Attachment, Anger, and Aggression

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In recent years, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982), designed originally to characterize infant-parent emotional bonding, has been applied, first, to the study of adolescent and adult romantic relationships (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and then, more broadly, to the study of emotion regulation and social motives and behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In this chapter we explore the theory’s relevance to understanding both normative and individual-difference aspects of human power and aggression. We begin with a brief summary of attachment theory and an account of the two major dimensions of attachment insecurity in adulthood. We then present a model of attachment-related processes in adulthood, based on an extensive review of the attachment research literature (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). Next, we focus on the experience of anger and on destructive forms of aggression. We review research on ways in which attachment processes included in our model affect (a) functional and dysfunctional forms of anger, (b) domestic violence, (c) antisocial criminal behavior, and (d) intergroup hostility and aggression. Finally, we consider the main adaptive goal of human aggression – to maintain power and dominance (Shaver, Mikulincer, & Segev, Chapter 4, this volume). We consider how attachment orientations and the experience and exercise of power are related. We also present some new exploratory research concerning the influence of attachment-related processes on cognition and action when a person’s sense of power is experimentally enhanced.

*Attachment Theory and Attachment Style*

According to Bowlby (1982), human beings are born with an innate psychobiological system (the *attachment behavioral system*) that motivates them to seek proximity to supportive others (*attachment figures*) in times of need. This system accomplishes basic regulatory functions (protection from threats and alleviation of distress) in humans of all ages, but it is most directly observable during infancy and early childhood (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby (1973) described important individual differences in the functioning of the
attachment system. Interactions with attachment figures who are available and responsive in
times of need facilitate optimal attachment-system functioning and promote a sense of
attachment security – a sense that the world is safe, that attachment figures are helpful when
called upon, and that it is possible to explore the environment curiously and engage
effectively and enjoyably with other people. This sense of security is rooted in positive
mental representations of self and others, which Bowlby called internal working models.
When attachment figures are not reliably available and supportive, however, a sense of
security is not attained, negative internal working models are formed, and strategies of affect
regulation other than appropriate proximity seeking (secondary attachment strategies,
conceptualized in terms of two major dimensions, avoidance and anxiety) are adopted.

In studies of adolescents and adults, tests of these theoretical ideas have generally
focused on a person’s attachment style – the pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and
behavior that results from a particular history of attachment experiences (Fraley & Shaver,
2000). Initially, research on individual differences in attachment was based on Ainsworth,
Blehar, Waters, and Wall’s (1978) three-category typology of attachment patterns in infancy
– secure, anxious, and avoidant – and on Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) conceptualization of
similar adult styles in the romantic relationship domain. Subsequent studies (e.g., Brennan,
Clark, & Shaver, 1998) revealed, however, that attachment styles are more appropriately
conceptualized as regions in a two-dimensional space. The first dimension, attachment
anxiety, reflects the degree to which a person worries that an attachment figure (including
adult relationship partners) will not be available in times of need. The second dimension,
attachment-related avoidance, reflects the extent to which a person distrusts relationship
partners’ goodwill and strives to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance
from partners. People who score low on both dimensions are said to be secure, or to have a
secure attachment style. The two dimensions can be measured with reliable and valid self-
Attachment styles are initially formed in interactions with primary caregivers during early childhood, as a large body of research has shown (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008), but Bowlby (1988) claimed that memorable interactions with others throughout life can alter a person’s working models and move the person from one region of the two-dimensional space to another. Moreover, although attachment style is often conceptualized as a single global orientation toward close relationships, it is actually rooted in a complex network of cognitive and affective processes and mental representations, which includes many episodic, context-related, and relationship-specific as well as general attachment representations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In fact, many studies indicate that a person’s attachment style can change depending on context and recent experiences (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007b). This makes it possible to study the effects of security and insecurity experimentally.

Attachment-System Functioning in Adulthood

Based on an extensive review of adult attachment studies, Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) proposed that when the attachment system is activated, an affirmative answer to the implicit or explicit question “Is an attachment figure available and likely to be responsive to my needs?” heightens the sense of attachment security and facilitates the use of constructive emotion-regulation strategies. These strategies are aimed at alleviating distress, maintaining supportive intimate relationships, and bolstering a person’s sense of love-worthiness and self-efficacy. Moreover, they sustain what Shaver and Mikulincer (2002), following Fredrickson (2001), call a “broaden and build” cycle of attachment security, which expands a person’s resources for maintaining coping flexibility and emotional stability in times of stress, broadens the person’s perspectives and capacities, and facilitates the incorporation of mental representations of security-enhancing attachment figures into the self. This broaden-and-build
process allows relatively secure individuals to maintain an authentic sense of personal
efficacy, resilience, and optimism even when social support is temporarily unavailable
(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a).

Perceived unavailability of an attachment figure results in attachment insecurity,
which compounds the distress aroused by the appraisal of a situation as threatening. This
state of insecurity forces a decision about the viability of further (more active) proximity
seeking as a protective strategy. The appraisal of proximity as feasible or essential – because
of attachment history, temperamental factors, or contextual cues – results in energetic,
insistent attempts to attain proximity, support, and love. These attempts are called
hyperactivating strategies (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988) because they involve up-regulation of
the attachment system, including constant vigilance and intense concern until an attachment
figure is perceived to be available and supportive. Hyperactivating strategies include attempts
to elicit a partner’s involvement, care, and support through clinging and controlling responses
(Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002); overdependence on relationship partners as a source of
protection (Shaver & Hazan, 1993); and perception of oneself as relatively helpless with
respect to emotion regulation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

If a person has learned, instead, that relying on attachment figures is not a safe or
effective way to cope with threats, he or she is likely to downplay such threats, inhibit
worries and negative emotions, and defensively engage in what Bowlby (1982) called
compulsive self-reliance. These coping strategies are called deactivating (Cassidy & Kobak,
1988) because their goal is to keep the attachment system down-regulated rather than
experience the frustration and pain of rejection, punishment for expressing feelings, or
abandonment.

In short, each attachment strategy has a major regulatory goal (insisting on proximity
to an attachment figure or on self-reliance), which goes along with particular cognitive and
affective processes that facilitate goal attainment. These strategies affect the experience, regulation, and expression of emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a), including anger, which is of special concern in the present chapter. Moreover, the strategies affect the functioning of other behavioral systems, such as exploration and caregiving, as we and others have shown in numerous studies (reviewed by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). As explained by Shaver et al. in Chapter 4 of the present volume, power and dominance can be viewed as the goals of a separate behavioral system. We expect the functioning of that system to be affected by differences in attachment style (attachment anxiety and avoidance) just as the other behavioral systems are.

*Attachment and Anger*

In Bowlby’s (1973) analysis of infants’ emotional reactions to separation from an attachment figure, he viewed anger as a functional reaction to separation because it sometimes motivates an attachment figure to pay more attention in the future and thereby provide better, more reliable care. In general, especially for adults, anger is functional to the extent that it communicates an intense but justifiable reaction to inconsiderate or undeserved ill treatment, rather than simply being a way to injure or destroy a relationship partner through acts of revenge. Bowlby (1973) called this constructive form of anger the “anger of hope,” because it is intended to bring about a better future state of a relationship. He also mentioned, however, that anger can become so intense that it alienates or injures a partner, in which case it becomes destructive to a relationship and can even lead to violence or death. He called this the “anger of despair.”

Functional anger is typical of people who feel secure in attachment relationships. Mikulincer (1998) found, for example, that when secure adults were hurt or frustrated by relationship partners’ behavior, they were optimistic about the partners’ willingness to apologize and ‘reform.’ Moreover, secure people’s memories of their reactions to anger-
provoking events were characterized by the constructive goal of repairing the relationship, engaging in adaptive problem solving, and restoring a positive mood following a conflict.

Another study explored the functional nature of secure adolescents’ anger (Zimmermann, Maier, Winter, & Grossmann, 2001). Adolescent research participants performed a difficult, frustrating problem-solving task with the help of a friend, and their disappointment and anger during the task and their negative behavior toward the friend (e.g., rejecting the friend’s suggestions without discussion) were coded. Disappointment and anger were associated with more aggressive behavior only in the case of insecure adolescents.

Avoidant individuals’ deactivating strategies favor suppression of anger, because anger implies emotional investment in a relationship, which is incongruent with avoidant people’s emotional distance and extreme self-reliance (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). Avoidant people’s anger tends to be expressed only in indirect ways and to take the form of nonspecific hostility or generally hateful attitudes. Mikulincer (1998) found, for example, that avoidant adults did not report intense anger in response to provocative experiences, but they were aroused physiologically and attributed hostile intent to a hurtful other even when the other's behavior was unintentional. In a laboratory study of support-seeking in dating couples, Rholes, Simpson, and Orina (1999) found, in a sample of women, that avoidant attachment was associated with hostility toward their partner (coded from video-recordings) when they worried about an upcoming painful task. Thus, although avoidant individuals are rarely comfortable describing themselves as needy or angry, they nevertheless react with hostility and hatred.

Attachment-anxious individuals, because of their tendency to intensify distress and ruminate about distressing experiences, are vulnerable to intense and prolonged bouts of anger. However, their fear of separation, desperate desire for love, and high dependency may keep them from expressing anger while causing them to direct it toward themselves. They
may react to provocations and insults with a tangled mixture of resentment, hostility, anger, self-criticism, fear, sadness, and depression. Indeed, Mikulincer (1998) found that anxious people’s memories of prior anger-provoking events included a flood of angry feelings, intense rumination, and a variety of negative emotions.

In a study of couple interactions, Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips (1996) found that attachment anxiety was associated with displaying and reporting more anger, hostility, and distress while discussing, with a dating partner, an unresolved problem in their relationship. In a study of support seeking, Rholes et al. (1999) found that, although anxious attachment was unrelated to anger toward a dating partner while waiting to undergo an anxiety-arousing experience, after participants were told they would not have to undergo the stressful task, attachment anxiety was associated with more intense expressions of anger toward one’s partner. This pattern was particularly strong if participants had been more worried about the upcoming experience and had sought more support from their partner. Thus it seems that anxious individuals’ need for reassurance and support caused them to hold back feelings of frustration and anger while seeking a partner’s support. But once the support was no longer needed (in that particular laboratory setting), the angry feelings surfaced and were expressed.

In a study using psychophysiological measures, Diamond and Hicks (2005) presented men with anger-provoking tasks (e.g., performing serial subtraction while being criticized by an experimenter), measured anger during and after the tasks, and recorded the men’s “vagal tone,” a physiological indicator of down-regulation of negative emotions. They found that attachment anxiety was associated with both greater self-reported anger and lower vagal tone during and after the tasks, suggesting intense anger that was difficult to subdue.

**Attachment and Aggression**

So far we have shown that attachment insecurities make it difficult for people to confine themselves to the constructive form of anger that Bowlby called the “anger of hope.”
These insecurities make it more likely that people will experience “anger of despair,” which may provoke destructively aggressive behavior. In the present section we review studies of attachment insecurities and destructive aggression at three levels of analysis: domestic violence in couples, antisocial behavior that affects communities, such as delinquency and criminality, and intergroup (e.g., inter-ethnic or international) violence.

**Domestic Violence**

From an attachment perspective, domestic violence is an exaggerated form of protesting a partner’s hurtful behavior. It is meant to discourage or prevent a partner from violating or breaking off the relationship (e.g., Bartholomew & Allison, 2006). We expect this kind of behavior to be more common among insecurely attached individuals, especially the anxious ones, who are especially vulnerable to hurt feelings and threats of abandonment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). Avoidant individuals, in contrast, might be expected to withdraw from conflict rather than escalate it, because they try to dismiss hurt feelings and avoid expressing vulnerability or need. Nevertheless, Bartholomew and Allison (2006) found that avoidant people sometimes became violent in the midst of escalating domestic conflicts, especially if their partner was anxiously attached and demanded their involvement.

Anxious attachment has been associated with domestic violence in two kinds of studies (reviewed by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). First, anxious attachment has been found to correlate with measures of domestic violence, across different samples of couples, whether married or cohabiting; and the correlation cannot be explained by other relational or personality factors. Second, abusive men who score relatively high on attachment anxiety report more severe and more frequent acts of coercion and abuse during couple conflicts.

Research also indicates that victims of domestic violence suffer from attachment insecurities, with most studies finding elevations in attachment anxiety and some finding elevations in avoidance as well (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). Because of the cross-sectional
nature of these studies, however, the findings may indicate either that attachment insecurity
puts people at risk for being abused or that abuse increases attachment insecurity, or both.
Also, because violence in relationships is often reciprocal, many victims are also perpetrators
(Bartolomew & Allison, 2006), which creates a strong correlation between perpetration and
victimization.

*Antisocial Behavior*

Adult attachment researchers have found links between attachment insecurities and
antisocial behavior, such as delinquency and criminality (reviewed by Mikulincer & Shaver,
2007a). Although both anxious and avoidant individuals are more likely than their secure
counterparts to engage in antisocial behavior, they do so for different reasons. Anxiously
attached people sometimes engage in delinquent or criminal behavior as a way of crying out
for attention and care, or of expressing anger and resentment (Allen, Moore, Kuperminc, &
Bell, 1998). Avoidant individuals engage in antisocial behavior to distance themselves from
others (e.g., parents) or to demonstrate, by violating rules and laws, their lack of concern for
others (Allen et al., 2002).

Levinson and Fonagy (2004) compared the attachment patterns of 22 imprisoned
delinquents, 22 personality disorder patients without a criminal history, and 22 healthy
controls. They noted a higher prevalence of avoidant attachment in the delinquent group than
in the other groups. Moreover, delinquents who had committed violent offenses (e.g., murder,
malicious wounding) exhibited the same inability or unwillingness to talk coherently about
their emotional experiences that has been noted in other studies of insecure attachment. In a
related study, van Ijzendoorn et al. (1997) interviewed 40 male criminals and found that 95%
of them had insecure attachment patterns. Similar findings were obtained in studies of
incarcerated psychopaths (e.g., Frodi, Dernevik, Sepa, Philipson, & Bragesjo, 2001).
If antisocial behavior is associated with attachment insecurity, then interventions aimed at strengthening a person’s sense of attachment security might help with rehabilitation. In fact there is evidence from studies of residential treatment programs for troubled and delinquent adolescents that forming and maintaining a secure attachment relationship with a staff member can reduce antisocial behavior (e.g., Born, Chevalier, & Humblet, 1997). In a year-long study of adolescents residing in an Israeli treatment center, Gur (2006) found that those who formed secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower rates of anger, depression, and behavioral problems and more positive emotional experiences during the year. Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members changed in the direction of security on measures of attachment orientation and exhibited less aggressive behavior toward peers and authorities.

**Intergroup Aggression**

The link between attachment insecurity and aggression is also evident in the field of intergroup relations. In a series of five studies, Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) found that higher levels of self-reported attachment anxiety were associated with more hostile responses to a variety of outgroups (as defined by secular Israeli Jewish students): Israeli Arabs, Ultra-orthodox Jews, Russian immigrants, and homosexuals. In addition, we found that experimental heightening of the sense of attachment security (by subliminally presenting security-related words or asking study participants to visualize the faces of security-providing attachment figures) eliminated negative responses to out-groups. These effects were found even when participants’ sense of personal value was threatened or their ingroup had been insulted by an outgroup member. That is, experimentally augmented attachment security reduced the sense of threat created by encounters with outgroup members and seemed to eliminate defensive and hostile responses to outgroup members.
Building on these studies, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007b) found that increasing people’s sense of attachment security reduced actual aggression between contending or warring social groups. Specifically, Israeli Jewish undergraduates participated in a study together with another Israeli Jew or an Israeli Arab (in each case, the same confederate of the experimenter) and were subliminally and repeatedly exposed (for 20 milliseconds on each trial) to the name of their own security-enhancing attachment figure, the name of a familiar person who was not viewed as an attachment figure, or the name of an acquaintance. Following the priming procedure, participants were informed that they would evaluate a food sample and that they had been randomly selected to give the confederate hot sauce to evaluate. They also learned indirectly that the confederate strongly disliked spicy foods. (This procedure has been used in other studies of interpersonal aggression; e.g., McGregor et al., 1998.) The dependent variable was the amount of hot sauce allocated to the confederate.

When participants had been subliminally primed with the name of someone who was not an attachment figure, they delivered a larger amount of hot sauce to the Arab confederate than to the Jewish confederate, a sign of intergroup aggression. But security priming eliminated this difference: Participants whose sense of security had been enhanced delivered equal (relatively low) amounts of hot sauce to both the Arab and the Jewish confederate. In addition, participants scoring higher on attachment anxiety gave more hot sauce to the outgroup member (Israeli Arab) than to the ingroup member (Israeli Jew). Thus, it seems that people who are either dispositionally secure or induced to feel more secure in a particular setting are better able than their insecure counterparts to tolerate intergroup differences and to refrain from intergroup aggression.

Attachment and Power

So far we have considered the association between attachment insecurities and destructive forms of anger and aggression: domestic violence, antisocial behavior, and
intergroup violence. As explained in Chapter 4 (Shaver et al., this volume), however, aggression is not exclusively maladaptive or destructive; it is presumably an adaptive strategy that arose and was maintained in evolution because it contributed to attaining the set-goal of a hypothesized power/dominance behavioral system. Following Sroufe and Waters’ (1977) analysis of “felt security” as the proximal psychological goal of the attachment system, we propose that something we call “felt power” is the goal of the power/dominance system. This “felt sense” is associated with feeling that one can control resources without undue social interference. Only when this goal is blocked by social interference do aggressive behaviors become pervasive, extreme, destructive, or dysfunctional. In this section, we focus on times when feelings of power and dominance are elevated and aggression serves its adaptive function. In particular, we explore whether and how attachment security and insecurity affect the experience and exercise of power.

According to the approach/inhibition theory of power (e.g., Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), experiencing a sense of power facilitates what Carver and White (1994) called an approach orientation and Higgins (1998) called a promotion orientation – that is, a motivated state involving reward-related thoughts, heightened attention to rewards, and positive emotions related to rewards. The sense of power also seems to counteract what Carver and White (1994) called an inhibition orientation and Higgins (1998) called a prevention orientation – a state aimed at avoiding threats, heightened attention to threats, activation of threat-related thoughts, and negative emotions. Galinsky et al. (2003) reasoned that a sense of power strengthens an approach orientation because powerful people expect to have greater access to rewards and less interference from others when pursuing rewards. For the same reasons, powerlessness favors an inhibition orientation because powerless people expect to be subject to more social and material threats and are aware of the constraints that these threats impose on one’s actions.
The approach/inhibition theory of power has received strong empirical support. For example, Keltner et al. (2003) reviewed evidence that elevated power increases the experience and expression of positive emotions, sensitivity and responsiveness to potential rewards, the automaticity of social cognitions, and the likelihood of approach, disinhibition, and extraverted behavior. In subsequent studies, experimental augmentation of the sense of power (e.g., asking people to recall an episode in which they had power over others) increased (as compared to control conditions) the action orientation (the tendency to act regardless of whether the action had prosocial or antisocial consequences) and optimistic perceptions of personally relevant risks and dangers in the world (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2003). These manipulations also elevated risk-taking in negotiations; engagement in risky, unprotected sex; and competitive behavior (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007).

An increased sense of power also protects people from others’ influence and social pressure, encouraging creative ideas, freedom from conformity, and willingness to entertain counter-attitudinal statements (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). At the same time, because powerful people feel they have control over others and do not feel constrained by them, increasing people’s sense of power may increase their psychological distance from others (Smith & Trope, 2005) and their tendency to objectify others and perceive them as means for attaining personal goals (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008). Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, and Gruenfeld (2006) found that increasing people’s sense of power reduced their inclination to adopt others’ perspectives and to empathize with others.

We suspect that these consequences of elevated power are moderated by people’s attachment orientations, because they are likely to depend on how one relates to others and on the goals, wishes, and fears that underlie one’s social behavior. For example, people who hold negative views of others, value self-reliance, and dislike closeness and intimacy (i.e.,
people with an avoidant attachment style) are likely to construe power as a way to gain distance from others and freedom from their influence. In contrast, people who hold positive views of others and are able to balance dependence and autonomy (i.e., relatively secure people) are probably able to use power and influence to improve their interpersonal relations, respond to others’ needs, and resolve interpersonal conflicts without deferring too much to a partner’s needs. Moreover, people who fear rejection and abandonment (i.e., anxiously attached people) may feel uneasy when granted power and be reluctant to act freely, take risks, and step outside the boundaries of conformity. In subsequent sections we report findings from three studies that examine these ideas.

Attachment Anxiety Weakens the Link between Power and an Approach Orientation

Our first hypothesis is that increasing a person’s sense of power will strengthen his or her tendency to adopt an approach orientation (e.g., be optimistic and take risks) as long as the person scores low on attachment anxiety, but not if he or she scores high. People with an anxious attachment style are likely to be ambivalent about power and dominance. On one hand, they want to have control over relationship partners (Shaver & Hazan, 1993); on the other hand, they may be reluctant to assert themselves (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), because this could provoke a partner’s resentment, create conflict, and threaten relationship stability.

To test this hypothesis, in Study 1 we examined the effects of priming a sense of power (using Galinsky et al.’s, 2003, technique) on optimism and risk, taking into account individual differences in attachment anxiety and avoidance. Eighty Israeli undergraduate students (60 women and 20 men) completed, in a class, the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) measure of attachment anxiety and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998), which had alpha reliability coefficients of .90 and .83 in this sample. Weeks later they came to a laboratory individually and were randomly assigned to a power priming or a control
condition. In the *power priming* condition (*n* = 40), participants were asked to recall a particular incident in which they had power over one or more other people and to write about what happened, how they felt, and what they did during and after the episode (see Galinsky et al., 2003, for instructions). In the *control* condition (*n* = 40), participants were asked to recall a particular TV program they had watched the previous week and to write about it.

All of the participants then completed Weinstein’s (1980) 15-item optimism scale (with an alpha of .85) and Tversky and Kahneman’s (1981) measure of risk preference. They were told to “imagine that you work for a large hi-tech company that is experiencing serious economic troubles and needs to lay off 6000 employees. Plan A will save 2000 jobs, whereas plan B has a 1/3 probability of saving all 6000 jobs, but a 2/3 probability of saving no jobs.” Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they would favor one option over the other using a scale ranging from 1 (“very much prefer program A”) to 7 (“very much prefer program B”). Higher scores reflect greater preference for the riskier program (plan B).

Hierarchical regression analyses examining the unique and interactive effects on optimism and risk preference of being primed with memories of power (a dummy variable contrasting the power condition with the control condition), avoidant attachment, and attachment anxiety revealed significant main effects of power priming and attachment anxiety. Replicating Galinsky et al.’s (2006) findings, participants in the power condition were more optimistic, $\beta = .27, p < .05$, and more likely to prefer the riskier plan than participants in the control condition, $\beta = .29, p < .01$. In addition, more anxiously attached participants were less optimistic and less likely to prefer the riskier plan, $\beta$s of -.33 and -.30, $ps < .01$. These main effects were qualified by significant interactions between power priming and anxious attachment ($\beta = -.41, p < .01$, for optimism; $\beta = -.29, p < .01$, for risk preference). Simple slope tests examining the nature of the significant interactions revealed that power priming led to greater optimism and risk preference than the control condition.
mainly when participants scored relatively low on attachment anxiety, $\beta$s of .68 and .58, $p$s < .01. These effects of power priming were negative or nil and not significant when attachment anxiety was relatively high, $\beta$s of -.14 and .00. In sum, as expected, attachment anxiety disrupted the previously documented association between power and an approach orientation.

**Power Increases Objectification of Others in the Context of Avoidant Attachment**

Our second hypothesis is that increasing a person’s sense of power will increase the objectification of others among people scoring high on avoidant attachment, but not among less avoidant people. Avoidant people hold generally negative, uncompassionate views of others and try to remain emotionally distant and detached from them (see review by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). It seems likely that they will use power as an opportunity to act on their preferences for autonomy and distance, their critical view of others, and their perception of others as objects to be used instrumentally for personal need satisfaction. In contrast, more secure people, who hold positive, empathic views of others and are guided by a desire to form mutually satisfying and harmonious relationships, should be less likely to see others as objects even when they are granted a degree of power over them.

To test these ideas we conducted a second study (Study 2) with a new group of 60 Israeli undergraduate students (41 women and 19 men), who completed the ECR scale during a class period (with resulting alphas of .86 for anxiety and .88 for avoidance). Weeks later they came to a laboratory individually and were randomly assigned to a power priming or a control condition as in Study 1. All of them were then asked to think about their relationships with three other students in their classes. For each of these students, participants completed Gruenfeld et al.’s (2008) 10-item objectification scale (e.g., “I tend to contact this person only when I need something from him/her,” “I try to get him/her to do things that will help me succeed”). Item ratings were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“not at all”) to 7 (“very much”). For each participant and each target student, we computed an objectification score
by averaging the 10 item scores (with alphas ranging from .88 to .91). Because the correlations between the three different student scores were high ($r > .64$), we computed a total objectification score by averaging them.

Hierarchical regression analyses examining the unique and interactive effects of power priming, avoidant attachment, and attachment anxiety on objectification revealed a significant main effect of avoidant attachment, $\beta = .34, p < .01$. This effect was qualified, as expected, by a significant interaction between power priming and avoidant attachment, $\beta = .29, p < .05$. Simple slope tests revealed that power priming led to greater objectification of others mainly when participants scored relatively high on avoidance, $\beta = .43, p < .01$. The effect was in the opposite direction but not significant when avoidance was low, $\beta = -.15$.

Thus, as hypothesized, when people were primed with a sense of power, avoidant participants tended to objectify others more than less avoidant participants, suggesting that secure people might be able to maintain a sense of power without treating others as objects.

**Attachment Security Guards Also Against Lack of Empathy in the Context of Power**

Our third hypothesis is that experimentally heightened attachment security will reduce the tendency of power to decrease perspective taking and empathy. Attachment research has shown that people with either a dispositional or a situationally heightened sense of security tend to be sensitive and responsive to others’ needs, a phenomenon we have conceptualized as the beneficial effects of attachment security on the functioning of what Bowlby (1982) called the caregiving behavioral system (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007a). This process should allow secure individuals to maintain concern for others’ needs and welfare even under conditions of increased power over them.

To test this hypothesis, we conducted a third study (Study 3) with a new sample of 120 Israeli undergraduate students (87 women and 43 men). They came to the laboratory individually, provided names of the people on whom they rely as security-enhancing
attachment figures (using the WHOTO scale developed by Hazan & Zeifman, 1994), and were randomly assigned to a power priming or control condition, as in the previous two studies. The participants in each of these conditions were further randomly assigned to either a security priming or a neutral priming condition. In the security priming condition, participants completed a 40-trial word-recognition task, during which, before each word, they were subliminally exposed (for 20 milliseconds) to the names of the security-enhancing attachment figures they had named in the WHOTO questionnaire. In the neutral priming condition, participants completed the same word-recognition task, but were subliminally exposed (for 20 milliseconds) to names other than those of their attachment figures. The details of the priming procedure were identical to those used by Mikulincer et al. (2001).

Following the manipulations, all of the participants read a brief story about Miriam, a university student, whose parents and sister had been killed in an automobile crash. This story was used by Mikulincer et al. (2001) and is based on the well-known Kate Banks story used in classic empathy experiments by Batson et al. (1989). After reading the story, participants read a list of 18 adjectives describing different emotional states and rated, on a 7-point scale, how much they had experienced that emotion while reading the Miriam story. Six of the adjectives were the ones Batson et al. (1989) used to assess empathy and compassion (sympathetic, soft-hearted, warm, compassionate, tender, and moved). We computed a total score by averaging the scores on these six items (which yielded an alpha of .85).

A two-way analysis of variance revealed significant main effects for both power priming, $F(1,116) = 4.38, p < .01$, and security priming, $F(1,116) = 27.25, p < .01$. Replicating previous findings, power priming produced lower ratings on the empathy/compassion items ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.32$; in the control condition, $M = 4.00, SD = 1.18$), and security priming produced higher ratings ($M = 4.32, SD = 1.18$; in the neutral priming control condition, $M = 3.25, SD = 1.13$). These main effects were qualified by a
significant interaction, $F(1,116) = 4.97, p < .01$. Simple Main Effects tests revealed that power priming produced lower mean empathy scores in the neutral priming condition ($M = 2.81, SD = 0.96$ vs. $M = 3.69, SD = 1.12$), but not in the security priming condition ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.19$ vs. $M = 4.30, SD = 1.18$). Thus, attachment security reduced the potential negative effects of a heightened sense of power.

**Concluding Remarks**

As explained in Chapter 4, Bowlby (1982) did not say much about anger, aggression, or power/dominance, partly because he wanted to part company with Freud’s emphasis on sexual and aggressive “instincts” or “drives,” and partly because he was concerned primarily with infant-parent relationships. He viewed anger in the context of infants’ reactions to separation or abandonment. Some of his ideas about anger (of “hope” or “despair”) can be extended to the realm of adult close relationships, and we have summarized some of the literature on that topic here. But infants are not prepared to occupy powerful or dominant roles in society, so Bowlby said virtually nothing about power and dominance in his books.

Nevertheless, attachment theory has been fruitfully expanded in several directions, including the conceptualization of leadership and group functioning in terms of attachment dynamics (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). And Bowlby’s behavioral-system construct has proven useful in the study sexuality, empathy, and altruism from an attachment perspective (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), partly because Bowlby explicitly referred to the existence of sexual and caregiving behavioral systems. Because we now want to extend the theory into the untouched domain of power and dominance, we have begun to conceptualize the existence of a power/dominance system. If such a system exists, we expect its operations to be colored by attachment security and the major forms of attachment insecurity. In this chapter we have unveiled our first efforts to explore links between attachment and power. We think the results and interesting and well worth pursuing further.
References


London: Routledge.


