

GOD ATTACHMENT, ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT, AND RELATIONSHIP  
SATISFACTION IN A SAMPLE OF EVANGELICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

GOD ATTACHMENT, ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT, AND RELATIONSHIP  
SATISFACTION IN A SAMPLE OF EVANGELICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The current study sought to answer the following research questions: First, does God Attachment account for unique variance in Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for Romantic Attachment? Second, what is the complex relationship between these two sets of variables (God Anxiety and God Avoidance and Romantic Anxiety and Romantic Avoidance) and Relationship Satisfaction? The study revealed that the two dimensions of both God Attachment and Romantic Attachment were significantly (inversely) correlated with Relationship Satisfaction. God Attachment accounted for 6% unique variance on Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for Romantic Attachment. God Anxiety and Romantic Avoidance had a direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction. Unexpected findings in regard to Romantic Anxiety's effect on Relationship Satisfaction were found. Future research and additional considerations are discussed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
List of Tables and Figures.....	ix
CHAPTER ONE: .....	1
The Problem .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Purpose.....	3
Background and Theoretical Considerations.....	3
Factors that Influence Relationship Satisfaction.....	3
Interpersonal Variables.....	4
Intrapersonal Variables.....	4
A Link between Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Variables: Attachment Perspective .....	6
Attachment Theory.....	7
Attachment Beliefs Organized at the Behavioral Level.....	8
Adult Attachment.....	10
Attachment and Adult Relationship Satisfaction.....	11
Adult Attachment to God.....	14
Importance of the Study and Implications.....	17
Research Questions.....	17
Limitations and Assumptions of the Study.....	18
Terms and Definitions.....	19

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	23
Overview.....	23
Relationship Satisfaction.....	25
Relationship Satisfaction Defined.....	27
Relationship Satisfaction Constructs.....	28
Interpersonal Variables.....	29
Intrapersonal Variables.....	33
Integrating Inter and Intrapersonal Variables of Relationship Satisfaction.....	35
Attachment Theory.....	36
Attachment and Childhood.....	38
The Attachment Behavioral System.....	39
Internal Working Models.....	42
Adult Attachment Beliefs.....	44
Adult Attachment Classifications.....	45
Attachment and Adult Relationship Satisfaction.....	48
Attachment Styles and Outcomes of Relationship Satisfaction.....	49
Attachment and Religion.....	51
God Attachment.....	52
God and the Attachment Behavioral System.....	55
Conceptualizations of God as an Attachment Figure.....	55
Hypotheses about Religious Belief.....	57
Correspondence Hypotheses.....	58
Compensation Hypotheses.....	61

Integrating Correspondence and Compensation Hypotheses.....	63
God Attachment and Romantic Relationships.....	67
Love Mechanism Hypothesis and Emotion Compensation.....	67
Individual Differences in Adult Attachment.....	69
God Attachment, Religiosity, and Relationship Status.....	71
God Attachment and Partner Availability.....	73
God Attachment and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction.....	74
God Attachment and the Current Study.....	76
Research Questions.....	81
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	80
Method.....	80
Procedures.....	80
Participants.....	81
Measures.....	82
Background Information and Family History.....	82
Experiences in Close Relationships.....	83
Attachment to God Inventory.....	84
Relationship Satisfaction Scale.....	86
Data Analysis.....	87
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	89
Introduction.....	89
Results.....	91

Research Question One.....	91
Correlations for Relationship Satisfaction.....	92
Variances Associated with Relationship Satisfaction.....	93
Research Question Two.....	95
Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis.....	95
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	99
Summary of Findings.....	99
Research Question One.....	99
Research Question Two.....	100
Discussion and Recommendations.....	101
Internalized Representations of Self and Other in Romantic Relationships.....	101
Unexpected Findings Regarding Romantic Anxiety and Relationship Satisfaction...	102
The Influence of God Anxiety on Relationship Satisfaction.....	104
The Influence of God Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction.....	106
The Influence of Romantic Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction.....	107
The Influence of Romantic Anxiety on Relationship Satisfaction.....	108
Implications for the Church and Faith-Based Counselors.....	109
Considerations Regarding the Correspondence and Compensation Hypotheses.....	110
Limitations.....	112
Conclusion.....	114
References.....	117

Appendix A.....136

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Bartholomew's model of self and other.....	48
Table 1. Demographic Frequencies of Initial Sample.....	82
Table 2. Correlations of Relationship Satisfaction (Burns Intimacy Scale) with Measures of Adult Romantic Attachment and God Attachment.....	92
Table 3. Hierarchal Regression Predicting the Unique Variances on Relationship Satisfaction.....	94
Table 4. Hierarchal Regression Analysis Predicting the Unique Variances on Relationship Satisfaction after Accounting for Romantic Attachment.....	95
Figure 2. Path Diagram displaying mediating effects of God Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction.....	98



## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

### Introduction

Satisfying intimate relationships reportedly increase the general well-being and life satisfaction for many individuals (Lee, Seccombe, & Shehan, 1991; Myers & Diener, 1995; Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). A multidimensional construct, relationship satisfaction has been widely researched using numerous relational determinants (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999; Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Davis & Oathout, 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985; Giest & Gilbert, 1996; Gottman, 1994; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1991; Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994; Klohnen & Bera, 1998; Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995). For example, some researchers have measured relationship satisfaction by studying interpersonal processes ranging from problem-solving discussions to structured couple interaction and assessment (Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Gottman, 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997). Others have looked at intrapersonal constructs such as attributional patterns (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994), attitudes toward love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1991), personality traits such as empathy (Davis & Oathout, 1987), hostility (Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995), private self-consciousness (Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985), self-disclosure and emotional expressiveness (Giest & Gilbert, 1996), dominance and pleasantness (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999), and self-esteem (Jones & Cunningham, 1996).

A promising area of research on relationship satisfaction has also focused on attachment (Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Klohnen & Bera, 1998). Attachment theory helps explain how early relational experiences with the primary caregiver influence

children's development of core relationship beliefs about themselves and others. This set of beliefs, referred to as an internal working model (IWM), provides a framework for understanding and interpreting experiences in close relationships and offers a script for relational behavior toward significant others. More specifically, these IWM's applied to adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990) reportedly influence relationship satisfaction (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Heavey, Shenk, & Christenen, 1994; Lawrence, Eldridge, & Christensen, 1998; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990).

Attachment theorists (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002) have also studied the conceptualization of religion as an attachment process, particularly in terms of how God functions as a substitute attachment figure. This area of study has focused specifically on how God attachment closely parallels that of parent-child attachment and adult romantic attachment. Though these researchers hypothesized God attachment as being more similar in function to parent-child attachment, they have found a moderate but consistent link between God attachment and romantic attachment as well (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). While the relationship between religion and relationship satisfaction has been investigated (Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Myer, 2006; Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008), no research has yet examined God attachment and its relationship to or association with relationship satisfaction. Moreover, research has not explored the interplay between relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1999; Sim & Loh 2003).

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the interplay between three constructs: relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment, specifically to determine whether God attachment accounts for unique variance in relationship satisfaction after controlling for romantic attachment. This study uses a hierarchical regression analysis, where a sample of college students was administered measures of adult attachment, God attachment, and relationship satisfaction. This research design should provide a statistical model for understanding the influence God attachment has on relationship satisfaction.

## Background and Theoretical Considerations

### Factors that Influence Relationship Satisfaction

A consistent link exists between level of satisfaction in intimate, close relationships and people who are generally happy and satisfied with life (Lee, Secombe, & Shehan, 1991; Myers & Diener, 1995; Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). Relationship satisfaction is a multidimensional construct widely researched using numerous relational determinants that can be categorized into one of two categories: interpersonal and intrapersonal variables. Interpersonal variables refer to the relational dynamics that unfold between two people and intrapersonal variables refer to the dynamics that unfold within an individual. One of these variables, attachment style, has been found to affect an individual's assessments of romantic relationships based on his/her core beliefs about self and others (Feeney & Noller 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988;

Simpson, 1990). As a result, attachment theory may function as a link connecting both interpersonal and intrapersonal variables

### *Interpersonal Variables*

Some researchers have measured relationship satisfaction by studying interpersonal processes or “in between partners” analyses (Gottman, 1993; Gottman, 2003; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994). For example, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) applied a mathematical model to determine relationship satisfaction and to predict whether a couple would stay married or ultimately divorce. Using a structured setting to observe the couples’ verbal communication, the emotions, tone, and nonverbal cues in which the words were being delivered, Gottman (2003) found that the processes of couple interaction are the most significant way of predicting marital happiness and relationship satisfaction. Additionally, he discovered that couples who stay married are more likely to influence the couple interaction (i.e. interactive processes) in a positive direction rather than in a negative direction. Karney and Bradbury’s (1997) findings support Gottman’s research, showing how changes in marital satisfaction can be predicted by the observed behavior of the spouses during couple interaction.

### *Intrapersonal Variables*

A second area of focused attention in research on relationship satisfaction is the study of intrapersonal variables—personality traits and characteristics that significantly influence partners’ behaviors both in and out of the relationship (Watson, Hubbard, &

Wiese, 2000). These “with-in partner” characteristics include perceptions, attitudes, and attributions about the relationship (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994). For example, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that while personality similarity is a weak predictor of relationship satisfaction, it is the *perception* of partner similarity that greatly affects it. When an individual perceives a partner to be more similar to him/ her, relationship satisfaction increases. In addition to the perception of similarity, an individual’s attitude toward love has also been found to significantly influence satisfaction in romantic relationships (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1991). The more positive attitude one holds toward a love relationship working, the higher the relationship satisfaction.

Similar to perceptions and attitudes, attributional patterns of individuals have also been linked to marital satisfaction (Karney, et al., 1994). Spouses characterized by high negative emotion make maladaptive attributions in their relationship. Even after controlling for negative emotion, attributions and marital satisfaction were still significantly linked among both husbands and wives suggesting that though negative emotion may fuel negative attributions, attributions alone still affect relationship satisfaction (Karney, et al.). Karney and colleagues (1994) suggest that personality characteristics, such as temperament may play a role in whether an individual makes positive or negative attributions toward relationship events. Blum and Mehrabain’s (1999) findings that scores on individual temperament scales provide a more accurate prediction of relationship satisfaction than similarity support Gottman’s (2003) notion that personality similarity is, at best, a weak predictor of relationship satisfaction. Specifically, they found that pleasantness of temperament tended to be a key predictor of

marital satisfaction, especially when a spouse was both pleasant and dominant. This suggests that relationship events and conflicts are handled in a proactive and mutually satisfying manner.

Beyond attributional patterns, perceptions, and attitudes, other intrapersonal variables influence relationship satisfaction. For example, romantic relationship satisfaction is also positively linked to private self-consciousness and self-disclosure (Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985). Couples who score high in self-consciousness scales are more likely to self-disclose, and self-disclosure is subsequently predictive of relationship satisfaction. Similarly, emotional expressiveness is predictive of satisfying relationships as well (Giest & Gilbert, 1996). This makes sense in light of self-disclosure. Since individuals who disclose thoughts and feelings are more vulnerable, they give permission to their romantic partners to be open as well. When two individuals are safe enough to mutually express their feelings to one another, that leaves room for empathetic responses. Davis and Oathout (1987) found that empathetic behavior positively influences the subsequent response by the other partner and, therefore, increases relationship satisfaction because that partner feels like he/she is genuinely cared for. On the other hand, hostile responses have been found to decrease marital satisfaction over time (Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995).

#### *A Link between Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Variables: An Attachment Perspective*

Finally, a promising area of research on relationship satisfaction has focused on attachment (Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Klohnen & Bera, 1998). Since attachment theory helps explain how early relational experiences with the primary caregiver

influence a child's development of core relationship beliefs about themselves and others, it may offer a link between interpersonal and intrapersonal variables. These external relational experiences influence intrapersonal processes such as beliefs about self-worth and help explain how these beliefs are affected by and later affect interpersonal interaction with others. These core relationship beliefs, known as internal working models (IWM), have been applied to adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). Romantic attachment styles have been shown to influence relationship satisfaction (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Heavey, Shenk, & Christenen, 1994; Lawrence, Eldridge, & Christensen, 1998; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). Jones and Cunningham (1996) found that male and female anxiety over abandonment and comfort with closeness, and the interactions among them, predicted relationship satisfaction even after controlling for self-esteem, gender roles, and romantic beliefs. Both partners in the romantic relationship are particularly low in satisfaction when either partner suffers from high anxiety over abandonment or experiences a low comfort with closeness.

### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory not only has empirical influence on romantic relationship satisfaction (Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Klohnen & Bera, 1998), but Kirkpatrick (1992) also argued that it provides a broad theoretical framework for scientifically studying the psychology of religion. Attachment theory is derived from an evolutionary perspective and is based on what Bowlby (1969) described as the biosocial behavioral system designed to help infants maintain close physical proximity to their primary caregiver. The

attachment behavioral system is characterized by a structured design of infant gestures such as calling, cueing, crying, and clinging and the subsequent adult response. The interaction between the infant and caregiver generates a protective, trusting relationship from the earliest stages of life and is the process by which people develop secure emotional bonds. Bowlby (1969) describes this process as attachment.

An attachment is a psychological bond developed between the infant and caregiver (Bowlby, 1969) and is triggered by two conditions that activate the attachment behavioral system indicating stress or danger. The first condition is that of the child and includes pain, hunger, or illness. The second condition is that of any real or perceived threat or unsafe stimuli in the surrounding environment. The way the caregiver responds to the infant's gesture for proximity influences the infant's development of the internal working model/ beliefs and expectations about the self's worth and the caregiver's ability to respond to felt needs. When caregivers respond in a timely and sensitive manner, the child develops a sense of security, believing that his felt needs are appropriate and legitimate and the caregiver is capable and willing to help in times of need. Insensitive and untimely responses to the child's proximity seeking lead to insecure models where the child may fail to develop positive beliefs about self and positive beliefs about the caregiver's reliability, accessibility, and trustworthiness (Cassidy, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Main, 1996).

#### *Attachment Beliefs Organized at the Behavioral Level*

Attachment theory suggests that the beliefs about self and others are formed in the first year of life and that they are organized at a prelinguistic behavioral level (Main,

1996). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) devised a measurement strategy, the Strange Situation that was able to identify attachment behavior in one year-old infants. She was able to link these patterns of attachment to parent-child interactions that unfolded in the first year of life. Ainsworth and her colleagues found four patterns of attachment (Ainsworth, et al. 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). These four patterns include the secure attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment and disorganized attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). Ainsworth found that infants who develop a secure attachment have parents who are consistently responsive and sensitive to their infant's needs in the first year of life. These infants are able to both interact with strangers while their mother is present and enthusiastically investigate their surroundings (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Infants who develop a secure attachment are also less likely to cry than others the same age. They are more likely to obey and respond more positively to their mother's request and they also welcome their mothers more assertively after normal separations. It is evident that securely attached infants expect their caregiver to not only be approachable, but to also acknowledge them (Ainsworth, 1985). Therefore, individuals with secure attachment view themselves as worthy of love and they view others as reliable and accessible in times of need (Schottenbauer, Dougan, Rodriguez, Arnkoff, Glass, & Lasalle, 2006). Secure attachment has been found to instill optimism, positive self-worth, and a more favorable belief that the world is safe and predictable (Ainsworth et. al., 1978; Belsky, et al. 1996; Kerns, et al, 2007).

Three insecure attachment styles develop when the caregiver is unreliable or inaccessible in times of stress. First, infants who develop an anxious-avoidant attachment

style have parents that are consistently rejecting, or rebuffing the child's bids for proximity seeking during times of stress. Upon separation from their mothers they display very little anxiety or stress, even though physiological markers have demonstrated that they are as equally distressed as their non-avoidant cohorts (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978).

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) found that parents of infants with anxious-ambivalent attachment style were consistently inconsistent and unreliable in their responses to their child's need in stress. More specifically these parents appeared to be more emotionally needy and immature often engaging in role-reversal with their parents such that the parent began to suddenly use the child as a secure base.

Discovered by Main and her colleagues (1986), the disorganized attachment style is characterized by infants with parents who engage in frightening or frightened behavior in relation to their infants. Many of these parents also engaged in some form of child maltreatment. When separated from the parent, the infants display a mixture of both avoidant and ambivalent behaviors and in reunion situations they have no organized manner in which to reunite with their mother. They tend to exhibit behaviors that are contradictory and unpredictable to the way an infant should respond after separation. Feelings of fear and confusion are evident in these infants when their mothers return (Main, 1996; Belsky, et al. 1996).

### Adult Attachment

Prior to the early 1980's, attachment theory was used primarily by child psychologists for studying the parent-child relationship (Beck, 2006). More recently,

however, due to the remarkable similarities in the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions between infant-mother attachments and close adult relationships, the *Adult Attachment Interview* was developed (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) to measure how an adult's state of mind with respect to attachment regarding early experiences with significant caregivers influences how the adult went on to parent his/her own children. Since research has revealed that attachment beliefs are carried into adulthood, another line of research is investigating how attachment theory constructs impact close interpersonal (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Simpson & Rholes, 1998; Weiss, 1982) and adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990).

#### *Attachment and Adult Relationship Satisfaction*

Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) found that attachment beliefs could be classified on two orthogonal dimensions (see Figure 1, p. 48). Individuals classified in one of four attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) could be defined by two dimensions in their romantic relationships—anxiety and avoidance. People with low anxiety have a more favorable view of self. Those high on anxiety have elevated levels of anxiousness about their own worthiness and tend to be highly concerned about abandonment and rejection by others. People with high avoidance have negative views about others' reliability and trustworthiness. Low scores of avoidance are characterized by people who hold more favorable views of others and are more comfortable with approaching and relying on others in time of need. These two dimensions can be

intersected resulting in four quadrants that correspond to Ainsworth's (1978) four attachment styles.

Those with a secure attachment score low on both dimensions, meaning they have a positive self-worth and view others as reliable and trustworthy. As a result they experience comfortable with closeness and intimacy, can express emotion, and have an expectation that others will respond to their needs effectively (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Avoidant individuals score high on avoidance and low on anxiety, meaning they have an overly inflated view of self and believe that others are untrustworthy and unreliable. Therefore, they tend to be uncomfortable with intimacy, have difficulty expressing their feelings, and tend to over rely on themselves to meet their own relational needs. Preoccupied/ Ambivalent individuals score low on avoidance and high on anxiety; they tend to hold a negative view of their own self-worth and have low self-confidence in their ability to cope with life. Overly concerned with abandonment and rejection, these individuals tend to become clingy and needy in romantic relationships. Fearful/Disorganized individuals score high on both anxious and avoidant dimensions. They have a negative view of themselves and believe that others are unreliable and untrustworthy. As a result, they have a greater inability to regulate emotion in times of stress, are less confident that others will be there to help, and lack the appropriate coping skills to overcome stressful life events (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

The internalized representations of self and others that the infant develops early in life function as a way for the individual to predict the future availability of others and to make decisions about what attachment behaviors to use in stressful situations (Cassidy,

1999; Eckert & Kimball, 2003). An individual's attachment style is related to relationship satisfaction based on assessments about the reliability and trustworthiness of others.

Research supports the notion that attachment styles affect an individual's assessments of romantic relationships (Feeney & Noller 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). For instance secure individuals, particularly when they are in relationship with a secure partner, show greater relationship satisfaction, feel closer to their partner, perceive less conflict in the relationship, report better communication, have faith in their partner, and perceive their partner to be more dependable and predictable.

Those with avoidant attachment style report lower levels of satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and commitment in their relationships compared to those with secure attachments.

Preoccupied/Ambivalent partners also report less satisfaction and more ambivalence about the relationship than do those with secure and avoidant attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990).

In addition to romantic relationships fitting into these two dimensions—*anxiety and avoidance*, researchers (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999) have also theorized and applied them to an individual's personal relationship with God having found a moderate but consistent link between God attachment and romantic attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). While the relationship between religion and relationship satisfaction has been investigated (Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Myer, 2006; Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008), no research has yet examined God attachment and its relationship to or association with relationship satisfaction. With an extensive body of empirical support for understanding the major role attachment beliefs play in emotion regulation, God attachment may buffer

satisfaction through emotion regulation (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). As previously mentioned, Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory suggests that infants use emotional signals to maintain proximity with caregivers when they are under stress or in need. The caregiver's ability to respond to the infant's emotional cues is the basis from which secure or insecure attachment beliefs are formed and by which an infant is then able to regulate emotion in stressful situations (Mikulincer et al., 2003; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Infants who develop secure attachments learn through external experiences with their caregiver's ways of managing negative emotions even in unfamiliar situations and when the caregiver is absent (Contreras & Kerns, 2000). Applied to the current study, it is hypothesized that those who develop secure God attachment may not be as overwhelmed by their partner's shortcomings or conflicts in the relationship because they rely on God as a significant source of security rather than exclusively on their partner.

#### Adult Attachment to God

The psychological need for safety changes as an individual grows older (Simpson, 2002). Instead of the need for physical proximity when stress exists (as in the case of an infant), the need to maintain "felt security," or the psychological belief that the object of attachment will stay a secure base in times of stress, remains (Simpson, 2002; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). This is relevant to the current research because God may be used as a substitute attachment figure when the romantic partner is unsafe.

Kirkpatrick (1992, 1999) first conceptualized religion as an attachment process; later research supported God as an attachment figure. For example, in times of distress

persons of faith seek proximity to God in ways similar to that of an infant who seeks closeness to the caregiver (Kirkpatrick, 1999). He argues that even the imagery and language used in the Judeo-Christian faith is representative of attachment relationships. Coping with distress in life is much easier when Christians speak of Jesus being “by one’s side,” “holding one’s hand,” or “holding one in His arms” (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 319). Prayer is a second way people turn to God (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). Research supports the claim that people seek God as a safe haven during times of stress (Granqvist, 2005). Additionally, in times of emotional distress, it has been found that people turn to prayer rather than the church (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975); grieving persons also tend to increase their faith and religious devotion during times of loss (Loveland, 1968); and soldiers pray more frequently in combat (Allport, 1950). Times of death and divorce (Parkes, 1972), fears associated with serious illness (Johnson & Spilka, 1991), emotional crises (James, 1902/2002), relationship problems (Ullman, 1982), daily hassles (Spilka et al., 2003) and other negative events (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996) have also been found as stressful activators that send one looking to God as a safe haven.

Other studies have shown that higher religious commitment and intrinsic religious orientation are positively correlated with more active problem-solving skills (Pargament, Steele, & Tyler, 1979), a sense of internal locus of control (Kahoe, 1974; Strickland & Shaffer, 1971), a sense of personal competence (Ventis, 1995), and a more optimistic and hopeful outlook on the future (Myers, 1992). As a whole, attachment to God seems to increase a person’s ability to handle both present and future challenges (Sim & Loh, 2003).

Finally, the feeling of loss or perceived abandonment by God should elicit the feelings of grief and anxiety of the person of faith to meet the final two criteria of an attachment bond. This is difficult to determine, however, because in most cases the separation from God is by the choice of the person of faith, who merely stops believing God exists (Kirkpatrick, 1999, 2005). However, there are reported instances (Pargament, 1997) where the person of faith felt abandoned by God, and the feelings are most often overwhelming, especially if the perceived abandonment came at a time of particular need.

With the *Attachment to God Inventory* (AGI) (Beck & McDonald, 2004), researchers are beginning to understand how persons of faith experience God from an attachment perspective. Subscales on the AGI are the same as Brennan, Clark, and Shaver's (1998) two dimensions of romantic attachment: Anxiety about Abandonment and Avoidance of Intimacy. Individuals scoring high on the Anxiety about Abandonment subscale of the AGI report, at times, jealousy, preoccupation and worry, angry protest and resentment, concerns whether they are lovable, and fears of potential abandonment in their love relationship with God. Those who score high on the Avoidance of Intimacy subscale of the AGI report a different experience in their love relationship with God—an experience characterized by a reluctance to communicate, avoidance of emotionality, and neurotic self-dependence. In contrast, those scoring low on the AGI subscales report a secure relationship with God and are generally free from anxiety and worry (Beck, 2006). Beck reports that the research on attachment to God closely parallels that of human love, where the love relationship can be characterized by pleasure and fulfillment but can also be frustrating and exhausting.

### Importance of Study and Implications

This research holds potentially important implications for understanding the processes that underlie the development of satisfying romantic relationships and furthers the research on the significance of God attachment. At this point, there is no research linking God attachment to romantic relationship satisfaction. It is hypothesized that God attachment will account for unique variance in relationship satisfaction after accounting for the effects of romantic attachment on relationship satisfaction. In addition, it is hypothesized that individuals who rely on God as a secure-base and a source of strength to regulate emotions and manage potential relationship conflicts are more likely to experience relationship satisfaction. Individuals who can regulate emotion are less likely to believe they will fall apart during times of stress and/or threats of abandonment or loss of the relationship. Since those who regulate emotion tend to display a secure attachment, they are also not as likely to engage in counter negative communication with their partner, a characteristic Gottman (2003) found to negatively affect relationship satisfaction.

### Research Questions

The research questions framing this investigation are as follows:

1. Does God attachment account for unique variance in relationship satisfaction after controlling for romantic attachment?
2. What is the complex relationship between these two sets of variables (God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Anxiety, and Romantic Avoidance)?

It is hypothesized in this study that God attachment will add unique variance to relationship satisfaction above that which is accounted for by romantic attachment. Those with a secure God attachment and a secure romantic attachment are hypothesized to have the highest level of relationship satisfaction followed by secure God attachment/ insecure romantic; insecure God/ secure romantic; and insecure God/ insecure romantic respectively.<sup>1</sup>

### Limitations and Assumptions

This study will be limited to a sample group of college-aged students in married and dating relationships who are enrolled in undergraduate degree programs at an evangelical university in the Southeastern United States. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to institutions that do not share the same worldview or to other age groups. In addition, Erikson (1968) describes the stage of young adulthood as a period of identity formation, where needs of self-esteem, autonomy, and relatedness to others are prioritized above ideological identities (e.g. religious values). As a result, many young adults may not be at a place where they are actively searching for God. In fact, it could be

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<sup>1</sup> Initially this study sought to answer the question of whether those with a secure God attachment are more likely to have a secure romantic attachment. However, due to the very small percentage of the participants who were categorized as both insecure God Attachment and insecure Romantic Attachment, this analysis lost statistical power (n = 8 or nine percent). Therefore, the second research question focused more specifically on the interrelationship between the dimensional variables of Anxiety and Avoidance. This exploratory measure was examined through a series of simultaneous regressions.

argued that they are actually becoming less dependent on God as they seek independence and identity in the world. Therefore, at this stage, young adults may not have established religious beliefs firmly enough to truly affect measures of God-attachment.

Another limitation with this population is that the majority of the sample is in dating relationships. As a result, the measure of relationship satisfaction may not yield long term results or necessarily reflect a secure attachment relationship due to the noncommittal nature of dating relationships, as opposed to married couples (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). This study also utilized self-report instruments, which depend on the honesty and integrity of sample responses. Reliance on self-report instruments for the measurement of both dependent and independent variables may raise concerns regarding the statistical conclusions and must be considered when reviewing the results of this study. Additionally, measures were taken only at the beginning of the semester, providing results at only one point in time. A longitudinal study would be preferable (Corsini, 2009).<sup>2</sup>

### Terms and Definitions

The following definitions are used in the study:

*Anxiety over Abandonment* is a dimension of classifying attachment and represents the individual's fear of real or perceived abandonment by the attachment figure,

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<sup>2</sup> The data used for this dissertation was retrieved from archival data on a God Attachment project performed by Dr. Kevin Corsini and Hitomi Makino. I was not directly involved in the data collection and therefore owe these two researchers my explicit gratitude.

concern over whether the individual is worthy of love, jealousy over the attachment figure's other intimate relationships and a preoccupation or worry over the availability and reliability of the attachment figure (Brennan, et al. 1998).

*Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment Style* is characterized by individuals who are not easily calmed. They struggle with ambivalent feelings of anger toward the attachment figure and an eagerness to be comforted by her (Belsky et al. 1996). Individuals with an anxious-preoccupied attachment style have a difficult time sharing feelings in fear they will not be reciprocated and tend to cling with threats of real or perceived abandonment by the attachment figure (Ainsworth et al. 1978).

*Attachment* refers to the psychological bond developed between an individual and an attachment figure and is based on four distinct functions: proximity seeking, safe haven, separation anxiety and secure base (Bowlby, 1969).

*Attachment to God Inventory (AGI)* is a measure assessing the attachment dimensions of Avoidance of Intimacy and Anxiety over Abandonment (Brennan, et al. 1998) in an individual's relationship with God (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

*Avoidance of Intimacy* is a dimension of classifying attachment and represents the individual's uncomfortable stance at being emotionally intimate with the attachment figure, a need to be self-reliant and trouble depending on the attachment figure in times of need (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

*Dismissing Attachment Style* is characterized by individuals who are most comfortable being alone. They are not confident the attachment figure will be available or responsive and have already developed expectations that their efforts to maintain

close proximity will be abruptly refused (Belsky et al.1996; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

*Factor* is a group of variables correlated together.

*Fearful Attachment Style* is characterized by individuals who exhibit behaviors that are contradictory and unpredictable to any attachment behaviors (Belsky, et al. 1996; Main, 1996).

*God Attachment* is the conceptualization of God fulfilling the functions of a substitute attachment figure (Kirkpatrick 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

*Internal Working Model (IWM)* is the set of thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and expectations about the self and others. Beliefs about self center on two primary questions: 1.) Am I worthy of love; and 2.) Am I capable of gaining love and support in times of emotional stress? Beliefs about other also focus on two primary questions—1.) Are other people able and willing to help me when I am in need; and 2.) Are they reliable and trustworthy?

*Proximity seeking* is a function of attachment and refers to the sought out physical closeness of the individual with the attachment figure, particularly under stress, illness, or threat of separation (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

*Romantic Attachment* is the psychological bond between two adults in a romantic relationship and may take 1-2 years to develop fully, just as in the case of human infants (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999).

*Safe Haven* is a function of attachment and refers to the reliability of the attachment figure to provide protection, comfort, support, and relief in times of stress, illness, or threat of separation (Ainsworth 1991; Bowlby, 1969).

*Secure base* is a function of attachment and refers to the real or perceived availability of the attachment figure by the individual. The secure base function allows for an individual to then explore other relationships and behaviors in a safe environment (Bowlby, 1969).

*Separation Anxiety* is a function of attachment and refers to the intense feelings of distress at the real or perceived separation of the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969).

*Secure Attachment Style* is characterized by individuals who are able to explore their surroundings and seek close proximity to the attachment figure when real or perceived danger is imminent. Individuals with secure attachment tend to report higher levels of self-esteem, can share feelings with others, and be comfortable in close, intimate relationships (Ainsworth, et al. 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990).

*The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR)* was used as a model to develop the AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

*The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)* questionnaire is an updated revision of the *Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR)* questionnaire (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECR-R is a measure assessing individual differences in attachment dimensions of Avoidance over Intimacy and Anxiety over Abandonment (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000).

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

An introduction to the relevance of examining the interplay between relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment was presented in chapter one. This chapter provides a review of the literature and begins with an overview of the entire study, briefly describing each variable. Then the dependent variable, relationship satisfaction, will be specifically reviewed in two categories—interpersonal and intrapersonal variables. A link will be made between research on adult attachment beliefs and relationship satisfaction. Next, attachment theory and research on how attachment beliefs are carried into adult romantic relationships will be explained. Finally, the theoretical and empirical study on how attachment theory has been applied to an individual's relationship with God is discussed. The purpose of the study will be presented along with the research questions.

### Overview

Relationship satisfaction increases the general well-being and life satisfaction for many individuals (Lee, Seccombe, & Shehan, 1991; Myers & Diener, 1995; Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). A multidimensional construct, relationship satisfaction has been widely researched using numerous relational determinants ranging from interpersonal processes to intrapersonal constructs (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999; Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Davis & Oathout, 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985; Giest & Gilbert, 1996; Gottman, 1994; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1991; Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, &

Sullivan, 1994; Klohnen & Bera, 1998; Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995). Attachment theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding both the interpersonal and intrapersonal variables that influence relationship satisfaction (Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Klohnen & Bera, 1998). More specifically, functions of attachment have been applied to adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990) and have been found to influence relationship satisfaction for both dating and married couples (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Heavey, Shenk, & Christenen, 1994; Lawrence, Eldridge, & Christensen, 1998; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). For instance, individuals classified with an avoidant attachment style report lower levels of satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and commitment in romantic relationships compared to those with a secure attachment. Anxious-preoccupied partners report less satisfaction and more ambivalence about the relationship than do those with secure and avoidant attachment styles. This research underscores the importance of the psychological need for safety in increasing relationship satisfaction (Simpson, 2002).

Understanding the need to maintain “felt security,” or the psychological belief that the object of attachment will stay a secure base in times of stress (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), theorists extended attachment research to the psychology of religion, particularly if and how God functions as a substitute attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). If levels of relationship satisfaction decrease with an insecure romantic attachment, then God could be used as a substitute attachment figure when the romantic partner is feeling unsafe or insecure and, therefore, levels of relationship satisfaction increase in spite of the insecure romantic attachment. With an

extensive body of empirical support for understanding the major role attachment beliefs play in emotion regulation, God attachment may buffer relationship satisfaction through emotion regulation (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Though researchers hypothesized God attachment as being more similar in function to parent-child attachment, they have found a moderate but consistent link between God attachment and romantic attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). While the relationship between religion and relationship satisfaction has been investigated (Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Myers, 2006; Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008), no research has yet examined God attachment and its relationship to or association with relationship satisfaction. Moreover, research has not explored the interplay between relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1999; Sim & Loh 2003). The purpose of this study is to investigate the interplay between relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment, specifically to determine whether God attachment adds unique variance in relationship satisfaction after controlling for romantic attachment.

### Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction has a significant effect on the course and outcome of the romantic relationship itself and the quality of one's life as a whole. First, it has been theorized that it is diminished relationship satisfaction that leads to divorce, not a loss of love as most would naturally suspect (Sprecher, 1999). Research supports this notion. Many young newlyweds are first characterized to have overwhelming feelings of love for one another but then experience lower levels of satisfaction from the inability to

effectively resolve the natural and often unavoidable challenges that are expected in a relationship. If these issues go unresolved, satisfaction decreases and the likelihood of divorce increases (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001; Hudson, 2001; Kurdeck, 1999).

Secondly, research reveals that dissatisfaction in romantic relationships also has a significant negative impact on one's quality of life and diminished physical and psychological well-being (Hawkins & Booth, 2005). In a study of married couples aged 50 and above in their first marriage, researchers investigated the role of marital quality and physical health. Results indicated that the quality of the marital relationship accounted for a significant amount of the variance in physical health, particularly physical symptoms, chronic illnesses, physical disabilities, and overall perceived health condition (Bookwala, 2005). Another study revealed that a direct correlation exists between couples who have trouble maintaining a satisfying relationship and their ability to be an effective parent (Fishman & Meyers, 2000).

In addition to the inevitable issues inherent in nurturing a committed romantic relationship are the cultural pressures and demands to leave a relationship as soon as it no longer offers felt love and satisfaction. These factors together do not bode well for the already 50% percent divorce rate among first time marriages and 65% divorce rate among second and third time marriages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Increased understanding of the variables that contribute to relationship dissolution can help researchers clinically apply practical techniques in preventing and enhancing relationships with low satisfaction (Hill, 2008).

## Relationship Satisfaction Defined

Relationship satisfaction has arguably been studied more than any other relationship outcome (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003; Michaels et al, 1984; Rusbult, 1983; Sprecher, 2001; VanYperen & Buunk, 1991). It is a multidimensional construct widely researched using numerous relational determinants. Inventories created to measure relationship satisfaction have assessed a broad range of variables such as affective couple interaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1985), communication (Hecht, 1978), and even sexual satisfaction (La Piccolo & Steger, 1978; McCabe, 1998). Other inventories have combined often vague and minimally studied variables such as intellectual intimacy and attitude toward privacy to measure relationship satisfaction (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Holman & Li, 1997; Schaefer & Olson, 1981, Troy, 2000). As a result of the plethora of variables used to study relationship satisfaction and its broad application within the literature, the debate of what inventory to use and when continues (Locke & Wallace, 1959; Snyder, 1979; Spanier, 1976, Troy, 2000).

With an unclear consensus on what constitutes relationship satisfaction and subsequently how to measure it, an attempt will be made to define it in the context of the current study. First, a romantic relationship is “defined by the interactions and interdependencies that occur between two individuals” (Donnellan, Assad, Robins, & Conger, 2007, p. 558). Due to the sample population in the present study, the terms romantic relationship and relationship satisfaction will refer to both dating and married couples. Shackelford and Buss (1997) offer one of the most cited definitions of marital satisfaction saying, it is “a psychological device that tracks the overall costs and benefits of a marriage [or relationship]” (p. 10). This definition asserts that dissatisfaction is

designed to “serve the adaptive function of motivating the individual to attempt to change the existing relationship, or seek another one that may be more propitious” (p. 10).

Therefore, relationship satisfaction can be viewed as a way of gauging how well the relationship is functioning, the degree to which romantic love exists, the level of satisfaction each partner experiences and the risk of the relationship ending. Based on the aforementioned definitions and research, individual differences in attachment styles can offer significant insight into the interactions and interdependencies that lead to relationship satisfaction and whether or not the relationship stays intact.

### Relationship Satisfaction Constructs

Before explaining the effects of attachment on relationship satisfaction, it is first important to develop an understanding of how relationship satisfaction has been dissected and studied throughout the literature. To understand and organize the broad range of inventories and relational determinants used to measure relationship satisfaction, this study will narrow the construct into the two categories used to assess it: *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* variables. Since internal working models shape an individual’s internal representations about self and others in adulthood, attachment theory may help researchers and clinicians understand relationship satisfaction from both an intrapersonal and interpersonal perspective. Attachment theory posits that external experiences influence intrapersonal processes such as beliefs about self-worth and attitudes toward others. In addition, interpersonal variables explain how these external experiences shape attachment beliefs. This section will begin with a review of interpersonal variables to measure relationship satisfaction.

### *Interpersonal Variables*

Interpersonal variables, which focus on communication styles, couple interaction, and conflict resolution, have been mostly used by marital experts and behavioral therapists (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In a measure of relationship satisfaction, Houlihan, Jackson and Rogers (1990) examined the communication styles of married couples solicited from the community at-large and local mental health facilities. Looking for couples who reported to be satisfied or experiencing trouble in the marriage, 14 married couples responded from the community and six married couples from the mental health facilities. The married couples were told about their participation in the study. To be considered a satisfied couple for the study, both husband and wife had to reveal via self-report no current signs of marital strife, show a mean score in the fourth quartile of Locke-Wallace Marital Relationship Inventory (MRI), and at the time of the study not be in marital therapy. Four of the ten couples entering the study who were satisfied in their marriage had children, a mean age of 31.9 years, a mean length of marriage of 6.5 years, and mean educational level of 17.1 years. The other ten were dissatisfied couples who were experiencing marital strife via self-report, had a mean MRI score in or below the third quartile, or were in marital therapy. Eight of the ten dissatisfied couples had children, a mean age of 32.3 years, a mean length of marriage of 7.8 years, and a mean educational level of 15.2 years. The largest difference between the satisfied and dissatisfied groups going into the study were the educational levels of the husband, 18.2 years for the satisfied and 15.8 years for the dissatisfied couples. Wives had little significant difference.

Each couple was interviewed separately about the outcomes of the measures given, specifically, the views of each partner on the decision making process within the relationship. Researchers used the MRI (to assess marital satisfaction), the Walster Global Measure of Participants' Perceptions of Inputs, Outcomes, and Equity/ Inequity (to assess what one puts into the marriage and what one gets out of it), Decision List (to assess the decisions made by the couple), and the Norm-Coding System (measures of the scale include Equity, Equality, Exchange, Need-based Norms, Situational Norms, and Other Norms in a relationship). The study found that couples who make decisions together and are able to meet the needs of the other in the decision-making process experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction. More specifically, the increase in relationship satisfaction was evidenced by a state of equity in the decision-making process. Husbands and wives who view themselves as equals in the relationship are more likely to offer personal opinions and suggestions when making important decisions. Researchers found that couples characterized by a state of equity believe their input matters (Houlihan, Jackson, & Rogers, 1990).

Similarly, researchers (Gottman, 1993; Gottman, 2003; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989) have longitudinally studied couple interaction to measure relationship satisfaction. John Gottman applied a mathematical model to determine relationship satisfaction and predict whether a couple would stay married or ultimately divorce (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). To study couples in a structured setting, Gottman set up an apartment laboratory at the University of Washington to observe couples' verbal communication, the emotions, tone, and nonverbal cues in which words were being delivered. He observed couples for 24-hour periods and asked them to live the way they normally would at home on a given

Sunday. Cameras would run from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M. A total of seven longitudinal studies were conducted with the longest spanning 15 years. Gottman and his colleagues measured young couples (Levenson & Gottman, 1983, 1985), a range from newlyweds to old age (Gottman, 1994a; 1994b), couples with preschool children (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996), newlyweds (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), middle-aged and couples in their sixties (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994), and highly abusive, moderately abusive, distressed nonviolent, and happily married nonviolent couples (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

Gottman (2003) found that the processes of couple interaction are the most significant way of predicting marital happiness and relationship satisfaction. He even defended his stance on how interpersonal processes may be a better indicator of relationship outcomes than intrapersonal processes, "It seems that research based on an individual psychopathology model, particularly one that is global, and not specific, has little to say about the possible mechanisms that lead to marital dissolution" (p. 87). Many inventories and profiles today on internet dating websites and in the therapeutic office are using the intrapersonal construct of similarity to measure relationship success and future outcome. However, Gottman (2003) found that similarity does not help predict marital outcomes because it does not measure the processes or interaction variables that make a difference in preserving or ruining a marital relationship. Gottman explains that, "It is generally the perception of personality differences that is related to marital unhappiness, not actual personality differences" (Gottman, 2003, p. 20). Research shows that while a relationship is strong, partners tend to perceive themselves as very similar. However, if conflict builds in the relationship, perceived personality similarities decrease. Therefore,

it is when a marriage is not typically going well that partners perceive problems in the other's personality. When this happens, relationship satisfaction decreases. Therefore, studies show that happy marriages are not predicted by personality traits, per se, but the perception of similarity (Gottman, 2003; Markman, 1977). Other research found that relationship satisfaction itself is a better predictor of relationship stability than personality (Lehnart & Neyer, 2006).

Additionally, Gottman (2003) discovered that couples who stay married are more likely to influence the couple interaction (i.e. interactive processes) in a positive direction rather than in a negative direction. For example, happily married, stable couples are more likely to respond kindly when they feel attacked whereas unhappy and unstable couples respond negatively, therefore, increasing the conflict. When studying the difference between interpersonal and intrapersonal variables, Karney and Bradbury (1997), also supported Gottman's research, showing how changes in marital satisfaction can be predicted by the observed behavior of the spouses during couple interaction. According to Gottman, the "processes" that predict marital stability have to do with accepting influence from one's spouse. Influence pertains to sharing power in all areas of life, including finances, raising the kids, housework, etc. (Gottman, 2003). Gottman maintains that if one is unable to accept influence from a spouse, relationship satisfaction will dramatically diminish. These findings suggest the potential importance of building and maintaining a secure base and safe haven in the context of a romantic relationship in order to accept influence from one's spouse.

### *Intrapersonal Variables*

The second area of focused attention in research on relationship satisfaction is the study of intrapersonal variables. Intrapersonal variables refer to the personality traits and characteristics that significantly influence partners' behaviors both in and out of the relationship (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Personality traits have been defined as "consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another" (Johnson, 1997, p. 74). Researchers first applied intrapersonal variables to study how marital relationships change over time (Adams, 1946, Burgess & Cottrell, 1939; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Tertnan, 1948).

Specific intrapersonal variables found to have an influence on relationship satisfaction include characteristics such as educational level and socioeconomic status (Caspi, 1987); commitment (Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Rusbult, 1983); emotional expressiveness (Giest & Gilbert, 1996); empathetic behavior (Davis & Oathout, 1987); love, sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, and investment in the relationship (Hendrick, 1988; Rusbult, 1983); and long-term orientation toward the relationship, psychological attachment to the relationship, and intention to persist in the relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). Romantic relationship satisfaction is also positively linked to private self-consciousness and self-disclosure (Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985). Couples who score high in self-consciousness scales are more likely to self-disclose, and self-disclosure is subsequently predictive of relationship satisfaction. However, of all of the intrapersonal variables studied, Karney & Bradbury (1997) claim that negative affectivity, or neuroticism, is the most reliably linked to longitudinal findings on marital outcomes. For example, spouses characterized by high negative emotion make maladaptive attributions

in their relationship. Even after controlling for negative emotion, attributions and marital relationship satisfaction were still significantly linked among both husbands and wives (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994).

The theory behind the intrapersonal models used for early research was based on the idea that the quality of relational interactions is largely influenced by each individual's personality traits and ongoing characteristics brought into the relationship. The cultural shift in the past few years to internet dating has contributed to the resurgence in studying intrapersonal variables within the context of romantic relationships. Online matchmaking websites such as Eharmony.com and Match.com as well as other dating services are among those who have held onto the claim that intrapersonal variables such as personality traits influence interpersonal interactions and therefore enhance relationship chemistry and satisfaction (eHarmony.com).

However, empirical support for the idea that intrapersonal variables such as personality characteristics affect couple interaction is limited (Donnellan, Assad, Robins, & Conger, 2007). Recent efforts (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000) to study the effects of intrapersonal variables on relationship quality utilized the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM, Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Two different estimates of actor and partner effects were assessed. Actor effects pertain to how the individual's own behaviors and attitudes about the relationship are affected by that individual's personality traits. Partner effects measure how the role of the partner's personality traits influences the individual's behavior and attitudes about the relationship. Concerning relationship satisfaction, Robins et al. (2000) found that Negative Emotionality had significant outcome effects on both the actor and partner. This finding supports other research.

Specifically, that similar variables to Negative Emotionality such as neuroticism, trait anxiety, emotional instability, and trait negative affect all decrease relationship satisfaction and increase the likelihood of relational instability (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Donnellan et al., 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Watson et al., 2000). Donnellan and his colleagues (2007) though point out that the process by which Negative Emotionality affects relationships has not been fully researched. In fact, those who adhere to an intrapersonal approach to relationship satisfaction have to explain interpersonal interactions in light of how personality traits affect relationships. With the limited evidence, this remains difficult. One of the studies that does exist found that individuals who had anxious personality types were more likely to yell and criticize partners (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). Such negative interaction cycles in turn decreased relationship satisfaction (Caughlin et al. 2000).

#### *Integrating Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Variables of Relationship Satisfaction*

Attachment theory may help researchers formally integrate the intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives on romantic relationship satisfaction. Attachment theory helps explain how early relational experiences with the primary caregiver influence the development of core relationship beliefs about themselves and others in adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). Since these internal working models shape an individual's internal representations about self and others in adulthood, attachment theory may help researchers and clinicians understand relationship satisfaction from both interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives. Conceptually speaking, interpersonal processes explain how external

experiences shape an individual's internal working model. These external experiences then influence intrapersonal processes and how an individual develops attachment beliefs about self and others.

For instance, a promising body of research on relationship satisfaction has found that romantic attachment styles influence relationship satisfaction (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Heavey, Shenk, & Christenen, 1994; Lawrence, Eldridge, & Christensen, 1998; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). Jones and Cunningham (1996) found that male and female anxiety over abandonment and comfort with closeness, and the interactions among them, predicted relationship satisfaction even after controlling for self-esteem, gender roles, and romantic beliefs. Both partners in the romantic relationship are particularly low in satisfaction when either partner suffers from high anxiety over abandonment or experiences a low comfort with closeness. Before explaining these findings further, a discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of attachment theory is due.

### Attachment Theory

In 1969, the object relations theorist John Bowlby, published a new conceptual framework that not only explained the theoretical phenomena of the psychoanalytic tradition but was also able to be empirically analyzed (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Bowlby intended to keep his paradigm shift consistent with other scientific developments in the fields of ethology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and social and emotional development (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Though it explains psychoanalytic tradition, Bowlby postulated a different starting point for his theoretical approach than

traditional psychoanalytic theory would have him do. Whereas psychoanalytic theory begins with a symptom or syndrome and makes attempts to hypothesize about the process or events that contributed to its development, attachment theory begins by looking early in life and working prospectively. Bowlby (1969, 1982) believed that functions of personality could be described by first observing the emotional and behavioral responses of infants and toddlers in stressful situations in early life and then outlining these patterns of response in later personality functions. For Bowlby (1969), “the change in perspective [from the psychoanalytic tradition] is radical” (p. 4).

Furthermore, the relationship between the infant and the primary caregiver, or object of attachment, is the focal point of what Bowlby termed attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). This alternative approach to object-relations theory nevertheless draws certain characteristics from the psychoanalytic tradition in that it takes an evolutionary approach to the infant-caregiver relationship whereby the infant develops a biosocial behavioral system ‘designed’ to maintain close proximity to the primary caregiver (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 316). By way of natural selection, the behavioral system provides protection and survival for the helpless infant who, under stress, uses signaling behaviors such as crying and clinging to regain close proximity to the object of attachment. The attachment figure in turn provides safety, comfort, and a secure base for the infant to explore the environment when an immediate threat of danger is no longer present. The caregiver’s behavioral response becomes programmed in the infant’s brain as mental representations known as internal working models (IWM) and later guide the infants thoughts about self, others, and relationships (Eckert & Kimball, 2003). Bowlby (1969, 1982) suggested that IWM’s are active and relevant throughout adulthood.

## Attachment and Childhood

Using the Strange Situation procedure, Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues pioneered the most convincing support for Bowlby's notion that infants seek proximity to the caregiver during times of stress (Ainsworth, 1973; Ainsworth, Blehar, Water, & Wall, 1978). Designed to activate the behavioral attachment system, researchers exposed children ages 12 to 18-months-old to a series of approximately 20 minutes of separation events from and reunion back to their caregivers. Behavioral observations were taken throughout the various parts of the experiment to record the infant's behaviors, caregiver's behaviors, and characteristics of their interactions. From these systematic observations of infant attachment strategies and subsequent caregiving behavior came three patterns of attachment: insecure avoidant (Group A), secure (Group B), and anxious ambivalent (Group C) (Main & Solomon, 1990). Secure infants (Group B) actively played and explored the environment in the presence of their caregiver. During separation the infant exhibited signs of distress and reduced play and sought proximity upon her return. Once back in the presence of the caregiver, the infant was easily comforted and explored the room again. Ainsworth (1978) described the sensitive and responsive behaviors observed by the caregivers of the secure group as a way of providing a "secure base" for the infants to freely explore the environment around them.

In contrast, infants characterized as insecure avoidant (Group A) actively played in the presence of the caregiver but paid little attention to her (Ainsworth, et al., 1978). When the caregiver left the room, the infant displayed little signs of distress and later ignored or resisted attempts of being held or soothed by her. Caregivers of infants in the insecure avoidant group were likely to either reject or respond negatively to the infant's

proximity seeking behaviors. Infants characterized as anxious ambivalent struggled to play and were overly attentive to the caregiver in her presence. During separation these infants displayed heightened levels of distress and restricted play behavior. When the caregiver returned, infants were not easily comforted and exhibited conflicting behaviors toward the caregiver oftentimes overreacting to slightly stressful situations with a preoccupation for the caregiver's attention. Ainsworth et al. (1978) observed conflicting and unstable caregiver behaviors in this group of infants. Main and Solomon (1990) later categorized a fourth group (Group D) of infant behavior known as disorganized-fearful. Infants in this group displayed unusual and incoherent behaviors when the caregiver was present. Infants would initially move toward the caregiver but abruptly fall to the floor instead, some sitting on the floor rocking on their hands and knees, all in an attempt to avoid contact. Caregivers of these infants will often be overbearing or frightening to the infant because they themselves are either preoccupied or dissociated from interaction with the infant. The struggle for the infant is that the caregiver is not only the source of comfort but also the source of pain.

### The Attachment Behavioral System

Bowlby (1969, 1982) depicted the attachment behavioral system as an innate set of behaviors designed to respond to real or perceived threats. In their research, Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, 1973, Ainsworth et al., 1978) defined five developmental stages of the behavioral system. The first stage includes the first three months of an infant's life and is characterized by behaviors such as sucking, grasping, smiling, gazing, cuddling, and visual tracking, all *proximity seeking* behaviors. It is

through these behaviors that infants become aware of the unique characteristics of their caregivers. In the second and third stages, from 3 to 6 and 6 to 9 months respectively, an infant begins to prefer a familiar face, usually the caregiver, and will start exhibiting more excitement and positive facial expressions toward this person. When the caregiver departs, the infant will become visibly upset and begin to seek physical closeness with the object of attachment as crawling and grabbing present the infant with more control over his/her actions and the subsequent outcomes of those actions.

The first internal representations of the caregiver are developed in the fourth stage, from ages 9 to 12 months. These internal representations provide the infant with a mental picture of the caregiver and patterns of expectations about how the caregiver will respond to the infant gestures. Finally, the fifth stage represents the period from toddlerhood on, where the child is now able to influence the behavior of the caregiver to meet his/her own needs for closeness. He/she may seek to be read to, cuddled, caressed, or included in daily activities simply to generate responses from his/her caregivers to fulfill the need for physical closeness and love (Ainsworth, 1973, 1985). In periods of unpredictable stressors such as separation or loss, infants initiate their attachment behaviors by sending signals that seek to produce outcomes of physical closeness and comfort. By responding sensitively and consistently, the caregiver alleviates the stress of the infant by providing a *safe haven*, thus deactivating the attachment system. Once soothed, the caregiver functions as a *secure base* from which the child can freely reengage and explore the environment. The safe haven and secure base functions provided by the caregiver promote healthy emotional and personality development in the infant (Bowlby 1969, 1982).

The goal of attachment behavior goes beyond physical protection from real or perceived danger. Bowlby (1969) noted the importance of the emotional availability of the caregiver as well based on child's early attachment experiences and evaluation of the caregiver. For instance, Sroufe and Waters (1977) focused on the subjective internal representation of the attachment figure and suggested the goal of attachment behavior is "felt security" for the infant even when the caregiver is absent. Research supports the notion that an emotionally healthy attachment to the caregiver requires a certainty of trust in the caregiver's ability to guard and console that requires both quality and quantity of interaction (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992).

Cognitively, these interactions form the basis from which an individual assesses potential threats, inner feelings of calm or stress, and the attachment figure's response (Corsini, 2009; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). The categories found by Ainsworth et al. (1978) emphasize the importance of these interactions for the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development of internal working models of both self and other (Bowlby, 1969, 1982).

### Internal Working Models

According to Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1988), internal working models are designed to control the overall attachment system and function as higher-order control processes that help individuals adapt. Over time children internalize experiences with their primary caregiver in such a way that forms a prototype, or internal working model, which guides later relationships outside the context of the family (Main et al., 1985). Bowlby (1973) identifies two key features of these working models of attachment: (1) whether or not the

attachment figure is perceived to be reliable and responsive to the child's needs and, (2) whether or not the self is perceived to be worthy of the attachment figure's caring response. The intense feelings of stress upon separation and the subsequent feelings after the caregiver returns shape which information individuals attend to and remember, and the attributions and interpretations they make about relational experiences. Main et al. (1985) described internal working models as a set of conscious and unconscious rules that organize attachment experiences and act as filters through which an individual evaluates new information, incorporates it with existing mental representations, and is reinforced by recurring experiences of one's interpersonal relating style (Bowlby, 1980).

Internal working models start with relationship specific representations of the attachment figure and turn into more generalized beliefs as the individual becomes an adult. If the attachment figure is reliable and available during times of stress and duress the individual develops positive beliefs about his/her self-worth (I am worthy of love and I capable of gaining love and support in times of emotional stress). The subsequent response from the attachment figure also shapes the beliefs and expectations about the reliability and willingness of other people (other people are able and willing to help me when I am in need and they are reliable and trustworthy). Recent research has explored the effect of internal working models on children's earlier attachment experiences. For example, children who were categorized as anxious ambivalent tend to hold negative views of self. However, the data was not consistent for children characterized as insecure avoidant (Cassidy, 1988; Kaplan & Main, 1985; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Other research consistently links the attachment of children 12 to 18-months with quality of emotional and social development through early childhood (Ainsworth et al., 1978;

Bretherton, 1985). Internal working models also provide a framework for understanding how early attachment relationships affect adult romantic relationships (Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

### Adult Attachment Beliefs

According to attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978), the infant will develop expectations and beliefs about the caregiver's availability and reliability through experience of the parent as a safe haven and secure base. Bowlby (1973, 1979, 1988) hypothesized the importance of attachment behaviors not just in infancy but stressed how internal working models would cognitively guide relational behaviors throughout the lifespan. Particularly important to this study is how the attachment system subsequently affects one's relationship with God and with romantic partners throughout his/her life.

Prior to the early 1980's, attachment theory was used primarily by child psychologists for studying the parent-child relationship (Beck, 2006). More recently, however, due to the remarkable similarities in the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions between infant-mother attachments and close adult relationships, the *Adult Attachment Interview* (AAI) was developed (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) to measure the internal working models found in adults. Main and her colleagues identified four attachment classifications theoretically and empirically related to the four childhood attachment styles discovered by Ainsworth and associates (1978) (Main & Goldwyn, 1998). One of the most significant studies on attachment classification in adulthood was conducted by van Ijzendoorn (1995). Recording the attachment classification of pregnant women using the AAI, he successfully predicted the

unborn child's attachment style at 12 months 70% of the time. In addition, van Ijzendoorn used the Strange Situation to record attachment classifications in childhood and then administered the AAI on the same individuals 16 to 20 years later. The findings indicated a nearly 80% association between attachment in childhood and later as an adult.

Research supports Bowlby's (1973) notion that internal working models are active throughout the lifespan, but can change based on the interplay of significant life events. Since research has revealed that attachment beliefs are carried into adulthood, researchers (Weiss, 1982; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Simpson & Rholes, 1998) have begun to apply attachment constructs to close interpersonal and adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). Shaver for example noted the remarkable similarities in the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions between infant-mother attachments and adult romantic love relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987), understanding romantic love as an attachment process, hypothesized that the different attachment styles as described by Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978) may actually bear a resemblance to the different ways individuals adjust in their adult love relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) as a result developed the first self report measure of adult attachment using Ainsworth's childhood attachment styles. This measure classified individuals into one of three attachment styles based on statements describing adult relationship strategies. Individuals responded to the measure and were subsequently categorized as either secure, avoidant, or anxious/ambivalent in their romantic love relationships. As Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) point out, "the results showed that the three groups differed in theoretically predictable ways with respect to their experiences with and attitudes about romantic love, as well as retrospective reports

concerning their childhood relationships with parents (p.318). Secure individuals were comfortable with closeness and dependency on the romantic partner and were more likely to trust their romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Avoidant adults were less likely to trust their romantic partners and were, therefore, less comfortable with closeness and dependency (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adults with anxious-ambivalent attachment were more likely to fall in love quickly and then experience intense feelings of insecurity with their romantic partner, constantly seeking their love and approval. Further studies on adult romantic attachment will be discussed in relation to the current study (e.g. Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Shaver, & Tobey, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Mikulincer, Florian, & Tolmcaz, 1990; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Shaver & Hazen, 1993; Simpson, 1990; Simpson, et al., 1992). These research findings are significant when comparing the concepts of a romantic relationship to that of relationship satisfaction and God attachment.

#### Adult Attachment Classifications

Romantic attachment has historically been measured by adult attachment styles. Hazan and Shaver's (1987) categorical paragraphs for measuring adult attachment styles had their limitations and were later reduced into multiple item scales that conceptualized attachment styles as regions in a two dimensional grid (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) discovered two orthogonal (mutually independent) dimensions of adult attachment beliefs: view of self (beliefs of self efficacy) and view of other (beliefs

about whether others are trustworthy and reliable). Intersecting these two dimensions resulted in a four category system for classifying styles of adult attachment. These styles reflect underlying internal working models (*secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful categories*). *Secure* attachment describes individuals who hold a positive view of self and others. These individuals are also comfortable with closeness and independence. *Preoccupied* individuals ascribe to a negative view of self and an unrealistically positive view of others. As a result they are usually anxious in relationships and have an unhealthy fear of abandonment. Adults with *dismissing* attachment, on the other hand, have an overly positive view of self, and an excessively negative view of others. Dismissing individuals are uncomfortable with closeness and tend to become overly self-reliant. *Fearful* attachment is characteristic of a negative view of both self and others. These adults have a very difficult time with intimacy and closeness and often avoid relationships altogether.

Since Hazan and Shaver's (1987) initial adult attachment inventory, many others surfaced. Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) decided to take the plethora of inventories and combine the items into one attachment assessment that would explore adult romantic attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Beginning with a 323 item instrument administered to 1,086 college students, factor analysis identified two primary factors—attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. These two dimensions were highly linked to the same four categories found by Bartholomew et al. (1991) (see Figure 1 below). Those with a *secure* attachment scored low on both dimensions; those classified with a *fearful* attachment scored high on both; those with an *avoidant*

attachment scored high on avoidance and low on anxiety; and those with an *ambivalent* attachment scored high on anxiety and low on avoidance.

**Figure 1**

		SELF	
		Positive View <i>Low Anxiety</i>	Negative View <i>High Anxiety</i>
OTHER	Positive View <i>Low Avoidance</i>	<p><b>SECURE</b></p> <p><i>Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy</i></p>	<p><b>PREOCCUPIED</b></p> <p><i>Preoccupied with relationships and abandonment</i></p>
	Negative View <i>High Avoidance</i>	<p><b>DISMISSING</b></p> <p><i>Downplays intimacy, overly self-reliant</i></p>	<p><b>FEARFUL</b></p> <p><i>Fearful of intimacy, socially avoidant</i></p>

Bartholomew's model of self and other

Secure adults hold a positive view of self and other, experience low levels of avoidance and anxiety, are comfortable with closeness, experience feelings of positive self-worth, and have healthy means of coping with stress, particularly by seeking out loved ones. Preoccupied adults on the other hand ascribe to a positive view of others and negative view of self, report increased levels of anxiety and decreased levels of avoidance, are insecure in attachment security, have a low sense of self-worth, are afraid

of rejection, crave closeness, and are obsessively worried, needy, and clingy in their closest relationships. Dismissing adults have a positive view of self and negative of others, report high levels of avoidance and lower levels of anxiety, have an overinflated sense of self-worth, and are uncomfortable with closeness. Finally, fearful adults hold a negative view of self and other, experience high levels of avoidance and anxiety, seek acceptance and self-worth from others but fear they are not capable of meeting their needs, and therefore, are uncomfortable with closeness and building intimacy (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

#### Attachment and Adult Relationship Satisfaction

The internalized representations of self and others the infant develops early in life remain active into adolescence and adulthood (Marchand, 2004) and manifest particularly in romantic relationships (Weiss, 1982, 1986, 1991). These internal working models function as a way for the individual to predict the future reliability and availability of romantic partners and to make decisions about what attachment behaviors to use in stressful situations (Cassidy, 1999; Eckert & Kimball, 2003). For instance, when stressful and anxiety provoking life events occur, the attachment alarm system triggers the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors characteristic of individual attachment styles (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006; Kobak & Duemler, 1994). During these times, romantic partners serve as a source of safety and security for the individual experiencing the stress (Feeney, 1999). When couples quarrel and do not get along, however, the romantic partner as the source of safety also becomes the source of stress, thus activating each individuals' attachment styles from early childhood in the current conflict (Shi, 2003). Therefore, attachment

styles offer important implications as they relate to relationship satisfaction and attitudes toward conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Marchand, 2004; Shi, 2003).

*Adult Attachment Styles and Outcomes of Relationship Satisfaction*

Research supports the notion that attachment styles affect an individual's assessments of romantic relationships in adulthood (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Heavey, Shenk, & Christenen, 1994; Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Lawrence, Eldridge, & Christensen, 1998; Levy & Davis, 1988; Simpson, 1990). For instance, *securely attached* adults have been found to see themselves as worthy of love and to believe others are capable of loving them. Therefore, they are more willing to depend on and trust others (Collins, 1996) and more likely to convey both negative and positive feelings in times of conflict (Feeney, 1995). Women in securely attached romantic relationships have greater relationship satisfaction, feel closer to their partner, perceive less conflict in the relationship, and report better communication. Men who have a *securely* attached partner are more likely to have faith in him/her and perceive him/her to be more dependable and predictable (Collins and Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990).

*Anxious-ambivalent* adults are willing to engage in closeness and intimacy but their negative view of self makes it difficult for them to rely on their romantic partners for fear of being rejected (Collins, 1996). When individuals with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style do not feel safe in the relationship, they are more likely to show aggression, cast blame on their partner, and display a mix of behaviors from clingy and needy in one moment to hesitant to engage in the next. Anxious ambivalent partners

report less satisfaction and more uncertainty about the relationship than those with secure and avoidant attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Those with *avoidant attachment style* hold a negative view of others and are, therefore, not comfortable with intimacy and closeness (Collins, 1996). As a result, avoidant adults are less likely to seek the support and nurture of others in stressful situations (Collins & Feeney, 2000) and more likely to avoid conflict (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001). Avoidant adults report lower levels of satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and commitment in their relationships compared to those with secure attachments.

Generally speaking, individual attachment styles are manifested during times of stress or duress in adult romantic relationships and are correlated with classic behavior patterns and attitudes that affect relationship satisfaction (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006). Specifically, *secure* individuals maintain a strong sense of self-efficacy, locus of control, are more optimistic of self and others, and tend to trust in others to help in difficult times (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). *Anxious, avoidant, and fearful* individuals are less self-confident and tend to hold a more negative view of self (*anxious-ambivalent*) and others (*avoidant*) in romantic relationships. They also have a greater inability to regulate emotion in times of stress, are less confident that others will be there to help, and lack the appropriate coping skills to overcome stressful life events (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). These behaviors and attitudes also have specific effects on relationship satisfaction particularly as they relate to gender differences. For example, relationship satisfaction is significantly decreased when the man has an avoidant attachment style and when the woman has an anxious ambivalent attachment style relationship satisfaction (Collins &

Read, 1990, Simpson, 1990). Simpson (1990) found that the level of anxiety and fear of abandonment was highly predictive of lower relationship satisfaction among the woman's male counterpart in nearly every relationship category.

### Attachment and Religion

The early pioneer of psychology William James (1902/2002) was one of the first in the field to describe how the security and confidence provided by religion can help people function more effectively in life. Sigmund Freud (1927/1961) also saw religion as a place of security and comfort for those who believe. However, his value-laden theoretical approach used terminology such as "regression" and "dependence" to negatively characterize a believer's relationship with God. In spite of these early theoretical considerations, mainstream psychology historically has not taken the psychology of religion seriously (Baumeister, 2002; Hill, Sarazin, Atkinson, Cousineau, & Hsu, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1992).

Researchers have suggested a few explanations for this trend. First, research psychologists tend to view the study of religion as insignificant because of their own lack of religious belief (Baumeister, 2002). Secondly, variables related to the area of religious study (sociological and psychological) can be researched in other scientific fields (Funder, 2002). Simpson (2002) argues that some researchers believe the study of religion is unscientific and those who do respect it view it as too complex and multifaceted to study. The more robust reason provided for this historical trend is that research in the psychology of religion has had very little support from major psychological theories (Kirkpatrick, 1992, Simpson, 2002). However, with attachment

theory's ability to organize theoretical and empirical results into the psychology of religion, this trend has changed (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Simpson, 2002). At this point, no other theory has been as effective in accounting for individual differences among religious coping styles as that of attachment theory (Granqvist, Lantto, Ortiz, & Andersson, 2001).

### God Attachment

With Bowlby's (1969, 1982) attachment framework, the ideas and observations of early theorists about religion can be conceptualized into empirical evidence for future scientific study. Bowlby developed his attachment model in a manner that supports the notion that throughout the lifespan the need for a secure and responsible caregiver remains within each individual and does not disappear in infancy. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) noticed, "To the extent that Bowlby is correct...theistic religion may play an important role in many adults' lives because of its ability to function in the manner of an attachment relationship" (p. 319). Theologian Gordon Kaufman (1981) earlier noted the correlation between Christian theology specifically and Bowlby's attachment theory. Kaufman (1981) stated, "The idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment-figure...God is thought of as a protective parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need" (p. 67).

Thus, Kirkpatrick (1992, 1999) became the first to conceptualize religion as an attachment process. Though he hypothesized God attachment as being more similar in function to parent-child attachment as Kaufman considered, researchers have since found a moderate but consistent link between God attachment and romantic attachment as well

(Kirkpatrick 1992, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). If adult love relationships can be conceptualized from the viewpoint of attachment theory, then so can one's experiences and conceptualizations of the Triune Christian God as a secure attachment figure (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Further research (Sim & Loh, 2003) supported the theoretical hypothesis that individuals develop multiple attachment relationships throughout life, and that one of those attachment bonds can be with a nonphysical deity. Cassidy's (1999) definition of an attachment bond supports this theoretical shift to a nonphysical deity as an attachment figure. He describes it as "a bond that one individual has to another individual who is perceived as stronger and wiser" (p. 12). He later states that a "person can be attached to a person who is not in turn attached to him or her" (p. 12). Based on the literature, God can serve the functions of an attachment relationship (seeking proximity, safe haven, secure base, and anxiety over loss or separation) just as a previously unfamiliar partner or spouse would in a romantic relationship.

### *God and the Attachment Behavioral System*

Research supporting the claim that people seek God as a safe haven during times of stress is the most researched area of attachment theory in the context of religion (Granqvist, 2005). Kirkpatrick (1999) suggests that in times of distress, persons of faith seek proximity to God in ways similar to that of an infant who seeks closeness to the caregiver. Bowlby (1973) postulated that, "Whether a child or adult is in a state of security, anxiety, or distress is determined in large part by the accessibility and responsiveness of his principal attachment figure" (p. 23).

In regard to Christianity, the imagery and language used is extremely representative of attachment relationships. Coping with stress and troubling times in life is much easier when Christians speak of Jesus being “by one’s side,” “holding one’s hand,” or “holding one in His arms” (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 319). Other research supports the safe haven function God plays in the life of a believer. For instance, in times of emotional distress, it has been found that people turn to prayer rather than the church (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975), grieving persons tend to increase their faith and religious devotion during times of loss even though their fundamental beliefs do not change (Loveland, 1968), and soldiers pray more frequently in combat (Allport, 1950). Times of death and divorce (Parkes, 1972), fears associated with serious illness (Johnson & Spilka, 1991), emotional crises (James, 1902/2002), relationship problems (Ullman, 1982), and other negative events (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996) have also been found as stressful activators that send one to seek God as a safe haven. These findings are consistent with the idea that one’s perceived relationship with God is similar in its function to the necessities offered by attachment relationships (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

With the convincing theory and evidence portraying religion as a haven of safety and emotional comfort, the aspect of attachment theory most appealing to the study of religion is that of the secure base (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Though there is little research on how God fills the secure base function, it has been found that those who believe they have a relationship with a stronger, wiser nonphysical deity report higher levels of global happiness (Pollner, 1989). When individuals feel safe, they experience positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and contentment. Such feelings allow people to

explore the self and the world around them, they become more creative, engage in increased times of recreation, and are more likely to serve others or repay kindness (Fredrickson, 2001). Secure attachment to God appears to provide contentment in the here and now and assurance in future challenges (Sim & Loh, 2003).

Finally, the feeling of loss or perceived abandonment by God should elicit feelings of grief and anxiety for the person of faith to meet the final two criteria of an attachment bond. This is difficult to determine, however, because in most cases the separation from God is by the choice of the person of faith, who merely stops believing God exists (Kirkpatrick, 1999, 2005). Research reveals that doubts about whether God exists in reality can produce anxiety, especially in a person who comes from a religious upbringing (Hunsberger, McKenzie, Pratt, & Pancer, 1993). Other research shows that college students who are going through the life transition of moving away from home have a positive correlation between levels of stress, daily hassles, depression, and the amount of the doubt they have about God (Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996). More doubt also correlated negatively to levels of adjustment (Hunsberger, et al., 1996). There are other reported instances where a person of faith felt abandoned by God, and the feelings are most often overwhelming, especially if the perceived abandonment came at a time of particular need (Pargament, 1997).

### *Conceptualizations of God as an Attachment Figure*

Critical to this review are the research findings on individual differences in the conceptualization of God and how one views God as an attachment figure. Studies of factor-analysis have supported frameworks for describing concepts of God (Kirkpatrick

& Shaver, 1990). One consistent factor has been expressed in the description of secure attachment in spite of the variation in regard to specific item content and subject populations throughout each of the studies. This factor, “nearness to God,” was first termed by Broen (1957) and later confirmed by other studies that related to it using terms such as “loving,” “protective,” “not distant,” “not inaccessible,” (Gorsuch 1968; Spilka et al. 1964), and “who give me comfort,” “a warm-hearted refuge,” and “who is always waiting for me” (Tamayo and Desjardins, 1976; in Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 320). The aforementioned research findings support the similarities between the Christian religion and the focal points of attachment theory. Expectedly then, early attachment relationships are most likely to shape the way one views God later in life (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

Based on the aforementioned evidence, the *Attachment to God Inventory* (AGI) (Beck & McDonald, 2004) was created to help researchers begin to understand how persons of faith experience God from an attachment perspective. Subscales on the AGI are the same as Brennan and associates’ (1998) two dimensions of romantic attachment: Anxiety about Abandonment and Avoidance of Intimacy. Individuals scoring high on the Anxiety about Abandonment subscale of the AGI report, at times, jealousy, preoccupation and worry, angry protest and resentment, concerns whether they are lovable, and fears of potential abandonment in their love relationship with God. Those who score high on the Avoidance of Intimacy subscale of the AGI report a different experience in their love relationship with God—an experience characterized by a reluctance to communicate, avoidance of emotionality, and neurotic self-dependence. In contrast, those scoring low on the AGI subscales report a secure relationship with God

and are generally free from anxiety and worry (Beck, 2006). Beck reports that the research on attachment to God closely parallels that of human love, where the love relationship can be characterized by pleasure and fulfillment but can also be frustrating and exhausting.

### Hypotheses about Religious Belief

Bowlby's (1973, 1980) notion that internal working models developed in early childhood with the primary caregiver are carried with individuals throughout their life has been supported and shown to affect behavior in adult relationships (Eckert & Kimball, 2003). Inclusive of this research is the putative effect of internal working models developed by an infant with the primary caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978) on an individual's attachment style with God as an adult (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999). Since the attachment system has been found to influence an individual's thoughts and feelings in the contexts of both interpersonal relationships and religious beliefs, researchers (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Granqvist, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002) have begun to study the empirical relatedness of the individual differences between one's relationships with parents, adult romantic partners, and other human attachment figures and individual differences in religious belief and experience.

From this research came two hypotheses. The first, known as the correspondence hypothesis, proposes that an individual's attachment to and concepts of God will mirror that of the attachment beliefs developed from the primary caregiver (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999). In contrast, the compensation hypothesis suggests that an individual with an

unavailable and unreliable caregiver who develops insecure attachment beliefs subsequently uses God as a compensatory attachment figure to maintain proximity in times of loss and stress (Kirkpatrick, 1999). Empirical research supports both theories (Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1998, 1999).

### *Correspondence Hypothesis*

The correspondence hypothesis proposes that individuals with secure attachment styles are more likely to sustain a future belief and relationship with God because a foundation has been established throughout childhood. This hypothesis is based on Bowlby's (1969) idea that relationship permanence and stability stem from stable working models of attachment. In groundbreaking research, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) studied the correlation between adult attachment style and religious belief and behavior using a measure developed by Hazan and Shaver (1987) classifying individuals into secure, ambivalent, or avoidant attachment styles with both parents and romantic partners. In addition, respondents answered measures on religious orientation, beliefs about God, attachment to God, and mental health. Results supported the correspondence hypothesis. Respondents who classified themselves as avoidant viewed God as more controlling, distant, and less loving than the secure group. In addition, avoidant respondents were more likely to describe themselves as agnostic whereas, though not statistically significant, ambivalent respondents had the most atheists. Securely attached respondents were the most committed to religion than either of the insecure groups. In addition, those who reported a secure romantic attachment were more likely to have a secure attachment to God than their insecure counterparts. Similarly, those who reported

an insecure attachment with their caregiver also displayed an insecure attachment to God. Interestingly, a secure attachment in childhood did not correlate to a secure attachment to God or romantic partner. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) suggest this finding may be due to poor interactions with religious and nonreligious people or an insecurely attached romantic partner.

Though unpublished, Kirkpatrick (2005) replicated the aforementioned study and found similar results. Respondents who were classified as avoidant were more likely to be agnostic and atheist and secure respondents not only once again had the highest level of religious commitment, but they were also more likely to identify themselves as an evangelical Christian. That is, they classify themselves in a religious orientation that focuses on a relationship with God and Jesus. In a second sample, those with avoidant attachment were overwhelmingly the least likely to report a personal relationship with God or Jesus and were more likely to view God as distant (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Though most of the studies to date on attachment and religion have been correlational, the one true experiment found in the literature was designed to activate the unconscious attachment system to measure effects on religiosity (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004). In three experiments, subliminal messages about separation were sent to a randomly assigned experimental group to measure attachment behaviors. In Experiment 1, the experimental group was exposed to the message, "God has abandoned me," whereas the control group was exposed to the message, "People are walking." Results again supported the correspondence hypothesis that individuals with a secure attachment are also likely to view God as reliable and trustworthy in times of need. Individuals in the experimental group classified with a secure attachment in childhood were more likely to

turn toward God in a way that supports the functions defined by an attachment relationship (safe haven, secure base, proximity seeking, and grief with loss). In Experiment 2, the purpose was to activate the parental attachment system and compare it to responses in relation to God. In this experiment, the separation stimulus was the primary caregiver, or mother. Again, the control group was exposed to the message, “People are walking,” and the experimental group this time saw “Mother is gone.” Experiment 2 yielded similar results. Respondents classified with a secure parental attachment were also more likely to turn to God as an attachment figure in times of need, whereas those with an insecure parental attachment tended to turn away from God. Experiment 3 was designed to determine if both the reference to the attachment figure and to the separation together were needed to explain the findings in Experiments 1 and 2. In addition to “God has abandoned me,” and “People are walking” as the messages given to the experimental and control groups respectively, were two more control group messages: “God has many names” and “Nothing has forsaken me.” Results showed that the attachment system is activated after exposure to an abandonment stimulus and that responses are moderated by parental attachment. Not only did both Experiment 1 and 3 find that God functions as an attachment figure, but all three experiments found an interaction between one’s attachment style and reactions to the abandonment messages. For instance, when the attachment system is unconsciously activated by either God or mother, those with a secure attachment were found to turn toward God and those with an insecure attachment turned away from God. This study reveals that an individual’s image of God as an available and reliable attachment figure is shaped by the internal working model developed by the primary caregiver. The internal working models of both the

parent and God were found to be related, thus providing support for the correspondence hypothesis.

In a more recent sample of college-aged students, researchers (McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005) studied the relationship between parental attachment and attachment to God and found overall support for the correspondence hypothesis. Those more likely to avoid God were also more likely to report low levels of tenderness, warmth, and support from their parents. They were also found to have come primarily from rigid, authoritarian homes and have higher levels of anxiety about whether they were lovable. Those from authoritarian homes also questioned their personal worth and God's love for them. Finally, a relationship was found between parental religiosity and a greater intimacy with God. Students emulated their parent's spirituality and relied on God more in homes characterized by religious activities whereas students who avoided God viewed their parents as hypocritical and having less of a personal relationship with God.

### *Compensation Hypothesis*

In addition to and somewhat in contrast with the correspondence hypothesis is the compensation hypothesis, based on Ainsworth's (1985) findings that those with insecure attachment styles seek substitute objects of attachment. Numerous studies (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Granqvist, 2005) have supported the compensation hypothesis and the correlation between childhood attachment, religious beliefs, and conversion. The first such study was conducted by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) to explore the relationship between religious beliefs, level of involvement in religious

activities, and childhood attachment style. Respondents were asked to fill out measures on family background and religious beliefs. Results showed that those with avoidant attachment styles were more religious than their secure or anxious-preoccupied counterparts and that those with secure attachment had lower levels of religious involvement. However, this was only true among participants whose mothers were nonreligious. Religiosity in adulthood was not related to any specific attachment style for those who grew up with strong religious mothers. Hazan and Shaver's (1990) results indicate that those who grew up in nonreligious homes do look to God as a substitute attachment figure. This study supports the compensation hypothesis in that those with avoidant attachment and nonreligious mothers were significantly more likely to believe in a personal, not pantheistic God; engage in religious activities and have higher levels of religious commitment; and share the belief of a personal relationship with God. Moreover, and in spite of parental religiosity, those with avoidant attachment style were more than four times as likely to have experienced a sudden religious conversion. Granqvist (1998) also found that insecurely attached individuals to the mother figure were almost three times as likely to have an experience in adulthood when his/her religious beliefs dramatically enhanced in importance. Also, individuals who experience an insecure attachment to both the mother and father, when both parents' religiousness is low, were found to be more likely to attend church, believe in a personal God, and experience a personal relationship with God than securely attached individuals (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Granqvist, 1998). These results indicate that God may serve the role of a substitute attachment figure (emotional compensation), compensating

for the distant, unresponsive care-giving style individuals experienced in infancy and childhood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

Kirkpatrick (1992) posited that if God functions as a source of safety and comfort, then individuals will increase religious belief and behavior during times of stress, especially the loss of a loved one. Comparing widows to a control group, Brown et al. (2004) found not only an increase in level of religious belief and behavior in widows but also a decrease in feelings of overall grief. The increase, however, returned to normal after 18 months for religious beliefs and 48 months for religious behaviors (such as increased church attendance). This study underscores the importance of God serving as a substitute attachment figure, compensating for the loss of a romantic attachment figure.

#### *Integrating Correspondence and Compensation Hypotheses*

As a result of the contradictory findings that both hypotheses support different aspects of attachment theory, Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) attempted to integrate the correspondence and compensation hypotheses. They had to first revise the original correspondence hypothesis to include the following: (1) the fact that previous support for it was consistently dependent upon the parent's level of religiousness, (2) an explanation as to why individuals of all attachment styles are religious, and (3) a wider range of falsifiable attachment predictions which raises "the critical question of whether such a conceptualization could be considered scientifically informative" (p. 257). The revised correspondence hypothesis consequently stated that it is the attachment figure's religiousness and not the security of the relationship per se that is attributed to the religiousness of the securely attached individual. This essentially means that "children in

secure dyads are more likely to be successfully socialized into and subsequently adopt parts of that attachment figure's system of religious behaviors and attitudes than are children in insecure dyads" (p. 257).

Combining the previous changes in the correspondence hypothesis with the emotional compensation hypothesis, which went unchanged, a study was performed by Granqvist and Hagekull (1999). The idea of regulating emotions arose in response to the emotional compensation hypothesis. Emotional regulation, as defined by Granqvist and Hagekull (1999), is "the process responsible for modifying the intensity of distressing emotional reactions to accomplish one's goals" (p. 257). If indeed one's attachment style and subsequent perceived relationship to God helps the insecurely attached individual regulate emotions, then a religiosity based on emotion regulation is hypothesized for insecurely attached individuals (Corsini, 2009). As for the revised correspondence hypothesis, consistent research on religion has shown increasing support for the child's acceptance of his/her parent's religious values based on both the parent's religiosity and the intimacy and quality of relationship between the parent and the child. As a result, a socialization pathway to religiousness was hypothesized for securely attached individuals. According to this hypothesis then, the explanation to the root of religiousness in securely attached individuals may be derived "from without", or socialization processes, whereas the religiousness of the insecurely attached individual may be derived "from within", or emotion regulation (Granqvist & Hagekull).

Upon studying the effects of attachment quality on religiosity, previous studies (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick 1997; Granqvist, 1998) found that sudden religious conversions and significant religious changes are the most prominent features of

individuals who are more insecurely attached as opposed to their securely attached counterparts. Granqvist (1998) utilized two broad types of religious change themes based on narratives resulting from important life factors. He stated that themes of compensation “are characterized by life situations indicating that religiousness fulfills an emotionally supportive function for a person in need, and themes of correspondence are defined as themes related to socialization-based takeover of religiousness” (p. 258). Therefore, securely attached individuals are more likely to experience religious changes early in life because their attitudes and beliefs are more likely to be assumed from their parent’s values. Similarly, religious conversion is more likely to take place over a steadier period of time as opposed to the suddenness characterized by that of insecurely attached individuals. This sudden religious change and/or conversion are more apt to occur during a period of intense emotional chaos or confusion brought on by a possible crisis or trauma. As can be expected, the latter themes are more likely to occur in adulthood or later life because the parental influence of religiousness was not imposed onto the individual (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999).

Findings of this study (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999) strongly support the hypotheses noted above concerning the emotional compensation hypothesis and the revised correspondence hypothesis. First, individuals with avoidant attachment styles were more likely to be associated with an emotionally driven religiosity. This finding was supported more strongly in cases where levels of parental religiosity were low. On the other hand, individuals described as having ambivalent attachment styles showed no correlation to an emotionally based religiosity. This finding is inconsistent with previous studies (Kirkpatrick, 1997) and, therefore, needs to be the topic of more research in the

future. Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) found that those with ambivalent adult attachment, that is those who hold to a negative view of self coupled with overly positive, idealized views of others, is linked longitudinally to positive religious beliefs. What remains unclear, however, is “why this particular combination of mental models is true for adult nonparental attachment but not for perceptions of childhood attachment to parents, in relation to religious change in adults...” (p. 266).

Secondly, in spite of parental religiousness, socialization-based religiosity was supported by those individuals who were securely attached to both parents. Socialization-based religiosity, in most instances, was not characteristic of those individuals who had developed insecure attachments. Also, in cases of less securely attached individuals and those with ambivalent attachment styles to both parents, sudden religious conversions were found to be consistent as opposed to steadier religious changes. Individuals who defined themselves as having an insecure attachment style (both avoidant and ambivalent) were more likely to have a sudden religious conversion than those who did not experience a religious change. The differences in the latter findings were substantial. As stated by Granqvist and Hagekull (1999),

the connection between attachment insecurity and sudden religious conversion may be considered the most robust and corroborated finding from the research on attachment and religion...This interpretation is in line with ambivalents' observed tendency to desperately seek care and easily fall in love...(p. 267).

## God Attachment and Romantic Relationships

Kirkpatrick (1992, 1999), conceptualizing God as a safe haven during times of stress and a secure base for exploration in times of normalcy, postulated that individual differences in religious experiences can be explained by attachment theory. The two underlying hypotheses at the core of God attachment research are the correspondence and compensation hypotheses. As previously noted, both hypotheses have gained considerable empirical support and both could be correct. The degree to which either one is accurate is based on the research question being studied. The correspondence hypothesis could provide clarification on how people view and maintain their religious beliefs about and personal relationship with God beginning in childhood and extending through adulthood. On the other hand, the compensation hypothesis may explain why religious belief and behavior can increase during times of stress or after the loss of a loved one. Both hypotheses can be included to elucidate religious belief and behaviors in individuals, particularly as they apply to adult romantic relationships. However, research on the compensation hypothesis, in particular, adds unique explanations as to why individuals may turn to God instead of, or in addition to, their romantic partner as a secure base.

## Love Mechanism Hypothesis and Emotion Compensation

The crux of the Judeo-Christian faith rests on the centrality of love (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Though many researchers such as Ullman (1989) initially hypothesized religious conversion as primarily a cognitive process, even she found that the dynamics and process have very little to do with cognition but are much more representative of *falling*

*in love*. The Love Mechanism Hypothesis (Kirkpatrick, 2005) suggests that the biological and psychological systems inherent in two people bonding in a committed love relationship closely resemble and activate the same systems when one enters into a love relationship with God. In other words, since dramatic religious conversions are found to take place primarily among those with an insecure attachment history (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1998), a good number of these insecurely attached individuals experience a stressor big enough to activate a love mechanism that has arguably been latent. If the conversion experience does indeed emit powerful emotions of falling in love, then the mechanisms involved may include a comprehensive set of attitudes and subsequent behaviors related to the *quality* of the relationship and an investment in a reproductive approach, such as a long-term attitude of commitment and a sense of obligation to invest as a parent. In fact, if previous relational experiences prior to conversion were based on *quantity* rather than *quality*, then this religious conversion with its sense of falling in love would produce significant life changes toward a *quality* orientation that now include a shift away from a high risk lifestyle to that of a more conventional one focused on traditional family ideals (Kirkpatrick, 2005). For instance, Kirkpatrick (2005) suggests that drug addicts and alcoholics may quit; criminals may give up their antisocial behaviors; and the sexually reckless may commit to one relationship in an attempt to enhance *quality* and nurture the newfound sense of falling in love. Kirkpatrick (2005) suggests that the Christian metaphor of being “born again” is fitting, as the individual, in essence, starts a new love relationship. In fact, sudden conversions have been found to be followed by an increase in religious belief and behavior (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1998). Interestingly, Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2001) found that increased

religious involvement consistently and significantly enhances both romantic commitment and relationship satisfaction. To the degree that those with sudden religious conversions, once converted, adhere to *quality* in romantic relationships, is the degree to which they experience higher levels of religious involvement and relationship satisfaction.

### Individual Differences in Adult Attachment

A discussion on why an individual would turn to God as a substitute attachment figure in addition to or instead of another partner during times of stress is warranted. A closer look at adult attachment styles and romantic relationship outcomes reveals that *secure* adults not only enjoy more satisfying and happier relationships, but they also last longer because the secure individual is more comfortable with long-term commitment. *Anxious/preoccupied* adults tend to be clingy, needy, and want more intimacy than their partner is willing to give them. These behaviors stem from a fear that their romantic partners will abandon them. *Avoidant* adults are not as likely to “fall in love” because of the uncomfortable feelings they get with increased closeness and intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Furthermore, the probability of an individual seeking God as a substitute attachment figure depends on the extent to which he/she views the self as worthy of love from romantic partners. Of the attachment styles, those with *secure* adult attachment relationships are most likely to see themselves as worthy of love, live in mutually satisfying romantic relationships, and therefore, have no reason to go out searching for a substitute attachment figure in addition to or in place of their romantic partner. Adults

with an *avoidant* attachment style, though most likely living in an unsatisfying relationship, are also unlikely to seek out another romantic partner because they do not desire or trust others. However, from the standpoint of the compensation hypothesis, the *anxious-preoccupied* adult is the most likely candidate to seek God during times of stress in a romantic relationship (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Consumed by the thought of being abandoned by a romantic partner, he/she is more likely to report a lack of closeness and intimacy in the current relationship, either because he/she has distanced entirely from being hurt, or because he/she is the one most likely responsible for pushing the romantic partner away (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick, 2005). Particularly for *anxious-preoccupied* women, interpersonal romantic relationships portray greater levels of jealousy, conflict, emotional lability, clinginess, dependency, and relationship dissatisfaction (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Consistent with the Love Mechanism Hypothesis (Kirkpatrick, 2005), *anxious-preoccupied* adults are also more likely than other attachment orientations to say they fell in love quickly, yet remained consumed by their fear of being abandoned (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan 1988).

From an attachment perspective, these interpersonal behaviors and characteristics seem to best describe the kind of person most likely to turn to God to meet attachment needs (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Enhanced motivation to seek God in times of stress is precipitated by a combination of an overly negative view of self, or a positive internal working model of other. For *avoidant* adults, the negative view of other hinders their ability to see God as someone who is reliable, accessible, and close (Kirkpatrick, 1998). However, for *anxious-preoccupied* adults who already view others as reliable and accessible (albeit in a somewhat idealized manner), these internal working models can be

transferred onto God. Anxious-preoccupied individuals may be more inclined then to make a dramatic, sudden conversion.

### *God Attachment, Religiosity and Relationship Status*

In the previous section the distinction was made that those with an anxious-preoccupied attachment style are the most likely to seek God as a compensatory attachment figure because of their ability to see God as reliable and trustworthy. Yet those with anxious-preoccupied styles have difficulty maintaining a sense of security in romantic attachment because of the negative view they carry of themselves. Compensation themes tend to be consistent with life events that trigger the attachment alarm system. For instance, Granqvist (1998) found that for those who report a major religious change, the most common reasons to seek God were because of “bereavement or death of significant other” and “relationship problems or divorce.” This study focuses specifically on the ability of an individual to seek God as a compensatory attachment figure when feeling distant from their romantic partner or when relationship problems exist within the romantic relationship. However, other evidence suggests that status of romantic relationship plays a vital role in the level of religiosity of an individual. For instance, Granqvist and Hagekull (2000) found that singles, more than couples in committed, long-term relationships, scored significantly higher on measures of religious behaviors, belief in God, perceptions of having personal relationship with God, and emotion-based religiosity. These findings were independent of individual differences in attachment and point again to the importance of emotional compensation and singles

turning to God as a substitute attachment figure in lieu of a romantic partner (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

In a more recent study, Granqvist and Hagekull (2003) examined relationship status longitudinally in a sample of 196 Swedish adolescents. Those with insecure attachment styles became more religious after a breakup or separation, but decreased in religiosity as soon as they entered a new romantic relationship. When replacing the romantic attachment assessments with measures of attachment history with mother and father, similar results were found. Again, individuals who were newly single showed increases in religiosity, a finding that was significantly inverted for those who entered into another romantic relationship. Kirkpatrick (2005) points out that an explanation for religious change and conversion cannot be given by individual differences or situational factors alone, but rather by the interaction between the two. Interestingly, the anxious-preoccupied attachment group was also most likely to report having “lost faith in God” during the previous four years (Kirkpatrick, 1997). Kirkpatrick (1997) suggests that the reason may be that though the anxious-preoccupied are more likely to turn to God, they are likely to find out later that God is not there to meet their needs for “felt” love, capability, and availability.

### *God Attachment and Partner Availability*

According to Pargament's (1997) review of the literature, seldom will people seek God in the midst of their normal everyday routine, particularly if they are in a secure romantic relationship with little to no stress or disillusionment (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). Instead, people are most likely to seek God in times of severe stress and duress. The reason most people turn to God during these times is because they believe Him to be safe, reliable, and comforting (Gorsuch 1968; Spilka et al. 1964), and in the case of major crises, many adults may wonder about the reliability and capability of their adult romantic partners to handle the intense pressure. God may thus serve as an "ideal" attachment figure, or a "felt security" (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), in replace of the much weaker and fallible romantic partner who may not be able to handle the current life circumstances.

Researchers studied the ability and availability of romantic partners to respond to a stressor in their partner's life (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Having brought romantic pairs to the laboratory setting, Simpson and his colleagues developed a distressing situation by telling female participants that the experiment would contain something moderately stressful. However, they did not tell the females what the stressor was going to be. With the videotapes running, they recorded the responses of the partners who were left alone together in waiting rooms, clueless as to what was going happen. Whereas the women's anxiety grew more intense, *secure* men provided more support to their partners and *avoidant* men offered less support. These findings were independent of the level of active support seeking displayed by the nervous female partner (Simpson et

al., 1992). Under the most stressful times, when anxiety is heightened, it is then that individuals need their attachment figure the most. However, this is precisely when avoidant partners are inadequate to meet the attachment needs of their partner.

Kirkpatrick (2005) suggests therefore that one can predict “that individual differences in the likelihood of utilizing God as an attachment figure should be related to the attachment and/or caregiving styles of people’s romantic partners” (p. 155).

One of the difficulties in analyzing these data is the individual difference in attachment style and how that is used to draw someone with a corresponding attachment style. For instance, it is more likely that someone with a secure attachment style will find a partner with a secure attachment style and vice versa. For example, Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) found a tendency for avoidant partners to become romantically involved with anxious-preoccupied partners. The important implication in the context of the present study is that individuals characterized as anxious-preoccupied are the most likely to turn to God as an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

### God Attachment and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

There is an important distinction between one’s perceived relationship with God and perceived relationship with people. The processes involved in interpersonal relationships are complex, multifaceted, and cyclical. For instance, the behavior of one partner will in turn influence the behavior of the other partner and confirm that partners’ beliefs about relationships; in turn that person’s subsequent behavior is going to come back and affect the other partner’s response as well. The clinginess and neediness of an anxious-preoccupied partner, for example, can simply push away a romantic partner, and

confirm to the avoidant partner that people want to be too close and intimate. On the other hand, an avoidant person can push a romantic partner away by deciding not to meet the partner's desire for intimacy and closeness. If this happens and the partner is an anxious-preoccupied style, it just reinforces to that partner that he/she not lovable enough and that nobody will be there for them (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Secondly, unless broken, these interpersonal processes often create a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby an individual treats his/ her partner according to internal working models (i.e. "I am not worthy of love"; "I believe others are capable of loving me"), and therefore elicits the behavior from the partner that confirms that mental model (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) suggest that this process of one's own self-defeating behaviors may be the reason that it is so hard for couples to free themselves from these cycles and why attachment styles generally tend to remain stable across time. For individuals who are insecurely attached in romantic relationships, yet have found a way to break the negative communication and counter-criticism cycles reported by Gottman (2003), or have reported high on relationship satisfaction in spite of the negativity within the relationship, God attachment may add unique variance due to the strategies of emotion regulation one develops in a secure attachment relationship. For example, since securely attached individuals are more likely to openly express their emotions and adapt to conflicts and stressful situations, the functions of a secure God attachment and the feelings of "felt security" offered by this relationship with God can provide the stability and feelings of security and safety to effectively cope with conflict and other stressors in the romantic relationship by being less likely to avoid intimacy or

being overly clingy and emotionally anxious (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Schottenbauer et al, 2006; Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

In the God attachment relationship, one's perceived relationship with God is not likely to be influenced by God's behavior per se, and neither is God's behavior going to be influenced by humans. Moreover, a perceived relationship with God will also be characterized by the level of intimacy and closeness one desires of that relationship independent from anybody's behavior in the relationship. This is relevant to the current study because "an individual might well be able to invent or reinvent his or her perceived relationship with God in secure terms without inadvertently undermining the process through previously established, counterproductive patterns of behavior" (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 156).

#### God Attachment and the Current Study

To summarize, it has been found that those who have a secure attachment style are less anxious and less avoidant in romantic relationships and are therefore less clingy, needy, or avoidant. They can fully participate in healthy relationships because of their strengthened sense of self and ability to regulate emotions and manage conflicts. Since this is the case, those who present with a secure God attachment may be more likely to feel as though they can fully participate in a romantic relationship and less likely to believe that if the relationship falls apart they will fall apart (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000). Consequently, they may be capable of managing their negative emotions in close relationships. As previously noted, emotion regulation is one of the strongest predictors of relationship satisfaction.

Though couples who are more securely attached to their romantic partner show less religious belief and behavior, those who present with an anxious-preoccupied attachment style tend to seek God more and use Him as a substitute attachment figure (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1998). When they use God as a compensatory attachment figure they are less likely to rely as heavily on their partner for happiness and positive affection in their romantic bond. When trouble or conflict comes in the relationship, the individual is more likely to look to God to calm or soothe the pain rather than his/ her partner. It has been found that when individuals turn to God and increased religious involvement both romantic commitment and relationship satisfaction are significantly increased (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Even among married couples, research shows a favorable association between religion and relationship satisfaction (Myers, 2006; Wilcox & Nock, 2006); religiosity better predicts marital adjustment than socioeconomic rewards and family development characteristics (Filsinger and Wilson, 1984); and when the father attends church several times a month, couples report to have happier and more emotionally supportive relationships (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Based on the findings noted above that a couple with an insecure romantic attachment can conceptually have a secure God attachment; this research will empirically study whether God attachment adds unique variance to Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for Romantic Attachment.

God attachment is believed to add unique variance to the prediction of relationship satisfaction over and above that which is accounted for by romantic attachment because couples who have an insecure romantic attachment and a secure God attachment are more likely to regulate emotion by turning to God as a safe haven when they are not feeling safe with one another in the relationship (Kirkpatrick, 1999). When

God acts as a secure base to couples who find themselves in troubling times in the relationship, it gives those individuals a sense of contentment and satisfaction with the current circumstances and provides a “sense of confidence to engage present as well as forthcoming challenges” (Sim & Loh, 2003, p. 374).

On the other hand, God attachment may have a negative effect on relationship satisfaction if the romantic partner possesses a faith characteristic of irrational beliefs about God. For example, as Beck and McDonald (2004) state some persons of faith may experience a “stormy and chaotic relationship” with God that hinders the romantic relationship and leads to poor relationship satisfaction and a decreased sense of intimacy. In spite of the findings, it appears as though God attachment and romantic attachment are qualitatively different in function (Kirkpatrick 1992, 1999, 2005). God attachment more closely resembles the infant-caregiver attachment. As a result, God could serve as the substitute attachment figure for adults to turn to when experiencing conflict in romantic relationships. The rationale is that an individual who has a secure God attachment will feel safer in the romantic relationship, be able to regulate emotion in times of stress, and subsequently demonstrate higher satisfaction in the relationship. The need therefore is to investigate if a relationship exists between God attachment, romantic attachment, and romantic relationship satisfaction.

More specifically, this study investigates the extent to which God attachment accounts for unique variance in relationship satisfaction after controlling for the variance attributed to romantic attachment, or if the combination of both God attachment and romantic attachment better predict relationship satisfaction—more so than explained by each variable independently. It is hypothesized that God Attachment will account for

unique variance in Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction. In addition, it is believed that individuals who rely on God as a secure-base and a source of strength to regulate emotions and manage potential relationship conflicts are more likely to experience relationship satisfaction. Individuals who can regulate emotion are less likely to believe they will fall apart during times of stress and/or threats of abandonment or loss of the relationship. With an extensive body of empirical support for understanding the major role attachment beliefs play in emotion regulation, God attachment may buffer satisfaction through emotion regulation (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003).

#### Research Questions

The research questions framing this investigation are as follows:

3. Does God attachment account for unique variance in relationship satisfaction after controlling for romantic attachment?
4. Secondly, what is the complex relationship between these two sets of variables (God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Anxiety, and Romantic Avoidance) and Relationship Satisfaction?

It is hypothesized in this study that a secure God attachment will add unique variance to Relationship Satisfaction over and above that of Romantic Attachment.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Method

This chapter presents the methods by which the interplay between relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment were evaluated. An explanation of the sample characteristics for participants, the procedure by which participants were recruited and data collected, and the measurements used to assess the sample are provided.

### Procedures

This study recruited a pool of students from an Evangelical university during the first few weeks of classes in the fall semester of 2006. Professors teaching in the Family and Consumer Science Department and a General Education class invited their students to participate, and those who agreed to do so were asked to sign an informed consent form at the time of the study. The first pool of students was exclusively freshman in their first semester of college, recruited from a required General Education class. The second pool was primarily second year students recruited from an entry level course in the Family and Consumer Science department. A series of t-tests and chi-square tests confirmed that these two groups could be combined into a single sample for further analysis because they were not significantly different on relevant measures. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between relationship satisfaction, romantic attachment, and God attachment using a cross sectional design.

Students were provided an informed consent form that described the study and the participants' rights, including that their participation was voluntary and they could

withdraw their participation at any time. The packet of assessments included a Background Information and Family History form (Appendix A) that gathered basic demographic information and facts about the participants' family of origin. The packet included three instruments; The Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR I), the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI), and Burns' Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT) were given to the sample at the beginning of the semester ( $n=211$ ). This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board in the summer of 2006. The data from these particular instruments were collected at the end of the fall semester that year but were not analyzed until the spring semester 2009 for the purposes of this study.

### Participants

The demographic characteristics of the sample population are displayed in Table 1. Of the 211 participants, 49 were male and 162 were female. Age ranged from 18 to 26 and was representative of single, undergraduate students. The age range is important because of the significance of romantic relationships at this stage of life. Erikson (1968) describes this stage of young adulthood as a period of identity formation, where needs of self-esteem and relatedness to others are prioritized and where individuals increase their focus on romantic relationships. However, because of these priorities, ideological identities (e.g. religious values) may take on less importance, as many young adults are not at a place where they are actively searching for God.

Though the sample ranged in age from 18 to 26, a majority of the population was 18 to 20 (80.6%). More than 4 in 5 of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian

(84.8%), while 5.6% as Hispanic, 3.8% as African American, 2.8% as Asian, and 2.3% as Other. Additionally, 23% of the participants were male and 76.6% were female.

**Table 1**  
Demographic Frequencies of the Initial Sample

Demographic	Type	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Sex	Male	49	23.2%
	Female	162	76.7%
Race	African-American	8	3.8%
	Asian	6	2.8%
	Caucasian	179	84.8%
	Hispanic	12	5.6%
	Other	5	2.3%
Age	18	66	31.2%
	19	65	30.8%
	20	39	18.4%
	21	20	9.5%
	22	12	5.7%
	23	3	1.4%
	24	4	1.9%
	25	1	0.5%
	26	1	0.5%

## Measures

### Background Information and Family History

Participants completed a background demographic questionnaire which included descriptive information such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, and original date of enrollment. Additionally, a questionnaire on family history was included asking participants to identify personal religious background, family of origin, and any recent

family losses. Participants were also asked to identify if there was a history of any significant mental disorders in their family (e.g. suicide, depression, and bipolar).

### *Experiences in Close Relationships*

Romantic attachment was assessed using the *Experiences in Close Relationships* survey (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECR has high internal consistency (coefficient alphas), with Cronbach alphas of .94 and .91 for the Avoidance and Anxiety scales respectively. A 36-item self report instrument, the ECR is designed to measure romantic attachment beliefs in adult relationships. Statements describing the romantic relationship are measured on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The instrument measures individuals on two dimensions that underlie adult attachment organization—avoidance and anxiety. The Avoidance and Anxiety scales both consist of 18 items each. The Avoidance scale measures the level of discomfort with closeness and intimacy in relationships and the Anxiety scale assesses fear of rejection and abandonment. Example items include, “I don’t feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners” and “I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close” for the Avoidance scale and “I worry a fair amount about losing my partner” and “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner” for the Anxiety scale.

In 1996, developers of the ECR gathered all of the non-redundant items from every published, and some non-published, adult attachment inventories. After collecting the items, researchers tested the 323-item instrument on a population sample of 1,086 college students and used factor analysis to analyze data. From this research, Brennan

and his colleagues (1998) found that two primary factors, anxiety and avoidance, accounted for 62.8% of the variance. This research, using hierarchical cluster analysis, found four categories that paralleled very closely to Bartholomew's (1991) four categories of attachment (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful). Secure individuals were those who scored low on avoidance and anxiety, dismissing individuals were those with low anxiety and high avoidance, preoccupied individuals were those with high anxiety and low avoidance, and fearful individuals scored high on both anxiety and avoidance dimensions.

Though romantic attachment scales and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) have been found to have low correlations (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Shaver, Belsky, & Brennan, 2000), respect for the ECR is found throughout the literature. Not only have construct and predictive validities of the ECR scales been confirmed across various independent peer reviewed studies (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002), but it is also the suggested attachment measurement in the handbook of attachment research (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999).

#### *Attachment to God Inventory*

The *Attachment to God Inventory* (AGI: Beck & McDonald, 2004) was used to measure God attachment. Based on the ECR (Brennan et al, 1998), the AGI measures dimensions of avoidance and anxiety as they relate to individuals and their relationship with God. Beck and McDonald (2004) with a multiple sample study found good factor structure and construct validity. Anxiety and avoidance dimensions on the AGI were found to be significantly correlated with each other and both adult attachment anxiety and

adult attachment avoidance. A Cronbach alpha of .86 was found on the avoidance scale and was associated with 15.4% of total variance whereas a Cronbach alpha of .82 was found on the anxiety dimension with 17.9% of total variance.

A 28-item self report instrument, the AGI uses statements that describe an individual's relationship with God using a Likert scale on items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The instrument measures individuals on two dimensions that underlie God attachment organization—avoidance and anxiety. The Avoidance and Anxiety scales both consist of 14 items each. The Avoidance scale measures the level of discomfort with closeness and dependence on God and the Anxiety scale assesses fear of rejection and abandonment by God. Example items include, “I am uncomfortable being emotional in my conversation with God” and “I prefer not to depend too much on God” for the Avoidance scale and “I worry a lot about my relationship with God” and “I often worry about whether God is pleased with me” for the Anxiety scale.

In the developing studies of the AGI, researchers administered the AGI and ECR to 118 (89 females and 29 males) undergraduate and graduate students at an Evangelical university. They found that subscale scores for anxiety and avoidance, specifically 26 of the 28 AGI items, significantly correlated with subscale scores for anxiety and avoidance on the ECR, matching results for God attachment with Adult Attachment. The AGI showed good internal consistency for the Anxiety subscale (alpha = .80) and the Avoidance subscale (alpha = .84) (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

*Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT)*

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the *Relationship Satisfaction Scale* (RSAT: Burns, 1993). Highly reliable and internally consistent, the RSAT 13-item scale has a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.97. The 7-item scale, used in this study, has an alpha of .94. The benefits of the brief 7-item version of the instrument is that it is faster and easier to take, is fitting for individuals in a variety of romantic relationships from married, dating, cohabiting, and homosexual, and measures global relationship satisfaction as opposed to more specific areas like raising children or handling finances.

The 7-item scale measures relationships satisfaction and dissatisfaction in seven different areas of a relationship using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied). Total scores on the 7-item instrument can range between 0 and 42. The higher the score the more satisfied the individual is in the relationship. Burns and Sayers (1988) found reliably differentiated scores for couples in therapy and those not in therapy as well as those who reported a very successful relationship, those who were troubled but not in need of therapy, and those in trouble and in need of professional care. In fact, RSAT scores are highly correlated with scores on the Lock-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale ( $r = .80$ , Burns & Sayers, 1988), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale ( $r = .89$ ; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994), and Norton's Quality of Marriage Index ( $r = .91$ ; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994).

In summary, the RSAT reliably measures satisfaction and dissatisfaction in close romantic relationships, differentiates very dissatisfied couples from very satisfied couples, has excellent internal consistency, is strongly correlated with other instruments that measure relationship satisfaction, has excellent discriminant validity (from measures

of depression and anxiety), and is not highly correlated with other measures of mood disorders (Burns, 1993).

### Data Analysis

The first research question was addressed using a zero-order correlation arranged in a correlation matrix to examine the relationships between all five variables: God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Anxiety, Romantic Avoidance, and Relationship Satisfaction. After examining the correlations, a hierarchical regression was used to examine whether God Attachment added unique variance on Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for Romantic Attachment. To measure this most conservatively, Romantic Attachment variables were entered first followed by the data on God Attachment. The first  $R^2$  generated by this method addressed whether Romantic Attachment accounted for significant variance on Relationship Satisfaction. The second  $R^2$  identified the amount of total variance accounted for by God Attachment. The Change in  $R^2$  identified the unique variance accounted for by God Attachment after controlling for Romantic Attachment.

The second research question was addressed using a series of three simultaneous multiple regression analyses to examine how Romantic Attachment mediates the effect of God Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction. The two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) were used in the first set of simultaneous regressions to predict Romantic Attachment. In the first simultaneous regression, Romantic Avoidance (which had the highest correlation to Romantic Satisfaction), was regressed onto God Anxiety and God Avoidance. In the second regression, Romantic Anxiety was regressed onto God

Anxiety, God Avoidance, and Romantic Avoidance. Finally in the third regression, Relationship Satisfaction was regressed onto God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Avoidance, and Romantic Anxiety.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex relationship between three constructs: Relationship Satisfaction, Romantic Attachment, and God Attachment, specifically to determine whether God Attachment accounts for unique variance in Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment. There are two research questions the study sought to answer. First, does God Attachment account for unique variance in Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for the effects of Romantic Attachment? Secondly, what is the complex relationship between these two sets of variables (God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Anxiety, and Romantic Avoidance) and Relationship Satisfaction?<sup>3</sup> This study used a sample of 212 students who were administered measures of Romantic Attachment, God Attachment, and Relationship Satisfaction. Complete data were available for 197 participants, 89 of whom were in romantic relationships.<sup>4</sup> The first research question was examined using a zero-order correlation and hierarchal multiple regression, where Romantic Attachment

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<sup>3</sup> Initially this study sought to answer the question of whether those with a secure God attachment are more likely to have a secure romantic attachment. However, due to the very small percentage of the participants who were categorized as both insecure God Attachment and insecure Romantic Attachment, this analysis lost statistical power ( $n = 8$  or nine percent). Therefore, the second research question focused more specifically on the interrelationship between the dimensional variables of Anxiety and Avoidance. This exploratory measure was examined through a series of simultaneous regressions.

<sup>4</sup> The RSAT was completed by the 89. Of those 89 participants, 55 fell into the secure God/secure romantic quadrant; 16 fell into secure God/ insecure romantic, 10 fell into insecure God/secure romantic; and 8 fell into insecure God/ insecure romantic. See footnote 1.

variables were entered first followed by the data on God Attachment. This strategy was the most conservative because it examines the relationship between God Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment. The second research question used a series of three simultaneous multiple regression analyses to examine how Romantic Attachment mediates the effect of God Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction. Since the age of religious conversion in the study's sample was a mean age of nine, it would seem that God attachment beliefs develop before Romantic Attachment beliefs. Therefore, the two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) were used in the first set of simultaneous regressions to predict Romantic Attachment. In the first simultaneous regression, Romantic Avoidance (which had the highest correlation to Romantic Satisfaction), was regressed onto God Anxiety and God Avoidance. In the second regression, Romantic Anxiety was regressed onto God Anxiety, God Avoidance, and Romantic Avoidance. Finally in the third regression, Relationship Satisfaction was regressed onto God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Avoidance, and Romantic Anxiety. The results of these regressions were displayed in a Path diagram for illustration (see Figure 2). Non-significant standardized beta weights were not drawn. Where no line is drawn between two variables, it means no relationship was found.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The data was also examined with both dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) entered as the predictor variables in the opposite direction. Very similar results were found.

## Results

### Research Question One

The first research question was addressed using a zero-order correlation arranged in a correlation matrix displaying Romantic Relationship Satisfaction and its relationship to God Attachment and Romantic Attachment constructs. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated using SPSS to determine the degree and direction of the linear relationships between Romantic Relationship Satisfaction and the two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance), as well as the two dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance). High anxiety scores reflect the negative beliefs about one's self-worth and ability to be loved. The avoidance dimension reflects negative beliefs about the reliability, accessibility, and trustworthiness of others or God. Since specific predictions were not made about the direction of the correlations, a two-tailed test with an alpha level of 0.05 was used to determine whether a nonzero correlation existed. See Table 2 below for an overview of the correlation matrix. T-test results revealed no difference in male ( $M = 23.647$ ,  $SD = 4.808$ ) and female ( $M = 23.986$ ,  $SD = 4.394$ ) participants on Relationship Satisfaction.

Table 2

Correlations of Relationship Satisfaction (Burns Intimacy Scale) with Measures of Adult Romantic Attachment and God Attachment

	R AVD	R ANX	God ADV	God ANX	RSAT
R AVD	1	.118*	.147*	.131	-.386**
R ANX	.118*	1	.185**	.435**	-.315**
God ADV	.147*	.185**	1	.316**	-.231*
God ANX	.131	.435**	.316**	1	-.303**
RSAT	-.386**	-.315**	-.231*	-.303**	1

Note: R AVD = Romantic Avoidance; R ANX = Romantic Anxiety; God ADV = God Avoidance; GANX = God Anxiety; RSAT = Relationship Satisfaction Scale

\* $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$

*Correlations for Relationship Satisfaction*

It was hypothesized that God Attachment would account for unique variance in Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction. Examining the correlation table, Romantic Avoidance ( $r = -0.386, p < .001$ ) and Romantic Anxiety ( $r = -0.315, p < .001$ ) were both significantly negatively correlated to Relationship Satisfaction. God Avoidance ( $r = -0.231, p < .05$ ) and God Anxiety ( $r = -0.303, p < .01$ ) were also negatively correlated with Relationship Satisfaction. God Avoidance was positively correlated to Romantic Avoidance ( $r = 0.147, p < .05$ ) and unexpectedly to God Anxiety ( $r = 0.316, p < .001$ ). God Anxiety was

also positively correlated to Romantic Anxiety ( $r = 0.435, p < .01$ ). Unexpectedly, Romantic Anxiety and Romantic Avoidance were also positively correlated ( $r = 0.118, p < .05$ ). Though this study interestingly found positive correlations between both variables of God Attachment and both variables of Romantic Attachment, the correlations were smaller than the original standardized research study conducted by Beck & McDonald (2004).<sup>6</sup>

#### *Variances Associated with Relationship Satisfaction*

After performing the correlation, a hierarchal regression was carried out to determine if God Attachment adds any unique variance on Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment. Romantic Attachment variables were entered first into the hierarchal regression followed by the data on God Attachment. This strategy was the most conservative because it examines the relationship between God Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment. The first  $R^2$  generated by this method addressed whether Romantic Attachment accounted for significant variance on Relationship Satisfaction. The second  $R^2$  identified the amount of total variance accounted for by God Attachment. The change in  $R^2$  identified the unique variance accounted for by God Attachment after controlling for Romantic Attachment. Results are shown in Table 3 below.

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<sup>6</sup> Beck and McDonald found a positive correlation between God Avoidance and God Anxiety ( $r = 0.56, p < .001$ ) and a positive correlation between Romantic Avoidance and Romantic Anxiety ( $r = 0.45, p < .001$ ).

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Predicting the Unique Variances on Relationship Satisfaction

	Mode and Variables	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$ Change
Step 1	Rom Anx, Rom Avoid	.212**	.212**	11.007**
Step 2	God Avoid God Anx	.270*	.059*	3.226*

Dependent Variable: Burns Intimacy

\*\*  $p = .001$     \*  $p = .05$

In the first regression, Relationship Satisfaction was regressed onto the two dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance), which revealed that these two variables accounted for twenty-one percent of unique variance ( $R^2 = 0.212$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $F = 11.007$ ). The second regression regressed Relationship Satisfaction onto the two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) while statistically controlling for the effects of Romantic Attachment. The entire model accounted for twenty-seven percent of variance ( $R^2 = 0.270$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ,  $F = 3.226$ ), with God Attachment accounting for about six percent of unique variance ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.059$ ). Therefore, God Attachment appears to add unique variance on Relationship Satisfaction beyond that which is accounted for by Romantic Attachment (See Table 3).

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting the Unique Variances on RelationshipSatisfaction after Accounting for Romantic Attachment

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	p	Part
Rom Avoid	-.331	-3.381	.001	-.323
Rom Anx	-.165	-1.575	.119	-.150
God Avoid	-.087	-0.847	.400	-.081
God Anx	-.220	-2.032	.045	-.194

Dependent Variable: Burns Intimacy

Examination of the Beta weights (see Table 4) reveal that God Anxiety (Beta = -0.220, t = -2.032) and Romantic Avoidance (Beta = -0.331, t = -3.381) were significant predictors of Relationship Satisfaction. God Avoidance did not add anything in this model.

### Research Question Two

#### *Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis*

Three simultaneous multiple regression analyses were conducted to test this mediation model. Since the mean age of religious conversion in this study's sample was nine, it was assumed that God attachment beliefs were formed before romantic attachment beliefs. Therefore, the two God Attachment beliefs (Anxiety and Avoidance) were entered as the first two predictor variables. In the first simultaneous multiple

regression, the criterion variable was Romantic Avoidance because it had the highest correlation, and the predictor variables were the two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance). This equation was significant,  $R^2 = 0.69$ ,  $F = 7.270$ ,  $p = .001$ . Figure 2 displays the standardized beta weights of each variable after controlling for the effects of all other variables in each equation. As seen in Figure 2, participants who were more avoidant toward God and did not trust Him to be there for them in times of need were also more likely to be avoidant in their romantic relationships as well (Beta = 0.181,  $p < .05$ ).

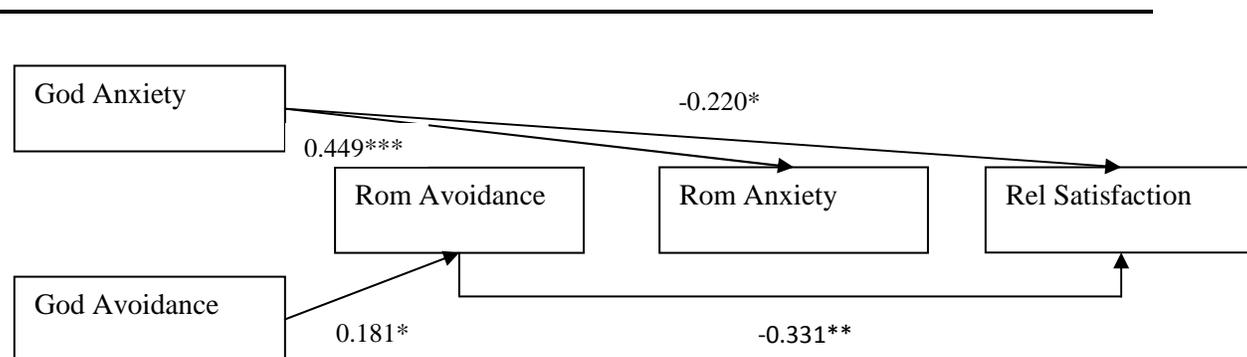
In the second simultaneous multiple regression analysis, the criterion variable was Romantic Anxiety and the predictor variables were both dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) and Romantic Avoidance. The squared multiple correlation was 0.265 ( $F = 23.322$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As seen in the left half of Figure 2, participants who were anxious about attachment relations to God were also more likely to be anxious about romantic relationships as well (Beta = 0.449,  $p < .001$ ).

In the third simultaneous multiple regression analysis, the criterion variable was Relationship Satisfaction (Burns Intimacy) and the predictor variables were both dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) and both dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance). This equation was significant ( $R^2 = 0.270$ ,  $F = 7.415$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As can be seen in Figure 2, God Anxiety and Romantic Avoidance both had direct effects on Relationship Satisfaction. Participants who were more anxious about God were more likely to have lower scores on Relationship Satisfaction (Beta = -0.220,  $p = <.05$ ). Note, that in this model, while God Anxiety

maintained its relationship with Romantic Anxiety, the relationship between Romantic Anxiety and Relationship Satisfaction was no longer significant.

Also in this model, God Avoidance is not directly related to Relationship Satisfaction, but appears to be mediated in its relationship with Romantic Avoidance (Beta = 0.181,  $p < .05$ ). Participants who scored high on Romantic Avoidance, that is those who do not believe others are accessible and trustworthy, were found to score lower on Relationship Satisfaction (Beta = -0.331,  $p = .001$ ). Interestingly, God Avoidance and God Anxiety seem to work differently in this model. Whereas God Anxiety has a direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction, God Avoidance appears to be mediated through Romantic Avoidance.

Figure 2

Path Diagram displaying mediating effects of God Attachment on RelationshipSatisfaction

Standardized beta weights of each variable are displayed in the model above after controlling for the effects of all other variables in each equation. Non-significant standardized beta weights were not drawn. Where no line is drawn between two variables, it means no relationship was found.

\* $p < .05$       \*\* $p = .001$       \*\*\* $p < .001$

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary of Findings

#### *Research Question One*

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether God Attachment accounts for unique variance in Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment. A correlation matrix revealed that the two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) and the two dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) were significantly (inversely) correlated with Relationship Satisfaction (see Table 2). This finding is consistent with other research that shows individuals who score high on Romantic Anxiety and Romantic Avoidance also report less Relationship Satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002; Simpson, 1990). In addition, God Avoidance was positively correlated to Romantic Avoidance and God Anxiety was positively correlated to Romantic Anxiety.

A hierarchal multiple regression analysis then found that God Attachment adds a significant amount of unique variance for Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for the effects of Romantic Attachment, a finding that supported the researcher's hypothesis regarding the influence of God Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction (see Table 3). Romantic Anxiety and Avoidance were found to account for twenty-one percent of unique variance on Relationship Satisfaction with the entire model accounting for 27% of variance. As hypothesized, God Attachment was found to account for about six percent of unique variance on Relationship Satisfaction. Specifically, Romantic Avoidance and God Anxiety were found to be significant predictors of Relationship

Satisfaction. These findings suggest that one's relationship with God can significantly impact Relationship Satisfaction.

### *Research Question Two*

The second research question sought to explore the complex relationship between God Attachment variables (Anxiety and Avoidance), Romantic Attachment variables (Anxiety and Avoidance), and Relationship Satisfaction. Three simultaneous multiple regression analyses were conducted to test this mediation model. Since the mean age of conversion in the study's sample was nine, the sample was primarily exposed to God prior to developing romantic interests. Therefore, it was assumed, (though no empirical link exists), that relationship with and beliefs about God developed temporally before beliefs about romantic relationships. As a result, both dimensions of God Attachment were placed as the predictor variables in the series of simultaneous regressions. Those who scored high on God Anxiety were found to be anxious in their romantic relationships and were also likely to have lower levels of Relationship Satisfaction. This finding was consistent with the hierarchal regressions where God Anxiety was also correlated with lower scores on Relationship Satisfaction. On the other hand, the effect of God Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction appeared to be mediated through Romantic Avoidance. That is, those who are likely to believe that God is not accessible or capable of love are also likely to be avoidant in their romantic relationships as well, which in turn directly affects their level of Relationship Satisfaction.

## Discussion and Recommendations

### *Internalized Representations of Self and Other in Romantic Relationships*

It is important to remember when discussing the influence of the two dimensions of God Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) and Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance) on Relationship Satisfaction that the internalized representations of self and others the infant develops early in life remain active into adolescence and adulthood (Marchand, 2004) and manifest particularly in romantic relationships (Weiss, 1982, 1986, 1991). These internal working models function as a way for the individual to predict the future reliability and availability of romantic partners and to make decisions about what attachment behaviors to use in stressful situations (Cassidy, 1999; Eckert & Kimball, 2003). During stressful and anxiety provoking times, romantic partners serve as a source of safety and security for the individual experiencing the stress (Feeney, 1999). When couples quarrel and do not get along, however, the romantic partner as the source of safety also becomes the source of stress, thus activating each partners' attachment styles from early childhood in the current conflict (Shi, 2003). If an individual turns to God as a substitute attachment figure in that moment of stress, the individual's attachment to God may lead to more positive attitudes about conflict, enhance emotion regulation, and reduce the likelihood of engaging in counter negative communication, thus increasing the feelings of safety, stability, and satisfaction in the romantic relationship because of the secure feelings that individual receives from God as an attachment figure (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Gottman, 1993; Marchand, 2004; Shi, 2003). Attachment styles have been found to offer important implications as they relate to relationship satisfaction;

however, this is the first known study to examine the influence of God as a substitute attachment figure on Relationship Satisfaction.

#### Unexpected Findings Regarding Romantic Anxiety and Relationship Satisfaction

With no surprise, the study found that Romantic Anxiety was inversely correlated to Relationship Satisfaction. However, in the series of simultaneous multiple regressions, once God Attachment was accounted for, Romantic Anxiety was no longer found to have a direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction. Instead, the relationship was primarily through God Anxiety and God Avoidance. This finding contradicts prior research that found anxious partners to report lower scores on Relationship Satisfaction than those with secure and avoidant attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002; Simpson, 1990). Studies show that when individuals with high Romantic Anxiety do not feel safe in the relationship, they are more likely to depend on emotion-focused coping, show aggression, cast blame on their partner, and display a mix of behaviors from clingy and needy in one moment to hesitant to engage in the next (Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Simpson, 1990). Anxious partners are also less likely to attribute positive meaning from their partners (Collins, 1996). For these reasons, one could conclude that those with high Romantic Anxiety, with their inability to regulate emotion, will experience more conflict in the romantic relationship and less satisfaction (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Indeed, previous research supports this conclusion. When anxiously attached individuals perceived greater conflict in the relationship and less support from their partners, they were significantly less satisfied, held more pessimistic views about the future of the relationship, and perceived their

partners to be less optimistic about the future of the relationship as well, (though this was not necessarily the case in all of the partners in the study) (Simpson, Campbell, & Weisberg, 2006).

On the other hand, Simpson et al. (2006) found that when anxiously attached individuals perceived greater support coming from their romantic partner, they were more likely to report higher scores on Relationship Satisfaction than even less anxious persons. Those who perceived to have greater support from their partner also had a more positive outlook about the future of the relationship and perceived their partners to be more optimistic about the relationship as well. Therefore, when individuals with high Romantic Anxiety perceive more relational support, or felt security from their romantic partner, they are likely to have higher Relationship Satisfaction. Since the mean age of religious conversion in this study's sample was age nine, it could be argued God Attachment beliefs were formed and in place earlier than Romantic Attachment beliefs for the individuals surveyed. Therefore, the "felt security of God" (Sroufe, 1977) that the individuals seemed to experience in this sample may have accounted for the lack of effect Romantic Anxiety had on Relationship Satisfaction. If anxious individuals perceive God to be supportive and secure, their anxiety about the romantic relationship may be lessened, thus increasing Relationship Satisfaction. For a better understanding into this finding it is recommended that future studies examine how Romantic Attachment mediates the effects of God Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction using a more formal mediational model such as the one championed by Baron and Kenny (1986).

Since avoidance and anxiety are on opposite ends of the attachment continuum (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), another unexpected finding was the correlations

between the two variables of God Attachment (Avoidance and Anxiety) and the two variables of Romantic Attachment (Avoidance and Anxiety). When further researched, it was found that these same positive correlations existed in the original study on the psychometric properties of the Attachment to God Inventory by Beck and McDonald (2004).

### *The Influence of God Anxiety on Relationship Satisfaction*

As expected, God Anxiety was negatively correlated to Relationship Satisfaction in the first statistical measure and was a significant predictor of Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for both dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance). In other words, individuals who are anxious about whether God could actually love them (because they have a poor view of self) or be there for them in times of need are likely to report lower levels of satisfaction in romantic relationships. This finding was also true in the series of multiple regressions, where it was found that the more anxious one was about his/her relationship with God the lower he/she scored on Relationship Satisfaction. In addition, individuals who scored high on God Anxiety were also likely to score high on Romantic Anxiety as well.

Two points should be made when considering future research in this area. First, research should focus on understanding why God Anxiety would have a direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction and why Romantic Anxiety would not. The explanation is likely to be complex considering the discrepancy found in the research on the religiosity of anxiously attached individuals. Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) found that those with an anxious adult attachment are linked longitudinally to positive religious beliefs. If this

holds true, those who are anxious in their romantic relationships would more likely view God as a secure attachment figure in times of stress. However, the findings of Granqvist and Hagekull are inconsistent both with previous studies (Kirkpatrick, 1997) and this study as well, where Romantic Anxiety predicted God Anxiety. It may be that an individual's questions about self-worth and his/her ability to be loved by God could dramatically cause feelings of unhappiness and anxiety. Carried into the romantic relationship, these unstable feelings could in turn disturb and irritate one's romantic partner so much that it directly and negatively affects the level of relationship satisfaction. This particular combination of mental models and their influence on Relationship Satisfaction needs to be the topic of future research.

Secondly, since the mean age of conversion in this study was nine that raises the question about which set of attachment beliefs were developed first: God or Romantic Attachment? If an individual's attachment to God was developed in early childhood and is characteristic of a negative belief about self and a positive belief about God, these beliefs could be the foundation then for how that person views their attachment relationship with his/her romantic partner. Results in this study concluded that God Anxiety did predict Romantic Anxiety and Relationship Satisfaction. From the standpoint of the compensation hypothesis, the anxious-preoccupied adult is the most likely candidate to seek God during times of stress in a romantic relationship (Kirkpatrick, 2005). However, since the mean age of conversion was nine, a more in-depth, longitudinal understanding of how God Attachment beliefs change and develop over time would be helpful, especially as it later applies to the newly formed attachment beliefs provided by a romantic relationship.

*The Influence of God Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction*

It came as no surprise that God Avoidance was negatively correlated to Relationship Satisfaction in the first statistical measure. Interestingly, God Avoidance did not add unique variance to Relationship Satisfaction after accounting for both dimensions of Romantic Attachment (Anxiety and Avoidance). A person's mistrust and uncertainty about the availability and accessibility of God was found however to contribute to the prediction of avoidance in romantic relationships. This was also found to be true inversely as well. Romantic Avoidance predicted God Avoidance. More specifically, the effect of God Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction was mediated through Romantic Avoidance. Individuals who characteristically did not believe in the accessibility and capability of God to be there for them were more likely to be avoidant in their romantic relationship as well, which ultimately affects relationship satisfaction.

If an individual characteristically avoids God, it makes sense that would not directly affect Relationship Satisfaction. When one is avoidant, he/she can turn to something else to calm and soothe the pain when the relationship is going sour. Since they do not trust or believe in the "felt security" of God, avoiding Him is not going to provoke clingy behaviors from God the way it would from an anxiously attached romantic partner. Future research should focus on the dynamic of individuals characterized by an avoidant attachment to God, particularly those who convert early in life. Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) found that individuals with avoidant attachment styles were more likely to be associated with an emotionally driven religiosity once they converted. However, since this sample was not derived from an emotionally-driven

institution, future studies should also examine other Christian denominations to see if God Avoidance affects Relationship Satisfaction in those populations.

*The Influence of Romantic Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction*

Consistent with other research (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001), Romantic Avoidance was negatively correlated to and found to be a significant predictor of Relationship Satisfaction. Participants who were more avoidant toward God and did not trust Him to be there for them in times of need were also more likely to be avoidant in their romantic relationships as well. This finding was consistent the other way around too. Romantic Avoidance predicted God Avoidance. Other research has shown that avoidant adults are not as likely to “fall in love” because of the uncomfortable feelings they get with increased closeness and intimacy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). When they do enter a romantic relationship, however, it is more likely to be characterized by low levels of satisfaction and conflict. When the relationship becomes difficult, avoidantly attached individuals are less likely to seek out another romantic partner or attachment figure such as God because they do not believe others are capable of loving them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick, 1997).

It was found that God Avoidance worked through Romantic Avoidance to affect Relationship Satisfaction in the series of simultaneous regressions. A valuable contribution to the research on God Attachment would be a more concentrated understanding of how an early conversion to God versus a later conversion affects Romantic Attachment beliefs and subsequent Relationship Satisfaction.

*The Influence of Romantic Anxiety on Relationship Satisfaction*

Finally, the study found that Romantic Anxiety was negatively correlated to Relationship Satisfaction. However, in the series of simultaneous multiple regressions, Romantic Anxiety was found to have no direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction. As previously mentioned, this needs to be the focus of future research on Relationship Satisfaction. Consumed by the thought of being abandoned by a romantic partner, anxiously attached individuals are more likely to report a lack of closeness and intimacy in the current relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick, 2005), and portray greater levels of jealousy, conflict, emotional lability, clinginess, dependency, and relationship dissatisfaction (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). From an attachment perspective, these interpersonal behaviors and characteristics seem to best describe the kind of person most likely to turn to God to meet attachment needs (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Enhanced motivation to seek God in times of stress is precipitated by a combination of an overly negative view of self, or a positive internal working model of others. However, for *anxious-preoccupied* adults who already view others as reliable and accessible (albeit in a somewhat idealized manner), these internal working models can be transferred onto God. Anxiously attached individuals may be more inclined then to make a dramatic, sudden conversion. Future research should examine anxiously attached individuals who made sudden conversions later in life to see if a direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction exists in that population. In this study Romantic Anxiety predicted God Anxiety and God Anxiety predicted Romantic Anxiety. Again, future research needs to examine a population that made religious conversions both early and later in life.

*Implications for the Church and Faith-Based Counselors*

This study raises some implications for religious leaders and faith-based counselors who minister to and work with parishioners, clients, and couples seeking relationship enrichment. First, pastors and religious leaders could train believers on the dynamics of a secure relationship with God and how this relationship can lead to feelings of safety in times of stress, particularly when other relationships feel unsafe. Understanding how God functions as a secure attachment in one's life can also help believers learn to regulate emotion in healthy ways, a variable that could directly affect levels of relationship satisfaction. Secondly, the church could also implement into marriage mentoring programs and premarital counseling sessions assessments on the understanding of how couples view God and how that in turn impacts their romantic relationship together. If one partner is secure in his/her relationship to God and the other partner is insecure, the secure believer could learn how the insecure partner relates to God and therefore help that partner see and relate to God in a healthier, more secure way. If partners are insecure in their attachment relationships, marriage mentors in the church could help facilitate a more secure relationship with God and one another in the romantic relationship.

In addition, faith-based counselors could incorporate God Attachment and Romantic Attachment measures into therapy to gain an understanding of how the couples interact and relate to one another and to God. When couples understand one another's insecurities, they can become more aware of what specifically triggers their partner's attachment behavioral system and, therefore, respond appropriately to meet their attachment needs. Counselors could teach and guide their clients on how to do this. The

findings of the current study could lead counselors to help understand if and how the couples' God Attachment and Romantic Attachment affects and explains the level of satisfaction in their romantic relationship.

Finally, when an individual is feeling insecure in a romantic relationship, religious leaders and counselors can train him/her to understand how God functions as a substitute attachment figure to bring about feelings of safety and confidence that the world is not going to fall apart if a romantic relationship falls apart. This is ultimately an attitudinal shift, for the avoidantly attached individual in trusting that God will be available and accessible in times of need, and for the anxiously attached individual that they really are worthy and lovable. Once insecure beliefs about God and self become more secure, the individual can believe in the security of God and not in his/her own ability to solve relationship problems. Supernaturally, secure attachment beliefs about God can also help believers look beyond their relational, natural problems toward an eternal life where such problems will cease to exist (Corsini, 2009).

#### *Considerations Regarding the Correspondence and Compensation Hypotheses*

In this study, Correspondence and Compensation hypotheses were not specifically addressed. However, some observations were made and should be noted. Two principal theories are now being studied to understand the relationship between one's attachment beliefs and his/her religious beliefs and experience (Kirkpatrick, 1992). The compensation hypothesis assumes that an individual characterized by an insecure childhood attachment has a greater likelihood and need to turn to God as a compensatory attachment figure in times of stress.

In contrast, the correspondence hypothesis assumes that a child will derive his/her own religious values based on the foundation of the parent's religiosity and the intimacy and quality of relationship between the parent and the child (Granqvist, 2002). Securely attached individuals are, therefore, more likely to experience religious changes early in life because their attitudes and beliefs are more likely to be assumed from their parent's values. Similarly, religious conversion is more likely to take place over a steadier period of time as opposed to the suddenness characterized by that of insecurely attached individuals.

The conceptual framework of the Correspondence hypothesis was assumed in this study when making predictions about God Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction. The findings supported this assumption on the correlational table (see Table 2) used for Research Question One. Throughout the correlations both sets of variables for God Attachment and Romantic Attachment lined up very closely with one another. Most of the research conducted on these two theories about God Attachment has focused on examining the dynamics that lead one to religious conversion (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999). Future research should examine how these two theories might explain how individuals use God as a substitute attachment figure when their romantic relationships become conflicted and stressful.

In addition, since the average age of conversion was age nine in the current sample it is no surprise to see the Correspondence hypothesis supported by this study. It would be essential for future studies to also examine the effects of God Attachment variables on Relationship Satisfaction in a sample of persons who converted later in life to see if God functions as a compensatory attachment figure for individuals in romantic

relationships. This would add valuably to the research on God Attachment's effect on Relationship Satisfaction since Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) found emotion regulation to be at the core of the compensation hypotheses. If one's perceived relationship to God helps the insecurely attached individual regulate emotions, then a religiosity based on emotion regulation could help the insecurely attached individual find security and satisfaction in his/her romantic relationships. Interestingly, Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2001) found that increased religious involvement consistently and significantly enhances both romantic commitment and relationship satisfaction. To the degree that those with sudden religious conversions, once converted, adhere to *quality* in romantic relationships, is the degree to which they experience higher levels of religious involvement and relationship satisfaction.

### Limitations

A number of limitations to this study must be considered. First, this study used a cross sectional design. To add more statistical power, future research should use a longitudinal design for studying the effects of God Attachment and Romantic Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction. Secondly, this study was limited to a sample group of college-aged students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs at an evangelical university in Central Virginia. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the general population or to institutions that do not share the same worldview as evangelical Christianity. Even other forms of Christianity (i.e. Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist, Pentecostal, etc.) may display different results on measures of God Attachment, Romantic Attachment, and Relationship Satisfaction based on that particular

denominations teaching on and concept of God and marriage. Future studies should look at different denominations within the Christian faith to understand the influence of God Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction in those particular faith-based settings to see if they are similar to the findings in this study.

In addition, it is difficult to generalize these findings to other age groups. Over ninety percent of the sample ranged between the ages of 18-21, which raises other limitations about the study. First, since most of the sample was college-aged, the majority of them were in dating relationships. As a result, the measure of relationship satisfaction will not yield long term results or necessarily reflect a secure attachment relationship due to the noncommittal nature of dating relationships, as opposed to married couples (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). Future research should examine an older, married population to see if the findings of this study are replicated within other generations and more committed, long-term romantic relationships. Secondly, since the mean age of religious conversion in this study's population was nine, it could be viewed as a contradiction to Erik Erikson's (1968) assertion that many young adults are not actively searching for God because they prioritize needs of self-esteem, autonomy, and relatedness to others above ideological identities (e.g. religious values). Due to the early age of conversion in the study's sample, it was assumed, at least in this study's sample, that God attachment beliefs were formed before romantic attachment beliefs. Future research should explore the complexities of these variables on a wider age-range sample of adults who experienced a religious conversion both early and later in life. Finally, the reliance on self-report instruments for the measurement of both dependent and

independent variables may raise concerns regarding the statistical conclusions and must be considered when reviewing the results of this study.

### Conclusion

This study extended the current research regarding the relationships between God Attachment, Romantic Attachment, and Relationship Satisfaction. The study found that in the sample population God Anxiety, God Avoidance, Romantic Anxiety, and Romantic Avoidance were negatively correlated with Relationship Satisfaction. Moreover, it found that God Attachment added unique variance to Relationship Satisfaction above and beyond that which was accounted for by Romantic Attachment. The findings supported the hypothesis. In an exploratory measure, it was found that those who scored high on God Anxiety were found to be anxious in their romantic relationships and were also likely to have lower levels of Relationship Satisfaction. On the other hand, the effect of God Avoidance on Relationship Satisfaction was found to be mediated through Romantic Avoidance. Unexpectedly, it was found that God Anxiety, but not Romantic Anxiety, had a direct effect on Relationship Satisfaction. This finding may be explained by prior research (Simpson et al., 2006) that found that anxiously attached individuals who perceived greater support coming from their romantic partner were more likely to report higher relationship satisfaction than even less anxious persons. If God functions as a perceived support for the anxiously attached individual, Relationship Satisfaction may not be directly affected.

The findings regarding God Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction are valuable in that these findings indicate the unique role a relationship with God plays

when it comes to the satisfaction one has in his/her romantic relationship. The implications are profound. As individuals learn how they conceptualize God and their relationship with Him, they can reach a better understanding of how to relate with and turn to Him during times of distress, especially in their romantic relationships. The findings of this study reveal that one's skewed beliefs about God or others could be the basis for why they become upset, anxious, angry, withdrawn, or overly emotional when things are not going well in their romantic relationship. If the needs for control of one's romantic partner or the circumstances around him/her are a result of these faulty relational beliefs, then relationship satisfaction could be positively affected with a renewed awareness and understanding of how to change one's skewed beliefs. Once a more secure relationship with God is developed, a religiosity based on emotion regulation could help the insecurely attached individual find security and satisfaction in their romantic relationships.

These findings have important implications for church leaders who want to help their congregants understand how their relationship with God impacts their romantic relationships. Churches should become more aware of and teach believers how their faulty beliefs about God affect their romantic relationships. More specifically, how their lack of faith in God to be there for them (avoidant) or their belief that they are not worthy of being loved (anxious) affects the way they relate to their romantic partner. Marriage mentoring programs and premarital counselors in the church could use such findings to help younger couples understand one another's relationship with God and each other.

It is also important for faith-based counselors to learn about and assess variables of God Attachment and Romantic Attachment in the couples they counsel. The

counselors should examine why their clients have developed the beliefs they have about God and others and how this ultimately affects their relationships and overall well-being. If counselors can help clients understand these underlying beliefs they can teach them how to rely on God as a substitute attachment figure and therefore better regulate their emotions.

The primary application for this study goes beyond helping people have more satisfying romantic relationships. It is the desire of this author first to help people understand how the importance of a personal relationship with God changes the overall well-being and outlook on life and, secondly, how it impacts and affects the overall satisfaction of an individual's other relationships. With the high divorce rates, marital infidelity, and increased rates of cohabitation, it is the hope that the findings of this study may help believers understand the importance of the role their relationship with God plays in their romantic relationships and family structure. When individuals in stressful circumstances can seek proximity to God as a safe haven, they can better regulate their emotions because they have a secure base from which they can function to reduce conflict and enhance relationship satisfaction.

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## APPENDIX A

**CONSENT FORM**

You are invited to be in a research study on how your life experiences and your personality influence your first semester here at Liberty, emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and religiously. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a college freshman at a faith based institution. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private and anonymous. We are asking for your student ID number so we can track if you return to school next semester and record your first semester GPA. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Publications from this research study will only report on statistical information and no personal information will be cited.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your grade in this class or any way affect your relationship with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without question.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researchers conducting this study are: Dr. Gary Sibcy and Mr. Kevin Corsini. Please feel free to ask questions at any time during the course of this study. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them in the Counseling Department at 592-4049.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to complete the attached questionnaire during this class period. When you have completed it, please submit it to the proctor before leaving class. You will be asked to complete a second questionnaire in a couple of weeks during class and a third questionnaire at the end of this semester.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Student ID #: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Year Born: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Year Started at LU: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Gender: \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female
5. Liberty Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Ethnicity: \_\_\_Caucasian \_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_ African \_\_\_ American \_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_ Other
7. Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_Single \_\_\_\_\_Married \_\_\_\_\_Widowed \_\_\_\_\_Divorced
8. Children: *Gender and date of birth only*
  - a. Male/Female DOB \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Male/Female DOB \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Male/Female DOB \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Male/Female DOB \_\_\_\_\_
9. Year Graduated High School: \_\_\_\_\_
9. High School GPA \_\_\_\_\_
10. SAT Scores: Math: \_\_\_\_\_ Reading: \_\_\_\_\_ Writing: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Parent's zip code (or where you previously resided) \_\_\_\_\_ *i.e. 30188*
12. Do you consider yourself a born again Christian? \_\_\_\_\_
  - (a.) If YES, at what age did this conversion occur? \_\_\_\_\_
  - (b.) If YES, select ONE statement that best describes your born again experience.
    1. \_\_\_I cannot recall the distinct moment when I made a commitment to follow God. It was a gradual process where I became increasingly committed to God.
    2. \_\_\_I can recall as a child making a decision to follow God, and since that time have grown closer to him.
    3. \_\_\_There was a very distinct period when I decided to commit my life to God, which was a sudden, dramatic life changing experience.
    4. \_\_\_I can recall as a child making a decision to follow God, but later made a distinct decision to rededicate my life to God.

If you selected #4 (rededication to God), answer the following:

  - a. What age were you when you rededicated your life? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Which best describes your rededication (select ONE):
    - i) \_\_\_ Rededication occurred during a crisis in your life.
    - ii) \_\_\_ Rededication was an outgrowth of a gradual process that came about over time.





- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I tell my partner just about everything.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.

## AGI

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. Use the following rating scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Neutral/ Mixed	Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree

1. \_\_\_\_ I worry a lot about my relationship with God.
2. \_\_\_\_ I just don't feel a deep need to be close with 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.
5. \_\_\_\_ I am jealous at how God seems to care more for other than for me.
6. \_\_\_\_ It is uncommon for me to cry when sharing with God.
7. \_\_\_\_ Sometimes I feel that God loves other more than me.
8. \_\_\_\_ My experiences with God are very intimate and emotional.
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 please with me.
12. \_\_\_\_ I am uncomfortable being emotional in my communication with God.
13. \_\_\_\_ Even if I fail, I never question that God is pleases with me.
14. \_\_\_\_ My prayers to God are often matter-of-fact and not very personal.
15. \_\_\_\_ Almost daily I feel that my relationship with God foes 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.
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 my problems and concerns with God.
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.
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.

### RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION SCALE (RSAT)

Place a check (✓) in the box to the right of each category that best describes the amount of satisfaction you feel in your closest relationship.

	0 Very Dissatisfied	1 Moderately Dissatisfied	2 Slightly Dissatisfied	3 Neutral	4 Slightly Satisfied	5 Moderately Satisfied	6 Very Satisfied
1. Communication and openness							
2. Resolving conflicts and arguments							
3. Degree of affection and caring							
4. Intimacy and closeness							
5. Satisfaction with your role in the relationship							
6. Satisfaction with the other person's role							
7. Overall satisfaction with your relationship							
Total score on items 1- 7 →							

**Note:** Please indicate who you had in mind when filling out this test:

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Please indicate the type of relationship (spouse, colleague, friend, etc.):

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Burns, D. (1983). *Relationship Satisfaction Scale*.