pursues this direction by drawing on the theory of attachment and the vast body of its related research (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1977, 1988; see reviews in Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Specifically, we suggest that follower–leader affective relationships function in many respects as attachment relationships between a child and a parent (Popper & Mayseless, 2003). We further argue that the relations between individuals and groups or societies to which they belong also reveal some underlying attachment processes. In our discussion of these processes we refer to them as reflecting *dynamics of attachment*. These dynamics do not necessitate the existence of a full-blown attachment bond. Further these dynamics (most notably the sense of a secure base) can be manifested in relationships even in symbolic forms without an actual encounter and even when the relations are not dyadic, such as the relations between individuals and social institutions. Thus, in this paper we propose an extension of the notions of attachment

processes to the variety of different efforts that individuals engage in to maintain a sense of felt security and refer to such efforts as reflecting attachment dynamics.

In this paper we offer propositions as to why and under what circumstances, individuals imbue social institutions with attachment (protective) functions; we further suggest why and under what circumstances, followers form relationships with a leader that reflect attachment dynamics. Finally we briefly examine these processes with regard to cultural variability and variability in followers' attachment internal models. The current conceptualization follows recent trends in social and developmental psychology which underscore the importance of integration of specialized theories and the application of theories and research methods from one area to another (Smith & Mackie, 1997). It is further in line with current theorizing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that stipulates a universal need to belong; a pervasive drive to form and maintain lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relations such as affiliation with peers, close friendships, romantic ties, and group membership. The application of attachment notions, which were developed within a dyadic parent-child scheme, to the relationship between a leader and a follower (Keller, 1999, 2003; Mikulincer & Florian, 1995; Popper, 2002; Popper, Mayselless, & Castelnovo, 2000) or between individuals and groups (Smith, Murphy, & Coats, 1999), falls within this broad conceptualization and the current plea for integration in social and developmental psychology.

To better understand the cases in which attachment notions might be applied to leadership, recent trends in leadership research are briefly delineated.

Trends in psychological research on leadership

The study of leadership developed during the last century through a series of paradigms that started with the "great man" paradigm (Carlyle, 1907), moved through the "behavioral approach" (see Bass, 1990), and progressed to contingency models which conceptualized leadership in terms of an interaction between leadership styles and situation variables (e.g., Fiedler 1967; Reddin 1967; Vroom & Yetton 1973). In the 1980s, theorizing on leadership moved from a perspective in which the followers were hardly taken into account, to a leader-follower relationship perspective (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Kelley, 1992; Meindl, 1995; Popper, 2004; Shamir, 1995). The most discussed forms of relationship are those based on emotional bonds, most commonly the relationship with charismatic leaders (Lindholm, 1990; Shamir, 1991).

Two different types of charismatic leaders were described (Howell, 1988; Howell & Avolio, 1992). *Personalized charismatic leaders*, such as Adolf Hitler, promote emotional bonding with them, but use this power for personal gain only, maintain one-way communication, and rely on convenient external moral standards to satisfy self-interests. By contrast, *socialized charismatic leaders*, such as Nelson Mandela, use their power with the needs and promotion of others in mind, maintain open, two-way communication, and rely on moral standards. A more elaborate account of charismatic socialized leadership has been offered by the description of *transformational leaders* (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), who are characterized by their *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *individualized consideration* and *intellectual stimulation*.

For the past two decades the "new view of leadership" as including an affective emotional bond between followers and leaders (Bryman, 1986; Popper, 2004) has become the central notion in the study of leadership and has revitalized and revived leadership research. We suggest that leaders with whom followers form affective relationships function in many respects like attachment figures (Popper & Mayselless, 2003). This might apply to leaders in organizations as well as those on the societal level (e.g., political leaders).

Brief overview of attachment theory and research

Based on ethological, evolutionary, and control systems concepts, attachment theory postulates an innate, biosocial behavioral system in the infant, whose goal has been discussed as involving maintaining proximity between the infant and his or her primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969/1982), preserving and promoting a sense of security (Sroufe & Waters, 1997), or maintaining accessibility and responsiveness of a caregiver within comfortable limits (see a discussion in Kobak, 1999). The evolutionary purpose of this behavioral system is to promote one's survival by receiving protection from a "stronger and wiser" figure, given that the newborn infant cannot survive on its own. The infant is assumed to be motivated to keep proximity to a caregiver, and to keep the caregiver's accessibility and responsiveness, and has numerous alternative ways, some inborn and some learned (e.g., following, talking), to receive the desired proximity and protection. These so-called attachment behaviors activate in the caregiver a complementary behavioral system of caregiving, whose main function is the protection of the infant (or the person whose well-being is sought), which is activated when there are signs of threat to that protégé's well-being (George & Solomon, 1999). Both the infant and the caregiver maintain a certain desired range of proximity, which may change depending on circumstances. Two major phenomena, the *safe haven* and the *secure base*, characterize the attachment relationships of the infant or child with the caregiver. In safe circumstances the level of activation of the attachment behavioral system can remain low for long periods of time, while other behavioral systems, such as exploration or affiliation, may be activated. The child uses the caregiver as a "secure base" from which to explore, and the child only periodically checks for the availability of the attachment figure (the secure base function). However, when threat arises the attachment system is activated and the child will seek reassurance and protection from the caregiver, who then serves as a haven of safety (the safe haven function).

Weiss (1982, 1991) and Ainsworth (1991) summarized the defining characteristics of attachment relationships: (a) the attached person seeks to maintain proximity to the caregiver, within the protective range; (b) the caregiver provides care and protection (the safe haven function) when the person is frightened or alarmed; (c) the caregiver also furnishes a sense of security (the secure base function) when no emergency is in sight; (d) a threat to continued accessibility of the caregiver or actual separation will be seen as a threat to the person's well-being, and will trigger attempts to regain the caregiver's presence; and (e) the caregiver is not easily interchangeable with another person who may try to fulfill the same functions.

On the basis of the baby's primary experience with caregivers, an internal working model is formed which constitutes a mental representation of the self, of significant others, and of the infant's relations with them. This internal representation gradually becomes a part of the child's developing personality, forms the basis for later representations of the self and the world, and guides one's interactions with others (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

Based on extensive research with infants, children, and adults, three major attachment patterns or styles were identified (see Cassidy, 1994; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002; Thompson, 1999): secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. Other patterns or styles were also suggested, depending on the assessment tool and the age of the individual assessed (e.g., disorganized pattern for infants and children, unresolved, or avoidant/fearful pattern for adults). In general the internal working model of secure individuals includes a basic trust in their caregivers and confidence that they will be available, responsive, and helpful should they encounter adverse or frightening situations.

The ambivalent individual's internal working model is characterized by an uncertainty whether the parent or caregiver will be available, or helpful when called upon. Because of this uncertainty, the ambivalent individual engages in hyperactivating behavior (e.g., overt anger, clinging) in an attempt to coerce an otherwise unresponsive caregiver to be accessible and responsive. An avoidant attachment is characterized by attempts to become emotionally self-sufficient and the use of a strategy of minimizing attachment behavior and feelings in the context of caregiver's emotional rejection. Two underlying dimensions are postulated to underlie these individual differences (Fraley & Waller, 1998; Fraley & Spieker, 2003; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994): *avoidance*, namely a propensity to avoid close relationships and intimacy, and *anxiety*, namely anxiety over abandonment and negative self perception in the context of attachment relationships (i.e., feeling unlovable).

Attachment in adulthood: Diversification and reliance on leaders and social institutions

The intensity of attachment behavior diminishes greatly as the infant grows up (Ainsworth, 1989; Weiss, 1991). This may have to do with children's better ability to function in the world, cope with obstacles and anxiety-provoking situations, and rely on themselves for protection. Since adults are even more self-sufficient and better able to care for themselves than children, attachment behaviors are displayed less often and mostly come into full play in cases of emergencies. However, attachment relationships and attachment processes continue to serve a major role in a person's social and emotional life (Allen & Land, 1999; Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Other figures besides parents may come to play an attachment figure role (e.g., best friends, coach, romantic partner; Ainsworth, 1991), and the different protective functions (e.g., safe haven, secure base) may become dispersed among several figures (Maysless, 2005; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997), taking the form of diversification. In contrast to infancy, when children tend to turn to one dominant figure in most of the conditions that activate the attachment behavioral system, in adulthood most individuals have a diverse group of individuals who serve attachment-related functions (Waters & Cummings, 2000), and they may turn to different figures in different situations of distress or alarm (see Maysless, 2005, for a discussion of this issue).

Several attachment researchers have described the interplay of attachment in adult years (see reviews by Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). For example, Weiss (1991) suggested that adolescents relinquish their parents as attachment figures when as part of their development they become more autonomous and individuated and as they realize that their parents are not as strong, savvy, and all-knowing as they had thought. Partly in light of this de-idealization they look for alternative attachment figures, with whom from the outset they have more egalitarian relationships (e.g., peers or romantic partners). Others (Allen & Land, 1999; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994; Maysless, 2005) suggested that parents are not relinquished as attachment figures but that other persons (e.g., a spouse) are gradually added as attachment figures and, in many cases, these new figures come to replace parents' position at the top of an attachment hierarchy. In other cases a more modular non-hierarchical organization of attachment figures exists without one clear dominant figure (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997).

In summary, according to proponents of attachment theory the need to be protected and cared for and the need to obtain/maintain a sense of felt security (Sroufe & Waters, 1977) do

not diminish with maturation. They become directed towards a diverse set of others, mostly parents, peers, and romantic partners (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). Whereas for the infant, an adult caregiver is indeed a stronger and wiser person capable of giving protection in an effective way, this is often not the case with adults turning for reassurance and protection to other adults in egalitarian relationships, or to their parents (Ainsworth, 1989; Weiss, 1982).

We suggest that inherent in adulthood is the inability of the predominant attachment figures (parents, peers, romantic partners) fully to satisfy the different attachment functions (safe haven and secure base), in particular that of the secure base. In adulthood, though a person's parents can reassure, help, and provide some sense of protection, they are usually no longer perceived as stronger and wiser, due to processes of de-idealization and, in many cases, because they themselves are now weaker and in need of help. Similarly, though adults may have other adults in egalitarian relationships (e.g., romantic partners or friends) on whom they rely as attachment figures (e.g., Simpson & Rholes, 1994; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997), the goal of protection is not fully satisfied with them. Relationships with these partners are usually embedded in an egalitarian scheme, so the partners are not necessarily perceived as innately stronger and wiser and cannot always provide the aspired-for security. Furthermore, in some cases both partners may feel distressed and in need of reassurance, namely for both of them the attachment behavioral system is activated, and they might both be in need of a caregiver at the same time.

Thus an inherent part of attachment dynamics in adulthood is that the evolutionary attachment function of being protected, and the goal of obtaining/maintaining a sense of security, cannot be fully satisfied in the context of close intimate relationships even in non-crisis situations. This occurs because of the realization by most adults that these figures are not naturally stronger and wiser, but are indeed imperfect and fallible. As part of the process of diversification some functions of attachment, most evidently the secure base function, may be partially directed to other entities that can more easily be perceived as stronger and wiser. These include God (Kirkpatrick, 1999), a leader with whom one forms an affective relationship, or different social structures or social groups on which the individual may rely for protection and security in addition to reliance on close others.

Reliance on social institutions: Exemplifying attachment dynamics

The social institutions that individuals rely on for a sense of security and protection may be informal and moderate in size, such as one's close community, church, or close group of friends. In analyses of the evolution of social behavior, this type of group is termed the band or *deme* (Caporael, 2001). Its size approximates 30 individuals and it is considered the smallest configuration that can be self-sustaining for survival and child rearing. Larger configurations in which demes are nested are called macrobands or *macrodemes*, and in the modern era they tend to be formal social entities such as the state. In fact, within the modern state there are several specific formal institutions, such as the government or the police, which serve general protective functions, and indeed are vested by law with such a mission. In current theorizing the terms *trust in organizations* (Kramer, 1999) or *trust in government* (Chanley, Rudolph, & Rahn, 2001) have been used quite extensively to capture the idea that people rely on various social institutions for protection and security, or social order, predictability, and having their basic needs met.

In line with this suggestion, part of the legacy of most modern nations includes a clear reference to parental images in discourse about the nation. For example, the nation or the

state is called *Fatherland* or is described as a mother welcoming her sons (Carrington, 1894/1970). Similar arguments were presented by Bowlby himself (1969/1982, p. 207):

During adolescence and adult life a measure of attachment behaviour 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 attachment to his state is a derivative of and initially dependent on his attachment to its sovereign or president.

Bowlby's words speak for themselves. However in his writings he did not delve into the normative development that promotes such processes. In a chapter focusing on political ideology, Feshbach (1991, p. 211) powerfully presented a similar argument, and suggested that:

... 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. In many ways, the nation provides the adult individual with feelings of security and vicarious feelings of approval and related rewards through identification that were directly experienced in early childhood situations.

In an exploratory study, Feshbach (1991) employed a sample of college students to demonstrate this argument and found that secure attachment to father in childhood (as retrospectively recalled) was positively associated with patriotism (love for one's country and pride in it). This preliminary finding is consistent with the proposition that similar dynamics (the need to be protected and to feel secure) underlie early attachment to parents and later attachment to one's nation. This general notion is not new. Many eminent scholars have quite extensively discussed the idea that the modern state, with its diverse set of institutions and bureaucracy, serves the function of protection. To briefly mention just a few examples, Thomas Hobbes believed that the state provides its citizens protection by regulating their natural aggression (Stagner, 1988). Similarly John Locke contended that the organization of individuals in states furnishes them better protection of their rights and needs (Stagner, 1988). Similar ideas regarding the role of norms and societal structure in providing people with a sense of moral order and security are also discussed in other well-known sociological and psychological analyses (e.g., Durkheim, 1973; Fromm, 1941, 1976).

While stressing the protective role of social organizations, in particular the modern state, these conceptualizations describe the need for this protection in light of the egotistic or aggressive condition of human nature. Namely, they suggest that because humans are egotistic and aggressive in their nature, social organizations and institutions were constructed to protect them from each other and to allow cooperation, which is beneficial for their survival. Notwithstanding this possibility, attachment theory views people differently, as inherently pro-social and oriented to trusting relationships with others (Bowlby, 1988). Hence, the current application of attachment theory to these processes highlights instead the congruence between the dyadic need for protection and security and reliance on leaders and/or on societal institutions for the satisfaction of this need. The

security and protection provided by social institutions and by leaders is not viewed (exclusively) as counterfeiting egoistic and aggressive tendencies, but as supplementing needs not met within the close dyadic relationship. (For a somewhat similar view of the functions of various levels of social configurations see Caporael, 2001; Feshbach, 1991.)

Reliance on leaders as attachment figures

When no crisis looms the need for a leader as an attachment figure may not be activated. This is usually the case when problems are largely mundane and most adults can cope with them; when the individual's attachment figures provide the needed reassurance and protection; and when simultaneously the pertinent social structures function moderately well and provide a sense of predictability and protection. However, each of these sources of protection and security (self, close others, social institutions) may fail, or at times may not be sufficient. In such crisis situations turning to other figures, in particular leaders, is an expected psychological alternative. Indeed, Freud (1939) connected the emotional bond with leaders to parenting relations. "It is longing for the father," he wrote, "which is common to all humans, from their childhood days. Now it may become clear to us that the characteristics that we attribute to the great person are the characteristics of parents, and that the essence of the greatness of great people lies in this convention" (pp. 109–111). Specifically with regard to leaders, Freud saw the relationship with the leader as a projected expression: "... resoluteness, strength of will, and energetic action (the qualities attributed to leaders) are part of the picture of the father" (Freud, 1939, p. 10).

In line with our proposition, in circumstances where one's life is under threat (even when one's attachment figures are available and even when social institutions function well) the activation of the attachment system should render attachment relationships with a leader a frequent occurrence (Popper, 1996). For example, in combat units the possibility of death or physical (and mental) injury is a close companion. The overt, and still more the suppressed, level of anxiety is incomparably higher than anything that can be described in most organizations. Parents, spouses, or other attachment figures can only partially alleviate this anxiety as most recruits do know that their attachment figures cannot really protect them in these circumstances. Psychological conditions such as these, provide fertile soil to the desire for a leader who is capable of giving reassurance and relieving deep anxieties.

Several studies conducted in the Israeli army on outstanding battalion commanders illustrate this argument (Nave, 1991; Zakai, 1992). Soldiers clearly articulated a strong sense of reliance and trust in their commanders reflecting the operation of the secure base and the safe haven functions, and gave vivid descriptions that clearly illustrated the family metaphor and image, and the commanders' role in it as protectors. For example, drawing an obvious parallel between the family and the military unit, one soldier said: "The battalion commander is the grandfather, his deputy is the grandmother, the company commanders are the parents, the soldiers are the children, and the staff are the uncles" (Nave, 1991, p. 43).

It is interesting to note that this view was also shared by commanders in a separate study. For example, the commander of an engineering battalion described his concept of professionalism: "The professional part is very important because soldiers are still *children* who need guidance" (emphasis added; Zakai, 1992, p. 33). The commander of another battalion said, "The battalion is like a home, a family, I raise them" (Zakai, 1992, p. 34). These excerpts demonstrate that images of parent–child relationships are readily evoked to describe the relationships that develop between commanders and soldiers in military units when life is in danger. In these circumstances the functioning of the leader, the commander,

as an attachment and parental figure is quite clear. A similar observation regarding caring relations between officers and soldiers in World War II was brought up by Bion (Lipgar & Pines, 2003). See also Gabriel & Savage (1981) for similar descriptions with regard to the Vietnam War.

This process is also apparent in cases of national danger and turmoil when the variety of social institutions do not fully provide the expected protection. This can happen, for example, when the social structure does not hold (e.g., an economic crisis) or because these institutions function poorly (e.g., corrupt bureaucracy), or when individuals' lives are not protected due to war or mass terror acts. At such times we can also expect a strong urge for a leader with whom to form, even in a symbolic manner, an attachment relationship and who can be expected to provide the desired feeling of security and protection.

In these circumstances, unlike the ones of the battalion commander, the leader is distant and the relations formed are mostly unilateral and are typically based on symbolic and representational processes on the part of the follower. First, though the follower knows the identity of the leader, in most cases this recognition is not reciprocated. Second, the follower does not really know the actual leader, only his or her represented image, and in most cases does not actually meet the leader. Finally, the sense of security and the reassurance received are mostly conveyed through distal means (e.g., radio talks, newspapers, stories) and are highly based on one's own attributions and expectations. This is not to say that the leader's actual actions are not important; only that they are strongly filtered through various lenses (i.e., the media, the followers' own needs, internal models and expectations).

History offers many illustrations of the tendency to seek leaders to rely upon when social institutions fail to protect the individuals (e.g., the Great Depression in the USA). Historians, sociologists, and social psychologists argue that crises are fertile soil for yearning for strong, perhaps transcendental forces, and this yearning often merges with religious feelings or finds expression in the wish for a charismatic leader (Lindholm, 1990). Hertzber (1940), who analysed the rise of 35 dictators, found that all of them took power in times of crisis in their nations. Some of the most horrific cases in history (e.g., Adolf Hitler) demonstrate this possibility quite clearly. In other cases socialized charismatic leaders rose to power, for example, Franklin Roosevelt or Charles de Gaulle. For a recent analysis regarding such processes in the aftermath of 9/11 see Chanley (2002).

Franklin Roosevelt's presidency can serve as an example of inherent yearning for a father figure. By regularly talking directly to the public on the radio (the famous "fire chats") about "strength, hopes, and challenges to face," and above all by instilling belief in people regarding their ability to overcome the difficulties during the troubled times of the depression and later during World War II, Roosevelt according to most historians (e.g., Burns, 1956) played a key role in the empowerment of the American public. For many Americans, Roosevelt was the man (like a good, strong, and protective father) who helped them feel secure and discover their hidden strengths during those troubled and very insecure times (Goodwin, 1995). A similar role was ascribed to Winston Churchill in the deep emotional crises during World War II. The British people felt that they could draw strength from Churchill's composure, his self-confidence, and his (in their eyes) amazing control; they felt they could overcome all the difficulties and win the war (Burns, 1978). Both of these examples illustrate the safe haven and the secure base functions of leaders in times of war or national turmoil. Thus, just as individuals turn to their loved ones for comfort and security in times of distress, so do followers turn to their leaders to be reassured, comforted, and protected (safe haven). Further, just as individuals who believe in the availability and protection capacity of their caregivers feel reassured and able to pursue other interests (secure base), so do followers who believe that they can trust their leaders to protect them.

The other characteristics of an attachment relationship are also apparent in the relationships with charismatic leaders. For example, just as individuals (adults and children) evince strong emotions of longing and love towards their attachment figures, so do followers with regards to their leaders. The case of Jim Jones's cult in which at their leader's behest 911 people killed themselves, in the largest mass suicide in history, clearly demonstrates the emotional impact leaders might have on followers. Jones's followers who by chance had not been present at the occasion at which Jones requested his followers to kill themselves wept bitterly after hearing the news. To the surprise of the people trying to console them, they said that they were weeping mostly because they missed him: in the words of one of them, "I wanted to be with Jim" (Gallagher, 1979, p. 124). Though it has been argued that this was not a "regular case" and those people were abnormal individuals, evidence indicates that "the members of the cult were far from robots as might be expected"; many had families and were largely functioning members of society (Reston, 1981, p. 8). History provides many more examples of strong emotional bonds of a parental nature between leaders and followers (not all of them necessarily destructive like the one presented). For example, the blind adoration of Hitler (who was democratically elected) by millions of "ordinary Germans" (Popper, 2001), the adoration and love directed toward Gandhi, (Chadha, 1997), and more recently toward Mandela (Sampson, 1999) are just a few examples of leadership that included strong emotional ties of love and longing evinced from followers to leaders.

Finally, just as individuals (adults and children) suffer and mourn when their attachment figure is gone, so do followers suffer and mourn the loss of their leader. A recent manifestation of the emotional bond to a leader as a father figure was expressed spontaneously immediately after the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Thousands of people gathered after the assassination in the square where Rabin had just been murdered and wept, and spoke of "losing a father" (Popper, 2001, p. xii; Raviv, Sadeh, Raviv, & Silberstein, 1998). Similar expressions of emotional void and mourning were expressed by millions of Americans when John F. Kennedy was assassinated (Burns, 1976).

One of the defining features of an attachment relationship with parents or peers is the sense of closeness, the perception of the relationship as unique and individualized, and proximity seeking in times of threat or distress. These aspects are not readily observed in all the types of follower-leader relations that we have considered. In this regard we have to distinguish between relationships with proximal leaders (e.g., battalion commander) with whom individuals form actual close relationships and distant leaders, most notably leaders at the societal, political level, with whom relationships are by and large not unique and individualized and with whom proximity seeking does not occur in a physical way. Can these distal relationships be seen as involving attachment dynamics? We believe they do and that the needed sense of closeness is fostered and maintained by various symbolic means.

We contend that leaders in an attachment capacity, especially in times of turmoil and danger need to be idealized in order to be perceived as stronger and wiser; hence there is a need for some distance to allow for this idealization. In line with this contention, Shamir (1995) demonstrated that distant leaders with whom respondents never had close contact (e.g., political leaders) were perceived in a much more stereotyped manner as figures "larger than life" compared with close leaders whom respondents met face to face. However, some closeness needs to be nurtured to allow for attachment dynamics to operate. Consequently distant leaders use various measures, mostly symbolic, to generate a sense of closeness, proximity, and familiarity, which encourages and sustains attachment dynamics (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). These measures include speeches to the public in which personal messages are conveyed, visits to ordinary people's homes or workplaces to illustrate

closeness and connectedness, provision of information on the leader's private habits, and more. These measures are enacted to strike a balance between some distance and idealization, needed to ensure the idealized expectation of power (the "stronger and wiser person" expectations), and closeness and personalized interaction that foster a belief that the leader really cares about everyone, including the individual. Both are needed to evoke the operation of attachment dynamics. (A similar argument with regard to the perception of God as a symbolic attachment figure has been extensively discussed elsewhere: Granqvist, 2002, 2003; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1994, 1999.) In the case of close proximal leaders, such symbolic means may not be needed as much and the actual behavior, composure, and personality of the leaders may convey their individualized consideration, as well as their power and efficacy to help and protect their followers. In sum, we propose that a leader who is ascribed parental properties and perceived as wiser and more capable can serve the functions of protection (safe haven) and security (secure base) which peer-like attachment figures in adulthood cannot wholly fulfill (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p. 207) and that this option becomes more salient when these attachment figures and/or when social institutions fall short of providing the desired level of felt security.

One of the implications of this proposition is that children who normally idealize their parents to some extent, and view them as highly powerful and able, will not have that need to assign some of the protective functions to leaders. Yet we would expect that, as children mature and processes of de-idealization of parents start, the need for a leader in an attachment capacity will be evident. This might be especially apparent in adolescence, when these de-idealization processes are at their height (Allen & Land, 1999; Blos, 1965) but the adolescent has not yet formed other full-blown attachment relationships that can provide a sense of security. In such cases the yearning for strong, decisive, and dependable leaders, from the relationship with whom one derives a sense of security, may be quite strong. This yearning may lead to the uncritical adoption of certain dogmas and leaders that offer such security, a quite frequent occurrence in adolescence (Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2000). Another non-trivial implication of the view presented here is that these different sources (i.e., dyadic close relationships, relationship with a leader, and reliance on social institutions) are interchangeable to some extent. When one source does not provide the desired level of security and protection a strong need for security from the other sources will surface. Stated differently, the strongest inclination to form attachment bonds with a leader will emerge when an unmanageable crisis arises as just described, *and* when the social structure and social institutions do not serve the functions of secure base and safe haven well.

The different arguments discussed in the preceding sections can be summarized in three interrelated propositions:

Proposition 1: When no crisis is in effect the functions of attachment, in particular that of a secure base, may be assigned to different social institutions on which the individual may rely for protection and security.

Proposition 2: In times of crisis people will be expected to seek a leader who will function as a parental figure and provide them with feelings of confidence and protection.

Proposition 3: Individuals may derive a sense of security and protection through different sources such as dyadic close relationships (e.g., parents, spouse), relationship with a leader, or social institutions and organizations. These sources are to some extent interchangeable with respect to providing the desired level of security. Namely individuals receiving a low sense of security from one source will have a high need for protection and a sense of security from a different source. Specifically, the tendency to

form an attachment bond with a leader will be most marked when attachment figures and the social institutions do not serve the secure base and safe haven functions well.

These propositions describe what we denote as normative processes. However, they also indicate an expectation of cultural and individual variations.

Cultural differences

In some cultures individuals may be more prone to form attachment relationships with leaders. This variation may be related to core values existing in a given society. As one way of exploring cultural variations, three of Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions are here presented as relevant to the level of susceptibility of adopting a leader as an attachment figure: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism vs. collectivism. Power distance refers to the extent to which societies have unequal distribution of power, view power figures as remote, and espouse compliance and obedience to them (high power distance). For example, Japan was judged higher on power distance than the USA. Differences in uncertainty avoidance refer to the extent to which a society is characterized by anxiety and stress and people are concerned for their lives (high levels of uncertainty avoidance). Level of anxiety can be determined by objective measures such as coronary diseases, use of alcohol, use of medication, or psychosomatic symptoms, and by subjective measures (for example, an anxiety questionnaire, e.g., Hofstede, 1984). Finally, collectivism and individualism refer mostly to the relative importance of the individual or the collective in a given society. In collectivistic societies individuals see themselves as part of a collective, are primarily motivated by the norms and duties imposed by those collectives, are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals, and emphasize their connectedness to the members of these collectives (Hofstede, 1984). By contrast, individualistic societies emphasize autonomy and emotional independence, and give personal goals priority over in-group goals. A comparative analysis of 50 nations (Hofstede, 1984) indicated significant differences among them in terms of these dimensions, with some values tending to co-occur with others. For example, high power distance was positively associated with collectivism.

We propose that individuals in various cultures might be differently predisposed to form relationships with leaders in which attachment dynamics operate, depending on the extent to which their society fulfills their need for attachment security and the extent to which the society endorses the idea that individual leaders can fulfill this attachment-related parental role. It is hypothesized that individuals in cultures characterized by high levels of uncertainty avoidance, high collectivist values, and a large power distance will be more prone to form relationships with leaders in which attachment dynamics operate. This is due to (a) the relatively high level of anxiety in cultures characterized by high levels of uncertainty avoidance, which activates the attachment behavioral system, (b) the positive value ascribed to relying on social groups and social structures as opposed to relying on the self (collectivism), and (c) the tendency to perceive leaders as powerful and knowledgeable (high power distance).

However, societies with low levels of uncertainty avoidance, strong emphasis on the value of individualism, and a tradition of democracy reflecting low level of power distance might have a lower tendency to yearn for stronger and wiser leaders who are parental figures, and may therefore show a lower tendency to embrace charismatic leaders in an attachment capacity. Churchill's defeat in the elections immediately after World War II, during which he was perceived as extremely charismatic, can serve as an example. The British public, due

to their individualistic values and long democratic tradition, are not likely to espouse a strong charismatic leader except in an acute crisis. Once the crisis of World War II subsided, the British public did not have the same yearning for a charismatic leader and preferred not to vote for Churchill. Interestingly, a finding consistent with our argument was reported by Pillai and Meindl (1998), who found that collectivistic cultural orientations in 101 work units in a large, complex organization were positively associated with the emergence of charismatic leadership in these units. Our arguments are thus summarized in the next proposition.

Proposition 4: Individuals in cultures characterized by high levels of uncertainty avoidance, high collectivist values, and a large power distance will be more prone to form attachment relationships with leaders.

Individual differences

Different individuals may have diverse propensities to turn to a leader who can fulfill the role of an attachment figure. Furthermore, different followers who form an attachment-related bond with a leader may feel and behave differently with the same leader. Some of these individual differences have to do with the individual's attachment style or internal working model of attachment. Following the analysis proposed by Kirkpatrick (1994) and Granqvist (2002) with regard to individuals' relationships with God, two different hypotheses may apply. The *compensation hypothesis* posits that those individuals who most miss an attachment figure will look for a substitute in their relationship with a leader. This hypothesis corresponds with our Proposition 3, in which we argued that the different sources of security are partially interchangeable.

Thus, individuals who are insecure in their closest relationships, particularly if they cope with their insecurity by approaching rather than avoiding others, will show the highest propensity to adopt a leader in an attachment capacity. We can expect a person with an ambivalent (preoccupied) attachment style (which denotes high anxiety and low avoidance) to show the strongest propensity to form attachment relationships with a leader. Preoccupied individuals may be more inclined to look for a leader even when there is no emergency and to cling to a personalized charismatic leader. This tendency stems from their strong need to rely on others at the expense of personal autonomy and their low tolerance of any stress.

The *correspondence hypothesis* posits that individual differences in the follower–leader relationship parallel individual differences in internal working models of attachment. Namely, in line with similar suggestions by Keller (2003) we suggest that having established an attachment-related bond with a leader, individuals behave toward that person according to their internal working models. A secure person may form secure relationships with a leader, namely s/he will rely on the leader in times of need but will also show a capacity to rely on himself/herself, and in general will display a balance between dependence and autonomy.

Furthermore, secure individuals, in line with their attachment schemas and general profile of information processing (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, & Enns, 1996; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002), will tend to perceive the leader as positive and benevolent, will have optimistic expectations, and will tend to show a bias towards positive attributions. By contrast, avoidant individuals of the dismissing style (high in avoidance and low in anxiety) will tend to refrain from turning to others, even when in need of help and advice; they may have negative expectations, and they may prefer leaders who do not

encourage an affectional bond. Avoidant individuals of the fearful style (high in avoidance and high in anxiety; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), in accordance with their dependency needs (Alonzo-Arbiol, Shaver, & Yarnoz, 2002), will tend to cling to a leader in a submissive way, showing both dependency and disappointment. They will be easily led to adopt a personalized charismatic leader. Finally, preoccupied or ambivalent individuals may cling to the leader, demand constant attention, show low levels of autonomy, and feel angry and disappointed for receiving less than their desired level of protection and closeness.

In line with these suggestions, Lord, Foti, and DeVader (1984) demonstrated that individuals have a priori schemata of leadership, which form the basis for their attributions regarding leaders. Similar findings were reported by Rush and Russell (1988) and Nye and Forsyth (1991). Further, Keller (1999) showed some correspondence between parental images and the image of the ideal leader. In a preliminary study which examined the proposed association between followers' attachment styles and leader's perception, Shalit (1999), in harmony with our suggestion, found that secure respondents preferred the socialized charismatic leader, whereas avoidant respondents (according to Hazan & Shaver's 1987 three-style categorization, in which avoidance is mostly of the fearful type) tended to prefer the personalized charismatic leader. A related finding with regards to groups was reported by Smith and colleagues (1999) who demonstrated that the three attachment styles identified in close relationships can be applied to categorize people's attachment to groups, and that these styles (attachment to relationship partners and to groups) are connected.

In general our discussion may be summarized in the next proposition.

Proposition 5: Followers may have varied tendencies to form an attachment relationship with a leader depending on their attachment style: ambivalent (preoccupied) individuals or those high on the anxiety dimension and low on the avoidance dimension will show the highest propensity; further, this relationship (once formed) may reflect their specific attachment style or internal working model.

Summary and discussion

We started by arguing that the universal need for security and protection (an attachment need) is not fully satisfied in adulthood by specific attachment figures because of the realization that they are fallible and imperfect. Hence, in line with the normative developmental process of diversification, adults come to rely on other sources for a sense of security. These include various social entities such as communities or the state. In these cases attachment dynamics such as the secure base or the safe haven can be observed. We further argued that when followers form an affectional bond with leaders, such as the relationships followers form with charismatic leaders, this bond functions in many respects as an attachment relationship between a child and a parent and it can be manifested in relationships with proximal as well as with distant leaders.

We suggested that the need for security and protection may be high due to different kinds of antecedents. These could be transient personal circumstances (Proposition 1), stable individual characteristics (Proposition 5), or cultural and ecological situations, stable or temporary (Propositions 2, 3, and 4). Each of these antecedents could be seen as having an independent effect on the tendency to rely on leaders or social institutions for security and protection. In terms of the relationship dynamics we argued that once an attachment relationship is formed with a leader, the type of the relationship, as well as its dynamics, reflect the follower's attachment internal working model (Proposition 5).

Dynamics of attachment

In our discussion of the relations between individuals and social institutions as well as between individuals and leaders we refer to *dynamics of attachment*. These do not necessitate the existence of a full-blown attachment bond. Individuals can exhibit certain aspects of an attachment bond (e.g., secure base) even if they do not show all the other elements described by Weiss (1991) and Ainsworth (1989, 1991) as characterizing an attachment relationship. For example, students may feel safer and better able to explore the academic and social challenges at a new college because a group of friends from home are also there, even though they do not serve as their attachment figures.

In this paper we have used the term attachment dynamics very broadly. We discussed the affective relationships between followers and leaders as involving attachment dynamics and as exhibiting many characteristics of an attachment bond. We even broadened the use of the term to refer to the relations between individuals and various social entities. This discussion accords with the conceptualization of the attachment behavioral system as a “safety regulating system” (Crittenden, 2000, p. 370) and felt security as this system’s set goal (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), the desired end state of attachment behaviors.

However, this view has been challenged by several researchers (e.g., Kobak, 1999; Waters & Cummings, 2000). It was argued that the set goal of the attachment behavioral system should not be conceived as felt security in general but as *felt security in the context of availability of protection in a relationship*. The argument presented was that people can derive a sense of security from various sources (e.g., good health, religious values) that have nothing to do with relationships, so they should not be viewed as reflecting attachment processes. It was argued that only when regulation of security occurs within relationships may it be deemed to reflect attachment processes.

The affective relationships between proximal leaders and followers clearly fall within this general requirement, insofar as they reflect a *relationship* between two individuals. However, this may not be the case in relations with distant leaders such as political leaders with whom individuals do not have personal relationships and where there is no direct face-to-face communication. We contend that in such situations this “relationship” is created and maintained via symbolic means. That is individuals develop expectations regarding the leaders, which if the leaders fulfill (e.g., give the impression that they can and will protect the nation and the individuals) help the individuals to feel secure and reassured. Insofar as various means (radio talks, news broadcast, pictures) can be extensively used to kindle and maintain the relations it can qualify as relations in which attachment dynamics are manifested. (For a similar idea that instead of actual turning to attachment figures symbolic and representational means to attain relief in times of distress can be used see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004.)

In contrast, the relations between individuals and the social groups to which they belong cannot be easily portrayed as relationships insofar as there is no personification of an “attachment figure.” Should we then refrain from applying the term *attachment dynamics* to these processes? We contend that we should not. Several of the most notable defining characteristics of attachment processes are observed in these relations. For example, the derivation of felt security from such relations (the secure base function) may lessen individuals’ anxiety and may therefore decrease their need for reassurance and protection within relationships; for example, when one can count on the transportation system, the health system, and the police there is less need for proximity and closeness to attachment figures. Further, when under threat, people turn to these

institutions for reassurance, help, and protection: the safe haven function. (This safe haven function was recently exemplified in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.) Additionally, when lines of communication with such entities are not functioning (e.g., when calls to the police are not answered) people are alarmed and try to reestablish connection.

Taken as a whole, in this paper we propose a broadening of the scope of attachment notions. Specifically we propose that once the fear system is aroused and individuals are alarmed, or distressed, or anxious, the various measures they use to increase felt security, which are to some extent interchangeable, all exhibit attachment dynamics even when no direct dyadic relationship can be inferred. Waters and Cummings (2000) suggested that the secure base function should be perceived as the hallmark of attachment. Sure enough, the operation of this function is most prominent in the cases that we discussed. Further, the use of one measure may reduce anxiety and fear and may therefore render turning to a full-blown attachment figure (e.g., spouse) less likely. This is an indication that they all stem from the same source. Moreover, some types of anxieties (e.g., economic hardship) cannot be easily relieved by closeness to an attachment figure. A believable new economic plan which is enacted by a reliable government may have far more success in alleviating anxiety and helping restore felt security.

The point that we are making is that though we cannot call reliance on social entities (such as the police) for protection an *attachment relationship*, the affective, cognitive, and behavioral processes of such reliance reflect *attachment dynamics*. In such reliance we see the operation of the safe haven function (turning to the police when in distress) and the secure base function (feeling more secure and able to explore freely when knowing that the police force is watching and protecting). Even certain forms of the importance of availability and responsiveness may be seen. Individuals need to know that the police force is available and responsive (should they need it) and will feel less secure and even actively seek to regain police availability if it is threatened. This view departs quite clearly from the more narrow view of attachment dynamics as reflecting only relationships with people. It enlarges the scope of attachment processes and views all different efforts to maintain a sense of felt security as originating from the same source.

Though we described the different sources as somewhat interchangeable this “equivalence” is somewhat limited. Different sources of felt security may alleviate different kinds of anxieties or may be preferred in different kinds of alarm situations. This diversification is not related only to the different sources we discussed (social entities, leaders, attachment figures) but is also relevant to different attachment figures. For example, a woman may turn to her mother when she is facing a painful medical examination but to her spouse when she is emotionally upset. This diversification has been noted already in middle childhood (Maysless, 2005) and may reflect a normative process.

Other conceptualizations regarding leadership, attachment, and the social domain

Several researchers have previously suggested applying insights based on attachment research to the general social and political context (e.g., Kraemer & Roberts, 1996; Staub, 2003). Specifically, it was argued that a good society should cultivate the same qualities of predictability, responsiveness, intelligibility, supportiveness, and commitment that are conducive to secure dyadic relationships (Marris, 1996). Holmes (1996) stated that politics should also espouse security as a value and should therefore include among its principles respect for persons, the capacity to listen, and the provision of a secure base. These conceptualizations are in line with the contention raised here. Yet there is one notable

difference. In those conceptualizations society is viewed as a context that fosters either security or insecurity in dyadic relationships, which are viewed as the proximal and most central vehicles for the development of security. Notwithstanding the importance of these processes we argue that relationships with leaders and reliance on social institutions for protection are, to some extent, complementary to security and protection gained within a close dyadic relationship. By our argument, the sense of security acquired in the relations with a leader will render the security acquired within a close dyadic relationship less important. A sense of security in the larger social domain can partly compensate for its lack in the close relationship arena.

Similarly, several central conceptualizations have been proposed by others regarding the emergence and the conduct of leaders: the application of social identity theory to the emergence of leaders (Hogg, 2001), which depicts this process as emanating from processes of self-categorization; also the leadership categorization theory (e.g., Lord et al., 1984), which maintains that leadership schema form the basis for the emergence of certain individuals as leaders; and the view that leadership reflects, to some extent, dominance hierarchies in a group (Savin-Williams, 1979). The conceptualization proposed here complements these perspectives in several respects. First, these perspectives focus on processes that clarify *who* are more likely to emerge as leaders, and are less concerned with *why* leaders emerge in the first place. The current model suggests an answer to the question why people turn to leaders at all, and predicts that this tendency will be related to the person's age (younger children will show lower levels of such a tendency), attachment style, quality of dyadic relationships, proximal ecological conditions, and broader cultural characteristics.

Second, the proposed model adds a developmental perspective. The model views the general process of transferring the need for protection from parents to other loci (e.g., leaders or social institutions) as age-related and individual differences in the inclination to forge affectional relationships with a leader as reflecting in part childhood experiences with parental figures. Third, the current conceptualization provides a contextual-cultural perspective, and ties together insights from political science, sociology, social psychology, and developmental psychology. Finally, the current model offers a perspective in which the strong emotions that transpire between followers and leaders can be elucidated. Unlike other scholars, who viewed these strong emotional processes as regressive (Kets de Vries, 1989), we argued that they often reflect a basic and "normal" universal need and as such are generally expected. Conversely, affective relationships with a transformational leader most probably will help a follower grow and develop as a person (Popper & Mayselless, 2003).

Leadership and parenting

Throughout this paper we have emphasized the resemblance between leadership and the parenting processes. However, we examined only one facet of parenting, namely attachment and the provision of protection and security. Parenting, however, includes several other facets, such as the promotion of competence, disciplining, setting rules, and teaching (Goldberg, Grusec, & Jenkins, 1999). When Freud noted the similarity between leadership and parenting he talked about the leader as a father and was most concerned with the father's superego function. It is our contention that once affectional bonds of an attachment type are formed between followers and leaders the leaders may function also in the other capacities of parents, that is, as limit-setters or as teachers. These additional aspects of leadership, which, in the case of transformational leaders include the promotion of

autonomous, empowered, and moral followers, are discussed in Popper and Maysless (2003).

Research applications

The propositions presented in this paper are tentative. Although some of them have already received partial support, additional research still has to be done and the current corroborating evidence is preliminary. This paper is not intended as a review of current knowledge but as a provisional, somewhat non-conservative theoretical analysis of one of the major universal human phenomena, the emergence of the reliance on social institutions and on leaders and the strong emotions that are sometimes revealed in these relations. Nevertheless, the main concepts discussed here can be operationalized and measured. For example, validated measures of transformational leadership exist across cultures and languages (e.g., Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, 1999), and measures assessing personalized and socialized charismatic leadership have also been proposed (Popper, 2002).

Similarly, the two most prevalent methods of assessing attachment in adulthood, the Adult Attachment Interview (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) and the attachment questionnaires modeled after Hazan and Shaver (1987; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002), have both shown strong concurrent and predictive validity (Crowell et al., 1999). They can be used in research designed to examine attachment processes in leadership, and individual differences in this respect. These measures, in particular the various attachment questionnaires, can be readily modified to assess the attachment bond with a leader. To explore the extent to which a follower–leader relationship is an attachment relationship, the criteria adopted by Trinke and Bartholomew (1997), to define what constitutes an attachment relationship as well as the measure they suggested to identify an attachment relationship in adulthood, could be adopted. Additionally, the assignment of the secure base function to different social institutions can be assessed by reference to feelings of trust in organizations and in governments. These constructs have been extensively studied and there are several reliable measures for them (Chanley et al., 2001; Kramer, 1999). Finally, Hofstede's (2001) Values Survey can be used to assess value structures in cultures and organizations. In sum, although largely based on theoretical argumentation, the propositions set out in this paper offer clear predictions and are open to empirical examination. In this respect the paper opens up a new area of research, where the vast insights gained from the attachment paradigm can be applied to understand leadership and societal processes. In addition, the paper provides predictions relevant to the general theory of attachment (e.g., the argument that adults' need for security and protection is partly satisfied through social entities). We should note that a large number of issues such as God as an attachment figure, the role of culture in attachment processes, the relations between individuals and society, and many group processes related to follower–leader relations besides those reflecting attachment dynamics, were not dealt with in this paper as they were outside its central scope.

During the past decade a general plea was advanced in psychology to go beyond the individual and dyadic relationships to account for ecological and cultural effects and their interactions (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Rutter & Rutter, 1992, Smith & Mackie, 1997). This paper has followed these calls by bringing together psychological, sociological, and historical notions in one conceptual model, and suggesting a conceptual platform for a new line of research that combines these diverse perspectives. We hope that future research will follow these suggestions and address its propositions.

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