Attachment Theory in Organizations:

Relationships with Coworker, Leader, and Organization Itself

by

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Abstract

I present a dissertation project consisting of three independent research papers focusing on how attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969) can inform the employee–organization relationship (EOR) research, including workplace relationships with coworkers, leaders, and the organization itself, and particularly what happens when difficulties in these relationships arise, such as mistreatment-like experiences. In Study 1, relying on survey data, I examine how different forms of organizational commitment may change after individuals experience social undermining (SU) enacted by other organization members, depending on the individual's organizational attachment style. In Study 2, two experiments were conducted to investigate how situationally induced attachment states moderate employees' task performance after exposure to leader mistreatment. In Study 3, using survey data and a person-oriented analytical approach, I focus on the within-individual attachment patterns and the implications of such patterns for important EOR outcomes, including perceived organizational trust and support. Drawing on attachment theory, these studies together demonstrate that the basic human orientations in interpersonal relationships entailed by attachment theory are relevant to the work domain, particularly to our understanding of the EOR.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Lei Jing (known as Emma Lei Jing in published works).

Study 1, presented in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, has been published as a co-authored article with Dr. Ian R. Gellatly (supervisor), Michelle Inness (committee member), and Justin R. Feeney. I was responsible for the data analysis and the manuscript composition. Dr. Gellatly was the supervisory author and was involved in the manuscript composition. Other co-authors contributed to manuscript edits.

The research projects, of which this dissertation is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board:

-- Project name "Customer and Coworker Interactions at Work: Examining Productive and Counter-Productive Employee and Customer Behaviours in the Workplace," No. Pro00052409, February 27, 2015.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As one of the fundamental theories of human relationships, attachment theory has recently been extended as a way of explaining how individuals relate to others in organizational settings and to the organization itself (e.g., Feeney et al., 2020; Harms, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Yip et al., 2018). The role of human attachment, however, has not yet been formally articulated in theories of the *employee–organization relationship* (or EOR)—"an overarching term to describe the relationship between the employee and the organization" (Shore et al., 2004, p. 292). In this project, I examine how attachment theory can inform the existing understandings of EOR—that is, how attachment-based functioning explains individuals' attitudes, emotions, and behaviours in their relationships with coworkers, leaders, and the organization itself, particularly what happens when they encounter difficulties in these relationships (e.g., mistreatment-like experiences). I argue that an attachment-based theoretical approach can lead to novel insights into the many unanswered questions around the EOR phenomenon.

Attachment Theory

Originally an attempt to explain why individuals' relationships with parents in early childhood have such a significant impact on subsequent personality development, attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1969) has been one of the most heavily researched theoretical frameworks in modern psychology (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The central thesis of attachment theory has been successfully adapted for various new purposes since its conception. The attachment literature now broadly covers contemporary personality theory, social psychology, clinical psychology, and, most notably, a growing area of management scholarship (i.e., attachment theory to explain organizational phenomena). As anticipated by Bowlby

himself, attachment theory should be relevant "from the cradle to the grave" (1973, p. 203), and the many social-psychological dynamics described in attachment theory are linked to individuals' workplace attitudes and behaviours.

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1982a), interactions with relationship partners in times of need, beginning in infancy, shape a person's mental representations of self and others and are important for mental health and satisfying relationships across the lifespan. Such mental representations constitute an innate psychological system that motivates and guides a person in their interactions with other people and the environment. Interactions with supportive and loving relationship partners foster the development of a sense of attachment security (i.e., confidence that one is socially valued and that others will be available and helpful when needed). When attachment figures are rejecting or unavailable, the sense of security is destabilized, and insecurities emerge that can be mapped in terms of two dimensions: attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998).

A person's position on the attachment anxiety dimension indicates the degree to which they worry that relationship partners will not be available in times of need and are afraid of being rejected or abandoned (Brennan et al., 1998). People scoring high on this dimension tend to regulate their insecurities by making strident, insistent, and even coercive attempts to obtain care and love from partners (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). A person's position on the attachment avoidance dimension indicates the extent to which they distrust relationship partners' goodwill and defensively strive to maintain independence and emotional distance (Brennan et al., 1998). Highly avoidant people tend to regulate distress by dismissing attachment needs and suppressing attachment-related worries (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). The orientations, defined by scores on the two dimensions, can be measured with reliable and valid scales (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016

for a review). Based on anxiety and avoidance dimensions, individuals may also experience elevated scores on both anxiety and avoidance attachment; these individuals not only worry about their status with respect to the attachment object but also actively engage in avoidance behaviours.

It is important to note that attachment orientations can be conceptualized as the top node in a hierarchical network of attachment-related mental representations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). This network also includes more specific attachment-related memories and images that apply only in certain relational contexts and can be activated by the actual or symbolic presence of a specific attachment figure, even if they are not congruent with the dominant attachment orientation (i.e., state-like attachment orientations vs. chronic attachment styles). This activation can then temporarily shift a person's cognitions and behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). For example, even among chronically insecure people, the presence of a supportive figure can infuse a momentary sense of security—what Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) called *security priming*—and lead them to think and behave like a secure person (Gillath & Karantzas, 2019).

Attachment Theory in Workplace Research

Organizational researchers have recently begun to consider whether attachment theory has relevance for understanding workplace relationships. These studies have largely centred on the broad attachment-based individual differences or on attachment to coworkers and other organizational members (e.g., Chopik, 2015; Little et al., 2011; Richards & Schat, 2011). An emerging area of research focuses on the organization itself (i.e., a non-human entity) as an attachment figure. Individual employees may form attachment bonds with their organizations that are similar to the bonds in interpersonal relationships. For example, some early evidence has supported that from an attachment perspective, group can be considered a symbolic attachment

figure providing a secure base for its members, and such group attachment has implications for individuals' group behaviours (Smith et al., 1999). As a result, considering organizations as inherently social groups, an organization should function as an attachment figure as well. Conceptual work has supported such theorization (see Albert et al., 2015), and a recent empirical study (Feeney et al., 2020) has demonstrated that organizational attachment is a valid and measurable focus of attachment. This line of research is, however, still in its infancy.

Attachment theory has also enriched workplace research through an attachment-based perspective on leadership. A fundamental assumption is that there are parallels between parental relationships (and other close personal relationships) and the leader–follower relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Early studies posit that attachment theory can explain how individuals may see authority figures differently, which in turn influences their leadership or followership behaviours (Kahn & Kram, 1994). More recently, considering the dyadic nature of leader–follower relationships, it is argued that organization leaders are in a position to provide their followers proximity, a secure base, and a safe haven, where followers can obtain social support in order to explore, grow, and cope with distress (see Mayseless & Popper, 2019 for more detail). In the investigations so far, leaders often take on such a stronger and wiser role—that is, similar to how individuals have the need to seek safety and care, they also have a capacity to provide care to others (caregiving; Bowlby, 1969). In organizational settings, a prominent function of leadership positions is to provide their followers such care and support; by doing so, leaders facilitate organizational operations (Thomas et al., 2013).

Challenges and Opportunities

My review of the attachment literature, particularly attachment-based studies in organizational settings, suggests that attachment theory has informed a range of organizational

topics and that its influence on organizational scholarship is growing; however, this research is still at an early stage. Notably, there is little attempt to incorporate the attachment perspective into the broad EOR theories, which is surprising given that attachment theory is a relational theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). This is likely due to the many challenges in place that prevent further integrating attachment theory into workplace research. The first conceptual challenge has been whether the attachment processes in interpersonal relationships also apply in individuals' relationships with an organization itself. A majority of the existing studies have focused on attachment-based individual differences and how these differences affect individuals' relationships with other organization members (e.g., coworkers, leaders) or their organizational behaviours, and interest in conceptualizing the organization as an attachment figure has only been emerging (Feeney et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2018). Evidence is accumulating, however, to support the parallel between attachment-related feelings toward a relationship partner and feelings toward a group, and such group attachment is linked to group attitudes and group-based behaviours (Smith et al., 1999). Recent work has shown that the organization itself, as a non-human entity, can serve as a valid (and measurable) focus of human attachment (Feeney et al., 2020).

The second challenge has rested in how to conceptualize attachment. Traditionally, attachment has often been viewed as a trait-like individual difference (e.g., attachment style). However, a large amount of psychological research has shown that it is more appropriate to describe attachment as a system consisting of both chronic attachment styles and state-like attachment schemas that can be triggered situationally (Baldwin et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). Both chronic and temporary attachment schemas are available and accessible to individuals in their social interactions, but organizational research is lagging behind in terms of

understanding how temporary attachment states have implications for the workplace (Yip et al., 2018). These implications are particularly important in work settings, however, because they address whether organizations can potentially articulate situational influences on attachment states and take advantage of the results.

Other challenges concern a narrow research focus in prior studies. Focusing on attachment-based individual differences and their relevant implications means that the studies often emphasize a direct relationship between attachment and an organizational outcome. Recent evidence, however, has shown that attachment is more likely to be a moderating influence in many workplace phenomena (see Dahling & Librizzi, 2015; Wu & Parker, 2017). Additionally, research to date has overlooked how attachment functions when individuals have negative relational experiences at work, such as mistreatment. Successful and satisfying workplace relationships can fulfil individuals' attachment needs, but what happens when attachment figures in the workplace fail to satisfy individuals' attachment needs is not yet known. For example, little research attention has been given to the question of what happens to followers when their leaders fail to fulfil a stronger and wiser attachment role. This is surprising given that attachment insecurities are often activated when individuals are exposed to hurting behaviours from their attachment figures and that attachment theory is particularly powerful at explaining the dynamics following negative relational experiences (Mikulincer et al., 2009). It is equally fundamental to understand such attachment dynamics in negative social situations, as in how attachment facilitates desirable social interactions, given that negative experiences often have a greater impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviours than positive events (Baumeister et al., 2001) and that a large number of workplace studies have documented the prevalence of mistreatment

behaviours by coworkers or leaders, as well as the deleterious outcomes such behaviours have on victims (Barling et al., 2009).

Finally, challenges remain around the measurement of attachment. When attachment is measured as a trait expressed in relevant caregiving relationships, it has been traditionally analysed from either a typological (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) or dimensional approach (Collins & Read, 1990). From a typological perspective, Hazan and Shaver (1987) assessed attachment style by asking individuals to select one of the attachment prototypes, including secure, anxious, and avoidant. A dimensional measure of attachment style assumes that attachment consists of two dimensions—anxious and avoidant. Attachment in organizational settings is often measured from the dimensional approach (Feeney et al., 2020; Richards & Schat, 2011). Both approaches, however, fail to take into account that individuals often experience more than one attachment style at a time (Baldwin et al., 1996). In work settings, EOR theories suggest that employees often consider multiple organizational agents when answering questions about their relationship with the organization (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). This means that the existence of multiple attachment styles or states within individuals in a workplace setting is very likely; however, the existing ways of measuring attachment are unable to capture this. Another inherent limitation with the currently dominant two-dimensional attachment measure is that although four conceptual styles of attachment (e.g., secure, anxious, avoidant, and fearful) are often discussed, only the two dimensions, anxiety and avoidance, are directly measured (Brennan et al., 1998). Secure and fearful styles are inferred based on low or high levels of anxiety and avoidance.

Acknowledging these many challenges of applying attachment theory in the workplace research, however, I also argue that the theory brings exciting opportunities. First, given that relationships with coworkers, leaders, and the organization itself can all be conceptualized as

attachment bonds, attachment theory facilitates a better understanding of multiple relational targets in organizations, which remains a conceptual and methodological challenge in the EOR research (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Second, compared with the currently dominant exchange-based view of EOR (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), attachment theory can be useful to reveal the innate human desire for bonding with other humans or non-human entities, such as the need to belong to a social group (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003). Third, attachment theory also acknowledges the interconnectedness of different social contexts in which relationships happen, including relational schemas formed in individuals' relationships in non-work contexts, as well as in their past social experiences, and how these schemas affect individuals' interactions in an organizational context.

Finally, the lens of attachment theory can be particularly useful to explain the impact of negative relational experiences at work. Many forms of workplace mistreatment, inflicted by leaders or coworkers, specifically harm workplace relations, and attachment functioning is directly concerned with a person's willingness and ability to engage in and maintain relationships. Additionally, experiencing such adversities at work is a source of emotional distress, and attachment theory describes a psychological system that is at work when people face a physical or psychological threat in relationships (Fraley & Waller, 1998). In other words, attachment theory may explain the psychological mechanisms of how individuals react to the distress caused by negative relational experiences.

In this dissertation project, through a three-study design, I address these challenges and fulfil the opportunities. The findings in this project demonstrate the potential contributions that attachment theory can make for organizational research by focusing on how attachment-based dynamics influence a selected number of EOR outcomes, including employees' organizational

commitment, perceived organizational support, organizational trust (attitude), emotional arousal following mistreatment-like experiences at work (emotion), and, finally, performance at work (behaviour). Specifically, I ask the following research questions: First, how does individuals' attachment toward their organization moderate the relationship between workplace mistreatment experiences (e.g., SU) and certain EOR outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment)? Given that EOR is an overarching term used to describe the relationships between employee and organization, and that organizational commitment has been an influential theory to conceptualize such relationships (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007; Meyer, 2016), focusing on organizational commitment as an outcome in this research question makes the empirical task feasible and the findings potentially generalizable within the EOR framework. Second, how does individuals' overall attachment functioning, particularly situation-induced attachment states, influence their task performance behaviours after experiencing mistreatment enacted by their leaders at work (i.e., leader mistreatment)? Third, how do within-individual attachment patterns (i.e., subgroups of individuals who exhibit the same patterns of attachment orientations from a person-oriented perspective) explain individuals' organizational attitudes and behaviours differently and more effectively, compared with the findings from the conventional variable-oriented operationalization of attachment?

To answer these research questions, I adopt a variety of study designs and analytical approaches in three independent but interrelated empirical studies, including survey, experiment, and a person-oriented analytical approach. These studies together advance the methodological front of this research, more importantly, they speak to different aspects of attachment functioning. For example, survey data shows the stable and trait-like attachment styles, whereas experimentally primed attachment captures the state-like attachment orientations. Additionally, a

person-oriented approach analytically tests whether individuals who experience unique patterns of attachment insecurities can be categorized together into cohorts, and then the behavioural properties of these cohorts studied. In Study 1, I conduct a correlation survey study focusing on organizational attachment style, which is measured through self-report with the newly established Organizational Attachment Scale (Feeney et al., 2020). I test in this study the basic premise of whether SU inflicted by coworkers damages the quality of EOR, represented by organizational commitment. More importantly, it measures whether this effect depends on individuals' organizational attachment styles. Previous attachment studies have extensively reported that a secure attachment style facilitates more positive interpersonal behaviours and outcomes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In this study, however, I focus on attachment insecurities and demonstrate how these insecurities may have under-explored effects on individuals' behaviour under the circumstance of coworker mistreatment.

Study 2 addresses the limitations of the correlational research design in Study 1 by experimentally manipulating individuals' mistreatment experience and their attachment functioning. I investigate how and why individuals' attachment orientations may determine the extent to which they lower their performance at work after experiencing mistreatment inflicted by leaders. Experimental studies of attachment in the field of psychology have shown that different attachment schemas are available in memory and can be activated under situational interventions (Baldwin et al., 1996). Additionally, such experimentally primed attachment states have been found to have significant impact on many theoretically relevant outcomes, independent of the chronic attachment styles. In other words, the situation-induced sense of security or insecurity leads people to behave similarly to those who have a chronic sense of security or insecurity, and chronic attachment styles do not affect the susceptibility to such

situational interventions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). Consisting of two experiments, Study 2 represents one of the first research attempts at experimentally priming attachment and investigating its implications in a workplace context.

Finally, Study 3 takes advantage of an emerging person-oriented approach—an analytical method that can reveal within-individual patterns of attachment styles and the implications of such patterns. Using latent profile analysis (LPA), I identify individuals belonging to the patterns categorized by different configurations of attachment anxiety and avoidance. For example, people may organically cluster around a high level of anxiety combined with a low level of avoidance, or around high anxiety and high avoidance. These two groups of individuals may show distinct attitudinal and behavioural tendencies at work. I look into such within-individual attachment patterns based on attachment to the organization in Study 3 and examine how these patterns influence some EOR-related outcomes. One main purpose of this study is to demonstrate the many conceptual and methodological advantages of studying workplace attachment from a person-oriented perspective.

Chapter 2: Social Undermining and Three Forms of Organizational Commitment: The Moderating Role of Employees' Attachment Style

Management scholars have long recognized many forms of workplace mistreatment, including relatively infrequent acts of physical violence, such as physical harassment and bullying, and far more prevalent forms of the behaviour, such as incivility and SU (e.g., Barclay & Aquino, 2011b; Dhanani et al., 2021). Regardless of the many forms of workplace mistreatment, across studies, the literature is rich with examples showing that workplace mistreatment increases the likelihood of negative physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioural outcomes for the victims, such as increased somatic complaints and feelings of

depression, negative work attitudes, burnout, and lower job performance (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barclay & Aquino, 2011b; Hershcovis, 2011).

SU is an important form of workplace mistreatment that has particular relevance and implications for the study of EOR (e.g., Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2016). According to Duffy and colleagues (2002), SU refers to intentional and malicious acts directed at another for the explicit purpose of harming or eroding the target's reputation and social standing at work or hindering the target's workplace performance. Examples of SU include belittling targets in front of others or spreading rumours to damage an individual's reputation within a group. Not surprisingly, a growing number of studies have demonstrated that behaviours aimed at deliberately harming another's social standing within a group at work have broader implications for how the victim relates to his or her organization (for meta-analytic reviews, see Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Caillier, 2021).

Traditionally, it has been common to study the relationship between different forms of mistreatment and the level of attitudinal or affective commitment (AC) reported by the victims. To be sure, studies involving emotion-based AC have revealed a consistent negative relationship (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). What has not been examined is whether mistreatment, generally, or SU, specifically, influence two other well-known forms of commitment—namely, normative (obligation-based) commitment (NC) and continuance (cost-based) commitment (CC). This omission is important because all three forms of commitment are influenced by different antecedent factors, and the AC, NC, and CC components have been differentially linked to important workplace outcomes, such as performance, citizenship behaviour, attendance, and turnover (e.g., Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Gellatly & Hedberg, 2016; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002). Given these existing findings, it is plausible to expect that

adverse relational encounters that harm one's social standing at work, such as SU, will affect different forms of commitment in a complex and nuanced way. In the current study, I build on this literature by examining how SU relates to the three forms of organizational commitment.

It is not yet known whether the damaging effect of SU on AC will extend to other forms of commitment. To the extent that the victims of SU feel threatened, I expect that their attention will likely shift to concerns around the personal costs (versus the benefits) of leaving, available employment alternatives, as well as a diminished awareness of one's responsibilities and obligations—all of which denote very different reasons for staying (or leaving) than pure affect. Taking a broader view of organizational commitment affords an opportunity to test the effects of SU on all three components of organizational commitment, some of which might be *positive* rather than negative. Furthermore, these differential effects of SU might be more nuanced if relevant characteristics of the victim, particularly the characteristics that guide individuals' relationship-building and maintenance behaviours, are considered. Drawing upon attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), I posit that the two attachment styles manifested in employees' relationship with their organizations—anxious attachment and avoidant attachment (Feeney et al., 2020; Harms, 2011)—are relevant for understanding how SU affects organizational commitment. In this study, I therefore investigate the following three questions, using data from a time-lagged sample of working adults: First, are employees who experience SU at work able to feel commitment to the organization? If so, what form does this commitment take? Second, do the effects of SU on commitment depend on one's fundamental attachment orientations toward human relationships?

Theoretical Rationale and Study Hypotheses

Coworker Mistreatment: Social Undermining

Although much has been written about workplace mistreatment (for a recent meta-analytic review, see Dhanani et al., 2021), with few exceptions (e.g., Mostafa et al., 2021; Watkins, 2021), SU remains an under-studied form of mistreatment behaviour. I find this puzzling given that SU is conceptually distinguishable from other forms of mistreatment, such as abusive supervision, bullying, harassment, and incivility (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis, 2011; Tepper & Henle, 2011), yet is particularly relevant for employee–organization relations. For example, compared with incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), the targets of SU are more likely to feel incompetent and experience failure. Compared with acts of bullying (Einarsen, 2000), perpetrators of SU have clear and particular intent in mind when they engage in such behaviour—that is, SU is planned and executed for the explicit purpose of damaging victims' work-related success and relations (Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy et al., 2012). Compared with workplace harassment (Rospenda, 2002), SU is often carried out in a more covert and subtle fashion. And compared with abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), the direction of SU needs not be downward, involving a power differential between the perpetrator and the victim. Taken together, SU could be a relatively more insidious form of mistreatment given its specific and clear intent, less overt operation, and more encompassing group of perpetrators. As such, acts of SU should particularly have relevance for the kind of commitment that employees feel toward the organization and its members.

Social Undermining and Organizational Commitment

Drawing upon commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, 2016) and the mistreatment and SU literatures, in this section, I consider the implications of SU for each form

of organizational commitment. The basic premise is that exposure to SU represents a non-trivial threat to targeted individuals' self-esteem and social status within a team or organization that could, in the extreme case, lead to resignation or termination. When threatened in this way, it would be natural for individuals to try to make sense of this event, such as by considering the personal and financial costs associated with leaving if the situation could not be resolved. SU should increase the salience of the economic concerns, and the specific nature of this form of mistreatment strikes at the heart of one's relationship with others and the organization. As such, SU should trigger emotional withdrawal as a self-protective mechanism. The notion that the mindsets or psychological states underlying the three forms of the commitment are differentially sensitive to such threat is implicit in a seminal paper by Meyer an colleagues (2004).

With respect to AC (and, to a lesser extent, NC), when these feelings are dominant, the mindset should be associated with promotion-oriented rather than prevention-oriented self-regulatory motives (cf. Higgins, 1997). According to Meyer et al. (2004), the AC mindset is associated with the motive to self-regulate toward organizational goals as one acts in accord with one's personal values and ideals (Allen, 2016; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Mistreatment by other organization members should come as an "emotional shock" and should represent a violation of this value alignment. In turn, it would be natural for targets of abuse to withdraw emotionally from the source of the mistreatment. As such, I expect that exposure to SU should lower feelings of AC. The mindset associated with NC, while sharing emotional overtones with AC, should be characterized by employees' beliefs about their responsibilities and felt obligations toward the organization. Evoking feelings of obligation is consistent with the social-exchange models in EOR, such as organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and leader–member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). From this broader theoretical perspective, SU

represents powerful negative acts that should erode individuals' sense of duty to an organization that condones such mistreatment. To the extent that the processes underlying NC are linked to social-exchange mechanisms (Allen, 2016; Meyer & Allen, 1997), I expect that targets of mistreatment will be more likely to reciprocate in kind, pursing self rather than collective interests (i.e., less likely to feel an obligation toward the organization); thus, I expect that exposure to SU should lower NC.

In stark contrast, Meyer et al. (2004) proposed that the CC mindset is more instrumental in nature, whereby decisions to stay or leave are evaluated in terms of available alternatives and the personal costs of staying versus leaving. This economic thinking has been thought to be closely associated with the prevention-oriented self-regulatory motive (cf. Higgins, 1997). Higher rather than lower levels of CC should be characterized by the motive to self-regulate toward security and safety goals, with desire to meet one's obligations and responsibilities (Meyer et al., 2004). Avoiding, limiting, or minimizing personal risk and being able to satisfy one's obligations requires an increased awareness of one's circumstances and the prevailing reward contingencies. (Allen, 2016; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Events that threaten one's self-esteem and job status within the organization, such as SU, should make these economic concerns more salient and evoke a self-protective regulatory focus. Thus, I expect that exposure to SU should increase rather than lower CC.

While I am not aware of any prior work that has studied the relationship between SU (or other forms of mistreatment) and the three forms of commitment, I note that elevated levels of felt stress or strain have been positively associated with CC and negatively associated with AC or NC (Felfe et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2002). To the extent that exposure to SU is also a work-

related source of stress or strain for the targets of the abuse, these empirical patterns would be conceptually consistent with the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.1: *Employees' perception of SU will be negatively related to their reported level of AC.*

Hypothesis 1.2: *Employees' perception of SU will be negatively related to their reported level of NC.*

Hypothesis 1.3: *Employees' perception of SU will be positively related to their reported level of CC.*

The Moderating Role of Organizational Attachment Styles

Attachment theory has only recently been applied to workplace relationships (Yip et al., 2018). It has been known for some time that people often anthropomorphize their organizations with human qualities, viewing their organizations as supportive (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) or trustworthy (Robinson, 1996), or as an attachment object not unlike a nurturing caregiver (Feeney et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2018). Our tendency to personify the organization creates psychological conditions whereby an individual can experience a meaningful human connection with a social entity as well as the social and emotional exchanges that naturally flow from these relationships (e.g., Albert et al., 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Tetrick, 1994). To the extent that people see and respond to their organization (and its agents) as a "significant other," attachment theory offers a new way of understanding how SU might affect the mindsets believed to underlie the different forms of organizational commitment. Within an attachment theory framework, SU will most certainly be experienced as a potent source of psychological threat that must be resolved lest it damage or alter the nature of the primary relationship (Bowlby, 1982b; Fraley & Waller, 1998). Second, given the likelihood that SU is seen as a threat to relationships,

SU will evoke innate tendencies with respect to attachment security or insecurity. I expect that one's predisposition to manifest a particular attachment style explains why people may process and react differently to SU. An emerging body of research now shows that inherent attachment styles explain workplace behaviour beyond what is explained by other dispositional characteristics, such as personality traits (Harms, 2011; Richards & Schat, 2011).

Among the various conceptualizations of attachment, a consensus has emerged that the two-dimensional model consisting of attachment anxiety and avoidance best captures the underlying structure of attachment styles (Brennan et al., 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Both anxiety and avoidance depict different forms of relationship insecurity. Specifically, anxiously attached individuals worry excessively that the "attachment object" will not be available in times of need and are preoccupied with real or imagined threats to their relationship status (a hyperactivating attachment system facing threat; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). Attachment avoidance, another form of insecurity, refers to a deep-seated distrust of the attachment object that leads to defensive psychological withdrawal and emotional and/or behavioural independence (an engaged deactivating attachment system; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). This hyperactivating or deactivating attachment system is evoked when individuals perceive that their relationship with the attachment object is in danger—as would be the case for a victim of SU. In contrast to these individuals who are insecurely attached, attachment security is inferred when both forms of insecurity (anxiety and avoidance) are low (Brennan et al., 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Accordingly, securely attached individuals are often confident that attachment objects will be responsive in times of need and are therefore more flexible and constructive when dealing with relational difficulties (Mikulincer et al., 2003).

I propose that the hyperactivating and deactivating strategies entailed by attachment anxiety and avoidance, respectively, have implications for the motivational orientations that underlie the different commitment mindsets. When employees are anxiously attached, by definition they should be more obsessed with the attachment object compared to those who are less anxious. In the face of real or imagined threat, as would be the case if employees were exposed to incidents of SU, the individuals' hyperactivating system would be fully engaged—that is, these employees may feel an urgency to fortify their relationship with the organization. I expect that this excessive response to threat will have implications for one's self-regulatory focus. The need to reassure one's status and reconnect with the attachment object (i.e., the organization) should lead to increased efforts to align personal goals with those of the organization, a pattern that is consistent with a promotion focus. To the extent that anxiously attached individuals who feel threatened are obsessed with strengthening and deepening their emotional bond and feelings of obligation to the organization, attachment anxiety will dampen the negative effects of SU on AC and NC. Thus, anxiously attached individuals exposed to SU should be less likely to experience an erosion of their AC and NC than would those who are exposed to SU but less anxiously attached.

Hypothesis 1.4a: *The negative relationship between SU and AC will be weaker when attachment anxiety is higher rather than lower.*

Hypothesis 1.4b: *The negative relationship between SU and NC will be weaker when attachment anxiety is higher rather than lower.*

When employees are avoidantly attached, they should be more guarded and distrustful, preferring to remain psychologically and emotionally distant and independent from the attachment object. Instead of becoming preoccupied with the relationship, as their anxiously

attached counterparts might, people who manifest a strong avoidant attachment (i.e., an engaged deactivating system) should see SU as further evidence that others are not reliable and cannot be trusted (cf. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). This emotional and social deactivation hastens a decoupling of individual and organizational goals and lowers feelings of obligation to the organization, rendering the employee even less committed to the attachment object and more self-reliant than they were before the threat (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995). Thus, the negative relationship between SU and AC or NC should be more pronounced for highly avoidant employees than for those who are low on the avoidant attachment dimension.

Hypothesis 1.5a: *The negative relationship between SU and AC will be stronger when attachment avoidance is higher rather than lower.*

Hypothesis 1.5b: *The negative relationship between SU and NC will be stronger when attachment avoidance is higher rather than lower.*

Finally, as noted previously, the mindset underlying CC is rooted in an economic (cost–benefit) calculation of one's present employment situation. First, I expect that the positive relationship between SU and CC (Hypothesis 3) should be accentuated when attachment anxiety is strong (i.e., the attachment system is hyperactivated) rather than when it is weak. When an individual is very worried about their status with the organization (i.e., the attachment object), I expect a heightened awareness of what is at stake and whether suitable alternatives exist. Second, I expect that this positive relationship between SU and CC will be attenuated when attachment avoidance is strong (i.e., the attachment system is deactivated). I propose that highly avoidant individuals should be better equipped to distance themselves psychologically from the aversive event—that is, avoidantly attached individuals create a psychological distance that allows them to dismiss or downplay the personal threat represented by SU (cf. Bormann & Gellatly, 2021). It

follows that these "targeted individuals" will not feel the need to self-regulate toward safety and security goals. Thus, the positive relation between SU and CC should diminish in magnitude when attachment avoidance is high rather than low.

Hypothesis 1.6a: *The positive relationship between SU and CC will be stronger when attachment anxiety is higher rather than lower.*

Hypothesis 1.6b: *The positive relationship between SU and CC will be weaker when attachment avoidance is higher rather than lower.*

Method

A time-lagged convenience sample was provided by Qualtrics, and the participants provided data anonymously. An increasing number of studies have supported a reliable equivalence between the findings based on such online panel data and the more traditional convenience samples in management and psychology scholarship (Gosling et al., 2004; Porter et al., 2019; Walter et al., 2019). In the questionnaire, all measures, except demographic and work questions, were presented in a randomized order to reduce potential item priming effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). To improve data quality, I collected and examined respondents' IP addresses and response times to rule out repeating respondents and other outliers. I also used some attention check questions, such as "If you are reading this question, please select strongly disagree." Research has shown that such measures are effective at ensuring the quality of web-based survey data (Aguinis et al., 2020; Meade & Craig, 2012).

Based on an anticipated effect size of .05 in hierarchical linear regression, I calculated that a sample size of approximately 400 will achieve a sufficient amount of power (Cohen, 1992; Faul et al., 2009). All measures were surveyed at Time 1, except for organizational commitment, which was collected at Time 2. In total, 626 respondents provided data at both time points. They

are from the 958 respondents who provided answers at the first time point, suggesting an approximately 35% attrition rate, which is in line with the attrition rate observed in some prior time-lagged studies in the area of workplace mistreatment (Nielsen et al., 2012; Tepper, 2000). As to the sample characteristics, respondents were at least 18 years of age and employed full-time (i.e., 35 or more hours per week). All participants worked for companies based in the United States. Of the total sample, 51.8% were men and 48.2% were women. Respondents reported an average age of 47 and an average of 12.5 years of tenure with an organization. I also compared the participants who dropped out after Time 1 with the final sample used for the analyses based on these key demographic variables; no significant difference in terms of sample characteristics emerged.

Measures

I measured AC, NC, and CC using the scales described by Meyer et al. (1993). Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with each of the 18 statements on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Scale scores were computed by averaging the six items per dimension (see Table 1.1 for mean, standard deviation, and scale reliability). I assessed workplace SU using Duffy et al.'s (2002) measure, broadly referring to "others at work" enacting the behaviour of SU. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they observed others in the workplace (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, customers, and clients) exhibiting 13 types of behaviours (e.g., spreading rumours about you; insulting you; talking down to you). Ratings were provided on 6-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *everyday*). Organizational attachment was measured through the seven-item measure described by Feeney et al. (2020). This scale assesses attachment anxiety and avoidance using the organization as the attachment object. Four items reflected attachment anxiety and another three items reflected attachment avoidance. Participants

were asked to express their degree of agreement on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). An example item of attachment anxiety is "I'm afraid of losing the 'affection' and goodwill that my organization shows me." An example item of attachment avoidance is "I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my organization." See Appendix A for a detailed list of measure items.

Following the recommendations by Becker et al. (2016), as control variables, I also measured respondents' gender (1 = *male*; 2 = *female*) and the number of years they had been with the organization. Both biological sex and tenure have previously been identified as important control variables when conducting research involving organizational commitment (Organ & Ryan, 1995). For example, cooperation and courtesy entailed by feminine values (Hofstede, 1980) could make female respondents report more commitment or respond differently to SU; longer tenure could indicate more substantial investment in the career, which may influence assessment of commitment. The analyses in this study were carried out considering these control variables.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2018) show sufficient validity of the studied variables. Prior to conducting the CFA, item parcels were used to reduce the number of indicators per latent factor. Item parcels allow for more parsimonious models, which are associated with superior reliability and distributional properties, and maintain a more favourable sample size to parameter ratio (Williams et al., 2009). SU items were divided into three parcels, and the three dimensions of organizational commitment had two parcels each in the analyses. The parcelling decisions were made according to the factorial

algorithm proposed by Rogers and Schmitt (2004) and Little et al. (2002), in which the indicators were assigned based on the rankings of their loadings on the principal latent factor.

In total, I compared the level of fit of the following six plausible measurement models based on a set of criteria parameters, including the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR): (a) a one-factor model where all indicators were specified to load on a common latent factor (χ^2 = 5638.49 [104], CFI = .38, TLI = .29, RMSEA = .29, SRMR = .25); (b) a three-factor model in which indicators were loaded on a common commitment factor, a common attachment factor, and an SU factor (χ^2 = 1834.90 [101], CFI = .81, TLI = .77, RMSEA = .17, SRMR = .15); (c) a four-factor model whereby indicators were loaded on a common AC-NC factor, a CC factor, a common attachment factor, and an SU factor (χ^2 = 1427.49 [98], CFI = .85, TLI = .82, RMSEA = .15, SRMR = .15): (d) a five-factor model whereby indicators were loaded on a common AC-NC factor, a CC factor, an attachment-anxiety factor, an attachment-avoidance factor, and an SU factor (χ^2 = 1019.38 [94], CFI = .90, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .13, SRMR = .13); (e) a five-factor model that involved three commitment factors, an SU factor, and a common attachment factor (χ^2 = 1002.60 [94], CFI = .90, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .11); and (f) a six-factor model in which each indicator variable was loaded on its respective latent factor (χ^2 = 581.82 [89], CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .08). The results clearly support the validity of the proposed measurement model that has six correlated latent factors (i.e., model *f*).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1.1 shows the correlations among the studied variables. First, the correlations among the three commitment variables were consistent with those reported from meta-analytic

studies (e.g., Meyer et al., 2002). Additionally, I observed a positive correlation between CC and gender (i.e., females reported higher rather than lower levels of CC than did males). With respect to organizational tenure, I observed that longer-serving employees were more likely to report higher levels of AC and NC than were shorter-serving employees. Second, in line with previous findings, I observed a moderate to high correlation between the two forms of insecure attachment—anxiety and avoidance (cf. Feeney et al., 2020).

Insert Table 1.1

Test of Hypotheses

The first three hypotheses specifically focused on whether SU co-varied with the three forms of commitment; thus, I examined the pattern of simple bivariate correlations. Inspection of the correlations depicted in Table 1.1 confirmed the predictions that SU correlated negatively with AC but not NC. SU was found to correlate positively with CC. Additionally, I repeated the analyses, replacing CC, in turn, with each of the two sub-scales of CC reported by McGee and Ford (1987)—low employment alternatives and high personal sacrifice. Both CC sub-scales were positively correlated with SU. Thus, the correlational evidence is consistent with the Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.3 but not Hypothesis 1.2.

To test for the interaction hypotheses, I performed and reported the findings from moderated regression analyses, controlling for gender and organizational tenure. A separate regression analysis was performed for each of the three commitment measures. For all three analyses, on Step 1, I entered the two control variables; on Step 2, I entered three predictor variables (anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and SU); and, on Step 3, I entered the

interaction terms. It is noteworthy that I performed the regression analyses without the control variables and observed no significant changes to the results.

Beginning with AC (Table 1.2), I found a significant interaction between SU and anxious attachment, holding all other variables in the model constant, but I found no evidence that SU interacted with avoidant attachment. Turning to NC (Table 1.3), I found a significant interaction between SU and anxious attachment. I did not, however, find support for an interaction between SU and avoidant attachment. Finally, with respect to CC (Table 1.4), I did not find evidence in the data that SU interacted with either attachment style. In summary, I found evidence that the negative relations between SU and AC/NC were contingent upon anxious attachment but not avoidant attachment (i.e., Hypotheses 1.4a and 1.4b were supported but Hypotheses 1.5a and 1.5b were not). I did not find that the observed positive relation between SU and CC was moderated by one's organizational attachment style; thus, Hypotheses 1.6a and 1.6b were not supported.

Insert Tables 1.2–1.4

To better understand the nature of the significant interactions, tests of the simple slopes were performed (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Plots of the interaction effects reveal that the negative relation between SU and AC was stronger for individuals who reported low attachment anxiety (slope = −.76, $t = -6.51$, $p < .01$) than for individuals who reported high attachment anxiety (slope = −.10, $t = -1.08$, *ns*). Likewise, the negative relation between SU and NC was more pronounced for individuals whose attachment anxiety was low (slope = −.62, $t = -5.17$, $p < .01$) than it was when individuals were highly anxious (slope = −.02, $t = -.21$, *ns*). In summary, I

found that the AC and NC of people who were less anxiously attached to their organization were more negatively affected by SU than those who felt more anxiously attached to their organization.

Insert Figures 1.1 and 1.2

Discussion

It is widely believed that employees who are treated badly at work will feel less commitment to the organization in which the mistreatment occurs. Although some aspects of this statement might be true, this view might be too simple. In this study, I found that when a broader definition of organizational commitment is considered, the overall relationship might be more complicated than realized. I observed that employees who had been exposed to SU were less likely to report AC and NC than employees who had not been victimized. I also observed that victims of SU tended to show an increase rather than a decrease in CC. While the notion that SU can fortify organizational commitment of any type seems counterintuitive, this finding makes sense if the economic (instrumental) nature of the CC mindset is appreciated, with SU representing a threat that heightens an awareness in victims of their employment alternatives and costs of leaving.

To the extent that feelings of commitment to an anthropomorphized entity (e.g., an organization) represent manifestations of fundamental human attachment processes, I proposed that responses to SU would be heightened or dampened depending on one's attachment disposition. The interaction results revealed that individuals characterized by insecure attachment, particularly attachment anxiety, were less likely to experience decreased AC and NC

following exposure to SU. Thus, for AC and NC, what seems to matter the most to victims of SU is what this mistreatment experience signals about their status with the attachment object (i.e., the organization). Turning to attachment avoidance, I hypothesized that naturally avoidant people would be able to psychologically distance themselves from acts of SU and, thus, offer a form of protective inoculation. Unfortunately, I did not find evidence that attachment avoidance interacted in any way with SU. In hindsight, the lack of evidence in the findings to support this could be explained by an overall detachment to organization and other organization members due to the avoidant individuals' preference for self-reliance. To the extent that this is true, it might have been ambitious to expect meaningful emotional connection at work to start with for this group of individuals, rendering SU experiences irrelevant.

Contributions

The current study contributes to both workplace mistreatment and organizational commitment literatures for the following reasons. First, the study provides more evidence for the conceptual differences among AC, NC, and CC. Although the differences among the three commitment forms have been extensively studied, the evidence has been lacking when workplace mistreatment is involved. This study demonstrates that employees' sense of desire or obligations may reduce when they experience SU at work; however, if there is a rational need to stay (e.g., financial concerns), these individuals may feel as stuck as ever, or worse. Second, scholars have been debating over the proliferation of workplace mistreatment concepts: some have called for a reconciliation of multiple mistreatment constructs (Fox & Spector, 2005; Hershcovis, 2011), whereas others have been championing for discrete mistreatment forms (e.g., Duffy et al., 2002; Pearson et al., 2000; Tepper, 2000). Focusing on workplace SU, this study provides more evidence to support SU as a meaningful workplace mistreatment form with

unique characteristics. For example, its explicit intent in damaging relationship-related outcomes makes SU an appropriate theory to explain how the distress an individual experiences in interpersonal relationships at work may spill over to the individual's relationship with the organization.

Finally, the lens of attachment theory in this study has implications, particularly the finding that a high level of attachment anxiety enables employees to remain affectively and normatively committed after workplace SU. This indicates a possibility that AC may have a more neutral or even negative aspect that is motivated by an irrational urge of feeling involved (i.e., attachment anxiety). Another interpretation could be that although attachment anxiety may not be the most desirable affect regulation mode that individuals want to be in, other parties in a relationship with the individual may benefit from the anxiety. For example, anxiously attached individuals can stay affectively committed to the organization even when they are victims of SU at work. More importantly, these findings contradict the notion that attachment insecurities always lead to bad outcomes. For example, attachment anxiety (a type of attachment insecurity) may make individuals less affected by certain interpersonal adversities at work. Taken together, attachment styles may have some consequences untapped by previous research; after all, they are acknowledged to have a broad psychological reach (Chugh et al., 2014).

Two managerial implications arise from this research. The first and most obvious suggestion is that SU should be discouraged. Organizations must be aware of the importance of nurturing a collegial and collaborative workplace. Second, once mistreatment behaviours arise, organizations should have institutional resources to support employees in need. The reason for this is twofold: First, when such resources are available to employees, employees can take actions to resolve their dissatisfaction caused by SU. According to the classic exit, voice, and

loyalty framework by Hirschman (1970), employees' ability to voice dissatisfaction can effectively reduce the likelihood of exit. Second, previous research suggests that individuals who are less anxiously attached are more proactive in seeking feedback and help (Allen et al., 2010). As a result, although it may be surprising to some, the finding that attachment anxiety weakens the effect of SU can be interpreted optimistically. When organizations have practices and resources in place to manage workplace mistreatment, those who are more severely affected (less anxiously attached individuals) are most likely to notice and take advantage of them.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. Although self-reports are deemed most appropriate when having respondents reflect on personal experience, work attitudes, and disposition-like concepts, common method bias may be a concern in this study. This concern was addressed first by collecting data anonymously, varying response options to create psychological and physical separation between the variables, and measuring the variables at multiple time points (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). A series of CFA were also conducted, and the results showed support for the hypothesized model. Another limitation is that only SU was examined. Considering the ongoing debate around the significance of having different forms of mistreatment (Hershcovis, 2011), some comparison studies would contribute to the discussion. Similarly, more research is needed to determine whether the nature of attachment in the workplace, such as attachment to coworkers (Richards & Schat, 2011), global attachment style (absence of a specific attachment target), or situation-induced attachment state (Game, 2008; Yip et al., 2018), also play a role in employees' post-mistreatment attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, only attachment insecurities were examined in this study—that is, the findings cannot speak to what happens to the SU-commitment relationship when individuals are securely

attached, which is often inferred based on low attachment anxiety and avoidance. There is potential benefit to consider attachment security in future investigations; it could be particularly promising to do so using experimental methods to prime a secure base (Mikulincer et al., 2005).

A particularly important question for future research is to explore the reasons why fundamental attachment systems are relevant for some forms of commitment but not others. I have suggested but not tested the role of intervening mechanisms, such as the relative strength of promotion- and prevention-oriented motives, and how negative workplace experiences might prime the strength of these motives. Extending this logic, I propose that employees who are preoccupied with the status of a relationship (i.e., characterized by elevated levels of attachment anxiety) might also be more sensitive to anything that threatens the status quo. In turn, these persistent worries might evoke an overarching self-regulatory motive aimed at minimizing personal losses and maintaining feelings of safety and security. As put forward earlier, appraising and monitoring the job situation and the prevailing employment landscape is a hallmark feature of CC but not of AC or NC. In stark contrast, employees who feel secure in their work relationships should aspire to optimize personal and collective goals—a mindset consistent with promotion-oriented regulatory focus and AC. Beyond self-regulatory motives, I propose that trait and state affect may also help unlock the psychological mechanisms underlying different attitudinal and behavioural responses to interpersonal mistreatment. When individuals are more affectively committed, for example, they may suffer more rapid and negative emotional consequences of SU. Emotion theorists have argued that after an eliciting stimulus (e.g., an SU encounter), as soon as the individual registers the stimulus, a corresponding feeling state will be experienced, and changes in attitudes, behaviours, and cognitions may follow as downstream consequences (Elfenbein, 2007). In comparison, affect may play a much smaller role in terms of

CC. More understanding of such intervening processes may reveal new insights on SU-commitment relations, particularly why attachment insecurities have a differential effect on forms of commitment.

Finally, the findings show that the relationship between SU and AC was less severe when employees were anxiously attached. This raises a counterintuitive proposal that heightened attachment anxiety (i.e., as experienced by those individuals who worry and are preoccupied with their relationship status) might, inadvertently, inoculate these employees against the negative workplace events and experiences. It would seem that if you are "expecting the worst," you are not as shocked when bad things happen.

Chapter 3: How Employees Respond to Leader Mistreatment: An Attachment Perspective

Followers who experience mistreatment by their leaders often manifest outcomes such as reduced psychological well-being, less job engagement, increased turnover intention, and impaired productivity or performance (e.g., Aquino & Thau, 2009; Tepper et al., 2017; Walter et al., 2015; Zhang & Liao, 2015). Broadly speaking, leader mistreatment is best thought of as a higher-order concept that encompasses abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), aggression (Barclay & Aquino, 2011a), harassment (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), and SU (Duffy et al., 2002). It is used to describe a situation in which employees perceive that their fundamental needs in the workplace, whether psychological or physiological, are harmed by a leader's behaviours (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Mayer et al., 2012). Specifically, acts of mistreatment may involve verbal abuse, non-contingent punishment, or even physical abuse (see Ashforth, 1994; Tepper et al., 2017). Much has been learned about the consequences of being a victim of leader mistreatment, and the existing evidence broadly suggests a severely negative relationship between leader mistreatment and follower performance. However, the current

understanding of the performance-related implications of leader mistreatment is limited due to a combination of theoretical and methodological constraints (Tepper et al., 2017).

First, a majority of the existing research relies on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974) or conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to explain the adverse effects of leader mistreatment on followers' performance (Tepper et al., 2017). For example, it is commonplace to view acts of mistreatment as triggers that evoke within victims the need to reciprocate with decreased job performance (Baron, 1988) or create a stressful situation in which employees experience resource depletion, in turn making it harder for them to perform well (Harris et al., 2007). According to these theoretical perspectives, however, the potentially rich variations among followers in response to leader abuse are not evident. Social exchange norms and resource depletion experiences make little provision for individual differences, yet they are important conditional factors to better understand the implications of leader mistreatment (see Harris et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2001). Additionally, these theories describe a cognition-based motivational process after mistreatment: Employees evaluate the situation, feel less motivated after facing mistreatment, and, hence, lower their performance efforts (Tepper, 2007). However, there is a need to better understand the affective nature of post-mistreatment behaviours in the workplace (Herman et al., 2018; Tepper et al., 2017).

Next, among the existing affect-based studies of leader mistreatment, affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and emotion appraisal theory (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) have shed light on these processes. Based on these theories, leader mistreatment represents an affective event that elicits emotions (primarily of negative valence) among the abused employees; after an appraising process, the emotional reactions lead to various workplace outcomes, including workplace deviance behaviour (e.g., decreased performance),

turnover, and so on (e.g., Atwater et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022). Although this existing affect-based perspective contributes rich theoretical understandings to the research of leader mistreatment, it is still at an early stage compared with studies from a cognitive perspective, and it has so far focused on affect-based individual differences, such as positive and negative affect, but have overlooked the more spontaneous emotional reactions to mistreatment-like experience, such as the immediate emotional arousal following such experiences. This is not surprising given that the empirical evidence has largely come from studies of abusive supervision, which emphasizes "a sustained display" of mistreatment behaviours by leaders (Tepper, 2000). Additionally, the existing studies do not answer the question of why the post-mistreatment reaction is affective in nature, which is often taken for granted.

In this project, I argue that attachment theory can potentially address these theoretical limitations and advance our understanding of leader mistreatment and its implications for employee performance, particularly from an affective perspective. First, attachment theory suggests that followers' behavioural reactions to mistreatment by an authority figure depend on the followers' own attachment orientations (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1969)—that is, viewed through the lens of attachment theory, leader mistreatment represents a situation where leaders fail to satisfy followers' fundamental attachment needs, and individuals cope with such unmet attachment needs differently. Second, according to attachment theory, individuals' immediate response to disruptions in attachment bonds should be affective in nature, as opposed to cognitive. Interestingly, it has long been suspected that feelings and emotions are an integral part of the intuitive appraising process in forming and maintaining attachment with others (Bowlby, 1969). This view that the mechanism underlying attachment processes is fundamentally emotional regulation persists to this day. In other words, individuals' attachment

functioning determines how they appraise emotion-eliciting experiences in relationships, as well as the "generation, experience, and expression of emotions" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 187). For example, attachment anxiety means that individuals are more likely to cope with distress in relationships with a hyper-aroused emotion-regulation system, whereas avoidance means that the system is not as easily aroused, indicating that emotional arousal can be a meaningful mechanism.

As a result, theoretically, I conceptualize leader mistreatment from an attachment perspective in this study: leader mistreatment represents an emotion-eliciting disruption to the attachment bond between leader and follower. From this perspective, I focus on examining the role played by arousal and attachment orientations (situationally induced state-like orientations) in how individuals respond to leader mistreatment experiences. To the extent that acts of leader mistreatment represent a potent emotion-eliciting experience and manifest as felt arousal, I argue that an elevated arousal will hinder performance on tasks that require attentional resources and that this indirect effect will depend upon followers' attachment security and insecurities, including attachment anxiety and avoidance (see Figure 2.1 for an illustration of the conceptual framework of this study).

From a methodological perspective, another challenge in the leader mistreatment research has been a reliance on correlational designs, which, in turn, impedes efforts to establish causal primacy within the focal process model. For instance, it is typical to see studies that report correlations between perceived leader mistreatment and a litany of follower perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2007). Although the natural assumption is that these consequences flow from acts of abuse (Harris et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2012; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), these implicit causal assumptions have not been explicitly tested. It is entirely

plausible that followers who report negative work perceptions and feelings may attribute these negative states to their leaders and view their leaders in negative terms. Unfortunately, correlational designs cannot rule out these alternative explanations. I employ experimental designs in this study to establish causal primacy and test for moderated relationships in the proposed process model. Specifically, I conduct two experiments: In Experiment 1, I draw upon attachment theory to ascertain whether followers' behavioural reaction to mistreatment by an authority figure depends on the followers' state-like attachment orientations. To unpack this primary relationship and the moderating role of attachment orientations, in Experiment 2, I examine the mediating role of emotional arousal. Next, I illustrate the theoretical hypotheses underlying the design of this study.

Insert Figure 2.1

Theoretical Rationale and Study Hypotheses

Reactions to Mistreatment and the Moderating Role of Attachment Orientations

To the extent that the dyadic leader–follower relationship is similar to the parent–child relationship, it is argued that organizational leaders are in a position to provide their followers a safe haven and secure base, where followers can feel safe and secure to explore and grow (see Mayseless & Popper, 2019 for more detail). However, as alluded to in the theoretical background earlier, little research attention so far has been given to the question of what happens to followers when their leaders fail to fulfil such a positive relational role. For example, what happens when leaders act abusively. I argue that a lens of attachment theory is relevant and valuable to answering this question. For example, research has shown that attachment security has beneficial

effects on distress management and positively biases the processing of attachment-relevant information (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Additionally, Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) propose that attachment security also facilitates the processing of attachment-unrelated information—that is, attachment security creates a calm and confident mental platform that reduces worries and distress, which allows people to be fully attuned to any kind of incoming information and to confidently and effectively engage in exploration, learning, and task performance.

As compared with attachment security, however, attachment anxiety is expected to exacerbate the negative effects of mistreatment experience on performance, and attachment avoidance attenuates these negative effects. At first glance, this expectation may appear inconsistent with the existing attachment literature, where a positive relationship between attachment security and some performance-related outcomes is often identified. For example, Mikulincer and Sheffi (2000) found that secure people are better at creative problem-solving tasks; in another study of small group tasks by Rom and Mikulincer (2003), attachment insecurities were found to impair individuals' instrumental performance in group tasks. However, these existing studies of the attachment-based effects on performance are often about individuals' general performance in a neutral or positive context. Fewer studies have examined how attachment orientations influence performance under a relationally negative circumstance—that is, a context in which individuals have negative relational experiences and may feel their attachment relationship endangered as a result (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

According to attachment theory, anxiously attached individuals cope with negative relational experiences differently from securely attached individuals. For example, those who are securely attached often cope with such experiences using constructive coping strategies that help

manage the resulting distress, while anxiously attached individuals often cope with such experiences using hyperactivating strategies. They are more likely to be paralyzed emotionally by the negative experience because they see it as a catastrophic rejection and unceasingly worry about its devastating consequences (e.g., Birnbaum et al., 1997; Green-Hennessy & Reis, 1998). Construing leaders in the workplace as attachment figures, anxiously attached individuals might react to leader mistreatment with heightened catastrophic appraisals and mental rumination on distress-related thoughts and feelings, which may be overwhelming and deprive them of the resources needed to perform well in tasks. Indeed, anxious individuals appear to be less confident and more distracted in performing certain activities after encountering uncertainties about the availability of an attachment figure (Hardy & Barkham, 1994).

In contrast, attachment avoidance is associated with the endorsement of emotion-deactivating strategies when coping with relational distress. Avoidantly attached individuals routinely expect an absence of or disappointment from attachment figures, and such expectations make them prefer to deal with related emotional distress by suppressing negative thoughts or disregarding those thoughts from the start (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995). As a result, avoidant individuals are able to work without interference from emotional closeness (or a lack of emotional closeness) to an attachment figure. To an extent, they are more likely to maintain their self-reliance and independence after threats to their attachment bonds, such as leader mistreatment. For example, attachment avoidance might sustain the adoption of a "just do my own thing" mindset at work and enable avoidant individuals to succeed in activities that do not require a significant amount of collaboration (Ein-Dor et al., 2012).

Therefore, compared with attachment security, attachment anxiety and avoidance, respectively, will make individuals react to leader mistreatment more and less severely. To an

extent, anxious people will decrease their performance because they care too much (i.e., intense attachment needs and catastrophizing relational distress), whereas avoidant individuals will not decrease their performance because they do not care enough (i.e., supressed attachment needs and downplaying relational distress).

Hypothesis 2.1: *Attachment anxiety (vs. security) will strengthen the negative direct effect of leader mistreatment on followers' performance.*

Hypothesis 2.2: *Attachment avoidance (vs. security) will weaken the negative direct effect of leader mistreatment on followers' performance.*

The Moderating Role of Attachment Orientations in an Arousal-Mediated Process

Given that leader mistreatment is a typical workplace experience that elicits intense and negative emotional responses in employees (Mayer et al., 2012), the implications of leader mistreatment on followers may unfold through an affect-based pathway (Herman et al., 2018; Inceoglu et al., 2018). Additionally, compared with positive emotions, negative emotional experiences often function like "red-alert buttons" (Haidt, 2003, p. 862) that direct individuals' attention to the specific negative experience at hand and detrimentally influence their subsequent behaviours (Tice et al., 2004). Seeing leader mistreatment as a disruption to the leader–follower attachment bond, such disruptions should bring about not only emotions of negative valence but also heightened arousal. In this section, I examine the puzzling ability of attachment to mitigate or reinforce the adverse implications of leader mistreatment, demonstrating that this ability is best addressed by incorporating arousal as an affect-based mechanism in this process.

Emotion is composed of valence and arousal, with the latter ranging from calm to excited or from low to high emotional activation (circumplex structure of affect; Russell, 1980, 2003). Typically reflected through a physiological form of arousal, such as heart rate or muscle

tenseness, arousal refers to "how energetic one feels, independent of whether that feeling is positive or negative" (Yik et al., 2011, p. 724). Among the existing mistreatment studies that examined the role of emotions, as well as in the broad affect-based workplace research, there has been an overwhelming focus on emotional valence or discrete emotions (see Tepper et al., 2017). However, between valence and arousal, the performance implications of emotion have been attributed to arousal, which has been tested using either positive or negative stimuli (Easterbrook, 1959; Gasper & Clore, 2002; Madan et al., 2019). Taken together, arousal is an under-studied component of affective experience following leader mistreatment, and there is evidence suggesting that arousal, irrespective of valence, may have implications for individual performance.

Unfavourable interpersonal interaction, such as leader mistreatment, will trigger arousal in followers that in turn has a detrimental effect on their task performance. This argument is grounded in the observations that arousal increases after such experiences (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Konecni, 1975; Mayer et al., 2012) and that a high level of arousal diminishes the attentional resources available for individuals to maintain their performance in tasks that require attentional resources (Garrison & Schmeichel, 2019; Matthews & Margetts, 1991; Pizzie & Kraemer, 2021). This arousal-mediated process, however, likely depends upon followers' attachment orientations.

First, attachment insecurities may alter the relationship between leader mistreatment and experienced arousal. Because anxiously attached individuals are often overly vigilant and sensitive to relational threats and view leader mistreatment as threatening and overwhelming, they may be more easily aroused by the negative relational experience compared with their secure counterparts. Therefore, attachment anxiety might exacerbate the link between leader

mistreatment and heightened arousal. In contrast, avoidantly attached individuals often dismiss the significance of relational threats and suppress the experience and expression of any intense emotion (Belsky, 2002; Brennan & Shaver, 1995). Therefore, following leader mistreatment, avoidantly attached individuals may feel less aroused than secure individuals, who can easily access their distress-related feelings without being overwhelmed by them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Second, attachment insecurities may alter the relationship between experienced arousal and followers' performance. Attachment anxiety entails a negative view of self (Brennan et al., 1998). As a result, when anxiously attached individuals feel affectively aroused by the mistreatment experience, they are more likely to view themselves as inadequate and feel helpless (i.e., blame themselves for the unpleasant feelings that occur after leader mistreatment), which may prevent them from engaging with the task and performing well. In comparison, avoidantly attached individuals have a negative view of others and a defensive positive view of self (Brennan et al., 1998); as such, they are less likely to blame themselves for the unpleasant feelings that follow leader mistreatment. In other words, arousal may be less likely to interfere with avoidantly attached individuals' performance, even though they still feel the arousal after leader mistreatment. As a result, I propose both first- and second-stage conditional processes in the following:

> Hypothesis 2.3: *Attachment anxiety (vs. security) will strengthen the indirect effect of leader mistreatment on follower performance via arousal by strengthening the positive relationship between mistreatment and arousal (2.3a) or the negative relationship between arousal and performance (2.3b).*

Hypothesis 2.4: *Attachment avoidance (vs. security) will weaken the indirect effect of leader mistreatment on follower performance via arousal by weakening the positive relationship between mistreatment and arousal (2.4a) or the negative relationship between arousal and performance (2.4b).*

Method

An overview of the methodology in this study now follows. To test the above hypotheses, two online experiments were conducted. In the first experiment, the focus was on the direct effect of leader mistreatment on follower performance and whether this effect was moderated by followers' state-like (experimentally primed) attachment orientations (Hypotheses 2.1 & 2.2). In the second experiment, the purpose was to more fully investigate the nature of the conditional indirect effects—that is, how attachment orientations moderate the link between leader mistreatment and the follower's performance via arousal (Hypotheses 2.3 & 2.4). In each experiment, based on an anticipated effect size of .30 in one-way analysis of variance tests among six experimental groups, I calculated that a sample size of approximately 300 will achieve a sufficient amount of power (Cohen, 1992; Faul et al., 2009).

Experiment 1

Participants

Experiment 1 was conducted as an online experiment with working adults across the United States who were recruited through Amazon TurkPrime Panel. Participants provided data anonymously. I took several steps to ensure the quality of data. For example, I deployed attention check questions to filter out participants who gave careless answers (DeSimone & Harms, 2018; Huang et al., 2015). Participants who failed to participate in the experimental primes were also excluded using one qualitative open-ended question and one yes/no question. In the open-ended

question, they were asked to "spend about two minutes here to get a visual image in your mind of this person [an attachment figure they were instructed to think about] and write about your relationship with this person." Participants who did not provide answers to this question were removed from the final sample. Participants were also asked whether they were able to think of such as person (yes/no); those who answered "no" were removed from the final sample. Finally, I checked if there were participants who completed the survey in an unreasonably short amount of time (i.e., less than 40% of the median completion time). Based on these criteria, from the initial sample of 400 participants, I removed 6 cases for failing to answer the attachment priming questions and 66 cases for failing attention check questions. No participants were excluded due to short response time. The final sample size in this experiment was 328 (M_{age} = 38, SD = 9; 53% female).

Design

This experiment employed a 3 (attachment primes: security, anxiety, avoidance) × 2 (leader mistreatment: high, low) between-subjects design. I randomly assigned participants to the conditions. Below is a detailed presentation of the design of the experiment.

Procedures and Manipulations

Participants first provided some demographic information about themselves, and their dispositional attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance) were also assessed at this stage. They were then introduced to the study via a pre-recorded presentation with audio and subtitles. This introduction made clear that participants would complete some tasks together with others who started the survey at around the same time, and that each participant's task performance would be evaluated by a group leader—an experienced management consultant who was monitoring the study in real time (fictional). Next, participants completed the attachment priming manipulation.

They were asked to think of and write about someone they knew and with whom they had had a specific type of relationship (secure, anxious, or avoidant; Bartz & Lydon, 2004; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). They completed relevant manipulation check questions about the state-like attachment orientations afterwards.

Next, participants were put into a virtual waiting room and asked to wait for other group members who would complete the task with them. The waiting room was used to enhance the impression that participants would be working on the task with others in a group. To reinforce the realism of this waiting room, participants viewed a loading image that lasted for one minute. Next, participants completed one round of the task: they were asked to list as many uses for a brick as they could think of in 2 minutes (Guerin, 1999; Harkins, 1987; Porath & Erez, 2007). After this first round, participants went through the leader mistreatment manipulation, which was delivered through group leader feedback (Mayer et al., 2012). In the high mistreatment condition, the task performance feedback was negative and conveyed in a rude manner. In the low mistreatment condition, the task performance feedback was also negative, but was conveyed in a neutral tone. Afterwards, participants completed a second round of the task: as a measure of task performance, they were asked to list as many uses for a paper clip as they could think of in 2 minutes. This was followed by questions to check the leader mistreatment manipulation. The experiment concluded with a short debriefing.

Manipulations in this experiment were carried out based on techniques that have been established in the literature and verified in several pilot studies. For example, I adopted the leader mistreatment manipulations used by Mayer and colleagues (2012). The materials used to prime participants' attachment states were based on the procedures developed by Bartz and

Lydon (2004) and Mikulincer and Shaver (2001). See Appendix B for detailed manipulation materials.

Measures

Task performance was assessed by counting the number of uses for paper clips that participants provided in the allocated 2 minutes. This type of brainstorming task has been frequently used in psychology and organizational behaviour research to test task performance (e.g., Guerin, 1999; Harkins, 1987; Porath & Erez, 2007). Second, I used multiple questions adapted from established attachment style (Gillath et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2007) and leader mistreatment measures (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) for manipulation check purposes, which were verified in multiple pilot tests.

Pilot Studies

Prior to running the experiment, I conducted pilot tests to ensure that leader mistreatment and attachment state manipulations were perceived as intended. In the pilot test that contained the finalized manipulation materials, the sample included 59 participants recruited via Amazon TurkPrime Panel, who were randomly assigned to one of the two leader mistreatment conditions and three attachment state conditions. After reading manipulation materials, respondents answered questions to measure their attachment states (i.e., secure; anxious; avoidant) and perceptions of leader mistreatment (i.e., high; low), using items based on established attachment style and leader mistreatment measures (Gillath et al., 2009; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Wei et al., 2007).

The finalized manipulation check questions are listed as follows: two items to assess attachment security (I feel comfortable and relaxed around this person; I feel safe around this person; $\alpha = .88$); two items to assess attachment anxiety (I'm very worried about my relationship

with this person; I want to be close to this person but worry that it would scare them away; α = .78); and three items to assess attachment avoidance (It's upsetting because I can't trust this person; I really want to be close to this person [reverse coded]; I'm comfortable keeping my distance; α = .77). All were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The robustness of leader mistreatment manipulation was assessed through questions asking respondents to reflect on the feedback they received from the group leader and indicate to what extent they felt that the leader had (a) acted rudely; (b) been a mean person; (c) ridiculed them; (d) told them that their thoughts or feelings were stupid; or (e) put them down in front of other group members (α = .96). All were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*to a very large extent*). See Appendix C for the manipulation check results.

Results

Manipulation Check

Results from one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate good efficacy of the manipulation materials. Participants in the attachment-secure condition felt more security (M = 6.64, SD = .52) compared with participants in the attachment-anxious condition (M = 5.36, SD = 1.61; t[1, 326] = 6.95, $p < .001$) or the attachment-avoidant condition (M = 4.36, SD = 1.6; t[1, 326] = 12.60, $p < .001$). Participants in the attachment-anxious condition felt more anxiety (M = 4.26, SD = 1.60) compared with participants in the attachment-secure condition (M = 1.66, SD = .94; t[1, 326] = 13.89, $p < .001$) or the attachment-avoidant condition (M = 3.31, SD = 1.48; t[1, 326] = 5.18, $p < .001$). Participants in the attachment-avoidant condition felt more avoidance (M = 4.61, SD = 1.20) compared with participants in the attachment-secure condition (M = 2.07, SD = .91; t[1, 326] = 16.93, $p < .001$) or the attachment-anxious condition (M = 2.86, SD = 1.21; t[1,

326] = 11.62, $p < .001$). As to leader mistreatment manipulation, participants in the high leader mistreatment condition reported more perceived leader mistreatment ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 1.05$) compared with participants in the low leader mistreatment condition ($M = 1.53$, $SD = .79$; t[1, 327] = 43.52, $p < .001$). I also conducted two-way ANOVA with perceived leader mistreatment as the dependent variable to determine that there was no interaction between this manipulation and attachment manipulation. The results show that the leader mistreatment manipulation remained effective (F[1, 328] = 1876.56, $p < .001$), and the interaction had no significant effect (F[2, 328] = .97, *ns*).

Test of Hypotheses

Before proceeding to testing the hypotheses, the characteristics of the performance variable were examined. On average, participants gave 6.56 ($SD = 2.90$) uses for paper clips; the number of uses ranged from 1 to 20. Across the six experiment conditions, the mean ranged from 5.39 ($SD = 2.40$) to 7.43 ($SD = 2.54$), indicating variation across the experimental conditions. Next, to test whether the priming of attachment orientations moderated the direct effects of leader mistreatment while taking into account individual differences in participants' dispositional attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance), I performed full-factorial analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), controlling for the two dispositional attachment scores as covariates (see Table 2.1). The results show that a significant main effect of leader mistreatment was support (F[1, 328] = 14.86, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), such that participants in the high leader mistreatment condition ($M_{high} = 5.96$, $SD = 2.75$) performed significantly worse than the participants in the low leader mistreatment condition ($M_{low} = 7.14$, $SD = 2.93$). Second, the results support a significant interaction effect between leader mistreatment and state-like attachment orientations on performance: $F(2, 328) = 3.11$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

More analysis was conducted to test the specific between-condition contrasts and probe the hypothesized interaction (see Table 2.2 and Figure 2.2). First, the hypothesis that the contextual priming of attachment anxiety would lead participants to perform worse after high leader mistreatment (compared with participants primed with security representations, Hypothesis 2.1) was not supported: anxiety-primed participants ($M_{\text{anxious/high}} = 5.87$, $SD = 2.29$) showed similar performance to security-primed participants in the high leader mistreatment condition (contrast 5; $M_{\text{secure/high}} = 5.39$, $SD = 2.40$; $t[5, 322] = .87$, *ns*). Second, supporting Hypothesis 2.2, under high leader mistreatment, the priming of attachment avoidance led to better task performance ($M_{\text{avoidant/high}} = 6.60$, $SD = 3.28$) than the priming of attachment security (contrast 7; $t[5, 322] = 2.29$, $p < .05$). See Figure 2.2 for an illustration. Additional contrasts showed that participants in the security and anxiety priming conditions performed significantly worse in the high leader mistreatment condition than in the low leader mistreatment condition (contrast 2: $M_{secure/high} = 5.39$, $SD = 2.40$ vs. $M_{secure/low} = 7.30$, $SD = 2.95$; $t[5, 322] = -3.50$, $p < .001$; contrast 3: $M_{anxious/high} = 5.87$, $SD = 2.29$ vs. $M_{anxious/low} = 7.43$, $SD = 2.54$; $t[5, 322] = -2.83$, $p < .005$). Participants in the avoidance priming condition showed no significant difference in task performance between the two leader mistreatment conditions (contrast 4: $M_{\text{avoidant/high}} = 6.60$, $SD = 3.28$ vs. $M_{avoidant/low} = 6.70$, $SD = 3.29$; $t[5, 322] = -.25$, *ns*).

These findings reveal a negative effect of leader mistreatment on followers' performance that is moderated by state-like attachment orientations. Specifically, followers who were primed with attachment-avoidant representations did not show performance decreases following leader mistreatment to the same degree as those who were primed with secure or anxious representations. This mitigating effect of attachment avoidance can be explained by the deactivation strategy (i.e., suppressing emotional arousal) that avoidantly attached individuals

often engage in to cope with relationship adversities. Such deactivation strategy could suggest that the process in which leader mistreatment influences follower performance is more affective in nature than the current literature indicates, and that emotional arousal may play a significant role in the process. Next, I turn to Experiment 2 to test the role of felt arousal and whether the contextual priming of attachment orientations moderates the indirect effects of leader mistreatment on task performance via arousal (a conditional process model).

Insert Tables 2.1–2.2; Figure 2.2

Experiment 2

Participants

Experiment 2 was an online experiment with working adults across the United Kingdom who were recruited through Prolific. Following the same criteria as in Experiment 1, I removed from the initial sample of 400 participants 9 cases for blank answers, 17 cases for failing the attachment priming question and giving nonsensical task performance answers, and 23 cases for failing attention check questions. The final sample size in this experiment was 347 (M_{age} = 36, *SD* = 10; 59% female).

Design

This experiment remains a 3 (attachment primes: security, anxiety, avoidance) × 2 (leader mistreatment: high, low) between-subjects design, in which participants were randomly assigned to the conditions. The design was similar to Experiment 1, with the addition of questions to measure the mediating variable. Below, I highlight the design details that are different from Experiment 1.

Procedures and Manipulations

Participants were first asked to answer demographic questions and questions about their dispositional attachment styles. They were then given a pre-recorded video introduction, in which I briefly explained what would happen next and what they were expected to do as in Experiment 1. Next, participants completed the attachment priming manipulation. Afterwards, participants were put into a virtual waiting room and asked to wait for other group members who would complete tasks with them. This was followed by the first round of the task and leader mistreatment manipulation through group leader feedback for the performance in the task. Next, participants completed the second round of the ask and answered questions that measured their state of arousal. Finally, a short debriefing concluded the experiment.

Measures

Five self-report measures of arousal (mediator) were administered right after the second round of the task. I adopted measure items based on the circumplex structure of core affect (Yik et al., 2011) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 2010) to measure arousal. Previous research has shown that self-report measures are particularly useful to assess current emotional experiences (Mauss & Robinson, 2009). Four items were used, including "My heart rate is racing," "My hands are feeling sweaty," "I am breathing faster than usual," and "My muscles feel tense." The scale ranged from *not at all* (1) to *very much so* (4). The reliability of this arousal scale was $\alpha = .87$. With regard to the attachment state and leader mistreatment manipulation check questions, two items were used to check attachment-secure manipulation ($\alpha = .85$); two items were used to check attachment-anxious manipulation ($\alpha = .79$); three items were used to check attachment-avoidant manipulation ($\alpha = .72$), and five items were used to check leader mistreatment manipulation ($\alpha = .95$).

Results

Manipulation Check

Prior to testing the hypotheses that Experiment 2 was designed for, the robustness of the manipulations was first established. Participants in the high leader mistreatment condition reported more perceived leader mistreatment (M = 5.83, SD = 1.03) compared with participants in the low leader mistreatment condition (M = 1.86, SD = 1.14; t[1, 345] = 34.05, p < .001). As to attachment state manipulations, participants in the attachment-secure condition felt more security (M = 6.51, SD = .83) compared with participants in the attachment-anxious condition (M = 5.08, SD = 1.72; t[2, 344] = 8.03, p < .001) or the attachment-avoidant condition (M = 4.47, SD = 1.43; t[2, 344] = 11.79, p < .001). Participants in the attachment-anxious condition felt more anxiety (M = 4.23, SD = 1.67) compared with participants in the attachment-secure condition (M = 1.86, SD = 1.20; t[2, 344] = 12.33, p < .001) or the attachment-avoidant condition (M = 3.35, SD = 1.50; t[2, 344] = 4.48, p < .001). Participants in the attachment-avoidant condition felt more avoidance (M = 4.61, SD = 1.04) compared with participants in the attachment-secure condition (M = 2.21, SD = .96; t[2, 344] = 17.17, p < .001) or the attachment-anxious condition (M = 3.13, SD = 1.27; t[2, 344] = 10.15, p < .001). Again, two-way ANOVA results indicate that leader mistreatment manipulation effects were significant after accounting for the interaction with attachment state manipulation (F[1, 346] = 1111.36, p < .001), and the interaction had no significant effect (F[2, 346] = 1.07, *ns*).

Test of Hypotheses

First, as to the outcome variable, participants provided, on average, 6.41 (SD = 2.92) uses for paper clips, and the number ranged from 1 to 19; across the experiment conditions, the mean ranged from 5.08 (SD = 2.34) to 7.50 (SD = 3.37), suggesting variations across conditions.

Second, the results replicated the main and moderating effects found in Experiment 1. For example, participants in the high leader mistreatment condition (M_{high} = 5.64, SD = 2.79) performed significantly worse than participants in the low leader mistreatment condition (M_{low} = 7.18, SD = 2.84; t[1, 345] = 5.12, $p < .001$). The interaction between leader mistreatment and attachment priming was significant (F[2, 339] = 4.04, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). Specifically, after high leader mistreatment, participants in the attachment-avoidance condition performed better ($M_{avoidant/high}$ = 6.33, SD = 2.98) than their counterparts in the attachment-security condition ($M_{secure/high}$ = 5.09, SD = 2.34; t[5, 341] = 2.34, $p < .05$). Again, participants in the attachment-anxiety ($M_{anxiety/high}$ = 5.59, SD = 2.94) and attachment-security conditions did not differ in their task performance following high leader mistreatment (t[5, 341] = .99, *ns*). These findings align with the results from Experiment 1.

The focus of Experiment 2 was to examine the hypothesized conditional indirect effects; to do so, regression analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro in the IBM SPSS Statistics version 28 (Hayes, 2013; Preacher et al., 2007). Conditional indirect effects are present when an indirect effect systematically varies based on the level or category of the moderator variable (Hayes, 2018). According to the hypotheses in this study, the contextual priming of attachment orientations (security, anxiety, or avoidance) should moderate the indirect effect of leader mistreatment on task performance via arousal—either through the first or second stage of this process (Hypotheses 2.3 & 2.4). To test these hypotheses, bootstrapped confidence intervals (CI) with 10,000 random samples using a multi-categorical moderator (i.e., three attachment conditions) were generated to interpret the significance of the conditional indirect effects. The bootstrapped confidence interval has been recognized as the preferred method in the analyses of conditional indirect effects, as it provides highly sensitive estimates and does not require the

assumption of normally distributed estimates of conditional indirect effects (Hayes, 2013; Hayes, 2015; Preacher et al., 2007). Due to the presence of a multi-categorical moderator, I used dummy coding (indicator coding in PROCESS), with the attachment-secure condition as the reference group.

Specifically, the analyses started with estimating a conditional process model that included the first-stage conditional effect (model 7 in PROCESS macro). The results of this model testing are presented in Table 2.3. First, the results for the index of moderated mediation show that the bootstrapped 95% CI for task performance both included zero (attachment anxiety or avoidance compared with security, respectively; CI = −.08 to .15 or −.08 to .13), indicating an absence of conditional indirect effects. Additionally, no significant individual moderation effect was observed when the outcome variable was arousal—that is, when arousal was the outcome, the interaction between leader mistreatment and attachment orientation had no additional effects. Finally, the bootstrapped indirect effects at values of the moderator (i.e., the size of the indirect effects based on different values or categories of the moderator) all included zero, further suggesting a lack of evidence for the hypothesized first-stage conditional process. Taken together, the findings show no support for first-stage conditional indirect effects; thus, Hypotheses 2.3a and 2.4a were not supported.

Next, the second-stage conditional process model was tested (model 14 in PROCESS macro; see Table 2.4 for the results). First, the index of moderated mediation suggests that the bootstrapped 95% CI for task performance ranged from .02 to .84 when the moderator was attachment avoidance but that it included zero (CI = −.20 to .38) when the moderator was attachment anxiety (reference group: attachment security), suggesting that the second-stage indirect effects depended on attachment state. Additionally, when the outcome was performance,

the interaction between arousal and attachment state had an additional effect (β = 1.50, $p < .001$). Finally, when the moderator was attachment avoidance, the indirect effect of leader mistreatment on performance via arousal was significantly different from zero among those who were primed to be attachment avoidant (.19, CI = .00, .49), but this was not the case in other attachment conditions. Taken together, these results show support for second-stage conditional indirect effects. Specifically, the findings suggest that attachment anxiety did not moderate the indirect effect of leader mistreatment on follower performance via arousal (Hypothesis 2.3b not supported). In contrast, attachment avoidance moderated this indirect effect by reducing the negative effect of arousal on performance (Hypothesis 2.4b supported).

In summary, these findings show that the mitigating effect of attachment avoidance on the relationship between leader mistreatment and followers' performance can be explained through an arousal-mediated process, that is, attachment avoidance disrupts the negative link between heightened arousal felt after leader mistreatment and performance. In contrast to participants who were primed with secure or anxious representations, participants in the attachment-avoidant condition did not perform worse after leader mistreatment, despite the increased arousal they experienced. This finding is in line with the emotion regulation strategies that are characteristic of avoidant individuals. However, the findings provide surprising insights: although avoidant deactivating strategies might suppress the experience of emotional arousal, participants in the attachment-avoidant condition were aroused to an extent similar to that of participants in other conditions, but their heightened arousal did not result in worse performance.

Insert Tables 2.3 and 2.4

Discussion

Consisting of two experiments, Study 2 in this project reveals that the effects of leader mistreatment on followers' task performance depended on followers' attachment orientations. In particular, the negative impact of leader mistreatment on followers' performance was largely attenuated when followers were primed with attachment-avoidance representations. More importantly, variations in the felt arousal after leader mistreatment can explain why attachment avoidance had such a mitigating effect. Regardless of the specific attachment representation primed during the experiment, participants experienced heightened arousal following leader mistreatment, but the priming of attachment avoidance weakened the contribution of arousal to worsened task performance. Specifically, in a state of attachment security or anxiety, leader mistreatment contributed to a heightened arousal, which was followed by a decrease in performance. However, while participants in a state of attachment avoidance still felt a heightened sense of arousal, this did not have a detrimental effect on their performance. Although the finding that attachment avoidance inhibited the detrimental effects of leader mistreatment may be surprising, it fits the social defence theory (Ein-Dor & Hirschberger, 2016), which highlights the potential benefits of attachment avoidance.

The findings suggest no support for the hypothesis that attachment anxiety would also influence the arousal-mediated path between leader mistreatment and follower performance. However, the findings show that attachment anxiety and avoidance play different roles in the link between leader mistreatment and followers' task performance. That is, there are significant post-mistreatment performance differences between anxious and avoidant individuals, with the performance of participants in the attachment-anxious condition being more negatively affected by leader mistreatment.

Contributions

The findings contribute to the leader mistreatment literature in several meaningful ways. First, the study speaks to the general question of why employees react to leader mistreatment differently, ranging from aggressive reactions to feeling trapped and staying in the abusive supervisory relationship (Breevaart et al., 2021; Tepper & Almeda, 2012). Existing studies suggest a variety of explanations, such as societal and organizational factors, characteristics and behaviours of the leaders who enact mistreatment, and follower characteristics (Breevaart et al., 2021). The findings in this study not only expand the discussion of follower characteristics to include attachment orientations but also suggest that these orientations might affect followers' reactions to leader mistreatment by disrupting the connection between the emotional arousal after mistreatment and performance. Second, existing studies on leader mistreatment are only starting to include affective variables, but, given the pervasiveness of emotions in workplace (Glomb et al., 2002; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), understanding the affective reactions to leader mistreatment is an important step. In doing so, I focus on the mediating role of self-report arousal in the link between leader mistreatment and followers' task performance and find that arousal is a meaningful affect-based mechanism.

More importantly, the findings show that attachment theory can contribute to our understanding of the performance implications of affective states following an adverse relational experience at work. In his early work (1973, 1980), Bowlby was interested in the emotions aroused by the formation of attachment bonds, separation from attachment figures, or the loss of significant attachment bonds. Recent works have focused on how attachment orientations affect individuals' emotion regulation efforts after positive or negative relational experiences (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The existing research, however, has overwhelmingly focused on

the advantages of attachment security in facilitating more effective emotion regulation. The findings here, however, suggest a potential silver lining that contrasts with the often-grim depictions of attachment insecurities: they do not unequivocally bring negative interferences into individuals' experience and regulation of emotions. Following an emotion-eliciting event, such as leader mistreatment, attachment avoidance might allow people to recognize and feel the accompanying emotional arousal, but its associated deactivating strategies might prevent any performance deficit triggered by such arousal. Additionally, the implications of contextual activation of specific attachment orientations have been relatively overlooked in attachment-based workplace studies (Yip et al., 2018). I show that this kind of contextual activation may be relevant in organizational settings. Attachment security and insecurities can be induced by relational cues, and the workplace is often filled with such cues.

Finally, acknowledging the limitations of using experimental design to examine the effects of leader mistreatment on followers' task performance (e.g., issues of external validity), this method has high internal validity. Because it is difficult to obtain objective performance evaluations (Tepper, 2007), researchers have often turned to self-rated performance or ratings provided by supervisors, with a few exceptions (see Harris et al., 2007; Walter et al., 2015). Such subjective performance ratings, however, may not be equivalent to actual performance (Bommer et al., 1995). More importantly, the distinction between leader-rated employee performance and employee-rated leader mistreatment is unclear because mistreatment can potentially be exercised by leaders through poor performance ratings (Tepper et al., 2017), and power differentiation between leaders and their subordinates influences performance evaluations (Georgesen & Harris, 1998). Investigating followers' actual task performance in experimental designs is encouraged and worth more research attention (Tepper, 2007). The experimental design in this study also

contributes to our understanding of attachment-based dynamics. It shows that experimental priming is an effective method to assess the state-like attachment orientations (Gillath & Ai, 2021; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001), and the implications of such contextual activation can be differentiated from dispositional attachment styles (Pierce & Lydon, 1998).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations. First, a computer-based experimental design allows only for certain leader mistreatment behaviours that could be conveyed through written texts. As a result, the findings in this paper may be best generalized to workplace contexts where electronic communications are prevalent. However, investigations of certain management concepts, such as leader mistreatment, are notoriously hard to carry out in field studies (Tepper, 2007). The sensitive nature of such topics makes the choice of online panel participants especially appropriate (Porter et al., 2019). Second, given the nature of the study design, I focused on performance implications that are short-term and temporal. Therefore, the findings in this study may not be generalizable to long-term, stable employee performance. Finally, although experimental vignette designs allow for causal testing and rigours (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), realism may be an issue because the findings from these experiments are based on hypothetical scenarios. However, given the prevalence of electronic communications in the contemporary workplace, particularly as a result of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 changes, this investigation of leader mistreatment in an online context likely provides a close equivalent to the current workplace environment.

Accordingly, studies that compare mistreatment carried out in texts and in verbal forms might provide interesting insights. Additionally, future research should examine whether affect-based processes are still relevant when employees' long-term performance is the focal outcome

of interest. Conceptualizing leader mistreatment as a negative emotion-eliciting event, one might construe its performance implications to be short-lived because the affective response is likely to be transient. However, research on how leader mistreatment affects employees' well-being has shown that leader mistreatment has long-term impact on subjects' ability to engage with work (Inceoglu et al., 2018). It is possible that leader mistreatment creates ongoing emotional strains among followers and may eventually lead to a chronic and persistent depletion of emotional resources and subsequent performance deficits. Such work could use experience-sampling methods to allow researchers to assess real-time workplace leader mistreatment and relevant affective processes and performance implications.

The findings also have managerial implications. First, leader mistreatment is detrimental to employees' performance and should be forcefully discouraged in organizations. Organizations should be aware of the importance of nurturing a collegial and positive leader-subordinate relationship and mindful about showing tolerance toward abusive leadership behaviours. Second, researchers and managers are increasingly aware that the workplace is filled with emotions. When relational adversities are experienced at work, emotions can be especially intense and negative. Organizations may want to consider having resources available for employees when they need help to get through such difficult phases. Finally, individuals have a fundamental need to build and maintain attachment bonds (Simpson & Belsky, 2008). At the workplace, it can be beneficial for leaders to understand that they may be seen as an attachment figure by their followers and what that role entails. For example, depending on their attachment orientations, followers may prefer different strategies to cope with relational distress, knowing such differences will potentially facilitate more effective conflict resolutions.

Chapter 4: A Person-Oriented Perspective on Attachment Patterns in the Workplace

In this study, I will attempt to further advance our conceptual understanding of attachment-based dynamics in the workplace. The research questions in this study are whether subpopulations who share a common phenomenological experience with respect to overall attachment exist and what the implications of this shared lived experience might be. This is different from questions of whether the relationship between values of attachment anxiety (attachment avoidance) and values of a criterion of interest vary as a function of attachment avoidance (attachment anxiety). It is noteworthy that, over the long history of attachment theory research, an implied dependence has assumed to exist between the anxiety and avoidance tendencies (e.g., Bowlby, 1982a; Brennan et al., 1998; Brennan & Shaver, 1995). To the extent that discernible and theoretically meaningful combinations (patterns) of anxious and avoidant attachment tendencies exist within subpopulations, a new direction in attachment research would be to study the implications of these patterns in terms of perception, affect, and behaviour (cf. McLarnon et al., in press).

Beyond testing for the presence of subpopulations who experience common attachment patters, the aim of this study is to examine what specific attachment patterns mean for theoretically relevant criteria. When the core topic concerns human attachment dynamics, the logical set of outcomes would be indicators of the EOR (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). For instance, how do different attachment patterns manifest as basic trust for the organization and its agents (Mayer et al., 1995; Robinson, 1996; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2000) and perceptions of support, which is a hallmark of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2017)? More precisely, in this study, I

examine the relations between employees' organizational attachment profile membership and their perceived organizational trust and organizational support.

As I outline in the next section, answers to questions about subpopulations and their properties call for a person-oriented analytic strategy (Foti et al., 2011; Howard & Hoffman, 2018; Weiss & Rupp, 2011). It is noteworthy that, in recent years, the questions driving theoretical development have required researchers to apply a person-oriented analytic strategy to a growing range of topics within organizational behaviour: team conflict (O'Neill et al., 2018), leadership (Arnold et al., 2017; Hancock et al., in press), and organizational commitment (Meyer & Morin, 2016). In the sections that follow, I begin with a discussion of variable- and person-oriented approaches and an overview of the analytic techniques from a person-oriented approach and how it can be used to advance theory in terms of workplace attachment. Next, where possible, I advance predictions with respect to the number and nature of attachment profiles and then propose how employees' membership in these profiles might relate to several EOR outcomes. Following this, a description of an empirical study and its results are presented and discussed.

Variable- and Person-Oriented Analytical Strategies: Implications for Attachment Research

An emerging new way of testing organizational phenomena and, in doing so, developing theory is to approach the topic using a person-oriented analytical strategy (e.g., Morin, 2016; Wang & Hanges, 2011). Focusing on people rather than variables allows researchers to ask questions they could not ask before (Morin, 2016). The person-oriented approach differs from the more traditional variable-oriented approach in a number of important ways (Howard & Hoffman, 2018; Morin et al., 2018).

A variable-oriented analytic strategy is, by far, the most traditional and common conceptual and analytic strategy used in the behavioural sciences and organizational behaviour research. The goal of this strategy is to explain relationships between variables of interest within a population of interest (e.g., a sample of employees drawn from an organization). As such, a variable-based approach is deemed appropriate when the research questions and resulting hypotheses concern the impact of one or more predictor variables on one or more criterion variables (e.g., whether there is a relationship between anxious attachment and perceptions of organizational support within a population of professional accountants). To apply this approach, data are typically collected from many subjects across one or more occasions, and the relationships between measured variables are then assessed using statistical techniques such as correlation, regression analyses, or structural equation modelling (Howard & Hoffman, 2018).

In contrast, adoption of a person-oriented analytic approach represents a very different view of how variables are organized and how data are interpreted. An important assumption underlying the variable-oriented analytic strategy is that all sampled individuals are drawn from a single (homogeneous) population and that a single set of averaged parameters can be estimated (Meyer & Morin, 2016; Morin, 2016). As such, a hallmark feature of the person-oriented approach is the relaxation of this assumption. A person-oriented approach considers the possibility that the overall sample might consist of two or more subpopulations that are qualitatively distinct from one another, yet members within each cohort are similar to one another on a particular set of parameters. Thus, the aim of a person-oriented approach is to identify natural groupings (cohorts; subpopulations) of people who share something important in common but are different from the members of other groups. Once these subgroups have been identified, the empirical properties of these cohorts can be studied, such as by examining whether

the likelihood of cohort membership is predictable from an individual's status on one or more auxiliary variables (i.e., variables that are outside the set used to determine group formation) and/or whether membership in a particular cohort matters in terms of one or more theoretically relevant outcomes. Additional benefits of the person-oriented approach are that (a) individuals are treated in a more holistic fashion by focusing on a pattern or profile of variables considered in combination rather studied in isolation, and (b) it allows for the detection of complex interactions among variables that would be difficult to detect or interpret using a variable-oriented approach (Meyer & Morin, 2016).

To apply a person-oriented approach, data are typically collected from many subjects. Based on this data, the next step is to determine and describe the optimal number of subpopulations within the overall sample using established best practices (e.g., Morin et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2011; Pastor et al., 2007). Mixture modelling techniques, such as latent class analysis or latent profile analysis (LPA), are common ways of testing whether two or more subgroups coexist within a population. This is accomplished by looking for qualitatively distinct patterns or profiles of scores on two or more input variables (e.g., anxious attachment; avoidant attachment). An issue to overcome pertains to how many subgroups exist within a population. Answers to this question are addressed by following best practices that have emerged over time (Pastor et al., 2007). Perhaps most importantly, researchers should ensure that the number of profiles makes sense from a theoretical perspective—be interpretable based on theory and past empirical research (see Hancock et al., in press).

Adopting a person-oriented analytic strategy offers a glimpse of insights not easily determined using a variable-oriented approach. For example, variable-based research may show that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, respectively, correlate positively with an

outcome *Y*. However, it is likely that there are subgroups of the population where attachment anxiety and avoidance occur concurrently or are absent simultaneously. In which case, simply relying on the results from the variable-based research can be misleading (e.g., attachment anxiety may not be positively related to outcome *Y* if the attachment avoidance is present at the same time). Some may argue that it is also possible to capture some of these complexities by investigating the interactions between variables, but interacting effects are notoriously difficult to detect and interpret, particularly in complex interactions (McClelland & Judd, 1993; Morin et al., 2018). However, a mixture modelling technique has been demonstrated to capture such complexities more easily by identifying subgroups of a population and comparing these subgroups (Asendorpf, 2015; Meyer & Morin, 2016). From a person-oriented approach, the focus is on the relations among individuals, rather on the relations among variables (Zyphur, 2009). Empirical evidence supporting these advantages of person-oriented approach is accumulating in the organizational behaviour literature, including topic areas such as personality (e.g., Yin et al., 2021), organizational commitment (e.g., Meyer & Morin, 2016), team conflict (O'Neill et al., 2018), and leadership (Arnold et al., 2017).

Theoretical Rationale and Study Hypotheses

Attachment Patterns

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982a) rests on the notion that two primary motives underlie attachment experiences—anxiety and avoidance. Anxiety in one's attachment is thought to be caused by negative self-views and feelings of unworthiness paired with a strong desire to be close to one's attachment object. Anxiety in this context manifests as the individual's excessive worry about their status in the relationship, leading to an unhealthy over-dependence on relationship partners. Avoidance in this context manifests as elevated feelings of self-worth

relative to others. As such, the avoidant individual distrusts and maintains psychological distance from the attachment figure, preferring to remain self-reliant and autonomous (i.e., a lone wolf). It has long been thought that anxious and avoidant tendencies interact with one another such that one's overall attachment experience depends upon the relative strengths of these two motives.

The interaction between anxious and avoidant tendencies can be easily seen in the work of Brennan and colleagues (Brennan et al., 1998; Brennan & Shaver, 1995). When high levels of anxiety and avoidance are experienced together, the result is fearful attachment. Fearfully attached individuals are believed to concurrently hold negative views of themselves and others. The lower feelings of self-worth cause them to worry about the status of their relations with the attachment figure, yet they are unwilling to engage with others who they do not respect or trust. When low levels of anxiety and avoidance are experienced together, the result is secure attachment. Securely attached individuals are more likely to feel personally confident and resourceful and to see others as trustworthy and supportive. As such, securely attached individuals are better equipped to deal with adversity and setbacks, knowing that they can count on themselves and attachment figures. When high levels of anxiety are experienced in conjunction with low levels of avoidance, the result is preoccupied attachment. Preoccupied attachment is thought to be characterized by a deep-seated sense of personal unworthiness, yet individuals with preoccupied attachment hold others "on a pedestal" (i.e., they see others much more favourably than they see themselves). As such, these individuals constantly need and seek validation and assurance from those they desire, due, in part, to heightened (over) sensitivity to rejection cues. Finally, when a high level of avoidance is experienced in conjunction with low levels of anxiety, the result is dismissive attachment. Dismissive attachment is thought to occur

when individuals hold a high sense of personal self-worth but see others are unreliable and untrustworthy and thus prefer to remain aloof and avoid closeness with an attachment figure.

In a very real sense, one's lived (phenomenological) experience reflects a particular instance of the anxiety and avoidance interaction. To the extent that these attachment experiences are shared, similar individuals can be classified into a particular pattern cohort based on a common attachment experience (i.e., a meaningful subpopulation based on attachment). Rendering and studying the implications of qualitatively distinct subgroups represents a departure from the way attachment theory is normally studied and offers a more nuanced glimpse of attachment dynamics that are not easily available from variable-oriented research (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Beyond identification of pattern cohorts, a person-oriented analytical strategy can examine the personal and situational factors that predict cohort membership or can study distal outcomes associated with belonging to a pattern cohort, such as cognition (e.g., perception), affect (e.g., emotional response), and behaviour toward the attachment object. In summary, a person-oriented analytic strategy permits both the testing for theoretically relevant cohorts and studying the implications of profile membership.

Several prior studies have rendered interpretable attachment patterns using LPA. Using a full-time employee sample, McLarnon and colleagues (in press) found evidence for four latent profiles that mirrored the earlier theorizing of Brennan and colleagues with respect to fearful, secure, preoccupied, and dismissive combinations. A few studies of the general or clinical population have revealed a mix of attachment profiles. For example, in a sample of clinically diagnosed trauma victims, Armour et al. (2011) identified profiles interpreted as fearful, preoccupied, and secure. Siegel et al. (2018) observed in a sample of male war veterans three attachment profiles: a group that was mainly avoidant, with medium anxiety; a group that was

high on both avoidance and anxiety (fearful); and a group that was secure, with low to medium avoidance. In a study that included both clinical (individuals who sought help for interpersonal difficulties) and general samples, three profiles were identified in the clinical sample—secure, preoccupied, and fearful, and four profiles were identified in the general sample—secure, preoccupied, dismissive (high avoidance combined with low anxiety), and fearful (Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2022). Together, these studies reveal dependencies between the two forms of attachment, that different "attachment types" should exist, and that the fearful, secure, preoccupied, and dismissive patterns can likely be rendered using LPA.

Hypothesis 3.1. *Four interpretable subgroups based on organizational attachment will emerge characterized as fearful (both anxiety and avoidance tendencies are high), secure (both anxiety and avoidance tendencies are low), preoccupied (high anxiety relative to the level of avoidance), and dismissive (high avoidance relative to the level of anxiety).*

Attachment Patterns and Choice of Distal Outcomes

As indicated earlier, employing a person-oriented analytical strategy affords the researcher with a means of considering within-individual variations in terms of attachment tendencies, grouping individuals together who share a common experience, and then studying what these configurations mean in terms of outcomes. Unfortunately, much of what is known in terms of attachment tendencies and outcomes comes from variable-oriented research. Studies using this approach have looked at how a single focal variable (e.g., an anxious or avoidant attachment style) relates to relevant outcomes in a sample. When only one component and its relationship with an external criterion is examined, there is no way of knowing the concurrent status on other components of interest that might change one's interpretation and the direction of the relationship. It should be noted that a category of outcomes that should have a great deal of

theoretical significance for workplace attachment are the myriad relationships individuals form in an employment context. Apart from a few studies linking attachment anxiety (or avoidance) and various outcomes in interpersonal relationships (e.g., Fournier et al., 2010; Jing et al., in press; Shaver et al., 2010), very little is known about how different configurations of the two attachment styles may make things different.

In this study, I seek to assess the implications of organizational attachment profiles to relevant EOR outcomes. Organizational trust refers to positive expectations individuals have about the intent of their organizations and a willingness to be vulnerable because of such expectations (cf. Mayer et al., 1995; Robinson, 1996; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2000). Perceived organizational support represents individuals' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017). More precisely, I examine the relationship between individuals' membership in the organizational attachment profiles and their perceived organizational trust and organizational support.

My choice of distal outcomes stems from the following reasons. First, previous variable-oriented research has shown that these variables present significant associations with employees' attachment styles (Geller & Bamberger, 2009; Richards & Schat, 2011). Second, organizational trust and organizational support represent key relational outcomes in employees' relationships with their organization. Both organizational trust and support are powerful indicators of the quality of EOR (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007; Shore et al., 2004). Finally, the broad EOR research has largely found that relationship with the organization itself is often a more efficacious predictor of outcomes pertinent to organization. For example, compared with the relationship quality between an employee and their leader (i.e., leader-member exchange; Graen

& Uhl-Bien, 1995), employees' perceived organizational support (representing the relationship quality between employees and the employing organization) is more powerful at predicting employee citizenship behaviour that is beneficial to the organization, whereas leader–membership exchange is a better predictor of leader-specific constructs, such as employee citizenship behaviour that is beneficial to the leader (Masterson et al., 2000).

Attachment Patterns and Organizational Trust

Extending on the above-mentioned body of work, it is reasonable to expect that individuals who share a secure attachment pattern will not only hold a positive view of themselves and others but also likely see the attachment figure as benign and trustworthy. As such, secure employees should more easily disclose personal information and make themselves vulnerable, believing that the organization or coworkers will not exploit or take advantage of them (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Furthermore, secure individuals will likely openly engage with the attachment object, trusting that their concessions will be reciprocated by others (see Serenko & Bontis, 2016). For individuals who share a secure pattern, organizational trust will likely be high. However, individuals who share a dismissive attachment pattern hold themselves in high esteem but see others as unreliable and untrustworthy and therefore remain closed, guarded, and distant from the attachment figure, if possible (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Richards & Schat, 2011). For individuals who share a dismissive pattern, organizational trust will be very low.

Within the fearful pattern, the relation to trust is likely more complicated. It has been argued that fearful individuals need to validate their own self-worth by obtaining closeness with others and that they also fear rejection from a valued attachment figure (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Thus, fearful individuals face a dilemma: they need to trust but cannot due to the fear that their relationship might be in jeopardy (e.g., Anand et al., 2020). Mixed and conflicting views on

the trustworthiness of the attachment figure will likely lead the fearfully attached individual to report moderate levels of organizational trust. Finally, I expect that those who feel preoccupied toward their attachment figure will willingly disclose personal information and expose weaknesses, in part because doing so aligns with a negative self-view and a positive view of others (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). A caveat, however, might be that too much disclosure could undermine the relationship, leading to increased worry about one's status with the attachment figure. Not unlike those who experience a fearful pattern, preoccupied individuals should exhibit moderate levels of organizational trust, although the reasons for doing so will be different. Taken together, I advance the following hypotheses as to organizational trust:

Hypothesis 3.2. *Individuals who share a secure attachment pattern will demonstrate the highest levels of organizational trust when compared to those who share other attachment patterns.*

Hypothesis 3.3. *Individuals who share a dismissive attachment pattern will demonstrate the lowest levels of organizational trust when compared to those who share other attachment patterns.*

Hypothesis 3.4. *Individuals who share either a fearful or preoccupied attachment pattern will demonstrate moderate levels of organizational trust when compared to those who share other attachment patterns.*

Attachment Patterns and Perceived Organizational Support

According to organizational support theory (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986), employees develop a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (perceived organizational support, or POS). Linking attachment patterns to POS is theoretically important given that POS has been

associated with a myriad of work outcomes, such as work attitudes (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction), job involvement, in- and extra-role performance, felt stress, and turnover (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Moreover, POS has been shown to be sensitive to company policies and management practices within the workplace, such as the perceived fairness of organizational policies and the enactment of these policies by supervisors/managers, reward policies, working conditions, job security, training/promotion opportunities, and the size of the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Much less research attention has been devoted to the person factors (dispositional characteristics) that affect POS. To the best of my knowledge, POS has not been previously linked to attachment theory, although the relevance seems compelling.

To the extent that attachment theory can be applied to non-human entities such as a company, the organization (and its agents) represents a salient attachment figure worthy of study (Feeney et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2018). Whether employees feel that the attachment figures (the organization or its agents) are committed to them is at the heart of POS and, as such, should represent a concept sensitive to attachment dynamics. Expressed in attachment theory terms, POS signals to individuals how the "caregiver" feels about them. Social-exchange mechanisms that lie at the heart of organizational support theory would then predict that exposure to a caring and benevolent caregiver would induce feelings of obligation to reciprocate the good will. Of course, what matters here will be the nature of one's attachment pattern and how this affects whether support is perceived or not.

Relations between POS and the proposed attachment patterns will likely mirror the rationales offered for organizational trust. Individuals who share a secure attachment pattern (positive view of self and others) should notice and respond to cues that signal nurturance. In

turn, for these individuals, POS should confirm the bond between the employee and the organization. In sharp contrast, individuals who share a dismissive attachment are, by definition, unlikely to see and process supportive acts, even when offered. If anything, dismissive individuals are more likely to attend to social information that confirms their view that the attachment figure is an uncaring and unsupportive caregiver (i.e., low POS). While individuals who share the fearful pattern need to distance themselves from the attachment figure (cf. Anand et al., 2020), they also need evidence of support and validation to offset negative self-views. These mixed and conflicting views of the attachment figure will likely lead fearfully attached individuals to report moderate rather high or low levels of POS. Finally, it is expected that those who are preoccupied with the attachment figure will be vigilant of any and all overt signs or signals that the organization cares for them. Thus, on the one hand, if supports are offered, the preoccupied individual, unsure about themselves and their status with the organization, may well interpret offers of support as a sign that the caregiver sees them lacking in some way, in turn increasing neurotic behaviour (including downplaying supportive acts). To the extent that anxiously attached individuals entertain mixed interpretations, overall, these individuals should report moderate rather than high levels of POS. Taken together:

> Hypothesis 3.5. *Individuals who share a secure attachment pattern will demonstrate the highest levels of POS when compared to those who share other attachment patterns.*
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> Hypothesis 3.6. *Individuals who share a dismissive attachment pattern will demonstrate the lowest levels of POS when compared to those who share other attachment patterns.*
>
> Hypothesis 3.7. *Individuals who share either a fearful or preoccupied attachment pattern will demonstrate moderate levels of POS when compared to those who share other attachment patterns.*

Method

The data for this study came from an online panel of 400 working adults provided by Qualtrics. While the use of data from convenience samples has its drawbacks (i.e., an undefined population sample), a recent meta-analysis concluded that online panel data exhibited psychometric properties and criterion validities that approached those reported in research using conventional data (Walter et al., 2019). Furthermore, in this study, to alleviate concerns about the trustworthiness of this source of data (e.g., Zack et al., 2019), I observed best practice recommendations that have been articulated in the literature (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2020; Porter et al., 2019). Study participants provided responses to all of the study measures. Inspection of the sample characteristics reveals that all participants worked for companies based in the United States. Respondents reported an average age of 30 and an average of 7 and 9 years, respectively, on the job and with the organization. This sample had a majority of female participants (89%), and 88% of the sample had college education or above.

Measures

I measured the involved variables using established scales in the literature. First, organizational attachment was measured through the seven-item measure described by Feeney et al. (2020). This scale assesses attachment anxiety and avoidance using organization as the attachment object. Four items reflected attachment anxiety ($\alpha = .79$), another three items reflected attachment avoidance ($\alpha = .75$), and participants were asked to express their degree of agreement on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). An example item of attachment anxiety is "I'm afraid of losing the 'affection' and goodwill that my organization shows me." An example item of attachment avoidance is "I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my organization." Next, organizational trust and perceived organizational support,

reflecting employees' attitudes toward their organizations, were measured using the six items of the Organizational Trust Inventory (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996) as well as the Perceived Organizational Support measure by Eisenberger and colleagues (1986), including eight items. An example item of organizational trust is "I fully trust my employer." An example item of perceived organizational support is "My organizational really cares about my well-being." The scale for both measures ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The reliability of the organizational trust scale was α = .95, and the perceived organizational support was α = .95 (see Appendix D for a detailed list of measure items).

Analytic Strategy

Given that all of the measures were self-reported, the first step was to perform a CFA to confirm the validity of the proposed measurement model. Next, an LPA was performed using Mplus 8.2. The objective with LPA is to test whether interpretable subpopulations (profiles) exist within a more general population. Following recommended procedures (see Morin et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2011; Pastor et al., 2007), the first step is to examine the fit of a two-profile model, then a three-profile model, then a four-profile model, and so on. Next, the different profile models are compared and evaluated against a set of criteria to determine the model that offers the best solution. An optimal LPA solution should have higher log-likelihood (LL) values and lower Akaike information criterion (AIC), Bayesian information criterion (BIC), and sample-size-adjusted BIC (SSA–BIC) values in comparison to other pattern solutions, and entropy values should be larger in comparison to other solutions. Additionally, p values <.05 associated with the adjusted Lo–Mendell–Rubin likelihood ratio test (LMR; Lo et al., 2001) and the bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT; Nylund et al., 2007), which assesses fit of a k-pattern model over a k-1 model, can be used to support an optimal model (Lo et al., 2001; Nylund et al., 2007).

Another indicator concerns the number of cases within each profile group, with the idea being that profiles should be sufficiently populated (i.e., not contain less than 5% of the sample). Finally, and arguably most importantly, the final solution must make sense from a theoretical perspective (Morin et al., 2011). Thus, my analysis was guided by this approach, where empirical fit, parsimony, and theoretical consistency were emphasized. Once the profiles were identified and interpreted, the next step was to look for mean differences across the profile groups that correspond to the study hypotheses. To achieve this goal, I used a model-based approach proposed by Lanza and colleagues (2013), implemented through the auxiliary function (DCON) in Mplus, given that the distal outcome variable in this study is continuous and that the entropy of the profile solutions is higher than 0.6 (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study measures are portrayed in Table 3.1. Results of the CFA show that among the proposed four-factor measurement model and several potential alternative models, the four-factor model showed the best fit. In total, I compared the fit of four plausible measurement models to the data: (a) a one-factor model where all indicators were specified to load on a common latent factor (χ^2 = 1623.33 [189], CFI = .80, TLI = .78, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .09); (b) a two-factor model where indicators of the perceived organizational support and trust were loaded on one common factor, and indicators of attachment anxiety and avoidance were loaded on one common factor (χ^2 = 1,328.74 [188], CFI = .84, TLI = .83, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .12); (c) a three-factor model where indicators of attachment anxiety and avoidance were loaded on one common factor but indicators of perceived organizational support and trust were loaded on separate factors (χ^2 = 973.12 [186], CFI = .89,

TLI = .88, RMSEA = .10, SRMR = .11); and (d) a four-factor model where each indicator was loaded on its respective latent factor (χ^2 = 691.76 [183], CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .10). The results support model *d* as the best-fitting model.

Organizational Attachment Profile Membership Results

Table 3.2 provides the LPA fit statistics associated with different models tested. To determine the number and nature of cohorts in the overall sample, I considered the fit indices associated with four profile solutions (*k* = 2 to 5). Note that in Table 3.2, as the number of profiles increases, the LL values become increasingly higher and the AIC, BIC, and SSA–BIC values become increasingly lower. Although the five-profile group had the highest *entropy value* (i.e., an index that reflects reduced classification errors), the four-profile solution revealed a non-significant LMR value, indicating that further profiles may hold little statistical value. To determine if these profile solutions made sense, the means of anxious attachment and avoidant attachment of the four profiles were plotted (using standardized scores to facilitate interpretation), and the findings were revealed in Figure 1. This plot clearly showed evidence of secure, dismissive, preoccupied, and fearful cohorts. Thus, the four-profile solution represented four theoretically interpretable and qualitatively distinct patterns that differ in predicted shape rather than level (Morin & Marsh, 2015).[1]

Insert Tables 3.1 and 3.2; Figure 3.1

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[1] I also tested the robustness of the four-profile solution using coworker attachment in this same dataset. A four-profile solution also emerged as optimal for coworker attachment based on the factor scores of attachment anxiety and avoidance towards coworker.

Outcomes of Organizational Attachment Profile Membership

My second set of research questions speaks to the potential distal outcomes of individuals' profile membership based on organizational attachment styles. These associations are reported in Table 3.3. In terms of perceived organizational trust, I observed significant differentiations among the four profiles. First, individuals in the secure profile reported the highest level of organizational trust, supporting Hypothesis 3.2. Second, individuals in the dismissive profile reported the lowest level, supporting Hypothesis 3.3. Finally, in between the secure and dismissive profiles were individuals in the preoccupied and fearful profiles who reported a relatively moderate level of organizational trust, supporting Hypothesis 3.4. Similar results in terms of perceived organizational support were observed as well. Individuals in the secure profile reported the highest level of organizational support; individuals in the dismissive profile reported the lowest level; individuals in the preoccupied and fearful profiles reported a moderate level of perceived organizational support in comparison. Taken together, Hypotheses 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 are all supported.

Insert Table 3.3

Discussion

In this study, the purpose was to test whether individuals can be classified into different groups based on a common or shared attachment experience. Studying attachment processes using a person-oriented analytic strategy is a departure from more conventional variable-based research. Rather than look at anxious attachment and avoidant attachment as variables that correlate with other variables in a population, in this work, I look at how these dimensions

combine as lived experience as well as what belonging to a particular cohort means in terms of focal outcomes. Interestingly, this work reveals that the four dominant cohorts align well with the theoretical understanding of how anxious and avoidant tendencies may be experienced together (e.g., Brennan et al., 1998; Brennan & Shaver, 1995). Fearful attachment is evident when high levels of anxiety and avoidance are experienced together. Secure attachment is evident when low levels of anxiety and avoidance are experienced together. Preoccupied attachment is evident when high levels of anxiety are paired with low levels of avoidance. And, finally, dismissive attachment is evident when high avoidance is experienced in conjunction with low levels of anxiety.

In terms of focal outcomes, the results of this study revealed that membership in a pattern (profile) group was associated with differential levels of organizational trust and perceived organizational support. For example, those in the secure profile reported the highest level of perceived organizational trust and support, whereas those in the dismissive profile reported the lowest level. In between were the fearful and preoccupied profiles, and the variations between all these four profiles were significant. These results are in line with previous variable-oriented studies showing that securely attached individuals often have more positive relationships in life or at work (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Richards & Hackett, 2012; Richards & Schat, 2011).

Contributions

This study provides evidence supporting the value of the person-oriented approach as a way to study attachment dynamics in the work domain. By adopting a person-oriented view of attachment styles, I identified the organic grouping of individuals in an employee sample based on their attachment to organization and coworkers. This approach complements the traditional

variable-oriented approach, as it establishes clear within-person patterns: individuals have different lived experiences of attachment anxiety and avoidance, and such experiences influence their relationship with the organization. Additionally, compared with existing person-oriented studies that have focused on individuals' overall attachment styles, I examine target-specific attachment patterns. The findings reveal that although organization is a non-human entity, definable organizational attachment profiles can still be identified and interpreted meaningfully. To an extent, this provides additional support for theories of anthropomorphism, whereby individual employees often personify the organization entity (Albert et al., 2015).

Prior research on attachment functioning suggests that attachment security provides a secure base that enables individuals to function better in relations. On the contrary, insecurities, including anxiety and avoidance, are often associated with significant impairment in personality functioning in various domains of life, such as interpersonal social functioning and work relations. Similar to the previous two studies in this dissertation, the findings in this study align with the majority of the observations in the literature but offer some surprising insights. For example, individuals in the organization-secure profile reported the highest levels of organizational trust and support, both of which are indicators of a high-quality EOR. Diverging from the traditional wisdom that the fearful attachment style (i.e., elevated levels of anxiety and avoidance) is the most harmful, I find that it is the individuals in the organization-dismissive profile who saw the least amount of organizational trust and support. This surprising finding may be explained by avoidant individuals' innate tendency to maintain self-reliance in relationships.

Practically, it is known that individuals bring their different personalities and ways of thinking into the workplace. First of all, the findings in this study suggest the importance of attachment styles as an individual difference. Individuals are capable of forming relationships

with their organizations characterized by attachment security or insecurities. The nature of this organizational attachment can potentially determine the quality of the EOR. Next, the conventional idea that one single individual difference, such as a personality trait, can determine relevant workplace outcomes may be an oversimplification. In the case of attachment dynamics, for example, the functioning of attachment anxiety (avoidance) depends on the level of attachment avoidance (anxiety). From this perspective, some organization practices, such as personnel selection based on personality tests, may offer limited value if the measured personality traits are considered in isolation. Much more person-oriented research is needed to provide reliable advice in this regard.

Limitations and Future Research

Study 3 is not without its limitations. Similar to Study 1, this study relies on self-report data. In Study 3, I took steps similar to those taken in Study 1 to address potential common method bias: for example, data was collected anonymously and response options were varied to create psychological and physical separation between the variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). Nonetheless, it may be advantageous for future studies to examine attachment styles over time and to test the hypothesized model with data at multiple time points. Additionally, due to the characteristics of a person-oriented approach (i.e., organic grouping of individuals in a sample; exploratory in nature), it is important to verify the attachment patterns observed in this study with more samples. I took an initial step by conducting a robustness check of the profile solutions of organizational attachment using a conceptually similar variable (i.e., coworker attachment). Finally, because I focused on some representative EOR outcomes in this study, future studies are encouraged to examine the relationship between attachment patterns and EOR more comprehensively.

Chapter 5: General Discussion

An increasing amount of research is demonstrating that attachment theory can benefit our understanding of workplace phenomena, but this research is still in its infancy. My review of the extant literature reveals that the fundamental role of human attachment is yet to be integrated with EOR theories. In this project consisting of three empirical studies, I investigate how attachment functioning influences individual employees' attitudes, emotions, and behaviours in their relationships with coworkers, leaders, and the organization itself; in particular, I examine the implications for individuals' responses to adverse relational experiences at work (e.g., workplace mistreatment). Theoretically, the overarching goal is to offer an attachment-informed perspective to EOR; practically, the findings in this project can offer individuals and organizations alike suggestions that can be implemented to improve workplace relationships, individual well-being, and organizational outcomes.

The motivation for this dissertation project lies in the observation that, as the fundamental theory of human relationships, attachment theory can offer exciting insights into our understanding of EOR. For example, the presence of multiple relational targets in organizations has remained a challenge to the EOR research (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). It is conceptually and methodologically challenging to study the variety of relational targets in the workplace. As a result, EOR research has been fragmented to an extent because relationships with coworkers, leaders, and the organization itself have been studied in separate domains, such as leadership and organizational attitudes. From an attachment perspective, however, these relationships are all attachment bonds in nature and share certain characteristics. Additionally, EOR research has been dominated by an exchange-based view (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), in which the relationship is often considered to be an exchange relationship governed by the rule of

reciprocity. Attachment theory, in comparison, offers a more intuitive, instinctive, and (often) emotional depiction of this relationship, based on an innate human need for bonding (Bowlby, 1969). Finally, a lens of attachment theory can be particularly useful to explain how individuals deal with the impact of negative relational experiences at work, given that attachment functioning is concerned with individuals' willingness and ability to engage in relationships and deal with the emotional distress that comes with relational difficulties.

In the rest of this chapter, I provide an overview of the three studies and their key findings, based on the primary research questions that these studies were designed to address. More importantly, I explain the contributions these findings can make to the relevant research literature and practices in organizations. These research questions are as follows:

1. Can attachment bonds to a non-human organization entity be empirically examined? What are the implications of this organizational attachment bond?

2. Can attachment orientations be situationally activated in an organization setting? What are the implications of such state-like attachment orientations?

3. What does attachment security and insecurities mean for individuals who are experiencing negative interpersonal relationships at work, such as mistreatment enacted by either coworkers or leaders?

4. Given the limitations of measuring attachment orientations in the existing literature (i.e., anxiety and avoidance measured in isolation from each other), is there an alternative way of conceptualizing and operationalizing attachment?

By addressing these questions, the studies in this project demonstrate that attachment theory can provide a "distinct relational perspective to the study of organizational behaviour" (Yip et al., 2018; p. 185).

Overview of the Studies

In Study 1 (correlational design), I test the basic premise of whether SU inflicted by coworkers damages the quality of EOR, represented by different forms of organizational commitment (i.e., AC, NC, and CC). More importantly, I examine whether the effect of SU on organizational commitment depends upon individuals' organizational attachment style. Findings in this study address Questions 1 and 3. First, further supporting the recent findings in Feeney and colleagues (2020), the findings show that individual employees are capable of forming meaningful attachment bonds with their organizations. And similar to interpersonal attachment, such organizational attachment bonds manifest as different levels of anxiety and avoidance. The findings based on organizational attachment styles suggest that it is important to contextualize attachment functioning and differentiate its implications among attachment targets. This is particularly important for workplace studies, given the multiplicity of relational targets in organizations.

Specifically, the study reveals that when individuals' relationships with their organization are characterized with insecure attachment, particularly anxious attachment, these individuals are less likely to experience decreased AC and NC following exposure to coworker SU—that is, a high level of attachment anxiety enables employees to remain affectively and normatively committed after being a victim of workplace SU. Findings in terms of CC are worth noting from an attachment perspective. It is observed that victims of SU show an increase rather than a decrease in CC, and this relationship is not similarly affected by attachment anxiety. This is interesting because it potentially speaks to the feelings of anxiety underlying CC, which has been less examined in commitment research. Traditionally, CC has been characterized from a rational perspective—for example, an employee needs to stay with their current organizations because

they lack other employment opportunities or see a high cost (often financial) of leaving. However, these rational considerations should naturally induce a sense of anxiety (i.e., state anxiety in relation to the continuity of an employment relationship) that in turn determines CC-related outcomes. To an extent, the experience of anxiety can be a meaningful mediator between SU and CC. Although attachment anxiety may not directly moderate the relationship between SU and CC, as shown in this study, given that attachment anxiety entails a proneness to anxious feelings about relational continuity, it may emerge as a more meaningful moderator when state anxiety is considered as a mediator.

Given the limitations of correlational designs, however, it is challenging to examine the mechanisms that can potentially explain why attachment orientations moderate individuals' response to workplace relational difficulties. To acquire this deeper understanding, I carry out Study 2—an experimental design that allows mediation analysis—to focus on how and why individuals' attachment orientations may determine the extent to which individuals lower their performance at work after experiencing mistreatment inflicted by leaders. Another advantage of experimental design is that it allows for the priming of state-like attachment orientations, which has so far been overlooked in workplace attachment research (Yip et al., 2018). Task performance is another workplace outcome pertinent to the quality of EOR. For example, from employees' perspectives, their performance is a key obligation and contribution to the relationship with their organizations (Shore et al., 2018).

Study 2 speaks to Questions 2 and 3 by developing and testing the idea that experimentally primed attachment orientations moderate the follower performance implications of leader mistreatment and that such moderating effects can be explained through individuals' felt arousal (an important aspect of state anxiety) in response to mistreatment experiences. As

expected, the findings show that individuals' attachment orientations can be situationally induced, which may or may not align with their trait-like attachment orientations. This is particularly important from an organizational perspective: a workplace is a relational space, and individuals are often exposed to an abundance of cues that may trigger attachment-based dynamics. Understanding attachment priming in an experimental setting can inform our understanding of how situational cues work in real workplaces and thus provide a better sense of how to manage them. For example, some human resource management practices can potentially be designed for this purpose.

Next, providing more answers to Question 3 (i.e., the implications that attachment has for individuals' post-mistreatment responses), the findings suggest that, in a state of attachment security or anxiety, leader mistreatment contributes to a heightened emotional arousal, which leads to a decrease in task performance. However, although participants in a state of attachment avoidance still feel a heightened sense of arousal, the felt arousal does not have a detrimental effect on the individuals' performance. A lack of findings in terms of attachment anxiety likely suggests a limitation of this study: measuring emotional arousal using self-report. Although previous research has shown that self-report measures are particularly useful to assess current emotional experiences (Mauss & Robinson, 2009), more direct ways of measuring arousal, such as an assessment of physiological arousal through detecting heart rate or brain activities, could be better at detecting state anxiety, which can be empirically difficult to differentiate from the trait anxiety entailed by attachment anxiety.

Taken together, findings in Study 1 and 2 show the importance of limiting and managing workplace mistreatment, as well as some unexpected functions of attachment insecurities once mistreatment has occurred—that is, attachment anxiety can enable individuals to remain

affectively and normatively committed to their organizations, even after mistreatment experiences. According to existing knowledge about organizational commitment, this is a desirable outcome for both individual employees and organizations. Additionally, attachment avoidance can inhibit the detrimental effects of leader mistreatment on task performance; avoidantly attached individuals may still feel emotionally aroused, but their performance does not necessarily decrease. However, looking at these findings together, particularly the lack of support for the other theory-based predictions covered in the studies, the findings point to a drawback of the current conceptualization of attachment orientations, which views and operationalizes attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance separately. To address this, I take a person-oriented approach to the study of attachment processes in Study 3.

With the emerging person-oriented approach, I examine the within-individual patterns based on workplace attachment orientations in Study 3 and answer Question 4 (i.e., an alternative way of conceptualizing attachment). I first identify cohorts of individuals who experience, together, at one time, a particular combination of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance—attachment profiles. Aligned with the existing theoretical understandings of the relationship between anxious and avoidant tendencies (e.g., Brennan et al., 1998; Brennan & Shaver, 1995), these identified profiles are (a) fearful attachment, which is evident when high levels of anxiety and avoidance are experienced together; (b) secure attachment, which is evident when low levels of anxiety and avoidance are experienced together; (c) preoccupied attachment, which is evident when high levels of anxiety are paired with low levels of avoidance; and (d) dismissive attachment, which is evident when high avoidance is experienced in conjunction with low levels of anxiety. The presence of these fundamentally different attachment profiles suggests that, for individuals, attachment anxiety and avoidance may constitute an integrated and holistic

experience; hence, examining them separately (as is often done from the traditional variable-based approach) may lead to oversimplified conclusions.

The findings in Study 3 about the implications of the membership in different attachment profiles for various workplace attitudes provide preliminary support for this claim. Specifically, I observe that those in the secure profile in terms of their attachment bonds with the organization report the highest level of perceived organizational trust and support but those in the dismissive profile report the lowest level. Those in the fearful and preoccupied profiles report a moderate level, and the variations among all four groups are significant. As opposed to findings based on either attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance, for example, these findings suggest that attachment avoidance alone is not sufficient to explain why individual employees trust their organizations less or see little organizational support; rather, this occurs when they simultaneously experience a low level of organizational attachment anxiety (the dismissive profile). Next, I delineate some major contributions that the findings in these studies can make to the relevant theories.

Theoretical Contributions

Broadly, a contribution of this project comes from shedding new lights on the more established theory of EOR. First, EOR theories traditionally have different focuses depending on the focal target of the relationship. For example, organizational commitment revolves around employees' relationship with an organization entity. On the contrary, leader–member exchange theory is about the relationship between employees and their workplace leaders. A better understanding of attachment-based characteristics, however, can potentially inform a more holistic view of EOR—relationships with coworkers, leaders, and the organization are attachment bonds in nature. More importantly, existing EOR research has been dominated by an

exchange-based view (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), whereas attachment theory reveals that workplace relationships can be driven by an innate and primary desire for bonding with humans or non-human entities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003). This more primary (as opposed to transactional) depiction of workplace relationships indicates that attachment theory may have overarching implications for EOR research, because attachment functioning underlies many existing EOR concepts. For example, from an attachment perspective, organizational identification (Dutton et al., 1994) may be a form of anxious attachment to the organization, which may explain the negative impact it has on individual employees' wellbeing (Avanzi et al., 2012). Finally, attachment theory also helps situate the EOR research in a broader social context: relational schemas formed in individuals' relationships in non-work contexts and past social experiences (i.e., attachment styles are trait-like and develop from early interpersonal relationships) affect their interpersonal interactions in an organizational context.

The findings in this project also contribute to the workplace mistreatment literature, speaking to the general question of why employees react to mistreatment experiences differently. Existing workplace mistreatment studies suggest a variety of explanations, such as societal and organizational factors, the characteristics and behaviours of the leaders who enact mistreatment, and follower characteristics (Breevaart et al., 2021). Whether pertaining to coworker or leader mistreatment, the findings in this project extend the discussion of follower characteristics to include attachment orientations, including chronic and state-like attachment orientations, showing them as important moderators. For example, anxiously attached individuals may stay affectively and normatively committed to their organizations after experiences of coworker mistreatment. These findings respond to a recent call for more research effort to answer the

question of for whom workplace mistreatment is more or less detrimental (Zhong et al., in press). More importantly, in terms of leader mistreatment, the findings suggest that state-like attachment orientations affect followers' reactions to leader mistreatment through an arousal-mediated path. For example, attachment avoidance can disrupt the negative relationship between emotional arousal and task performance after mistreatment experiences and, hence, keep individuals' task performance stable. Taken together, mistreatment experiences in the workplace represent a major disruption to individuals' attachment bonds. As a result, depending on their attachment orientations, individuals' responses to mistreatment vary.

More specifically, the contribution to workplace mistreatment literature comes from the evidence generated around different mistreatment concepts, including coworker SU and leader mistreatment. Given the debate over the proliferation of workplace mistreatment concepts, in which some scholars have called for a reconciliation of multiple mistreatment constructs (Fox & Spector, 2005; Hershcovis, 2011) and others have championed for discrete mistreatment forms (e.g., Duffy et al., 2002; Pearson et al., 2000; Tepper, 2000), the findings in Studies 1 and 2 support that SU and leader mistreatment are meaningful mistreatment concepts in their own right. Next, findings in Study 1 contribute to the organizational commitment research. Although the differences among affective, normative, and continence forms of commitment have been studied extensively, the evidence has been lacking when workplace mistreatment is involved. Study 1 demonstrates that, after mistreatment experiences, individuals' desire and a sense of obligation toward the organization may reduce as a result, but when they have a rational need to stay, such as financial constraints (i.e., CC), they may feel as stuck as ever, or worse.

Next, the findings in this project contribute to workplace attachment research from multiple fronts. First, they contradict the notion that attachment insecurities always lead to bad

outcomes. For example, attachment anxiety (a type of attachment insecurity) can make individuals less affected by certain interpersonal adversities at work, to the extent that the individuals stay affectively committed to their organization. Attachment avoidance can also enable individuals to keep performing well in tasks after leader mistreatment experiences. These findings suggest that an irrational urge of feeling involved (i.e., attachment anxiety) or a preference for autonomy (i.e., attachment avoidance) likely buffer individuals from certain detrimental effects of mistreatment-like workplace experiences. Second, through an experimental design, Study 2 in this project uncovers evidence for a mechanism that may further explain why attachment avoidance has such surprising effects on individuals' post-mistreatment responses. Different from the long-held expectation that attachment insecurities make effective emotion regulation less likely, I find evidence that a heightened sense of emotional arousal following an affectively distressing event, such as workplace mistreatment, does not affect avoidantly attached individuals as significantly as other individuals characterized by secure or anxious attachment styles.

Finally, the person-oriented approach taken in Study 3 uncovers new territories in attachment-based workplace research. Identifying cohorts of individuals who share configurations of attachment anxiety and avoidance in an employee sample, this study shows that the traditional variable-based approach may oversimplify how attachment orientation functions, in that attachment anxiety and avoidance are examined separately. In comparison, a person-oriented approach can show that the implications of one attachment anxiety (avoidance) depend on the level of attachment avoidance (anxiety). To an extent, the use of a person-oriented approach reveals an alternative paradigm in terms of how attachment can be conceptualized.

Managerial Contributions

Given that individuals spend a considerable amount of their time working in organizations, managers should be mindful that individuals form meaningful attachment bonds with their organization that are similar to those formed in close interpersonal relationships. As a result, the nature of the relationships between employees and organizations varies among individuals. For some, this relationship is built on an innate desire to stay attached and may enable the individuals to willingly stay in the relationship, even under circumstances traditionally thought to accelerate the dissolution of the employee-organization relationship (e.g., workplace mistreatment). Or, when individuals' attachments to their organization are avoidant in nature (e.g., employees feel attached to the organization but associate more value with their own autonomy), the quality of their relationship with the organization may mean less for the individuals because they prefer to seek individual outcomes, such as their own task performance. From organizations' perspectives, these outcomes should not be interpreted as good or bad; rather, they offer a way to understand employees' individual needs in the workplace.

The findings in this project should in no way be interpreted as an excuse to tolerate workplace mistreatment. Organizations should be alert of mistreatment behaviours and culture, and they should have resources available for employees in the case that any should become victims of workplace mistreatment. Now more than ever, the contemporary workplace is collaborative, and scholars and managers should always aim for creating a collegial and healthy work environment that minimizes negative relational experiences for employees. Findings in this project show that when employees feel mistreated by their coworkers or leaders, their commitment to the organization, as well as their task performance, may take a hit. These effects, however, are contingent upon employees' most salient attachment orientation at the time.

Another managerial implication is that managers may need to rethink how they assess and understand individual differences. Traditionally, managers have considered certain individual traits, such as conscientiousness or extroversion, important for success at work. However, from a person-oriented perspective, this may be an oversimplification. In the case of attachment styles, for example, the implications of attachment anxiety depend on the level of attachment avoidance. From this perspective, it is of limited value to consider individual differences in isolation, and a more individualized approach is called for.

Future Research

In the process of carrying out this project, I identified new opportunities that can be explored by future studies. Besides the ones alluded to earlier, such as studies that examine emotional arousal with more sophisticated methods or more studies that adopt a person-oriented perspective, I present two additional ones that are both currently under development. These studies together should help set an agenda for future workplace attachment research in the following ways: the psychological processes following workplace mistreatment experiences should be explored in more depth to understand the moderating role of attachment; the compatibility based on attachment between employees and leaders, as well as between employees and their organizations, will provide more answers as to the implications of attachment for workplace outcomes; and more person-oriented studies are urgently needed to generate a more holistic understanding of attachment orientations.

Emotional, Motivational, or Both?

Some findings in this project suggest the importance of uncovering more meaningful mechanisms that can explain why attachment orientations have a powerful moderating effect on individuals' responses to mistreatment. To do so, I focused on an affect-based process

manifested through emotional arousal in Study 2, but a lack of conclusive findings in this study is likely opening new theoretical grounds. For example, the correlational evidence in Study 1 can also be interpreted in a way to suggest that individuals' self-regulation efforts play a role in how their commitment changes after workplace mistreatment, which cannot be captured by an exclusively affective perspective (as I did in Study 2). As a result, a logical next step is to examine some potential cognitive mechanisms, such as self-regulation motivations. I have been developing more experiments, taking into account variables such as self-regulatory focuses and perceived self-efficacy as meaningful mediators. Projects such as this will provide opportunities to explore the linkages between attachment theory and self-regulation theory—both are theories speaking to fundamental human behavioural patterns.

A Matter of Compatibility?

To a large extent, the studies in this project take an employee' perspective—that is, the studies examine how individual employees report their attachment orientations and how they perceive their relationships with their organizations. However, classic organizational behaviour theories, such as person–environment fit (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011; Kristof, 1996), suggest that in order to understand EOR, the concept of fit (i.e., the level of congruence or compatibility between employees and organizations, based on various elements) should be important. Unfortunately, little is known about the fit based on attachment in workplace relations. For now, I have developed another empirical study in which I focus on the fit between employees and their supervisors at work, based on attachment orientations. Collecting dyadic data and using polynomial regression and response surface analysis (Edwards, 1991), the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that, in addition to employees' own attachment orientations, supervisors'

attachment orientations also matter in determining employee outcomes, depending on whether there is an alignment or a misalignment between them.

Conclusion

This project aims to provide more empirical evidence to support the relevance of attachment theory to workplace phenomena. As a foundational theory of human relationships, attachment theory can offer novel and valuable insights into the dynamics in the EOR. Specifically, through three studies using a variety of designs, methods, and analytical strategies, the findings in this project answer the broad research question of how attachment-based dynamics influence a selected number of EOR outcomes, including employees' organizational commitment, perceived organizational support and organizational trust (attitude), emotional arousal that follows mistreatment-like experiences at work (emotion), and, finally, performance at work (behaviour).

Tables and Figures: Study 1

Table 1.1

Correlations, Mean, and Standard Deviation

	Mean	*SD.*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.48	.50	--							
2. Organizational Tenure	12.51	10.06	−.05	--						
3. Attachment Anxiety	2.99	1.45	−.02	−.16 **	**.84**					
4. Attachment Avoidance	3.67	1.52	−.04	−.13 **	.54 **	**.82**				
5. Social Undermining	1.70	.10	.03	−.09 *	.46 **	.40 **	**.98**			
6. Affective Commitment	4.75	1.56	−.04	.21 **	.00	−.35 **	−.14 **	**.96**		
7. Normative Commitment	4.29	1.51	.00	.10 **	.11 **	−.25 **	−.06	.80 **	**.93**	
8. Continuance Commitment	4.30	1.33	.09 *	.02	.37 **	.26 **	.20 **	.23 **	.38 **	**.84**

Note. Measures 1 to 5 preceded measures 6 to 8 in time; diagonal entries in bold indicate coefficient alpha; 1 = Male, 2 = Female.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.
$N = 626$.

Table 1.2

Results of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Affective Commitment

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	β (*SE*)	β	β (*SE*)	β	β (*SE*)
(Constant)	4.47 **	.21	4.57 **	.19	4.30 **	.19
Gender	−.08	.12	−.12	.11	−.05	.11
Organizational Tenure	.03 **	.01	.03 **	.01	.03 **	.01
Attachment Anxiety (ANX)			.35 **	.05	.33 **	.05
Attachment Avoidance (AVD)			−.48 **	.04	−.44 **	.04
Social Undermining (SU)			−.13 *	.06	−.43 **	.08
SU * ANX					.23 **	.05
SU * AVD					.00	.05
F Value	14.01 **		33.71 **		32.30 **	
R^2	.04		.21		.27	
R^2 Change	.04 **		.17 **		.05 **	

Note. β = Unstandardized coefficients; *SE* = Coefficients standard error.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 1.3

Results of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Normative Commitment

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	β (*SE*)	β	β (*SE*)	β	β (*SE*)
(Constant)	4.06 **	.21	4.10 **	.19	3.90 **	.19
Gender	.02	.12	−.01	.11	.05	.11
Organizational Tenure	.02 *	.01	.02 *	.01	.02 *	.01
Attachment Anxiety (ANX)			.39 **	.05	.37 **	.05
Attachment Avoidance (AVD)			−.41 **	.04	−.38 **	.04
Social Undermining (SU)			−.08	.06	−.32 **	.08
SU * ANX					.21 **	.05
SU * AVD					−.03	.05
F Value	3.47 **		22.90 **		21.33 **	
R^2	.01		.16		.20	
R^2 Change	.01 *		.15 **		.04 **	

Note. β = Unstandardized coefficients; *SE* = Coefficients standard error.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 1.2

Results of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Continuance Commitment

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	β (*SE*)	β	β (*SE*)	β	β (*SE*)
(Constant)	3.91 **	.18	3.75 **	.17	3.70 **	.17
Gender	.24 *	.11	.27 *	.10	.28 *	.10
Organizational Tenure	.00	.01	.01 *	.01	.01 *	.01
Attachment Anxiety (ANX)			.30 **	.04	.30 **	.04
Attachment Avoidance (AVD)			.08 *	.04	.09 *	.04
Social Undermining (SU)			.02	.06	−.05	.07
SU * ANX					.04	.04
SU * AVD					.01	.05
F Value	2.56		23.46 **		17.17 **	
R^2	.01		.16		.16	
R^2 Change	.01		.15 **		.00	

Note. β = Unstandardized coefficients; *SE* = Coefficients standard error.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1.1

Two-Way Interaction Effects of Social Undermining and Attachment Anxiety on Affective Commitment

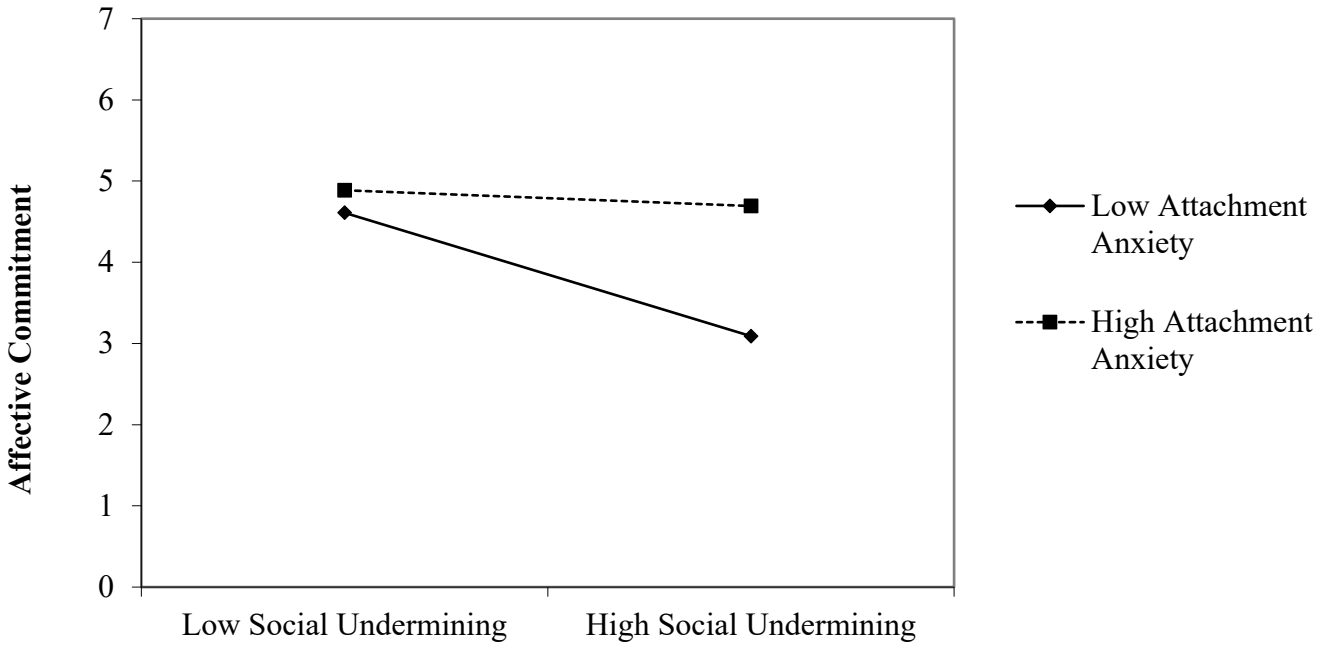
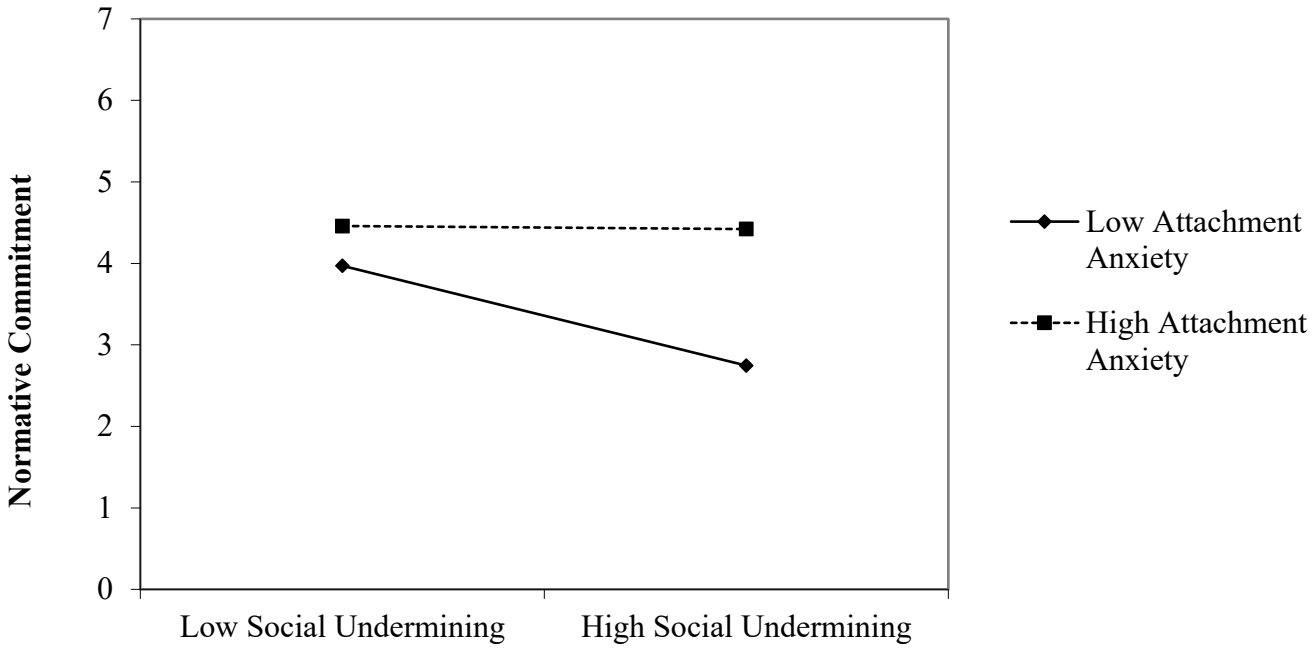


Figure 1.2

Two-Way Interaction Effects of Social Undermining and Attachment Anxiety on Normative Commitment



Tables and Figures: Study 2

Table 2.1

Results of the Analysis of Variance: Experiment 1

	Task Performance				
Predictors	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	Partial η^2
Dispositional Attachment-Anxiety	6.97	1.00	6.97	.87	.00
Dispositional Attachment-Avoidance	.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00
Leader Mistreatment (X)	119.25	1.00	119.25	14.86 **	.04
State Attachment (W)	6.47	2.00	3.24	.40	.00
X × W	49.93	2.00	24.96	3.11 *	.02
Error	2,568.40	320.00			
Total	16,870.00	328.00			
Corrected Total	2,750.78	327.00			
R^2	.07				

Note. Leader Mistreatment: 0 = Low; 1 = High. State Attachment: 1 = Attachment Security; 2 = Attachment Anxiety; 3 = Attachment Avoidance.
Analyses were repeated without controlling for dispositional attachment and no significant changes to results was observed.
N = 328.

Table 2.2

Contrast Codes for Task Performance as a Function of Experimental Conditions: Experiment 1

	Low Leader Mistreatment			High Leader Mistreatment			Contrast tests: *t* value
Contrast	Attachment Security	Attachment Anxiety	Attachment Avoidance	Attachment Security	Attachment Anxiety	Attachment Avoidance	Task Performance
1	−1	−1	−1	1	1	1	−3.81 **
2	−1	0	0	1	0	0	−3.5 **
3	0	−1	0	0	1	0	−2.83 *
4	0	0	−1	0	0	1	−.25
5	0	0	0	−1	1	0	.87
6	0	0	0	0	−1	1	1.30
7	0	0	0	−1	0	1	2.29 *
8	−1	1	0	0	0	0	.25
9	0	−1	1	0	0	0	−1.4
10	−1	0	1	0	0	0	−1.09

Note. Leader Mistreatment: 0 = Low; 1 = High. State Attachment: 1 = Attachment Security; 2 = Attachment Anxiety; 3 = Attachment Avoidance.

Analyses were repeated without controlling for dispositional attachment and no significant changes to results was observed.

$N = 328$.

Table 2.3

First-Stage Conditional Indirect Effects on Task Performance: Experiment 2

Predictor	Arousal (M)			Task Performance (Y)		
	β	*SE*	*t*	β	*SE*	*t*
Dispositional Attachment-Anxiety	.10	.04	2.87	.11	.15	.73
Dispositional Attachment-Avoidance	−.00	.03	−.09	−.05	.12	−.45
Leader Mistreatment (X)	.17	.12	1.42	−1.52	.31	−4.94 **
Arousal (M)	--	--	--	−.08	.23	−.37
State Attachment-Anxiety (W_1)	.17	.13	1.29	--	--	--
State Attachment-Avoidance (W_2)	−.07	.12	−.56	--	--	--
X × W_1	−.06	.18	−.33	--	--	--
X × W_2	.07	.18	.42	--	--	--
M × W_1	--	--	--	--	--	--
M × W_2	--	--	--	--	--	--
	R^2 change after X × W = .00, F (2, 339) = .26, *ns*.					
	Conditional indirect effects at values of the moderator:					
State Attachment	*Bootstrap indirect effect*		*Bootstrap SE*		*95% bootstrap CI*	
Security	−.01		.06		(−.18, .07)	
Anxiety	−.01		.05		(−.13, .08)	
Avoidance	−.02		.06		(−.15, .12)	

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000. State attachment (moderator) was multi-categorical and dummy coded, and the attachment secure group was the reference group. Leader mistreatment (focal predictor) was categorical, high and low levels. Analyses were repeated without controlling for dispositional attachment and no significant changes to results was observed.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.
$N = 347$.

Table 2.4

Second-Stage Conditional Indirect Effects on Task Performance: Experiment 2

Predictor	Arousal (M)			Task Performance (Y)		
	β	*SE*	*t*	β	*SE*	*t*
Dispositional Attachment-Anxiety	.10	.04	2.91	.09	.15	.59
Dispositional Attachment-Avoidance	−.00	.03	−.14	−.05	.12	−.44
Leader Mistreatment (X)	.20	.07	2.70 *	−1.58	.31	−5.13 **
Arousal (M)	--	--	--	−.53	.35	−1.53
State Attachment-Anxiety ($W_{1)}$	--	--	--	−.13	.87	−.15
State Attachment-Avoidance (W_2)	--	--	--	−1.96	.90	−2.19 *
X × W_1	--	--	--	--	--	--
X × W_2	--	--	--	--	--	--
M × W_1	--	--	--	.27	.51	.52
M × W_2	--	--	--	1.50	.57	2.61 **
				R^2 change after M × W = .02, F (2, 340) = 3.61, p < .05.		
State Attachment				Conditional effects of M at values of the moderator:		
Security	--	--	--	−.53	.35	−1.53
Anxiety	--	--	--	−.27	.37	−.71
Avoidance	--	--	--	.97	.46	2.10 *

	Conditional indirect effects at values of the moderator:		
State Attachment	*Bootstrap indirect effect*	*Bootstrap SE*	*95% bootstrap CI*
Security	−.11	.09	(−.31, .03)
Anxiety	−.05	.09	(−.26, .10)
Avoidance	.19	.13	(.00, .49)

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000. State attachment (moderator) was multi-categorical and dummy coded, and the attachment secure group was the reference group. Leader mistreatment (focal predictor) was categorical, high and low levels. Analyses were repeated without controlling for dispositional attachment and no significant changes to results was observed.

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

N = 347.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Model and Study Overview

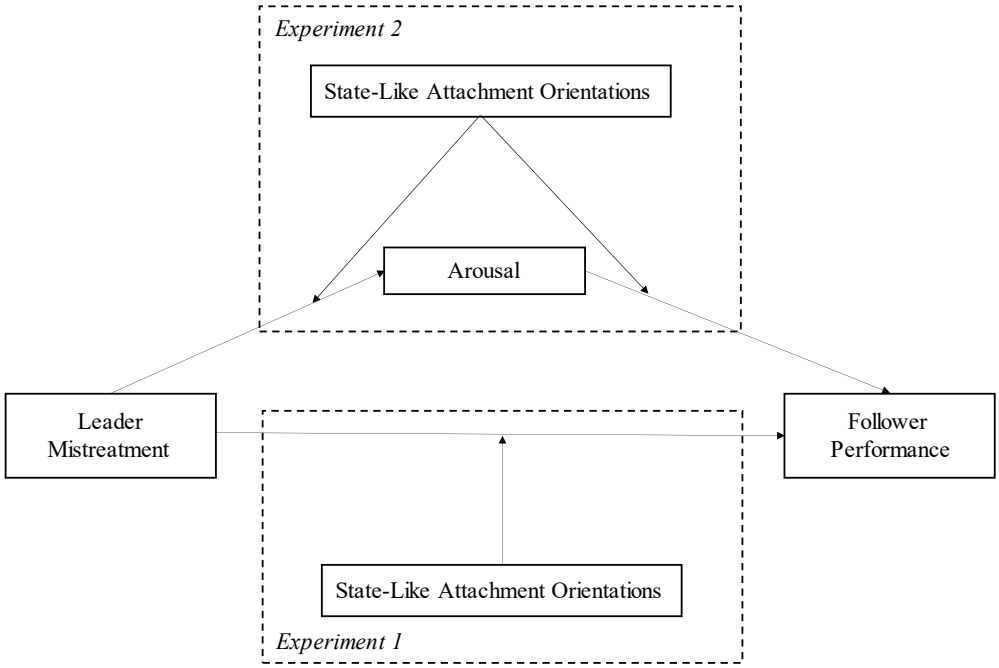
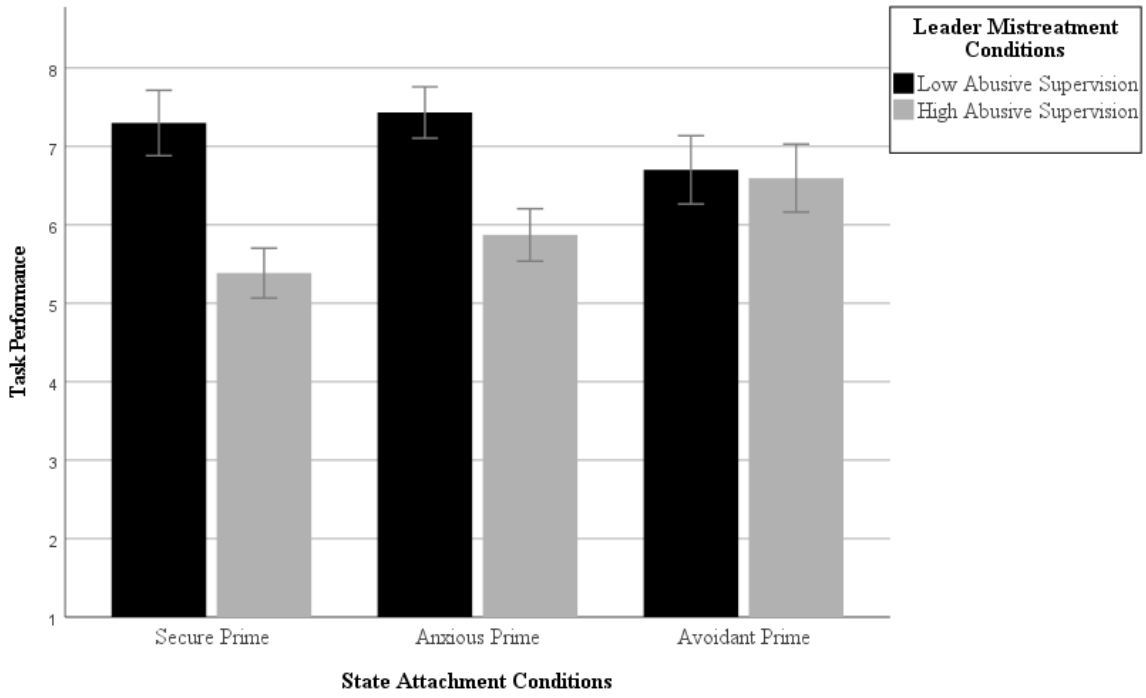


Figure 2.2

Interactive Effects of Leader Mistreatment and State-Like Attachment Orientations on Task Performance: Experiment 1



Note. Error bars plotted based on standard error of the mean = 1.

Tables and Figures: Study 3

Table 3.1

Correlations, Mean, and Standard Deviation

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Anxious attachment	3.15	1.51	**.79**			
2. Avoidant attachment	4.07	1.53	.43**	**.75**		
3. Organizational trust	4.77	1.63	−.26**	−.62**	**.95**	
4. Perceived organizational support	4.52	1.52	−.26**	−.67**	.86**	**.95**

Note. Diagonal entries in bold indicate coefficient alpha.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.
$N = 400$.

Table 3.2

Results from the Latent Profile Analysis Models: Organizational Attachment

K	npar	LL	BIC	SSA-BIC	AIC	LMR, p value	BLRT, *p* value	Entropy
2	7	−1,412.414	2,866.77	2,844.56	2,838.83	.00	.00	.73
3	10	−1,398.984	2,857.88	2,826.15	2,817.97	.00	.00	.74
4	13	−1,388.654	2,855.20	2,813.95	2,803.31	.07	.00	.72
5	16	−1,380.003	2,855.87	2,805.10	2,792.01	.03	.00	.76

Note . K = number of profiles; npar = number of free parameters; LL = Model LogLikelihood; BIC = Bayesian Information Criteria; SSA-BIC = Sample-size adjusted BIC; AIC = Akaïke Information Criteria; LMR = Adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test; BLRT = Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test.

Table 3.3

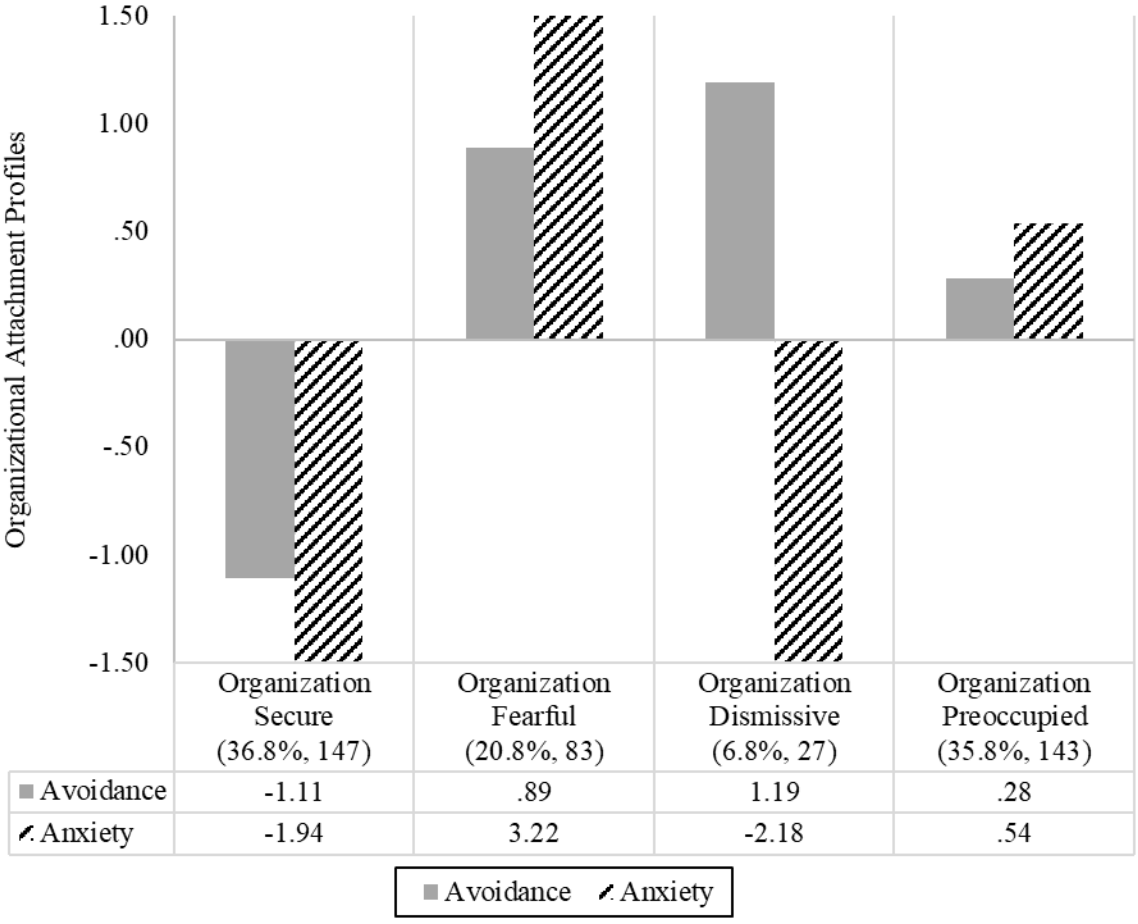
Associations Between Organizational Attachment Profile Membership and the Outcomes

	β (*SE*)				Between-Profile Comparisons: χ^2 *(df)*						Overall Test	
Outcome	Profile 1: Organization Secure	Profile 2: Organization Fearful	Profile 3: Organization Dismissive	Profile 4: Organization Preoccupied	1 vs. 2	1 vs. 3	1 vs. 4	2 vs. 3	2 vs. 4	3 vs. 4	Overall $\chi 2$ *(df)*	Summary of tests of profile means
Perceived Organizational Trust	6.41	3.93	2.51	5.22	271.21 (1)**	433.53 (1)**	147.82 (1)**	40.59 (1)**	57.48 (1)**	182.76 (1)**	612.57 (3)**	1 > 4 > 2 > 3
Perceived Organizational Support	6.02	3.61	2.27	4.75	278.48 (1)**	407.70 (1)**	117.60 (1)**	40.23 (1)**	67.47 (1)**	183.96 (1)**	601.03 (3)**	1 > 4 > 2 > 3

Note . The mean values of the variables for each profile group are displayed.
** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$.
$N = 400$.

Figure 3.1

Profile Membership and Standardized Profile Means: Organizational Attachment



Notes. Scores were standardized to aid interpretation.

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Appendix A: Study 1

Measure of Organizational Commitment, Including Affective, Normative, and Continuance Commitment

(Meyer et al., 1993)

I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.
I feel emotionally attached to this organization.
I feel like part of this family at my organization.
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now.
I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.
One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
I feel an obligation to remain with my current employer.
Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.
I would feel guilty if I left my organization now.
This organization deserves my loyalty.
I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.
I owe a great deal to my organization.

Measure of Organizational Attachment Styles, Including Anxious and Avoidant

(Feeney et al., 2020)

I'm afraid of losing the "affection" and goodwill that my organization shows me.
I often worry that my organization will not want me to remain as a member.
I often worry that my organization doesn't care for me.
I worry that my organization might want to replace me for someone else.
I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my organization.
I prefer not to be too close to my organization.
I rarely turn to my organization in times of need.

Measure of Social Undermining

(Duffy et al., 2002)

How often have others in your work environment:
Hurt your feelings
Put you down when you questioned work procedures
Undermined your effort to be successful on the job
Let you know that they did not like something about you
Talked bad about you behind your back
Insulted you

Belittled you or your ideas
Spread rumours about you
Made you feel incompetent
Talked down to you
Gave you the silent treatment
Delayed work to make you look bad
Did not defend you when people spoke poorly of you

Appendix B: Study 2—Manipulation Materials

In the high leader mistreatment condition, the leader's message was the following:

I have just reviewed your work. It seems clear to me that you didn't understand the task. How can someone do so poorly on such an easy task? Your answers were stupid. Nobody else in your group did as bad. Let's try it again and see if you can show more creativity. Group leader Alex.

In the low leader mistreatment condition, the leader's message was the following:

I have reviewed your work. I'm afraid your performance was less than I expected. But I think it takes practice to do well with this type of task. Let's try again and see if you can do better this time. Good luck! Group leader Alex.

The materials used to prime attachment security were as follows:

For the following questions, you will need to think about someone you know. This would be someone whom you care about and have found it easy to connect with. Someone who

1. you feel very comfortable getting close to
2. you can depend on them completely and they can depend on you
3. you know they won't abandon you under any circumstances
4. you always feel relaxed around them

The attachment-anxiety prime included the same instructions, with the addition of the following:

1. You constantly worry that they won't like or love you.
2. You constantly worry that they won't want to share their feelings with you.
3. You constantly worry that you might scare them off if you get too close.
4. You constantly worry that the relationship won't last.

The attachment-avoidance prime was follows:

1. Even though you care about this person, you prefer to be independent and self-sufficient.
2. Even though you care about this person, you prefer to keep your distance.
3. You feel a little unsure about this person and can't trust them completely.
4. You prefer to keep your feelings to yourself in this relationship.

Appendix C: Study 2—Pilot Study Results

Pilot Study Results

Prior to running the study, I conducted pilot tests to ensure that leader mistreatment and attachment state manipulations were perceived as intended, five in total. In the pilot test that contained the finalized manipulation materials, the sample included 59 participants recruited via Amazon TurkPrime Panel. As shown in the paper, the participants were first randomly assigned to one of the three attachment state conditions and then to one of the leader mistreatment conditions through written leader feedback. After going through each manipulation, respondents answered manipulation check questions measuring their state-like attachment orientations (i.e., secure; anxious; avoidant) and perceptions of leader mistreatment (i.e., high; low), respectively.

Results from one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate good efficacy of these manipulation materials. Participants in the high leader mistreatment condition felt more mistreated ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.28$) compared to participants in the low leader mistreatment condition ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.62$; $t[1, 57] = 9.17$, $p < .001$). As to the three attachment state manipulations, between-condition contrasts also show good results: participants in the attachment-secure condition felt more secure ($M = 6.45$, $SD = .71$) compared with participants in the attachment-anxious condition ($M = 5.31$ $SD = 1.71$; $t[1, 56] = 2.72$, $p < .01$) or the attachment-avoidant condition ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.39$; $t[1, 56] = 4.83$, $p < .001$). Participants in the attachment-anxious condition felt more anxious ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.68$) compared with participants in the attachment-secure condition ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.79$; $t[1, 56] = 3.35$ $p < .001$) or the attachment-avoidant condition ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.40$; $t[1, 56] = 2.73$, $p < .01$). Participants in the attachment-avoidant condition felt more avoidant ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.37$) compared with participants in the attachment-secure condition ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.54$; $t[1, 56] = 4.19$, $p < .001$) or the attachment-anxious condition ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.47$; $t[1, 56] = 3.72$, $p < .001$). Additionally, I also tested whether there was an interference between the two sets of manipulations in the study—that is, whether participants' responses to leader mistreatment manipulation were influenced by the attachment state manipulation, which happened prior to the mistreatment manipulation. To do so, I performed a two-way ANOVA, in which an interaction between the two sets of manipulations was accounted for to explain the variation in participants' leader mistreatment perception (i.e., scales based on relevant manipulation check questions). The results show that leader mistreatment manipulation was still effective ($F[1, 58] = 83.39$, $p < .001$), and the interaction had no significant effect ($F[2, 58] = 1.42$, *ns*).

Appendix D: Study 3

Measure of Organizational Attachment Styles, Including Anxious and Avoidant
(Feeney et al., 2020)
I'm afraid of losing the "affection" and goodwill that my organization shows me.
I often worry that my organization will not want me to remain as a member.
I often worry that my organization doesn't care for me.
I worry that my organization might want to replace me for someone else.
I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my organization.
I prefer not to be too close to my organization.
I rarely turn to my organization in times of need.

Measure of Organizational Trust
(Cummings & Bromiley, 1996)
My employer is open and up-front with me.
I fully trust my employer.
I believe my employer has high integrity.
In general, I believe my employer's motives and intentions are good.
My employer is always honest and truthful.
I can expect my employer to treat me in a consistent and predictable fashion.

Measure of Perceived Organizational Support
(Eisenberger et al., 1986)
My organization cares about my opinions.
My organization really cares about my well-being.
My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
Help is available from my organization when I have problem.
My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
If given the opportunity, my organization would not take advantage of me.
My organization shows that it is concerned about me.
My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.