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All you need is love?

Investigating leadership from leaders' attachment experiences in close relationships

Per-Magnus Moe Thompson

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SERIES OF DISSERTATIONS

All you need is love?

Investigating leadership from leaders' attachment experiences in close relationships

by
Per-Magnus Moe Thompson

A dissertation submitted to BI Norwegian Business School
for the degree of PhD

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear, dear family;

Tonje – for being my secure base entering the world of academia, and my safe haven when things are rough, for being the love of my life.

Julie and Mattis – for spreading so much joy and love.

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Summary

The influence of Bowlby's attachment theory on leadership research is growing. Most studies support the view that leaders' attachment style, mirroring their experiences with significant others (e.g., parents) early in life, predict important follower outcomes and quality of the leader-follower relationship. However, this field is in its early stages, and more knowledge is needed in order to understand *how* attachment insecurities affect leadership processes and outcomes. Furthermore, given the context-sensitive nature of the attachment system, there is need for research investigating *under which conditions* the negative consequences of attachment insecurities arise. This dissertation addresses these research gaps empirically. First, all three studies investigate the principle of attachment system activation. The results support what could be expected from theory, namely that when leaders experience distress, their attachment insecurities become more pronounced, which in turn influences leadership negatively. Second, two mediators connecting attachment style to follower outcomes are explored: *caregiving orientation* and *implicit followership theories*. Although the results favor these variables being significant mediators, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn. Taken together, this dissertation contributes to the literature by demonstrating the importance of keeping in mind the full width of Bowlby's theory when studying leadership through the lens of attachment. Practical implications, limitations, and future research directions are discussed.

List of articles

Paper 1 **Attachment style and leader-member exchange: The moderating role of work-related basic psychological needs satisfaction**

Thompson, P-M. M., Glasø, L., & Matthiesen, S. B.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2016 Academy of Management Conference, Anaheim.

A short version of this paper was published in the AoM *Best Paper Proceedings, 2016 (1), 14688. https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2016.248*

Paper 2 **The way I see you. Implicit followership theories explored through the lens of attachment**

Thompson, P-M. M., Glasø, L., & Matthiesen, S. B.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2017 European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) Conference, Dublin.

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Paper 3 **Leader's attachment style as an antecedent to caregiving: A moderated mediation analysis**

Thompson, P-M. M., Fosse, T. H., & Skouverøe, J. B.

Submitted to the 2019 European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) Conference in Turin.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Leadership and individual differences

Since ancient times people have been interested in individual differences, and what makes some leaders better or more effective than others. In contemporary academic leadership literature this interest now seems to be at the cusp of a renaissance (Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012). Furthermore, the study of leadership and individual differences has evolved into not only a multi-paradigmatic field, containing a large number of relevant concepts, but also a multidisciplinary research area, with concepts originating from psychology (e.g., personality traits), psychiatry (e.g., dark-triad personalities), physiology (e.g., vocal characteristics), and genetics (e.g., twin studies) (Tuncdogan, Acar, & Stam, 2017, p. 41).

Despite the inclusion of new perspectives, research on individual differences and leader development seems to have, by and large, overlooked the relevance of leaders' childhood and youth experiences as contributing factors (Murphy & Johnson, 2011), although many foundational leadership traits are likely to emerge early in life (Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2018). For example, there is theoretical reason to believe that childhood stories and memes about leadership contribute to the growth of *leader identity* (Zaccaro, 2014). Empirical studies support this idea about a link between early life experiences, such as parenting style (Kudo, Longhofer, & Floersch, 2012) or family's intellectual cultural orientation (Oliver et al., 2011), and leadership in adulthood.

A theoretical framework that addresses the connection between experiences early in life and personality development into adulthood, is Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory. In fact, building on psychoanalytic theory, post-Darwinian ethology, cognitive psychology and cybernetics, British psychoanalyst John Bowlby created attachment theory to explain why early relationships with parents have such a pervasive and long-lasting effect on personality development (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 4).

Despite receiving an increased amount of attention in other areas investigating interpersonal dynamics since the 1980s (e.g., adult romantic relationships, Hazan & Shaver, 1987), and being one of the most influential theories in psychology (Finkel & Simpson, 2015; Rholes &

Simpson, 2004), attachment theory has been given surprisingly little attention in the leadership literature (Harms, 2011; Paetzold, 2015). However, this now seems to be changing, with more articles on attachment theory in the field of organizational studies published in the last five years than during the preceding 25 years combined (Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2018).

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the current development of this emerging literature. The following presents the key features of Bowlby's theory and a review of the existing research on leadership and attachment, with a view to identifying research gaps. The consecutive chapters in this dissertation will then raise research questions targeting those gaps.

Attachment theory

A basic premise of attachment theory is that people are born with an innate tendency to seek proximity to others in times of distress (Bowlby, 1969/1982). For example, when distressed, infants and children turn to their caregivers for support and comfort (in attachment terminology, a *safe haven*). Furthermore, knowing that their caregivers are present and sensitive to their needs for security (i.e., a *secure base*), infants and children are more likely to explore the world and engage in activities with confidence and joy. Over time, Bowlby argued, this interplay between child and parent(s) lays the foundation for development of core aspects of the child's personality. As infants experience how their caregivers respond to their needs for security in times of distress, cognitive scripts representing the generalization of these patterns are formed. These mental scripts (in attachment theory referred to as *internal working models*) help the child predict future responses from their significant others.

According to the theory, some children develop a sense of security with their caregiver(s), while others unconsciously develop strategies for coping with lack of sensitivity and availability from those held close (for review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Although subject to change, longitudinal studies have shown that these secure or insecure patterns of relating to others remain relatively stable over time (Fraley & Shaver, 2008), hence highlighting the importance of early childhood experiences for the ability to build and retain trusting relationships in adulthood.

The pioneer work of Mary Ainsworth in the 1970s (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) has been crucial to the popularity of attachment theory. By making these individual differences empirically measurable, she responded to the longstanding critique against psychoanalytic theories being untestable (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As attachment research expanded from the study of the mother-child relationship to include adult relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), categorizations of attachment differences in adults mirroring the work of Ainsworth emerged (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). In the adult attachment literature, individual differences are operationalized as *attachment styles*, defined as *an individual's patterns of expectations, needs, emotions, and social behavior that result from a particular history of attachment experiences, usually beginning in relationships with parents* (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 25). There seems to be a consensus in the literature that adult attachment orientations could be described along two orthogonal dimensions: *attachment avoidance* and *attachment anxiety* (Ravitz, Maunder, Hunter, Sthankiya, & Lancee, 2010)[1].

Individuals with an *avoidant attachment style* experience discomfort with closeness and dependence on relationship partners, and often express a need for independence. *Anxious attachment style* is associated with an intense desire for closeness and protection, and worries about partner availability and their own value to the partner. Individuals holding this style fear rejection and not being loved, and heartily wish for closeness to others, often without experiencing that this is mutual. While anxious attachment style is associated with excessive reassurance-seeking and low self-esteem (Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005), avoidant individuals are more likely to deny personal vulnerabilities and engage in "self-inflation" (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005).

Individuals with low scores on both dimensions are classified as having a *secure attachment style.* People with a secure attachment orientation are more trusting, and hold a favorable view of self and others (for review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Finally, high scores on both dimensions are often labeled as *fearsome* (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) or *fearful avoidance* style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), resembling the *disorganized* attachment

[1]Although individual attachment style should be interpreted along a continuum, rather than from a classification point of view (i.e., the *degree of attachment insecurity* rather than either holding a secure or an insecure attachment style), this thesis will align with the custom in the literature of referring to attachment style in a categorical manner. All analyses, though, will apply the recommendations of Mikulincer and Shaver (2016, p. 534) and calculate dimensional scores when measuring attachment style.

patterns in children observed in by Ainsworth and colleagues (1978). The latter style has received limited attention in the leadership literature, possibly due to its low occurrence. Therefore, in the following, attachment styles will be referred to as *avoidant*, *anxious* or *secure*.

As noted by Harms (2011), in order to make a significant contribution to the study of individual differences, new variables should not be Big Five (McCrae & Costa, 1995) personality traits (i.e., extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism) in disguise (Block, 2000). Although anxious attachment style does correlate with neuroticism, and avoidant attachment style is weakly related to introversion and disagreeableness, the findings are generally either small or insignificant (Fraley & Shaver, 2008). Furthermore, attachment theory postulates that the presence or absence of a secure base is essential when it comes to predicting behaviors like risk-taking or exploration, which in Big Five terminology would mean that traits like openness to experience and neuroticism would change dramatically in the presence of a significant other. Hence, from a theoretical point of view, attachment styles and personality traits should be viewed as fundamentally different concepts (Harms, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Empirical studies have supported this view, showing that attachment style accounts for differences in organizational outcome variables above and beyond the Big Five traits (Neustadt, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Furnham, 2006; Noftle & Shaver, 2006; Richards & Schat, 2011; Roisman et al., 2007).

Attachment theory in leadership research

The idea of applying attachment theory to the workplace was initially introduced by Hazan and Shaver (1990), who saw work in adults as paralleling play in infants and children. However, what seems to be the dominant rationale for studying leadership from an attachment point of view is mirrored in psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's (1930/1963) metaphor of the leader as father figure, and the parallel between the asymmetric parent-child and leader-follower relationship (Keller, 2003; Keller & Cacioppe, 2001). Popper and Mayseless (2003) suggested that leaders, like parents, are supposed to guide, take charge, and care for the less powerful, whose fate is highly dependent on them. From an attachment point of view they argue, the single most important method of leading is to develop a sense of attachment security in followers. When delegating, giving direction, or empowering their followers, in the attachment terminology, the leader serves the *secure base* function, they argue.

Furthermore, by being available, offering meaningful explanations, and providing comfort and support, leaders serve the purpose of a *safe haven*.

This proposed interplay of proximity-seeking and exploration in the leadership process was recently investigated empirically by Wu and Parker (2017), results suggesting that *secure base-oriented* leadership is associated with pro-social behaviors in insecurely attached followers, as could be expected from the theory. In this study, leadership *behaviors* likely to promote follower security, was the independent variable. Most leadership studies, however, have considered attachment *style* rather than leadership *behavior* as the predicting variable, hence focusing more on the individual differences aspect of the theory rather than the normative security-enhancing principles. For example, it has been reported that individuals with a secure attachment style, as expected from theory, are more likely to be selected leaders (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007), are more willing to delegate (Johnston, 2000), and are more often perceived as transformational leaders (Popper, Mayseless, & Castelnovo, 2000).

Furthermore, studies have found that anxiously attached followers are more prone to be driven by their unfulfilled need for love, support, acceptance and reassurance (e.g., Shalit, Popper, & Zakay, 2010). Davidovitz and colleagues (2007) found that leaders' attachment anxiety was associated with lower task efficacy in followers, and more self-serving leadership motives. In the same study, leaders' attachment avoidance was associated with failure to act as a secure provider, and with followers suffering from poorer long-range mental health. Interestingly, avoidant-oriented followers reported higher levels of job satisfaction when the leader was less supportive (Schirmer & Lopez, 2001), a finding that fits the interpersonal goal of the avoidant style, namely keeping distance to avoid rejection and negative emotions. Overall, most studies investigating attachment styles in organizational contexts are in favor of the secure style. However, as addressed below, the *importance* the role-attachment style plays may vary significantly as a function of both intra-psychological and contextual factors.

The leader-follower relationship

The relational side of leadership processes are often highlighted in contemporary leadership research (e.g., Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). For example, the choice of outcome variables frequently investigates emotional or motivational aspects of leadership (Hiller, DeChurch, Murase, & Doty, 2011; House & Aditya, 1997).

Therefore, being a theory about inter-personal dynamics, attachment theory has in particular inspired leadership scholars studying the *dynamics* and the *quality* of leader-follower relationships. For example, building on the authentic leadership (AL) framework (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), a typology of leader-follower attachment style combinations was recently proposed by Hinojosa, Davis McCauley, Randolph-Seng, and Gardner (2014). They argued that there are similarities between their description of being authentic (i.e., high levels of self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) and attachment security. Consequently, they propose that the combination of a securely attached leader and a securely attached follower will make up the most authentic leader-follower relationship. In their 3x3 matrix they describe all nine combinations and rank them from high to low level of authentic quality, with the combination of the avoidant leader and the anxiously attached follower as the least genuine.

A radically different description of these nine combinations is Keller's (2003) congruence theory, proposing that attachment style *similarity* will enhance relationship quality, as leaders and followers in such relationships will hold the same expectations, preferences and interpersonal goals (table 1). For example, according to this view, avoidant attachment styles in both parties will make a well-functioning relationship in which both share a mutual understanding of not expecting a lot of comfort, support, and closeness from the other. Keller's theory is controversial when considering attachment research from different contexts other than the workplace. For example, attachment insecurity has been shown to be positively related to interpersonal difficulties (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), greater hostility toward others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001), dysfunctional attitudes and low self-esteem (Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996), ineffective coping (Wei, Heppner, & Mallinckrodt, 2003), and maladaptive perfectionism (Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004).

TABLE 1

Keller's congruence theory (adapted from Keller, 2003, p. 147)

Possible interactions of leader and follower attachment styles

Follower attachment style	Leader attachment style		
	Secure	Anxious–ambivalent	Avoidant
Secure	Consistent: Positive relationship	Leader clings to follower and fosters dependence; follower doubts own ability	Leader inattentive and provides little emotional support; follower adopts defensive self-reliance
Anxious–ambivalent	Leader seeks distance from follower's clinging; follower intensifies clinging	Consistent: Positive relationship	Leader upset by demanding follower; follower blames self and redoubles efforts
Avoidant	Leader distressed by inability to build relationship with follower; follower resents leader's intrusions	Leader blames self for inability to build relationship with follower; follower retreats further	Consistent: Positive relationship

Although never tested in its entirety, existing evidence gives some support for the beneficial effect of attachment style congruence (e.g., Schirmer & Lopez, 2001). For example, securely attached followers have been found to prefer sociability and consideration in leaders more than both avoidant and anxious followers (Berson, Dan, & Yammarino, 2006). But, contradictory to Keller's predictions, the securely attached co-workers in this study appreciated task-oriented leadership behavior just as much as the ones with anxious attachment style. Richards and Hackett's research (2012) on attachment style and leader-member exchange (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) also yielded mixed support. They did find that LMX quality suffered when there was a significant gap between leader and follower attachment anxiety scores. However, the idea that attachment insecurity in both dyad members could predict higher levels of LMX was not supported among the avoidant leaders and followers, thus challenging the findings of Keller. Therefore, and in line with the theoretical work by Hinojosa and colleagues, what seems to be the more agreed-upon view is that secure attachment style in one, or ultimately both partners, predicts the highest relationship quality (Schyns, 2015). Furthermore, the combination that potentially is the most harmful is the avoidant leader and the anxious follower (Hinojosa et al., 2014; Keller, 2003), as their defense mechanisms are polar opposite, which in turn can result in a dysfunctional push-and-pull cycle (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

As the brief review above reflects, there are both theoretical rationale and empirical studies supporting the view that attachment style constitutes an antecedent to important leadership outcomes. However, this field is still in its early stages, and, as described in more detail below, scholars studying the link between attachment style and leadership outcomes have been urged to investigate both moderators and mediators explaining this link (Paetzold, 2015; Yip et al., 2018).

Responding to these calls for further research, this present study now examines two gaps in the literature that, if tightened, should contribute to increasing understanding of *when* and *how* early experiences in close relationships, operationalized as attachment styles, influence leadership. Next follows a brief description of how these research gaps will be addressed in the following three chapters.

Research gap 1: The principle of attachment-system activation

A core tenant of the original attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982) is the principle of attachment-system activation. According to this principle, as a universal primal response to threat, human attachment schemas are activated under stress or in need, and de-activated when security is re-established (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 30). Applying this principle to leadership research, one would expect the influence of attachment style differences to be stronger when leaders and/or followers experience distress or face situations that are perceived as threatening. For example, in contexts likely to trigger attachment-system activation, strategies such as clinging behaviors (anxious style) or suppression of the need for others (avoidant style), should be more pronounced (e.g., Mikulincer & Florian, 1998).

This aspect of attachment theory has been largely overlooked in organizational research (Yip et al., 2018, p. 9), even though studies have shown that attachment-seeking behaviors increase at work under demanding conditions (Albert, Allen, Biggane, & Ma, 2015). Although only a few empirical studies (e.g., Rom & Mikulincer, 2003) have explored this principle directly, there is indirect evidence suggesting the relevance of attachment-system activation, as effect sizes seem to be bigger in attachment studies from more extreme contexts, such as military combat training (e.g., Davidovitz et al., 2007), compared with samples from less extreme work environments.

In a study by Richards and Hackett (2012), no direct link between leaders' attachment insecurities and follower ratings of LMX was found. This is surprising, as attachment theory suggests that the behaviors and interpersonal goals associated with both avoidant style (e.g., a compulsive self-reliance and devaluation of individuals' display of their own vulnerabilities) and anxious style (e.g., a deeply held longing for love and care from others) are in conflict with common descriptions of effective leadership behaviors (Yukl, 2010). However, Richards and Hackett found that lack of emotion regulation capabilities in anxiously attached leaders moderated the attachment-LMX relationship, such that follower LMX was poorer in those cases where the anxiously attached leaders also struggled with controlling their emotions. This lack of emotion regulation could be seen as evidence demonstrating the importance of attachment-system activation, as robust emotion regulation capabilities might compensate for the negative consequences of attachment-system activation in anxiously attached leaders. However, as a critique of Richards and Hackett, one could argue that lack of emotion regulation, in fact, is one of the core features of the anxious style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) rather than an independent factor. Therefore, our first study investigates attachment style and LMX from a different angle, targeting attachment-system activation directly.

The moderating role of work-related basic need satisfaction

Paper 1 explores attachment-system activation by investigating the moderating role of *work-related basic need satisfaction* (W-BNS; Deci & Ryan, 2000) on the relationship between leader's attachment style and follower LMX. It is proposed that lack of W-BNS will trigger activation of the leader's attachment system, hence causing a decrease in follower LMX. The rationale for selecting this variable to mirror attachment system activation over, for example, stressful workplace events (as suggested by Yip et al., 2018) is the importance of subjective appraisals of potential threats (e.g., Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003). That is, what is perceived as threatening to some, such as organizational change, could be perceived as an exciting opportunity for others (e.g., the biopsychosocial model of challenge and threat; Blascovich & Mendes, 2000), hence causing different levels of attachment-system activation. As the basic psychological needs construct has been found to have universal appeal (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001), there is reason to believe that lack of W-BNS is associated with attachment-system activation in most people (for a discussion on subjective versus objective situations, see Zaccaro et al., 2018).

The moderating effect of group cohesion

Paper 3 investigates attachment system activation from a group perspective, as groups hold the potential to be useful sources of support, comfort, and relief (Abrams, 2015), hence establishing a sense of felt security and prohibiting activation of attachment strategies. Interestingly, in contrast to the anxiously attached group members, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) found that group cohesion (i.e., the shared bond or attraction that drives team members to stay together and to want to work together; Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009) had an adverse effect on those with an avoidant style. They suggested that this finding could be interpreted such that the high level of interdependence found in cohesive groups may cause distress in self-reliant, avoidant individuals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 477), although they see this conclusion as highly speculative. To test this idea and to explore the moderating role of group cohesion, paper 3 proposes that avoidant leaders withdraw from leadership significantly more when they experience higher levels of cohesion in their group, as a consequence of attachment system activation.

Defensive projection as a reaction to attachment system activation

Within the framework of *implicit followership theories* (IFTs; Sy, 2010), paper 2 takes a more narrow approach to the topic of attachment system activation. Rather than investigating consequences, this paper explores how leaders deal with attachment system activation. Specifically, paper 2 examines one of several strategies applied by avoidant individuals when their attachment system is activated (for review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), namely *defensive projection* (Freud, 1915/1957; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). This form of projection is defined as *the act of perceiving in other people those characteristics that one wishes to deny in oneself* (Newman, Duff, & Baumeister, 1997). Studies have found that avoidant individuals, in contrast to secure and anxiously attached people, are more likely to perceive others as dissimilar to themselves to exhibit a false distinctiveness bias (e.g., Gabriel, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud, 2005), and that what is projected onto others is often unwanted self-traits (e.g., Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999). Therefore, paper 2 proposes that when avoidant leaders experience the unpleasantness of negative self-evaluation (in this case, not

feeling competent at work), their attachment system becomes activated. In contrast to secure and anxiously attached individuals, to reduce this attachment system activation these leaders project their negative self-evaluations onto their followers (i.e., perceive them as more incompetent).

Research gap 2: Connecting attachment style to the leader-follower relationship

A second area in which more knowledge is needed is *how* attachment style influences leadership outcomes (Yip et al., 2018). In other words, as attachment style is being established as an antecedent to the quality of the leader-follower relationship (e.g., Game, 2008; Towler & Stuhlmacher, 2013), an essential task for scholars is to develop more complex mediation models explaining this link (Paetzold, 2015, p. 281). Theoretically, if leader and/or follower attachment style does play an antecedent role in determining the quality of leader-follower relationships, there is no apparent single explanation for such an effect. For example, one path that has been investigated is through one dyad member's interpersonal goals (e.g., follower's effort to build high quality relationships; Maslyn, Schyns, & Farmer, 2016), another is through one or both dyad members' emotion regulation capabilities (Kafetsios, Athanasiadou, & Dimou, 2014). The following presents the theoretical rationale for investigating two different pathways that could increase understanding of how leader attachment style influences the leader-follower relationship.

Implicit followership theories as mediator

Numerous attachment studies have demonstrated that both insecure styles are associated with more negative views of others. However, in contrast to avoidant individuals, anxiously attached individuals tend to hold more ambiguous assumptions of others (i.e., both positive and negative views), reflecting their painful memories of significant others, but also their longing for closeness (for review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The latter has also been found in leadership studies, demonstrating anxiously attached followers' tendency to "see" transformational leadership when it is actually not there (Hansbrough, 2012), suggesting that their perception, in this case, is subconsciously colored by their longing for a transformational leader.

In leadership literature, the equivalent to attachment research on people's mental models of others is the study of *implicit theories*, investigating the views leaders hold of followers and vice versa. Implicit theories are lay theories about a category's most defining characteristics (Phillips, 1984; Rosenberg & Jones, 1972). Consequently, an individual's *implicit leadership theories* (ILTs; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1991) consist of this person's subjective view of leaders (e.g., what leaders are like or what characterizes ideal leaders). Likewise, *implicit followership theories* (IFTs; Shondric & Lord, 2010; Sy, 2010) represent people's subjective views of followers.

To our knowledge, no studies have investigated the mediating role of ILTs/IFTs on the relationship between attachment style and quality of leader-follower relationships (e.g., LMX). However, there are theoretical rationales, as well as empirical findings, encouraging testing of such a mediation model. First, there seems to be a consensus that ILTs/IFTs are rooted in childhood and early life experiences (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Junker & van Dick, 2014). For example, Keller (1999) found parents' characteristics to be an antecedent of ILTs, and proposed that ILTs mirror followers' experiences with their caregivers (Keller, 2003). Empirical studies also support the idea that ILTs echo experiences with significant others in childhood (Berson et al., 2006; Boatwright, Lopez, Sauer, VanDerWege, & Huber, 2010; Shalit et al., 2010). Therefore, a promising line of ILTs/IFTs research is on the antecedent role of attachment style (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013).

Second, the link between ILTs/IFT and relationship quality has been investigated in several studies (for review, see Junker & van Dick, 2014). For example, Sy (2010) found that leaders' IFTs were associated with follower ratings of LMX, liking of leader, and trust in leader, in favor of leaders holding a positive view of their followers. Epitropaki and Martin (2005) found that the closer followers perceived their leader's profile to be to their ideal ILTs, the better the quality of LMX, suggesting that consequences of ILTs/IFTs also should be understood beyond mechanisms such as self-fulfilling prophecies (e.g., the Pygmalion effect; Eden, 1990).

Taken together, as the field of attachment-oriented leadership research is at the point where mediators are to be explored (Paetzold, 2015; Yip et al., 2018), the discussion above suggests that ILTs and IFTs are promising candidates in that matter. Paper 2 aims at contributing to this research by investigating the antecedent role of leaders' insecure attachment styles on IFTs. Building on the principle of *schema transference*, defined as *the process by which existing mental representations of significant others resurface to influence new social*

interactions (Andersen & Cole, 1990), and studies supporting the existence of such an effect (Ahmed & Brumbaugh, 2014; Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006), it is suggested that both avoidant and anxious styles are associated with more negative assumptions about followers.

Caregiving avoidance as mediator

A different pathway possibly linking attachment style to leader-follower relationship quality goes through leaders' caregiving system (George & Solomon, 1999). Here, caregiving refers to *an individual's capacity to provide protection and support to others who are either chronically dependent or temporarily in need* (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 348). Bowlby (1969/1982) made a distinction between the *attachment behavioral system*, referring to people's inborn tendency to seek proximity to their loved ones in times of distress, and the *caregiving behavioral system,* relating to people's innate capacity to empathize and care for those in need. Theoretically, these systems are complementary, as being in need activates the attachment system, while the recognition of this need in another person activates the caregiving system in order to respond to the observed distress.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that adults' caregiving competencies are related to experiences with own caregivers earlier in life, such that attachment security is considered a foundation for optimal caregiving (e.g., Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000). However, although interrelated, there is a consensus in the adult attachment literature that they should be viewed as two separate systems (Collins, Ford, Guichard, Kane, & Feeney, 2010).

According to the theory, when dealing with another person's suffering, caregivers react either with empathic compassion or with distress (Batson, 2010). Mirroring the operationalization of attachment styles, individual differences in *caregiving system functioning* is measured along two orthogonal dimensions reflecting the degree of caregiver's distress (Shaver, Mikulincer, & Shemesh-Iron, 2010). *Hyperactivated caregiving* refers to an intrusive, poorly-timed, and effortful way of caring, with the purpose of making oneself indispensable to the other or being admired as a caregiver. *Deactivated caregiving* (or *caregiving avoidance*), on the other hand, involves insufficient empathy, withdrawal or halfhearted assistance, and keeping emotional distance to the person seeking support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 350). The first dimension is the equivalent of the anxious attachment style, and the latter to the avoidant attachment style.

As attachment theory has already been introduced into leadership research, where leader behaviors such as looking out for followers' welfare and expressing appreciation and support is acknowledged in most modern leadership theories (e.g., transformational leadership; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994), it is somewhat paradoxical that leadership scholars, with a few exceptions (e.g., Lavy, 2014; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2012; Wu & Parker, 2017), have neglected this aspect of the theory. In the study by Ronen and Mikulincer (2012), the mediating role of caregiving on the relationship between leader attachment style and follower job satisfaction and burnout was empirically tested. In line with their hypotheses, they found support for their model with the anxiously attached managers, namely that the low levels of job satisfaction and high levels of burnout found among followers of anxiously attached leaders seemed to be caused by these leaders' impaired abilities to provide care. Surprisingly, this pattern was not found among avoidant leaders, although theory suggests that the withdrawal from caregiving associated with avoidant attachment style would cause similar effects on followers. Therefore, paper 3 revisits the model proposed by Ronen and Mikulincer, investigating the mediating role of *caregiving avoidance* on the relationship between leader's attachment avoidance and follower's sense of being cared for (i.e., interactive empathy; Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2006)

Summary

The overall aim of this dissertation is to extend existing knowledge in leadership research and contribute to the academic literature on individual differences. Addressing the research gaps described above, the overall research question addressed in this dissertation is: *How and when is leadership influenced by leader's experiences in close relationships?* The three empirical articles presented next, draw on different literatures when approaching this question. However, they all build on principles and insights from attachment theory. A brief description of the papers is presented in table 2, and the overall research model is presented in figure 1.

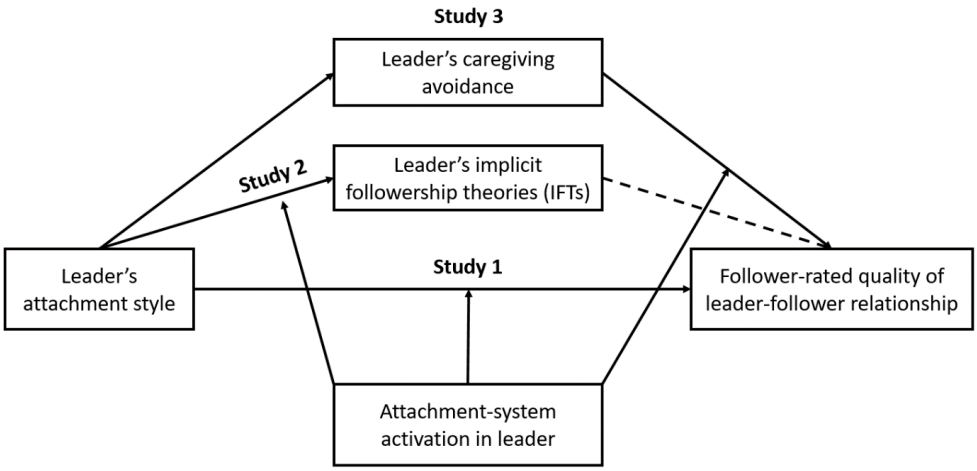
TABLE 2

Overview of the empirical papers

	Topic	n	Methodology	Unit of observation	Level of analysis
Paper 1	Attachment style, LMX, and attachment-system activation	192	Quantitative	Dyadic	Dyadic
Paper 2	Attachment style as predictor of IFTs	254	Quantitative	Individual	Individual
Paper 3	The mediating role of caregiving	410	Quantitative	Group	Individual

FIGURE 1

The overall research model



CHAPTER 2

Attachment style and leader-member exchange: The moderating role of work-related basic psychological needs satisfaction

by

Per-Magnus Moe Thompson, Lars Glasø, and Stig Berge Matthiesen

Abstract

Building on Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory, this study examines how *attachment style*, mirroring an individual's experiences in close relationships, relates to LMX. Data was gathered from 192 independent leader-follower dyads. Results from APIM analysis showed that both avoidant and anxious attachment styles were associated with LMX at the individual level. Surprisingly, no direct links were found at the dyadic level. To further investigate the principle of attachment-system activation, and the idea of leaders serving the role of attachment figures, we examined the moderating role of leaders' *work-related basic psychological needs satisfaction*. Results indicated that among anxiously attached leaders, attachment-system activation (i.e., lack of basic needs) was associated with poorer follower-ratings of LMX. No such effect was found among avoidant leaders. The present study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the relevance of applying key principles from the original theory when studying leadership processes through the lens of attachment.

Keywords: *attachment theory; leader-member exchange; work-related basic psychological needs satisfaction; attachment-system activation*.

Introduction

In recent years, Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory has received increased attention in the leadership literature (Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2018). Most studies applying this perspective on leader-follower relationships focus on individual differences in attachment-system functioning (i.e., attachment styles; Paetzold, 2015), with a few exceptions investigating relational dynamics described in attachment theory, such as the interplay between felt security and exploration (e.g., Wu & Parker, 2017). Attachment style refers to an individual's pattern of expectations, needs, emotions, and social behavior that result from a particular history of attachment experiences, usually beginning in relationships with parents (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 23). Although there is a large body of research demonstrating that individuals with insecure attachment styles struggle more in establishing and maintaining stable and enjoyable relationships (e.g., Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009; Pallini, Baiocco, Schneider, Madigan, & Atkinson, 2014), more research is needed investigating if this also applies to organizational contexts. For example, research on who bears the cost of insecure attachment styles in leader-follower relationships - the one with the insecure attachment style, the dyad partner, or both - has been somewhat inconclusive (e.g., Kafetsios, Athanasiadou, & Dimou, 2014; Richards & Hackett, 2012). The current study examines the association between attachment style and leader-member exchange (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) both at the individual and dyadic level. Further, responding to the call for attachment studies investigating contextual variables, in particular those likely to trigger activation of the attachment system (Paetzold, 2015; Yip et al., 2018), we investigate the moderating effects of work-related basic psychological needs satisfaction, suggesting that lack of basic needs would result in attachment-system activation, hence increasing the negative relational costs associated with attachment insecurities.

Theory and hypotheses

Attachment theory

Bowlby (1969/1982) postulated that infants are born with an innate tendency to seek proximity to others in times of distress. That is, when in need, infants and children turn to their caregiver(s) for support and comfort (in attachment terminology, a safe haven). Furthermore, knowing that a significant other is available and sensitive to their needs (a secure base), they are more likely to explore the world and engage in activities with

confidence and joy. Over time, the child's experiences from this interplay with caregiver(s) develop into generalized mental scripts about close relationships that help the child predict future responses from their significant others. Although individuals eventually also develop person-specific scripts, longitudinal studies have found that these generalized scripts continue to influence interpersonal experiences and expectations throughout life (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006), as they are relatively stable over time (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011).

Attachment style differences are commonly described along two dimensions (Ravitz, Maunder, Hunter, Sthankiya, & Lancee, 2010). One is attachment anxiety, referring to fear of rejection and being unloved, combined with a strong need for closeness to others. The other dimension is attachment avoidance, indicating discomfort with emotional intimacy and reacting to others' need for belonging by exerting their own need for independence. Low scores on both dimensions indicate a secure attachment style. Individuals in this group are both trusting and hold a positive view of self and others. High scores on both dimensions is often labeled as a fearsome (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) style, resembling the disorganized attachment patterns in children observed by Ainsworth and colleagues (1978). However, the latter style has received limited attention in the leadership literature, possibly due to its low occurrence. Therefore, in the following, attachment style differences will be referred to as avoidant, anxious and secure (for review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Leader-member exchange

LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) understands leadership through the quality of the dyadic relationship between leader and follower (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014). A key premise is that leaders differentiate between followers. That is, leaders usually end up having better quality relationships with some followers than others, referred to as high or low quality LMX relationships, respectively. To explain how relationships evolve towards high quality or remain low quality, LMX theory builds on the principle of reciprocity (Blau, 1964): when someone does another a favor, the recipient is motivated to respond in kind. If a mutual investment in each other continues over time, trust is likely to increase. Furthermore, both parties will gradually become less concerned with scorekeeping the give and take, and an increased willingness can emerge to exceed the requirements of the formal job description to protect and help the other. For example, when followers receive attention, support and

resources from their superior, they may reciprocate by putting in extra effort and taking more responsibility (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997).

To date, the majority of the LMX literature has focused on consequences of LMX quality (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014). More than 40 years of research has established links between LMX and important outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Gerstner & Day, 1997), organizational citizenship behaviors (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), and turnover (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012), in favor of high LMX quality. A key issue in contemporary LMX research is to better understand why some relationships evolve into high quality relationships, while others do not. Although studies on LMX antecedents have found numerous predictors, including leader and follower personality traits (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Lapierre & Hackett, 2007), follower competence (Gerstner & Day, 1997), and leader delegation (Yukl, O'Donnell, & Taber, 2009), more research is needed to better understand how and why LMX sometimes changes radically (e.g., Rousseau, 1998), the different routes to high quality relationships, and how to enhance LMX quality.

Most studies have focused on follower LMX alone. The meta-analysis of Ilies, Nahrgang, and Morgeson (2007) revealed only a moderate level of agreement in leader and follower ratings of LMX (the effect size calculated was .37 after correcting for measurement errors). Consequently, scholars have argued that there are both empirical and theoretical reasons to treat leader and follower LMX as independent constructs (Joseph, Newman, & Sin, 2011), and also to acknowledge that LMX is a dyadic or multi-level concept when analyzing and theorizing (Krasikova & LeBreton, 2012).

Attachment style and LMX at the individual level

While research on adult romantic relationships has shown that insecurely attached individuals experience more difficulties relying on and investing in their partner (e.g., Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004), and generally find their relationships less satisfying (e.g., Hirschberger et al., 2009), less is known about how attachment insecurities influence work relationships. Although negative consequences of insecure attachment styles in both leaders and followers have been documented in numerous studies (for reviews, see Harms, 2011; Paetzold, 2015), the effects of attachment insecurities on LMX are not necessarily straight-forward. First, it has been suggested that anxious followers have a tendency to glorify relationships, and see high quality exchanges whether they are there or not (Schyns, 2016). For example, Hansbrough

(2012) found that anxiously attached individuals rated video clips of leaders as more transformational than did others (i.e., more unrealistically positive), suggesting favorable projection (mirroring their own longing for support and care) onto these leaders. Second, the frequently-cited model of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), stating that avoidant style is characterized by a positive view of self and a negative view of others, and anxious style the other way around, also supports the idea that anxiously attached followers are likely to view their dyadic partner favorably. Taken together, these arguments could indicate that individuals holding an anxious attachment style would report more favorable LMX ratings than would others.

In their extensive review, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) challenge Bartholomew and Horowitz' often-cited model, arguing that both insecure styles are associated with negative mental representations of others. Avoidant individuals, using deactivating strategies to distance themselves from the love and support of others, engage in cognitive dismissal of positive information and defensive projection (i.e., projecting one's own shortcomings onto others; Thompson, Glasø, & Matthiesen, 2018). Anxious individuals' use of hyperactivating strategies, motivated by the need for love and attention, influence their view of others in ways that are more complex. Their history of negative interactions with unreliable attachment figures makes them doubt others' ability to care for them, although they remain hopeful, hence they do not have a completely negative view of others. For example, they have a tendency to engage in what is referred to as projective identification (Klein, 1940) in psychoanalytic literature, that is projection of self-traits onto others as a means of blurring the self-other boundaries and defending against separation. The latter process often involves excluding from awareness negative information about oneself and projecting it onto others, which in turn results in a negative view of other people.

Richards and Hackett (2012) conducted the first study to combine measures of adult attachment style and LMX in leader-follower dyads. They found that both avoidant and anxious attachment styles were negatively associated with LMX at the individual level – for both leaders and followers. In line with Richards and Hackett's findings, Towler and Stuhlmacher (2013) demonstrated lower levels of follower LMX in insecurely attached female followers. Furthermore, Kafetsios and colleagues (2014) found that both leader and follower attachment insecurity was associated with lower levels of positive affect and job satisfaction at the individual level. Therefore, building on these empirical studies and the reasoning in Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016) review, we propose that:

Hypothesis 1. In leader-follower dyads, avoidant and anxious attachment styles will be negatively associated with LMX at the individual level.

Attachment style and LMX at the dyadic level

Leadership researchers have argued that attachment style in one member of the leader-follower dyad is likely to influence the dyadic partner, and ultimately how the relationship is perceived by both parties (e.g., Hinojosa, Davis McCauley, Randolph-Seng, & Gardner, 2014; Keller, 2003; Keller & Cacioppe, 2001; Roisman et al., 2007). Theoretically, the influence of leader attachment style on follower is different from the influence of follower attachment style on leader.

Popper and Mayseless (2003), building on Freud's (1930/1963) metaphor of the leader as father figure, argue that leaders, like parents, can serve the function of attachment figures for their followers, guiding and caring for those less powerful, whose fate is highly dependent on them. This idea has been supported empirically. For example, Wu and Parker (2017) found that leadership behaviors mirroring the secure base function (i.e., being available, encouraging and avoiding unnecessary interference), fostered proactivity among followers, especially the ones with insecure attachment styles. Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that an individual's attachment style predicts how care is provided, in favor of secure attachment style (Collins, Ford, Guichard, Kane, & Feeney, 2010). For example, when offering care and support, anxiously attached individuals easily get sidetracked by self-focused worries and concerns, misplaced projections, and blurred interpersonal boundaries (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 350). They are often willing to offer support, but with the unconscious agenda of satisfying their own unmet need for closeness (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2006). Avoidant people, on the other hand, are less likely to respond to others' needs, and as a suffering person might mirror their own suppressed weaknesses, avoidant people are likely to distance themselves by expressing disapproval, lack of sympathy, or pity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 351). Therefore, building on the assumption of leader as attachment figure, and the fact that insecurely attached individuals have more difficulties providing care, we expect that followers of insecurely attached leaders will be less satisfied with their leader relationship.

Being the leader of an insecurely attached follower is also likely to cause interpersonal difficulties. Keller (2003) proposed that anxiously attached followers (who have dealt with unreliable and inconsistent parenting by maintaining close proximity to caregivers), are likely to cling to their supervisor, which in turn could cause the leader to doubt the follower's abilities, be overwhelmed by the intense demands of reassurance, and end up viewing the follower as a burden. Furthermore, Keller proposed that avoidant followers (who have a history of nonresponsive caregivers) are more likely to reject friendly initiatives, distrust others, and engage less in organizational citizenship behavior, which could cause leaders to perceive them as disrespectful, distant, or even hostile. Similar predictions have been made by Hinojosa and colleagues (2014). Therefore, we expect that leaders of insecurely attached followers will be less satisfied with these relationships.

> Hypothesis 2. In leader-follower dyads, one dyad member's insecure attachment style will be negatively associated with the other member's rating of LMX.

Attachment-system activation and the moderating role of basics

The principle of attachment-system activation is a core tenant of attachment theory and yet the most neglected in organizational attachment studies (Yip et al., 2018, p. 9). According to the theory, the attachment-system is activated when the individual experiences threats or distress, and is de-activated when felt security is re-established (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 30). When activated, secure individuals increase accessibility to thoughts of their previous positive interactions with supportive and loving attachment figures, resulting in seeking proximity to the ones held close. In contrast, insecurely attached individuals trigger painful memories of unavailable or derogatory attachment figures. This makes them doubt proximity-seeking as a means to reduce their discomfort, resulting in attachment strategies such as clinging behaviors (anxious style) or withdrawal and suppression of the need for others (avoidant style; e.g., Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Consequently, from a theoretical point of view, the negative outcomes associated with attachment insecurities should be more pronounced in those work contexts where people's attachment-systems are frequently activated.

Despite the lack of organizational studies investigating attachment-system activation, empirical studies indirectly seem to support the significance of this principle. For example, the associations between insecure attachment styles and leadership outcomes seem to be stronger in more extreme contexts, such as military combat training (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007). In their review, Yip and colleagues (2018) suggest several opportunities to investigate this topic, such as the influence of stressful workplace events (e.g., large-scale organizational change) on attachment processes. Building on their ideas, but also studies demonstrating that individual appraisals of potential threats are highly subjective (e.g., Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003), we investigate the moderating role of work-related basic needs satisfaction (W-BNS; Deci & Ryan, 2000). As the construct's universal appeal has been demonstrated in studies of both everyday life (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001) and the workplace (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004), we suggest it holds the potential to reflect attachment-system activation more accurately than, for example, organizational change processes, that by some would be perceived as a threat and by others as an opportunity, hence resulting in different levels of attachment-system activation.

Basic psychological needs is a concept traceable to psychoanalytic thinkers such as Fairbairn, Kohut and Bowlby, and a key element in Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory. The W-BNS construct has three facets, where need for autonomy reflects the feeling of being the initiator of work-related actions, need for competence relates to feeling capable of work-related tasks, and need for relatedness refers to feeling supported and included by colleagues.

Due to the inherent asymmetric nature of leader-follower relationships described above, where leaders from an attachment point of view serve the function of attachment figures (e.g., Popper & Mayseless, 2003), we expect the leader-follower relationship to suffer when insecurely attached leaders experience unfulfilled basic needs. In other words, as the strategies associated with insecure attachment styles (e.g., clinging behavior or withdrawal) are contrary to descriptions of effective leadership behaviors, such as providing care and supporting their followers (Yukl, 2010), we expect follower LMX ratings to be lower when the attachment system of their insecurely attached leader is more often activated. Therefore, to investigate the principle of attachment-system activation in leader-follower dyads, we propose that:

Hypothesis 3a. The relationship between anxious attachment style in leader and follower LMX is moderated by leader's W-BNS, such that follower LMX will be poorer when leader's attachment anxiety is high and basic needs satisfaction is low.

Hypothesis 3b. The relationship between avoidant attachment style in leader and follower LMX is moderated by leader's W-BNS, such that follower LMX will be poorer when leader's attachment avoidance is high and basic needs satisfaction is low.

Methods

Sample and procedure

The aim of our sampling procedure was to gather leader-follower data from different contexts – some more demanding and stressful than others – as attachment-system activation plays a key role in the testing of hypothesis 3. Therefore, using the framework for examining leadership in extreme contexts developed by Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, and Cavarretta (2009) as a guide, data was collected from large and mid-size companies from a variety of branches (22 from private and 1 from the public sector) in Norway, ranging from traditional office workers to fire fighters and health care personnel occupied at demanding specialized institutions. In each of these companies, leaders at one level of the organization (ranging from top management groups to first line managers) were recruited. Of the 454 leaders who received the survey, 298 leaders completed it, yielding a response rate of 65.6%. The next step was to recruit one randomly-selected follower of each leader: 192 followers accepted the invitation and completed the survey questionnaire. In this sub-group, the response rate obtained was of 65.1%. The final dyadic sample thus was comprised of 192 matched pairs of leaders and followers.

The average age of leaders was 46.9 years (range 27 to 67); 62.4% were male, 79.7% had a degree from university or college, 30.4% had five to ten years of leadership experience, another 45.9% had more than ten years of experience, 4.6% had less than one year of leadership experience, and 44.8% of leaders had more than 10 followers reporting to them. Average age for followers was 44.5 years (ranging from 22 to 69), 53.1% were male, and 65.4% held a degree from university or college. The average length of the leader-follower relationship was 1.92 years, and 22.7% of the relationships had lasted longer than five years.

The frequency of interaction varied; 57.2% of the dyadic partners interacted several times a day, another 14.4% on a daily basis, and 5.7% interacted once a week or less.

Measures

Attachment style. Leader and follower attachment style was measured using the self-report 36-item measure Experience in Close Relationships (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). A Norwegian version of the instrument was developed taking a collaborative and iterative approach (Douglas & Craig, 2007) to traditional back translation (Brislin, 1970, 1980). Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The instrument consisted of two subscales, comprising 18 items each. Sample items from the attachment avoidance scale were "I prefer not to show others how I feel deep down" and "I don't mind asking close others for comfort, advice, or help" (reversed). Sample items from the attachment anxiety scale were "I worry a lot about my relationships" and "I want to get very close to others, and this sometimes scares them away." Following the recommendations of Mikulincer and Shaver (2016), the formulas in Brennan et al.'s (1998) appendix for classifying individuals into type categories based on the dimensional ECR scores were not used in the subsequent analyses. Instead, average scores for each subscale were calculated. Coefficient α was .84 for both subscales in the leader sample, and .85 for the avoidant scale, and .88 for the anxious among followers.

Leader-member exchange. Leader and follower LMX was measured using a Norwegian translation (Rønning, Brochs-Haukedal, Glasø, & Matthiesen, 2013) of the LMX-7 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) measure. Sample items were "How well does your leader (follower) recognize your potential" and "How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader (follower)." Responses were measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = e.g., not at all / extremely ineffective, to 5 = e.g., fully / extremely effective. Coefficient α for leaders was .78, and .87 for followers.

Basic psychological needs satisfaction. Leaders completed the Norwegian version (Dysvik, Kuvaas, & Gagné, 2013) of the 20-item measure Work-related Basic Needs Satisfaction scale (W-BNS; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010). The instrument has three subscales: Relatedness, Competence, and Autonomy. Sample items are "At work, I feel part of the group" (relatedness), "I feel competent at my job" (competence), and "In my job, I feel forced to do things I do not want to do" (autonomy) (reversed). Coefficient α

was .77 for relatedness, .81 for competence, and .67 for autonomy. Total scale score was derived by calculating the sum of mean scores from the three subscales.

Control variables. Leaders provided the number of employees reporting directly to them (i.e., span of supervision) and the length of their leadership experience. Followers in each dyad reported frequency of leader-follower interaction and dyadic tenure. Other control variables were leader and follower age, gender, and education level.

Statistical analyses

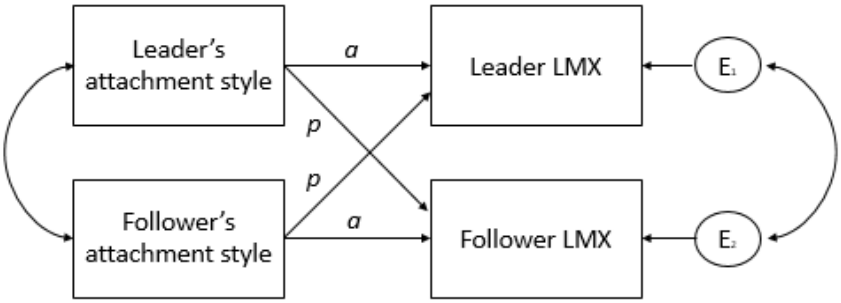
Although empirically weakly associated (Cameron, Finnegan, & Morry, 2012), there is a consensus in the literature that the two insecure attachment styles investigated in this study are seen as orthogonal at the theoretical level (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Therefore, we first performed a Principle Component Analysis (PCA). This is a statistical procedure that uses an orthogonal transformation to convert a set of observations of possibly correlated variables into a set of values of linearly uncorrelated variables (Jolliffe & Cadima, 2016). To ensure discriminant validity, items were excluded from the subsequent analyses if factor loading was lower than .50 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2007), cross-loading was higher than .35 (Kiffin-Petersen & Cordery, 2003), or the differentiation with other items was lower than .20 (Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994). In the leader sample, of the 36 items, seven from the avoidance subscale and six from the attachment anxiety subscale were taken out. In the follower sample, eight (avoidance) and three (anxiety) items were removed.

It has often been the case in LMX research that level of theory and level of analysis have not aligned (Gooty, Serban, Thomas, Gavin, & Yammarino, 2012; Krasikova & LeBreton, 2012). Dealing with data from distinguishable dyad members (i.e., leader and follower), the recommendation of Krasikova and LeBreton was followed, so that hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) (Kashy & Kenny, 2000) and the LISREL 8.80 software. As illustrated in figure 1, this model retains the individual unit measures nested within dyads (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). In APIM, actor effects are referred to as the relationship between the independent and dependent variable within the same dyad member (e.g., a leader's attachment style and LMX ratings), while the partner effect reflects the relationship between a feature in one dyad member and the other dyad member's evaluation of that feature (e.g., leader's attachment style and follower's LMX ratings; Fitzpatricka, Gareaua, Lafontainea, & Gaudreaua, 2016). To determine whether this

choice of method was justified, the correlation between leader and follower ratings of LMX was calculated. The significant result ($r = .26$, $p < .01$) confirmed the lack of interdependence, hence warranting analysis at the dyadic level (Kenny et al., 2006).

FIGURE 1

The APIM schemata for hypotheses 1 and 2 (adapted from Kenny et al., 2006, p. 145)



a = actor effect, p = partner effect.

Results

Descriptive statistics and alpha reliability coefficients are presented in table 1.

TABLE 1

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 Leader age	46.9	8.56																				
2 Leader gender	1.62	.49	.35																			
3 Leader educ.	4.11	.93	-.09	-.10																		
4 Leadership experience	4.05	1.14	.63**	.13	-.07																	
5 Span of supervision	2.93	1.12	.04	-.13	.08	.07																
6 Follower age	44.5	11.1	.18*	.11	-.01	.14*	-.04															
7 Follower gender	1.53	.50	.02	.35**	-.13	.03	.00	.08														
8 Follower educ.	3.72	.96	-.04	-.06	.41**	-.01	.08	-.15*	-.03													
9 Freq. of interaction	4.20	1.07	.09	-.13	-.06	.02	-.22**	.00	-.21**	-.04												
10 Duration of relationship	3.72	1.67	.36*	-.03	-.03	.43**	.16*	.17*	.00	-.07	.14											
11 Leader avoidant attachment style	2.82	.94	.03	.20**	-.08	.01	-.07	.10	.15*	.03	-.14*	.05	(.84)									
12 Leader anxious attachment style	2.33	.80	-.07	.21**	-.06	-17*	-.11	.05	.03	-.03	-.06	-.09	.21**	(.84)								
13 Follower avoidant attachment style	2.91	1.01	.02	.11	-.04	.01	-.03	.01	.17*	.00	-.07	-.08	.16**	.00	(.85)							
14 Follower anxious attachment style	2.72	.94	.03	-.06	-.06	-.03	.00	-.04	.06	-.01	-.04	-.04	.05	.04	.23**	(.88)						
15 Leader-rated LMX	3.95	.47	.14	-.12	.02	.13	-.11	-.10	-.19**	.01	.25**	.20**	-.31**	-.24**	-.09	-.06	(.78)					
16 Follower-rated LMX	3.95	.66	-.06	-.11	.05	-.01	-.05	-.05	-.08	-.04	.07	.09	-.02	-.01	-.14	-.16*	.22**	(.87)				
17 Leader W-BPS - relatedness	4.31	.67	.26**	-.09	.02	.12	.17*	-.13	-.08	-.05	.08	.02	.,34**	-.21**	-.07	-.15*	.30**	-.01	(.77)			
18 Leader W-BNS - competence	4.34	.63	.16*	-.03	-.03	.12	-.10	-.18*	-.02	-.12	.17*	.13	-.16*	-.14	-.14	-.10	.33**	-.14	.27**	(.81)		
19 Leader W-BNS - autonomy	4.05	.71	.11	-.16	.13	-.01	.05	-.20**	-.11	.08	.08	-.01	-.19*	-.21**	-.10	-.13	.23**	.03	.33**	.27**	(.67)	
20 Leader W-BNS - total	4.24	.48	.25**	-.13	.04	.12	.05	-.24**	-.09	-.05	.15*	.08	-.32**	-.27**	-.15*	-.18*	.41**	-.05	.73**	.76**	.70**	(.64)

N = 192. Coefficient α's are displayed on the diagonal.

LMX = Leader-member exchange. W-BNS = Work-related Basic Need Satisfaction. Gender: 1 = female, 2= male; * p <.05; ** p <.01

Actor and partner effects

Results from the APIM analysis are presented in table 2. Hypothesis 1 proposed a link between attachment style and LMX at the individual level in leader-follower relationships. Actor effects in leaders were found for both avoidant attachment style (ß = -.15, t(180) = -4.34, p < .001) and anxious attachment style (ß = -.14, t(180) = -3.35, p < .001). Among followers, both anxious attachment style (ß = -.11, t(180) = -2.23, p < .05) and avoidant style (ß = -.09, t(180) = -1.94, p = .05) were associated with self-rated LMX, although the latter was barely significant at the .05-level. Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported. Hypothesis 2 proposed that the insecure attachment style in one member of the dyad would be associated with poorer LMX ratings from the dyad member. This hypothesis was not supported, as none of the partner effects were significant (beta coefficients ranging from .00 to -.02). Subsequent analyses investigating possible interaction effects (e.g., attachment style congruence) produced similar results, indicating a lack of partner effects. Therefore, findings from the APIM analysis imply that attachment styles are associated with how individuals themselves experience the leader-follower relationship, while the dyad partner's perception of LMX – being either the leader or the follower – is not affected by the other's attachment style.

TABLE 2

APIM analysis results: Direct effects predicting LMX

	Actor				Partner			
Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*	*df*	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*	*df*
Leader avoidant attachment style	-.15	.03	-4.34***	180	.00	.05	.07	180
Leader anxious attachment style	-.14	.04	-3.35***	180	.00	.06	.01	180
Follower avoidant style	-.09	.05	-1.94*	180	-.02	.03	-.51	180
Follower anxious style	-.11	.05	-2.23*	180	-.02	.03	-.71	180

N = 192. Coefficients are standardized. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Moderating effects

To test hypotheses 3, multiple ordinary least squares regressions were conducted. Model 1 contained control variables, model 2 control variables and the main variables, and model 3 consisted of controls, main variables, and interaction effects. Results from the regression analyses are presented in table 3. Hypotheses 3a and 3b proposed that insecure attachment styles in leader are associated with poorer follower LMX if leader experiences less W-BNS at work. The moderation effect was significant (ß = .10, $p < .05$) in the case of anxious attachment style, while no significant interaction effect was found between avoidant style and W-BNS (table 3 and figure 2). Hence, hypothesis 3a was supported, while 3b was not, suggesting that followers of anxiously-attached leaders experience poorer relationship quality if their leader is often distressed.

TABLE 3

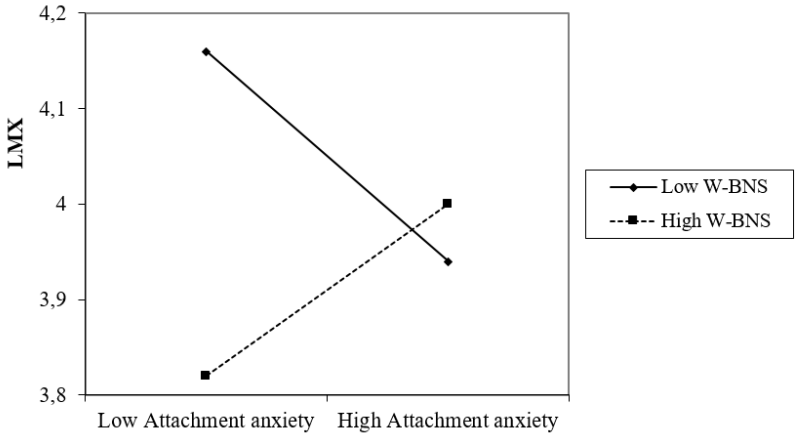
Regression analyses

		Hypothesis 3a		Hypothesis 3b	
Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 2	Step 3
Control variables					
Constant	3.95	3.95	3.98	3.95	3.96
Leader age	-.07	-.05	-.06	-.05	-.05
Leader gender	-.06	-.07	-.06	-.07	-.07
Leader education	.05	.05	.07	.05	.05
Leader experience	.02	.02	.04	.02	.02
Span of supervision	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.05	-.05
Follower age	-.04	-.05	-.06	-.05	-.05
Follower gender	-.02	-.02	.00	-.02	-.01
Follower education	-.04	-.05	-.06	-.05	-.05
Frequency of interaction	.02	.02	.03	.02	.02
Dyadic tenure	.09	.09	.09	.09	.09
Main effects					
Leader anxious attachment style		.00	-.01		
Leader avoidant attachment style				-.01	-.01
Leader W-BNS		-.06	-.07	-.06	-.06
Dyadic tenure					
Interaction effects					
Leader anxious style X Leader W-BNS			.10*		
Leader avoidant style X Leader W-BNS					.02
F-value	.83	.79	1.06	.79	.74
Total R-sq	.04	.05	.07	.05	.05

N = 192. W-BNS = Work-related Basic Need Satisfaction.
Coefficients are standardized. Dependent variable = Follower LMX. * p < .05

FIGURE 2

The moderating role of leader's work-related basic needs satisfaction on the relationship between anxious attachment style in leader and follower-rated LMX



Discussion

Our first hypothesis investigated the direct link between attachment style and LMX at the individual level. We proposed that insecurely-attached leaders and followers would experience lower relationship quality than securely-attached individuals. Our results showed that this was indeed the case, particularly in the leader population, possibly due to the obligations and challenges nested within the leadership role, which may conflict with the interpersonal goals of both avoidant and anxiously-attached individuals. For example, avoidant leaders may find it difficult to express support and concern for followers, as this would entail closeness and acknowledging their followers' vulnerability. Anxiously-attached leaders, on the other hand, may find it hard to make unpopular decisions, as this would conflict with their need for approval and being liked.

A somewhat surprising finding (based on the size of the coefficients) was that avoidant followers seemed to experience their leader-follower relationship as more satisfying than both anxiously-attached followers and leaders. This contradicts the findings of numerous studies outside the work context, namely that the avoidant style is associated with the least favorable evaluation of relationships (e.g., Molero, Shaver, Fernandez, Alonso-Arbiol, & Recio, 2016). However, the complex nature of the defense mechanisms found in avoidant individuals might

explain this finding. As described above, two of the defense mechanisms associated with the avoidant attachment style are: a) projecting early painful experiences with caregivers onto new relationship partners (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006); and b) self-enhancing evaluations (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005). Consequently, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) argue that avoidant individuals might have difficulty explaining to themselves their choice of partner, friends and colleagues (with all their shortcomings and negative attributes), given their own uniqueness. Therefore, a third defense mechanism in avoidant individuals for resolving this issue is splitting, alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation of certain figures in some contexts, thus enabling them to retain their generally negative view of others (Hesse, 1999). For example, avoidant individuals might state that "leaders in general are full of flaws, except for a few exceptional individuals," in order to remain credible and consistent. The object of idealization is usually a superior or authority figure (e.g., parents), so it is more likely this process will occur in followers rather than leaders. Therefore, one possible explanation for our finding is that some avoidant followers engaged in idealizing their leaders, thus evaluating them more favorably.

Our second hypothesis proposed that insecure attachment style in one member of the dyad would negatively affect the other member. The results did not indicate such a direct link. This was similar to the findings of Richards and Hackett (2012), but the opposite of what is usually found when studying attachment and relationship satisfaction in other contexts (e.g., adult romantic relationships; Hirschberger et al., 2009). It is also contrary to the results of Kafetsios and colleagues (2014), who found that followers of anxiously-attached leaders experienced less positive affect and job satisfaction. Richards and Hackett suggested there could be a "compensating" or "neutralizing" element in the leader-follower context that prevents negative partner effects. The two last hypotheses in the current study support this notion, further investigating the link between leader attachment style and follower LMX.

Building on the principle of attachment-system activation, our third hypothesis proposed that followers of insecurely-attached leaders would perceive the relationship less satisfying if their leader experienced less W-BNS. Results supported our predictions in the case of anxious attachment style. This finding points to the relevance of including attachment triggers when studying attachment processes in the workplace, and the suitability of W-BNS as an attachment-system trigger. Furthermore, this finding could also help explain why hypothesis 2 was not supported. There is a possibility that the "neutralizing component" that eliminated the proposed partner effect in our (and Richards and Hackett's) study was lack of attachment-

system activation. The W-BNS mean score in our sample was 4.2 (on a scale from 1 to 5), indicating that most leaders in our study did experience high levels of relatedness, mastery, and autonomy at work. Therefore, a plausible explanation is that the negative consequences of leader anxious attachment style on follower LMX first appear when the leader experiences distress.

We found no moderation effect of attachment system-activation among avoidant leaders. One possible explanation could be that the emotional under-regulation found in anxiously attached leaders is a bigger threat to follower LMX than the suppression of emotions (i.e., over-regulation) found in avoidant leaders. For example, it is likely that followers of anxiously-attached leaders, when distressed, become the focus of emotional gratification, since these leaders tend to rely on validation and support from others to calm down (e.g., Hinojosa et al., 2014; Keller, 2003). Such interpretation is in line with previous research demonstrating the compensatory effect of emotion-regulation capabilities in anxiously-attached leaders (Richards & Hackett, 2012). However, the role of attachment-system activation among avoidant leaders in particular, needs further attention in future studies.

Practical implications

There is a growing literature demonstrating the negative consequences of attachment insecurities in the workplace (Paetzold, 2015; Yip et al., 2018). Consequently, understanding how leaders and followers deal effectively with their attachment insecurities is crucial. As our study demonstrates, the existence of a link between attachment style and important leadership outcomes such as LMX will further contribute to a long-lens approach to leadership development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) that draws parallels between individual early life experiences and current leadership style.

Inspired by Bowlby's (1988) work on how to apply attachment research to clinical practice, Drake (2009) developed an attachment-oriented leadership coaching framework to help insecurely-attached leaders. One of the activities suggested in this approach is having leaders reflect on their interpersonal style and attachment patterns. Adding insight to this work, results from the present study suggest that leaders with different attachment styles would benefit from different interventions and foci. For example, as anxiously-attached leaders seem more vulnerable to attachment-system activation, coaching of these leaders could benefit from

practicing effective ways of coping with stress (e.g., develop relationships that serve the secure base and safe haven function).

Limitations and future directions

Certain limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results of the present study. First, our cross-sectional data make causal claims unwarranted (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). Second, all our hypotheses rely on accurate ratings. As pointed out by Hansbrough, Lord, and Schyns (2015), there are many factors influencing ratings of leadership, including individual differences. For example, the attachment style of raters is likely to influence how leadership is perceived, as various types of projections are associated with the different attachment styles (Hansbrough, 2012; Thompson et al., 2018). This variance could be treated as measurement error, but it could also be seen as an effect that is part of the leadership process (e.g., Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012). Building on this notion, and our results supporting the view that attachment-system activation is a phenomenon of relevance when studying attachment and leadership, we suggest that future attachment studies include measures of attachment style and potential attachment triggers (e.g., W-BNS) from both leader and follower.

Finally, the principal component analysis revealed weaker factor loadings than expected. Even though the ECR has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties in non-work contexts (Ravitz et al., 2010), several ECR items in the current study were removed when our fairly strict rules of thumb were applied. We have noticed that, with a few exception (e.g., Richards & Schat, 2011), most attachment studies within the leadership literature do not elaborate on the psychometric properties of the attachment style measure used. We urge future studies to be more explicit on this matter, so that leadership scholars eventually will have a better starting point when selecting their attachment style measurement tools.

Conclusion

The present research aimed at extending the understanding of how early attachment experiences with significant others (e.g., parents) influence leader-follower relationships. Taken together, we argue that attachment theory does serve as a useful framework for studying leadership, and that attachment style constitutes an important individual differences

factor, as we find this variable to be associated with LMX both at the individual and dyadic level. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of applying key principles (e.g., attachment-system activation) from the original theory when studying leadership processes through the lens of attachment.

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CHAPTER 3

The way I see you. Implicit followership theories explored through the lens of attachment

by

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Abstract

Building on Bowlby's attachment theory, the present study examines the relationship between leaders' attachment style, mirroring their relational experiences with significant others, and implicit followership theories (IFTs). Drawing on the principle of schema transference, it was hypothesized that both anxious and avoidant attachment styles were related to negative IFTs. Furthermore, investigating the phenomenon of defensive projection, it was proposed that leaders' perception of their own competence level would moderate the relationship between avoidant style and the IFT facet 'incompetence,' so that avoidant leaders feeling less competent at work would view followers as more incompetent than other avoidant leaders. Survey data was collected from 258 leaders in a variety of work settings. Hierarchical regression analyses supported both hypotheses. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: *attachment theory; attachment style; implicit followership theories; schema transference; defensive projection*

Introduction

It has been more than half a century since McGregor's (1960) seminal book on Theory X and Theory Y managers. In recent years, scholars have found empirical support for McGregor's idea, namely that: (a) leaders do hold different views of followers (Wofford & Goodwin, 1994; Wofford, Goodwin, & Whittington, 1998), and (b) that these views are associated with important outcomes, such as follower liking, relationship quality, trust, and job satisfaction (Sy, 2010). The phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecies, or the Pygmalion effect (Eden, 1990), has been suggested as an underlying mechanism explaining why leaders' view of followers influences important aspects of leader-follower relationships (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997; Whiteley, 2012).

Little is known about the origin of these follower assumptions, referred to as implicit followership theories (IFTs) in contemporary research (Sy, 2010). However, it is often assumed that implicit theories develop through socialization experiences early in life (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013), such as interactions with parents (Keller, 2003). The aim of the present study is to use Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory to investigate empirically, for the first time, the link between attachment style (mirroring the quality of interactions with parents and others held close) and leaders' IFTs. Our study responds to the need for research on IFT antecedents (Epitropaki et al., 2013).

Theory and hypotheses

Implicit followership theories

In organizations, individuals unconsciously deal with information complexity by applying previous experience to what appear to be relevant situations (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Lord & Maher, 1991). This entails reliance on pre-existing cognitive schemas to make sense of others' behaviors and to predict future behaviors (Rosch, 1978). Among these cognitive schemas, organizational scholars have showed particular interest in implicit theories, defined as lay theories about a category's most defining characteristics (Phillips, 1984; Rosenberg & Jones, 1972). Consequently, implicit followership theories (IFTs) represent subjective views of followers (e.g., Shondric & Lord, 2010; Sy, 2010). These largely subconscious assumptions (sometimes referred to as prototypes, schemas, or exemplars) include cognitions about how followers behave, their values and their attributes. In contrast to the voluminous

literature on implicit leadership theories (ILTs; Eden & Leviatan, 1975), IFT research is still in its early stages (Junker & van Dick, 2014).

IFT content seems to comprise both performance-related attributes and attributes such as loyalty and being able to cooperate with others (Van Gils, Van Quaquebeke, & van Knippenberg, 2010). Although most IFT studies have focused on typical rather than ideal IFTs (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010), Sy (2010) found the content of the two to be quite similar. The six factors from Sy's study are industry, enthusiasm, good citizenship, conformity, insubordination, and incompetence. The first three hold a positive valence (i.e. followership prototype), and latter three hold a negative valence (i.e., followership anti-prototype).

Among various information-processing models describing cognitive processes related to implicit theories, categorization theory has received the most attention (Junker & van Dick, 2014). According to this theory, once an individual recognizes and classifies someone, for example as a follower, a pattern-completion process will occur through which the individual "fills in the gap" by applying his or her subjective IFTs (Shondrick, Dinh, & Lord, 2010). More recent information processing models facilitate a deeper understanding of how implicit theories operate (Shondric & Lord, 2010). For example, connectionist theory (Brown & Lord, 2001) and the principle of schema (de)activation may explain the fact that IFTs seem to be both sensitive to context (Kruse & Sy, 2011), and yet quite stable over time (Sy, 2010).

Attachment theory and mental representations of others

Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory offers an empirically-based framework for investigating the relationship between (a) the quality of interactions with primary caregivers in childhood, and (b) mental representations of others in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Specifically, attachment theory proposes that experiences with caregivers in times of need are cognitively encoded, processed, and stored in the form of mental representations of self and others, which in turn provide the framework of a person's attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 149).

Attachment style is defined as "an individual's patterns of expectations, needs, emotions, and social behavior that result from a particular history of attachment experiences, usually beginning in relationships with parents" (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Individuals holding a

secure attachment style find it easy becoming emotionally close to others and being dependent on others. Avoidant attachment style is characterized by feeling uncomfortable when others want to get emotionally close, and individuals with this attachment style often express the need for independence. When avoidant individuals face threats or distress, they draw attention away from the threat, or suppress thoughts and mental images likely to activate the attachment system (i.e., deactivating strategies; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 39). Anxious attachment style is characterized by worries of rejection and not being loved, and strongly desiring closeness to others in times of need (i.e., hyperactivating strategies; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 37).

A recent review by Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) goes against the more simplistic model by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), which proposed that avoidant individuals hold positive views of self and anxiously-attached individuals hold positive views of others. First, they present evidence suggesting several underlying mechanisms explaining how early attachment experiences influences mental representations of others in adulthood (e.g., schema transferences and defensive projection, see below). Second, they describe how individuals with different insecure attachment styles maintain these negative views differently. For example, by diverting their attention away from attachment-related information, avoidant individuals dismiss others' good intentions and positive traits. As a result, genuine signals of others' support and love can be overlooked, easily forgotten, or shallowly processed, so that the existing negative schemas of others seldom are challenged (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 169).

Attachment style as an IFT antecedent

Although early socialization processes are assumed to influence the development of IFTs (Epitropaki et al., 2013), to our best knowledge, no studies have investigated attachment style as an IFT antecedent. However, implicit leadership theories have been studied from an attachment theoretical perspective. For example, Keller (2003) proposed that ILTs mirror follower experiences with their caregivers. She hypothesized that the ILTs of securely-attached individuals include images of sensitive, supportive, and attentive leaders, as these followers have experienced consistent and warm caregiver responsiveness. Anxiously-attached followers, having experienced inconsistent caregivers, may likewise hold ILTs that include images of leaders who are inconsistent in their responsiveness, supportiveness, and

attentiveness. Finally, ILTs of avoidant followers, having experienced consistent non-responsiveness from their caregivers, may include images of insensitive, indifferent, and inattentive leaders.

The first empirical testing of Keller's idea was conducted by Berson, Dan, and Yammarino (2006). Results showed that anxiously-attached individuals viewed ideal leaders as less considerate compared to secure individuals, and avoidant individuals viewed ideal leaders as less sociable. Later, Shalit, Popper, and Zakay (2010) found, when they had college students watch videos of candidates for a CEO position, that securely-attached individuals favored leaders who engage in two-way communication, were warm, considerate, and ethical (personalized charismatic leaders). Avoidant individuals favored leaders who cared more about their own self-interest, were detached, impersonal and cold (personalized charismatic leaders). A similar result was also found by Boatwright, Lopez, Sauer, Van Der Wege, and Huber (2010). In the latter study, both anxiously- and securely-attached individuals shared the preference for relational leaders, in contrast to avoidant individuals. Taken together, it seems that securely- and anxiously-attached individuals prefer caring and supportive leaders. Avoidant individuals who value autonomy and independence do not share these views of ideal leaders. Furthermore, these results suggest that ILTs may have roots in images of one's parents, such that people prefer leaders similar to their parents regardless of the quality of this relationship, and that ILTs echo relationship experiences with significant others such that earlier experiences with inconsistent or indifferent relationship partners result in mental models of others that are less trustful.

Whether or not one could expect IFTs to be associated with attachment style based on ILT research is a matter of generalizability. A fundamental principle in attachment theory is that representations of others are carried forward from one relationship to the next (Bowlby, 1973). Within the social-cognitive perspective, this principle has been termed *schema transference*, and is defined as "the process by which existing mental representations of significant others resurface to influence new social interactions" (Andersen & Cole, 1990). In a study investigating the generalizability of this principle in the context of adult romantic partners, Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) found evidence that working models of attachment are activated and applied to new relational contexts both in a selective and general way. Specifically, they found that established representations of others influence new relationships more when features of a novel social target overlap with features of one's former significant others (i.e., a selective effect), but also in cases where there was no such overlap (i.e., a

general effect). More evidence in favor of a general effect was found in a study by Ahmed and Brumbaugh (2014), showing that attachment insecurities towards parents among undergraduate students were transferred to a variety of relationships (e.g., friends). As there is both empirical evidence and theory supporting the idea that relational experiences with significant others in childhood can influence new relationships such as the leader-follower relationship, we propose that the general negative view of others associated with both insecure attachment styles will influence leaders' general assumptions about followers:

Hypothesis 1a: Avoidant attachment style in leader is negatively associated with prototype IFTs and positively associated with anti-prototype IFTs.

Hypothesis 1b: Anxious attachment style in leader is negatively associated with prototype IFTs and positively associated with anti-prototype IFTs.

Defensive projection

In addition to the schema transference process, negative views of others may be exacerbated through a deactivating strategy unconsciously applied by avoidant individuals called defensive projection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Rooted in psychoanalysis (Freud, 1915/1957), this type of projection is defined as the act of perceiving in other people those characteristics that one wishes to deny in oneself (Newman, Duff, & Baumeister, 1997). Studies have confirmed that avoidant individuals, in contrast to secure and anxiously-attached people, are more likely to perceive others as dissimilar to themselves to exhibit a false distinctiveness bias (e.g., Gabriel, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud, 2005), and that what is projected onto others is unwanted self-traits (e.g., Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999).

If the defensive projection phenomenon applies to IFTs, we would expect that those avoidant leaders who experience more unwanted negative self -thoughts and emotions are more likely than other avoidant leaders to perceive followers in a negative light because they project their own unwanted material onto them. Furthermore, according to the theory, we would expect this effect to be domain-specific. For example, if a leader experienced lack of motivation at work, (s)he would be more likely to view followers as less motivated, while other follower assumptions would remain the same.

To explore this phenomenon empirically, competence was selected as the moderating variable. This variable meets an important criterion when studying the defensive projection effect: it taps a subjective unpleasant inner state (i.e., incompetence being an unwanted self-evaluation; Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005) and has also proven to be a key follower attribute in studies investigating IFT content (e.g., Van Gils et al., 2010). This is essential, as defensive projection involves transforming an unwanted inner state to an attribution. Competence refers to a person's feelings of curiosity and desire for efficacy, and is considered at all ages one of the basic psychological needs that must be satisfied in order for an individual to experience a sense of growth and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As it is mainly when people lack security or feel threatened that they tend to compensate by engaging in psychological defense mechanisms such as defensive projection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), and the fact that studies have connected lack of competence to internal states such as shame and depression (Wei et al., 2005), we propose that when avoidant leaders feel less competent at work, they may deal with this threat unconsciously by projecting that unwanted material onto followers. Furthermore, as what is being projected is domain-specific material (Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999), we propose that the interaction effect between avoidant attachment style and perceptions of own competence level is limited to the competence facet:

> Hypothesis 2: The relationships between leader's avoidant attachment style and the IFT facet incompetence is moderated by leader's perception of own competence level, such that those avoidant leaders who experience lack of competence at work view followers as less competent than do other avoidant leaders.

Methods

Sample and procedure

Replicating Sy's (2010) sampling strategy, data were collected from a wide range of industries (e.g., retail, healthcare, construction, professional services). Organizations were recruited through The Brönnöysund Register Centre, the Norwegian government's main register for data on individuals and businesses. An invitation to participate in this research project was sent to approximately 300 companies from the region of Oslo, resulting in 16 companies (14 within the private sector, 2 from public sector) being willing to participate. For

validity purposes, only leaders were addressed in each company. To reduce the effect of branches, we wanted each company to contribute approximately equally with the number of leaders. Therefore, we asked each organization to select 10 to 30 leaders themselves. These leaders received an e-mail from the HR director or CEO, with the link to our survey, and a friendly request to find time to fill out the questionnaire. Out of the 379 leaders included in the study, 258 leaders (a response rate of 68%) completed the survey: 13% were CEOs or members of the top management group, 18% were middle managers, and the remaining 70% were first-line managers, 69% of the participants were male, average age was 46.33 (SD = 8.90), average years of higher education (college/ university) was 3.78 (SD = 1.07), and average total years of experience in leadership positions was 4.02 (SD = 1.18).

Measures

Attachment style was measured with the 36-item instrument Experience in Close Relationships (ECR) by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998), which has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across different cultures (Ravitz, Maunder, Hunter, Sthankiya, & Lancee, 2010). It consists of the two 18-item subscales, attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. Our Norwegian version of the instrument was developed taking a collaborative and iterative approach (Douglas & Craig, 2007) to traditional back-translation (Brislin, 1970, 1980). Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items from the attachment avoidance scale are "I prefer not to show others how I feel deep down" and "I don't mind asking close others for comfort, advice, or help" (R). Sample items from the attachment anxiety scale are "I worry a lot about my relationships" and "I want to get very close to others, and this sometimes scares them away." Following the recommendations by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver to treat attachment style as continuous variables, average scores for each subscale were calculated. As seen in table 1, coefficient α (for the remaining items after the EFA, described below) was .83 for the avoidant subscale, and .85 for the anxious subscale.

Implicit followership theories were measured using Sy's (2010) trait list, consisting of six first-order factors (i.e., industry, enthusiasm, good citizenship, conformity, insubordination, and incompetence) and two higher-order facets (i.e. followership prototype and followership anti-prototype). The first three and the latter three factors make up the two second-order factors; prototypic (positive) and anti-prototypic (negative) IFTs. Leaders were asked to make

judgments on a 9-point Likert scale on how well adjectives describe "the typical follower." Coefficient α for the conformity factor was only .65, and this factor was excluded after the EFA (see below). The remaining first-order factor α's ranged from .75 to .90 (table 1). Since the hypotheses make predictions about IFTs along the positive-negative dimension, the two second-order IFT factors (i.e., prototype and anti-prototype followership) were calculated (average scores of first order factors) and used in the regression models.

Competence was measured using the seven items that comprise the competence factor in the Norwegian version (Dysvik, Kuvaas, & Gagné, 2013) of the Work-related Basic Need Satisfaction scale (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010). Sample items include "I doubt whether I am able to execute my job properly" (R) and "I feel competent at my job." Coefficient α (for the refined scales after EFA) was .76.

Control variables were age, gender, leadership experience and education, as all four have proven to influence IFTs in earlier studies (Junker & van Dick, 2014).

Statistical analyses

Most theories within the field of attachment share the assumption that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are orthogonal dimensions, although a recent meta-analysis including 196 samples revealed a weak correlation (r = .15) between the two when measured with the ECR (Cameron, Finnegan, & Morry, 2012). Specifically, the theory about hyperactivating and deactivating strategies considers these processes as either/or responses to attachment threats, assuming that the two insecure styles are unrelated (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). As the hypotheses in the present study rely on theory that see attachment styles as orthogonal, we applied this perspective when analyzing our data. Principal component analysis (PCA) is a statistical procedure that uses an orthogonal transformation to convert a set of observations of possibly correlated variables into a set of values of linearly uncorrelated variables (Jolliffe & Cadima, 2016). We found this approach suitable for the purpose of testing our hypotheses, as we investigate both how attachment styles differ and opposite valence (positive vs negative) of IFTs. Therefore, to enhance discriminant validity, items were excluded from the subsequent analyses if the factor loading was lower than .50 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2007), cross-loading was higher than .35 (Kiffin-Petersen & Cordery, 2003), or if the differentiation with other items was lower than .20 (Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994). Basic descriptive statistics include means, standard deviation, and inter-correlations of the control

and main variables (table 1). Calculation of all regression coefficients was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

Results

Principal component analyses

Applying the strict rules of thumb outlined above, six out of the 18 items from the avoidant attachment scale in the ECR (Brennan et al., 1998) were rejected (items 3, 11, 13, 17, 21, and 29), and four out of 18 items (16, 22, 26, and 28) were taken out of the anxious-attachment scale. Three out of seven items (7, 10, and 12) from the competence subscale in the Work-related Basic Need Satisfaction scale (Van den Broeck et al., 2010) were also removed. Regarding Sy's (2010) IFT measure, factor analysis showed that all items in five out of six first-order factors performed according to our exclusion criteria and loaded properly on both first- and second-order factors. However, none of the three items that make up the conformity factor loaded properly on either followership prototype or anti-prototype. As this study evaluates the valence (i.e., positive vs negative) of IFTs, and factor analysis showed that conformity did not prove to be considered as either positive or negative in our leader sample, this subscale was excluded in the subsequent analyses.

TABLE 1

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities

	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Gender	1.69	.47														
2	Age	46.33	8.90	.01													
3	Education	3.78	1.07	-.18**	.09												
4	Leadership experience	4.02	1.18	.16**	.54**	.10											
5	Avoidant attachment style	2.85	.90	.27**	-.03	-.17**	.07	(.83)									
6	Anxious attachment style	2.77	.87	.24**	-.06	-.07	-.07	.21**	(.85)								
7	IFT - Industry	19.95	3.94	-.20**	.08	-.01	.02	-.22**	-.17**	(.83)							
8	IFT - Enthusiasm	21.16	3.86	-.19**	.06	.00	.02	-.29**	-.27**	.75**	(.87)						
9	IFT - Good citizen	22.25	3.67	-.18**	.12	.02	.09	-.19**	-.26**	.65**	.73**	(.90)					
10	IFT - Conformity	17.98	4.09	-.16**	.05	-.15*	-.02	-.12	.03	.30**	.26**	.33**	(.66)				
11	IFT - Insubordination	6.68	3.81	.23**	-.09	-.08	-.06	.33**	.28**	-.37**	-.49**	-.54'*	-.21**	(.84)			
12	IFT - Incompetence	7.53	3.93	.20**	-.14*	-.01	-.08	.27**	.26**	-.48**	-.47**	-.44**	-.25**	.67**	(.75)		
14	Self-rated competence	4.13	.53	-.11	.10	.01	.13*	-.23**	-.27**	.16*	.22**	.27**	.15*	-.25**	-.25**	.24**	(.76)

N = 258; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Coefficient α's are displayed on the diagonal.

Gender coded 1 = female, 2= male; education = years of higher education; Leadership exp = total amont of years in leader roles

IFT = Implicit followership theories; LMX = Leader-member exchange

Direct effects

Hypothesis 1a and 1b proposed a relationship between leaders' insecure attachment styles and negative IFTs (i.e., lower ratings of prototype IFTs and higher ratings of anti-prototype IFTs). As seen in tables 1 and 2, both insecure styles were associated with less positive IFTs (ß = -.20 for avoidant style, and ß = -.18 for anxious style) and more negative IFTs (ß = -.26 for avoidant style, and ß = -.21 for anxious style). All p values were below the .01 level. Collinearity statistics indicated that the two independent variables (i.e., attachment styles) clearly contributed separately in the regression analysis, tolerance values for both IFT regression models being .91 for avoidant attachment style, and .93 for anxious attachment style. Therefore, hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. Furthermore, these findings indirectly suggest that the secure style (i.e., low scores on both dimensions) is associated with the most positive IFTs among the three attachment styles, as both insecure styles seem to have a similar impact on IFTs. To investigate empirically if the secure style in fact was associated with more favorable IFTs, we performed an additional analysis. First, we merged each leader's scores on the two insecure attachment dimensions to calculate a score reflecting degree of attachment insecurity. Then we performed the same analysis as described above. As expected, secure attachment style (i.e., low attachment insecurity score) predicted both prototypical (ß = .34) and anti-prototypical (ß = -.40) IFTs. However, as the ECR does not tap the full range of security (Cameron et al., 2012; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), this finding should be interpreted with caution.

TABLE 2

Regression analysis; the effect of avoidant and anxious attachment styles on prototype (positive) and anti-prototype (negative) IFTs.

Dependent variables: Implicit followership theories

	IFT - prototype		IFT - anti-prototype	
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	-.23***	-.14*	.25***	.13*
Age	.08	.07	-.10	-.08
Education	-.05	-.08	.01	.05
Leadership experience	.05	.05	-.06	-.06
Attachment avoidance		-.20***		.26***
Attachment anxiety		-.18**		.21***
Total R^2	.06	.14	.07	.19
F value	3.96**	6.72***	5.00***	9.81***

N = 258; gender coded 1 = female, 2= male; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$,

Moderating effect

Hypotheses 2 proposed that leaders' perception of their own competence level moderates the relationship between avoidant attachment style and IFT facet incompetence. To test this hypothesis, a multiple ordinary least squares regression was conducted. Model 1 contained control variables, model 2 control variables and the main variables, and model 3 consisted of controls, main variables, and interaction effects. The hypothesis was supported, as the interaction term was significant and slopes were according to our prediction (table 3 and figure 1). Considering discriminant validity, additional analysis showed no other interaction effect between the two attachment styles and competence on any of the IFT facets.

TABLE 3

The moderating effects of competence on the relationship between avoidant attachment style and IFT incompetence facet

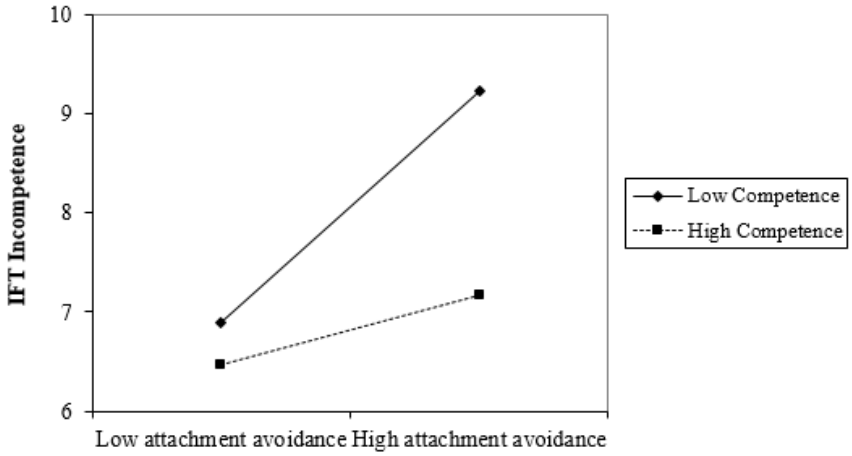
Dependent variable: IFT Incompetence

	Avoidant attachment style		
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controls			
Gender	.85**	.57*	.58*
Age	-.46	-.39	-.39
Education	.16	.25	.20
Leadership experience	-.20	-.18	-.12
Direct effects			
Attachment avoidance		.80**	.76**
Competence		-.67**	-.62*
Interaction effects			
Attachment avoidance x Competence			-.41*
Total R-sqare	.06**	.14**	.16**
F	4.22**	6.98**	6.71**

N = 258; gender coded 1 = female, 2= male; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$
Coefficients standardized

FIGURE 1

The moderating effects of competence on the relationship between avoidant attachment style and IFT incompetence facet



Discussion

Little is known about the origin of implicit followership theories. Furthermore, the question of IFT stability over time has produced conflicting evidence, suggesting that leaders both hold relatively stable assumptions about followers (Sy, 2010), and that IFTs seem to change from moment to moment. For example, Kruse and Sy (2011) found that negative emotions were associated with more negative IFTs, supporting the connectionist view, namely that implicit theories exist in broad cognitive networks with emotional valence, and experiencing an emotion should increase the likelihood of activating those parts of the network that are emotionally congruent (i.e., affective priming; Hermans, Houwer, & Eelen, 1994). Therefore, scholars have recently called for research on IFT antecedents (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Junker & van Dick, 2014) and the fluid and context-sensitive nature of implicit theories (Foti, Hansbrough, Epitropaki, & Coyle, 2017).

The contribution of our study is two-fold. First, we present empirical evidence that supports the existing view on the origin of implicit theories related to leadership processes, namely that they are rooted in early life experiences (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Keller, 2003). A fundamental assumption in attachment theory is that existing mental representations of significant others are carried forward from one relationship to the next (Bowlby, 1973), and research on schema

transference has supported this view (Ahmed & Brumbaugh, 2014; Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006). Building on Freud's work, that drew parallels between father figures and leaders (e.g., Keller, 2003; Popper & Amit, 2009), organizational scholars have found support for this idea, linking attachment style to implicit leadership theories (ILTs; Berson et al., 2006; Boatwright et al., 2010; Shalit et al., 2010). The present study develops this research further by connecting attachment style to leaders' assumptions about followers (i.e., IFTs). As proposed, both avoidant and anxious styles were associated with more negative IFTs in our study, indicating that securely-attached leaders hold more favorable IFTs. Interestingly, our results indicate that avoidant leaders hold more negative IFTs than anxious leaders, which could be explained by the ambivalent nature of the anxious style (e.g., both hope and doubt), in contrast to the more one-sided negative view of others associated with avoidant attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). A similar difference between the two attachment styles was demonstrated in a study by Zhang and Hazan (2002). They investigated how many behavioral instances were needed to confirm or disconfirm the existence of the positive and negative traits in a hypothetical partner. Results showed that avoidant participants requested more evidence before concluding that others possessed positive traits, suggesting more stability in their negative views of others.

The second contribution of the present study is offering theoretical explanations about the underlying mechanisms connecting experiences early in life (i.e., attachment styles) with IFTs. Our results support the idea that leaders' attachment experiences influence IFTs, not only through the more general process of schema transference, but that there are different routes at the intra-psychological cognitive level. Specifically, our results suggest that one such route is through defensive projection, and that this effect, in line with theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), is associated with the avoidant style. This finding underlines the complexity of the mechanisms involved, as schema transference processes and the defensive projection effect are likely to occur under different conditions. While schema transference occurs when a target reminds an individual of a past significant other (i.e., the principle of schema activation based on similarity; Ahmed & Brumbaugh, 2014), defensive projection is a result of the interplay between a psychological defense mechanism (relatively stable) and an unpleasant inner state (relatively unstable). For example, avoidant leaders might perceive a follower as overly distrustful if the follower reminds the leader of a distrustful parent (i.e., transference). But it could also be the case that the perception of the follower as distrustful results from the leader having behaved in a distrustful manner him/herself, and dealing with this negative way

of behaving through projecting the unwanted self-trait onto the follower (i.e., defensive projection).

Practical implications

There is a voluminous literature on the negative consequences of both attachment insecurities (Paetzold, 2015) and negative implicit theories (Junker & van Dick, 2014) in the workplace. Therefore, knowledge on how to reduce these negative consequences is essential, and has thus far received scant attention. In the following, we present some suggestions on how our research findings could be integrated into executive coaching practices and leadership training programs.

Executive coaching is a targeted, purposeful intervention that helps executives develop and maintain positive change in their personal development and leadership behavior (Grant, 2012). Based on Bowlby's (1988) model on helping clients understand their attachment experiences, identify and revise insecure working models, and learn about ways to achieve healthy relationships, Drake (2009) developed a guide for applying attachment theory in executive coaching. Mirroring Bowlby's work, one of the coaching activities is exploring leaders' patterns of attributing and projecting established working models onto present relationships. Our study presents empirical evidence underlining the relevance of this activity. Furthermore, our finding of a defensive projection effect suggests that looking into these patterns of attributing and projecting does not necessarily start out by investigating early attachment experiences, but could also be addressed when avoidant leaders show their tendency to see followers in a negative light. We share Drake's notion that this tendency should be understood as a strategy developed early in life in order to protect oneself, and that this strategy is now no longer helpful, or even necessary (Cozolino, 2004). The coaching industry is a field with high variation in coaches' background and quality of training (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2017), and our view is that using attachment theory in leadership coaching only applies to coaches with extensive training in psychology.

Leadership training programs are designed to enhance leader knowledge, skills, and abilities (Day, 2000), and a recent meta-analysis suggests that these programs are substantially more effective than previously thought (Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, & Salas, 2017). One way of facilitating learning in leadership training programs is to challenge leaders' preexisting schemas and thinking patterns (Unsworth & Mason, 2012). Scholars have suggested different

approaches targeted at changing negative implicit theories, including a self-reflection exercise identifying, validating, and adjusting one's own assumptions (Junker & van Dick, 2014), and an exercise where participants draw their prototypes before discussing their drawings in groups and in the plenum (Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, & Tymon, 2011). We suggest that applying a life-span perspective (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) to how leaders' IFTs may have developed could be helpful when reflecting upon their follower assumptions and the current state of their follower relationships. For example, as a supplement to the exercises mentioned above, trainers could end the session by presenting research on IFT antecedents, followed by a personal reflection where each leader is given the opportunity to make sense of the origin of his/her IFTs, in order to increase self-understanding (Bell & Leite, 2016).

Limitations and future directions

Obviously, this study is not without limitations. Even though we theorize about the direction of the attachment-IFT relationship, the cross-sectional design of our study prevents us from making causal claims (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). The single source design of our study makes it vulnerable to common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), although some precautions were taken, such as eliminating common scale properties (e.g., questionnaire vs trait list, different scale type, different number of scale points). Other methods for measuring attachment style (Ravitz et al., 2010) and IFTs (Epitropaki et al., 2013) are available, and may be included in future studies on attachment and IFTs. Principal component analyses revealed low factor loadings on several items. After completing the questionnaire, some leaders gave us feedback that they found the survey time-consuming. This is compatible with our observation that most of the "bad items" were the ones being reversed, containing long sentences, or were perhaps more ambiguous, hence more vulnerable to misinterpretation. Given the fact that validated short-versions of the ECR measure are available (e.g., Olssøn, Sørebø, & Dahl, 2010), we suggest that scholars consider these scales in future organizational studies. Furthermore, the IFT facet conformity did not load on either followership prototype or anti-prototype (i.e., did not seem to be considered by leaders as either a positive or negative feature). We assume that the latter is a reflection of the fact that all data was collected in a culture where conformity was considered a strong and by many quite a negative norm up until more recently, while the contemporary view of conformity is more neutral and balanced (Avant & Knutsen, 1993).

IFT research is still in its early stages. Building on the findings in the present study, we suggest four directions for future research. First, for validity purposes, scholars should try to replicate the defensive projection effect among avoidant leaders with other types of negative material than competence. Second, rather than projecting unwanted negative material onto others, studies have shown that anxiously-attached individuals have the tendency to project their actual self-traits onto others, in order to create a sense of similarity and closeness (Berant & Wald, 2009; Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999). Therefore, future attachment-IFT studies should investigate if this type of projection (i.e., projective identification; Klein, 1946) is associated with the IFTs of anxiously-attached leaders. Third, the principle of (de)activation of the attachment behavioral system is largely overlooked in organizational research (Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2018), despite being a core tenant of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Our study highlights the importance of incorporating contextual variables likely to reflect attachment system activation (e.g., self-evaluated competence), and encourage future studies to include this aspect of attachment theory (e.g., see Thompson, Glasø, & Matthiesen, 2016). Finally, although we found no significant effects of leadership experience in our study, we notice that the majority of participants were less-experienced leaders, with average years of experience in leadership positions being 4.02, and the standard deviation being 1.18. As prior research has found that experienced leaders hold richer follower descriptions (Sanders, 1999), we encourage future studies to investigate the association between attachment styles and IFTs among highly-experienced managers.

Conclusion

The present study proposed, and found support for, an association between attachment style and leaders' assumptions about followers. Specifically, our findings suggest that attachment experiences from close relationships influence how leaders think of followers, and that underlying mechanisms include both a general effect (i.e., schema transference) and an additional effect that only involves avoidant leaders (i.e., defensive projection). This study is aligned with research on related psychological concepts, such as relationship expectations, relationship attributions, trust, and insecurity dispositions, finding that positive expectations, with a few exceptions, are associated with better interpersonal functioning (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016).

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CHAPTER 4

Leader's attachment style as an antecedent to caregiving: A moderated mediation analysis

by

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Abstract

The rationale for studying leadership from an attachment perspective often rests on the idea of leaders as caregivers. Therefore, it seems somewhat paradoxical that most studies focus on leaders' attachment style rather than their caregiving orientation. The present study investigated the mediating role of caregiving avoidance in the relationship between leaders' avoidant attachment style and followers' experience of being cared for (i.e., interactive empathy, IE). Furthermore, given the context-sensitive nature of the attachment and caregiving behavioral systems, the moderating effect of group cohesion was tested. Data was collected from 410 military recruits in the Norwegian defense sector. The moderated mediation model was statistically significant. However, contrary to previous research, cohesion was found to have a favorable effect on avoidant leaders' tendency to withdraw from caring. This suggests that highly cohesive groups may provide avoidant leaders with a sense of attachment security which allows for activation of the caregiving behavioral system, hence enabling the leader to better provide care for followers. Implications for future research and organizational practice are discussed.

Keywords: *attachment style; caregiving; interactive empathy; group cohesion; moderated mediation*

Introduction

The importance of leaders providing care and support for their followers has been at the heart of leadership theory and practice since the middle of the 20th century (e.g., Stogdill, 1950). For example, consideration, referring to the degree to which a leader shows concern and respect for followers, looks out for their welfare, and expresses appreciation and support (Bass, 1990), has proven to predict a range of leadership outcomes (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004; Piccolo et al., 2012). Consequently, knowledge of leaders' capacity and tendencies to provide care seems highly relevant, both for theoretical and for selection and leadership development purposes.

Being one of psychology's most influential theories (Finkel & Simpson, 2015), Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory provides a distinct perspective to the study of compassion, kindness, and care for others (Shaver, Mikulincer, Gross, Stern, & Cassidy, 2016). Attachment theory describes personality development as a function of the quality of early interaction between the child and its primary caregiver(s). According to Bowlby (1969/1982), lack of sensitivity and responsiveness from caregiver would have the child develop negative mental representations of self and others (i.e., attachment insecurities), resulting in interpersonal difficulties such as distrusting others or being overly sensitive to rejection.

Bowlby made a distinction between the attachment behavioral system, referring to people's inborn tendency to seek proximity to their loved ones in times of distress, and the caregiving behavioral system, referring to people's inborn capacity to empathize and care for those in need. There is a consensus in the literature that the two separate systems are interrelated such that attachment security is considered a foundation for optimal caregiving (Collins, Ford, Guichard, Kane, & Feeney, 2010). For example, discomfort with closeness (i.e., attachment insecurity) is likely to result in withdrawal from caregiving (Reizer, Ein-Dor, & Shaver, 2014). Empirical studies support the view of two separate, yet interrelated, systems. For example, attachment insecurities have been found to predict people's capacity to take the perspective of someone who suffers (Joireman, Needham, & Cummings, 2002) and people's willingness to offer help to needy others (Bailey, McWilliams, & Dick, 2012).

So far, attachment studies within the field of leadership have almost exclusively investigated leader's attachment insecurities rather than their capacity for caregiving. That is, the individual differences in leaders that are usually targeted by attachment scholars are the ones activated when the leader him/herself feels distressed, rather than the system being activated

when others need their help and support. This might seem paradoxical, as the idea of studying leader-follower relationships from an attachment point of view originally was inspired by Freud's (1930/1963) work that drew parallels between parent-child relationships and leader-follower relationships, the leader being the provider of care and the follower depending on the leader (Keller, 2003; Keller & Cacioppe, 2001; Popper & Amit, 2009; Popper, Mayseless, & Castelnovo, 2000). Therefore, it remains an open question whether followers' sense of being cared for is best understood as (a) a direct function of leaders' attachment insecurities or (b) a function of leaders' caregiving capabilities, which, to some degree, is influenced by their attachment insecurities. The present study investigates the mediating role of caregiving on the relationship between leader attachment style and followers' sense of being cared for. Furthermore, given the context-sensitive nature of the attachment and caregiving systems, we investigate the moderating effect of group cohesion. A moderated mediation model is presented and empirically tested.

Theory and hypotheses

Attachment style and caregiving orientation

Bowlby (1969/1982) postulated that the attachment behavior system is an innate psychological system that motivates people to seek comfort and support from others in times of distress. Individual differences in attachment-system functioning have been heavily studied, and are commonly referred to as attachment styles, defined as patterns of expectations, needs, emotions, and social behavior that result from a particular history of attachment experiences, usually beginning in relationships with parents (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 23). Descriptions of attachment style differences are derived from two underlying dimensions. First, attachment anxiety is characterized by an exaggerated desire for closeness and dependence, and a hyper-sensitivity towards being rejected. Second, attachment avoidance is associated with a preference for self-reliance and discomfort with own and others' vulnerability. Secure attachment style (i.e., low scores on both dimensions) is characterized by being comfortable with intimacy, relying on others for support, and a general sense of being valued by others.

Caregiving refers to an individual's capacity to provide protection and support to others who are either chronically dependent or temporarily in need (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The goal of the caregiving system is to reduce others' suffering, protect them, and foster their

growth and development (Collins et al., 2010). Effective caregiving depends on both intra- and interpersonal competencies, including social skills, psychological resources, and motivation to help (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2006). For example, an important element in the process of caregiving is that the caregiver shows genuine interest in the person's problem through expressing concern and affection. This responsiveness to another person's suffering involves generous intentions, validating the troubled person's needs and feelings, respecting his or her beliefs, attitudes, and values, and helping the other feel understood and cared for (Reis & Shaver, 1988).

One of the main contributions of attachment research has been to describe individuals' caregiving capacities partly as a function of experiences with their own caregiver(s) early in life (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 347). For example, studies have shown that individuals with an avoidant attachment style, having themselves experienced neglectful caregiving relationships, are less likely to respond to others' needs (Bailey et al., 2012; Kogut & Kogut, 2013). Theoretically, this tendency to withdraw from caregiving (i.e., caregiving avoidance) is related to the attachment system such that the need for care in others might be associated with personal painful attachment experiences, hence triggering strategies associated with the avoidant attachment style (e.g., suppression of emotions, devaluating attitudes towards vulnerability). For example, as a suffering person might mirror their own suppressed weaknesses, and avoidant personalities are likely to distance themselves from distressed others by expressing disapproval, lack of sympathy, or even pity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 331).

Attachment, caregiving and interactive empathy

There is growing interest in attachment theory among leadership scholars (Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2018). The idea of applying a theory that originated in developmental psychology to the study of leadership was inspired by Freud's (1939) metaphor of leaders as father figures (Popper & Mayseless, 2003), and Bowlby's equivalent descriptions of human's innate tendencies to seek proximity to others in times of distress (i.e., attachment-system activation) and to offer help and care when others are in need (i.e., activation of the caregiving system). Studies on follower attachment style support the view that the interpersonal dynamics outlined in attachment theory are present in leader-follower relationships. For example, followers with an avoidant attachment style seem to have less trust in their leader

(Harms, Bai, & Han, 2016), whereas anxiously-attached followers are more prone to project their own unfulfilled needs onto leaders in order to create a sense of closeness (Popper et al., 2000).

Attachment studies on leader individual differences have primarily focused on attachment styles. For example, leader attachment style has been linked to transformational leadership (Popper et al., 2000), motives for becoming a leader (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007), and ability to delegate work (Johnston, 2000). Despite the growing evidence of leader attachment style as a predictor of important leadership outcomes, little is known about mediators explaining such a linkage (Paetzold, 2015, p. 281). Theoretically, one could argue for both direct effects (i.e., the processes associated with attachment-system activation are influencing follower outcomes directly) and indirect effects (e.g., when followers are in need, leader responses are dictated by the caregiving system, which in turn is influenced by attachment insecurities).

Ronen and Mikulincer's (2012) study is the only one to date that has empirically investigated the mediating role of caregiving in the relationship between leader attachment style and follower outcomes (i.e., job burnout and satisfaction). They found support for their model among anxiously-attached managers, suggesting that the lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of burnout found among followers of anxiously-attached leaders were explained by these leaders' impaired capabilities of providing care. Surprisingly, no significant effects of caregiving avoidance were found. The authors speculated that avoidant managers' self-confident appearance (i.e., an avoidant attachment style strategy) could provide followers with some sense of safety and security, hence counteract the negative effect of insensitive care on burnout and dissatisfaction. Therefore, to further investigate caregiving avoidance as a potential mediator between attachment style and follower outcomes, the present study introduces a variable targeting the actual experience of being cared for. This presents a different angle to the question originally addressed by Ronen and Mikulincer: Is follower's sense of being cared for primarily influenced by leader's attachment insecurities or leader's caregiving capabilities?

To measure followers' sense of being cared for, we build on Kellett, Humphrey, and Sleeth's (2006) work, and their interactive empathy (IE) construct. IE was developed to fit the context of leadership, and measures leaders' "initiative in creating a two-way emotional bond in which they influence others' emotions as well as feel others' emotions" (Humphrey, 2013, p. 103). We find this construct fits well with descriptions of caregiving in attachment literature,

which highlights the ability to express empathic concern for another's suffering (Batson, 2010). We also find this construct highly relevant in terms of leadership, as leaders responding empathically to followers' needs and initiatives represent a cornerstone in numerous contemporary leadership theories (e.g., Scott, Colquitt, Paddock, & Judge, 2010). For example, studies have found leader empathy to be related to leader-follower relationship quality (Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2010) and effective leadership behaviors (Kellett et al., 2006).

As described above, theory suggests that leaders' caregiving orientation plays an important role in providing care and support for followers. To further investigate the discrepancy between theory and the empirical findings in Ronen and Mikulincer (2012), we propose, according to theory, that:

> Hypothesis 1: Leader caregiving avoidance mediates the relationship between leader's avoidant attachment style and IE, such that leaders with an avoidant attachment style engage more in caregiving avoidance, which explains why their followers feel less cared for.

The moderating effect of cohesion

Individual differences research has often left out of the equation the fact that from moment to moment changing situations activate and de-activate a range of leader traits or features (Tuncdogan, Acar, & Stam, 2017). Leadership studies of attachment styles are no exception (Paetzold, 2015), with only a few studies investigating moderating effects of contextual variables likely to activate or deactivate the attachment system (e.g., Thompson, Glasø, & Matthiesen, 2016). In other research areas, a large body of literature on attachment security priming supports the context-sensitive view of attachment processes. For example, priming of attachment security in laboratory experiments (e.g., having participants recollect memories, reading a story, or looking at a picture of supportive others) has been found to promote empathic responses towards people in need (e.g., Mikulincer et al., 2001). Interestingly, secure priming of avoidant individuals has been found to not only reduce their unwillingness to show compassion and help others, but also to downplay the egocentric motives underlying avoidant patterns of caring (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005).

In the case of leadership, an obvious contextual factor with the potential to trigger leaders' attachment insecurities is the very group of people they are set out to lead. Groups hold the potential to be effective sources of support, comfort, and relief (Abrams, 2015), which could reduce the detrimental effects of attachment insecurities in group members. Investigating this idea empirically, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) found that group cohesion (i.e., the shared bond or attraction that drives team members to stay together and to want to work together; Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009) improved psychological functioning in insecurely-attached military recruits, but only the anxious ones. Among avoidant group members, cohesiveness seemed to actually impair their functioning. One explanation for this finding could be that the high level of interdependence found in cohesive groups may cause distress in self-reliant, avoidant individuals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 477).

Therefore, given the importance of context in predicting effects of attachment style (Paetzold, 2015), and the findings of Rom and Mikulincer that psychological functioning among avoidant individuals seems to decrease in cohesive groups, we suggest that a similar pattern (i.e., an increase in caregiving avoidance) will appear in avoidant leaders facing followers in need of help and support:

> Hypothesis 2: Group cohesion moderates the negative relationship between leaders' caregiving avoidance and follower interactive empathy (IE), such that caregiving avoidance is a stronger predictor of followers' sense of not being cared for in cohesive groups.

Methods

Participants

Data was collected from applicants to the Officer Candidate School in the Norwegian Armed Forces in 2017. There were 1117 applicants who started the first assessment week, 782 applicants participated in the following field exercise and, of these, 406 were admitted to Officer Candidate School. Of the 782 participating in the field exercise, 410 were included in this study (52.4 %). The sample consisted of 79 % men and 21 % women, with a mean age of 19.9 (SD = 1.52). Only a small fraction of participants had previous military experience, having completed the basic one-year military service for conscripts. The current study was

part of a larger project analysing the selection process and leader development in a population of students applying to military schools and academies in Norway.

Measures

Avoidant attachment style was measured with 4 items from the Norwegian short-version (Olssøn, Sørebø, & Dahl, 2010) of the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) measure (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). ECR has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across different cultures (Ravitz, Maunder, Hunter, Sthankiya, & Lancee, 2010), and our items were no exception, yielding factor loadings above .75 and a Cronbach alpha at .84. Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items were: "I am nervous when another person gets too close to me" and "I want to get close to others, but I keep pulling back". Average scores were calculated for sub-sequential analyses. Following the guidelines of Mikulincer and Shaver (2016), aggregated scores were treated as contingent variables, rather than serving the function of classifying participants into categories (e.g., secure vs avoidant type).

Caregiving deactivation was assessed with 4 items from the Caregiving System Scale (CSS) (Shaver, Mikulincer, & Shemesh-Iron, 2010), translated into Norwegian taking a collaborative and iterative approach (Douglas & Craig, 2007) to traditional back-translation (Brislin, 1970, 1980). Sample items from the CSS were: "I feel comfortable holding my partner when s/he needs physical signs of support and reassurance" and "When necessary I can say 'no' to my partner's requests for help without feeling guilty". Again, responses were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, and internal constancy was satisfactory ($\alpha = .71$, all factor loadings above .65).

Interactive empathy was rated using the 5-item measure developed by Kellett, Humphrey, and Sleeth (2006). Translation of the measure into Norwegian followed the same guidelines as described above. Sample items were: "[The leader] feels emotions that other people experience" and "[The leader] encourages others to talk about how they feel". Factor loadings were above .80, and alpha was .91. An individual IE score for each leader was calculated by aggregating peer-ratings from all group members.

Group cohesion was measured with a Norwegian adaptation (Bartone, Johnsen, Eid, Brun, & Laberg, 2002) of the combat platoon cohesion questionnaire by Siebold and Kelly (1988).

Only those four items that targeted small-unit cohesion at the squad or group level (horizontal cohesion) were included. Response options ranged from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true).

Procedure

The ECR and CCS items were distributed and completed in plenary with a member of the research team on site during the first assessment week. The second week consisted of a field exercise, where candidates were divided into groups of 7 to 9. Candidates remained in the field for six days and were given different tasks to complete. The leader role rotated between group members, and at the end of the week each person evaluated overall group cohesion and IE for each group member. Respondents were informed that the study had been approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services and were assured that collected data would be treated with strict confidentiality. In addition, respondents were assured that the results were to be used solely for research purposes. This information about purpose and confidentiality was provided both in oral and written form.

Statistical analyses

First, mediation analysis was conducted following the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008) with the SPSS PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013). The effect of attachment avoidance on IE (total effect) and the effect of attachment avoidance on IE controlling for the mediating effect of deactivated caregiving (direct effect) was tested. Bootstrapping was used to determine whether the strength between the total and the direct effect was significantly different from zero, indicating a mediation effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping estimates were based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. Second, to test the moderation hypothesis, a step-wise multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), the nature of the moderating effect of group cohesion was examined by plotting the relationship between deactivated caregiving and IE at high (+1SD) and low (-1SD) levels of cohesion. Third, integrating hypotheses 1 and 2 into one model (fig. 1), and investigating under which conditions (i.e., levels of group cohesion) the proposed mediating effect occurred, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted, following the guidelines of Preacher, Rucker,

and Hayes (2007), again using the PROCESS macro (model 14). For interpretation purposes, the moderated mediation index (Hayes, 2015) was calculated.

Results

Means, standard deviations, correlations for all variables, and coefficient alphas are presented in table 1. Consistent with our predictions, avoidant attachment style was related to deactivated caregiving. Although both avoidance and caregiving deactivation were negatively associated with IE, only the latter correlation was significant, suggesting that the indirect (mediation) effect of caregiving is stronger than the direct effect between attachment style and IE.

TABLE 1

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	Gender	Age	Avoid.	Care. avoid.	IE	Cohseion
Age	19.9	1.52	-02					
Avoidant attachment style	2.19	1.09	.05	-.06	(.84)			
Caregiving avoidance	2.38	.84	-.14**	-.12*	.40**	(.71)		
IE	5.43	.73	.35**	.11*	-.09	-.14**	(.91)	
Cohesion	4.52	.48	.02	.02	-.22**	-.06	.20**	(.77)

N = 410. Coefficient α's are displayed on the diagonal. Gender coded: 0 = male, 1= female; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Hypothesis 1 proposed that deactivated caregiving mediates the relationship between avoidant attachment style and IE. The direct effect (c') of avoidant attachment style on IE was not significant, in contrast to the relationship between the independent variable and mediator variable (a), and the relationship between the mediator variable and dependent variable (b). As the indirect effect was significant, with a 95% confidence interval of -.335 to -.004, and the direct effect was not, the result indicates an indirect-only mediation (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Consequently, hypothesis 1 was supported.

TABLE 2

Bootstrap analysis summary showing the indirect effects of attachment styles on Interactive empathy via caregiving avoidance

Independent variables (IV)	Mediator variables (MV)	Dependent variables (DV)	*a* path coef. (IV-MV)	*b* path coef. (MV-DV)	c' path coef. (direct effect)	Mean indirect effect (*ab*)	*SE* of mean	BC 95% CI mean indirect effect (lower, upper)
Attachment avoidance	Caregiving avoidance	Interactive empathy	.38**	-.40*	-.17	-.15*	.08	(-.335, -.004)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Values based on standardized path coefficients.

Hypotheses 2 proposed that group cohesion moderates the relationship between caregiving avoidance and IE. To test this hypothesis, a multiple ordinary least squares regression was conducted. Model 1, containing control variables only, showed that both age and gender were associated with the dependent variable (table 2). Model 2, also including the main variables, showed that cohesion, but not caregiving orientation, was related to IE. Finally, model 3, including controls, main variables, and the proposed interaction effect, showed that the interaction term was significant (p = .02), and an increase in R square. As seen in figure 1, slopes were contrary to our prediction. That is, results showed that when cohesion increased, this had a favorable effect on avoidant leaders' ability to engage empathically in their followers' struggles. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported. We did find group cohesion to be a significant moderating variable, but the effect was the opposite of the findings of Rom and Mikulincer's (2003) study.

TABLE 3

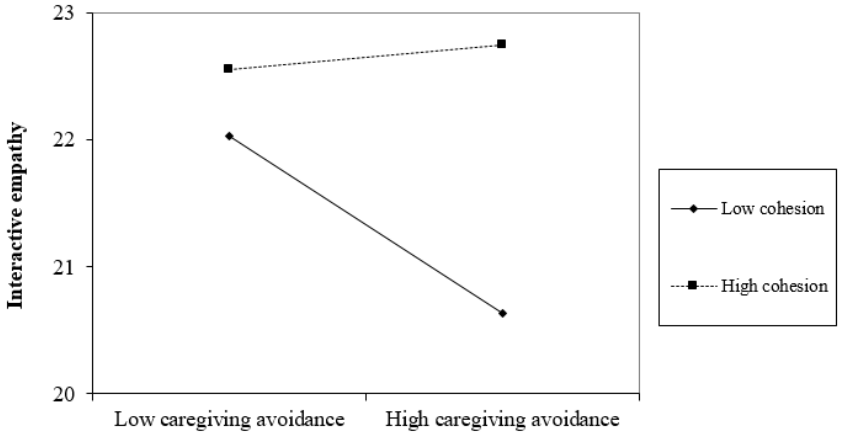
The moderating effect of group cohesion on the relationship between de-activating caregiving orientation on interactive empathy

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Controls			
Age	.27*	.24*	.23*
Gender	3.05**	2.94**	2.92**
Main effects			
Caregiving avoidance		-.28	-.30
Team cohesion		.65**	.66**
Interaction effect			.39*
F-value	28.63**	19.30**	16.67**
Total R-sq	.13**	.16**	.18**

N = 381. Coefficients are standardized.
Dependent variable = Interactive empathy
Gender is coded: 0 = male, 1 = female
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

FIGURE 1

The moderating effect of cohesion on the relationship between caregiving avoidance and interactive empathy



Finally, we tested our two hypotheses in a moderated mediation model (figure 2). All statistical requirements for a moderated mediation were met (Hayes, 2013), although the p value for the interaction between deactivated caregiving and group cohesion was .06, as seen in table 4. To further interpret this interaction effect, how different levels of cohesion influenced the conditional indirect effect of attachment avoidance on IE through caregiving avoidance was tested. Bootstrapping tests for two out of three conditions yielded significant indirect effects; i.e., for mean levels of cohesion (95% CI: -.350 to -.017) and for levels of cohesion 1 standard deviation below the mean (95% CI: -.544 to -.097). The third condition (i.e., 1 standard deviation above the mean) did not yield significant results. As indicated by the moderated mediation index (Hayes, 2015) in table 4, the overall moderated mediation model was supported (95% CI: .004 to .282).

TABLE 4

Results of the moderated mediation analysis

	Mediator variable model: *DV* = Caregiving avoidance			
Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	-.02	.47	-.34	.73
Avoidant attachment style	.37	.05	7.87	.00

	Dependent variable model: *DV* = Interactive empathy			
Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	27.15	.18	147.18	.00
Caregiving avoidance	-.45	.20	-2.20	.03
Avoidant attachment style	-.02	.20	-.08	.94
Cohesion	.69	.19	3.64	.00
Caregiving avoidance x Cohesion	.36	.19	1.90	.06

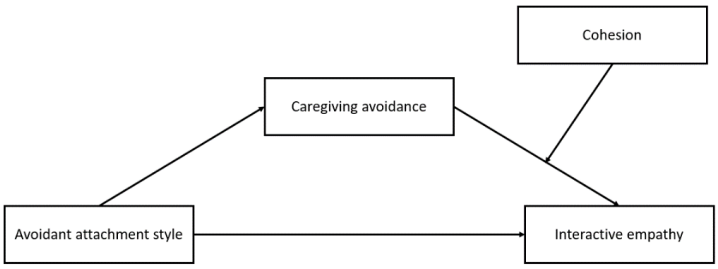
	Conditional effects X at Y at values of cohesion *DV* = Interactive empathy			
Team cohesion	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
- 1 SD	-.99	.11	-.544	-.097
Mean	-.51	.19	-.350	-.017
+ 1 SD	-.07	.25	-.244	.176

	Index of moderated mediation			
Mediator	Index	Boot *SE*	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Caregiving avoidance	.13	.07	.004	.282

Notes. Standardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 10 000.
DV = Dependent variable; *SD* = standard deviation; *SE* = standard error;
LLCI & ULCI = lower & upper levels of confidence interval

FIGURE 2

The proposed moderated mediation model



Taken together, the hypotheses received partial support. Contrary to study predictions, group cohesion had a positive, rather than negative, effect on avoidant leaders' empathy towards

followers. Merging both hypotheses into a moderated mediation model, results showed that the mediating effect of caregiving avoidance was only present in cases where the leader-perceived level of group cohesion was average or low.

Discussion

An important characteristic of leadership effectiveness is the ability to offer support and respond empathically to followers needs (Piccolo et al., 2012). The dynamics of providing and receiving care are thoroughly described and studied in the field of attachment, and have inspired leadership scholars to view leadership as a process wherein leaders provide their followers with a secure base for exploration and a safe haven for comfort and support (e.g., Wu & Parker, 2017). Ronen and Mikulincer (2012) were the first to include measures of both leader attachment style and leader caregiving orientation, hence introducing a key element of the original attachment theory (i.e., the caregiving system) to leadership research. However, finding no effect of caregiving avoidance on follower burnout and job satisfaction, the aim of the present study was to investigate whether caregiving avoidance was related to other follower outcomes, in this case, followers' sense of being cared for, operationalized as IE.

In line with other studies linking avoidant attachment style to lack of empathy (e.g., Cassidy, Stern, Mikulincer, Martin, & Shaver, 2017), we found that followers of avoidant leaders experienced their leader as less empathic to their needs, and that caregiving avoidance mediated this relationship. This finding suggests that when followers need support from their leader, what seems to matter more is leader repertoire of caregiving strategies, rather than leader pattern of relating to others when they are distressed themselves (i.e., attachment style). This could help explain why studies of avoidant attachment style and followers' perception of leader-member exchange (LMX) have yielded mixed results (Richards & Hackett, 2012; Thompson et al., 2016). As leader ability to provide care and support could be more important contributions to the social exchange processes (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) than those contributions related to attachment insecurities, there is a possibility that leader caregiving avoidance is a stronger predictor of LMX than leader avoidant attachment style.

While Rom and Mikulincer's (2003) study suggested that cohesive groups are perceived as a threat by avoidant individuals, hence activating avoidant attachment strategies and increasing caregiving avoidance, our findings suggest the opposite. That is, cohesion seems to provide the avoidant leader with a sense of attachment security. Applying the theoretical view by

Mikulincer and Shaver (2016, p. 370), this perceived security allows for the activation of the avoidant leader's caregiving behavioral system, directing attention to others' needs, taking their perspective and reacting empathically to their distress.

The contradictory finding outlined above might reflect a different procedure for measuring cohesion. Traditionally, cohesion was assumed be a group-level construct (Mullen & Copper, 1994), and Rom and Mikulincer applied this understanding of the construct when they used group scores of cohesion, calculated by averaging each group member's evaluation of group cohesion. In the present study, cohesion scores were not aggregated to a group-level score. Instead, building on the principle of attachment-system activation (Bowlby, 1973), stating that attachment strategies are activated as a consequence of an individual's subjective evaluation of potential threats, we suggest that the self-experienced level of cohesion is more relevant than group-level cohesion in terms of understanding individuals' patterns of caring. Therefore, even though Rom and Mikulincer found within-group variance to be significantly smaller than the between-group variance, there is a chance that the negative effects associated with team-level cohesion in the latter study reflect the experience of being alone in a cohesive group, while the positive effect of individual-level cohesion reflects the experience of being part of a cohesive group. Obviously, more research is needed in this area.

Practical implications

Overall, attachment styles are rooted in childhood experiences and seem relatively stable over time (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011). Therefore, scholars have not focused on developing interventions designed to change people's attachment style in the workplace, although it has been suggested that experiences at work could contribute to attachment style changes (e.g., having a secure attachment style modeled by a transformational leader; Paetzold, 2015). The present study suggests that targeting leaders' patterns of caregiving could be a different and fruitful approach dealing with attachment insecurities in organizations. For example, given that caregiving is a predictor of important follower outcomes, as the present study suggests, interventions designed to improve leaders' ways of caring (e.g., sensitivity and responsiveness towards follower needs) could be implemented in leadership development programs aiming at developing relational leadership skills. Our findings also encourage the inclusion of caregiving in leadership coaching models building on attachment theory (e.g., Drake, 2009). For example, some leaders might find it easier and

more practically useful to reflect upon their ways of caring for followers, rather than issues related to their attachment insecurities.

Another route to promoting followers' sense of being cared for by leaders implied in the present findings is through group cohesion. The positive effects of cohesion on avoidant leaders found in this study suggest that interventions proven effective to enhance cohesion, such as team goal-setting (Senécal, Loughead, & Bloom, 2008), could be even more effective when the leader has a tendency to withdraw from providing care.

Limitations and future directions

Studying the interplay between the attachment and the caregiving systems within the field of leadership is new and promising. However, given the complexity of predicting organizational outcomes from individual differences (Tuncdogan et al., 2017), the present study has several shortcomings. For example, potential interaction effects between leaders' caregiving avoidance and follower attachment style were not included in the study model, although, theoretically, there is reason to expect such effects (e.g., Keller, 2003).

Responding to Ronen and Mikulincer's (2012, p. 842) call for research replicating their research model in more demanding contexts, our sample consisted of military recruits under highly stressful conditions. As our results underline the importance of context, a limitation of the present study is the generalizability to non-extreme and non-military settings, as leadership under such conditions, in many aspects, is very different (Hällgren, Rouleau, & De Rond, 2018).

Furthermore, the unexpected positive effect of cohesion, contradictory to previous research findings (Rom & Mikulincer, 2003), might also have been caused by differences in the two participant samples. Even though both our sample and their sample were drawn from military populations, the Israeli army may be considered a more extreme context than military training for selection purposes in Norway, in terms of aspects such as probability of negative consequences and proximity to threat (Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009).

From an attachment perspective, the key factor in leaders' failure to empower followers is the inability to develop a secure attachment bond to followers, due to lack of sensitivity and responsiveness to their needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 481). Therefore, future leadership studies building on attachment theory should also consider focus on caregiving.

Furthermore, research investigating the role of organizational context is needed (Paetzold, 2015). As the attachment system is activated and deactivated as a reaction to the individual's evaluation of threat, moderators likely to reduce or trigger a sense of threat (e.g., group cohesion) should be of particular interest (Yip et al., 2018). Leadership studies incorporating this key feature of attachment-system functioning have shown promising results (e.g., Thompson, Glasø, & Matthiessen, in press). Specifically, we urge attachment scholars to further investigate the role of cohesion, given the incongruent results discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

Favorable consequences of leaders showing care and support for followers are well-documented in leadership research. The present study investigated the origin and intra-psychological mechanisms underlying these leadership behaviors. Applying attachment theory as a framework for capturing individual differences in leader caregiving capabilities, the results support the idea that experiences from close relationships (e.g., with parents) influence leaders' patterns of caring, which, in turn, explain why some leaders are perceived as better caregivers than others. However, it seems that, in attachment terms, leaders with a tendency to withdraw from caregiving are able to generate in their followers a significantly stronger sense of being cared for when individuals in the group they set out to lead make their leader feel safe and secure.

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CHAPTER 5

Concluding remarks

Main findings and theoretical contributions

Mirroring the two research gaps addressed in chapter 1, the overall research question in this dissertation is: *How and when is leadership influenced by leader's experiences in close relationships?* Chapters 2-4 investigated different aspects of this research question empirically, as leaders' experience with their significant others, operationalized as attachment style, were linked to leader-member exchange (LMX), implicit followership theories (IFTs), and interactive empathy (IE). In the following section the overall theoretical contribution of this dissertation is discussed in light of the two research gaps. Then limitations and proposed venues for future research are outlined, before practical implications are discussed. Finally, a summary and conclusion of the work is presented.

Revisiting research gap 1: The principle of attachment-system activation

The importance of situation has long been a key element in leadership theories. However, the general conclusion has been that there is a lack of evidentiary support for the classic contingency theories, such as Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory and Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership theory (Yukl, 2011). Lack of support does not mean that situation is not important. For example, studies have demonstrated significant within-person variability in trait-related leadership behaviors as a function of situational factors (e.g., Michel & LeBreton, 2011). Therefore, Zaccaro and colleagues (2018) argue that individual differences models in leadership research have not yet successfully integrated important contributions from other interpersonal theories that have a more holistic understanding of person and situation. Tuncdogan and colleagues' (2017) refinement of the leadership process model by Antonakis, Day, and Schyns (2012) could be viewed as a contribution to that subject, as they introduce the moderator *trait-activating situation* (i.e., the extent to which a situation may activate a particular trait) of the relationship between leader trait and leader behavior.

Paralleling the idea of situations causing activation or de-activation of traits, a core tenant of the original attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982) is the principle of *attachment-system activation*. In a recent review of attachment theory at work by Yip and colleagues (2018), they called the investigation of attachment-system activation the most neglected issue in this field, suggesting several approaches to investigate this principle.

Responding to their call for research, paper 1 explored attachment-system activation by investigating the moderating role of *work-related basic needs satisfaction* on the relationship between a leader's attachment style and follower LMX. It was proposed that the lack of basic needs satisfaction would result in negative emotional states (Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005) that would trigger the attachment system. According to the theory, in insecurely-attached leaders, this activation should be accompanied by insecure attachment strategies (e.g., clinging or withdrawal), that might cause a decrease in follower LMX. In line with this reasoning, we found empirical support for this interaction effect among anxiously-attached leaders. That is, when anxiously-attached leaders experience distress (e.g., feel incompetent or alone at work), our results suggest that they are the ones handling their unpleasant emotions least favorably with regard to their leader role obligations, resulting in poorer follower LMX.

Although paper 1 found no significant effect indicating lower follower LMX among those avoidant leaders who experienced lack of basic needs satisfaction, paper 3 suggests that avoidant leaders too are influenced by situational factors likely to trigger the attachment-system. Specifically, results from our third study suggest that avoidant leaders withdraw from caregiving when they experience a lack of cohesion in the group they are set out to lead. Furthermore, paper 2 found support for the existence of a defensive projection effect, one of the strategies applied by avoidant individuals when their attachment-system is activated (Gabriel et al., 2005; Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999). Specifically, results in this study showed that those avoidant leaders feeling less competent at work displayed significantly more negative assumptions about followers' general level of competence, hence suggesting a negative effect of attachment-system activation.

Regarding research gap 1, this dissertation contributes in two ways. First, all three studies provide empirical evidence in favor of the view that attachment-system activation increases the importance of the antecedent role attachment style plays in leadership outcomes. Being a highly relevant topic in contemporary attachment research (Paetzold, 2015; Yip et al., 2018), this dissertation demonstrates from three different angles that attachment-system activation does seem to matter, and may in fact be the single most important contributions of this

dissertation. Therefore, in terms of theory building, our research strongly encourages future studies to include this principle in research models investigating leadership and attachment.

Second, results from our three studies demonstrate the complexity in predicting leadership outcomes from attachment style, even when considering the principle of attachment-system activation. For example, based on the findings in our first study, it seems too simplistic to assume linear effects only, such that the more insecurely attached the leader is, and the more frequently the leader's attachment-system is activated, then the more negative leadership outcomes that result. If this were indeed the case, we would also find support for the hypothesis regarding avoidant leaders. As suggested by Tuncdogan and colleagues (2017), other contextual variables than trait-activating situations (e.g., situational strength) should also be considered when investigating individual differences and leadership.

This perspective is useful when evaluating the joint contribution of our three studies. For example, results from paper 1 suggest that, in contexts where leaders experience moderate to high levels of W-BNS (which was the case for nearly all participants in our study), followers are better off with an avoidant, compared to an anxious, leader. One possible explanation for this finding is that these anxiously-attached individuals, when occasionally distressed, engage in behaviors such as excessive reassurance-seeking (Shaver et al., 2005), which could become a burden for followers, as suggested by Keller (2003). Avoidant leaders' tendency to deny personal vulnerabilities or act self-confidently when distressed (Hart et al., 2005), on the other hand, seemed to be better strategies in our study population. However, as most attachment studies from other interpersonal fields (e.g., adult romantic relationships) suggest that satisfaction with partners is lower in avoidant individuals than anxious ones (e.g., Amir, Horesh, & Lin-Stein, 1999), it could be that the scenario described above would turn upside-down when the context was different (e.g., if followers were more dependent on their leader). Evidence in favor of such an interpretation is found in paper 3, demonstrating that avoidant leaders when distressed, fail to provide their followers with sufficient support and care. Furthermore, the study by Davidovitz and colleagues (2007), found that followers of avoidant leaders operating in extreme contexts suffered more (e.g., mental health problems) than followers of anxiously-attached leaders.

To sum up, this dissertation contributes to research gap 1 by providing empirical evidence in favor of the view that attachment-system activation is a significant moderator in the relationship between attachment style and leadership outcomes. Three different approaches are employed to study this principle. However, the discussion above suggests that integrating

the principle of attachment-system activation into research models is necessary, but not sufficient. The latter falls in line with newly-proposed perspectives in the individual differences literature (Tuncdogan et al., 2017; Zaccaro et al., 2018). Thus, it challenges earlier theoretical work on leader-follower attachment style combinations (Hinojosa et al., 2014; Keller, 2003), as findings from our three articles suggest that it is difficult to make accurate predictions from such taxonomies without considering situational factors (e.g., trait-activating situations and situational strength).

Revisiting research gap 2: Connecting attachment style to the leader-follower relationship

One of the topics that has received most attention in the field of attachment-oriented leadership research is the link between attachment style and the leader-follower relationship (Paetzold, 2015). Although empirical studies seem to support the view that leader and/or follower attachment style predicts the quality of this relationships (e.g., Kafetsios et al., 2014; Richards & Hackett, 2012; Towler & Stuhlmacher, 2013), less is known about the mechanisms potentially causing these effects. As noted by Zaccaro and colleagues (2018), dynamics in interpersonal relationships are complex phenomena, typically requiring mediation models to explain important pathways. Therefore, the second aim of this this dissertation was to present and empirically investigate potential mediating variables.

Results from paper 2 showed that leaders' attachment insecurities were associated with more negative IFTs. Although a full mediation model was not tested in this study, our findings support a future empirical investigation of IFTs as a mediator explaining the influence of leader's attachment style on leader-follower relationships. Theoretically, such a mediation model would imply that: (a) leader's mental scripts about significant others resurface to influence how (s)he perceives followers in adulthood (i.e., schema transference, Andersen & Cole, 1990), and that (b) these follower assumptions affect the quality of the relationship between this leader and his/her followers (e.g., through the principle of self-fulfilling prophecies).

Paper 3 investigated the mediating role of caregiving avoidance on the relationship between leader's avoidant attachment style and followers' sense of being cared for (i.e., interactive empathy). Results supported our proposed model, suggesting that an important reason why avoidant leaders more often provide their followers with insufficient care, is that these leaders, according to theory, have not witnessed, experienced, and benefited from generous

attachment figures' effective care in the same manner as securely-attached individuals (Collins et al., 2010). Hence, as they lack a cognitive model to follow in the caregiver role, they provide their followers with care of lower quality.

Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the literature by providing a theoretical rationale and empirical support in favor of the view that the two mediators mentioned above may provide insight into how leader attachment style influences the leader-follower relationship.

Limitations and future research directions

Overall, this dissertation has several limitations. Obviously, the cross-sectional and cross-lagged nature of the data in all three studies prohibit us from making causal claims (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). This also prevents us from studying leadership as a dynamic process (for review, see Castillo & Trinh, 2018), and to see how attachment styles influence the development of leader-follower relationships over time. Furthermore, the extensive use of self-report measures makes us vulnerable to mono-method bias, even though we applied several of the recommendations described in the literature (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon, & Podsakoff, 2003). These and several other limitations are thoroughly addressed in previous chapters. Next follows an elaboration of some of the limitations and challenges that became apparent when considering this dissertation as a whole, and a reflection upon how these obstacles could be handled in future.

Measuring attachment style in organizational contexts

Although the 36-item ECR questionnaire is considered one of the best attachment style measures in clinical contexts (Ravitz et al., 2010), our experience from the first two studies was that its psychometric properties were not satisfactory. In particular, we found that items that were reversed or contained long sentences loaded poorly, and our interpretation was that participants suffered from fatigue.

To deal with this issue statistically, we built on a core assumption in most attachment theories, namely that anxious and avoidant dimensions are orthogonal, despite the fact that when measured, they are to some extent oblique (Cameron, Finnegan, & Morry, 2012). For example, in study 2, when investigating the phenomenon of defensive projection, which at the theoretical level is only associated with the avoidant style, we applied a statistical technique

(i.e., principal component analysis) that enabled us to exclude items that fitted poorly with the orthogonal assumption. Although this approach is an accepted method to handle low factor loadings (Jolliffe & Cadima, 2016), there are several shortcomings associated with this procedure, both in terms of measuring the attachment style variable properly, and even at the theoretical level (e.g., the fact that some individuals do have an attachment style that should result in high scores on both the anxiety and avoidance dimensions, i.e., the fearful avoidance or fearsome attachment style). Therefore, we suggest that leadership scholars consider measuring attachment style with short versions of the ECR, like we did in our third study.

Measuring leadership

The conclusions from studies 1 and 3 rely heavily on accurate follower ratings, as the dependent variables are follower evaluations of the leader-follower relationship. The idea that variance in follower-rated leadership evaluations is, partly, not a reflection of the leader's actual behavior, but rather individual differences in followers, is well-established in the literature (e.g., Antonakis et al., 2010). Therefore, a limitation in both these studies is the lack of testing or controlling for such a bias. For example, the correlation between followers' anxious attachment style and negative LMX ratings in study 1 might actually be stronger in reality, as anxiously-attached individuals have the tendency to view others as potential attachment figures who can meet their unmet needs, hence rating them more favorably (Hansbrough, 2012; Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). Avoidant individuals' tendency to idealize those hard to look down at (Hesse, 1999) suggests a similar pattern. However, the latter's general tendency to view others more negatively (Hart et al., 2005) suggests the opposite effect. Therefore, as the avoidant style in some followers would be associated with more favorable leader ratings, and in others the other way around, controlling for rater bias effects based on avoidant style scores is more challenging. Nonetheless, we encourage future studies to follow recommendations for how to improve follower ratings, such as collecting data from multiple sources and controlling for individual differences that are known to impact rating accuracy (e.g., Hansbrough, Lord, & Schyns, 2015), such as attachment style.

Generalizability and the influence of culture

All three studies draw upon sample from Norwegian populations. This calls for caution when considering the generalizability of our conclusions across nationalities and cultures. On the one hand, studies have demonstrated that the Norwegian LMX scale and its correlates are similar to the ones found in LMX meta-analyses (e.g., Furunes, Mykletun, Einarsen, & Glasø, 2015), suggesting that the negative consequences of having an insecurely-attached leader are somewhat similar to what is found in studies from other countries on attachment style and LMX. However, as the meta-analysis by Rockstuhl, Dulebohn, Ang, and Shore (2012) found LMX to be a stronger predictor of justice perceptions, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and leader trust in horizontal-individualistic countries similar to Norway (e.g., Western), our conclusions about the problematic aspects of having insecurely attached leaders might not be replicated in vertical-collectivistic cultures (e.g., Asian).

In our second study, we found that one of the six IFT facets, *conformity*, was not considered by our leader populations as either a positive or negative feature, in contrast to the negative valence it had in Sy's (2010) two samples consisting of multiple nationalities. This suggests that the content of IFTs in the Norwegian population, to a certain degree, is different from other cultures. That is, when asked to describe the ideal or a typical follower, our data suggests that Norwegian leaders will think somewhat differently than managers from other cultures. Although this did not interrupt our investigation of schema transference and defensive projection directly, it highlights the relevance of considering culture when studying leadership, and the importance of replicating studies in different contexts.

Investigating attachment-system activation

There is no established method of investigating attachment-system activation in the organizational literature. In our two first studies, we built on research demonstrating the importance of considering people's subjective appraisals of potential threats (e.g., Mikulincer et al., 2003). That is, since people experience external events with the potential of triggering the attachment system differently (e.g., organizational change), we measured participants' internal state rather than situational factors. In our third study, we applied a slightly different approach, suggesting that leader's perception of group cohesion would reflect attachment-system activation. Even though the latter is a group-level variable, the intention was similar as

in the first two studies, namely finding measures that tapped into the individual's unpleasant affective states – likely to trigger the attachment system.

A challenge associated with our ways of measuring attachment-system activation is, again, the fact that ratings might be biased due to rater individual differences. For example, avoidant individuals' tendency to trivialize and suppress their own vulnerabilities (Hart et al., 2005) is an obvious source of rater-bias when applying our approach to measure attachment-system activation. Therefore, we agree with the recommendations by Yip and colleagues (2018), that a complementary approach would be to focus on stressful job events (e.g., employment dissolution; Albert et al., 2015). For this purpose, the framework for examining leadership in extreme contexts by Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, and Cavarretta (2009) might serve as a useful guide.

A different approach would be to apply a dyadic perspective on attachment-system activation. That is, treat the leader as a context for follower attachment. Harms, Bai, and Han (2016) note that the attachment system is only triggered when an individual feels that an attachment figure is absent or may become absent (p. 1859). In line with this idea, they found that anxiously-attached followers reported more stress than others, but only in those cases where the follower had a leader with an avoidant style. Building on this finding, and the results from our third study, a promising line of research could be to treat leader's caregiving capacities as a context for follower attachment.

Finally, a promising trend in leadership studies is measuring biological markers. For example, measuring cardiovascular reactivity could be a way to evaluate stress (e.g., Slater, Turner, Evans, & Jones, 2018) and attachment-system activation more objectively. Such a method is of particular interest when investigating the avoidant style, as studies have found that avoidant individuals report less unpleasant feelings in laboratory studies than others, even though the biological processes in their bodies are the same (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In other words, even though avoidant individuals might not recognize their unpleasant emotions and attachment needs, it does not mean that their attachment-system is not activated. Measuring biological markers could, in that aspect, increase validity.

Investigating the mediating effect of implicit theories

Our investigation of attachment and implicit theories is a continuation of the highly leader-centric perspective on leadership that has dominated the field throughout the 20th century (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Obviously, followers' ILTs might be just as important as leaders' IFTs in explaining how attachment insecurities influence dynamics and quality of the leader-follower relationship.

Furthermore, what could be a third significant predictor here is the level of *congruence* between leader and follower expectations as to what their relationship should be like. In their review, Epitropaki and colleagues (2013) call for an investigation of the content and stability of *Implicit Theories of Leader-Follower Relationships* (ITLFRs). In addition to holding implicit theories of ideal leaders and followers, people also have assumptions and ideas about what ideal LMX relationships are like, they argue. Evidence in favor of this congruence perspective is found within ILT/IFT research (e.g., Riggs & Porter, 2017), in studies of leader and follower attribution styles (e.g., Martinko, Moss, Douglas, & Borkowski, 2007), and in studies of leader and follower's relational schemas (e.g., Tsai et al., 2017). As attachment theory provides detailed descriptions of the interpersonal goals associated with the different attachment styles (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), we encourage future studies of attachment and the leader-follower relationship to investigate the mediating effects of both IFTs, ILTs and ITLFRs, so that a richer description of the cognitive mechanisms involved can emerge.

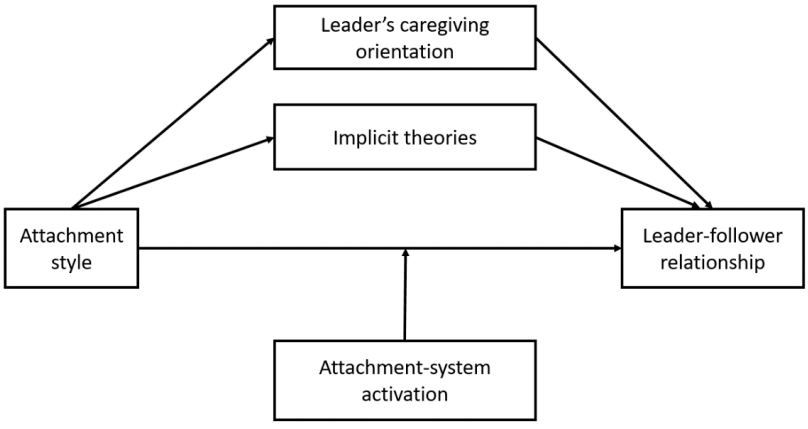
This line of research could also be a way to investigate Keller's (2003) theory about attachment style congruence, but from a different theoretical point of view. Studying these implicit theories might integrate the propositions from Keller's theory about the advantages associated with congruence, and research from other fields (e.g., adult romantic relationships) going against her ideas (e.g., Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004). For example, it could be that some of the strategies associated with insecure attachment styles have a destructive effect on leader-follower relationships, also when both parties engage in these behaviors (e.g., avoidant individual's tendency to be "passive aggressive"; Bartholomew & Allison, 2006) At the same time, it is quite likely that an agreement about follower expecting and leader providing little support (i.e., when both members of the dyad hold an avoidant style) could result in some kind predictability and mutual understanding, as suggested by Keller. Therefore, we urge scholars to continue the integration of attachment theory and implicit theories research.

Conclusion

To sum up, the discussion above encourages a fuller investigation of the moderator and mediators investigated in our three studies (see figure 1). For example, research on implicit theories should consider ILTs, IFTs, and ITLFRs, both from a content and a congruence perspective. Caregiving studies should include measures of follower attachment style in order to study caregiving as a process at the dyadic level. And there is need for more research investigating whether relationship quality can be predicted from combinations of leader and follower attachment styles (as proposed by Hinojosa et al., 2014; Keller, 2003). Such an investigation, we urge, should consider the principle of attachment-system activation. Finally, the leader-follower relationship should also be investigated through other lenses than LMX, in order to generate a deeper understanding of the relational dynamics involved. One such approach could be to study how follower's attachment style predicts consequences of *psychological contract breaches* (referring to employee's perception that there is discrepancy between what is promised and what is delivered; Rousseau, 1998). As anxiously-attached individuals are more sensitive towards disappointment, and avoidant individuals hold more hostile attitudes towards others, an integration of attachment research and psychological contract research could provide scholars with a look inside the black box of LMX.

FIGURE 1

A theoretical model for further investigation of attachment style as a predictor of the leader-follower relationship



Practical implications

Hopefully, results from this dissertation are of interest, not only to leadership scholars, but also to leadership development companies, organizational psychologists, and those working in human resources departments. Below are presented suggestions on how to implement insights from our research at various levels of the organization.

EAP and leadership coaching interventions (individual level)

The emergence of Employee Assisting Programs (EAPs) has increased significantly in recent years (Allday, 2013). EAPs provide workers with an opportunity to get help with personal concerns, such as health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress or other personal issues that may affect job performance (Joseph, Walker, & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2018). Obviously, an attachment-approach to such personal issues will only be preferable in some cases. And if preferable, it would require the professional to have extensive psychotherapeutic training to work with topics such as clients' unmet attachment needs, which many of those providing these services do not have (Bozer & Jones, 2018). However, as our research suggests that attachment insecurities might be a root cause of personal and relational distress at work, there is reason to expect that some, but not all, who makes use of EAPs could benefit from attachment-oriented interventions.

Bowlby (1988) proposed three routes to therapeutic change (i.e., a more secure attachment orientation). These are: (a) corrective experience with a therapist, (b) psychological and behavioral exploration of current relationships, and (c) psychological exploration of relationships with prior attachment figures (Dozier & Tyrrell, 1998). Adjusting Bowlby's ideas to the context of leadership coaching, Drake (2009) included the first two routes in his coaching model. That is, he proposed that insecurely-attached individuals could achieve a more secure attachment orientation by working with a coach who serves the secure base and safe haven function. Furthermore, he encouraged coaches to set up experiments with their clients, so that existing attachment schemas can be challenged. For example, an anxiously-attached leader who is overly self-critical of his/her own performance could benefit from actively seeking feedback from subordinates (e.g., initiate a 360-degree evaluation), in order to test whether his/her self-critical assumptions are right. Most likely such interventions are effective, not only in leadership coaching but also in EAPs.

Leadership development program interventions (group level)

The negative consequences of destructive leadership and laissez-faire leadership are well-established in the literature (e.g., Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). In line with previous research, our findings suggest that insecurely-attached leaders are more prone to misbehave or withdraw from their duties. Therefore, given the stability of attachment styles (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011), an important question for practitioners is how to downplay the negative consequences of leaders' attachment insecurities in ways that are both cost-effective and ethically sound.

One approach that could be applied in training situations is practicing *skills* that could increase leaders' abilities to serve the function as secure base and safe haven. Our finding that caregiving avoidance seems to explain to some degree why avoidant leaders are less supportive, gives direction to the development of such interventions. The two fundamental skills in caregiving are *sensitivity* (i.e., attunement to, and accurate interpretation of, another person's signals of distress; George & Solomon, 1999) and *responsiveness* (i.e., validating the troubled person's feelings, respecting his or her beliefs and values, and helping the person feel loved, understood, and cared for; Reis, 2014). There is reason to expect that these skills could develop in the course of a leadership development program. For example, studies of active listening (which taps into both sensitivity and responsiveness) have demonstrated that people improve their skills rapidly through training (e.g., Bernstein, Bekki, Wilkins, & Harrison, 2016). In addition, a recent meta-analysis of intervention studies from developmental psychology showed that parents improve their caregiver abilities significantly from training (dependent variable being the child's attachment security). Training of secure base and safe haven skills could be accompanied by knowledge on how felt security among coworkers increases proactivity and counteracts mental health illness (e.g., the studies by Davidovitz et al., 2007; Wu & Parker, 2017).

Second, there is good reason to believe that IFTs are more easily changeable than a person's attachment style (e.g., Kruse & Sy, 2011). Finding support for the view that IFTs mediate the relationship between attachment style and LMX, this could give practitioners important insights on how to intervene to increase leader-follower relationship quality. That is, helping leaders to reflect upon the content of their subjectively held IFTs, and how their IFTs shape their action tendencies, could be an effective intervention in leadership training programs (Epitropaki et al., 2013). The exercise by Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, and Tymon (2011),

where groups of leaders make drawings that represent their ILTs before discussing them in plenary, could serve as a template for a similar IFT activity.

Third, given the context-sensitive nature of implicit theories (Offermann & Coats, 2017) and our findings linking attachment insecurities to negative IFTs, leadership development programs could aim at accentuating narratives of followers that challenge participants' negative IFTs. Furthermore, the rationale for promoting an optimistic view on followers could be clarified through a lecture on McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y managers, contemporary research on implicit theories, and the power of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Preparing for change and loss (organizational level)

Meta-analytic evidence estimates that nearly 40% of the non-clinical adult population hold an insecure attachment style (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009). As results from our first study connect attachment insecurities with distress at work (in both leaders and followers), interventions targeting attachment insecurities at the organizational level could be a fruitful way of dealing with challenges such as presenteeism (i.e., being present at work with decreased mental and/or physical functioning) and absenteeism.

For example, the way organizations prepare for and execute involuntary loss of employment (e.g., layoffs, restructuring, and downsizing) could benefit from applying insights from attachment research. Albert and colleagues (2015) suggested that employment dissolution is comparable with other forms of loss (e.g., the loss of a significant other) in terms of how the individual seeks support, reacts emotionally, and adjusts to the new situation. Therefore, they argue, attachment styles may be able to explain employee reactions to change above and beyond Big Five traits and situational factors. A practical implication of the latter perspective is that organizations should be attentive to needs associated with the different attachment styles. From theory, avoidant employees are expected to seek less support, and might even feel uncomfortable if their leader attempts to provide them with care and support. Anxiously-attached workers, on the other hand, will benefit from leaders being sensitive and available. As suggested by Richards and Schat (2011), providing multiple types of support (e.g., informational, emotional, instrumental), and ensuring that accessing them is voluntary, may help to prevent unintended negative consequences.

Overall conclusion

The overall purpose of this dissertation was to empirically investigate *how and when leadership is influenced by leader's experiences in close relationships*. The theoretical framework applied to explore this topic has its origin in developmental psychology, and the study of infants/children and their caregiver(s). In management literature, theory integration across fields and disciplines has a long history (Agarwal & Hoetker, 2007), being both applauded (Shaw, Tangirala, Vissa, & Rodell, 2018) and criticized (see Markóczy & Deeds, 2009). The increased popularity of Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory in leadership research (Yip et al., 2018), suggests a promising integration, where new theory expands knowledge and offers a different way of understanding existing issues. However, this research area is in its early stages, and this dissertation aims at contributing to a fuller integration of the attachment theory in the field of leadership.

In addition to the distinct contributions of the three studies, the combined contribution of this dissertation is a demonstration of the usefulness of attachment theory when core tenants from Bowlby's original work, as well as developments in contemporary adult attachment research, are integrated into research models. Specifically, this dissertation addresses the principle of *attachment-system activation*, explores the phenomenon of *schema transference* and *defensive projection*, and investigates the role of the *caregiving system*. These are all important features of attachment theory that have not received enough attention in the literature. We believe that when leadership scholars keep in mind the full width of Bowlby's theory, this emerging research field will continue to develop essential insights about individual differences and leadership in the years to come.

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