Chapter 1

Introduction: Conceptualizing prosocial behaviors in individual and group settings from the perspective of attachment theory.
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Researchers have examined the prosocial behavior of caring, manifest by helping, volunteerism, empathy etc. (e.g., Batson, 1991; De Waal, 1996; Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995). Although the desire to do good, according to Wilson and Musick (1999) is more or less evenly distributed among people, the resources to fulfill that desire are not. Investigators (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; see Penner, 2002 for a review) have recently begun to study those resources, motives, and benefits involved in caring with sustained prosocial activities. Among these continual prosocial involvements are altruistic volunteer activities such as teaching reading to poor children, running errands for the homebound elderly, and regularly donating blood.

To date there have been relatively few theoretical analyses which considered the role of attachment insecurities as they relate to caring as a prosocial behavior in individual and group settings (see Penner, 2002; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000, for preliminary efforts).

The purpose of the current thesis is to conceptualize individual and group prosocial behaviors in terms of Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982), and in so doing to uncover some of the psychological mechanisms underlying caring behavior (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). In terms of the resource theory (Wilson and Musick, 1999), one can ask to what extent does secure attachment provide a meaningful resource for prosocial behavior, and at
what level can this behavior be suppressed or over-ridden by attachment insecurity (Kunce & Shaver, 1994).

Therefore, the current study has four purposes;
1. The first is to conceptualize individual and group prosocial behavior, in terms of attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982).
2. The second is to examine the unique explanatory power of attachment patterns beyond the potential contribution of high-order personality traits (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness) to caring behavior.
3. The third purpose is to examine the role of moral judgment in the relation between attachment insecurities and volunteerism.
4. Finally, the fourth purpose is to apply attachment theory in understanding intra-group caring behavior.

Attachment style

Attachment is the unique affective relationship that forms between infants and their primary caretakers (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). The attachment system is especially apparent during the first years of life, however Bowlby (1979) viewed attachment processes as affecting human beings “from cradle to the grave”. Bowlby’s attachment theory (1969, 1973, 1979, 1980), focused on the process through which infants and young children develop confidence in their caregivers’ protection. According to Bowlby, human beings have a biologically based predisposition to a system of behaviors that promote physical and psychological proximity to a primary caregiver (These behaviors include for example crying, following and looking at the person who serves as a primary caregiver, proximity seeking etc.(Brisch, 2002)
Because of the primacy and depth of the early attachment relationship between infant and caregiver, this bond may serve as a prototype for later life relationships (Brisch, 2002) although early attachments are not supposed to determine later relationships as they remain open to relational experiences throughout and beyond childhood. Its parameters are gradually shaped and altered by social experiences with attachment figures, resulting eventually in fairly stable individual differences in mental representations of past attachment experiences and in a concomitant attachment style – a systematic pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and behaviors toward partners and friends that result from a particular attachment history (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Research, beginning with Ainsworth et al. (1978) and continuing through recent studies by social and personality psychologists (reviewed by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), indicates that individual differences in attachment style can be measured along two orthogonal dimensions, attachment-related anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). A person’s position on the anxiety (or anxious attachment) dimension indicates the degree to which he or she worries that a partner will not be available and responsive in times of need. A person’s position on the avoidance dimension indicates the extent to which he or she distrusts relationship partners’ goodwill and strives to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from partners. Individuals who score low on these two dimensions are said to be secure or to have a secure attachment style.

**Attachment and caring**

According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2001), the caregiving system, was presumably selected over the course of human evolution because it contributed to the alleviation of genetically related others’ distress and
thereby helped their survival and reproductive success, thus promoting inclusive fitness, and subsequently was gradually extended, beyond those with whom a person shared genes (i.e., children, siblings, and tribe members (Hamilton, 1964) to anyone who was suffering or in need, either by natural generalization or deliberate ethical training (e.g., Hopkins, 2001).

Recently, researchers have begun to examine associations between attachment and caregiving feelings and behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). Attachment security (i.e., relatively low scores on the avoidance and anxiety dimensions) is related to positive conceptions of self and others, curiosity and interest in exploration, cognitive openness and flexibility, mental health, and relationship satisfaction (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for a review). Security has also been associated with empathy, in children as young as 2 or 3 years of age (Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989; van der Mark, van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2002) and in adults (Mikulincer et al., 2001). Furthermore, it has been found to be associated with sensitive and responsive caregiving toward romantic or marital partners (e.g., Feeney & Collins, 2001) and greater tolerance of out-group members (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). Experimental studies based on attachment theory demonstrate that dispositional and manipulated attachment security facilitate cognitive openness and empathy, strengthen self-transcendent values, and foster tolerance of out-group members, suggesting an effect of one behavioral system, attachment, on another, caring or prosocial behaviors in individual or group settings.

But what might interfere with the innate tendency to provide care to someone who expresses need? Attachment theory suggests that caregiving can be suppressed or over-ridden by attachment insecurity (Kunce & Shaver, 1994) whereas attachment security makes empathy, caregiving and altruism more likely. Only a relatively secure person can easily perceive others not
only as sources of security and support, but also as human beings who themselves need and deserve support. An insecure person may have difficulty finding the mental resources necessary to provide sensitive and effective care to others. In the same way that Ainsworth and others (Ainsworth et al., 1978) showed that a child’s exploration system is inhibited or distorted by the need for attachment security in threatening situations, Gillath, Shaver, & Mikulincer, (in press) and others (e.g., B. Feeney & Collins, 2001) have argued that the natural tendency to provide care to dependent or needy others can be suppressed or over-ridden by attachment insecurity (Kunce & Shaver, 1994).

Attachment insecurities have been negatively related to the propensity for caring. For example, anxious or avoidant individuals are less sensitive to their romantic partners’ needs, report less cooperative caregiving, and spontaneously offer less comfort and reassurance to their distressed romantic partner. B. Feeney & Collins, 2001; J. Feeney, 1996; J. Feeney & Hohaus, 2001; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Priel, Mitrany, and Shahar (1998) found that anxious and avoidant high school students were perceived by peers as less supportive than their secure classmates. In addition, insecurely attached students were less likely than secure students to engage in reciprocally supportive relationships. Soerensen, Webster, and Roggman (2002) found that lower scores on the anxiety and avoidance dimensions predicted a person’s planning to care for older relatives, suggesting that secure adults are care-oriented even before care is explicitly called for.

**Attachment, Caring and Groups**

In the current set of studies we apply attachment theory to the study of small group dynamics to provide a better understanding of individual
differences in the way people react to signals of respect and disrespect from other group members.

Previous studies have found that attachment theory is a relevant framework for exploring individual differences in the context of group interactions (e.g., Rom & Mikulincer, 2003; Smith et al., 1999). Dispositional and manipulated attachment security were found as facilitating empathy and fostering tolerance of out-group members, suggesting an effect of one behavioral system, attachment, on another, caring in a group context (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). In our study, we used attachment framework as a prism for inquiring about the effects of perceived group respect on group commitment and pro-group behavior. Specifically we wanted to examine whether variations along the attachment anxiety dimension are relevant in explaining individual differences in feelings of group commitment and expenditure of actual effort on behalf of the group following induction of group respect and disrespect.

Although group disrespect is an aversive experience for every group member, the extent to which self-esteem is damaged and the compensatory expenditure of pro-group efforts might depend on a person’s susceptibility to signals of rejection and the strength and stability of his or her sense of self-worth. In our view, these individual differences can be interpreted in terms of attachment theory and might depend on a person’s attachment insecurities, especially those related to attachment anxiety. These insecurities make a person more susceptible to signals of rejection, shatter the strength and stability of his or her self-esteem (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2005, in press), and therefore can be highly relevant in explaining a person’s reactions to signs of group respect and disrespect.
Attachment-anxious individuals’ tendency to base their unstable self views on external resources and their sense of self-esteem on others’ acceptance or rejection has been well documented (Srivastava and Beer, 2005; Broemer and Blumle, 2003; Andersson & Perris, 2000; Park, Crocker, & Mickelson, 2004). In contrast, less attachment-anxious individuals are more likely to base their self-worth on domains that do not require constant external validation, such as long-term family support. In line with their emphasis on self-reliance, avoidant individuals have been found to be less dependent on interpersonal sources of self-esteem (Park et al., 2004).

We hypothesized that anxious individuals’ mental rumination, which heightens the cognitive accessibility of negative self-views and self-related doubts, together with their strong needs for love and acceptance (e.g., Cassidy & Kobak, 1988) might make them particularly susceptible to signals of group respect and disrespect and lead them to display pro-group behaviors as a means to being accepted and loved.

The five studies are described in four main chapters:

**Chapter two** describes two innovative studies to determine whether the two dimensions of attachment insecurity – anxiety and avoidance – are related to real-world altruistic volunteering. We hypothesized that individual differences in attachment anxiety and avoidance would help to explain involvement or lack of involvement in volunteer activities and the motives for volunteering.

Volunteerism has been defined as long-term, planned, prosocial behavior, especially behavior intended to benefit strangers (Penner, 2002). We assessed two aspects of volunteering, the range of activities engaged in and the time devoted to them, and six motives for volunteering (Clary et al., 1998). These included four that might be considered self-serving (self-
protection, self-enhancement, social approval, and career promotion), one that is altruistic (genuine concern for others), and one that is conceptually related to what Bowlby (1969/1982) called the exploration system (learning new things about oneself and the world). Previous research suggests that anxiously attached individuals are especially preoccupied with their own worries about and wishes for security, and that avoidant individuals are less empathic and less cognitively open, and in that sense, less exploration-oriented. Therefore the range of motives covered by the Clary et al. (1998) provided a good opportunity to see whether and how much these two major attachment dimensions are associated with different motives for volunteering.

We expected attachment anxiety to be associated with self-comforting or security-enhancing motives for volunteering, such as volunteering in order to feel included in a group, have higher self-esteem, and feel less troubled by interpersonal problems. We expected attachment avoidance to be related to lower involvement in volunteer activities and less generous and exploration-oriented motives for volunteering.

Another issue examined in this chapter is the possibility that engaging in caring activities can improve a person’s sense of social well-being. In attachment-theoretical terms, this possibility is interpreted as a positive effect of the caregiving system on the attachment system. We expected engagement in volunteer activities to be beneficial to anxious individuals, as reflected in lower scores on measures of interpersonal problems (e.g., loneliness, hostility, and lack of assertiveness) as a function of volunteering. A person who has negative models of self and others – mental representations associated with attachment insecurity (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) – can, through helping others, feel more positive about him- or herself and about the value and deservingness of others. Although, as
explained above, insecure attachment generally militates against caregiving, if caregiving is nevertheless undertaken, it may have positive effects on the caregiver, including an improvement in the caregiver’s social well-being. Finally, we were interested in determining whether the predicted findings would generalize across differences in societal and cultural norms. Attachment theory was intended to be a general theory, heavily rooted in conceptual and empirical literature on primate ethology. There is nothing in the theory that leads to the prediction of cultural differences, and at least in the case of infant-to-parent attachments, research has turned up much more support for cross-cultural universality than for cultural differences (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). Nevertheless, there are a few published studies suggesting cross-cultural differences in either caring behavior or links between caregiver sensitivity and attachment style (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000), so it seemed important to consider the cross-national generalization of our own findings. We decided to conduct the studies in three countries: Israel, the Netherlands, and the United States.

Chapter three focuses on the unique explanatory power of attachment patterns beyond the potential contribution of high-order personality traits (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness) to volunteerism.

Personality refers to an enduring system of characteristics that individuals carry with them from one situation to the next, affecting their behavior across these contexts. Personality psychologists have argued that individuals with a ‘prosocial personality’ are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (Graziano and Eisenberg 1997; Oliner and Oliner 1988; Schroeder et al. 1995). It seems likely that prosocial preferences are important for helping behaviors that produce little or no material gain.
(Graziano and Eisenberg 1997). Personality characteristics also determine which situations are attractive to people because people usually select situations that meet their personality (Buss 1987). In general, prosocial personality characteristics should lead people to select situations that enable them to express these traits in overt behavior (Bekkers 2003).

One-hundred and fifty-nine Dutch undergraduates completed self-report scales tapping attachment insecurities, engagement in volunteer activities, motives for volunteering, and high-order personality traits. The results may help to indicate whether the outcomes reported in Chapter two are actually unique for attachment dimensions or a mere reflection of personality traits.

The second issue of the study refers to the interplay between attachment patterns, motives for volunteerism, and volunteerism behavior (i.e., the role that motives for volunteering plays in mediating or moderating the links between attachment insecurities and volunteering behavior). Theoretically, lack of altruistic motives for volunteering should mediate the observed link between attachment avoidance and relatively low engagement in volunteering activities. Highly avoidant people hold negative models of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) therefore may not give any priority to the improvement of others’ welfare among their values and goals which, in turn, would directly inhibit any engagement in volunteering behavior. In addition, motives for volunteering can moderate the possible effects of attachment anxiety on volunteering behavior. Although attachment anxiety was not significantly associated with this kind of behavior, it is still possible that attachment-anxious people, who constantly search for others’ approval and love, would be particularly prone to engage in volunteering activities where these activities offer some kind of self-focused benefits (e.g., social admiration).
Chapter four describes the relevance of moral judgment to the relation between attachment insecurities and volunteerism. The role of moral judgment in prosocial behavior has been described frequently (Eisenberg et al., 1987, 1991; Raviv, Bar-tal, & Lewis-Levin, 1980) and its importance to volunteerism has been emphasized (Allen & Rushton, 1983). According to Kagan (1984), emotions are the basis for acquiring morality. Early maternal attunement described by Ainsworth (1969) and Stern (1985) is the basis for development of a personal identity, empathy for others and for development of a rule-based internal standard that becomes moral reasoning of right and wrong. Also, studies have focused on the negative impact of attachment insecurities (anxiety, avoidance) for prosocial behavior (Tavecchio, Stams, Brugman, & Thomeer-Bouwens, 1999) and discussed the attribution of antisocial behavior to lack of a secure attachment bond in infancy (Magid and McKelvey, 1987). Van IJzendoorn and Zwart-Woudstra (1995; Van IJzendoorn, 1997) suggested that autonomous attachment could be at the core of mature moral reasoning. Based on those studies and theoretical elaborations we proposed the hypothesis that moral judgment may interfere with the relation between attachment insecurities and volunteerism. In other words, one may ask how two insecure people would differ in their levels of volunteerism, if one person would function at a low level of moral judgment and the other person on a high level.

One-hundred and thirty-nine Dutch undergraduates completed self-report scales tapping attachment insecurities, engagement in volunteer activities, motives for volunteering, and they completed a moral judgment scale (the Defining Issues Test, DIT). The findings may shed light on the extent to which morality is involved in the relation between attachment insecurities and volunteerism.
Chapter five: Previous research has demonstrated that intra-group respect can strengthen people's group identification, and encourage them to exert themselves on behalf of their group (De Cremer, 2003; Simon & Sturmer, 2003; Smith & Tyler, 1997; Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2001, 2002; Tyler & Smith, 1998).

In Chapter five we examine the susceptibility to intragroup respect/disrespect from the perspective of individual attachment orientation. We ask what happens to the caring system under inductions of group respect and disrespect, assuming that variations along the attachment anxiety dimension would determine the extent to which these inductions would lead to heightened group commitment and enhanced caring behavior towards the group. Specifically, attachment-anxious people tend to base their sense of self-worth on others’ love and acceptance, depend on continual validation from others, and display extreme susceptibility to others’ positive and negative reactions. As a result, group respect can lead attachment-anxious people to feel appreciated and valued, temporarily pacifying their chronic self-doubts and can then enhance group commitment and pro-group motives and caring behaviors. Group disrespect can remind attachment-anxious people of their worthlessness, strengthening worries concerning acceptance and approval by other group members, and then can lead them to higher effort expenditure on behalf of their group. On this basis, we hypothesize that people scoring higher on attachment anxiety would be more likely to show the "respect-beneficial effort polarity effect" (Sleebos et al., 2006b). That is, both high and low respect responses from other group members would lead attachment-anxious people to show effort expenditure.

In our view, highly avoidant people would not show enhanced group commitment and pro-group behavior following inductions of group respect or disrespect. These people dismiss others’ feedback, do not derive their self-
worth from others’ approval, and tend to suppress distressing thoughts and repress painful emotions (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 1997).

On this basis, we predicted that attachment anxiety but not avoidance would moderate the effects of group respect and disrespect on group commitment, group-related worries, and pro-group behaviors; (1) As compared to an average group respect condition, inductions of high group respect and low group respect would lead to higher effort expenditure in group tasks among participants scoring high on attachment anxiety, but not among less anxious participants. (2) Inductions of low group respect would lead to higher levels of group-related worries, lower group commitment but to more money donation to the group and higher effort expenditure than the average group respect condition among participants scoring high on attachment anxiety, but not among less anxious participants.

In the final chapter six the findings of this series of studies will be summarized and discussed in the light of recent theoretical and empirical work on prosocial behaviors in group settings and on attachment in adults. The main hypothesis of the current work suggests that attachment style, and in particular attachment anxiety, affects prosocial behavior in groups and in natural settings, at least under specific conditions. In the closing chapter the evidence supporting this hypothesis as well as its specifications will be delineated, and issues for future research will be derived from the current attempts to test the idea that attachment and caring are intimately related.
References:


Chapter 1


Introduction


