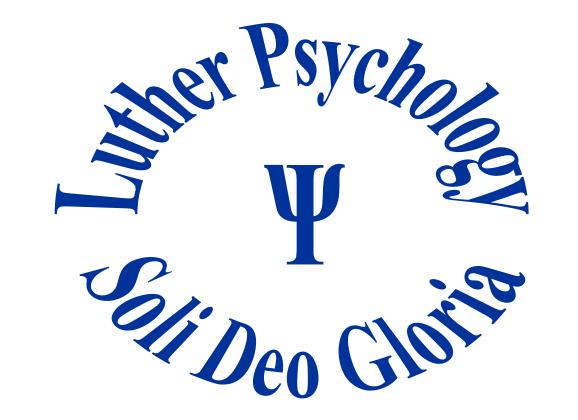# God Attachment Predicts Four Aspects of Psychological Well-Being

David M. Njus and Betsy Fawcett
Luther College

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Kirkpatrick (2005) proposed that for theists a representation of God can serve as an attachment figure—a safe haven in times of distress, a secure base from which one can venture into the world. He further proposed that the two dimensions of adult attachment (anxiety and avoidance) also apply to the attachment relationship with God.

Previous research has provided evidence that theists' attachment to God (ATG) is negatively related to depression (Miner, Dowson, & Malone, 2014), and positively related to self-esteem (Kézdy, Martos, & Robu, 2013; Zahl & Gibson, 2012), and that this ATG-well-being relationship persists after controlling for adult attachment and locus of control, explaining an additional 8-10% of variability in those measures of well-being. (Njus & Scharmer, 2016).

The current study examines whether attachment to God is related to four other aspects of psychological well-being: psychological flourishing, positive and negative experience, subjective well-being, and anxiety..

Method

Participants

Data from 1211 U.S. subjects were collected online through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Data from 99 participants who did not pass attention and lie scales were removed from analysis, as were 478 participants who did not identify as monotheists. The final sample consisted of 418 females and 216 males ranging from age 19 to 75 ($\bar{X}$ = 38.7; Md = 36). Most participants (94.6%) identified as Christian.

Measures

Attachment. Subjects completed the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures questionnaire (ECR-RS; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011), which taps avoidant and anxious attachment to one's mother, father, best friend, and romantic partner. Subjects also completed the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), which measures avoidant and anxious attachment to God using two 14-item subscales.

Locus of Control. The Control and Defense Scale measures locus of control using eight-items that produce two subscales: responsibility for success and responsibility for failure (Mirowsky & Ross, 1990).

Well-Being. Subjects completed the GAD-7, a measure of generalized anxiety (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Löwe, 2006); the 12-item Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), which yields a net positive experience score; the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al, 2010), an 8-item scale assessing perceptions of psychological flourishing in areas such as relationships, purpose, and optimism; and a 5-item measure of satisfaction with life (SWL) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin, 1985).

Results

Correlations among ATG and well-being variables are presented in Table 1. Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed, one on each measure of well-being. In each analysis, LOC was entered first, followed by the eight adult attachment variables (anxious and avoidant attachment to mother, father, romantic partner, and friend) in step 2. Finally, in step 3, the two ATG scales were entered.

As can be seen in Tables 2-5, LOC accounted for significant variability in each of the measures of well-being. In addition, the combined adult attachment scales accounted for significant additional variability in each of the measures of well-being.

Finally, after controlling for both LOC and adult attachment, attachment to God accounted for significant variability in each of the measures of well-being, accounting from between 2.7% and 5.7% of additional variability. As both Table 1 and the analysis of Beta coefficients in Tables 2-5 show, God anxiety was a slightly better predictor of well-being than God Avoidance, though God avoidance was related to both flourishing and positive experience.

Discussion

God attachment is related to psychological well-being. Secure God attachment is positively related to positive life experience, psychological flourishing, and life satisfaction, and is negatively related to general anxiety. Importantly, these relationships persist after statistically controlling for locus of control and adult attachment to parents, friends, and romantic partners.

For theists, God may be conceptualized as a source of comfort in times of stress or difficulty. Consistent with previous research, however, the present research suggests that there is variability in how individuals perceive their relationship with God. It further suggests that variability in those perceptions—i.e., whether the relationship is perceived as secure or insecure—is related to individuals' psychological well-being.

Table 1. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5
1. ATG Anxiety	--				
2. ATG Avoidance	.02	--			
3. Anxiety	.35**	.07	--		
4. Satisfaction w/Life	-.34**	-.13*	-.47**	--	
5. Flourishing	-.35**	-.28**	-.41**	.71**	--
6. Positive Experience	-.40**	-.18**	-.74**	.72**	.73**

*$p < .01$ **$p < .001$ Note: correlations have been corrected for unreliability of measures

Table 2. Variance Accounted for in Positive Experience

	R^2	ΔR^2	Subscale	Beta	Equation F	$\Delta R^2 F$
Step 1	.102***		Resp. Success	.265***	35.99***	
			Resp. Failure	.09*		
Step 2	.247***	.145***	Father Anxiety	.029	17.81***	13.09***
			Father Avoid.	-.106*		
			Mother Anxiety	.024		
			Mother Avoid.	-.101		
			Romantic Anx.	-.259***		
			Romantic Avd.	-.057		
			Friend Anxiety	-.052		
			Friend Avoid	-.069		
Step 3	.551***	.057***	God Anxiety	-.25***	19.69***	22.19***
			God Avoidance	-.096*		

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Table 3. Variance Accounted for in Flourishing

	R^2	ΔR^2	Subscale	Beta	Equation F	$\Delta R^2 F$
Step 1	.166***		Resp. Success	.395*	62.77***	
			Resp. Failure	.024		
Step 2	.401***	.235***	Father Anxiety	.057	36.35***	26.68***
			Father Avoid.	-.143**		
			Mother Anxiety	.010		
			Mother Avoid.	-.127*		
			Romantic Anx.	-.103*		
			Romantic Avd.	-.180***		
			Friend Anxiety	-.144**		
			Friend Avoid	-.136**		
Step 3	.434***	.033***	God Anxiety	-.139***	34.63***	15.80***
			God Avoidance	-.145***		

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Table 4. Variance Accounted for in Subjective Well-Being

	R^2	ΔR^2	Subscale	Beta	Equation F	$\Delta R^2 F$
Step 1	.065***		Resp. Success	.17***	22.04***	
			Resp. Failure	.122**		
Step 2	.291***	.226***	Father Anxiety	.000	22.39***	21.68***
			Father Avoid.	-.149**		
			Mother Anxiety	.060		
			Mother Avoid.	-.094		
			Romantic Anx.	-.259***		
			Romantic Avoid	-.245***		
			Friend Anxiety	-.004		
			Friend Avoid	-.060		
Step 3	.318***	.027***	God Anxiety	-.177***	21.02***	10.73***
			God Avoidance	-.045		

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Table 5. Variance Accounted for in Anxiety

	R^2	ΔR^2	Subscale	Beta	Equation F	$\Delta R^2 F$
Step 1	.043***		Resp. Success	.185***	14.06***	
			Resp. Failure	-.037		
Step 2	.151***	.108***	Father Anxiety	-.103	9.703***	8.81***
			Father Avoid.	-.096		
			Mother Anxiety	.077		
			Mother Avoid.	.017		
			Romantic Anx.	.291***		
			Romantic Avoid	-.029		
			Friend Anxiety	.080		
			Friend Avoid	-.002		
Step 3	.186***	.035***	God Anxiety	.206***	10.30***	11.64***
			God Avoidance	.024		

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

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