

I Feels so Attached: Influence of Attachment Orientations on Leader Perception, Transfer and Prototypicality

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This dissertation discusses the mutual influence between leaders and followers on perception, emotion and behavior, using an attachment theory perspective. Some individuals are more likely to be seen as leaders than others. On the one hand this is determined by the characteristics or attributes as well as skills of the person in question. However, on the other hand, followers' perception and expectations play a big role as well, in particular which expectations of an ideal leader can be fulfilled by followers' current leader.

Although attachment theory and – styles have only recently entered the organizational psychology literature, this dissertation advances that literature by looking at the role of attachment orientations between leaders and followers. In doing so, this dissertation answers several recent research calls on this topic.

The three main subsequent chapters discuss the predictive role of attachment orientations with regard to leader preferences, the transference of behavioural expectations from one leader to another, and the perception of leader prototypicality in groups.

The first chapter discusses the connection between implicit leader preferences and attachment orientations as predictors. Results show that avoidant attached individuals prefer a more autonomous and independent leadership style, whereas anxious attached individuals prefer a supportive and team-oriented leadership style.

In the second chapter I study the transference of behavioural expectations from one leader to another. Results show that avoidant attached individuals are more likely to engage in this transference process. In addition, I discuss and empirically test the influence of culture with regard to leader transference.

In the final chapter, I examine the behavioural influence of attachment orientations on how likely someone is perceived to be a leader in groups. Based on 57 project groups, I find that team members actually perceive avoidant attached individuals to be the most leader-like. Put differently, given certain environmental conditions, insecure attachment orientations can be perceived as leaders. These results show that it is even more important that leaders somewhat adapt to their followers' preferences and not commit to merely one particular leadership style.