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# Yearnings: Stories of Insecure Attachment and the Journey to Connect to God

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY  
School of Science and Technology  
in conjunction with the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies

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Yearnings: Stories of Insecure Attachment and the Journey to Connect to God

by

John Bracy

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A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Marriage and Family Therapy


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June 2011


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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this dissertation in his/her opinion is adequate, in the scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Yearnings: Stories of Insecure Attachment and the Journey to Connect to God

by

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Loma Linda University, June 2011  
Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, Chairperson

Utilizing grounded theory and the semi-structured interviews of 25 participants, this study sought to understand how an insecure attachment affects one's relationship with God. Participants' stories suggested that: 1) one's struggle to connect with God was a part of their struggle to connect with others; 2) that experiencing others as safe and responsive contributed to building a more secure attachment with God; and 3) that attachment is less a fixed style and more of an ongoing process: defined as gradual changes made by the participants towards the set-goal of feeling safe and secure. Four major processes were identified: 1) finding what works; 2) a safe community; 3) significant time and energy given to creating secure relationships; and 4) being able to distinguish feelings about God and critical parent. Participants' stories appeared to suggest that a safe community may facilitate a more secure attachment to God and others and provide a potential means of affect regulation during times of distress. Community is suggested to mediate affective responses of participants during times of distress by: 1) providing a bridging function between insecure participants and God through helping participants feel safer and more secure as they seek a closer relationship with God; 2) soothing participants' fears as they begin to experience intimacy; and 3) helping to create new safe images of God. Implications for clinical practice included suggestions for: 1)

incorporating attachment or relational language to help bridge the gap between client-therapist religious background differences while tapping into the strengths and resources of a client's religious beliefs and heritage; 2) utilizing small groups within a client's faith community as another potential solution for developing healthy relationships and personal resources; and 3) helping clients create a positive image of God through experiencing others as caring and responsive as a therapeutic intervention in developing a more secure attachment. Limitations and directions for future research were also discussed.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will utilize a qualitative research method to understand the experiences of individuals who demonstrate a longing for a personal connection with God, or in what might be termed a supernatural being, but may feel that He is distant and unapproachable (avoidant attachment) or inconsistent in His responsiveness toward them (anxious – ambivalent). The premise of this research is that rather than being a religious or spiritual problem, this struggle may represent a larger issue which John Bowlby (1969) referred to as one’s internal working model (IWM) or cognitive map. Internal working models are said to act as a mediator of one’s attachment related experience and from which one’s attachment security is developed in response to the perceived availability and responsiveness of one’s childhood caregivers.

### **Background**

#### *Personal Note*

I have been a pastor for over twenty-eight years in an evangelical Christian denomination. Becoming a marriage and family therapist has helped me bridge the gap between working with individuals’ spiritual, family, and life issues. One observation that I have made repeatedly in the ministry is that there are individuals that profess to have a love for God, desire to be close to Him, and follow generally accepted spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, reading the Bible, worship, etc.) yet feel that God is distant, have trouble feeling emotionally connected to Him, or feel that God is not available or responsive to them. After reading Bowlby’s (1969) assertion that individuals are hard

wired for relationships – that in each person there is a longing and desire to be bonded or *attached* to another – first to their caregiver(s) and then to their romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) – it made sense to me that this same longing for connection or *attachment* exists in the individual for the Divine. Similarly, the same struggles inherent with insecure – anxious avoidant – anxious ambivalent attachment histories that individuals experience throughout their lifespan can and are experienced in their relationships with God (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

A further concept has shaped my interest for this research. First suggested in an unpublished class project on diabetes and attachment, was the evidence that an individual with an insecure attachment may, over time, develop a more secure attachment to another (such as could take place in long-term relationships). Later I found similar suggestions in the attachment and God literature (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; TenElshof and Furrow, 2000). I am intrigued by the possibility of whether an individual with an insecure attachment history may find a secure relationship with God through developing secure relationships with another or conversely whether a secure relationship with God may help build secure attachment bonds with another. Some parallel research suggests that a secure relationship with God may, overtime, moderate the effect of low self-esteem, or the “model of self” (Reinert, 2005), but would this also work on the model of the other?

### **Attachment and Marriage and Family Therapy**

About the same time that Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) and Hazen and Shaver’s (1987) seminal work in romantic adult attachment began, Marriage and Family



Therapy (MFT) slowly began to investigate and integrate attachment related concepts into clinical practice. Some of the earliest attempts to integrate attachment with family systems (Dickman & Prieto, 1987; Heard, 1982; Kane, 1989), parent-child relationships (Isabella & Belsky, 1985; Thompson & Walker, 1984; White, Brinkerhoff, & Booth, 1985), and marital relationships (Greenberg & Johnson, 1986; Israelstam, 1989; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985, 1988; Johnson, 1986) occurred at this time. Today attachment theory is fully integrated with MFT and found to be effective in mediating the effects of an insecure attachment and help partners and family members overcome past trauma (Johnson, 2002, 2003, 2004), chronic illness (Cloutier, Manion, Walker, & Johnson, 2002; Kowal, Johnson, & Lee, 2003), depression (Dessaulles, Johnson, & Denton, 2003), Bulimia (Johnson, Maddeaux, & Blouin, 1998), adult mental health problems (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, (1998) and much more. This research on attachment-based family therapy interventions supports the premise of this dissertation that while attachment may be consistent throughout one's life span (Hazan and Shaver, 1990), insecure or anxious attachment histories may be mediated through the development of close bonds through significant relationships.

### **Research Question**

Attachment and God research has been confined largely to self-report measures from either sociological or psychology of religion perspectives. The proposed research will study attachment to God from a relational perspective that draws on the lived experience of the participants in the context of their ongoing relationship with God. The

method of data analysis for this research will follow a qualitative grounded theory paradigm consistent with Corbin and Strauss (2008).

Research Question: What are the attachment experiences of individuals who have a past insecure attachment from his or her family of origin and who have sought to find a secure relationship with God?

The background of this research question is situated in the attachment and God literature and the debate referencing how a person's attachment security / insecurity in relationship with God either corresponds to (including revised correspondence theory – less attachment oriented and more socially influenced) or compensates for their attachment to their caregiver(s) (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 2005a; Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2001; McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005). Correspondence theory suggests that those with an insecure attachment history will respond to all relationships either romantic or towards God according to their Internal Working Model (IWM) (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). IWM's are said to act as a mediator of one's attachment related experience, consist of over-generalizations, and should be interrelated to other substitute attachment figures (Kirkpatrick, 2005b). Compensation theory suggests that God and religion may function in a compensatory role for individuals with avoidant attachment histories (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). That is, a relationship with God was found to compensate for insecure attachment history.

### **Suggested Gap in the Literature**

While the correspondence and compensation theories suggest how one's attachment history influences beginning a relationship with God, they fall short of

explaining the attachment experiences of the individual as they continue their relationship with God. Utilizing grounded theory and the semi-structured interviews this study will seek to explore the journey of participants with an insecure attachment history and how they seek to have a more secure attachment with God. To date there is only one other qualitative research study that considers the ongoing attachment relationship between God and the individual (Eun Sim (2006).

### **Placing the Focus on Attachment**

Although research on attachment and God can be considered to be related to research on spirituality, this research focuses on the relational aspect of how an individual connects with God as a caregiver or a substitute attachment figure and the influences of one's attachment security as well as how an individual views such a connection.

Therefore research on spirituality is not included. A further area of related research is the field of object relations theory. Though some studies in attachment and God research hold to an object relations perspective, the majority of attachment and God research views one's IWM to represent cognitive (Bowlby, 1969) rather than psychodynamic processes. There is also an issue of whether object relations theory and attachment and God theory are compatible and is a subject of debate (Granqvist, 2006b, 2006c; Luyten & Corveleyn, 2007; Rizzuto, 2006). Therefore object relations theory is not included in this research.

### **Contributions to the Field**

The proposed research would contribute to current marriage and family research,

literature, and clinical practice by providing an understanding of an individual's experience who reports struggling with their relationship with God in areas of loss, fear, insecurity, anger, and/or ambivalence vis-à-vis an attachment framework. An attachment and God perspective can provide family therapists a means to identify, understand, and integrate the *relational experience* of a client's relationship with God in terms that are consistent with relational therapy. The incorporation of attachment language opens a new avenue of identifying with a client's religious beliefs when dealing with spiritual issues in therapy, allowing the family therapist to draw upon the strengths and values of their clients.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To understand attachment and its association to an individual's relationship with God, it is helpful to understand that it does not exist apart as its own theory but is situated within attachment theory and shares both theoretical and research findings related to both attachment theory and adult attachment theory. Therefore it is important to understand the foundational principles of attachment first proposed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and Ainsworth (1963, 1967; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Attachment began as an attempt to explain in systemic and behavioral terms the emotional bond between a child and their parents/caregiver. Five decades later, attachment theory evolved into a comprehensive model that explains an individual's need and longing for secure relationships. Adding to this theoretical framework and as a natural outgrowth of attachment research is the exploration of the effect of childhood attachment on one's adult romantic relationships and the ability to create affectional bonds, referred to as adult attachment theory.

#### **Attachment**

##### *John Bowlby and Attachment*

John Bowlby (1907-1990), an analytical psychiatrist, found that Freudian theories of early childhood as well as theories of object relations did not 'fit the facts' associated with childhood pathological behavior related to separation from their caregiver. Although some of Bowlby's language (e.g., instinct, inner working model, drives, goal-object) is reminiscent to psychoanalytic psychology and object relations theory in particular,

nevertheless, Bowlby sought to make attachment theory purposefully and foremost an ethological / behavioral science that could be explained by empirical observation (Bowlby, 1969). Appropriately his research occurred at a time where there was a lack of research on the development of self-awareness, emotions, and a child's intentional communication through gestures and language (Bretherton, 1987).

Attachment theory was formulated in an attempt to understand why children separated from their caregiver during the early years of childhood resulted in acute distress and adversely affected the child's personality development (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980). This caregiver, referred to as mother figure by Bowlby and Ainsworth, represents the person who has been the child's principle caregiver / attachment figure, and could be the child's mother, father, or other significant person. Other researchers during the same period (Bender & Yarnell, 1941; Burlingham & Freud, 1942, 1944; Goldfarb 1943; Levy, 1937; Spitz, 1945, 1946) as well as two films, *A Peril in Infancy* (Spitz, 1947) and *A Two-Year-Old Goes to Hospital* (Robertson, 1953) were noting the same adverse consequences of prolonged separation from the child's caregiver.

### ***Protest, Despair, and Detachment: Coping with Loss***

Bowlby (1969), in conjunction with research by James Robertson observed that young children who had until that time demonstrated a secure relationship with their caregiver began to exhibit a predictable pattern of behavior – *protest, despair, and detachment* – when removed from their caregiver and familiar surroundings, and then placed in the care of unfamiliar persons and surroundings of a hospital. The first phase began with the child's *protest*, where the child demonstrated distress while seeking to

reconnect with his caregiver through crying and physical agitation, while eagerly and expectantly looking about for his mother's return. This behavior suggested that the young child expected his mother to return. In phase two, *despair*, the child's behavior became inactive and more withdrawn, evidencing increased hopelessness and appeared to be in a state of mourning. In the final phase, *detachment*, the child begins to develop relationships with his nurses and exploring his surroundings. However when the child's caregiver returns, the child turns away and responds with apathy, demonstrating a complete lack of the previous signs of attachment towards her. If separation or absence of the child's attachment figure, physically or emotionally continued, Bowlby propose that such separation would lead to fear, anger, pathological anxiety, and depression (1980) over the child's lifespan (1973).

Ainsworth (1985b) later emphasizes distress upon inexplicable separation or loss from one's caregiver or attachment figure as one of the essential characteristics of identifying a true attachment to someone other than one's caregiver. Kirkpatrick (1999) and Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) recognize that such distress is vital in identifying a true attachment to God. Birgegard and Granqvist (2004) noted that individuals increase their desire to be close to God when sublimely exposed to threat of separation. Religious behaviors such as prayer, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), going to church, and worship styles that include uplifted hands are seen as parallels to how children signal, communicate and/or try to maintain proximity and receive comfort from God, especially in times of distress (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

### *Ethological – Behavioral Systems Explanation of Attachment*

To explain the mother/child bond, Bowlby (1969) incorporated ethology, biology and control systems theory which provides the basic principles that underlie what he believed to be an adaptive, goal directed behavior on the part of the child. From this prospective, attachment behavior is seen as being organized around the idea that proximity to his caregiver, who provides a sense of security or a secure base (Bowlby, 1973), is the set-goal of the child. From an ethological perspective – a branch of zoology, focuses on innate behaviors that are held to be a product of evolution – this behavior occurs within the content of the child’s environment and is postulated as being instinctive to facilitate survival advantage on part of the child and is regulated by a set of behavioral systems, sometimes referred to as cybernetic systems and are situated in the child’s central nervous system. While Bowlby emphasized the concept of behavioral systems, when used in relationship with attachment processes, they are more often referred to as the individual’s attachment system.

It is this concept that attachment is a part of a behavioral system and is instinctive or hard wired (Bowlby, 1969), which have led researchers to understand that one’s attachment security, once developed is consistent over the individual’s life span (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) or as Bowlby suggests will remain active from the “cradle to the grave” (1977, p.203; 1979). That individuals innately long to be connected to significant others is part of the link of how attachment and God theorists explain one’s attachment to an unseen God. The second part of the link is the concept of a *substitute attachment figure* which Bowlby (1969) held that when the principle attachment figure was unavailable, a child will seek out – to obtain or maintain proximity to – a substitute attachment figure,



especially when troubled or anxious. Bowlby (1969) spoke of this behavior as a function of *ontogenesis* – innate behavioral systems influenced by one’s environment. Ainsworth (1989) saw this as a process of natural maturation as one moved from childhood and adolescence to adulthood. In attachment and God literature, God may function as this substitute attachment figure (Granqvist & Dickie, 2006; Ullman, 1989) or as Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) suggested, as “an exalted attachment figure” in an individual’s life (p. 908).

### *Inner Working Models*

The child, from birth to three years, develops a *cognitive map* of his environment, attachment figures, and of himself which Bowlby (1969) refines as *inner working models* or representational models. These IWMs seek to understand how the world around the child, including how the child’s caregiver and significant others can be expected to behave, how the child can be expected to behave and how each interacts with the other. It is within these initial working models that the child evaluates his circumstances, makes plans and explores his world.

Inner working models are representations a child forms based upon perceived responses of his caregiver to be available, accessible and responsive to his needs and becomes the foundation for future relationships with others as well as the means by which the child forecasts the likelihood of an individual providing security or being a secure base for them (Bowlby 1973, 1988). According to Bowlby (1973) there are two internal perspectives to this working model:

(a) Whether or not the attachment figure is judged to be the sort of person who in general responds to calls for support and protection; (b) whether or not the self is judged to be the sort of person towards whom anyone, and the attachment figure in particular, is likely to respond in a helpful way. (p. 203-204)

The latter refers to the child's image of his self and the former refers to the child's image of other people. Therefore a child that grows up in a critical environment unloved by his parents may not only feel unloved, but also that he is unlovable by anyone. Conversely, a child that grows up in a loving and responsive environment may not only feel loved, but also that all others will be loving towards him. While IWMs act as a mediator of attachment-related experience, they consist of over-generalizations which once developed, are so intertwined in the child's thinking that they are believed to be true throughout the child's lifespan. It is this idea that the individual develops a cognitive model of the self and other that leads to the formation of what is now understood as one's attachment style (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and how one responds, securely or insecurely in their romantic relationships and towards God.

### *Mary Ainsworth and Attachment Theory*

According to Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991), the development of attachment theory grew out of the partnership between the two researchers. Bretherton (1992) attributes the innovative research methodology of Ainsworth, which allowed for the empirical testing of some of Bowlby's ideas, to expand as well as develop new directions in attachment theory. According to Bretherton (1992), Ainsworth's major contributions to attachment theory include the attachment figure as a child's *secure base* in which he is able to explore his world, the concept of *maternal sensitivity* (Ainsworth, 1969; Bell &

Ainsworth, 1972) to a child's signals and the role it plays in the development of the infant-caregiver attachment process, and as a significant theoretical contributor to Bowlby's presentation of the ontogeny of human attachment. This maternal sensitivity or responsiveness and its role in the development of secure attachment is significant to this research's concept of a reciprocal relationship between the individual and God. If the individual cries out, does God respond? How and in what ways does he respond?

Ainsworth conducted two significant longitudinal and naturalistic research projects which had a major impact on the development of attachment theory. The first was her research with infants and their mothers in Uganda (Ainsworth, 1963; Ainsworth, 1967). It was during this research that Ainsworth began noticing that the children were using their mother as a secure base to explore their world. In attachment to God literature Kirkpatrick (1992; Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2008) argues that God may provide a secure base as well as a haven of safety, consistent with Ainsworth (1985b, 1989) and remains a significant feature of attachment and God literature.

The second significant longitudinal research project (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) allowed for more intensive research than what she was able to accomplish in Uganda (Ainsworth, 1985a) and led to the development of a semi-structured laboratory procedure referred to as the Strange Situation from which the theoretical concepts of one's attachment patterns or attachment style as being secure, anxious/avoidant, and anxious/resistant or anxious ambivalent were developed. These three styles are the most commonly used in attachment and God literature, although a four part adult attachment pattern – secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful – was suggested by Bartholomew (1990) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) based upon Ainsworth et al. (1978) and

Main et al. (1985) Adult attachment Interview which suggested a disorganized-disoriented attachment style.

### **Adult Attachment**

Moving from the foundation of childhood attachment and the corresponding IWMs of the individual developed in childhood, attachment research embarked on an exploration of the effect of childhood attachment on one's adult life. Bowlby (1977) held that childhood attachment continued on into adulthood and affected the individual's "capacity to make affectional bonds" (p. 206). Ainsworth (1985b, 1989) held to the possibility that relationships beyond childhood with peers, siblings, significant kin and one's romantic partners could develop into an attachment relationship which she similarly described as affectional bonds. She held that these affectional bonds tend to be enduring relationships to a significant partner with a desire to maintain closeness and proximity; with corresponding distress upon unresolved separation and relief from distress when reunited; as well as the desire to seek out closeness with one's partner that results in a feeling of security (1985b, 1989).

Attachment and God research is indebted to adult attachment theory in that through adult attachment research the individual has been shown to establish adult attachments with others who are not one's caregivers; that these adult attachments are consistent with one's childhood attachments; and that initial attachment and God research utilized or adapted adult attachment research instruments. Kirkpatrick (1999) argues that attachment bonds between and individual and God are more like the individuals attachment to their caregiver, whereas adult attachment is more an outgrowth of

affectional bonds. A further reason that adult attachment is presented in this framework is an underlying question that is a significant part of this study, “In what way(s) might present relationships contribute to the individual’s secure or insecure relationship with God?”

### *Beginnings of Adult Attachment Research*

Two seminal works specifically set adult attachment apart from childhood attachment. The first work was the development of the adult attachment interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1998). The AAI is a semi-structured interview that asks adults to describe and reflect on past, rather than present attachment relationships. The significant difference between the AAI and the Strange Situation is that the AAI focuses on the coded verbal responses of the participants rather than their behavior. By focusing the level of analysis on the participant’s verbal responses Main, et al. (1985) transformed the study of attachment from behavioral observation to the analysis of cognitive structures of the participant’s IWM.

About the same time that Main, et al. (1985) were completing their research, Hazan and Shaver (1987) took a totally different perspective on adult attachment conceptualizing romantic love as an attachment process from a social psychology perspective. Hazan and Shaver (1987) research consisted of two studies utilizing self-report style questionnaires developed around an adult attachment scale. Their results suggested three significant outcomes. First, the prevalence of the three attachment styles – secure, anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant – by Ainsworth et al. (1978), are

approximately the same in adulthood as in infancy. Second, the three attachment styles in adults differed predictably in romantic relationships. Finally, that an individual's attachment style relates to the individual's internal model of self, social relationships and with parents.

Attachment and God research predominantly chose to follow the self-report model of Hazen and Shaver (1987) rather than the AAI model of Main et al. (1985). This may reflect both the influence of Kirkpatrick and his work with Shaver (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, 1992), and early attempts to combine an attachment and God framework to an adult attachment model, as well as the difficulty in utilizing the AAI. However, there has been a recent movement to incorporate the AAI model with attachment and God research (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008).

### *Trait versus State*

A significant issue in attachment research which sets adult attachment apart from childhood attachment is the trait versus state debate, often discussed in terms of individual differences (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990). The question at hand is whether what is being measured in Adult attachment via research reflects an enduring trait-like characteristic of attachment (secure – anxious) (Roisman, Holland, Fortuna, Fraley, Clausell, & Clarke, 2007), or reflects participants' current or recent relationship experiences (Fenny, Cassidy, & Shaver, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). At the heart of this debate is the stability of one's attachment security over the lifespan (Hazan & Shaver, 1994, 2004). In attachment to God literature, the emphasis is

on the enduring characteristics of the individual's attachment style (Beck & McDonald, 2004; de Roos, 2006; Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Granqvist, Ljungdahl, & Dickie, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2005b; Kirkpatrick & Shaver 1990; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Nevertheless, several researchers have suggested that one's current relationship(s) may have a significant effect on one's attachment with God (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; TenElshof & Furrow, 2000).

### *Methodology in Adult Attachment Research*

Hazan and Shaver's (1987) initial research utilized a simple questionnaire format following the three part childhood attachment styles defined by Ainsworth et al. (1978). Their results were roughly consistent to what was believed as the prevailing division – secure 62%, avoidant 23%, and anxious/ambivalent 15% – of attachment styles among young children (Campos, Barrett, Lamb, Goldsmith, and Stenberg, 1983). The use of the questionnaire format and the three part division of attachment continued to be a tradition in adult attachment research. However, researchers began to vary in the way they conceptualized attachment dimensions.

Collins and Read's (1990) adult attachment scale (AAS), utilized Hazan and Shaver's (1987) attachment style measure to emphasize the dimensions of 1) closeness; 2) whether one feels he or she can depend on another; and 3) whether one is fearful or anxious about being abandoned or unloved. They referred to these attachment schemas as a way of forming cognitions which in turn form positive or negative attributions which one makes about another's potential behavior toward them – i.e., can this person be trusted, will they hurt me?

Bartholomew (1990) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) noted that previous research on adult attachment focused on how one felt about the other; they held there was an implication about how the individual felt about his/her self, consistent with the two dimensions of one's internal model proposed by Bowlby (1973). To support this assertion, Bartholomew and Horowitz developed a four-part categorical model – relationship questionnaire (RQ) – to investigate the effect of how one felt about ones' self interacted with how one felt about the other. Their model was built on the two dimensions of interaction – self and other – following the traditional three-part categorical attachment styles, adding the concepts of dependence: self-autonomy verses neediness – and avoidance: whether one embraced or rejected intimacy. They retained the concept of a secure attachment style: individuals who are comfortable with intimacy and comfortable with self-autonomy. Anxious-ambivalent attachment was renamed as preoccupied: one high in dependence, low in avoidance of relationships – individuals who do not feel good about themselves, who tend to over worry that the other may reject them, and therefore, seek to please the other. Avoidant attachment was divided into two categories. The first, dismissing: individuals who dismiss the need for intimacy and dependence on another; they feel good about themselves, but are unwilling to invest in close relationships. The second, fearful: individuals who are fearful of intimacy and therefore socially avoidant; they do not see themselves as worthy of another's love or affection and are fearful of intimate relationships and seek to avoid them.

The results of their research gave support to conceptualizing attachment across the dimensions of self and other as well as expanding the three attachment style model to four, suggesting an alternative view of how attachment theory can provide insight into



interactions in relationship with significant others. Later analyses suggest that the three group and four group categorical measures demonstrate a statistically significant relationship to each other (Brennan, Shaver, & Tobey, 1991; Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) and that the model of self and of other attachment scales have been found to be valid across 62 cultures (Schmitt, et al., 2004).

As adult attachment research continued to develop, so did the development of research instruments in the attempt to discover more meaningful results and greater internal and external validity. Narrative instruments such as the AAI, the current relationship interview (CRI) (Crowell & Owens, 1996) have demonstrated a rich level of detail; however, many researchers find the interview model impractical for large scale research (Brennan, Clark, Shaver, Simpson, & Rholes 1998). A plethora of self-report measures have been developed; a partial list includes: the inventory of parent and peer attachment (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), Levy and Davis's (1988) comparison of love styles and attachment styles, the AAS (Collins 1996; Collins & Read, 1990), the attachment history questionnaire (AHQ) (Pottharst, 1990), the adult attachment questionnaire (AAQ) (Hazen & Shaver, 1990), the attachment style measure (Simpson, 1990), the RQ (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), the relationship styles questionnaire (RSQ) (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), the measure of attachment qualities (MAQ) (Carver, 1997), and the attachment style scales (ASS) Becker & Billings (1997).

However, it was Brennan, Clark, Shaver, Simpson, and Rholes' (1998) meta-analysis of current research which suggested that two dimensions – Avoidance (of intimacy, dependency and discomfort with closeness) and Anxiety (fear of abandonment and rejection) – underlie “virtually all self-report adult attachment measures and appear

crucial for capturing important individual differences” (p. 67). These are seen as consistent to the two-dimensional space in which Ainsworth et al. (1978) three attachment types were originally conceptualized.

Using the results of their Meta-analysis of attachment research, Brennan et al. (1998) developed a 36-item self-report measure – experiences in close relationships (ECR). One of the significant outcomes of the ECR was that it set a new direction of moving away from a “categorical” or “typology” model of attachment to one that is built upon a continuum. The generally recognized limitation of the categorical model is the assumption that variation between individuals within a particular category either does not exist or is not significant (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999). By rating responses on a continuum within one of four romantic categories, Brennan et al. (1998) held that this classification procedure produces stronger results than Bartholomew’s (1990) original categorical model. A revised version of the ECR, ECR-R, also a 36-item self-report measure, was developed by Fraley, Waller, & Brennan (2000) utilizing item response theory (IRT).

Attachment and God research use of research instruments appears to follow the same pattern of adult attachment research. There is a consistent pattern of utilizing the three-part attachment style format of Ainsworth et al. (1978) in self-report instruments, apart from a few exceptions of using the four-part attachment model (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004; Eurelings-Bontekoe, Kirkpatrick, L. A. 1998; Steeg & Verschuur, 2005). Further, attachment and God research made consistent use of the categorical oriented self-report research instruments and then later recognized the need to utilize instruments built on a continuum to demonstrate individual differences (Granqvist,

1998, 2005; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000, 2001; Sim and Loh, 2003). Influenced by the research of Brennan et al. (1998) and Fraley et al. (2000), research in attachment and God began to gravitate to the two dimensional model of avoidance and anxiety (Beck, 2006a; Beck & McDonald, 2004; Byrd & Boe, 2001; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

To understand attachment and God research and its association to an individual's relationship with God, it is helpful to conceptualize attachment and God theory as nested within attachment history which includes the theories of attachment and adult attachment with which it shares both theoretical conceptualization and research findings. Attachment theory has provided a comprehensive model that explains an individual's need and longing for secure relationships. Adult attachment theory has demonstrated the effect of childhood attachment on one's adult romantic relationships as well as the ability and longing to create affectional bonds with someone other than one's initial caregivers. Attachment and God research and theory extends previous attachment theory by demonstrating how relational bonds may be extended beyond one's caregivers and adult romantic relationships to an unseen God with whom they seek meaning and connection. This process and theoretical development is examined in the preceding chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter considers ongoing research on how attachment bonds relate to one's relationship with God or in what might be termed a supernatural being. A Western concept of God will be examined rather than that of Eastern religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism, because of the Western view of the centrality of God as an "other" that is seen as responsive and relational (Miner, 2007). However, it is recognized that there are many belief systems in a variety of gods, deities, or supernatural beings that may function in a capacity of an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1994). In this chapter, where God is referred to, it should be understood that another deity or supernatural being could be supplemented that fulfills an attachment role in the life of an individual.

Monotheistic religions and specifically Christianity, hold to the belief that an individual can have a personal relationship with God and that the relationship is vital, responsive, and interactive. Kirkpatrick (2005a) states, "The religious person proceeds from faith that God (or another figure) will be available ... [and] to approach the problems and difficulties of life with confidence" (p.52). This faith in a personal God has been found to be pervasive throughout the United States. Religious surveys consistently demonstrate statistical significance related to a belief in God. A recent Baylor Religion Survey administered and collected by the Gallup organization (Froese & Bader, 2007) found that 69.4% of those surveyed have no doubts that God exists; however, belief in God increases to 95.7% when some doubt is allowed. This is similar to a national Gallup poll where 78% of respondents said they believed in God while 54% said religion is very important to their life, followed by 26% who said religion is fairly important to their life

(Gallup, 2008). Nevertheless, a relational bond with God, especially if it holds the characteristics of an attachment bond is more than just believing in the existence of a deity, higher power or supernatural being. Bowlby (1977) held that one of the core attachment behaviors was that individuals will seek to attain or retain proximity to a significant attachment figure.

### **God as a Substitute Attachment Figure**

While much attention has been given to adult romantic attachments, Washburn (1982) suggests that an individual might also experience an attachment to God as a caregiver that is “God-targeted and God-specific” (p.3). Kirkpatrick (1999) argues that attachment bonds between an individual and God are actually more straightforward, fit the attachment model more accurately – in situations where human attachments are perceived as unavailable or inadequate (Kirkpatrick 2005c) – and “more neatly” and in a more “pure form” (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1995) than romantic or affectional bonds. Noller likewise is in agreement with Kirkpatrick that attachment between “God and His people” is potentially “more similar” than in romantic relationships (1992, p. 30). Sim and Loh (2003) suggest that an attachment to God can be distinguished from one’s attachment to father and mother. While Beck and McDonald (2004) found that a relationship with God may be characterized as an attachment bond similar to other attachment bonds, Kirkpatrick (1992) argues that God may provide a secure base, a haven of safety, and comfort for believers. Granqvist and Dickie (2006) maintain that individuals with insecure attachment histories, because their experience has taught them that a secure attachment figure is unavailable to them, are in greater need of establishing a relationship

with a substitute attachment figure, in this case God, to help regulate their distress and obtain felt security. Or as Ullman held, this relationship touches on “the subjective experience of the self and allowing a new start” (Ullman, 1989, p. xvii). This stance is consistent with Ainsworth (1989) who holds that substitute or supplementary attachments are an outgrowth of natural maturation, specifically related to romantic affectional bonds, but are complicated by other behavior systems such as reproductive and care giving or the reciprocal nature of the relationship bond. Bowlby (1969) likewise held that when the principle attachment figure was unavailable, a child will seek out – to obtain or maintain proximity to – a substitute attachment figure, especially when troubled or anxious. This attachment figure may be inanimate (e.g., a child’s doll or blanket) and in adulthood the individual’s need for proximity as well as acting with proximity seeking behavior may take such forms which underlie, “many of our attachments to country, sovereign or church” (Bowlby, 1956, p. 588). To what extent this reference to church refers to God as a substituted attachment figure or a comforting institution may be open for interpretation. However, that individuals will seek out a significant substitute attachment figure, especially in times of distress is well documented (Bowlby, 1969).

Ainsworth (1985b, 1989) cites four criteria (Cassidy, 1999 cites Ainsworth as having five with a slightly different emphasis than listed here) for the formulation of an attachment bond or what she refers to as affectional bonds which she defines as “a relatively long-enduring tie in which the partner is important as a unique individual and is interchangeable with none other” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 711). The characteristics of this bond includes: 1) the desire to maintain closeness or proximity; 2) the experience of comfort and closeness, or a haven of safety; 3) a secure base from which the individual

feels secure to explore their world; and 4) distress upon inexplicable separation or loss (Ainsworth 1985b).

Kirkpatrick (1999) and Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) draw upon Ainsworth's (1985b) four criteria to demonstrate how individuals find and use God as a substitute attachment figure. They suggest that, "God is neither an exalted father figure nor an exalted mother figure, but rather an exalted attachment figure" (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008, p. 908; Kirkpatrick, 1992). Others (Kirkpatrick, Shillito, & Kellas, 1999) refer to God or Jesus as a "constant psychological source of companionship" (p.520) and/or seen as a person who is omnipresent, the loss of which, at times of crises of faith or feeling that God has abandoned them, may result in traumatic emotional turmoil and feelings of betrayal (Kirkpatrick, 2005a).

These attachment based concepts are reflected by Kaufman (1977) who provided one of the earliest references concerning one's attachment to God and suggests that while this attachment may be strong, because it is an attachment to an idea, which cannot be seen, it lacks the same concreteness as an attachment to a person who may be touched. Kirkpatrick (2005a) points out that "one cannot be physically proximal to God" (pp. 56-57). Nevertheless, Kaufman held that by its very nature, this concept of God cannot be separated from our attachments to other persons – that "the idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment-figure" (1977, p. 264). To Kaufman, God is the "protective caring parent" who is "always reliable and always available" in times of distress (1981, p.67).

## God as a Relational Figure

The suggestion from research is that religion has the ability to function as an attachment relationship (Kirkpatrick and Shaver, 1990) and that one's attachment style contributes to the security or insecurity of the relationship (Byrd & Boe, 2001; Kirkpatrick 1992). Much like Bowlby's dynamic equilibrium (1969), where the caregiver and child negotiate their boundaries through give and take interaction, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990, 1992) emphasize the active role of the individual in "constructing, maintaining, and negotiating" their attachment relationships rather than being passive observers (p. 319). Such is suggested by Birgegard and Granqvist (2004) who compared subliminal responses of individuals to God and participant's parents and found that individuals increase their desire to be close to God when sublimely exposed to threat of separation. While it may seem contradictory that God, as a substitute attachment figure, is both idea and person, research suggests that what may at first appear to be incongruous fits accurately the relational model of attachment as suggested by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and Ainsworth (1985, 1989). Studies of attachment and God typically draw upon religious behaviors such as prayer, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), going to church, worship styles that include uplifted hands, and turning to religion in times of distress, as evidence of attachment behavior of individuals seeking or expressing a relationship with God (Beck, 2006a; Beck & McDonald, 2004; Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004; Byrd & Boe, 2001; Granqvist, 2005; Granqvist & Dickie, 2006; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1998, 2001; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 1992a, 1995, 1999, 2005a; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; McDonald, et al., 2005; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick 2002). These religious behaviors are seen as parallels to how



children signal, communicate and/or try to maintain proximity and comfort to their attachment figure, especially in times of distress. The emphasis here, however, is relational: how one is seen trying to connect to a specific other or as Kirkpatrick (1995), states, “To be attached is to love and to feel loved” (p. 450). From a Western concept of God, God invites His people into relationship with Him. From the Old Testament God says, “Call to me and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3, NIV) and in the New Testament, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

Where Kaufman (1981) suggested that a relationship with God although unseen, lacking concreteness yet being an absolutely adequate attachment-figure, Ullman (1989) suggests that the bond developed between the individual and God maybe deeper and more meaningful. Ullman studied the religious conversion experience of forty religious converts seeking to understand the process of change which she initially considered to be a process of change in ideology. After examining the recurring themes of the accounts of these converts she discovered that their religious conversion was more like “falling in love” (Ullman, 1989, p. xvi). Using words such as “alliance” and “love affair” when referring to a participant’s response to God, Ullman writes that, “The typical convert was transformed not by a religion, but by a person [God]. The discovery of a new truth was indistinguishable from a discovery of a new relationship” (1989, p. xvi).

## **Correspondence, Compensation, and Revised Correspondence: Emerging Theories Concerning the Function of a Relationship with God**

Two major researchers in the field of attachment and God research dominate the majority of the theoretical development within the field; the first is Lee Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, 1992; Kirkpatrick, Shillito & Kellas, 1999) and the other is Pehr Granqvist (Granqvist, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Granqvist & Dickie, 2006; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000, 2001; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Granqvist, et al., 2007). Later, the two join together for several attachment and God projects (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2000, 2004, 2008). While other researchers have provided significant contributions to the field of Attachment and God, it is Kirkpatrick and Granqvist who have provided the theoretical underpinnings from which the rest of the research is built. This research will consider these researchers first to lay a foundation of the major attachment and God theories.

One of the earliest attempts to understand attachment to God, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990), used multiple existing sources that included secular – Hazen and Shaver's (1987) initial survey – as well as religious and childhood/parent attachment measures. Their results suggested that God and religion may function in a compensatory role (compensation hypothesis) for individuals who present with avoidant attachment histories (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). That is, a relationship with God was found to compensate for insecure (avoidant) maternal attachment history. Specifically, individuals with an avoidant attachment toward a mother who was non-religious tended to be more religious as adults; this included a higher rate of sudden religious conversion – regardless of either

parent's religiosity, suggesting that at times of extreme emotional stress, loss, or problems in their adult relationships, an individual with an insecure attachment will seek out a relationship with God. For those with an avoidant attachment history, 25% during adolescence and 44% at some time in their life, experienced sudden religious conversion. The results appear to contradict the IWM hypothesis, however Kirkpatrick and Shaver suggest it is possible that a contributing factor may be that the majority of respondents came from non-religious families (1990). No gender differences were noted.

Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) repeated their initial research; however, they added a new measure of attachment to God that was modeled after the original Shaver and Hazen (1987) parental attachment, measuring secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles – exchanging God's name for the parental figure. Their results suggested support for a mental models hypothesis – IWM – referred to as the correspondence hypothesis. Secure romantic relationships were found to be positively related to secure believers (76.5% of secure lovers report a secure relationship with God versus 59.3% of insecure lovers) and more likely to perceive God as loving, responsive and available. Adult attachment style was found to be strongly related to Attachment to God for only those with an insecure child attachment to their mothers. However, those with an insecure attachment history to either parent, who have recently developed a secure romantic attachment, demonstrated a strong God attachment. The researchers suggest the possibility that through their love interest, insecure participants have learned to trust and have experienced a change in their IWM (see also Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). Secure attachment was further related to greater life satisfaction and less anxiety, loneliness and depression, and physical illness. Researchers refer to religious beliefs as

mental models of God, suggesting that such a model could be the master mental model (p. 269).

Bowlby (1969) refers to cognitive maps which he refines as IWM or representational models. These IWM seek to understand how the world around the child, including how the child's caregiver and significant others can be expected to behave, how the child can be expected to behave and how each interacts with the other. It is within these IWMs that the child evaluates his circumstances, makes plans and explores his world; these IWMs are based upon the child's perceived responses of his caregiver to be available, accessible, and responsive to his needs and becomes the foundation for future relationships with others as well as the means by which the child forecasts the likelihood of an individual providing security or being a secure base for them (Bowlby 1973, 1988). While IWMs act as a mediator of attachment-related experience, they consist of over-generalizations which once developed, are so intertwined in the child's thinking that they are believed to be true throughout the child's lifespan. And while attachment behavior is suggested as remaining active from the cradle to the grave (1977, 1979); it is seen as a moderator of perceived outcomes rather than determining actual events. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) research provides continuing evidence that finding secure relationships with a romantic partner may moderate one's attachment style with God.

On a second follow up from the original sample of Shaver and Hazen's (1987) research participants, Kirkpatrick (1997) sent a seven item religious questionnaire to a much reduced pool of 146 women. The results suggest that between time one and two, approximately four years, woman with an avoidant or anxious attachment style were more likely than secure respondents to report a new relationship with God or in the case

of anxious respondents, to report having a religious experience or conversion. These results, suggests Kirkpatrick (1997), provide further support that a relationship with God provides a compensatory function for individuals with an insecure attachment style. Further, anxiously attached women appear to evidence more emotional, experiential orientation toward religion compared to participants with a secure or avoidant attachment history. Kirkpatrick suggests that this is a function of anxiously attached individuals who, fearing abandonment, have a greater desire for closeness and intimacy which others do not reciprocate. It is further possible that the compensating effect a relationship with God offers is particularly effective, because in their quest for closeness, God cannot be chased away (Kirkpatrick, 1997).

Granqvist (1998) sought to follow up on the Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) study, testing the connections between childhood attachment bonds and the individual's religiousness; investigating the hypothesized role that a relationship with God, corresponds to or compensates for one's relationships with each parent. While finding more support for the compensation hypothesis than the correspondence hypothesis, Granqvist (1998) found a suggestion that perhaps there are different pathways to religiousness, based upon one's childhood attachment. Specifically, that those with an insecure attachment style respond from an emotional ontogenesis, finding a compensation for past familial insecurity, while respondents with a secure attachment history may stem from social circumstances, corresponding to their parents religiousness (Granqvist, 1998, p. 363). However, there is also the question of whether what Granqvist (1998) is suggesting is being influenced by the limitations of a categorical view versus one built upon a continuum, excluding the significance of individual differences within

the category (Crowell, et al., 1999). In later research he moves from a categorical view to examining secure and insecure attachments on a continuum (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000, 2001; Granqvist, 2005).

Kirkpatrick (1998) continuing a longitudinal study of attachment to God (Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1992), sought to integrate Hazen and Shaver's (1992) three category model with Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four part categorical model, using attachment to predict religious change across time. Measures included items concerning one's relationship with God, beliefs about God, and images of God. Research results suggested a support for both the correspondence and compensation models depending upon time as a significant factor. Support for a correspondence model was found for participants with a positive model of the other and desire close intimate relationships. They tended to believe that such a relationship with God is possible and viewed God as loving and caring. Participants with a negative model of the other were inclined to see God as distant and unavailable. However, consistent with Kirkpatrick (1997), those with a negative model of self and a positive model of others anxious/ambivalent, preoccupied attachment styles – over a four year period, reported the highest rate of religious conversion, supporting a compensation model. Kirkpatrick (1998) suggests that these results lead to an understanding that attachment is dynamic; that at any given time mental models of self correspond with mental models of God; however, over time – the key here is longitudinal – the individual may find a compensatory relationship with God as a substitute attachment figure for what they have been lacking with others (see Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000, for further discussion on concurrent correspondence). Further, he argues that attachment to God occupies a place

in an individual's hierarchy of attachment figures (Collins & Read, 1994). Significant gender differences were noted; woman demonstrated greater closeness to God, whereas men saw God more distant

Granqvist and Hagekull (1999, 2000) challenged Kirkpatrick's (1998, 1999) suggestion for an integration of the correspondence and compensation models based upon the effect time and suggests a third model – revised correspondence – which takes into consideration the socialization process for individuals with a secure attachment style. That is, individuals with a secure attachment style will be more likely to adopt their parent's religious standards (revised correspondence – socialized to adopting parent's religion or lack of religion in a safe environment) and will experience religious change earlier in life and such changes will be more gradual. The researchers suggest that it is the emotionally safe environment (attachment theory) that allows for social learning (learning theory). However, insecure individuals will be more likely to use religious experience as a means of emotional regulation (emotional compensation – finding in God a substitute attachment figure for security and a safe haven) and at times of increased emotional turmoil leading to intense or sudden religious change.

Looking at how relationships affect loneliness and how a perceived relationship with God might predict decreased levels of loneliness, Kirkpatrick, Shillito, and Kellas (1999), found religiosity and gender to be contributing factors to decreased loneliness of the participants. From a population of college students, 184 subjects, 123 women and 61 men, Kirkpatrick et al.'s (1999) research suggests that increased religiosity predicted decreased loneliness for women, but not for men. They suggest the reasons for different

responses between genders may be associated to the differences in coping mechanism between men and women (i.e., men tend to view God in more instrumental terms).

In study that utilized 156 university students from Sweden, Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) expanded their research to include measures of emotionally based religiosity (compensation), parental socialization of religiosity (revised correspondence), religious change and sudden religious conversion. They report finding strong support for a revised correspondence model. Insecure-avoidance related to attachment history to both parents, especially low parental religious activity, was positively related to emotionally based religiosity. Regardless of parental religiosity, secure attachment to both parents was positively associated with socialized-based religiosity. Sudden religiousness was associated with avoidant attachment histories to both parents characterized by more intensity, suddenness, later onset and compensatory life themes. Conversely, secure attachment histories to both parents demonstrated a positive association to experiencing religious change gradually and with early onset. No gender differences were noted.

In their follow up research, Granqvist and Hagekull (2000) focused on an assumed need for single adults to experience felt security with God as compared to lovers, who were assumed to already possess close relationships, thus fulfilling their attachment needs. Moving from a categorical measure, they utilized continuous scales, with three levels (avoidant, security, ambivalence) of attachment. With emotionally based religiosity (compensation), three other scales were utilized: religious activity, relationship with God, and religious change. Their results suggest that single adults, compared to lovers were more religiously active; supporting a compensation model, in that single individuals find security in relationship with God providing a means of affect regulation.



Further, there was modest support for Kirkpatrick's (1998, 1999) concurrent correspondence hypothesis, though not at all levels of measurement, as well as support for a socialization correspondence hypothesis. Unexpectedly, there was another suggestion that relationship status may have affected previous research studies, causing them to underestimate the connection between attachment security and religiousness.

Continuing their research on the comparison of the revised correspondence and compensation models – what Granqvist refers to here as a two-level correspondence hypothesis and an emotional compensation hypothesis – Granqvist and Hagekull (2001) apply these models to individuals that seek security in the New Age movement, noting that Sweden has a higher secular population versus traditional Christianity, and a growing movement toward religions/organizations that may or may not have a personal Western concept of God. Looking at New Age as an individual difference variable, they sought to test whether the emotional compensation model was applicable to participants in this type of religion and the nature of spiritual change. Utilizing a subsample of adolescents for comparison, new age participants, in line with an emotional compensation hypothesis, were found to: exhibit perceived insecurity related to parental attachment, emotionally based religiosity, and significant spiritual change. Granqvist and Hagekull (2001) suggest that from an attachment perspective it is possible that an “insecure new ager, in need of felt security,” may move from one form of expression to another without reaching a place of stability or lasting benefits (p.559). A further, more significant, question is the issue of the potential for limited external validity of “emotional compensation and two-level correspondence predictions” (level one: IWMs – level two: social learning correspondence) associated to religious and spiritual changes outside of Protestant

Christianity (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001, p. 540). Later Granqvist and Dickie (2006) noted that such results are only significant if the attachment behavior (e.g. seeking felt security) of the participants is directed at some external supernatural figure. It is not conclusive that participants in the New Age study claimed to believe in such a supernatural figure.

One of the basic attachment and God perspectives is that individuals with an insecure attachment history turn to God or religion to help facilitate coping and regulate distress, especially in situations that activate one's attachment system. Granqvist (2005) explored whether and to what extent parental righteousness might moderate the association of insecure attachment, using God as a coping mechanism and if religious coping mediates between insecure attachment and compensation – suspected affect regulation ability. Results suggest that those with an insecure attachment style tended to involve God more in their coping – but demonstrate modest support for the compensation hypothesis. Conversely, when parents of an individual with an insecure attachment style demonstrated low parental religiosity, that individual was more likely to involve God in coping and less likely to exercise self-directed coping. No relationship was demonstrated for religious coping and high parental religiosity for secure individuals. Mediation effects and attachment history were non-significant.

Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2004) worked together on a meta-analysis from 11 cross-national questionnaire studies representing 1450 participants. Three hypotheses were tested: 1) those with sudden religious conversion would tend to have more insecure attachment histories than nonsudden converts and with those who experienced gradual religious change; 2) the religiosity of sudden religious conversions as compared to

nonsudden conversions would demonstrate more distress-regulation as a part of their IWMs, whereas nonsudden conversions would tend to demonstrate socialization of parent's religious values (socialized correspondence); 3) finally, they would test for possible gender differences.

Consistent with their predictions, sudden religious conversions tended to have more insecure attachment relationships with their parents/caregivers, although more modest with maternal than paternal relationships; and scored higher on emotional based religiosity than nonsudden converts. No gender differences were noted. Further, nonsudden religious converts demonstrated more socialized based religiosity than sudden converts. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2004) made several significant observations based upon their meta-analysis. First, based on the differences of the attachment histories in their family of origin and the processes of their religious conversions, they hold that sudden conversion and nonsudden conversion “represent two relatively distinct religious profiles” (p. 240) or pathways/individual differences to religiosity. Second, those who demonstrate sudden conversions consistently demonstrate that they regulate their emotional distress by using God as a substitute attachment figure. They state:

The perception of having experienced either distant/rejecting, inconsistent, or threatening and unpredictable caregiving from parents could ... be interpreted as promoting the development of sudden religious conversions ... religiosity functions to regulate attachment-related distress. The sudden conversion experience itself is a nominee for representing the most salient indicator of this function. (p. 242)

Birgeward and Granqvist (2004), utilizing subliminal cues to activate participants' attachment systems testing the correspondence hypothesis between participants IWMs of parents and God. Progressing through three experiments, they suggest results imply that

when subjected to unconscious attachment system activation, participants with a secure attachment history turns toward God, while insecure history participants turn away from God; that one's IWM about parents determines the degree God is seen as available as a substitute attachment figure and as a source of affect regulation in response to unconscious stress. They further indicated that there is in this context, a greater support for a correspondence hypothesis than a compensation hypothesis.

In a research project to explore whether "God's perceived closeness" is greater during the activation of a child's attachment system, Granqvist, Ljungdahl, and Dickie (2007) worked with forty children of a mean age of 6.1 years. Their results suggested that normal attachment processes in participant children when activating their attachment system versus an attachment neutral situation. Second, there was a moderation effect due to securely attached children: secure children found God to be closer during the times of distress, and more distant in neutral situations, supporting a correspondence hypothesis. However there was no support for social correspondence. Finally, their research suggested that attachment processes are active in a child's perception of God with individual differences related to secure and insecure child attachment. Granqvist et al. note that their findings implied "striking similarities... to the strange situation" (2007, p. 66).

Significantly, children with an insecure attachment did not find a compensation effect related to God. The authors suggest several reasons for this including possible problems related to the technique used in testing – insufficient stress was applied to gain measurable results, and the possibility that a compensatory religious strategy for affect regulation occurs at a later age.

Kirkpatrick (2005b) provides a conceptual framework on individual differences in attachment and religion related to the correspondence model. IWMs of all attachment figures should be interrelated based on the view that IWMs are to some extent more global and positively correlated with IWMs of romantic partners. Utilizing Collins and Read (1994) hierarchical model, Kirkpatrick places religious IWMs on the same level as parental and peer models (2005, p.103) and that the correspondence between other attachments and God attachment should be observed longitudinally. Where, in earlier research, he held that parental religion moderated the effect of attachment (Kirkpatrick & Shaver 1990) he says of Granqvist's (1998) revised correspondence hypothesis turned "my interpretation on its head" – that the moderating effect was more about individual differences, that secure attachment history enable "socialization" or learning parental religion, which is not the case for insecure attachment history (Kirkpatrick, 2005b, p. 114). However, while he holds that both levels of Granqvist's (1998) two-level correspondence hypotheses are necessary to account for the variations of individual differences, he believes that the "socialization" explanation has three specific limitations for explaining the additional variance in religious belief beyond what would normally be expected by a "socialization" effect. The first is the issue of "infinite regress" (i.e., if passed on from parent to child, where did the first parent get the original belief?). Second, the socialization "rule" is probably false as often as it is true, pointing to greater variability of family attitudes and beliefs within families as between families. And third, what can appear as a process of socialization, is most likely something else.

Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) state that they recognize the intergenerational challenge of socialized correspondence in their research. Their belief is that their results

do not imply that the religiosities of secure attachment histories are identical to their parent's religiosity, rather that the intergenerational similarity is more likely to be higher with secure rather than insecure attachment dyads. Specifically, this intergenerational similarity "reflect[s] a difference in susceptibility of adopting important standards held by the primary attachment figures in childhood" (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, p. 266).

### **Further Research on Attachment and God**

As Attachment to God research continued to develop, the utility of the theory was found to be useful in settings which sought to expand beyond how attachment may influence the processes of developing a relationship with God to how attachment may influence the ongoing relationship as well and the building of spiritual / relational maturity between the individual and God. To understand the nature of this relationship in the context of an attachment bond, researchers also began to develop self-report instruments that would help identify what is occurring in the relational interaction between an individual and God, in much of the same terms as they would between an individual and their caregiver or romantic partner.

TenElshof and Furrow (2000), hypothesized a three tier effect of attachment: 1) The relationship of a secure childhood attachment on one's adult attachment which they believed would be positively correlated; 2) a secure adult attachment would be positively related to spiritual maturity; 3) a secure adult attachment would be responsible for a greater amount of the variance in total for vertical and horizontal spiritual maturity than secure childhood attachment. This research took place in a seminary setting. Their results suggested a weak relationship between secure childhood attachment and secure adult

attachment which they suggest could be influenced by their adult relationships (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992); although there was somewhat significant relationship between paternal care and secure Adult attachment. Secure attachment was found to be significantly and positively related to faith maturity (This may be indicative of the correspondence hypothesis. Note that the authors did not report the results in an attachment to God context), with secure attachment the strongest predictor of faith maturity vertically (towards God), however not horizontally (toward others). The significant predictor of horizontal faith maturity was paternal over protection. While the results of their study were not expected, from an adult attachment perspective the results appear to suggest that those with a preoccupied attachment are more likely to focus on ministry toward others as a means of affect regulation and to feel good about themselves (compensation hypothesis?). Without the research data, this is only speculation.

Byrd and Boe (2001) sought to explore the relationship between avoidant and anxious attachments and prayer; they believed that those who avoid closeness would engage in less overall prayer than non-avoidant attachment styles. Further that anxious individual would engage in more help-seeking prayer to moderate their anxiety. Examining two dimensions, anxiety and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998) their results, consistent with the correspondence hypothesis, suggested that avoidant individuals are negatively associated with meditative (time with God) and colloquial (how often) prayer. However, those with anxious attachments (who fear abandonment) were positively associated to petitionary prayer (as proximity, help-seeking).

Rowatt and Kirkpatrick (2002), similar to the research design of Byrd and Boe (2001), utilized a two dimensional (avoidant – anxious) attachment to God scale which could then be applied to measures of affect and personality that could manifest themselves as confounding variables. Their results demonstrated further evidence that individual differences in attachment to God can be demonstrated on the two dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. Avoidant attachment to God was negatively associated with intrinsic religious orientation, while anxious attachment to God was correlated with extrinsic religious orientation (they anticipate from some external reward). Further, anxious romantic attachment was positively related with anxiety in attachment with God, with avoidant attachment to God being positively related with avoidance with adult attachment (correspondence hypothesis), while inversely responding to measures of religious belief and motivation, seeing God as more controlling than caring; whereas anxiety relates more strongly with extrinsic orientations on the one hand and negative affect and anxious behavior on the other. More specifically, they suggest that the effects of attachment to God variables are not merely byproducts of adult attachment styles but specific to attachment and God. Their results suggest that the two dimensional attachment dimensions are distinct and separate from each other.

Sim and Loh (2003), sought to develop and test a four part attachment to God construct: God as a safe haven, secure base, maintaining proximity to God, and responses to separation and loss (Ainsworth 1985b, 1989, four criteria for true attachment development), based on a continuum rather than categorical model. Utilizing factorial modeling, their results suggest that an attachment to God may be distinguished from religious belief and practice, though highly interrelated and significantly, that an



attachment to God can be distinguished from one's attachment to father and mother – providing continuing evidence that it is possible to form an attachment with a God that is unseen.

In an attempt to construct a more refined measure of an attachment bond as it relates to one's relationship to God, Beck and McDonald (2004) developed the twenty-eight item Attachment to God Inventory (AGI). The AGI is based on a two dimensional scale, (modeled after the ECR) avoidance and anxiety, which has been demonstrated to underlie child and adult attachment measures as well as demonstrating individual differences in attachment styles (Brennan et al., 1998). Utilizing three separate studies (Study 1, five hundred and seven undergraduates from a Christian university; Study 2, one hundred and eighteen undergraduate students from a Christian university; and Study 3, consisting of one hundred and nine community adults) the AGI was found to have stable factor structure and internal consistency. The results suggested two important additions to attachment literature. First, continued evidence that a relationship with God may be characterized as an attachment bond. Second, there is a suggestion that the more attachment anxiety an individual has in his or her love relationships the greater the expressed attachment anxiety in their relationship with God (correspondence hypothesis).

Drawing on 208 members of Orthodox reformed and Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands as participants, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Steeg, and Verschuur, (2005) found that secure and dismissing (a form of insecure) attachment experienced positive feelings toward God. In this instance the IWM of the individual seemed to reflect the model of self rather than the other. That is, a dismissing attachment style in general feels good about self and distrusts the other can experience positive feelings toward God. Fearful

and preoccupied attachment styles demonstrated negative feelings toward God under high psychological distress. Further, Psychological distress was found to be the strongest predictor of negative feelings toward God among the participants; and was found to mediate the association between personality, attachment variables, and negative feelings toward God. Church denomination / religious culture was the second best predictor of negative feelings toward God, especially with the Orthodox reformed participants who were positively associated with perceiving God as a punitive judge. This effect was not mediated through personality, attachment style or psychological distress.

Incorporating in-depth interviews which were then coded for quantitative analysis, Cicirelli (2004) studied 109 older adults between the ages of 70 and 97 to explore whether elder adults view God as an ultimate attachment figure. Their findings suggest that God may serve as a substitute attachment figure for religious elders, especially when they have lost other significant attachment figures. However, while the majority of elders studied were highly religious (praying and feeling that God was a source of comfort), only some demonstrated a “strong” attachment to God and more so for those who were associated with an “evangelical” religion. Women, African Americans, those of lower SES and those who were younger also tended to demonstrate a stronger attachment to God. Only partial support was suggested that fear of death was related to strength of attachment; fear of being destroyed was significantly related, but not fear of the process of dying or fear of the afterlife.

McDonald, Beck, Allison, and Norsworthy (2005) in a follow up research project utilizing the AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004) sought to test the correspondence versus compensation hypotheses of attachment. One hundred and one undergraduate students

were selected from a Christian university. In support of the correspondence hypothesis, students that came from families that engaged in more religious activities were more likely to rely on God, whereas students that reported their parents were non-religious were less likely to rely on or express intimacy with God; paternal hypocrisy was associated with avoidant attachment.

Reinert (2005) conducted a longitudinal study of Seminarians at a Roman Catholic College. Total time between time one and time two was eight months and all participants were male. The results suggest that those with a secure attachment to their mothers demonstrated higher levels of awareness and connection to God. However, a combination of maternal avoidant attachment and paternal anxious attachment demonstrated higher levels of instability to God (i.e., the individual had difficulty trusting that God would not be rejecting or punishing). No particular attachment style demonstrated as having an influence on spiritual growth between times 1 and time 2. Reinert suggests that the mother, as primary caregiver, in early childhood is the key influence on the individual's sense of self and later attachments including one's attachment to God (2005).

Beck (2006a) took an exploratory approach to understanding one's relationship with God. Consistent with a two dimensional approach (anxiety and avoidance), he utilized the AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004); the spiritual assessment inventory (SAI, Hall, & Edwards, 2002), which allowed for personalizing God as the Other; the ECR (Brennan et al., 1998); and the triangular love scale-god version (TLS, Sternberg, 1997) seeking empirical connections between attachment, object-relations theory, and triangular love perspectives. Factor analysis demonstrated that two factors, Communion (the degree

of intimacy, closeness, dependency and trust in the God-relationship) and Complaint (the degree of disappointment and/or frustration involved in the God-relationship), best express all three paradigms (attachment, object-relations theory, and triangular love perspectives). Because they are orthogonal, Beck suggests that they provide a glimpse of the emotional dynamic in one's God-relationship that is similar to human relationships (2006a). He suggests that the relationship with God might be expressed as the interplay between Communion and Complaint. This concept may provide an alternate view to the compensation and correspondence hypotheses.

Based on the theory that a characteristic of a secure attachment for a child is the security to explore one's world, Beck (2006b) asked whether exploration would apply to adult attachment to God and one's theological exploration. Working with students at a Christian college, he found that securely attached students tended to be positively related to theological exploration and tolerance for other religious groups; there was evidence that this exploration was comparatively free of anxiety and while they could explore different theological beliefs they did not reject core doctrines. Avoidant attachment students were positively associated with rejecting Christian orthodoxy. Fearful attached students were associated with decreased theological exploration; while fearful and preoccupied attachments were less tolerant of other religious groups. Beck suggests the latter is possible due to evidence of increased anxiety of abandonment (2006b).

Seeking to test the correspondence and social correspondence hypotheses, de Roos (2006) initiated two research studies of preschool and kindergarten age children. In the first study (mean age 63 months, coming from 62% non-affiliated and 37.5% liberal protestant families; selected at random from a public and a Protestant school), path

analysis demonstrated support for the correspondence hypothesis in the child's relationship with his/her teacher rather than the child's mother; that is, the more positively related the child-teacher relationship, the more the child saw God as a loving God, even though the child reports a positive relationship with his/her mother. Though this is reported as support for the correspondence hypothesis, this appears to reflect social learning processes. In the second study (mean age 68 months, coming from families with a more diverse religious sample with 44% non-affiliated, 14% Dutch reformed, 14% Catholic, and 28% Orthodox Reformed), no support for the correspondence hypothesis was found. The quality of the caregiver-child attachment was not significant related to the child's positive concepts of God; however traditional religious education was. The researchers suggest that religious socialization / cognitive learning is the important contributor to the children's concepts of God. However, when children have negative relationships with all caregiver relationships, God is not perceived as a close, personal and warm entity. Nevertheless, it was found that relationships with mother, father, and teacher could compensate for each other in fostering intimate relationships among the children (e.g. a child with negative relationships with both parents can be positively influenced by his/her teacher that God is a loving and kind friend). The researchers conclude by suggesting that attachment may not be as strong a factor in the development of individual differences in young children as that of adolescents and adults.

Moving from children to young adults, Dickie, Ajega, Kobylak, and Nixon (2006), in a study of 132 college students found that gender, that the individual's mother (their hypothesis had been that it was the father) best predicts feeling close to God and is crucial in the development of young adult concepts of God. The researchers concluded it

was the mother who was responsible for the religious socialization of the children. An additional gender distinction was seen in that mothers “created a climate” for her son’s self-esteem that leads to seeing God as nurturing, feeling close to God, and greater religiosity; while it was the mother and father who created a “model of nurturance” leading daughters to seeing themselves and God as nurturing and powerful. Young adult women were able to feel close to God in an environment with low levels of punishing and judging. Further, their results suggest that, for these young adult participants, God did not so much fill a substitute attachment role (compensation) as much as having a close relationship with the mother “increases the desire for attachment across the life span”... leading them to suggest that, “perhaps the substitute attachment theory should be the ‘continuing attachment’ theory” (Dickie et al., 2006, p. 69).

Eun Sim (2006) provides one of the few (this research has only found one) qualitative research studies on attachment to God. Following an autobiographical narrative in-depth interview, unstructured and open ended, Eun Sim asked three main research questions of her 10 female Korean participants: 1) is there a relationship between human attachment and God attachment; 2) are there any differences in a woman’s God attachments; 3) do mental models of attachment guide the experience of God attachment or are mental models influenced by the God attachment experience. Her research suggests that the woman’s own images of parents are correlated with their representations of God, though some women grasped a view of God that is the opposite of their parental image, especially if they experienced emotional deprivation in early relationships and converted to Christianity in their teens or later. Significantly, a woman’s self-image appeared to be related to their feelings and reactions to their parents’

care in childhood and impacts their relationship with others and God. Adult romantic attachment was found to be linked with early child-mother attachment; God attachment was suggested to be a secondary source for romantic attachment. Strong ties to mother appeared to affect both secure and insecure attachments to self, others, and God. Anxious/ambivalence attachment histories reported dual or split images of God (e.g., God is fearful and benevolent). Secure attachment histories corresponded to romantic attachments as well as return to their communities, share, and reach out to needy people physically and spiritually.

Continuing in the thought that perceived relationships with God are an extension of one's attachment history to caregivers, Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, and Gatto (2008) compared 30 Catholic priests and religious individuals to a match group of lay Catholics (in Italy) with 584 individuals representing a worldwide sample. Purposely seeking to examine the radically devout, those who should be more likely to experience "full blown" attachment to God, the researchers utilized the AAI, the three brief force-choice attachment to God paragraphs (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; to sort participants into attachment categories) and a God image assessment adapted from Benson and Spilka (1973). The researchers report three key findings: 1) a significantly higher proportion of secure attachment (both from family history and concurrent) with a significantly lower proportion of unresolved-disorganized attachment; 2) a significantly higher proportion of priests – religious participants reported a secure attachment to God, as well as seeing God as more loving, whereas the lay group reported more than 50% an insecure-ambivalent attachment to God and that God was viewed as more controlling and distant; 3) support for the correspondence hypothesis was demonstrated in that the AAI security scores were

positively related to perceptions of God as loving, however the categorical attachment to God and AAI failed to find expected predictions. The researchers suggest that their results imply that religion needs to be fully incorporated into an individual's life – stressing the more dynamic process which allows for continual cognitive assimilation – rather than an inconsistent relationship determined by the individual's current needs to regulate distress. It is interesting that the researchers utilized one of the earliest assessments of attachment and God relationships (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992) and then point to a need for more valid assessments of attachment to God.

### **Discussion of the Implications of the Correspondence, Compensation and Revised Correspondence Models and Relational Attachment Interactions**

Monotheistic religions and specifically Christianity, hold to the belief that an individual can have a personal relationship with God and that relationship is vital, responsive, and interactive. Attachment and God research is interested in how individuals find and use God as a substitute attachment figure and how one's attachment style contributes to the security or insecurity of the relationship. Initial research contributed two hypothesis concerning God as a substitute attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1990, 1992, 1997): first, a relationship with God provided a compensatory relationship for an insecure attachment history because their experience has taught them that a secure attachment figure is unavailable to them. These individuals therefore, will be more likely to seek out a relationship with a substitute attachment figure, in this case God, to help regulate their distress and obtain felt security and provide a means of affect regulation and emotional compensation (Granqvist, 2000; Granqvist & Hagekull 1999) – sudden



religious change later in life is characteristic of the compensation hypothesis. The second hypothesis supports a correspondence model, where one's attachment style related to one's attachment history and adult love relationships, is somewhat consistent with their attachment style with their relationship with God. This perspective suggests that attachment is dynamic; that at any given time IWMs of self correspond with IWMs of God; however, over time the individual may find a compensatory relationship with God as a substitute attachment figure for what they have been lacking with others (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

It was Granqvist (1998) that saw a different effect occurring, more specifically he held that there were different pathways to religiousness, based upon one's childhood attachment: Specifically, that those with an insecure attachment style respond from an emotional ontogenesis but those with a secure attachment tend to respond from a socialization process – socialized to adopting parent's religion or lack of religion in a safe environment characterized as experiencing a religious change earlier in life and that such changes will be more gradual. This led into the development of a third hypothesis, the revised correspondence theory which Granqvist (2000) refined into a two-level correspondence hypothesis: an emotionally safe environment (attachment history) allows for social learning (learning theory), conversely, those with an insecure attachment history will respond to all relationships either romantic or towards God according to their IWM.

This revised theory appears to be consistent Bowlby's belief in the integration of phylogenetic and ontogenetic processes were individuals come with potential to develop systems of behavior as a part of an evolutionary process (1969, 1973, 1980) on a

phylogenetic / nature level. However, he recognized that this potential for the development of behavioral systems – later referred to as attachment systems – would be influenced by the environment on an ontogenetic / nurture level (Bowlby, 1969). These environmental influences were hypothesized by Bowlby to affect the developmental pathways on any given individual intersecting with the concepts of individual vulnerability and resilience (1988). Bowlby held that:

It is necessary to think of each personality as moving through life along some developmental pathway, with the particular pathway followed always determined by the interaction of the personality as it has so far developed and the environment in which it is then finding itself [and] that the pathway followed by each individual and the extent to which he or she becomes resilient to stressful life events is determined to a very significant degree by the pattern of attachment he or she develops during the early years. (1988, pp. 171-173)

Other suggestions such as Dickie et al.'s (2006) inference that perhaps the idea of God as a substitute attachment figure should be seen as the 'continuing attachment theory' (p. 69) or Beck (2006a) suggestion that the relationship with God might be expressed as the interplay between Communion and Complaint might provide other possibilities of viewing the relationship between individual and God as more than subject (the individual) to object (God) and how the subject responds to object and why. This concept is more indicative of attachment and God research that extends beyond Kirkpatrick and Granqvist. In critique of Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) original work, Noller (1992) pointed out the problem of a single theory (attachment theory) is the failure to account for all the ambiguities of religious attachments. Specifically she saw a problem with attachment to God "as an expression of a deficiency in a person's other emotional

attachments” (p. 32), especially when the role of fear (affect regulation) is emphasized as a causal factor for the relationship. She asks,

If we believe in a God active in the lives of individuals, we must ask whether God chooses when to approach individuals with comfort, much as a loving parent approaches the distressed child. (Noller, 1992, p. 33)

Miner (2007) is more specific in her critique of attachment and God literature; she states, “There is no direct relationship with God: at most, there is human activity with respect to representations to God” (p. 119). Though Noller (1992) did not use the specific words, her critique underscores a possible missing concept in attachment and God literature – that attachment is relational and reciprocal. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990, 1992) emphasize the active role of the individual in “constructing, maintaining, and negotiating” their attachment relationships rather than being passive observers (p. 319), however the development of their theory suggests that God is a passive force rather than an active participant in the relationship. Nevertheless, with such diversity of religious cultures and beliefs, it is understandable why attachment and God literature focuses on processes that lead up to the point of connection as well as attachment expressions seen in the individual, but stops short of the ongoing attachment relationship between the individual and God.

However, if attachment to God is a relationship, then it by necessity must be seen as ongoing and relational. The concept of a relational attachment interaction is suggested by Bowlby’s (1980) reference to parental care giving as the complementary system to the child’s attachment system, whose function is to protect the infant. As a part of the parental care giving system the child’s caregiver shares the goal of proximity. If the child

crawls too far away the caregiver calls to the child or goes to the child and brings him back or if the child cries he is picked up, held and comforted. Bowlby refers to this behavior as dynamic equilibrium (1969). In the day-to-day living of the child and caregiver, distance from each other is maintained within shared limits which are negotiated through the give and take interaction between the two and can be complicated by the child's attachment behavior, the child's exploratory behavior, the parental caregiving behavior, and caregiver's own independent behavior. The emphasis here is on the dynamic equilibrium shared in a dyadic relationship. Ainsworth (1969; Bell & Ainsworth, 1972) spoke of this behavior as complementary responsiveness or maternal sensitivity to a child's signals and plays an important role in the development of the infant-caregiver attachment process. However what would such an interaction look like between an adult and God? In what ways might an individual and God maintain such a dynamic equilibrium?

Although, Bowlby (1969) did emphasize that a substitute attachment figure may be inanimate (e.g., a child's doll or blanket) and therefore not a two sided relationship. Nevertheless, as previously noted, the attachment to God literature consistently points out that studies of attachment and God typically draw upon religious behaviors such as prayer, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), going to church, worship styles that include uplifted hands, and turning to religion in times of distress as evidence of attachment behavior of individuals seeking or expressing a relationship with God. These religious behaviors are suggested to be parallels of how children signal, communicate and/or try to maintain proximity and comfort to their attachment figure, especially in times of distress. It would seem logical to conclude then, if God is seen as a safe haven in times of distress,

then God in His capacity of substitute attachment figure, responds to the individual's attempts of connection. This is consistent with Kirkpatrick (1999) and Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) suggestion that, "God is neither an exalted father figure nor an exalted mother figure, but rather an exalted attachment figure" (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008, p. 908; Kirkpatrick, 1992); a "constant psychological source of companionship" (Kirkpatrick, Shillito, and Kellas, 1999, p.520) and/or seen as a person who is omnipresent (Kirkpatrick, 2005a). The understanding that individuals believe that God responds to them is supported by the Barna Group which found that 75% of respondents "say they sense that 'God is motivating people to stay connected with Him, but in different ways and through different types of experiences than in the past'" (Barna, 2009). However, what might such a relationship look like and how might ones' attachment history affect the ongoing nature of the relationship?

The real difficulty concerning a relational research study on the interaction between an individual and God is the problem of measurement. How does one measure the interaction between God and the individual? Or as Myers and Jeeves (2003) exclaim,

At the core of the religious impulse is a sense of awe, an attitude of bewilderment, a feeling that reality is more amazing than everyday scientific reasoning can comprehend. Wonder-struck, we humbly acknowledge our limits and accept that which we cannot explain. (p. 55)

### **Conclusion**

This research suggests a possible avenue for extending attachment and God theory is to move to a qualitative paradigm and utilize a grounded theory approach that allows the lived experiences of individuals to inform and describe how one's attachment

history might affect their relationship with God. To date, this review can point to one other qualitative study on attachment and God (Eun Sim, 2006), which demonstrated that women's stories are endowed with images of God, self, and parents, especially the maternal parent. It was in their images of God that one begins to see a picture of how participants compared and contrasted God's responsiveness to parental responsiveness in attachment language. It is hoped that by focusing on such stories a fuller picture of the dyadic relationship between the individual and God, from an attachment perspective, might be explored and expanded.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHOD**

Monotheistic religions and specifically Christianity, hold to the belief that an individual can have a personal relationship with God and that relationship is vital, responsive, and interactive. Attachment and God research is interested in how individuals find and use God as a substitute attachment figure and how one's attachment style contributes to the security or insecurity of the relationship. Further, attachment and God theory suggests that individuals are capable establishing affectional bonds with God and those bonds are consistent with the affectional bonds that are experienced with persons. The following proposed research will study attachment to God from a relational perspective that draws on the lived experience of the participants in the context of their ongoing relationship with God, utilizing a qualitative grounded theory paradigm consistent with Corbin and Strauss (2008).

#### **Research Question**

Through the stories of individuals the proposed research seeks to understand what are the attachment experiences of individuals who have an insecure attachment from his or her family of origin and who have sought to find a secure relationship with God? The background of this research question is situated in the attachment and God literature and the debate referencing how a person's attachment style in relationship with God either corresponds to (including revised correspondence theory – less attachment oriented and more socially influenced) or compensates for their attachment to their caregiver(s) (Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1997, 2005;

McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005). Correspondence theory suggests that those with an insecure attachment history will respond to all relationships either romantic or towards God according to their IWM (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). IWM's are said to act as a mediator of one's attachment related experience, consist of over-generalizations, and should be interrelated to other substitute attachment figures (Kirkpatrick, 2005b). Compensation theory suggests that God and religion may function in a compensatory role for individuals with avoidant attachment histories (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). That is, a relationship with God was found to compensate for insecure attachment history. However, while the correspondence and compensation theories suggest how one's attachment history influences beginning a relationship with God, they fall short of explaining the attachment experiences of the individual as they continue their relationship with God.

### **Grounded Theory**

Qualitative research may be identified as a group of similar approaches that include: case study, narratives, ethnography, grounded theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and heuristics (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of these forms of investigation is to seek to understand "the meaning and complexity that individuals or groups ascribe to an experience" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that qualitative research focuses on characteristics and persons as well as on the processes. The emphasis here is on the work of the researcher to understand *how* experience is created rather than *how many* and for understanding the world from the perspective of the participants (Pratt, 2009). Previous research has almost singularly



focused on quantitative methods seeking to understand the pathways and individual differences of how individuals connect with God from an attachment perspective; however, the emphasis has been on the individual rather than the dyad – the individual and God. Further, while attachment and God research has moved from classifying types of attachment styles to measuring attachment responses on a continuum (Granqvist, 1998, 2005; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000, 2001), there is a lack of richness and depth in understanding and communicating what is happening in the attachment relationship between the individual and God. This lack of rich detail and depth makes a qualitative design ideal for continued investigation of attachment relationships between individuals and God. Because this research is seeking to explain what is happening at a *relational* level between the individual and God and how it is occurring, a grounded theory methodology is being utilized.

Grounded theory is a process where the researcher seeks to discover a theory that is grounded in the information and descriptions of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Because it is derived from the participants, the theory may be more general and abstract (Creswell, 2003). Strauss and Corbin (1998) initially concluded that grounded theory was where abstract theory or theories emerged from the systematic gathering and analyzation of data derived through the research process by submerging one's self in the data. However, Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) has expanded her definition to include the development of theoretical constructs, which are derived from qualitative analysis. Glaser (2007) classifies grounded theory into two categories or levels of depth – substantive and formal – the latter building on more general and abstract grounded theories by

incorporating continued research and lower levels of abstraction. The proposed research would fall into Glazer's (2007) substantive classification due to its exploratory nature.

### **Biases and Assumptions**

A significant theoretical premise of this research is that a qualitative researcher becomes a part of their research and that their research becomes a part of them. This premise is consistent with Denzin and Lincoln (2003) who state that, "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p.4). Therefore it is understood that the researcher takes measures to limit the affect their presence may have on the research.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that analysts and research participants each bring into the research process their own biases, beliefs, and assumptions. Although they do not hold that this is necessarily negative, they see the potential for these biases to intrude upon data collection and the way the researcher analyzes data. In an attempt to minimize the effects of research bias and cultural influences, some have proposed that the researcher exercise a discipline referred to as *bracketing* – a process of putting aside one's previous knowledge, theories and preconceived ideas (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Morse & Richards, 2002). However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that even bracketing is not enough due to the deep seated nature of one's beliefs, perspectives, and cultural influences. Therefore they stress the importance of the researcher to have a means of recognizing when these assumptions and biases may be intruding on the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Creswell (2009) offers the suggestion that

researchers think through the philosophical world view assumptions they bring into the research process.

To minimize the influences of my personal biases and assumptions and to make them clear to the readers, I am identifying the ones that I bring to this research. However, I recognize that my background also provides a unique perspective and informs the focus of this research. Therefore my goal is personal transparency. I will continue to maintain self-reflexivity regarding my contributions throughout the research process.

I am an affluent white male, who has had a specific and vital relationship with God for 42 years. I view this relationship from the perspective of Western culture and I am highly influenced by Western scriptures – the Bible. I am the Senior Pastor of an evangelical church from a conservative denomination and have pastored for over 26 years, 22 of those years with the same church. I have identified that I have a dismissing attachment style from my family of origin that has moved more towards secure attachment in the context of a 32 year marriage. By reviewing the longevity of the commitments in my life I recognize that such longevity in itself sets me apart from many persons. In reflection, I recognize that through the course of my returning to academic life in pursuing a doctorate degree in marriage family therapy that I have moved from a positivistic worldview to more of a constructionist perspective. However, while I have come to see that much of what is called truth is socially constructed, I do not hold to a postmodern world view.

A further significant perspective is my background and research in attachment literature. Creswell (2009) recommends that the researcher use existent literature sparingly to facilitate an inductive method of study. However Corbin and Strauss (2008;

Strauss & Corbin, 1998) suggest familiarity with existent literature may contribute positively to the research process through enhancing the researchers sensitivity, being a source from which to draw questions for initial interviews or to stimulate questions during analysis (p. 37). I recognize that I have come to view most relationships from an attachment perspective. That is, I assume that individuals long for connection with significant others and it is in our connections that the individual is able to understand self, others, and God.

Much of the aforementioned assumptions and personal interests will influence data collection, organization, and conclusions. They also provide a wealth of insight into issues related to attachment, God, and interpersonal relationships, especially in the sense of how I personally would and do experience them. This provides an opportunity for me to compare individual differences of experiences from a personal level. In this sense, I am not separate from my data, but a part of it (Charmaz, 2003; Charmaz, 2006).

### **Sampling**

This research will begin with convenience sampling utilizing churches in Southern California and then proceed following the suggestion of Corbin and Strauss (2008) which emphasizes theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling differs from convenience sampling in that data collection is based on physically and analytically following the concepts and themes derived from the data. This method is concept driven, where data collection and analysis go hand in hand and sampling is seen as cumulative (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Each interview will build upon the data gained from the previous interview and the analytic leads derived from ongoing analysis. Prior to

meeting, participants and researcher will agree on a comfortable setting in which to meet, possibly the individual's home or a more public place, depending on the participant's preference. Interviews are expected to take approximately an hour and a half. A semi-structured interview will be utilized, composed of questions derived from attachment and attachment and God theory (See Appendix A). However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that "adhering rigidly to initial questions throughout a study hinders discovery because it limits the amount and type of data that can be gathered" (p.152). Therefore, as participants introduce significant topics or a theoretical concept that adds depth and richness to the investigation or proves to be important, that topic will be investigated as well.

### **Pre-screening Participants**

An initial self-report questionnaire composed of three parts will be used to screen participants that are at least eighteen years of age, speak English, and indicate that they have a relationship with God that is meaningful and important to them. The first portion (See Appendix B) consists of brief background questions including the participant's age, gender, race, relationship with God, marital status, and whether they are willing to be interviewed – if so, they will be asked to provide their name and a contact phone number. The second and third portions (See Appendix C and Appendix D) consist of the Experiences in Close relationships Scale-Short Form (ECR-S) (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007) and the AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004). The ECR-S and the AGI will facilitate identifying the participant's attachment style as they relate to their personal relationships and their relationship with God prior to being interviewed. This

will help save time during the interview process and provide a point of comparison between how participants respond to interview questions and their identified attachment style.

Participants will be selected based upon the above prescreening requirements, their willingness to be interviewed, and their attachment style. They may demonstrate secure or insecure attachment stemming from their family of origin as well as demonstrating secure or insecure attachment in their relationship with God. It is hoped that by comparing and contrasting attachment styles related to family of origin and one's relationship with God, a richer, deeper, and more meaningful description of these relationships might be understood. The goal will be to have a diverse representation of various attachment styles. Because research indicates (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) the majority of individuals have a secure attachment style, it is likely that I will have more secure volunteers than are needed for the study.

The ECR-S is a 12-item self-report measure was developed by Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, and Vogel (2007) as an adapted form of the ECR (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECR was developed based on the meta analysis of current research which suggested that two dimensions – *Avoidance* (of intimacy, dependency and discomfort with closeness) and *Anxiety* (fear of abandonment and rejection) – underlie “virtually all self-report adult attachment measures and appear crucial for capturing important individual differences” (p. 67). These are seen as consistent to the two-dimensional space suggested by Ainsworth et al. (1978). Current Attachment research suggests that attachment styles are best conceptualized in this two-dimensional space (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). The validity of ECR-S has been demonstrated to be

the equivalent of the ECR and the shorter version has been suggested to be more adaptable to non-college age participants (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007).

The AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004) is a twenty-eight item Attachment to God Inventory based on the two dimensional scale, avoidance and anxiety (modeled after the ECR). The AGI provides the flexibility of both dimensional and typological attachment classifications. The AGI further provides a psychometric scale that integrates how one experiences God in an attachment framework.

### **Recruitment**

It is expected that sixty individuals will need to be prescreened to form a pool of potential participants. Churches will be contacted and asked if they would be willing to publish in their church newsletter or worship folder/bulletin a brief note about the research project which has a link to a web page where interested individuals can learn more about the project and choose to participate, if they desire (See Appendix E). Potential participants will be able to respond to the pre-screening questionnaire electronically, via SurveyMonkey. Respondents that indicate that they are willing to be interviewed, meet the inclusion and exclusion requirements, and provide a contact phone number will provide a pool of participants for the study. Each participant will be contacted by phone (See Appendix I) and given an “Informed Consent Form” (See Appendix G) which will explain the purpose and procedure of the interview process at the time of the interview. Participation will be voluntary and no financial remuneration will be offered.

## **Trustworthiness**

The nature of qualitative research places it at odds with the traditional concepts of validity, reliability, and generalizability. Morse and Richards (2002) state that reliability and validity hold different meanings for the qualitative researcher yet should still be the goal of qualitative research. Janesick (2003) is more outspoken that such an attempt is contradictory to the purpose of qualitative research. The essential problem seems to revolve around the significant differences in paradigm. A more positivistic or traditional approach, tends to believe that reality can be, “studied captured, and understood” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.14). Conversely, qualitative researchers tend to believe that reality is relative and not stable across various populations. Morse and Richards (2002) believe that “replicating a qualitative study is sometimes impossible and always difficult, because the data are richly within the particular context” (p. 168). Creswell (2009) proposes instead that researchers develop what he refers to as believability in qualitative design:

The criteria for judging a qualitative study differ from quantitative research. First and foremost, the researcher seeks believability, based on coherence, insight, and instrumental utility and trustworthiness through a process of verification rather than through traditional validity and reliability measures. (p.196)

Data analysis will proceed consistent with the methodology Corbin and Strauss (2008), with the goal of transparency and believability.

## **Data Analysis**

To ensure the trustworthiness, this research seeks to be transparent about the research process and the process of data analysis. Collection of data and analysis begins



with the first interview; with each successive interview being compared to previous interviews. Analysis proceeds by breaking down like data into segments, while making comparisons at the concept level. I will be asking questions similar to, “What other information am I learning that will extend my understanding of what it is like for these individuals to long to connect with God?” I will ask attachment oriented questions to facilitate further data collection such as, “Do you see God as available and responsive to your needs? If so, can you share with me a time when He did respond and what you might have felt at that time? If not, what is it like for you to feel that God may or may not respond to you?” While I have specific interest in how the individual perceives God’s responsiveness and availability and what it is like for he or she to feel such a response or lack of it, each story creates a new and fresh perspective of the *relational* interaction.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasize that, “Research is a continuous process of data collection, followed by analysis and memo writing, leading to questions, that lead to more data collection, and so on” (p. 197). This procedure will continue until I feel confident that I have enough data to provide a rich, deeper, and more meaningful description of each conceptual category, which in turn is sufficient enough to account for variations and depth of detail for the ongoing experience of the participant’s stories. Data analysis will include initial *open coding*, the beginning process of finding segments of related concepts with their properties and dimensions which in turn solidifies into *axial coding* which allows for linking like concepts. Coding, whether open or axial, focuses the on the analytic process of discovering and developing concepts from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2003).

Open coding “is fundamentally interpretive” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994); it is a process of labeling, breaking down, examining, conceptualizing, making comparisons, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); special interest is given to similarities and differences in data (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The researcher is constantly asking what is happening here or how is this phenomena being experienced by the participants. As concepts begin to solidify similar incidents, ideas, feelings, etc., are grouped together and labeled. Some may be given names used by the participants, “in vivo” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 40), and some may represent similarities of characteristics or imagery (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An example of open coding may look like recognizing repeated words or phrases which the researcher senses represent the emotional struggle of some of the participants: “I try to connect with God – I feel that God does not hear me;” these in turn may be labeled as longing or seeking to connect. While labeling may be somewhat arbitrary, Strauss and Corbin suggest that the concept or label be “suggested by the context” (1998, p. 106). As this process continues such concepts are developed into loose categories with potential subcategories. Subcategories may answer questions concerning the what, when, where of a given concept (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

When such concepts are linked or related to each other, moving from the more to the less abstract such as, times/moments of God’s availability and how they affect the participants feeling of connection to God, these concepts are descriptive of axial coding. Axial coding allows for data which was segmented through open coding to be reassembled, while categories and concepts are linked and elaborated on with more depth and description. Strauss and Corbin emphasize that such linking takes place at the “conceptual level” (1998, p. 125). This in turn facilitates comparative analysis of like and

dissimilar incidences or events such as might revolve around gender, how men verses women experience times and moments of God's availability or why do some men experience times and moments of God's availability different than other men?

Corbin and Strauss (2008) find that the distinction between open and axial coding to be "artificial" since they often occur "hand in hand" (p.198). However, Corbin identifies this process of taking place as a part of memo writing which allows the researcher to explore and link the conceptual segments (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memo writing, "forces the analyst to work with concepts rather than raw data" (p. 120) and may include diagramming relationships between concepts, include short quotes, provide a forum for the researcher to organize or reorder their thoughts, and/or to synthesize the content of multiple memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). An example of memo use may include expected comments on God, availability, and responsiveness because they are contained in the concepts and questions asked. However, as each participant responds with their story, I may recognize that an expected concept/category of God's availability being linked to one's family of origin takes a different direction; some individuals may find something in their relationship with God and his availability that is significantly different than their family of origin. The relationship appears to "compensate" for an insecure attachment pattern more for women than for men. I find that I must now wrestle with linking conceptual data, theoretical attachment and God data, and multiple participants' personal experience/data and then discover that they better fit the participant's experience in different forms and different words. Due to the need to depend heavily on the use of memos and organizing data, this research will utilize a qualitative computer program.

## **Saturation**

Charmaz (2003) warns that saturation is “elastic”; in the context of grounded theory, the researcher can be seduced by easily achieved data and recommends more sustained field research (p. 267). Morse and Richards (2002) view saturation as being achieved when the researcher has, “a sense of having heard it all” and/or when data replication is reoccurring; such reoccurrence of data represents verification of reaching saturation (p. 174). Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasize both conceptual and theoretical saturation. Data collection and synthesis is to continue until concepts become more solid and categories or themes emerge, which with sufficient data, will lead to conceptual saturation. Conceptual saturation occurs at the point where each category or theme and has been sufficiently accounted for and allows for the full development of their properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008 p. 195). Theoretical saturation is attained when no new data, properties, dimensions or their variations are emerging (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin 1998). Nevertheless, there is an understanding that full saturation or “complete development” of major categories is “probably never achieved” for the qualitative researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.149).

The emphasis of this research is on theory building from the rich, thick description of data collected from the stories of the participants combined with the theoretical background of attachment and God theory. It is expected that at some point the stories and theory should overlap based upon previous attachment and God research. However it is also expected that participant’s stories should move beyond the limitations of previous self-report research. In this sense saturation should envelop theory, practice, and adaptation of the participant’s experience of seeking and living in connection with

God. Data collection, analysis, and synthesis of participant's data will continue in this context until both conceptual and theoretical saturation occurs. It is expected that this will take a minimum of 15 to 20 interviews.

To help develop saturation, analyses will also incorporate triangulation. Triangulation is another way researchers insure trustworthiness and believability of research findings by adding other layers, voices, and methodology, "adding one layer of data to another" (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003, p.187) through multiple perspectives of a phenomena (Stake, 2003). It will also be used in this research to solidify concepts and theoretical development. This research will utilize two types of triangulation. The first is the use of a focus group which will consist of research participants who have been previously interviewed and desire to provide feedback. This methodology has the advantage of multiple voices and perspectives to review initial thoughts to clarify and validate emerging concepts and theory. It is estimated that this focus group will meet approximately half way or a little later in the data collection. The second form of triangulation is working with my dissertation chair who provides a safe place for personal reflection and to help me clarify my thoughts and perceptions.

### **Implications**

This research will focus on the stories and connections of individuals as they recount their attachment experiences in the context of their ongoing relationship with God. Each individual comes to the concept of Deity from different perspectives, wants, and desires. The purpose of this research is to help clarify how *some* individuals have worked out their attachment longings toward God, given attachment histories formulated

in childhood. It is hoped that through this and continued research, a therapeutic model might be developed to help individuals find a secure connection with God that fulfills their inner longing. Furthermore, it is hoped that through the stories of these individuals, an understanding might be gained of how to utilize attachment language to open a new avenue of identifying with an individual's religious beliefs when dealing with spiritual issues in therapy, regardless of the differences of religious beliefs between therapist and client.

### **Limitations**

There are several significant limitations to this research. First, this research is not intended to be generalized onto a larger population. Rather, its purpose is to help clarify how *some* individuals have worked out their attachment longings toward God, given their attachment histories. The research design also provides several limitations, including limiting the potential pool of participants to those who attend church, are able to use computers, and hold to a Western concept of God rather than that of Eastern religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism. There is a further design limitation in that the researcher is just an observer and was not there when the actual experiences took place. What participants provide are a sharing of their experiences that have been processed through their own recollection and interpretation of the events. There is also the limitation of the theoretical – attachment – lens which the researcher brings into the research. Another researcher, from another theoretical perspective, might provide a quite different account of the events shared in the context of this research. However, given these limitations, it is hoped that we can learn from the stories of these individuals as they relate to what has or

has not worked for them and that they may provide insight on how to overcome or strengthen the attachment bonds in one's relationship with God.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**YEARNINGS: STORIES OF INSECURE ATTACHMENT AND THE JOURNEY**  
**TO CONNECT TO GOD**

By

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## **Abstract**

Utilizing grounded theory and the semi-structured interviews of 25 participants, this study sought to understand how an insecure attachment affects one's relationship with God. Participants' stories suggested that one's struggle to connect with God was a part of their struggle to connect with others; that experiencing others as safe and responsive contributed to building a more secure attachment with God; and that attachment is less a fixed style and more of an ongoing process: gradual changes made by the participants towards the set-goal of feeling safe and secure. Four major processes were identified: finding what works; a safe community; significant time and energy given to creating secure relationships; and being able to distinguish feelings about God and critical parent.

## **Introduction**

### **Yearnings: Stories of Insecure Attachment and the Journey to Connect to God**

Understanding the lived experiences of individuals as they journey to connect with God and how one's attachment history affects that journey is significant to the field of Marital Family Therapy and to clinical practice. A growing body of literature suggests that one's Faith practice is not just about personal beliefs, but it also "Anchor[s] and nourish[es] families and their communities... [and has a] powerful influence... on [the] physical, emotional, and relational well-being and on recovery from illness and trauma..." (Walsh, 2009, p. xi, 3). One's Faith practice also "speaks to the very heart of people's existence" (Aponte, 2009, p.126). However, sometimes one's Faith practice is a source of pain and emotional struggle. This study explores one possible cause for this struggle, the unfulfilled yearnings to emotionally connect with God as a result of an insecure attachment history.

I approach this study as a student in a doctoral program in Marital and Family Therapy and I have had a long history of a personal faith relationship with God; I am also the senior pastor of an evangelical church. As a marital family therapist I have sought to bridge faith and clinical practice. For years I have wondered why some people who longed to connect with God have struggled in their pursuit of Him. Pursuing this research is a direct outcome of this wonderment. I also approached this research from an attachment lens that views attachment as a behavior system rather than a state or trait.

This study is situated in attachment and attachment and God theory; specifically in conceptualizing God as a substitute attachment figure. It has been shown that individuals will turn to their substitute attachment figure during times of stress or crisis as a means of affect regulation, when their attachment figures (parent or caregiver) are

perceived as unavailable. Attachment and God theory suggests that individuals are capable establishing affectional bonds with God and those bonds are consistent with the affectional bonds that are experienced with persons. A Western concept of God is used throughout this study rather than that of Eastern religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism, because of the Western view of the centrality of God as an “other” that is seen as responsive and relational (Miner, 2007).

### *Attachment Theory*

Attachment theory began as an attempt to explain (1) in systemic and behavioral terms the emotional bond between a child and their parents/caregiver (Ainsworth, 1963, 1967; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) and (2) why children, separated from their caregiver during the early years of childhood, resulted in acute distress and adversely affected the child’s personality development (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Five decades later, attachment theory evolved into a comprehensive model that seeks to explain an individual’s need and longing for secure relationships. Attachment behavior is organized around the idea that proximity to the child’s caregiver, who provides a sense of security or a secure base (Bowlby, 1973), and is the set-goal of the child. Bowlby (1969) held that attachment is instinctive or hard wired, which has led researchers to understand that one’s attachment security, once developed is consistent over the individual’s life span (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) or as Bowlby suggests will remain active from the “cradle to the grave” (1977, p.203; 1979). When the principle attachment figure was unavailable, a child will seek out a substitute attachment figure, especially when troubled or anxious (Bowlby, 1969) as a means of affect regulation. Central to attachment theory is the concept that a

child develops a cognitive map of his environment, attachment figures, and of himself which Bowlby (1969) refines as inner working models (IWM) or representational models. These IWMs seek to understand the world around the child, including how the child's caregiver and significant others can be expected to behave, how the child can be expected to behave, and how each interacts with the other. It is within these initial working models that the child evaluates his circumstances, makes plans and explores his world.

### *God as a Substitute Attachment Figure*

Monotheistic religions and specifically Christianity, hold to the belief that an individual can have a personal relationship with God and that relationship is vital, responsive, and interactive. Attachment and God research is interested in how individuals find and use God as a substitute attachment figure and how one's attachment security contributes to the security or insecurity of the relationship (Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull 1999, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

Faith in a personal God has been found to be pervasive throughout the United States. Religious surveys consistently demonstrate statistical significance related to a belief in God. A recent Baylor Religion Survey administered and collected by the Gallup organization (Froese & Bader, 2007) found that 69.4% of those surveyed have no doubts that God exists; however, belief in God increases to 95.7% when some doubt is allowed. This is similar to a national Gallup poll where 78% of respondents said they believed in God while 54% said religion is very important to their life, followed by 26% who said religion is fairly important to their life (Gallup, 2008). Nevertheless, an affectional bond

with God, especially if it holds the characteristics of an attachment bond is more than just believing in the existence of a deity, higher power or supernatural being.

Kirkpatrick (1999) argues that attachment bonds between the individual and God are actually more straightforward, fit the attachment model more accurately than romantic or affectional bonds. Noller likewise is in agreement with Kirkpatrick that attachment between “God and His people” is potentially “more similar” than in romantic relationships (1992, p. 30). Ainsworth (1985, 1989) cites four criteria for the formulation of an attachment bond or what she refers to as affectional bonds which she defines as “a relatively long-enduring tie in which the partner is important as a unique individual and is interchangeable with none other” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 711). The characteristics of this bond includes: 1) the desire to maintain closeness or proximity; 2) the experience of comfort and closeness, or a haven of safety; 3) a secure base from which the individual feels secure to explore their world; and 4) distress upon inexplicable separation or loss (Ainsworth, 1985). Kirkpatrick (1999) and Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) utilize Ainsworth’s (1985) four criteria to demonstrate how individuals find and use God as a substitute attachment figure.

### *Purpose of This Study*

This study explores the attachment experiences of individuals who have a past insecure attachment from his or her Family of Origin (FOO) and who have sought to find a secure relationship with God. Grounded theory was utilized to more effectively understand the attachment experiences of the participants. The background of this research question is situated in attachment and God literature and the debate referencing

how a person's attachment security in relationship with God either corresponds to (including revised correspondence theory – less attachment oriented and more socially influenced) or compensates for their attachment to their caregiver(s) (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 2005a; Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2001). Correspondence theory suggests that those with an insecure attachment history will respond to all relationships either romantic or towards God according to their Internal Working Model (IWM) (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). IWM's are said to act as a mediator of one's attachment related experience, consist of over-generalizations, and should be interrelated to other substitute attachment figures (Kirkpatrick, 2005b). Compensation theory suggests that God and religion may function in a compensatory role for individuals with avoidant attachment histories (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). That is, a relationship with God was found to compensate for insecure attachment history. However, while the correspondence and compensation theories suggest how one's attachment history influences beginning a relationship with God, they fall short of explaining the attachment experiences of the individual as they continue their relationship with God. This study seeks to explore the journey of participants with an insecure attachment history and how they seek to have a more secure attachment with God.

### **Method**

To understand the journey of individuals with insecure attachment histories and who seek to find a secure relationship with God, I utilized a qualitative grounded theory paradigm consistent with Corbin and Strauss (2008) situated in both attachment and attachment and God theory. This study is based on 25 interviews that were transcribed

and coded for data analysis. Participants had to be eighteen years old or older, speak English and indicate they had a relationship with God that is meaningful and important to them. Data analysis was computer assisted utilizing Atlas ti.

### *Participants*

From a pool of 53 prospective participants, 25 were interviewed based upon their attachment histories, six did not complete the online assessment, four did not give consent to be interviewed. Of the 25 participants (see table 1), there were eight men (n=8) and seventeen women (n=17). The ages of the men ranged from 25-58 (mean = 42). The ages of the women ranged from 24-61 (mean = 41). Eighteen of the participants were Caucasian, four were Hispanic, one Middle Eastern, one African American and one listed themselves as Other. The prescreening assessments suggested that nine participants had secure to moderately secure attachment histories (n=9), while sixteen participants had moderate to high insecure attachment histories (n=16).

### *Sampling*

Participants were initially selected through convenience sampling which progressed to theoretical sampling, based upon the suggestion of Corbin and Strauss (2008), which enables data collection grounded on the themes that were developing through the stories of the participants. One of the ways that theoretical sampling was used in this study stems from the suggestion from current research that the prevailing division of attachment styles in America is approximately 62% secure, 23% avoidant, and 15% anxious/ambivalent (Campos, Barrett, Lamb, Goldsmith, and Stenberg, 1983; Hazan &

Table 1.

*Participants Demographics*

Age	Gender	* Race	** Marital Status	*** Attachment Security
37	F	H	M	MI ATG/ECR
61	F	C	M	S
25	M	C	M	MI ATG/ECR
43	F	C	M	MI ATG/ECR
29	F	ME	D	MI ATG/ECR
39	F	H	M	MI ATG/ECR
56	F	C	M	MS
58	M	C	M	MS
24	F	C	M	HI ECR
60	F	C	R / 4	MI ATG/ECR
32	F	C	D	HI ECR
33	M	H	M	MS
48	F	C	R / 2	HI ATG / ECR
37	F	C	M	HI ECR
46	M	C	M	S
40	M	C	M	HI ATG / MI ECR
33	M	C	M	S
58	M	B	M	HI ATG / MI ECR
40	F	O	R / 2	MI ATG/ECR
44	M	C	M	MI ATG/ECR
47	F	C	M	MS
42	F	C	R / 2	MI ATG/ECR
42	F	C	M	MI ATG/ECR
30	F	C	D	MS
29	F	H	M	S
Mean = 41.3	Male, n=8; Female, n=17	C (n=18); H (n=4); B (n=1); ME (n=1); O (n=1)	M (n=18); D (n=3); R (n=4)	Secure: n=9, 36% Insecure: n=16, 64%

Note: \* Race: C = Caucasian; H = Hispanic; B = Black; ME = Middle Eastern; O = Other

\*\* Marital Status: M= Married; D = Divorced; R = Remarried + number of marriages

\*\*\* S = Secure; MS = Moderately secure; MI = Moderately Insecure; HI = High Insecurity; ATG = Attachment to God Inventory; ECR = Experiences in Close relationships Scale-Short Form



Shaver, 1987). As the research progressed, to facilitate exploration of those with an insecure attachment, this study purposely excluded some potential participants with a secure attachment history while seeking out participants with a higher proportion of insecure attachment histories (insecure: n=16, 64%; secure: n=9, 36%). A second way that theoretical sampling was utilized involved changes in the original semi-structured interview. As significant themes were developing more attention was given to addressing these with each new participant. Examples of these adaptations to the semi-structured interview include questions concerning the phenomenon of the role of the critical parent and how the participants perceived God speaking to them.

Individual churches in Southern California were contacted to place a brief note concerning this study in their worship folder/bulletin which included a web address for the prescreening questionnaire. However, many participants learned of this study and then accessed the online web site through social networking. Potential participants completed an online attachment assessment comprised of the Attachment and God Inventory and Experiences in Close relationships Scale-Short Form to provide insight into their attachment history prior to being interviewed. Participants were then contacted by phone and individual appointments were set up for an interview. Most of the interviews took place in the researchers' office. Four of the interviews took place in a home close to where the participants lived for their convenience. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcription service. Names of the participants were deleted from the transcriptions and transcriptions were referred to by number. During analysis, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to maintain their confidentiality.

Each interview followed a semi-structured format composed of questions derived from attachment and attachment and God theory. Participants were asked questions such as: describe your relationship with their parents when you were a small child; as a child, who would you go to for comfort; who would you go to for comfort today; do you see God as available and responsive to your needs; has there ever been a time that you felt God was unavailable to you; how do you seek to connect to God; What does connecting with God look and feel like for you?

### *Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory is a process where the researcher seeks to discover a theory that is grounded in the information and descriptions of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Strauss and Corbin (1998) initially held that grounded theory was where abstract theory or theories emerged from the systematic gathering and analyzation of data derived through the research process by submerging one's self in the data. However, Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) has expanded her definition to include the development of theoretical constructs, which are derived from qualitative analysis.

### **Open Coding**

During this initial stage I was seeking to understand what was happening within the stories of the participants by breaking down each story, examining, making comparisons, continuously asking myself, "what is happening here" and to provide labels that offered a conceptual description of what was occurring (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Five hundred and eight six open codes were created in a line by line review of each

transcript. For example, when one participant described her early home life as, “usually it was abusive” it was given the initial coding abusive. Later when the same participant stated that “I thought I was a speck and I as getting smaller and smaller and smaller” it was labeled disappearing. Some codes were given names used by the participants, “in vivo” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and some represented similarities of characteristics or imagery (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Electronic memos were created following interviews and between times of data analysis as ideas and insights occurred when my mind was relaxed.

### **Axial Coding**

In the second stage of analysis I began to group together the parts of each story, identifying categories and concepts and to link them with more depth and description. At this point I was seeking to name what I seeing that reflected emerging concepts of opposing and similar phenomena. For example, the category “transition” sought to communicate the phenomena of some participants appearing to move toward more secure attachment with God. The category “community” was the outgrowth of the phenomena of finding someone who is safe which in turn sought to communicate how the role of relationships with others might contribute to a more secure attachment with God. The benefit of utilizing Atlas ti was the ability to track and organize quotes that developed potential themes, phenomena, and categories throughout the coding process. For instance, the categories transition and community were given greater weight than other categories based on the amount of data that reflected these phenomena.

## **Selective Coding and Theory Building**

As analysis continued categories and concepts appeared to solidify and relationships between categories were identified. It was from these relationships that theory began to emerge. For example the original category “transition” was now perceived as a phenomenon which suggested that attachment was more fluid than the literature suggested. Some participants who tended toward insecure attachments did demonstrate times of feeling more secure, but not all the time or even most of the time. I was curious about what the participants were doing that appeared to contribute to a more secure attachment experience. The data suggested that time and effort on the part of the participant helped contribute. So too the importance of community seemed to have an effect of producing feelings of safety as the participant experienced others as responsive and available to their needs. As concepts began to turn to theory, I found it helpful to diagram relationships. For instance there was a relationship between being in “transition” and “finding someone who is safe” which in turn was associated to participation in “small groups” which was further associated with “accountability and support.”

## **Focus Group**

In a later stage of analysis, I presented my observations on nine major categories and their relationships which I had identified to the focus group. While all the participants were invited to participate in the focus group, nine were able to attend. Their feedback helped to both solidify previous conceptualization and to reconceptualize significant phenomena. Where I had conceptualized interconnecting and contributing categories to explain phenomena, they saw it as something that they were in process of

experiencing that depended upon their current life problems, emotional availability and good habits – which I later labeled connecting behaviors. They gave more emphasis to seeing and experiencing people as caring within their church community which I recognized, but their feedback helped me to more accurately conceptualize the phenomena. They were astonished, yet approved of my observation that viewing God as the critical parent was a major obstacle in their journey to a more secure relationship with God.

As a result of the focus group meeting, the phenomenon of transition – that individuals were moving from an insecure attachment history to a more secure attachment history – was reconceptualized as a process of processes. That is, transition was multifaceted, consisting of many processes that were not linear but dynamic. The nine major categories were solidified into four major processes with their own individual tasks or processes.

### **The Journey to Connect With God**

This study began by asking, “What are the attachment experiences of individuals who have a past insecure attachment from his or her FOO and have sought to find a secure relationship with God?” By utilizing grounded theory and the stories of the participants, it is suggested that experiencing a secure attachment to God is interconnected with their attachment to others and provides an image of attachment as a process of processes marked by gradual changes towards the set-goal of feeling more safe and secure in their relationship with God and others. These processes included (1) finding what works; 2) finding a safe community where participants were able to see and

experience caring people first hand, as well as utilizing support from others and discovering specific persons who cared about them; 3) giving significant time and energy to creating secure relationships with God through connecting behaviors; and 4) being able to distinguish their feelings about God and their critical parent.

There was a significant difference between the ways participants with a secure attachment history responded to God over against those with an insecure attachment history. Those with a secure attachment history could describe their relationship with God and others in terms of closeness, trust, dependency, confidence, and comfort during times of need. The stories of participants with an insecure attachment history presented a mosaic of interconnecting tales of a struggle to connect to *any* relationship. That is, their struggle to connect with God was a part of a greater struggle to connect with others. Consistent with attachment theory this struggle to feel safe and secure in any relationship was firmly rooted in the participants' FOO. However, participants with an insecure attachment history demonstrated that by developing a relationship where they experienced another – human – as safe, responsive and available, such relationships significantly contributed to the journey of building a more secure relationship with God.

### *A Journey of Processes*

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (2005) defines process as "a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead to a particular result." Bowlby (1973) describes attachment behavior in an individual as having the set-goal of a maintaining proximity – closeness – to the one who provides a sense of security or a secure base. In this study, process is referred to as gradual changes made by the participants towards the set-goal or

journey to feel safe and secure – secure attachment – in their relationship with God and others.

Significantly, participants' stories of their relationship with God suggested that attachment is less a style – a fixed state – and more of a process of processes – an ongoing, but complex and multifaceted journey towards the set-goal of feeling safe and secure with God. Much like Stephanie, a single 30 year old, who experienced a divorce four years ago. She can look back on her life and recall that changes have been taking place in her ability to feel closer to God. She said, "I can't tell you the point in time...knowing that [God] loves me...before that it was doubt...I kind of wrestled...it took a couple of years." Her word "wrestled" captures the idea of a repetition of events and struggles, slow growth, and learning new things about herself and God, moving from doubting God's love to accepting that He does love her.

It is important to note that in this analysis, the concept of process includes the following observations: 1) these processes tend to influence the possibility of change rather than cause change; 2) these processes are not linear – one leading to another – but dynamic; and 3) the more processes the participant demonstrated – the more likely they were to exhibit significant movement in their journey toward a more secure relationship with God. The following analysis is grouped into four major processes which contain their own individual tasks or sub-processes. The order is not to imply priority, but to facilitate understanding how the participants were working through their attachment issues. This analysis reflects attachment as being in a process of change rather than being in a fixed state.

### *Finding What Works*

Finding what works reflects an observation concerning how participants made decisions whether or not to risk seeking a closer relationship with God or others at any given time. Finding what works is about maximizing what feels comfortable and minimizing situations or activities that made them feel afraid or threatened. Tom is a 40 year old Caucasian computer programmer and is in a troubled marriage with three children. Tom admits that, “I’m not good at relationships... I’m scared of being in a closer relationship with God.” He longs to be closer to God but finds that he tends to move away from Him when his fear that God “is not here today” gets too strong. In “finding what works,” Tom tries to let less time pass before he tries to “connect back with God and stop feeling sorry for myself.” Tom’s previous method was to allow more time and distance to accumulate.

Kara is a middle age wife and mother, who grew up believing that no one is safe, especially her mom with whom she still struggles. Kara struggles with seeing herself as vulnerable or what she calls, “being needy and really high-maintenance.” On the one hand she said, “I just don’t allow myself to feel the need... for Him.” Yet on the other hand she sees significant times where, “He’s there with me, helping me through it.” What works for Kara to work through her vulnerability issues is spending time in prayer and Bible study. During these times she said, “I feel connected [with Him].” She interprets her fears as saying that being too close to God will make her feel vulnerable. However, she can soothe her fear by being in close proximity to Him. Also notice that finding what works does not eliminate the stress of dealing with one’s resistance or fears, but it does tap into the participants’ natural strengths and resources.



### *A Safe Community*

A safe community appears to be one of the more significant processes that helps facilitate a participant's journey toward a more secure attachment with God. It is interesting to note that of the 25 participants interviewed, all but one saw their church as supportive. Even the most avoidant participants agreed that a supportive church was important to them. To these participants, being with other people or seeing other people care appeared to soften their barriers, enabling movement toward a more secure attachment process. Key features appear to be: 1) being able to see God or feel His presence and love through the actions of others; 2) experiencing first hand that others care; 3) the ability to foster more secure relationships with others (especially if that person is their spouse); and 4) learning to utilize support from others to work through their attachment fears. The apparent need to find a safe community underscores what participants expressed as being able to feel close to God by seeking connection with others. Finding safe relationships was significant in finding a closer relationship with God.

### **The Community Effect**

The community effect is the ability to feel the presence of God more effectively among others than by themselves; as if others became the embodiment of the presence of God. One of the most consistent processes for the participants was the significance of time spent within a believing community. It did not matter what attachment history a participant demonstrated, they shared a longing to be with others or, in attachment terms, they appeared to seek proximity to others who might be safe. If a participant felt someone

was getting too close or personal they could move away, but the longing for proximity would bring them back. Even the most avoidant would report that they could feel the presence of God better among others than by themselves.

The power of the community effect was repeated over and over in the stories of the participants. Mellissa, a 40 year old Hispanic woman, is in her second marriage. She and her partner are struggling to keep their relationship together. She stated, “There are things in my life that I couldn’t have made it through without sisters in Christ lifting me up.” Marie is also a Hispanic and married; she grew up believing she was not important to anyone. She shared that with the “support [of] the ladies group... it’s starting to make me realize that maybe He does want to hear [me].” Tom said, “As uncomfortable as it is dealing with relationships... that’s what drew me here and it’s what kept me here.” Scott, a married middle aged Caucasian school teacher clearly expressed the connection between how others may embody the presence of God, He said, “I feel more of a sense of Him using those around us to be His hands and His feet and His voice to us.”

### **Seeing That People Care**

Participants with an avoidant attachment history learned in their FOO that people are not safe and then generalized that belief to all other relationships, including their relationship with God. It appears that one of the community effects is that participants see others behaving in ways that they perceived as safe and responsive to the needs of others. Rebecca, a Hispanic at-home mom in her late 30’s grew up in church and attended a parochial school most of her childhood. She talked about the first time she walked into what was for her a safe believing community, She said, “I wanted what [they]... had.”

Ann, a Caucasian mom and business woman is married to Tom. She finds God to be a safe relationship; it is people she sees as unsafe. Ann stated that being a part of her community “gives me an opportunity to see God work through other people.” Scott said about his community, “I felt comforted by those around me.” Stephanie shared, “I’ve just watched them love ... I’ve seen lives be[ing] changed in [community].”

### **Personally Experiencing Caring People**

Being in community not only allowed participants to see others behaving in ways that they perceived as safe and responsive, it also gave them an opportunity to experience it for themselves. Claire’s story would break your heart. Claire suffered significant physical/emotional abuse and neglect. From the age of five she had to take care of her siblings while living with daily fear. She said, “Five o’clock was my bad hour. I would get nervous and neurotic because that’s usually when my mom would come home.” She described having a reoccurring dream, “I thought I was a speck and I as getting smaller and smaller and smaller... it used to terrify me.” When she attempted suicide as a teenager, she was placed with a Christian family. Claire said of that experience, “I spent the whole summer with those loving people... I loved it... it was the turning point... of my life.” There is no way to measure the role loving people played in Claire’s life except perhaps that her attachment assessment, completed during the prescreening process, reflected that she had a moderately secure attachment.

### **Searching For a Specific Person to Care**

This process emphasizes the longing of the participants to move from proximity

to intimacy. There also appears to be a relationship between turning to God and seeking out close relationships with others. When Mary was asked who she turns to for comfort, she replied, “that would be my husband, because I do have an amazing husband and I am open now.” This is her second marriage; her first ended when her husband had an extramarital affair. She described how, after her first husband left her, her life was filled with dark times where she prayed at home, alone and in tears. She started going to church where she found God. When asked why she turned to God she replied, “My husband got all of our friends in the divorce... I did not have anybody. I did not know anybody.” When she joined her community she first found friends and then later a special someone with whom she could be open and who, “loves me for me and I... can confide in.”

Claire talks about finding special relationships within her community. She said, “I love my small group... [We] are there for each other and it’s an extended family... it gives me the family I never really had.” Kathy is a newly married young adult who just recently began attending a church. People have never been safe for her, especially her mom who she describes as hostile and petty. She said of her mother, “I was the adult, she was the child.” Yet she found a different experience in her community, she said, “everyone’s really friendly... [They] care about you and want you to be there.” However, Kathy’s experience appears to have created a longing to have what she found in in her community with her husband. She said, “I remember when we first got here, [we] weren’t really together doing well and we were still fighting.” Nevertheless, Kathy can now say she is trying to “be more open with [her husband]... I’m not a very open person... that’s just how I grew up.”

## **Learning to Utilize Support from Others**

Participants shared what appeared to be a Catch 22 situation: on the one hand an insecure attachment leads to avoiding intimacy and vulnerability, but on the other hand, to experience intimacy is to purposefully allow one's self to experience vulnerability. Those participants who appeared more successful in experiencing times of intimacy were more willing to be vulnerable by sharing their struggle in a small supportive group.

Jason, a young adult college student, is married to Kathy. He describes himself as someone who avoids close relationships, yet recognizes, "you can't do it on your own." When asked what advice he would give to other 'avoiders' he responded, "You have to get connected [to] a small group... share your feelings with people... to be vulnerable and be open." When Mary was asked about the quality of her relationships before she started attending her small group, she replied, "There was no quality in them. There were no relationships. I went into this group at church very reluctantly." Mellissa is also reluctant; she said of her group, "I haven't put my heart out ... that's scary for me." There are experiences in Mellissa's life that she feels, if she would share them with others, would cause them to reject her. But she also said, "I know pretty soon that I'm going to share the other stuff because ... as messed up as I was I've come through all that and I'm still a believer."

### ***Significant Time and Energy Given to Creating Secure Relationships***

A third significant process is that the more time and energy a participant gave to seeking a more secure relationship with God and others, the more they were able to talk about feeling more secure in their relationship with Him. Woven into their stories were

times where they made specific choices to do more or different behaviors that appeared to be an outgrowth of their longing to feel closer to God. Those who seemed to be creating movement in their growth process were intentionally giving significant time seeking to connect with God and others. There appeared to be a mindset of wanting more out of their relationships. Brian said of his relationship with God, “It’s an active relationship and it has to move.” Jason remarked, “You get out what you put in.” Kathy recognized that her relationship with God was growing, “not because He’s there more; because I’m more active, I’m definitely participating more and looking for Him more.” John said, “When I started doing more actual study of scripture other than just reading it, I really see how good God is.” Michelle found that, “If there’s something that I know I’m doing that’s drawing me away from Him then I try to cut that out, and I try to replace it with spending time with God.” Faith stated, “The more that I sought him, the more I felt that longing was being satisfied or [was] being fulfilled.”

There appeared to be certain “connecting behaviors” or ways participants sought to feel closer and more connected to God. This list is different for every participant. An overview of this list would include prayer, Bible reading, attending worship services, listening to music, meditation, and journaling. Others might speak about focused attention, opening oneself to God, submission, taking risks, persistence, or going for a walk with God – the list is quite extensive. However, it seemed like how the participant sought to connect to God was less important than the amount of time they gave to connecting behaviors that worked for them.

### *Ability to Distinguish Feelings about God and Critical Parent*

A significant barrier to being able to experience a more secure relationship with God appeared to be a phenomenon where participants compared God to that parent(s) with whom the participant most closely, yet negatively identified. The term critical parent is used to represent this negative identification. This phenomenon appears to include: 1) unfulfilled longings concerning a significant parent(s) and a fear that the longing will never be fulfilled; 2) views of God – as parent – in the negative image they hold of the critical parent; 3) or, having experienced the loss of a parent or a substitute attachment figure, and thus living in fear of losing God or that God will abandon them.

#### **Examples of Comparing God to One's Critical Parent**

Tom never knew his dad, growing up with a series of mom's boyfriends, and eventually an abusive stepdad that mom divorced after 10 years. Mom was seldom home and Tom was often left in the care of "others." When discussing times he felt God was not available to him, he was able to make the connection between how he felt about his mom and God. He stated, "Like you need Him and He's not there... nobody's there for me." But he also made a connection between his struggle to love God and his lack of trust for his father figures. He said, "I never trusted any of my father figures... it was the biggest obstacle... to a real emotional relationship with God." He was afraid to love God because what he knew of parental figures was unsafe and unavailable.

When Robert was asked whether he trusted God he responded, "Yes, [but] deep inside it only goes so far... I have a hard time with this word father." Robert grew up with an abusive dad. His birth mother and father weren't married and he was a baby

when dad took him away from her. At a young age he ran away from home. When asked what word works for him when he tries to imagine God, he responded, “overseer... omnipotent, all seeing, all of those rather run the gambit... a father somehow just falls short.” It became apparent that Robert could not embrace what he knew to be ‘father’ and compare that with God. Therefore he found a more impersonal image that facilitated his ability to distinguish God from father and maintain a relationship with God that he felt was safe.

Kevin experienced significant loss in his life and struggles with the fear that God will abandon him as well. He does not negatively compare God to his father – father is a good image in his mind. The fear of loss appears to have become the negative image he attaches to God. His dad died when Kevin was three and his mom never remarried. He can remember fragments of images about his dad. He sees his life as a series of losses, “every five to seven years, they were passing away, the significant [father figures].” Kevin recognizes that he seeks to protect himself from the fear of losing God as well, “I think that this theme of loss in my life is one that’s kind of recurring... I’m gonna lose Him.” So he finds ways of avoiding closeness with God. When asked what it would be like to lose his protective shell between him and God he replied, “I think it’d feel pretty vulnerable and a little bit like things would be beyond my control.” Caught between his love for God and his fear of losing Him, Kevin copes by making sure that he does not disappoint God. He said, “Just the idea of Him not being pleased with me would ... feel like I would be losing that relationship.”



## **Recognizing God Is Not My Critical Parent**

It became evident that many of the participants could see that their problem with intimacy with God was directly related to their image of their critical parent. However, those participants that were experiencing movement to a more secure attachment with God could separate the two images and the feelings the negative image stirred within them. Further, they could move closer toward God despite the fear that they might be experiencing.

Jason can recognize that he struggles with issues of acceptance. He said it “goes back to my parents and not wanting to disappoint them... I want to be accepted.” However he appears to be able to make the distinction between what he feels about his parents and what he feels about God. He said, sometimes I lose me by trying... to be accepted, but with God, I know [“through prayer and reading the Bible”] I am what I am... [and] He accepts me.” It appears that for Jason, his image of God is being aided through experiencing God through communication – prayer – and what he is learning by reading the Bible.

Kathy has a habit of running away from relationships. When she sees herself running from God, she is able to bring herself back by remembering “a good experience I’ve had with God... [that] He responded to me... [and] showed me that He was there.” She made the connection that her fear response to relationships is related to her struggle with her mom. She said, “She just was never nice about anything or never made me feel good about anything I did or who I was.” Nevertheless, she can make a clear distinction about how she feels about God, she said, “God makes you feel so good about who you

are.” Yet she does this by remembering times where she felt God was responsive and accessible to her during times of need

Stephanie’s struggle was with feelings of rejection and abandonment. She described her movement to a more secure attachment to God as a long process. She said...

“There has been a change.... over the last four and a half years, since my husband left, there has been a lot of you know, like onion layers, I guess peeled off. And so a lot of it made me think about my dad that I kind of projected onto God.”

When asked what created the desire in her to change, she replied, “Prayer and asking God for the change.” She first understood that her struggle with closeness with God was directly related to her dad during her journaling – recalling and comparing memories of the past and present. The courage to take on the emotional struggles related to how she felt about God and her dad reflected her longing for greater closeness to God.

### ***Conclusion***

This study began as an outgrowth of wondering why some people who longed to connect with God have struggled in their pursuit of Him. The stories of participants with an insecure attachment history suggested that their struggle to experience a secure relationship with God was connected to their struggle to securely connect to *any* relationship. However, participants’ stories also provided an image of attachment as a process of processes marked by gradual changes towards the set-goal of feeling more safe and secure in their relationship with God and others. Participants with an insecure attachment history demonstrated that by developing a relationship where they

experienced another – human – as safe, responsive and available, such relationships significantly contributed to the journey of building a more secure relationship with God.

### **Discussion: The Journey from Proximity to Intimacy**

This study provides insight on attachment and suggests that attachment is not static or constrained by styles; rather it can be conceptualized in terms of openness to a process of change, especially if the individual is a part of a safe community. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) suggest that correspondence and compensation theories represent “two distinct pathways to religion” and that individuals tend to find in God those qualities, such as unconditional love, which helps regulate distress when “no other sufficient attachment figure is available” (p.918). However, participants’ stories suggest that a safe of community helps facilitate a more secure attachment which may indicate an additional pathway regarding how people connect with God. This theoretical premise is supported by three significant themes: 1) a safe community provides a bridging function; 2) helps sooth attachment fears and minimizes the need for affect regulation; 3) helps facilitate the creation of new images of God. These three themes appeared to be necessary to undergird the processes of participants as they sought to move from proximity to intimacy.

#### ***A Safe Community Creates a Bridging Function***

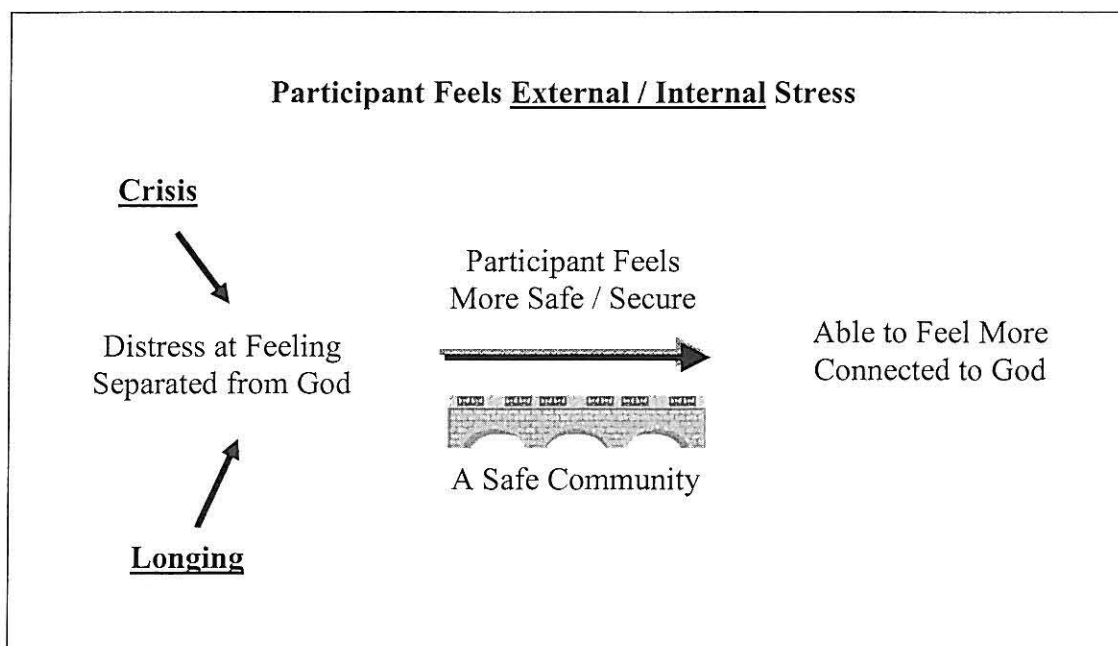
Participant’s stories appeared to suggest that attachment is not set and should be seen as being open to a process of change. The literature consistently suggests that 70% of individuals will continue maintain their attachment security throughout their life span

(Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994; Davila, Burge, & Hammen, 1997). Previous research is uncertain why there is variability with the other 30% and what factors might lead to a change in attachment security. Waters, Weinfield, and Hamilton, (2000) suggested attachment variability could be due in part to negative life events and circumstances. Davila, Burge, and Hammen, (1997), have suggested four causes: natural disposition, attachment insecurity, psychopathology, and personality disturbance.

Nevertheless, participants with an insecure attachment history seemed to long for and to be working towards the set-goal of feeling safe and secure in their relationship with God, with varying degrees of success. It appeared that three factors were associated with attachment variability and their journey to connect to God: 1) personal struggle – whether relational crises or a crisis of faith; 2) longing; and 3) a safe community. Consistent with attachment theory when some participants experienced personal turmoil or crisis, they sought out someone to comfort them. In the absence of a secure attachment to a significant other, they sought out God as a substitute attachment figure to provide a sense of security (Bowlby, 1973).

Others seemed to seek out God as an outgrowth of their longing for Him. This longing may or may not be the product of the “set goal” that Bowlby (1969) spoke about as existing within the child to maintain proximity to their attachment figure. However, participants expressed a longing to experience the presence of God and experienced distress when they felt disconnected to Him. Because participants reported feeling the presence of God more clearly when they were with others, there appears to be a relationship between turning to God and seeking out relationships with others. Their longing to connect with God led them into proximity to others. Once a participant came

into proximity to others, in the context of safe relationships, they were provided the opportunity to see, experience, search for a specific safe person(s), and utilize support. In those cases where a participant could describe moving toward a more secure relationship with God they describe having begun to experience relationships with others as safe. These safe relationships seemed to provide a “bridging” function which facilitated feeling more connected to God during times of external and internal stress (see figure 1). This appeared to be especially true for those whose IWM corresponded to their attachment history related to their FOO. Although, those who experienced a relationship with God as compensation for their insecure attachment history, also reported feeling more connected with God while in proximity to others.



A Safe Community Creates a Bridging Function

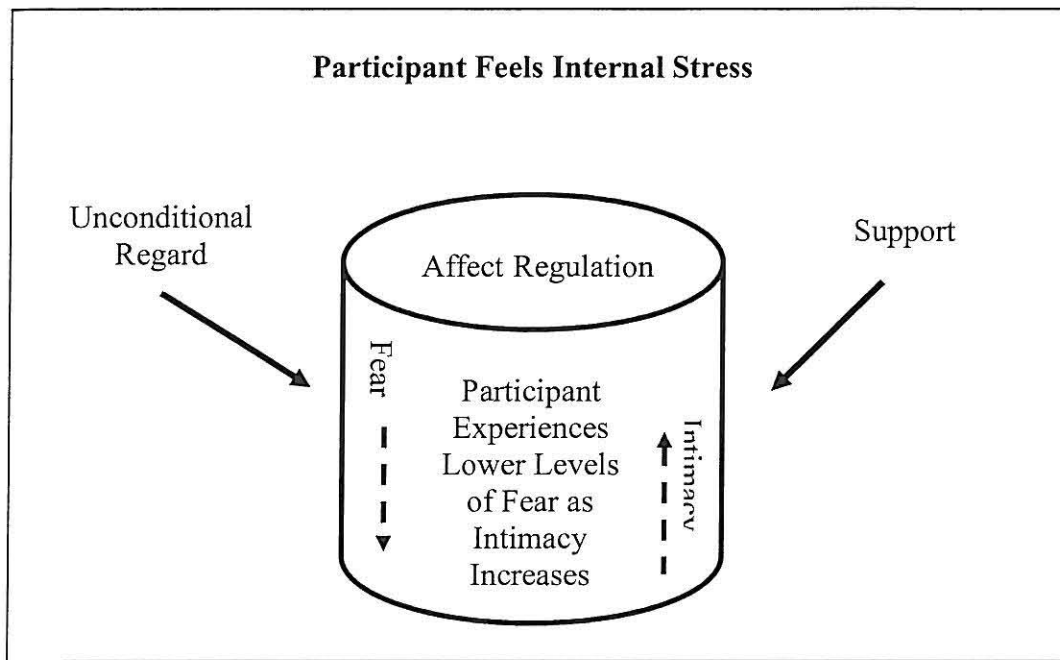
*Figure 1.* Participant experiences community as safe

### *A Safe Community Soothes Attachment Fears*

The journey from proximity to intimacy also included the participant finding ways to connect to God that worked for them. What ways the participant eventually chose tended to tap into what felt comfortable to them. Those who enjoyed reading, read. Those who enjoyed journaling wrote. Those who enjoyed more active means, such as worship, music, group participation, etc., chose those.

The study was also highly suggestive that “a lot” of one particular way, such as worship, Bible reading, prayer, was not always productive. One reason for this may be that some participants reported that at times, they became flooded or emotionally overwhelmed and they would choose to withdraw as a means of affect regulation. To illustrate this, consider a container that instead of having one large opening has many small conduits filling the container at a much slower pace. The more a participant is secure, the more intimacy they can draw in at one time. The more a participant is insecure, the less they can handle even the appearance of intimacy at any one time. So if the appearance of intimacy can be regulated or distributed through multiple channels, the container will slowly fill – developing the possibility of tolerance for closeness – in a way that works for the participant.

The key here appears to be the participants’ need for affect regulation. To continue the illustration, those who are more fearful in their attachment history tend toward a greater possibility for checking behaviors and hyper-awareness that the container is filling, i.e., experiencing closeness and intimacy. This, in itself, is enough for the person to withdraw. A second characteristic of a safe community appears to be the ability of community to help soothe these fears (see figure 2). When a community creates



Community as a Vessel of Support

Figure 2. Community helps soothe participants' fears

an environment of unconditional regard and support, it may provide a less reactive means of affect regulation as well as long-term encouragement during times of internal stress.

### *A Safe Community Helps Facilitate Creating New Images of God*

This study suggests that the majority of participants with an insecure attachment were comparing God to that parent with whom they most closely, yet negatively identified. In essence, these participants' view of God corresponded to that of their critical parent. This phenomenon was suggested as participants described their internal struggle with God using descriptive words that were similar to those used to describe

their parent(s). Expressions of longing, anger, fear, and/or futility that their critical parent would ever be responsive and available to their needs were applied to their relationship with God. The literature refers to the process of how the individual integrates thoughts about their critical parent and God as internal or cognitive models, maps, or structures (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; John Bowlby, 1969). Although, there is a suggestion that the building of IWM's also involves previous childhood images as well as the feelings that accompany these images (Keller, 2003).

### **Accessing Images Consistent with One's IWM**

There were times as participants discussed particularly distressing events related to their critical parent or God, that they would look up and away as if accessing a memory; at these times there were often tears, strong emotion and descriptive stories of a painful event. A possible explanation for what was occurring is that the participant was accessing an image that was consistent with their IWM, combining both as a symbol of their pain and yearning. To illustrate, the literature suggests that a child's early cognitive structures are developed as the child seeks to make sense of his world. However, at some time in the life of the individual an event(s) takes place that may symbolize or represent the insecure cognitive structures already present or solidifying and in turn, becomes a negative mental image. Participants' responses suggest the possibility that this negative image gets imprinted visually in the individuals' memory and is now associated with similar events in the present. Not only is there a way they think about the world, but there is an image that supports that view along with certain negative, almost visceral, feelings that are associated with the image.

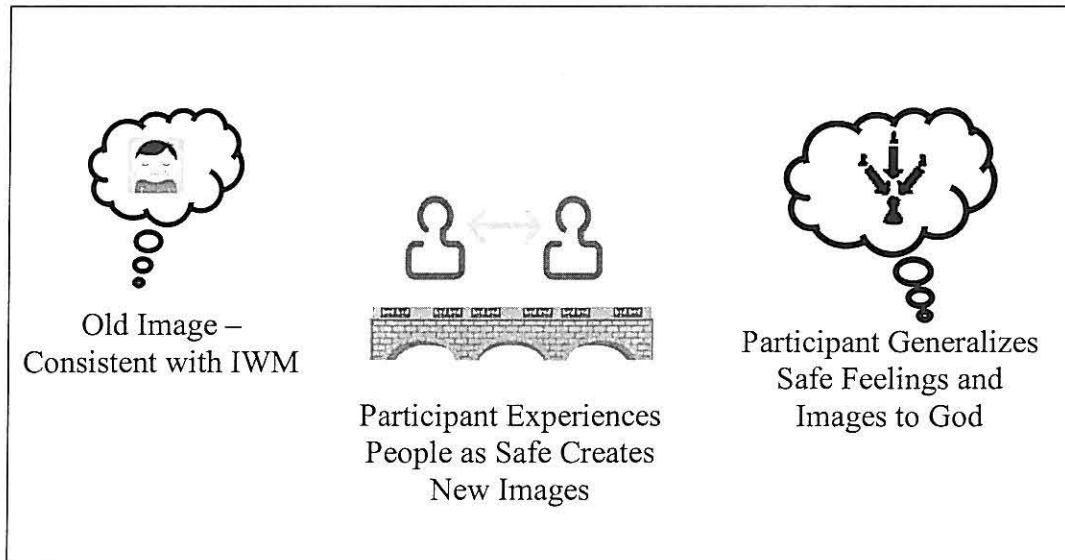


### **God as My Critical Parent**

Whatever this negative image may represent and the feelings associated with it, as they somehow become paired with ones' image of God, that image can become too painful. When participants were asked to consider God as Father, some could do so simply, while others didn't just say no, they shook their head in negation, expressed sadness and/or tears, or used a joke. The image was too painful. Nevertheless, there was still a longing to be in relationship with God. To compensate, some participants changed the image to one that was acceptable, like Robert seeing God as "overseer," or Patricia's image of God as "a God of all, the Great God and the Creator." For these participants, an insecure attachment became a tug of war between the relationship they longed for with God and an internal image that justified their fear of getting too close to Him.

### **A Safe Community May Facilitate a New Image of God**

A third characteristic of a safe community appears to be the ability of participants to find or create new images of God. In community, the participants appeared to create new experiences where God and others could be seen as safe, available, and responsive. By seeing or experiencing others as safe, a new tangible image or memory could be created. This memory of loving/caring others could then be generalized to God. It appeared to have the effect on the participants, "if people can be like this, God can also be like this" (see figure 3). Those participants that adapted to their insecure attachment history by creating a less personal name for God such as "Creator – overseer," were able to regulate their affect responses by choosing a not to see God as "Father." It could be said that they were creating a safer image of God, however, that had the appearance of



**A Safe Community Helps Facilitate a New Image of God**

*Figure 3. Community helps create a new safe image*

being a coping mechanism rather than a reconfiguring of emotional reality or perception. There were other participants that appeared to be experiencing movement to a more secure attachment with God who could separate the two images – critical parent and God as Father – which required less affect regulation. They appeared not to change names for God but gained a new image. Further research is necessary to validate and explore the role of a safe community and the development of positive images may play in the movement from an insecure to a more secure attachment process.

***Conclusion:***

The role of community as a means of affect regulation during times of distress appears to presents a possible theoretical addition regarding how people connect with

God. Participants' stories appeared to suggest that a safe community may facilitate a more secure attachment to God and others; however, why this might be so is unclear. The participants' faith community did not appear to be in themselves a substitute attachment figure consistent with Ainsworth's (1985) four fold criteria for the formulation of an attachment bond. However, several researchers have suggested the possibility that one's current romantic relationship(s) may have a significant positive mediating effect on one's attachment with God (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; TenElshof & Furrow, 2000). This study suggests that a safe community may also provide a significant positive mediating effect one's attachment with God as well.

This study has suggested this potential mediation as functioning as a 1) bridge to help participants feel more safe and secure; 2) soothing participants' fears; and 3) helping to create a new safe image of God. While some research has studied the effects of attachment history on group processes (Markin & Marmarosh, 2010) further research is needed to understand the role that a safe community may play in facilitating secure attachments and affect regulation.

### *Implications for Clinical Practice*

Understanding the lived experiences of individuals as they journey to connect with God and how one's attachment history affects that journey is significant to the field of Family Therapy and to clinical practice. This study suggests four specific ways clinical practice can incorporate a client's faith practice to facilitated therapeutic goals: 1) incorporating attachment language as a means of exploring one's faith experience; 2) reaching the unseen wounds; 3) utilizing small groups that may be existent in one's faith

community; 4) and helping clients create new images of God that are consistent with their faith beliefs.

### **Incorporating Attachment language**

While there has been growing recognition in the field of marriage and family therapy that, “spirituality is an inherent aspect of human experience” (Kimball & Knudson-Martin, 2002, p. 146), many therapists “may still struggle with the challenges associated with addressing spiritual issues in practice” (Keeling, Dolbin-MacNab, Ford, & Perkins (2010, p.229). The reason for this struggle may be, in part, a lack of familiarity with a particular religion or feeling, and discomfort entering into dialogue about religious/spiritual issues outside the scope of the therapists’ experience. Attachment or relational language may help bridge the gap between the client-therapist religious backgrounds while tapping into the strengths and resources of a client’s religious beliefs and heritage.

Religion and issues of spirituality concern, in part, the attempt of an individual to connect with the Divine and make sense of their world. While there are many different religions and ways an individual’s beliefs maybe expressed, a way of discovering the meaning a client makes of their faith experience is to talk in terms of relationship. A religious discussion can be initiated by asking, “When you attend religious services, where do you attend?” This kind of question is non-threatening and opens the door for further disclosure. Follow up questions may include, “Do you find your place of worship meaningful?” “Tell me about your relationship with God.” “Do you feel that God is available and responsive to your needs?” “Do you find the people with whom you

worship to be supportive and encouraging?” These types of questions provide insight into how the client views not only their relationship with the Divine, but also other possible significant relationships, as well as whether they see their place of worship as a resource for support and encouragement that can be utilized to assist therapy goals.

A one down attitude or a not knowing stance on the part of the therapist when discussing religious issues enables the client to feel that their faith experience and values will be respected. The more a client identifies with a western culture evangelical church background, the more they might view secular therapy with distrust. The clinician can allay these fears by aligning with the clients need to have their faith experience reinforced.

### **Reaching the Unseen Wound**

One’s faith experience may be a strength or a source of pain and woundedness. Many of the participants in this study were carrying silent relational wounds, longing to connect to God and others yet lacking the knowledge or the resources to work through their issues. Unless the clinician purposefully explores spiritual issues with their clients, spiritual wounds tend to be ignored in favor of exploring physical / tangible relational issues, even among attachment oriented clinicians. Most clients will not present with God issues so the sensitive therapist will work to make explicit spiritual issues and how they may impact or may be being impacted by relationships with others or one’s FOO.

### **Utilizing Small Groups**

Participants placed a significant value on their small group that was a part of their

faith community. This is most often not a support group in the classical sense, though the participants valued the group for its support. Sometimes it's called a Sunday school or a Sabbath school class. More often these groups meet any day and time during the week – depending upon the size of the church – usually in someone's home and are less “Bible study” oriented and more of a safe group to meet with that help individuals find meaning in their world in their “Faith” context.

In this study, participants were more likely to go to a small group to find a way to work through their relational problems than to seek out professional therapy. The importance of small groups is suggested by the observation that the more involved the participants were in developing healthy relationships in their small group, the more positive processes could be identified that facilitated movement toward a more secure attachment process. In small groups they began to learn how to utilize support from others. They were further able to see and experience caring people which facilitated self-exploration of FOO issues and the development of more secure relationships. From a clinical perspective, encouraging a client who attends a church to get involved in a small group in their faith community is another potential solution for developing healthy relationships and personal resources.

### **Creating New Images**

An important suggestion in this study is the significance of helping clients create a positive image of God through experiencing others as caring and responsive as a therapeutic intervention in developing a more secure attachment. How images and soothing experiences affect the attachment bond may be similar to what is suggested in

Emotionally Focused Therapy, as creating softening events (Bradley & Furrow, 2004) where partners are able to experience each other as safe and responsive and as a result partners are able to “reconfigure their emotional realities” (p. 234).

What was fascinating in this study was the apparent capability of some participants, in the context of a caring community, to spontaneously create powerful enough images to soothe their attachment fears. Possible ways to enter into this kind of discussion is to ask the client, “Tell me a time that God was available and responsive to you.” “What was that like for you?” “What did you see God doing?” “What were you doing? It could also be helpful to have the client invite members of their small group to come into one or more counseling sessions to provide multiple voices of how God is working in and around the client to help them solidify their memories and experiences.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

There are several limitations to this study. The sample size limits the ability to generalize the results to other populations or religions. This was a sample of individuals with a view of God from a Western perspective. It was chosen because of the significant emphasis participants gave to having a relationship with God, which in turn facilitated how they sought to be in relationship with God from an attachment perspective. A suggestion for further research would be to compare how Jewish, Eastern, New Age, or Islamic religions interact from an attachment perspective within their view of God.

A further limitation is that the data on which this research was developed was in a significant way largely retrospective. It was based on participants’ memories as well as their present experiences. Past memories were filtered by the participants’ own ability to

remember and how they internally processed their own recollections, which in turn influenced the data recorded in the interviews.

Other limitations of this study include a limited sample of churches within the broader context of what is called evangelical churches; how evangelical churches might differ from non-evangelical churches; how a small church might differ from a mega-church in the sense of perceived supportiveness; and how church size might impact the community effect. There was a further limitation related to race. The majority of participants were Caucasian. There is a question about how other races might experience attachment with God either individually or in the context of their faith community and what kind of support mechanisms might be more appropriate for different ethnic communities.

Utilizing grounded theory and a qualitative approach provided a unique perspective to attachment literature. Nevertheless, future research is needed to understand the mechanisms of building secure relationships with others and how that affects ones' relationship with God or other significant attachment figures. There is a further need to understand what role creating new images of significant individuals might play in overcoming insecure attachment histories from ones' FOO and how those images might be facilitated through therapy.



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## APPENDIX A

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. To begin... could you describe your relationship with your parents when you were a young child (as far back as you can remember)? Do you feel that your parents were emotionally and physically there for you when you needed them? How did they respond to you when you needed help?
2. When you were a child and you were hurt or frightened, who would you go to for comfort? What about today? Who would you go to for comfort?
3. Are you currently in a committed romantic relationship? On a scale between 1 and 9 (1, being very distant – 9, being very close) how close or distant would you rate this relationship?
  - If close, could you tell me about this relationship? What about the person or relationship makes you feel close to the other person?
  - If distant, have you ever experienced a close romantic relationship? If so for how long? Could you tell me more about this relationship? What about the person or relationship makes you feel close to the other person?
4. Were your parents very religious?
5. Have you ever had a conversion experience? Was it sudden – dramatic or gradual? Can you tell me about your conversion experience? At what age? Why did you turn to God?
6. When you attend church, where do you attend? Do you see your church as supportive and encouraging? If so, in what way? Or if not, how would you like them to be?
7. When you pray, how do you pray (non-verbal, verbal, or other?)
8. Some people might say that when they pray they feel as if God is in the room with them while others might say they feel like their prayers bounce off the ceiling. What is your prayer life like for you?
9. How do you seek to be close to God? (Prayer, worship, meditation, Bible reading, other?)
10. Have you ever felt the presence of God? If so, what's it like for you to feel the presence of God? If not, what is it like for you not to feel the presence of God?
11. During times of distress do you sense God is closer to you or more distant?

12. Do you see God as available and responsive to your needs? If so, can you share with me a time when He did respond and what you might have felt at that time? If not, what is it like for you to feel that God may or may not respond to you?
13. Have you ever felt that God was distant and unavailable to you when you needed Him? How did you come to reconnect with Him (if you did)?
14. How does it make you feel about yourself that God is either responsive or non-responsive to your needs? Have you ever felt you weren't good enough for God?
15. Have you ever felt God comfort you? If so how?
16. Describe to me a time of difficulty or crisis where...
  - You felt the presence and comfort of God. What was it like? What did you sense God was doing?
  - You needed to feel the presence and comfort of God, but you felt that He was distant or unavailable to you.
17. What does connecting with God look and feel like for you? Or, what does a longing to connect with God look and feel like to you?
18. What haven't I asked you about your relationship with God that would help me understand your relationship with Him Better?



## APPENDIX B

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ (Year)

Gender: \_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_ Female

Race: (Check all that apply) \_\_\_\_ Black \_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_ Native American \_\_\_\_ East Indian \_\_\_\_ Middle Eastern \_\_\_\_ Other

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_ Married \_\_\_\_ Never-Married \_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_\_  
Remarried, If remarried number of marriages \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 0 to 5 (0 = not committed - 5 = very committed), I rate my commitment to God as:

0 1 2 3 4 5 (circle only one)

On a scale of 0 to 5 (0 = not close - 5 = very close), I rate my closeness to God as:

0 1 2 3 4 5 (circle only one)

## APPENDIX C

### EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIP SCALE-SHORT FORM (ECR-S)

Instruction: The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Mark your answer using the following rating scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Scoring Information:

Anxiety = 2, 4, 6, 8 (reverse), 10, 12

Avoidance = 1 (reverse), 3, 5 (reverse), 7, 9 (reverse), 11

## APPENDIX D

### THE ATTACHMENT TO GOD INVENTORY

The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with God. We are interested in how you generally experience your relationship with God, not just in what is happening in that relationship currently. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write the number in the space provided, using the following rating scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I worry a lot about my relationship with God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I just don't feel a deep need to be close to God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. If I can't see God working in my life, I get upset or angry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I am totally dependent upon God for everything in my life. (R)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I am jealous at how God seems to care more for others than for me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. It is uncommon for me to cry when sharing with God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Sometimes I feel that God loves others more than me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. My experiences with God are very intimate and emotional. (R)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I am jealous at how close some people are to God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I prefer not to depend too much on God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I often worry about whether God is pleased with me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I am uncomfortable being emotional in my communication with God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Even if I fail, I never question that God is pleased with me. (R)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. My prayers to God are often matter-of-fact and not very personal.\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Almost daily I feel that my relationship with God goes back and forth from "hot" to "cold."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I am uncomfortable with emotional displays of affection to God.\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Without God I couldn't function at all. (R)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I often feel angry with God for not responding to me when I want.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I believe people should not depend on God for things they should do for themselves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I crave reassurance from God that God loves me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Daily I discuss all of my problems and concerns with God. (R)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I am jealous when others feel God's presence when I cannot.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I worry a lot about damaging my relationship with God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. My prayers to God are very emotional. (R)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I get upset when I feel God helps others, but forgets about me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I let God make most of the decisions in my life. (R)

Scoring: Avoidance = sum of even numbered items. Anxiety = sum of odd numbered items. Items 4, 8, 13, 18, 22, 26, and 28 are reverse scored

## APPENDIX E

### RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Participants will NOT include close friends or family members, but may include acquaintances.

#### When contacting churches

My name is Jack Bracy; I am a pastor and PhD student at Loma Linda University. I am looking for volunteers to participate in a research project about how people connect with God. I am asking if your church would be willing to publish in your newsletter or worship folder/bulletin a brief note about my research project, which has a link to a web page where interested individuals can learn more about the research project and choose to participate, if they desire. There is absolutely NO obligation to participate. This research is a doctoral student study supervised by a faculty member.

Brief background of the research project: As a pastor I have observed that there are individuals that go to church, read the Bible, and pray on a regular basis, yet feel that God is distant or not responsive to their needs. Rather than being just a spiritual problem, I have wondered if this is a relational problem. This research project is about listening to people's stories about their relationship with God and other significant people in their life (dad, mom, spouse, or significant other). After completing a brief confidential online questionnaire, each person will be asked if they would like to be interviewed. If they consent to be interviewed they will be asked to provide their name and a phone number where they may be contacted. Not everyone who consents to be interviewed will be interviewed. This will depend on how many persons choose to participate in the research project and whether they meet the research criteria.

#### Sample newsletter or worship folder/bulletin insert

Have you ever felt that that God is distant, doesn't hear you or doesn't respond to you when you need Him even when you go to church, read the Bible, and pray on a regular basis? Or do you sense that God is close, and readily responds to you in times of need? Would you like to tell your story? For more information about participating in a research project about how people connect with God go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Godandme>. Participants must be 18 years old or older.

## APPENDIX F

### ONLINE PRE-SCREENING INFORMED CONSENT

#### How People Understand God's Availability and Responsiveness Study

##### **Purpose and Procedures**

You are invited to participate in a research study about how people connect with God, how they view their relationship with Him, and how that relationship may be affected by other significant relationships in their life. The goal of this study is to build a collection of stories that will help contribute to understanding how people view their relationship with God, His availability and responsiveness during times of need.

This study is being conducted by Jack Bracy, a Doctoral Student at Loma Linda University under the guidance of Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor.

You are being asked to complete a questionnaire about how you feel about your relationship with God and your close/romantic relationships. It is expected that it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. *At the conclusion of the questionnaire, you will be asked if you would consent to being interviewed by the Student Researcher.*

##### **Risks**

The risks to you are the possibility that some issues may be raised that make you uncomfortable.

##### **Benefits**

While participation in this study may be of no direct personal benefit to you, the potential benefit to others is great. What is learned from you may help other individuals learn to have a closer and more secure relationship with God.

##### **Participants Rights**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

##### **Confidentiality**

The answers you provide to for the survey questions will be held in confidence

##### **Costs**

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

##### **Reimbursement**

You will not be paid for participating in the study.

##### **Impartial Third Party Contact**

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909)558-4647 for information and assistance.

.....

**Informed Consent Statement**

By checking the box I am verifying that I have read the contents of the consent form and I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in the questionnaire portion of this study. I understand that giving my consent does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators, institution or sponsors from their responsibilities. I may call Jack Bracy (Student Researcher) at 1-760-954-3794 or Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor at 1-909-558-4547, ex 47002 if I have additional questions or concerns.

.....

*The following consent will appear on screen following the completion of the questionnaire:*

Would you be willing to be interviewed? If you would like to be interviewed, your participation will involve an individual interview lasting approximately 1-1½ hours. The interview will take the form of a guided conversation about how you came to know God and what your relationship with Him is like, including your struggles and victories. There will also be questions about the family you grew up in and other close relationships. The purpose of this interview is to learn from you. No assessment regarding the quality of your relationship with God will be made and no advice or suggestions will be offered.

The interview will be voice-recorded and transcribed for further study. Your name and identifying information will be removed from the written transcripts.

Unfortunately, not everyone who completes the survey will be contacted for an interview. The researchers will interview only about 20 individuals selected so that we will have a variety of different types of people based on different relationships with God and others. You will be contacted by phone if you are selected for the interview portion of this survey. Thank you for your help.

**Consent to Participate in Interview Process**

By checking the box I am indicating my voluntary consent to be contacted regarding the Interview portion of this study. I may call Jack Bracy (Student Researcher) at 1-760-954-3794 or Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor at 1-909-558-4547, ex 47002 if I have additional questions or concerns.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

You may contact me at this phone number \_\_\_\_\_

The best time of day to contact me is \_\_\_\_\_ Am / Pm (circle one)

## APPENDIX G

### INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

#### How People Understand God's Availability and Responsiveness Study

##### **Purpose and Procedures**

You are invited to participate in a research study about how people connect with God, how they view their relationship with Him, and how that relationship may be affected by other significant relationships in their life. The goal of this study is to build a collection of stories that will help contribute to understanding how people view their relationship with God, His availability and responsiveness during times of need.

This study is being conducted by Jack Bracy, a Doctoral Student at Loma Linda University under the guidance of Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor.”

Your participation will involve an individual interview lasting approximately 1-1½ hours. The interview will take the form of a guided conversation about how you came to know God and what your relationship with Him is like, including your struggles and victories. There will also be questions about the family you grew up in and other close relationships. The purpose of this interview is to learn from you. No assessment regarding the quality of your relationship with God will be made and no advice or suggestions will be offered.

The interview will be voice-recorded and transcribed by GMR Transcription Services, Inc. for further study. Your name and identifying information will be removed from the written transcripts. GMR Transcription Services, Inc. agrees to destroy the voice-recording at the conclusion of the research project. A copy of GMR Transcription Services, Inc. confidentiality agreement is available upon request. All voice-recordings held by the Student Researcher will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project.

##### **Risks**

The risks to you are the possibility that some issues may be raised that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to discuss.

##### **Benefits**

While participation in this study may be of no direct personal benefit to you, the potential benefit to others is great. What is learned from you may help other individuals learn to have a closer and more secure relationship with God. However, you may find that discussing your relationship with God with a third person to be interesting and helpful.

##### **Participants Rights**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose what information you reveal. You may decline to answer a question, stop the voice recording, or terminate the interview at any time.



**Confidentiality**

All personal information revealed in the interview will be held in strict confidence. Your name will be deleted from the transcriptions of the voice recording. A master list containing the name and phone number of the interview participants will be maintained in a locked filing cabinet in case there is a need to contact participants to obtain more information or clarification of their interview. This master list will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project.

**Costs**

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

**Reimbursement**

You will not be paid for participating in the study.

**Impartial Third Party Contact**

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909)558-4647.

.....  
**Informed Consent Statement**

I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by investigator. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators, institution or sponsors from their responsibilities. I may call Jack Bracy (Student Researcher) at 1-760-954-3794 or Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor at 1-909-558-4547, ex 47002 if I have additional questions or concerns.

I have been given a copy of this consent form and consent to be interviewed

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Researcher

Phone Number

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Group**

Selected participants will be given an opportunity to participate in a Focus Group. The Focus Group will consist of individuals who have been interviewed and will have an opportunity to hear, discuss, and make suggestions regarding the observations the researcher has made during the research process.

**Confidentiality of the Focus Group**

The confidentiality of this meeting is held in trust by those who attend. The student researcher is will not be able to prevent focus group members from violating confidentiality.

I give my permission for Jack Bracy (Student Researcher) to contact me for the purpose of inviting me to participate in the Focus Group for further discussion of this topic.

Signature of Participant

Date

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## APPENDIX H

### FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

#### How People Understand God's Availability and Responsiveness Study

##### **Purpose and Procedures**

The Focus Group will consist of individuals who, like you, have been previously interviewed for the "How People Understand God's Availability and Responsiveness Study." You will have an opportunity to hear, discuss, and make suggestions regarding the observations the student researcher has made during the research process. The goal of this study is to build a collection of stories that will help contribute to understanding how people view their relationship with God, His availability and responsiveness during times of need.

This study is being conducted by Jack Bracy, a Doctoral Student at Loma Linda University under the guidance of Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor."

Your participation will involve a group discussion with other individuals who have also been previously interviewed. The focus group will last approximately 1½ to 2 hours. The focus group will take the form of the researcher sharing his insights of what he has observed during the interview process and asking for your feed back and suggestions for future interviews. The purpose of this focus group is to learn from you. No assessment regarding the quality of your relationship with God will be made and no advice or suggestions will be offered.

The focus group will be voice-recorded and transcribed for further study. Your name and identifying information will be removed from the written transcripts.

##### **Risks**

The risks to you are the possibility that some issues may be raised that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to discuss.

##### **Benefits**

While participation in this study may be of no direct personal benefit to you, the potential benefit to others is great. What is learned from you may help other individuals learn to have a closer and more secure relationship with God. However, you may find that discussion your relationship with God with a third person to be interesting and helpful.

##### **Participants Rights**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose what information you reveal. You may decline to answer a question, stop the voice recording, or terminate your participation in the focus group at any time.

**Confidentiality**

All personal information revealed in the focus group will be held in strict confidence by the researcher. Your name will be deleted from the transcriptions of the voice recording. In the analysis of the focus group, you will be known only by a number or pseudonym. All identifying material will be purged when quotes or case examples are used in the presentation or publication of study results. The confidentiality of this meeting is held in trust by those who attend. The student researcher will not be able to prevent focus group members from violating confidentiality.

**Costs**

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

**Reimbursement**

You will not be paid for participating in the study.

**Impartial Third Party Contact**

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909)558-4647 for information and assistance.

.....  
**Informed Consent Statement**

I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by investigator. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in the focus group.

I may call Jack Bracy (Student Researcher) at 1-760-954-3794 or Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin, faculty research supervisor at 1-909-558-4547, ex 47002 if I have additional questions or concerns.

I have been given a copy of this consent form and consent to be interviewed

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Researcher

Phone Number

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I

### TELEPHONE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Participants will NOT include close friends or family members, but may include acquaintances.

#### When contacting individuals who have consented to be interviewed

My name is Jack Bracy; I am a student at Loma Linda University. I am calling today because you recently completed an online survey about how People Understand God's Availability and Responsiveness and indicated that you would be interested in being interviewed. I was wondering if you were still interested and if so, I would like to set up an appointment with you. We can meet at your home or any location where you feel comfortable. This interview will only take 1 to 1 ½ hours. This interview will be recorded and transcribed for further study. Everything that you share will remain confidential and your name will be removed when your interview is transcribed.

When would be a good date and time to meet? Where would you like the interview to take place?

Thank you for your time, I am looking forward to meeting you in person.

**APPENDIX J**

**TRANSCRIPTION SERVICE CONFIDENTIALITY FORM**

**Confidentiality and Nondisclosure Agreement**

**WHEREAS**, GMR Transcription Services, Inc. agrees to performing contracted transcription work with Client realizing the sensitive and confidential nature of client information and content. Under no circumstances will Contractor make contact with client, but agrees to communicate exclusively with the designated employee of GMR Transcription Services, Inc.

**WHEREAS**, GMR Transcription Services, Inc. agrees to review, examine, inspect or obtain such confidential information only for the purposes described above, and to otherwise hold such information confidential pursuant to the terms of this Agreement.

**BE IT KNOWN**, that GMR Transcription Services, Inc. has or shall receive from Client certain confidential information. Client agrees to rate quoted for each project and will discuss any changes in billing before project is completed.

1. GMR Transcription Services, Inc. agrees to hold confidential or proprietary information or trade secrets ("confidential information") in trust and confidence and agrees that it shall be used only for the contemplated purposes, shall not be used for any other purpose, or disclosed to any third party.
2. No copies will be made or retained of any written information supplied to Contractor from GMR Transcription Services, Inc. once project is completed.
3. At the conclusion of any project, or upon demand by GMR Transcription Services, Inc., all confidential information, including audio, written notes, or transcribed text shall be deleted and/or returned to GMR Transcription Services, Inc. by Contractor.
4. Confidential information shall not be disclosed to any third party unless expressly given permission by Client.
5. This Agreement and its validity, construction and effect shall be governed by the laws of the State of California.

**AGREED AND ACCEPTED BY:**

**Company:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Transcription)**

**Global Marketing Research (GMR**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX K**

**PERMISSION GRANTING USE OF THE EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE  
RELATIONSHIP SCALE (ECR)-SHORT FORM**

April 21, 2011

Please feel free to use it. See my website for scale and scoring information

Meifen Wei,

Associate Professor,  
Department of Psychology  
Iowa State University  
Ames, IA 50011-3180

**APPENDIX L**

**PERMISSION GRANTING USE OF THE ATTACHMENT  
TO GOD INVENTORY**

April 21, 2011

Jack,

Thank you for contacting me and feel free to use the scale for your study. It sounds like an interesting and worthy project.

Best wishes,

Angie McDonald

Associate Professor of Psychology  
Palm Beach Atlantic University  
901 S. Flagler Dr.  
West Palm Beach, FL 33401  
(561) 803-2363