

God-image and Romantic Partner Relationships: Emotional Neglect and Adult Women

by

Danette A. Buchanan

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

John C. Thomas, PhD, Chair

Joy Mwendwa, PhD, Member

Yulanda Tyre, PhD, Member

ABSTRACT

Childhood emotional neglect often leads to relationship dissatisfaction, psychopathology, decline in physical health, and permanent scars from a lack of emotional validation. Women who have grown up with a history of emotional invalidation are at risk for suicide, divorce, emotional instability, unstable relationships, and a chronic belief that they are not enough. Lacking emotional attachment from parents and other primary figures, girls and young women may transition into adulthood either anxiously attached, avoidant attached, or both. This state of dysphoria may extend into their perceptions of God and other authority figures. Counselors and other professional helpers such as clergy, teachers, and social service workers are uniquely positioned to offer critical resources beginning in early childhood that extend into adulthood. This study aims to assess the effects of childhood emotional neglect on adult romantic partner relationships by examining how women view God and their romantic partners. A parallel multiple mediation model examined multiple pathways of influence between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction. Although there were key findings from the study, particularly in the relationship between emotional neglect and God-image, the results showed that the three variables were unrelated.

Keywords: childhood emotional neglect, romantic relationships, God-image, image of God, attachment, adverse childhood experiences, religion

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Paul, my sons, Wes and Dan, their beautiful wives and families, my siblings, mother, and late father. You believed in me, cheered for me, prayed for me, listened to me endlessly, and kept me on track when this felt too hard. I love you!

Paul, you held me steady when I was working on this dissertation and traveling coast to coast to attend classes at Liberty. You kept me grounded and inspired me to finish well! You talked me through roadblocks and scenarios that threatened to steal my enthusiasm for this goal. We did this together, and I am so grateful for your constant support.

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Mom, I wish dad was here to share this moment with us, but he is here in you and in all our hearts. I am grateful that you both modeled hard work, persistence, and grit when the going got tough. My success is your success.

To my siblings, I love you! We share many memories of life in a Christian home. You are an integral part of my story.

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.

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List of Abbreviations

Experiences in Close Relationships – Short Form (ECR-RS)

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)

Child Protective Service (CPS)

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)

Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Health and Human Service (HHS)

Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)

Electroencephalogram (EEG)

World Health Organization (WHO)

Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4)

United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Childhood relationships shape adult romantic relationships (Colman & Widom, 2004; Grossman et al., 2006; Seedall & Wampler, 2013) and can disrupt marital functioning (DiLillo & Peugh, 2009). The emotional bond formed between a child and their primary caregiver plays a powerful role not just in childhood but, according to Bowlby (1979) “from the cradle to the grave” (p. 129). The quality of future relationships depends on the formation, maintenance, disruption, and renewal of attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1979/1994). One particular aspect of childhood familial experiences that creates a risk factor for later relationship problems is childhood emotional neglect (Egeland & Erickson, 1999; Peterson et al., 2018; Reyome, 2010; Widom, 2012). Childhood neglect is defined as “the failure of caretakers to meet children’s basic emotional and psychological needs, including love, belonging, nurturance, and support” (Bernstein et al., 2003, p. 175). It is vital to intervene in childhood to prevent dysfunction in adult relationships (McCarthy & Taylor, 1999).

To date, little research has focused explicitly on romantic relationships for survivors of childhood emotional neglect (Clément et al., 2016). This study will address the gap in the literature on what makes romantic partner relationships problematic for this population. However, some related research (Widom et al., 2014; Hartman & Zimberoff, 2004; Walker et al., 2011) has examined romantic relationships for other forms of family maltreatment physical, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Surprisingly, few studies have been found on the effect of God-image on romantic relationships. The current study aims to add to the shortage of empirical studies that have explored the impact of God-image on romantic relationships. An “attachment based God image” as understood from attachment theory, is based on the internalization of early experiences with attachment figures (Hall & Fujikawa, 2013, p. 281). The researcher will

simultaneously use the terms “God-image” and the “image of God” to indicate one’s relational connection to God. Other terms that may be used interchangeably with God image are God concept and God representation.

Background to the Problem

Childhood neglect is a significant public health problem and is a common form of child maltreatment in the United States (Carmel & Widom, 2020; Clément et al., 2016; Glaser, 2002; Hovens et al., 2010; Norman et al., 2012; Semanchin Jones & Logan-Greene, 2016). Out of 3.5 million child protective investigations, more than 75% were for cases of neglect in 2019 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). By the age of 17, approximately one in five children will be exposed to emotional neglect and/or physical neglect (Cohen et al., 2017). Depending on age, developmental needs, and chronicity of events, young children are the most vulnerable to the impact of neglect; however, this impact can extend into adolescence (Clément et al., 2016). According to Carmel and Widom (2020), the problem of neglect is complex and broad. However, parents, caretakers, teachers, social workers, clergy, babysitters, relatives, and other adults responsible for children do not always agree on what constitutes neglect. This heterogeneous phenomenon (Barnett et al., 1993) has led some researchers to differentiate distinct types of neglect: physical, supervision, cognitive, and educational neglect (Carmel & Widom, 2020). This study aims to advance empirical research on the factors contributing to this complexity.

There is a lack of literature and empirical studies that deal specifically with emotional neglect (Glaser, 2002; McSherry, 2007; Stoltenborgh et al., 2013; Stone, 1998; Wolock & Horwitz, 1984). Moore (1989) suggests that the “neglect of neglect” (Wolock & Horowitz, 1984, p. 530) occurs because cases do not contain enough drama to spark the child protection system

into action. Therefore these cases go unchecked and continue. Adult survivors of neglect may describe their experience with childhood emotional neglect as “what happens when, throughout your childhood, your parents fail to respond enough to your emotional needs” (Webb 2018, p. XVI). Webb (2018) adds that survivors of neglect often feel empty and lonely due to a lack of emotional validation in their childhood. Neglect may look ‘harmless’ because cases rarely contain enough visual impact for social services to consider children in serious harm. But research appears to indicate “that neglect can result in profound developmental deficits for children” (McSherry, 2007, p. 612). These factors may contribute to why neglect may be under-researched. Essentially, neglect is (a) difficult to define, (b) difficult to substantiate, (c) associated with poverty, (d) not prioritized, (e) under-estimated due to a lack of negative impact, and (f) difficult for social service agencies to agree on how to respond to it (McSherry, 2007). McSherry (2007) calls on researchers to prioritize the problem of neglect within the arenas of research, policy, and training. Practitioners and others with a vested interest in children will benefit from researchers’ advocacy to intensify research efforts by recognizing the initial signs of neglect and moving toward action (McSherry, 2007).

One challenge in estimating the prevalence and incidence of childhood neglect is obtaining samples from neglected children or adults with known histories of neglect (Carmel & Widom, 2020). One strategy is to validate measures of people who are expected to have experienced neglect to test the construct validity of instruments (Carmel & Widom, 2020). High sample scores on the neglect measure would indicate evidence of construct validity (Carmel & Widom, 2020). Reliable and valid instruments are necessary because if there is no documentation or official neglect records, researchers need to rely on responses to survey questions to assess neglect. Carmel and Widom (2020) recommend the development of a

validated instrument to measure neglect retrospectively; however, they note that it may be difficult for adults who experience neglect to provide reliable reports based on vague memories. Adult survivors of neglect show greater impairment in establishing and maintaining safe, healthy, and loving relationships compared with survivors of other types of childhood trauma (Grossman et al., 2017). Women who experienced adverse childhood experiences (e.g., emotional neglect, reported emotional dysregulation, fear of intimacy, emotional avoidance, or lack of trust) talked less about their problems with their partners and found fewer solutions to them (Schütze et al., 2020). Norman et al., (2012) suggest that the impact of non-sexual maltreatment should be considered a significant risk not only to the mental and physical health of those affected but also to the “burden of disease in all parts of the world” (p. 1).

The role of trust is an essential aspect of a stable and secure relationship but may be compromised due to a history of neglect. When parents and caregivers cultivate a state of “felt security” (Hazan & Shaver, 1994, p. 3) for their children, it can create confidence in the reliable responsiveness of others. However, if parents fail to do so, Hazan and Shaver (1994) state that it only takes one important relationship (i.e. teacher or relative) to *disconfirm* insecure expectations of unreliability or rejection to increase the likelihood of forming a secure attachment in adulthood. Hall & Hall (2021) examines the possibilities of an “earned secure attachment” (p. 153). Securely attached individuals cultivate trust and dependability, which results in confidence in the future of the relationship and each other (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). Research shows that when secure women need help managing their emotions, they seek support from their partners, making them feel less anxious (Hall & Hall, 2021). A secure woman might feel comforted, but an insecure woman will tend to withdraw emotionally and physically from their partners.

Statement of the Problem

Adult relationships are at risk for relationship difficulties due to childhood emotional neglect (Basham & Miehl, 2004). Damage from neglect can range from subtle to obvious signs that accumulate over time (Holland, 2019). It may be difficult for parents, caregivers, teachers, clinicians, and doctors to recognize the subtle signs and, thus, overlook them (Holland, 2019). Childhood emotional neglect is marked by the *absence* rather than the presence of harsh behaviors (Clément et al., 2016). Webb (2018) defines *absence* as under-responding. Emotional neglect is characterized by the *failure to meet* children's emotional needs, provide adequate nurturance and affection, and seek care. Emotional neglect involves detached and uninvolved parents who may have met their children's physical needs but lack necessary nurturing (Cowen, 1999). Neglect may develop as a chronic pattern of interaction, or it may be acute (Brassard & Hardy, 1997). It is important to note that one single type of neglect or other adverse childhood experiences (ACE) does not occur in isolation (Schilling et al., 2015). Evidence shows that ACEs are interrelated rather than independent (Dong et al., 2004).

Emotional neglect can result in children who become adults left with permanent scars affecting many aspects of their development (Clément et al., 2016). The long-term consequences of childhood emotional neglect often lead to adult psychopathology (Briere & Jordan, 2009; Cohen et al., 2017; Schneider et al., 2007) and romantic partner dissatisfaction. The result is that survivors of emotional neglect cope by suppressing their emotions so as not to burden their parents or other attachment figures (Webb, 2018). Survivors grow up having difficulty recognizing and expressing their feelings. Treating the problem of emotional neglect is about teaching survivors how to recognize and healthily express their emotions. The challenge of treating clients "most often in the shadows" is that no treatment models have been specifically

designed to target the effects of child neglect in adults or survivors (Grossman et al., 2017, p. 86). Researchers, clinicians, and counselor educators must prevent the potential damage caused by emotional neglect, especially for young children, but research and assessment obstacles persist.

Second, emotional neglect is difficult to operationalize. Dubowitz (2004) found that most empirical research collapsed subtypes of neglect into a ‘general neglect’ category using the definition set by Child Protective Service (CPS) (Dubowitz, 2004; Zuravin, 1999). He states that neglect is not a dichotomous variable, defined as either fully met or not met at all (Dubowitz, 2004). The problem is that CPS labels do not include context about the nature of children’s experiences (Dubowitz, 2004). He recommends applying objective and standardized measures to allow for a “sensitive appraisal of neglect” (Dubowitz, 2004, p. 346).

Third, substantial research on relationship satisfaction comes from such theories as attachment, objects relations, and emotionally focused, emphasizing early representations of parental figures (Bowlby, 1988; Neumann, 2017; Seedall & Wampler, 2013). However, empirical research connecting *emotional* neglect to relationship satisfaction is sparse.

Fourthly, this researcher is unaware of any studies that have examined the role of the Judeo-Christian God-image of adult women who have experienced childhood emotional neglect. The lack of research on this topic appears unexplored in the psychology of religion, counseling, and psychology literature. Stakeholders invested in the mental and physical health of children and families, such as counselors, counselor educators, counseling supervisors, and advocates, would benefit from the exploration of this study.

Fifth, prevention and treatment efforts to fund state child protective services are reportedly underfunded. CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevent Prevention and Treatment Act) state

grants increased in 2018 from \$60 million to \$80 million, but CAPTA argues it is not enough to fund important initiatives. Their legislative agenda recently asked for \$500 million in Title I CAPTA state grants and \$500 million in Title II community-based prevention programs (<https://www.cwla.org/>). The National Child Abuse Coalition is advocating for a “strong public health approach to child maltreatment as recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Health and Human Service (HHS) (<https://www.cwla.org/>).

Lastly, the perception of rejecting and neglectful parenting is a vulnerability factor for lifetime suicide attempts, especially for women (Ehnavall et al., 2008). Bowlby (1980) equated the perception of being rejected or neglected in childhood to feeling unwanted, in general, as an adult. These factors contribute to suicidal risk (Ehnavall et al., 2008). Women were more likely to ‘blame’ both parents for suicide attempts, but men were more likely to view their parents in an idealized way (Ehnavall et al., 2008). Females are more rejection sensitive in general when compared to males (Koestner et al., 1991). The researchers interpreted this to mean that males may be more dismissive of negative emotions when compared to females (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). This study aims to demonstrate the differences between gender in patients who perceived themselves as rejected or neglected by either parent, thereby raising the risk for rejection sensitivity as an adult (Ehnavall et al., 2008).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine the relationship between childhood emotional neglect in adult women, romantic partner attachment, and the role of the Judeo-Christian God-image as a mediator.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Is emotional neglect related to image of God?

Research Question 2: Is image of God related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

Research Question 3: Is the relationship between childhood emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction mediated by the image of God?

Research Question 4: Is childhood emotional neglect directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for God-image?

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The study includes assumptions that are relevant when interpreting the research outcomes. The first assumption is that using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) will provide an adequate sample representing the general population of women who have experienced childhood emotional neglect. Another assumption is that the study participants will honestly rate their romantic partner relationships and image of God. A third assumption is that the sample will include a diverse population, including ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, and selection of women. Fourth, it is assumed that assessment measures will accurately assess the intended construct within the sample and that the assessment measure is both valid and reliable.

As with any study, there are limitations. First, self-report measures tend to lead to inflation or underreporting scores (Exline et al., 2013; Gonyea, 2005). For example, social desirability bias may lead a respondent to edit their responses to look good to the researcher (Beretvas et al., 2002; Nancarrow & Brace, 2000). Respondents may underreport undesirable behavior or overreport desirable behavior (Nancarrow & Brace, 2000). A sub-group of women who espouse a Judeo-Christian worldview may be vulnerable to underreporting undesirable behavior if they believe they are morally wrong (Exline & Grubbs, 2011; Exline et al., 2012; Exline et al., 2013). Additional limitations include concerns about generalizability and measurement. Research results may not generalize to a population with non-Christian

worldviews beyond the current sample. Measures are a snapshot in time and are not perfect in measuring the intended construct. This researcher will be relying on retrospective reports from study participants who may not remember details from their trauma (Schneider et al., 2007), or may deny, distort, or unconsciously forget painful experiences (Belsky, 1993).

While MTurk has advantages and has earned respect as a data collection tool, Lewis et al., (2015) have urged caution on the use of the marketplace for research involving religion. Lewis et al., (2015) compared five MTurk samples with a student convenience sample and the 2012 General Social Survey, noting that MTurk samples have a consistent bias toward non-religion, underrepresenting Catholics and evangelical protestants. The authors recommend obtaining larger samples to account for more religious individuals. However, they note there is enough reliable information for survey experiments which they believe are the best of MTurk (Lewis et al., 2015). One limitation of using MTurk includes workers who perform poorly or cheat. Another is that the sample population does not represent any geographic area or segment of the population (Shapiro et al., 2013).

The analysis will be based on a single data collection method; however, it would be more desirable to conduct a multimodal study, especially given the chronic nature of neglect (Schneider et al., 2007). Lastly, there may be limitations in how this researcher creates the survey and whether it has appropriate reliability and validity to measure the constructs. This researcher has made choices that will serve as delimitations. The study will focus specifically on adult women who have experienced childhood emotional neglect. Participants eligible for the study will include women ages 18 and over. This researcher will define God-image as the *Judeo-Christian* view of God, which holds common traditions, beliefs, and values.

Definition of Terms

1. Emotional neglect-

Emotional neglect is defined as “the failure of caretakers to meet children’s basic emotional and psychological needs, including love, belonging, nurturance, and support” (Bernstein et al., 2003, p. 175).

2. God-image-

A God-image is an internal working model of God based on the internalization of early experiences with attachment figures (Hall & Fujikawa, 2013).

3. Romantic partner attachment-

A romantic attachment is a deep emotional bond to another individual.

4. Internal working model-

An internal working model is a cognitive framework comprising mental representation that underlies peoples’ feelings, thoughts, behaviors, sensations, and motivations in any relationship, including relationships with divine figures (Bowlby, 1973).

Significance of the Study

Having a positive close bond with God could yield emotional benefits (Exline et al., 2013), especially for religious or spiritual clients. Fifty percent of clients who seek out pastoral counselors, Christian psychologists, or spiritual directors for psychotherapy have God-image-related difficulties (Allmond, 2010). Counselors who understand the associations between spirituality and the effects of childhood emotional neglect may help prevent detrimental outcomes (Kosarkova et al., 2020). Support for spiritual and emotional outcomes can be integrated with clinical outcomes to reinforce the therapeutic process. Moriarty and Davis (2011) recommend that psychotherapists use “a nuanced, psychotherapy-integrationist approach as

opposed to a rigid, orientation-specific approach” (p. 155) to conceptualize and treat God-image related difficulties.

Improving parent-child attachment is beyond the scope of this study, but romantic relationship difficulties are at least one result of the harmful downstream effect of parental neglect. It has been well established in the psychology of religion that there is a correlation between parental attachment and God attachment (Zarzycka, 2019). Bowlby (1991) stated that children form internal working models from the early attachment bond to form future relationships. If the emotional bond is neglected, female survivors are left with damaging effects on their self-esteem, relationships, overall happiness, and so much more.

Johnson’s (1992) view is that one’s personal experience of God and self mutually influence each other. Counselor interventions such as group therapy have shown that psychological symptoms decrease when ones’ image of God improves (Cheston et al., 2003). Further, clients come as ‘whole persons’ when they enter the therapeutic relationship, including their religious views and spirituality. The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), a division of the American Counseling Association, recognizes that “the client’s beliefs (or absence of beliefs) about spirituality and/or religion are central to his or her worldview and affect psychosocial functioning” (Cashwell & Young, 2011, p. 4). Pursuing strategies for changing clients’ images of God would be a significant outcome of this study.

An additional outcome of this study would be to increase research and examine therapy treatments for adult women who have experienced emotional neglect and struggle to cope in romantic relationships. The purpose would be to reduce the incidences of emotional neglect for families at risk and advocate for children and adult survivors of neglect.

Theoretical /Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is guided primarily by Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979/1994). A child's predictable interpersonal connection and attachment figure are necessary for proper development (Siegel, 2020). Other theories relevant to this study and linked to attachment theory are Romantic Attachment Theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hazan & Diamond, 2000), Psychoanalytic Theory (Freud, 1905/1953), Object Relations Theory (Klein, 1984; Winnicott, 1965), Affective Neuroscience (Siegel, 2007) and Schema therapy (Young et al., 2003) a blend between Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Psychoanalysis, Attachment Theory, and Emotion-Focused treatment, may be beneficial.

Attachment Theory provides the framework for Romantic Attachment Theory, which advances the concept of relationship development, maintenance, and relationship dissolution beyond the child development years (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Romantic attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1978) is a pragmatic theoretical framework that conceptualizes romantic love as an attachment process (Fraley & Shaver, 2000), linking adult romantic relationship dynamics. Both theories apply to this study.

Psychoanalytic Theory views God as a projection of a father's image and the idea that God images reflect the views of parents. This concept is particularly relevant for Judeo-Christian traditions that link the God-image to parental thinking (Exline et al., 2013). Object Relations Theory conceptualizes how parents shape children's views of God. Rizzuto (1979) pioneered the concept that an infant's implicit knowledge of God is born as a "God representation" (Hall & Hall, 2021).

Schema therapy (Young et al., 2003, p. 68) may be beneficial since it "re-parents" the vulnerable child by providing necessary nurturing such as soothing, validation, reassurance, and

praise (Bach et al., 2018; Rafaeli et al., 2011). The adult part of the self learns to self-soothe, which builds up the adult part of the patient (Bach et al., 2018).

More recent research has confirmed that infants' "internal experiences synchronize with their relational experiences, and their brains literally develop a brain-to-brain connection with their attachment figures" (Hall & Hall, 2021, p. 125). Affective neuroscience complements attachment theory because of its emphasis on the link between the brain and the infant attachment system.

Lastly, this study incorporates the concept of Hall and Hall's (2021) Relational Spirituality Paradigm, which synthesizes recent insights from attachment theory, psychodynamic theory, and theology. It is a *being-in-relation* model that focuses on the concept that humans are fundamentally relational and reflect the nature of a triune God (Hall & Hall, 2021). God is portrayed as a secure base and an attachment figure (Proctor, 2006). The God-image serves a spiritual and psychological function and may be integrally connected, "thus when something shifts for one part of the self, it shifts for another part of the self as well" (Cheston et al., 2003, p. 106).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters will advance the dissertation by addressing the scope of the problem through a comprehensive literature review (Chapter Two) and describing the research method and design, selection of participants, instruments used, research procedures, and data processing and analysis (Chapter Three). Chapter Four will outline the data collection results and provide further analysis of the data in detail. Chapter Five will summarize previous chapters and discuss how the findings interacted with the hypotheses and current literature. Finally, the

dissertation will close with relevant conclusions, implications for research and practice, and research limitations.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One was an introduction to the problem of childhood emotional neglect and romantic partner relationships. Background of the problem and a description of the prevalence of emotional neglect was provided. The chapter introduced the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Relevant terms were defined, and the significance of the study was explored. This study is presented in the broader context of child abuse and neglect, relationship attachment, spirituality and religion, overall health and well-being, and behavioral health. The study aims to understand the correlation between childhood emotional neglect in adult women, romantic relationship satisfaction, and God-image as a mediator.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter two will begin with a review of the literature for each study component. First, the study will examine the literature on childhood emotional neglect and its effect on romantic partner relationships, gender differences, mental and physical health outcomes, trust, and relational outcomes. Second, there will be a focus on childhood emotional neglect in the United States, the lack of empirical research, obstacles to research, and the ramifications of childhood emotional neglect in adult women. Third, the researcher will expand on the God-image and its connection to attachment theory, the role of religion and spirituality in counseling and ethical practice, and finally, a summary of the chapter.

Humans in Relationship

Neuroscience has determined that humans are wired for relational connections from birth, neurologically shaping the brain (Siegel, 2010, 2012). The part of the brain that processes relational experiences (the Orbital Front Cortex) is dependent on attachment figures (i.e., parents) to grow and develop normally (Hall & Hall, 2021). The findings demonstrated that infants respond to interactional events with their mothers (Hall & Hall, 2021). Electroencephalogram (EEG) activation of the left and right frontal lobe indicates that infants experience positive and negative emotions, depending on their mothers' responses (Davidson & Fox, 1982; Dawson et al., 1992). The mother figure acts as a secure base to support the infant's exploration (Feeney & Thrush, 2010). Studies show that neural connections synchronize with relational connections, transforming relational experiences into brain circuits (Siegel, 2012). The adaptive biochemical process stimulates the release of the neuro-chemicals responsible for creating positive feelings (Hall & Hall, 2021). Yet, early adverse experiences may inhibit the

release of neuro-chemicals that regulate pair-bonding and the ability to form long-term attachments in adulthood (Anda et al., 2006).

Neuroscience employs measurement procedures such as neuroimaging and electrophysiology that link thoughts and emotions to specific neural receptors (Lemon & Wagner, 2013). Brain imaging demonstrates that each emotion fires in a different part of the brain (Lemon & Wagner, 2013). Examples of therapies that utilize mind-body techniques are Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) (Shapiro, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2007), Biofeedback (Basmajian, 1979; Kamiya, 1969; Miller, 1978), Brainspotting (Grand, 2013), Emotion-Focused Therapy (Johnson, 2019), and Somatic Processing (Levine, 1996, 2010). Survivors of emotional neglect can explore mind-body treatments that harness the power of the brain and body to re-shape vital neural connections. Part of the role of a counselor is to help the client develop the capacity to stay in psychological contact with their pain (Cashwell & Young, 2011). Practices such as prayer, meditation, mindfulness, and ritual (Cashwell & Young, 2011) are examples of coping strategies that bolster the power of the mind-body connection.

Research has linked childhood maltreatment to the quality of future romantic relationships in adulthood (Cohen et al., 2017; Peterson et al., 2018). Children who receive pathological care may develop negative expectations about current or future relationships (Toth & Manly, 2019) and be less likely to positively perceive current romantic partners (Colman & Widom, 2004). Adult survivors of neglect face relationship challenges, mental health challenges, and challenges to developmental growth. A 22-year longitudinal investigation found that infant attachment was associated with emotion regulation in adulthood (Toth & Manly, 2019). Because of the powerful influence of attachment on relationships, relational interventions are recommended for maltreated children and adults (Toth & Manly, 2019).

Individuals who experienced childhood emotional abuse and neglect were six times more likely to experience difficulties forming and maintaining adult romantic relationships (McCarthy & Taylor, 1999). Childhood trauma increases the chances of divorce and separation and lowers satisfaction levels among married couples (DiLillo et al., 2009; Li & Chan, 2012; Peterson et al., 2018;). Male and female abuse and neglect victims report higher cohabitation rates, walking out, and divorce (Colman & Widom, 2004). Research shows that survivors of childhood neglect experience an inability to trust, tolerate intense emotions, a poor sense of self, and attachment problems (Grossman et al., 2017; Kapeleris & Paivio, 2011). Neglect represents a breach of trust for children who have counted on parental figures to provide care and protection but instead deprive them of basic emotional needs (DiLillo et al., 2009). A major challenge for survivors of emotional neglect is that fundamental attachment experiences are difficult to conquer in later life (Schütze et al., 2020). As adults, they avoid intimacy due to betrayals of trust, threats to vulnerability, and punished or unmet dependency needs (Kapeleris & Paivio, 2011).

Ordinarily, children spend more time with their parents than anyone else. The quality of the parent-child relationship is essential given the quantity of time spent with their parents. Yet, parents account for 80% of child maltreatment cases, according to Van Der Kolk (2005), and 92% for those neglected (Sedlak et al., 2010). This is important because the quality of the parent/caretaker-child relationship in a child's early years has been proven to impact psychosocial functioning into adulthood (Briere & Jordan, 2004). The persistent effects of childhood emotional neglect, such as abandonment, reduced parental attunement, and instability, creates attachment-related problems (Bowlby, 1988;). These problems and many others may foster adult psychological disturbance (Briere & Jordan, 2004; Cloitre et al., 2008). Researchers found that psychiatric patients who suffered from childhood emotional neglect may not have

developed a secure attachment bond with their caregivers (Song et al., 2016). Therefore, they may not have developed an internalized secure base and consequently be insecurely attached (Song et al., 2016). Trauma such as emotional neglect may affect individuals' perception of self, others, God, and the world they lived in before the trauma (Finkelhor & Browne, 1991; Song et al., 2016).

Self-reports, observations, and interviews are often used to assess parent-child neglect. Since emotional neglect is an act of omission rather than commission, assessment can be problematic. Some researchers use the social cognition research method to assess parents' implicit and unconscious processes to explain how parents organize their experiences and respond to stimulus events (Camilo et al., 2016). Abusive or neglectful parents may have biases or errors in their information processing during parent-child interactions. Their processing is characterized by their automaticity and low level of awareness (Camilo et al., 2016). The systematic review results were organized into three domains: a) parental errors in emotion recognition and physiological reactivity, b) parental biases in the perceptions and attributions about children, and c) aggressive parental behaviors (Camilo et al., 2016). As a result of an impaired information processing system, parents are less likely to show empathy for their children.

Adult survivors of emotional neglect are especially vulnerable to loneliness (Reyome, 2010). Loneliness is a complex emotion that is painful to adult survivors of neglect. Hawkley & Cacioppo (2010) defined loneliness as the social equivalent of physical pain, hunger, and thirst. Research estimates that as many as 15-30% of the general population live in a chronic state of loneliness (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Theeke, 2009). Chronic loneliness (e.g., the experience of loneliness more than three days a week) was linked with depression in women at risk for

coronary heart disease (Hawkley & Cacioppo (2010). This can also transfer into the academic experience. Undergraduates with a history of emotional neglect had the highest rates of loneliness and social isolation (Loos and Alexander, 1997). Experiencing loneliness affects physical health, mortality, mental health, and cognitive functioning (Hawkley & Cacioppo (2010).

Romantic Attachment Theory offers a perspective on personality development, emotion regulation, and psychopathology (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Research suggests that the same motivational system that drives infants to attach to their parents also characterizes adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1978). Childhood emotional neglect is characterized by an insecure attachment that extends into adult romantic partner relationships (McCarthy & Taylor, 1999).

If children or adolescents experience a chronic history of unresponsiveness from attachment figures, they are less likely to respond with warmth and engagement (Egeland & Erickson, 1999). Neglected individuals may react by distancing themselves from intimate relationships. They may respond further by extreme independence to deny the importance of relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

Secure attachments are the result of “consistent, continuous and caring connections with [our] caregivers in early life” (Siegel, 2010, p. 188). Loving relationships are at the heart of secure attachments (Siegel, 2010) and are crucial for mature development emotionally, relationally, and spiritually (Hall & Hall, 2021). Parent/caregiver behaviors can range from positive interactions to complete disengagement between parents and children (Gauthier et al., 1996). A history of neglect can lead to deficits in normal social functioning in part because individuals have not learned to self-soothe (Hall & Hall, 2021). An insecure-dismissing

attachment pattern emerges for a child whose emotional needs for nurturing, physical, emotional, and relational warmth and comfort is consistently denied (Briere, 2002). Previous research has also found victims of maltreatment to have problems with attachment (Crittenden, 1989; Egeland & Sroufe, 1981; Egeland et al, 1983).

Trust is a core component of the attachment system, but it has not been researched as widely as attachment in romantic relationships (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). The component of trust can be understood through individual differences in a couple or within a dyadic concept (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). Attachment theory conceptualizes couples' differences through an individual, dispositional perspective. Interdependent theoretical approaches view trust as a unique dynamic that develops within the relationship or an interactional perspective (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). Each approach aims to understand how trust develops and how trust changes in relationships. In a study by Arriaga et al., (2014), trust toward a partner was associated with lower attachment anxiety which raised levels of relationship security. Trust increases confidence that a partner will be a safe haven in times of distress (Murray et al., 2006).

Childhood Neglect

More children are victims of neglect than any other form of maltreatment (Cohen et al., 2017; Dubowitz & Black, 2002; Erickson & Egeland, 1996; Jones & Logan-Greene, 2016; World Health Organization, 2002; Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Neglect is a global problem recognized by most countries as a form of maltreatment (Kobulsky et al., 2020). It is the form of maltreatment most often reported to CPS (Stoltenborgh et al., 2013). However, according to their research, Clemente and Chamberland (2016) contend that “emotional neglect and cognitive neglect seem to be less commonly reported.” (p. 91). They cite the differences in their studies to corroborate their results. Infants and toddlers are more likely to

be victims of neglect and most at risk of fatality than any other form of maltreatment (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2002). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) reported that 52% of all cases were for neglect, but in 2015, the percentage rose to 78% (Jones & Logan-Greene, 2016). Research indicates that neglect in childhood may be as harmful as physical and emotional abuse (Gauthier et al., 1996; Norman et al., 2012). Physical neglect puts *children* more at risk for internalizing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal than emotional neglect (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Kim & Cicchetti, 2006), but emotional and physical neglect puts surviving *adults* at risk (Norman et al., 2012; Widom et al., 2007). By the time emotionally neglected children have reached adulthood, many have already suffered a lifetime of stressors (Horwitz et al., 2001). This reality makes them more vulnerable to long-term mental health impacts (Horwitz et al., 2001).

Allegations of neglect receive fewer services and less intensity from child protection workers and ascribe a lower risk level than physical abuse or sexual abuse (Stokes & Taylor, 2014). CPS investigations seldom address emotional and physical neglect unless associated with other forms of maltreatment (Kobulsky et al., 2020). Emotional neglect is often considered secondary when presented with an abuse allegation (Cohen et al., 2017). Emotional and physical neglect must reach a significant threshold as a severe form of neglect before CPS investigations deepen (Cohen et al., 2017). As a result, children inside and outside of CPS do not receive the necessary attention. CPS workers must have expertise and skill in assessing neglect in an under-resourced and stressed system. (Connell-Carrick, 2003)

There are practical reasons for this prioritization. Since 1980, the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) has used two definitional standards to classify abuse or neglect. Both require an act of omission that results in demonstrable harm to a

child. One purpose of the study is to specify the criteria for what situation ‘counts’ as maltreatment in the study estimates (Sedlak et al., 2010). Sedlak et al., (2010) designate two standards of harm that guide CPS, community professionals, and other professionals invested in the responsibility and care of children. The two designations are the Harm Standard and the Endangerment Standard. The Harm Standard is the first measure, and it defines neglect narrowly. The disadvantage is that it can be too stringent and narrow for many purposes. It can exclude many children who CPS deems abused or neglected (Sedlak et al., 2010). The second standard includes all the children who meet the Harm Standard but adds others. The Endangerment Standard is slightly more lenient than the Harm Standard. It counts children “who were not yet harmed by abuse or neglect if a sentinel (reporter) thought that the maltreatment endangered the children or if a CPS investigation substantiated or indicated their maltreatment” (Sedlak et al., 2010, p. 3).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services oversees at least three programs to monitor the health and welfare of children and families: (a) The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), (b) The Children’s Bureau, and (c) The Federal Interagency Workgroup on Child Abuse and Neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) sets minimum standards for child abuse and neglect. Even though there is no standard definition for each form, most states recognize four major types of maltreatment: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse or neglect. It is up to each state to define specific forms of maltreatment. How forms of maltreatment are defined has implications for practice, policy, and research (Rebbe, 2018).

Professional training and guidelines on what constitutes neglect are lacking. The ability to distinguish between situations that should and should not be reported is an important part of

reporter training (Kenny et al., 2018). Mandated reporters who had received training on specific agencies' policies reported more suspected child maltreatment than those who had not (Sedlak et al., 2010). Research is sorely needed in what would lead to expert recognition in the reporting of child maltreatment (Kenny et al., 2018). Training and education for counselors are essential to know the indicators of child abuse and neglect and how to report them to local authorities. Counselor education programs should incorporate child abuse reporting in multiple courses, including ethics and counseling children and adolescents (Kenny et al., 2018).

Researchers struggle with defining emotional child neglect because it has not been clearly defined in the literature (Reyome, 2010). The quarrel is whether emotional neglect should be defined singularly or combined into 'neglect' or 'no neglect'? (Dubowitz, 2013). The dilemma is complicated because child welfare samples have defined much of the research, focusing on parental omission, which leads to blaming the parent (Dubowitz, 2013). But in reality, adequacy of care is based on a continuum between optimal to grossly inadequate (Dubowitz, 2013). Deficits in care may need to be addressed, but they may not be due to parental negligence (Dubowitz, 2013). Dubowitz (2013) recommends defining neglect as occurring when a child's basic needs are not met in a broader, more nuanced approach. This approach is based on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979), which views child development as a complex system of relationships in immediate and broad environments. This approach has three advantages: 1) It fits well with a broader medical goal, 2) less blaming and more constructive, 3) it draws attention to other contributors to neglect beyond the parents. This approach widens alternatives for quality interventions for the family and community (Dubowitz, 2013). The support families receive outside their home, and their connections to society can be equally as important as its support.

Ecological theory guides CPS to strengthen families by respecting the family, culture, and individual needs and sharing community responsibility for the welfare of families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005a; Scannapieco et al., 2019). The ecological framework for prevention assumes that prevention strategies must target interventions at multiple levels: the individual, the family, the community, and society (Child Welfare Information Gateway, (n.d.); Children’s Advocacy Center, (n.d.). Examples of causal agents that may contribute to inadequate care include; societal attitudes toward family privacy, poverty, tolerance of violence, situational factors such as a temperamental child, or parents' attributes, such as hostile personality (Belsky, 1993). Clemente et al., (2016) state that neglect comes from a series of personal, family-related environmental factors. However, there is no one cause for the problem of emotional neglect. Understanding the etiology of child neglect and how to address complicated systemic issues will continue to be cause for investigative research (Kobulsky et al., 2020; Norman et al., 2012; Proctor & Dubowitz, 2014).

Dialogue is needed regarding the boundaries and definitions of emotional neglect, especially in cases of extreme poverty and in the context of diverse cultures (Kobulsky et al., 2020). It is crucial to consider the ecological context of children growing up. Nikulina et al., (2011) demonstrated that childhood neglect, poverty, and neighborhood poverty contributed to poor outcomes later in life, such as increased traumas, reduced academic achievement, delinquency, or criminal behavior. “It is theoretically plausible that any relationship between child abuse and neglect and subsequent outcomes is confounded with or explained by social class differences” (Widom et al., 2012, p. 1136). The cultural context must be considered when interpreting the presence of emotional neglect in family systems. Collective caregiving “may allow for greater variation in emotional responsiveness based on shared caregiving practices”

(Lawler & Talbot, 2012, p. 462). Shared caregiving practices such as utilizing grandparents or extended family members for caregiving may serve to balance the load of caring for children adequately (Lawlor & Talbot, 2012).

Differences in race and sex must be considered when examining exposure rates to physical and emotional neglect in childhood (Cohen et al., (2017). The consequences of early neglect exposure in childhood can pose a risk of developing internalizing symptoms, substance use, physical, cognitive, and interpersonal deficits for emerging adults (Cohen et al., 2017). Cohen et al., (2017) found that Latino youth were at a decreased risk for neglect exposure due to culturally-relevant protective factors such as their familial system, religiosity, and social support. Neglect-exposed African-Americans were at heightened risk for internalizing distress due to physical and emotional neglect, while Latinos were more vulnerable to substance use outcomes. Neglect-exposed females tended to experience elevated internalizing distress and substance use compared to their male counterparts (Cohen et al., 2017).

The risk factors for the effects of poverty are similar to the risk factors for those associated with neglect (Smith & Fong, 2003). “Outcomes for children are exacerbated when poverty and neglect are both present” (Smith & Fong, 2003, p. 246). More research is needed from an ecological perspective on the intersectionality between childhood neglect (all forms), substance abuse, culture, being female, and being poor. “The idea that child neglect is a poor relation of child abuse must be deconstructed” (Smith & Fong, 2003, p. 249). When future research, policies, and programs raise awareness in the communities, more attention is given to the issues, and structural changes can be made (Smith & Fong, 2003).

Challenges to the highest level of care for children are often complicated by divisive politics, culture, and the state of the economy. Ratifying the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child (CRC) is one such example. It has been a contentious debate for presidential administrations since 1990, when it came into force (Congressional Research Service, 2015).

The CRC is an international treaty that addresses the rights of children worldwide. Article 19 says that states' parties will take appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children from all forms of injury or abuse, *neglect or negligent treatment*, maltreatment or exploitation while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child (Kobulsky et al., 2020). The United States has been criticized for not ratifying the CRC. One hundred ninety-six countries have become 'state parties' (nations) to the convention as of 2015, except for the United States. According to Congressional Research Service (2015), some congress members believe it conflicts with U.S. laws regarding privacy and family rights, among other reasons. This example has factions on each side of the debate. But problems like this only delay the services that children and families need. Emotional neglect and other forms of maltreatment are complex problems that need to be addressed as soon as they are identified (McSherry, 2007).

Compared to abuse, where some children are thought to provoke abusive acts with their behaviors or temperament, the dynamics surrounding neglect are inherently different due to the *lack* of behavior on the part of the parent that constitutes this type of maltreatment (Connell-Carrick, 2003). Emotional neglect may not be blatant or easily observed, making it difficult to measure. One approach measures neglect by harming the child; the other measures whether the child's needs are met. As stated before, measuring neglect by harming the child alleviates interpreting parental intention.

A history of emotional neglect may contribute to adult primary care visits. Spertus et al., (2003) found a significant correlation between emotional abuse and neglect with the number of

primary care doctor's visits for non-clinical adult women. The findings indicated that psychological and physical symptoms were associated with a history of emotional abuse and neglect, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Spertus et al., 2003). In a study by Anda et al., (2010), emotionally neglected patients reported headaches and migraines more than four times the population estimates. Due to depression, anxiety, and other adverse childhood experiences, primary care visits should motivate health care professionals to integrate neglect experiences into medical care (Shutze et al., 2020). Offering more comprehensive care could increase understanding of patients with physical and emotional symptoms of neglect (Bernstein & Fink, 1998; Spertus et al., 2003). The increase in programming suggests that health care utilization and costs need to be considered for this population in the future (Spertus et al., 2003), consequently improving diagnostics, treatment, and ultimately prevention (Shutze et al., 2020).

Widom et al., (2012) conducted a prospective investigation on physical health outcomes on abused and neglected children between 1967-1971. Researchers measured biological data and conducted a physical examination to assess physical health outcomes over time (Widom et al., 2012). The researchers followed neglected and abused children (ages 0-11) into middle adulthood and investigated important health indicators (Widom et al., 2012). Their 30-year follow-up demonstrated that child abuse and neglect affected long-term health status (Widom et al., 2012), including diabetes, lung disease, malnutrition, and vision problems. The study supports a need for early health care intervention in children (Widom et al., 2012).

A reported history of childhood emotional neglect is associated with a higher risk of comorbid anxiety and depressive disorders in adulthood (Hovens et al., 2010). Hillegers et al., (2004) found that it is not life events, per se, that increase liability to mood disorders, but the

quality of the childhood holding environment (eg., family dysfunction) or the quality of the relationship with either the parents or other caregivers.

Secure attachments are the result of “consistent, continuous and caring connections with [our] caregivers in early life” (Siegel, 2010, p. 188). Loving relationships are at the heart of secure attachments (Siegel, 2010) and are crucial for mature development emotionally, relationally, and spiritually (Hall & Hall, 2021). Secure attachments in early relationships provide a base of safety, ultimately contributing to emotional, behavioral, and cognition integration (Bowlby, 1969, Toth & Manly, 2019). Parent/caregiver behaviors can range from positive interactions to complete disengagement between parents and children (Gauthier et al., 1996). A history of neglect can partially lead to deficits in normal social functioning because individuals have not learned to self-soothe (Hall & Hall, 2021). An insecure-dismissing attachment pattern emerges for a child whose emotional needs for nurturing, physical, emotional, and relational warmth and comfort are consistently denied (Briere, 2002).

God Image, Spirituality, and Attachment

This study aims to assess the effects of childhood emotional neglect on romantic relationship satisfaction by examining how women view God and their romantic partners. This researcher seeks to explore God as a secure base and attachment figure for survivors of emotional neglect. Proctor (2006) found that subjects described God in ways analogous to an attachment figure. For example, believers in God speak of how God is “holding their hand,” “walking with them,” or is “by their side” as they encounter stressful life situations or traumatic losses in their life (Proctor, 2006). “Religion may play an important role in many adults’ lives because of its ability to function in the manner of an attachment relationship” (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 319).

God-image was used as a variable because Christianity emphasizes a relational view of the divine (Moriarty & Davis, 2011). Cheston (2000a) explores the concept of psychospiritual themes in both religious traditions and modern psychotherapies. Psychological and religious/spiritual insights come into contact, for example, through the theme of suffering, why we suffer, what suffering means, what to do with it, etc. (Stewart-Sicking et al., 2017).

This study uses the terms spirituality and religion broadly, but these two concepts are not necessarily interchangeable (Lu et al., 2020). The term religion is often associated with an affiliation to an organized religious institution where individuals or groups espouse a specific dogma or doctrine (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005). Spirituality is broader in context and “refers to a person’s individualized, internal, and value-based connection to the transcendent” (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005, p. 55) and may or may not be associated with organized religious institutions. In social science research, spirituality has often been framed as an alternative to organized religion due partly to dissatisfaction with organized religion (Ammerman, 2013). According to Ammerman (2013), the terms religion and spirituality are under negotiation in contemporary western society. Pargament (2011) describes the phenomena as the polarization of religion (‘the institutional bad guy’) and spirituality (‘the individual good guy’) and notes that it does not fit the empirical evidence (p.13). However, many Americans claim to be both religious and spiritual. It is often not clear what it means to be spiritual or religious.

Research on the development of the God-image began to appear in the 1950s, emerging from classical psychoanalytic theory, object relations theory, and attachment theory (Moriarty & Davis, 2011). Most empirical research on God images comes from the broader Christian faith tradition (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Rizzuto, 1979) partially because the Christian faith emphasizes a relational view of the divine (Moriarty & Davis, 2011).

Religion and spirituality are important to most Americans. A survey from 2017 reported that 80% of U.S. adults believe in either God as described in the Bible or some other higher power or spiritual force (Geiger, 2018). Statistics from the 2020 Census of American Religion reported that 70% of Americans identify as Christians. Nearly 1 in 4 Americans (23%) are religiously unaffiliated, and 5% identify with non-Christian religions (Public religion research institute, 2021). 72% of Americans say that *God* plays an important role in their lives, while 67% say prayer plays an important role (Pew Research Center, 2020). When Americans were asked, “how important is *religion* in your life?” 41% said “very important,” 25% said “somewhat important,” 17% said “not too important,” and 18% said “not at all important” (Pew Research Center, 2021). A Gallup Poll asked, “how important is religion in your life?” 48% said “very important,” 25% said “Fairly important,” and 27% said “not very important” (Religion, 2021). Since 72% of Americans report belief in God or some other higher power or spiritual force, it is relevant to assume it may be a factor in how they live and what they value.

God-image research emerged from classical psychoanalytic theory, object relations theory, and attachment theory. These theories view personality as shaped through events in one’s childhood and can have a powerful influence on ones’ adult life. Each approach can inform how one views God. In classical psychoanalytic theory, Freud proposed that God-images develop early in life during the Oedipal-Electra period (Freud, 1913/1950; 1930/1962). Children’s ambivalent feelings of guilt and longing toward their father become displaced onto their God images (Freud, 1913/1950; 1930/1962). God becomes an “exalted father” figure to be feared (Freud, 1913/1950, p. 244). In this theory, religion and one’s view of God are associated with compulsive neurosis and obsession (Moriarty & Davis, 2011). Freud (1856-1939) began to associate religion with hysteria and neurosis (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013). Their theory would start

a “deep divide separating religion from mental health care for the next century” (Koenig, 2009, p. 284). Larson et al. (1986) argued for more research between religion and mental health across health disciplines countering Freud’s view. Research increased substantially between 1990 and 2010 due to their efforts (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013).

Object relations theory (Fairbairn, 1952; Greenburg & Mitchell, 1983) theorizes that children gradually internalize how their parents treat them. (Rizzuto (1979) contends that infants form God images during the first years of life, based on how parents and other caregivers treat them through the establishment of trust or mistrust (Erikson, 1959) and the development of a “living” (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 41) God representation. Rizzuto maintained that God images promoted an “internal sense of balance, [and] calm (e.g., felt security)” (Moriarity & Davis, 2011, p. 135).

Attachment theory is an organized behavioral system activated by environmental, physical, or relational threats to safety, such as separation from an attachment figure (Bacon & Richardson, 2001). The goal of the attachment system is to regulate behaviors to maintain proximity to a 'secure base' (Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby, 1973; Taylor & Ainsworth, 1981). A child ‘selects’ the parent or caregiver that usually responds to their needs and attaches based on the quality of the response (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Children form working models of their worthiness based on their interactions and experiences with their parents regarding the parent’s availability and willingness to care for them (Bacon & Richardson, 2001).

Siegel (2020) expands on this unique parent-child interaction:

Attachment at its core is based on parent sensitivity and responsivity to the child’s signals, which allow for collaborative parent-child communication. Contingent communication gives rise to secure attachment and is characterized by a collaborative

give-and-take of signals between the members of the pair. Contingent communication relies on the alignment of internal experiences, or states of mind, between child and caregiver (Siegel, 2020, p. 225). A parent's state of mind concerning attachment is the most powerful predictor of how the parent-child relationship will evolve. (p. 226).

This excerpt by Siegel (2020) is consistent with Bowlby's central assumption that relationships function to increase survival (Handley et al., 2019). Attachment theory maintains that infants are biologically predisposed to bond with caregivers and seek proximity to those who can provide safety and support (Handley et al., 2019). This internal model operates across the lifespan guiding how the individual views the world and relationships. Indeed, the paradigm of 'relational spirituality' works with attachment and object-relations theories in creating these working models (Hall & Hall, 2021). "We are gaining a deeper picture of how relationships profoundly shape our spiritual development and capacity to love" (Hall & Hall, 2021, p. 6).

Empirical research supports God as an intimate relationship partner or attachment figure (Beck, 2006; Beck & McDonald, 2004; Davis et al., 2009; Exline et al., 2013; Granqvist et al., 2010), especially for individuals who identify with Christianity. In the research, positive thoughts about God were highly endorsed and predominated over negative thoughts and feelings (Exline et al., 2011; Pargament et al., 1998; Wood et al., 2010).

This study will measure participants' God-image using the God 10 Scale. The scale is based on a concept that psychologists call *divine struggle*, which focuses on ideas about God or a perceived relationship with God (Exline et al., 2013). The God-representation (Rizzuto, 1979) is a mental model that describes how people view God as an intimate relationship partner (Beck, 2006; Davis et al., 2009). Exline et al., (2013) posit that having a positive close bond with God can yield emotional benefits. The operational components of the study are the Experience in

Close Relationships- Revised (ECR-S) Scale measuring attachment patterns and the God-10 Scale measuring one's perceived relationship with God.

Of particular interest to this researcher was the concept of connection vs. attachment to parental figures and God in forming close adult relationships. Even though attachment and connectedness are not the same, they speak to the fundamental needs of human nature. Humans long to have an intimate, close relationship with a significant other and harmonious contact with the unseen, such as a higher power (Prior & Quinn, 2010). Ellison (1983) states that the spirit of human beings enables and motivates meaning and purpose in life and provides a sense of direction and order. He believes that human beings are psychospiritual entities that should not exist in isolation from the psyche and soma. Additionally, he suggests that spirituality and overall health and wellness can co-exist together. Many scholars see the importance of religion and spirituality in professional counseling (Bartoli, 2007; Diallo, 2013; Pargament, 2009; Post & Wade, 2009; Young et al., 2002; Young et al., 2007)

God images are a person's heart knowledge of God and are primarily composed of implicit relational knowledge (Hall, 2004). The relational spirituality paradigm synthesizes recent insights from attachment theory, affective neuroscience, emotion theory, trinitarian theology, interpersonal neurobiology, and spiritual theology (Hall & Hall, 2021). His model merges spirituality with psychodynamic theory and attachment theory into the conceptual framework of this dissertation by focusing on being made in the image of God. This framework will influence the current study's exposition.

A God-image is an internal working model of God based on the internalization of early experiences with attachment figures (Hall & Fujikawa, 2013). The God-image serves a spiritual and psychological function to measure whether emotional symptoms correspond to positive

changes in individuals' images of God (Cheston et al., 2003). Bonelli and Keonig (2013) noted an association between depression, substance abuse problems, suicidal tendencies, and religious/spiritual involvement (Bonelli & Keonig, 2013). However, some mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, bipolar, and stress-related disorders, revealed minimal evidence that religious/spiritual involvement improved mental health (Bonelli & Keonig, 2013).

A relevant question for this study is whether one's God-image affects mental health and future relationships. "If one's perception of God has a direct effect on psychological wellbeing, then an individual's image of God represents a factor in one's psychological stability" (Cheston et al., 2003, p. 104). Cheston et al., (2003) suggest that integrating the God-image in the therapeutic process can be beneficial for predicting psychological wellbeing over time. More research is needed on changing the God-image through psychotherapy participation, but some studies have demonstrated promising strategies (Cheston et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 2011; Tisdale et al., 1997).

Song et al., (2016) studied patients who had suffered various types of abuse or neglect in childhood. The results showed that depressed, emotionally neglected patients were more likely to develop psychopathology than other types of abuse or neglect (Song et al., 2016). Further, evidence showed that a history of emotional neglect was associated with significantly lower spirituality (Song et al., 2016). Most empirical research demonstrates more pessimistic effects of childhood maltreatment on adult religiosity (Bierman, 2005). The impact of maltreatment on religiosity and spirituality has been understudied in the literature, but deserves more attention, especially on the long-term effects of childhood maltreatment (Bierman, 2005).

Similar studies have explored the link between emotional neglect and adult spirituality. Prior and Quinn (2010) found that as the severity of emotional neglect increased, levels of

reported connectedness with a higher power, inner core, and others decreased. Prior & Quinn (2010) used the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, the Religious Well-Being Scale (RWBS) (Ellison, 1983), and three connection scales.

The American Counseling Association recognizes the value of religion and spirituality. This is reflected in the Association for Spiritual, Religious, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling. ASERVIC is a division of the ACA that has established fourteen guidelines that “complement, not supersede, the values and standards espoused in the ACA Code of Ethics (2014).” (ASERVIC, n.d., para. 1). The Preamble “recognize[s] the diversity and embrace[s] a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (ASERVIC, n.d., para. 1.). The competencies are divided into six categories: a) culture and worldview, b) counselor self-awareness, c) human and spiritual development, d) communication, e) assessment, and f) diagnosis and treatment. Although the history of ASERVIC dates back to 1951 as the Catholic Guidance Council, the name was changed in 1993 to ASERVIC, to include the larger faith community.

Spiritual competence has been emphasized in the field of professional counseling as a way to help clients maintain and promote wellness (Myers & Willard, 2003). Although they overlap, religion and spirituality are distinctly different concepts. Religion is a set of beliefs usually connected to persons devoted to their faith. ASERVIC (n.d., p. 1) defines spirituality as “a capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons” that leads individuals “toward knowledge, love, meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, wellness, and wholeness.” Recognizing clients’ religious and spiritual values is linked to counselors’ ethical responsibility to be multiculturally competent, just as in other forms of cultural diversity

(e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability). However, counseling programs are not required to include spirituality as a core curriculum area.

Counselor educators such as Bohecker et al. (2017) assert that “spirituality transcends culture” and therefore deserves to be emphasized as an essential part of achieving and maintaining health and holistic wellness (Bohecker et al., 2017, p. 134). They advocate for an additional CACREP core curriculum area that goes beyond the “spirit” of the CACREP standards. Evans and Nelson (2021) say that there has been less emphasis on integrating religion and spirituality than other forms of multicultural components such as race, gender, etc. They cite recent clinical evidence on relational responsiveness, which uses evidence-based practices to build relationships and provide greater effectiveness of treatment (Evans & Nelson, 2021). At the time of this writing, CACREP 2023 is calling for the removal of standard 2.F.2.g. under social and cultural diversity: “Concerning the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients’ and counselors’ worldviews” from the 2024 standards (CACREP, n.d.). However, it appears that there is no recommendation that spirituality be removed from addiction counseling standards. It is unknown whether the following recommendations will be adopted.

Chapter Summary

Chapter two was a review of the literature divided into three sections. In the first section, there was a literature review on the effect of emotional neglect on romantic partner relationships. Evidence shows that relational connections are wired into brain circuits so that relational growth can develop normally. Advancing developments in neuroscience have contributed to researchers knowledge of how humans relate to each other. Yet, these connections are dependent on attachment figures to provide necessary nurturance. If children are neglected because of

pathological care, they are at risk for psychological disorders and unstable relationships. Loneliness and a lack of trust result from a history of parental negligence.

The second section examined the history and prevalence of childhood neglect in the United States. Child Protective Services and United States government agencies were referenced as key organizations set up to prevent the worsening of child maltreatment and advocate for needed funding to plan programs that assist the community and schools in growing healthy families. Obstacles to research and the lack of empirical research specifically on emotional neglect were discussed, even though it may be more detrimental than physical abuse or emotional abuse. Ramifications of emotional neglect were discussed, such as physical health problems, increased visits to primary care physicians, and female suicide risks. The ecological theory was explored as a more holistic way of treating the individual in the context of culture and community rather than blaming the parents exclusively as the only cause of neglect. Standards of harm were summarized as to what constitutes abuse or neglect. The problem is that state agencies don't agree on a particular standard for emotional neglect. Each state sets its standard for what constitutes harm. Researchers can't agree on the definition of neglect either, so research has been hampered.

Section three examined the history and the definition of the God-image and the role of religion in the United States both in the recent past and present. Connections between religion, psychological theories, and attachment were presented as related to the theoretical aspects of this study. Hall and Hall's (2021) relational spirituality paradigm was noted because God views humans in relationships with Him and each other. It is a model especially suited to the Judeo-Christian faith tradition. The role of spirituality in counseling curriculum and respecting clients'

cultural beliefs was also discussed. Chapter three will focus on the research method and design and will expand on research questions and hypotheses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Introduction

Chapters One and Two provided the background and statement of the problem and a literature review. Chapter Three will focus on the specific research method, the research design, research questions and hypotheses, instrumentation, selection of participants, and the data analysis method. The desired objective of this study is to understand how God-image mediates the effects of childhood emotional neglect on romantic relationship satisfaction and to what extent one's image of God as loving, distant, or cruel is related. The study will amplify the problem of emotional neglect and its potential harm to female romantic relationships.

This study uses a parallel multiple mediation model, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. The model will examine multiple pathways of influence (Hayes, 2017) between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction. The specific indirect effects of multiple mediators (views of God as loving, distant, cruel) will “estimate causal influences independent of other processes in the model” (p. 186). One advantage of using parallel mediation is that it allows for more stimulating and nuanced analytical opportunities and tests (Hayes, 2018) compared to simple mediation models.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: Is emotional neglect related to image of God?

RQ 1a: Is emotional neglect related to image of God as loving?

Hypothesis 1a: Childhood emotional neglect for adult women is negatively related to God-image as loving.

RQ 1b: Is emotional neglect related to image of God as distant?

Hypothesis 1b: Childhood emotional neglect for adult women is positively related to God-image as distant.

RQ 1c: Is emotional neglect related to image of God as cruel?

Hypothesis 1c: Childhood emotional neglect for adult women is positively related to God-image as cruel.

Research Question 2: Is image of God related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

RQ2a: Is image of God as loving related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 2a: Image of God as loving is positively related to romantic relationship satisfaction?.

RQ 2b: Is image of God as distant related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 2b: Image of God as distant is negatively related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

RQ 2c: Is image of God as cruel related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 2c: Image of God as cruel is negatively related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

Research Question 3: Is the relationship between childhood emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction mediated by God-image?

RQ 3a: Is the relationship between childhood emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction mediated by image of God as loving?

Hypothesis 3a: The relationship between childhood emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction is mediated by image of God as loving.

RQ 3b: Is the relationship between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction mediated by image of God as distant?

Hypothesis 3b: The relationship between childhood emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction is not mediated by image of God as distant.

RQ 3c: Is the relationship between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction mediated by image of God as cruel?

Hypothesis 3c: The relationship between childhood emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction is not mediated by image of God as cruel.

Research Question 4: Is childhood emotional neglect directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for image of God?

RQ 4a: Is childhood emotional neglect directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for image of God as loving?

Hypothesis 4a: Childhood emotional neglect is significantly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for image of God as loving.

RQ4b: Is emotional neglect directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for image of God as distant?

Hypothesis 4b: Childhood emotional neglect is not significantly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for God image as distant.

RQ4c: Is emotional neglect directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for image of God as cruel?

Hypothesis 4c: Childhood emotional neglect is not significantly related to romantic relationship satisfaction when controlling for image of God as cruel.

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, non-experimental cross-sectional survey to measure relationships between variables. Research question one examined the relationship between

emotional neglect and image of God. Research question two examined the relationship between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction. Research questions three and four examined the direct and indirect effect of emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction mediated by the image of God as loving, distant, and cruel. Survey participants answered questions directly related to the research questions with three standardized instruments described in the following sections.

Selection of Participants

Participants in the study were females aged 18 and over. Excluded from the survey were men and individuals under age 18. The researcher ran a power analysis to determine an adequate sample size to avoid a type I or type II error due to insufficient power (Heppner, 2008, 2016). Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, was used as the survey platform for the study. Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an Amazon crowdsourcing platform, was used to recruit participants. MTurk connects ‘workers’ (the crowd online) to ‘requesters’ (researchers or employers) to complete small tasks for individuals or companies for pay. MTurk has its advantages: it is diverse, it is on-demand, data can be collected quickly, requesters can set their pay, and lastly, the platform is relatively inexpensive (Sheehan, 2018). There are benefits to combining both platforms in that Qualtrics is a user-friendly tool, and MTurk has recruiting capabilities. Once the survey was completed and IRB approval was given, the survey link was entered into the MTurk platform so that eligible participants could take it.

Instrumentation

Demographic Information

Participants were randomly selected using MTurk software for recruitment and received \$1.00 to complete the survey. The researcher entered study criteria, and only participants

meeting the criteria had access to the survey. The criteria included only females living in the United States. (see Appendix C). Once they clicked on the survey, they viewed the consent form and the invitation to be part of the study. (see Appendix A). Participants answered nine demographic questions about their gender, race, age, religion, level of commitment to their religion, marital status, whether they had ever experienced emotional neglect, level of education, and employment status (see Appendix B).

Emotional Neglect (CTQ-SF)

The instrument used to assess emotional neglect was the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF; Bernstein et al., 2003). Participants answered 28 questions about their experiences growing up as a child and teenager. Responses to the questions are set up on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never true to very often true. Most participants completed the instrument in five minutes or less. The CTQ-S quickly identifies individuals with a history of maltreatment, such as emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect. Each category has specific cut-off scores. The cut-off scores for emotional neglect were: None= 5-9; Low= 10-14; Moderate= 15-17; Severe= 18+. All five items for emotional neglect were reverse-scored. Even though participants answered questions about other kinds of maltreatment, their responses were not included in this study.

The CTQ-SF demonstrated good criterion-related validity in a subsample of adolescents on whom corroborative data were available (Bernstein et al., 2003). Each subscale was analyzed for internal consistency (reliability) using Cronbach's Alpha (α) as reported in Bernstein et al., (2003). Values from the subsample included Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the CTQ-SF subscales ranged from 0.68 to 0.95: Sexual Abuse ($\alpha = 0.95$), Emotional Neglect ($\alpha = 0.90$), Emotional Abuse ($\alpha = 0.86$), Physical Abuse ($\alpha = 0.80$), and Physical Neglect ($\alpha = 0.68$) (Cruz et

al., n.d.). All five subscales reported a range of alpha coefficients above the acceptable threshold of $\alpha = 0.80$; thereby, suggesting high reliability. As a result, the survey does an acceptable job of measuring each subscale reliably.

God-Image (God 10 Scale)

The instrument used to assess God-image was the “God 10 Scale” (Exline et al., 2013). Participants in the subsample were asked to read the prompt, “Generally speaking, I imagine God as being...” (Exline et al. 2013, p. 5). The God 10 Scale contains ten adjectives split between three subscales: Loving (loving, caring, forgiving), Cruel (cruel, unkind, rejecting), and Distant (distant, remote, unavailable, uninvolved). Items were rated from zero (not at all) to ten (extremely). Each subscale was analyzed for internal consistency (reliability) using Cronbach’s Alpha (α), as reported in (Exline et al., 2013). Values included cruel ($\alpha = 0.90$ to 0.91), Distant ($\alpha = 0.88$ to 0.92), and Loving ($\alpha = 0.94$ to 0.96). All three subscales reported a range of alpha coefficients above the acceptable threshold of $\alpha = 0.80$; thereby suggesting high reliability. As a result, the survey does an acceptable job of measuring each subscale reliably.

Romantic Relationship Satisfaction (ECR-S)

The researcher used the ECR-S to measure romantic partner attachment as a proxy for relationship satisfaction rather than a direct measure of a relationship. The rationale behind this decision was that the theoretical framework for this study was primarily grounded in attachment theory. The researcher sought continuity between instrumentation and the conceptual framework. The decision was grounded in previous research that found an association between insecure attachment, negative affect, and relationship satisfaction (Molero et al., 2017). Banse (2004) suggests that marital satisfaction can be predicted by an individual’s attachment orientation, partner’s attachment orientation, and interaction. The dyadic effect is that insecure partner

attachment may be related to reduced levels of marital satisfaction (Banse, 2004). The researcher chose to explore anxiety attachment (six items) exclusively rather than both anxiety and avoidant attachment (twelve items).

As stated in the previous paragraph, the instrument used to assess romantic relationships was the Experiences in Close Relationships Revised Scale (ECR-S) (Wei et al., 2007). The ECR-S is a 12-item self-report adult attachment scale developed out of the original 36-item version of the ECR (Brennan et al., 1998). The scale measures maladaptive attachment in adults in romantic relationships. It is designed to measure attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in current or past relationships. Attachment avoidance is defined as “fear of dependence and interpersonal intimacy, an excessive need for self-reliance, and reluctance to self-disclose” (Wei et al., 2007, p. 188). Attachment anxiety is defined as “fear of interpersonal rejection or abandonment, an excessive need for approval from others, and distress when one’s partner is unavailable or unresponsive” (Wei et al., 2007, p. 188). Participants answered each question according to their current or prior romantic relationships. The questions were based on the response given on a 7-point Likert Scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The researcher chose to measure the six items on anxiety and not the items on avoidance. Participants that scored higher on the questions were assumed to be more anxiously attached and hence, less satisfied and less secure.

To measure the validity and reliability of the instrument, researchers conducted six studies to develop a short version based on the original ECR. The scale appears to have comparable or equivalent internal consistency with coefficient alphas from .77 to .86 for the Anxiety subscale and from .78 to .88 for the Avoidance subscale across the six studies. Test-retest reliability across the six studies was acceptable when used in samples of college students. The two oblique factors (anxiety and avoidance) fit the data well for the two versions of the

ECR. Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ranges were from .95 to .97 after removing systemic error due to positively and negatively worded items (Wei et al., 2007). Construct validity was supported in all six studies and was comparable or equivalent to the original 36-item version of the scale (Wei et al., 2007).

Research Procedures

Before collecting data, the researcher received approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). A Qualtrics survey was pilot tested with volunteers to ensure readability, flow, and data collection confirmation. After successful pilot testing, the survey link was entered into MTurk to recruit participants. Monetary compensation of \$1.00 was offered for completing the survey on the MTurk platform. Participants were required to read the consent document explaining the purpose of the study and were given information about what kinds of questions would be asked. An explanation of the three scales was included and how they were connected to the study. The participants were informed that the information and data collected would be used for research purposes and that their responses would be anonymous. Participants were given directions on how to complete the survey and approximately how long the entire study would take.

Data Processing and Analysis

The study included four research questions, with each question including multiple parts. Data was collected at one point in time through a cross-sectional survey using Mturk. Data collection was processed and analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25). Data were explored using descriptive statistics to report measures of central tendency, demographic representation, and normality distributions for the sample. Internal consistency analyses were run on surveys and subscales to ensure item reliability and confirm the surveys reflected the

construct it intends to measure (Field, 2013) given the sample in the study. Statistical analyses was conducted to assess whether the variables were related according to researcher expectations (Warner, 2013).

Research Questions 1 and 2 – Zero Order Correlations

Zero-order correlations between variables emotional neglect and God as loving, distant, and cruel (RQ 1) were explored using Pearson's r to understand the strength of association between variables (Field, 2013). The covariates for the study included gender, race, age, religion, level of commitment to religion, marital status, level of education, employment status, and if they had ever experienced emotional neglect. Zero-order correlations (Pearson's r) were also used to explore the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and God as loving, distant, and cruel (RQ 2).

Research Question 3 – Linear Multiple Regression with Mediation

A linear multiple regression analysis with mediation was run to evaluate the relationship between emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction as mediated by God as loving. (see Figure 3.1). Mediation models were tested using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples. To run a multiple regression model, the expectation is that the data have met a set of assumptions. There must be linearity in the data, so this was checked a priori by running a bivariate scatterplot and residual plot to ensure the relationship between the independent and dependent variables were linear.

The second assumption, which was run post hoc, is to ensure the data have independence of errors (residuals). This was explored visually in residual plots to ensure no patterns emerged.

The third assumption is that the data have normality. This assumption was checked a priori using univariate plots (histograms and boxplots) to ensure the data were normally

distributed. This assumption was checked post hoc using P-P plots to ensure observed distribution of residuals fall along the normal distribution of residuals line.

The fourth assumption is that the data have homoscedasticity (equal variance). This was explored a priori using a bivariate scatterplot and residual plot. All model fit statistics were presented. Latent factor variances will be discussed later in the current chapter. Any assumptions that are not met will be appropriately corrected during the analyses or interpreted with adjustments post hoc.

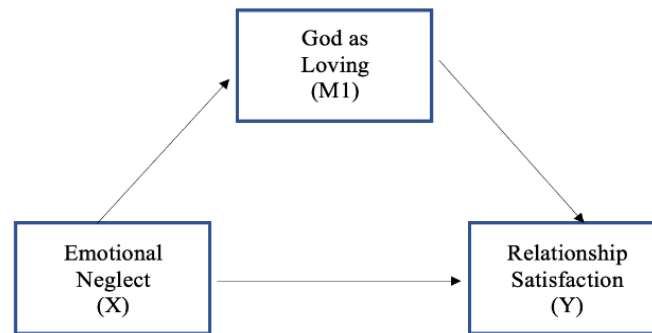


Figure 3.1

Research Question 3a. Is the relationship between emotional neglect (X) and relationship satisfaction (Y) mediated by the image of God as loving (M1)?

$$\text{Relationship Satisfaction}_i = b_0 + b_1 \text{Emotional Neglect} + e_i$$

$$\text{God as Loving}_i = b_0 + b_2 \text{Emotional Neglect} + e_i$$

$$\text{Relationship Satisfaction}_i = b_0 + b_3 \text{Emotional Neglect} + b_4 \text{God as Loving} + e_i$$

A linear multiple regression analysis with mediation evaluated the relationship between emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction as mediated by God as loving (See Figure 3.1).

The model included exploration of the mediator variable (God as loving) on the dependent

variable (relationship satisfaction) and then explored the independent variable (emotional neglect) on the dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) as mediated by God as loving.

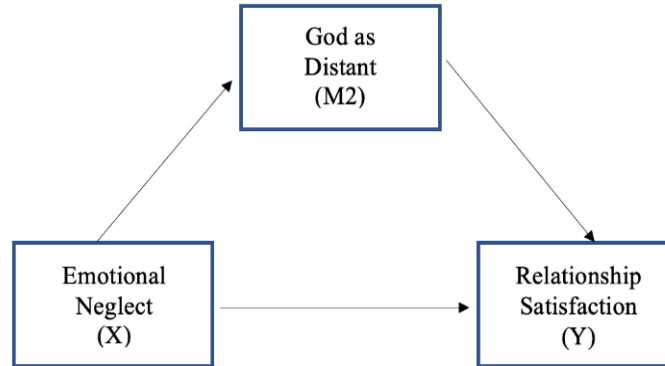


Figure 3.2

Research Question 3b. Is the relationship between emotional neglect (X) and relationship satisfaction (Y) mediated by the image of God as distant (M1)?

$$God\ as\ Distant_i = b_0 + b_2 Emotional\ Neglect + e_i$$

$$Relationship\ Satisfaction_i = b_0 + b_3 Emotional\ Neglect + b_4 God\ as\ Distant + e_i$$

A linear multiple regression analysis with mediation evaluated the relationship between emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction mediated by God as distant. (See Figure 3.2). The model included exploration of the mediator variable (God as distant) on the dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) and then explored the independent variable (emotional neglect) on the dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) as mediated by God as distant.

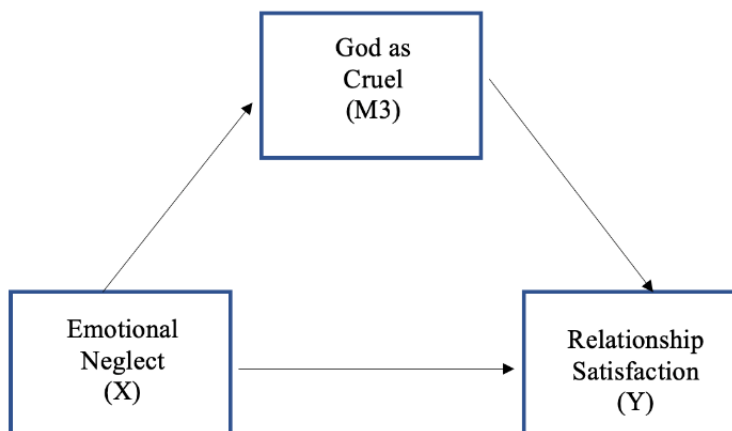


Figure 3.3

Research Question 3c. Is the relationship between emotional neglect (X) and relationship satisfaction (Y) mediated by the image of God as cruel (M1)?

$$God\ as\ Cruel_i = b_0 + b_2 Emotional\ Neglect + e_i$$

$$Relationship\ Satisfaction_i = b_0 + b_3 Emotional\ Neglect + b_4 God\ as\ Cruel + e_i$$

A linear multiple regression analysis with mediation evaluated the relationship between emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction as mediated by God as cruel. (See Figure 3.3). The model included exploration of the mediator variable (God as cruel) on the dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) and then explored the independent variable (emotional neglect) on the dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) as mediated by God as cruel.

A power analysis for the linear multiple regression with mediation was conducted to evaluate sample sizes necessary to achieve a power level of .80 and a significance level of .05. Table 3.1 shows the power analysis for a linear multiple regression with mediation, indicating the sample size needed for a small effect ($d = .20$), the sample size needed for a medium effect (d

= .50), and the sample size needed for a large effect ($d = .80$). Therefore, a sample size of $n = 67$ would yield a small effect size ($d = .20$) in the study using these parameters for a linear multiple regression with mediation model.

Table 3.1

Power Analysis for Linear Multiple Regression with Mediation

Effect size	Total N
Large	19
Medium	29
Small	67

Note. The above power analysis is based on a power level of .80, a significance (alpha) level of .05, two predictors. Power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 software (Faul et al., 2007, 2009).

Research Question 4 – Hierarchical multiple regression

The fourth research question investigated whether emotional neglect was directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction, when controlling for image of God. This was tested using hierarchical multiple regression models (one each for God as loving, God as distant, and God as cruel) where image of God as entered as a predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction in the first level of the regression (in order to account for image of God fully), before emotional neglect was added at the second step. The assumptions of hierarchical multiple regression are the same as those in mediation. As the variables in the models were also the same, there was no need to retest the already-met assumptions.

Ethical Considerations

As with any study, there are ethical concerns to take into consideration. The surveys may touch on emotionally difficult topics that may trigger some participants in the current study, even though no harm was intended. Participants were informed of the sensitive nature of the questions and risks so that the researcher may protect their welfare. It is essential to consider other fundamental ethical principles, such as demonstrating competence as a researcher and a professional counselor. Researchers should also be trustworthy and transparent when making promises about survey procedures. Deception could likely destroy participants' impression of the counselor's trustworthiness. It is vital to report research results accurately to prevent data misuse. The researcher should fully understand the incentive process on crowdsourcing platforms such as MTurk, to utilize labor in ways consistent with the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014; Mullen et al., 2021).

Efforts were made to ensure ethical considerations were implemented. First, IRB approval was obtained, and all ethical concerns were explicitly stated in the consent process. All participants were able to view their rights as a participant, how data would be managed and used, and any ethical concerns. Lastly, data was anonymously collected, and will be properly stored on a password-protected laptop, only accessible by this researcher. No data contained personally identifiable data. All data and documentation will be destroyed three years after the study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three described the methodology and research design for the study. Research questions and hypotheses were specified, followed by instrumentation and the selection of participants. The researcher established procedures for data processing and analyses. The following chapter will examine the data collection results and analyze the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This study aimed to examine the relationship between childhood emotional neglect in adult women, romantic relationship satisfaction, and the role of the Judeo-Christian God-image as a mediator. A central goal of this study was to understand the experiences of emotionally neglected women and how they navigate intimate relationships. This chapter will present survey screening methods, results of the data collection, and data analysis. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the analysis and the results.

Results

A frequency table was created to summarize the demographic data of the 142 participants (see Table 4.1), and a descriptive statistics table was created to display the summary statistics for the experimental variables of interest (Table 4.2). The variables of interest that were used in each analysis all met criteria for univariate normality, defined as skewness $< |2|$ and kurtosis $< |4|$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Demographic Data

Demographics of all participants were reviewed after running the survey on MTurk. A majority of participants ($n = 81$; 58%) were aged between 25-44 and married ($n = 88$, 62.0%). Most respondents identified as Christian or Judeo-Christian ($n = 105$, 73.9%), which is expected given the survey description used to recruit participants. Also notable, 28 participants (19.7%) identified with no religion. Despite religious affiliation, religious commitment displayed a wider spread of data across the scale, ranging from definitely not committed to highly committed. Most participants ($n = 97$, 68.2%) identified as highly or moderately committed. Most participants ($n = 121$, 85.2%) identified as employed and educated with some college, a college degree, or a

Master's degree ($n = 124$, 87.3%). The sample was mainly White ($n = 122$, 85.9%), with other races/ethnicities minimally represented. Finally, the sample consisted predominately of women who reported experiencing emotional neglect during their youth ($n = 102$, 76.1%), which is not surprising given the survey description for participant recruitment.

Table 4.1

Frequencies of Participant Demographic Data (N = 142)

Variable	Frequencies
Age	(4) 18-24 years; (40) 25-34 years; (41) 35-44 years; (28) 45-54 years; (23) 55-64 years; (6) 65 years or older.
Race	(122) White; (6) Asian/Pacific Islander; (4) Black/African American; (4) Latina/Hispanic; (1) Native American/Alaskan Native; (4) Mixed; (1) no response.
Marital Status	(88) Married; (26) Single; (14) Divorced; (11) Cohabiting; (2) Single and Cohabiting; (1) Widowed.
Religion	(105) Christian or Judeo-Christian; (28) No Religion; (3) Jewish; (6) Other.
Religious Commitment	(55) Highly committed; (42) Moderately committed; (24) Neutral commitment; (10) Not committed; (11) Definitely not committed/not interested.
Employment	(121) Employed; (18) Not employed; (3) no response.
Education Level	(1) Less than high school graduate; (9) High school graduate; (2) Tech school; (27) Some college; (3) Some master's; (34) Master's degree; (3) Doctor's degree.
Emotional Neglect in Youth	(108) Yes; (8) Not sure; (26) No.

Table 4.2*Descriptive Statistics of Experimental Variables of Interest (N = 142)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis	Reliability
Emotional Neglect	16.89	5.23	5.00	25.00	-0.39	-0.75	.916
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	4.20	1.37	1.00	6.67	-0.60	-0.36	.806
God as loving	7.44	2.91	0.00	10.00	-1.27	0.64	.965
God as distant	4.34	3.23	0.00	10.00	0.06	-1.25	.935
God as cruel	3.54	3.29	0.00	10.00	0.40	-1.30	.936

Research Question One

The first research question was to investigate the association between emotional neglect and image of God. Pearson correlations were conducted between scores on emotional neglect and the three image of God dimensions (loving, distant, and cruel), as the variables of interest met the assumptions of Pearson correlations (i.e., variables are continuous and normally distributed). It was found that emotional neglect positively correlated with God as loving ($r = .34, p < .001$). However, emotional neglect did not significantly correlate with God as distant ($r = .02, p = .857$) or God as cruel ($r = .12, p = .157$). Figure 4.1 shows the scatterplots and lines of best fit of the three correlations.

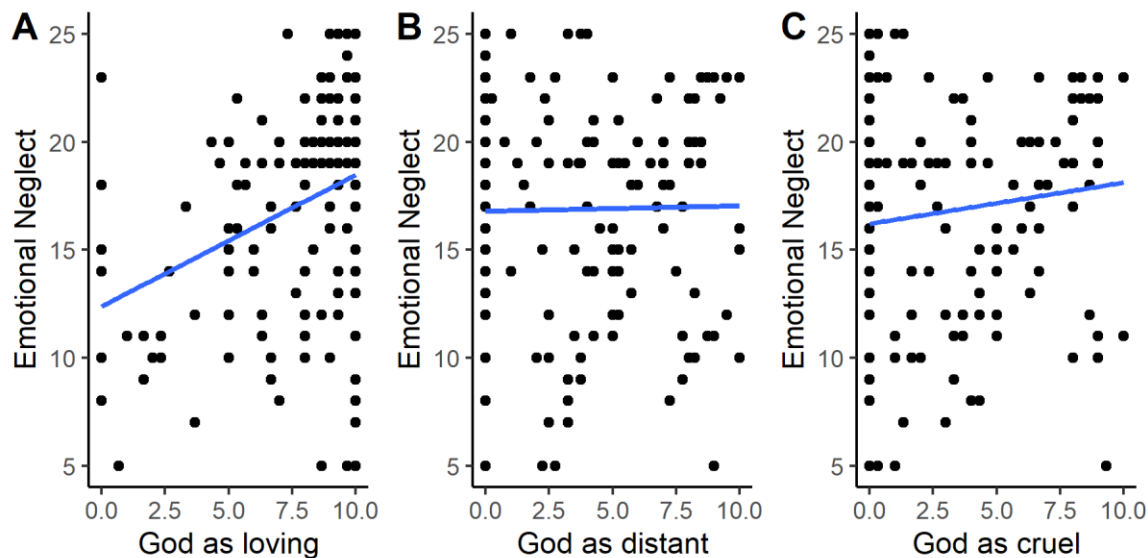


Figure 4.1 Scatterplots between emotional neglect and (A) God as loving, (B) God as distant, and (C) God as cruel. The blue line represents the line of best fit.

Research Question Two

The second research question was to investigate the association between romantic relationship satisfaction and image of God. Pearson correlations were conducted between scores on romantic relationship satisfaction and the three image of God dimensions, as the variables of interest again met the assumptions of Pearson correlations (i.e., continuous and normally distributed). It was found that romantic relationship satisfaction did not significantly correlate with God as loving ($r = .14, p = .102$). However, romantic relationship satisfaction did significantly and positively correlate with both God as distant ($r = .23, p = .008$) or God as cruel ($r = .29, p < .001$). Figure 4.2 shows the scatterplots and lines of best fit of the three correlations.

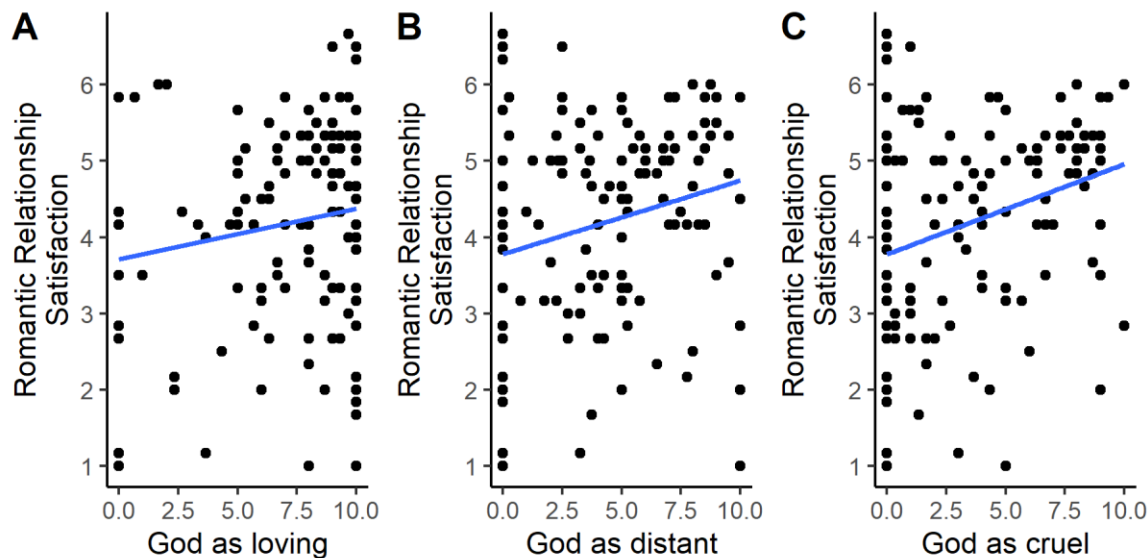


Figure 4.2 Scatterplots between romantic relationship satisfaction and (A) God as loving, (B) God as distant, and (C) God as cruel. The blue line represents the line of best fit.

Research Question Three

Research question 3 investigated whether the association between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction is mediated by God-image. Mediation models were tested using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) with 10,000 bootstrapped confidence intervals. The total, direct, and indirect effects were estimated and considered to be significant if the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval of the unstandardized regression estimates (*B*) did not overlap with zero. Mediation was considered to have occurred if the total effect and indirect effect were both statistically significant, but the direct effect was not. Assumptions of mediation were met for all models: specifically, no multicollinearity was observed due to correlations between variables in any given model not being larger than $r = .34$.

Additionally, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals for each model was visually examined in residual scatterplots, with each of these assumptions met. These residual

scatterplots also demonstrated a lack of outliers in the data. Additionally, a Pearson correlation was conducted between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction, but it did not reach statistical significance, $r = .15$, $p = .074$ (see Figure 4.3 for a scatterplot of the association).

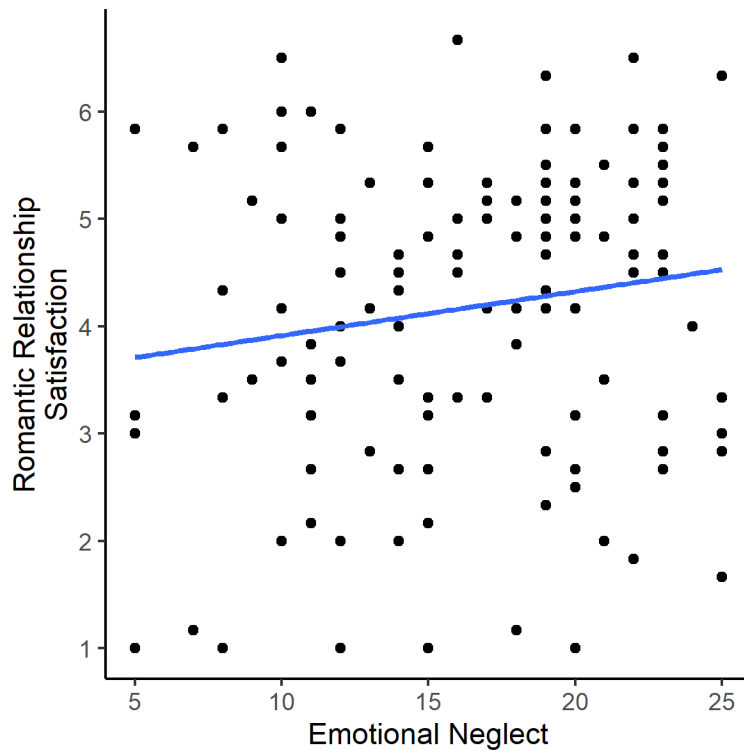


Figure 4.3 Scatterplot between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction. The blue line represents the line of best fit.

For the God as loving mediation model, the total effect ($B = 0.041$, $SEM = 0.023$, 95% CI = $-0.004 - 0.086$), indirect effect ($B = 0.008$, $SEM = 0.011$, 95% CI = $-0.012 - 0.031$), and the direct effect ($B = 0.033$, $SEM = 0.024$, 95% CI = $-0.015 - 0.080$) were all not statistically significant, implying that the three variables are unrelated. Figure 4.4 shows the mediation model of this analysis.

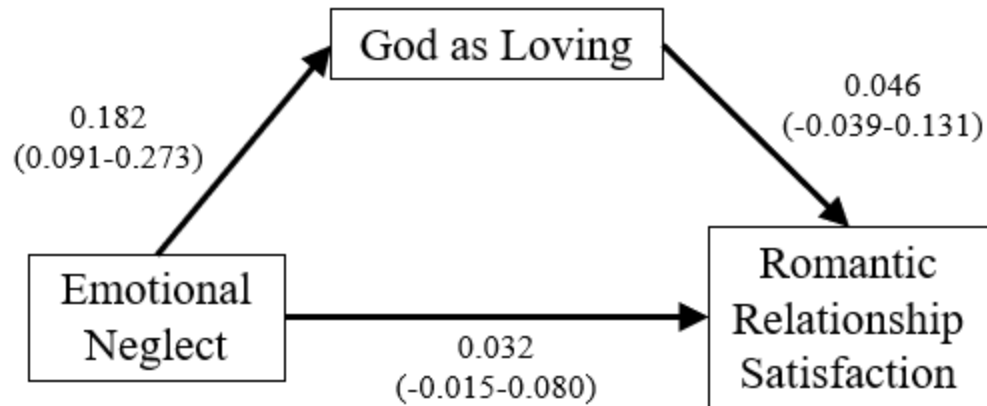


Figure 4.4 Mediation model with emotional neglect as independent variable, God as loving as mediator variable, and romantic relationship satisfaction as dependent variable. Values next to arrows are unstandardized regression estimates, and values in parentheses are 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals.

For the God as distant mediation model, the total effect ($B = 0.041$, $SEM = 0.023$, 95% CI = -0.004 – 0.086), indirect effect ($B = 0.002$, $SEM = 0.006$, 95% CI = -0.009 – 0.015), and the direct effect ($B = 0.039$, $SEM = 0.022$, 95% CI = -0.005 – 0.083) were all not statistically significant, implying that the three variables are unrelated. Figure 4.5 shows the mediation model of this analysis.

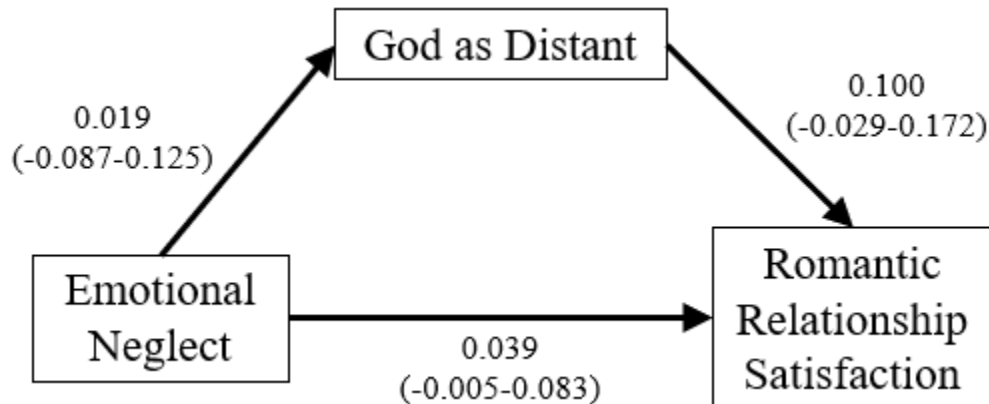


Figure 4.5 Mediation model with emotional neglect as independent variable, God as distant as mediator variable, and romantic relationship satisfaction as dependent variable. Values next to arrows are unstandardized regression estimates, and values in parentheses are 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals.

For the God as cruel mediation model, the total effect ($B = 0.041$, $SEM = 0.023$, 95% CI = -0.004 – 0.086), indirect effect ($B = 0.009$, $SEM = 0.008$, 95% CI = -0.004 – 0.026), and the direct effect ($B = 0.032$, $SEM = 0.022$, 95% CI = -0.012 – 0.076) were all not statistically significant, implying that the three variables are unrelated. Figure 4.6 shows the mediation model of this analysis.

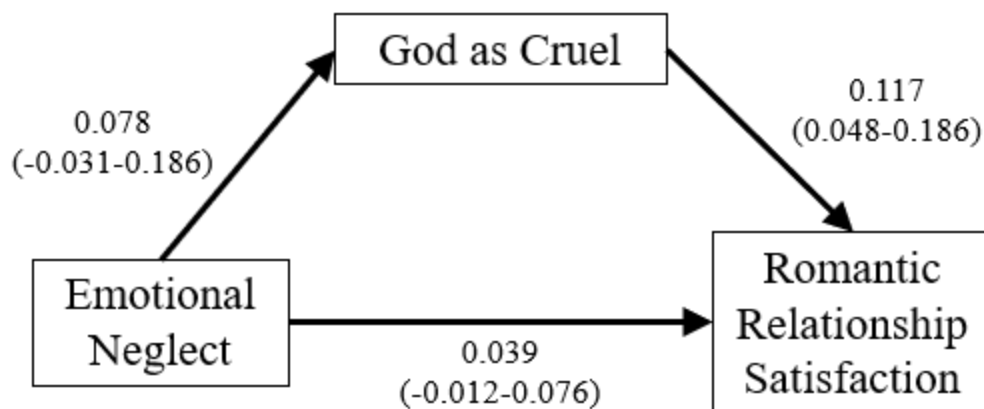


Figure 4.6 Mediation model with emotional neglect as independent variable, God as cruel as mediator variable, and romantic relationship satisfaction as dependent variable. Values next to arrows are unstandardized regression estimates, and values in parentheses are 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals.

Research Question Four

The fourth research question investigated whether emotional neglect is directly related to romantic relationship satisfaction, when controlling for image of God. This was tested using three hierarchical multiple regression models (one each for God as loving, God as distant, and God as cruel), where image of God was entered as a predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction in the first level of the regression (in order to fully account for image of God), before emotional neglect was added at the second step. The assumptions of hierarchical multiple regression are the same as those in mediation, and as the variables in the models were also the same, there was no need to retest the already-met assumptions.

Table 4.3 shows the results of the three hierarchical multiple regressions. For the first model, it was found that God as loving was not significantly predictive of romantic relationship satisfaction. However, the addition of emotional neglect as a predictor at step 2 did not

significantly increase predictive power of the model either, $F(1, 131) = 1.94, p = .177$. This model only explained 3.2% of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction. Therefore, God as loving is not related to romantic relationship satisfaction, and does not affect the (lack of) association between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction. In the second model, God as distant significantly and positively predicted romantic relationship satisfaction; however, the addition of emotional neglect did not significantly change the proportion of variance explained, $F(1, 131) = 3.10, p = .080$. This model explained 7.8% of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction. Therefore, God as distant is related to romantic relationship satisfaction, but given the lack of association between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction, does not have any effect on it. In the third model, God as cruel was positively predictive of romantic relationship satisfaction, but the addition of emotional neglect to the model did not increase predictive power, $F(1, 131) = 2.09, p = .150$. This model explained 10.1% of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction. Therefore, God as cruel is related to romantic relationship satisfaction, but given the lack of association between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction, does not have any effect on it.

Table 4.3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Emotional Neglect Predicting Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Model	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Model 1	Step 1				.019	.019
	God as loving	0.064	0.041	.113		
	Step 2				.032	.013
	God as loving	0.046	0.043	.286		
	Emotional neglect	0.033	0.024	.177		
	Model 2	Step 1				.056
	God as distant	0.102	0.036	.006		
	Step 2				.078	.022
	God as distant	0.100	0.036	.006		
	Emotional neglect	0.039	0.022	.080		
Model 3	Step 1				.087	.087
	God as cruel	0.123	0.035	< .001		
	Step 2				.101	.014
	God as cruel	0.117	0.035	.001		
	Emotional neglect	0.032	0.022	.150		

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Previous chapters included the background and statement of the problem, a literature review, research method, research design, research questions, and hypotheses. Procedures for the study were explained, including instrumentation, participants, and data analysis method. Results were included with a summary of the findings. This chapter presents the findings and how they interact with the research questions, hypotheses, and the current literature. Chapter five concludes with a summary of findings and interpretation, limitations of the study, implications, and a final summary.

Summary of Findings

One hundred forty-two female participants were recruited through an online Qualtrics survey posted on MTurk, an online crowdsourcing platform. Participants answered nine demographic questions and responded to three assessment measures from the “God 10 Scale” (Exline et al., 2014); Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF; Bernstein et al., 2003), and Experiences in Close Relationships Revised Scale (ECR-S) (Wei et al., 2007).

Discussion of Findings

The findings from research questions one and two were surprising given the data from the literature review. It was expected that emotional neglect in adult women would negatively correlate with God as loving and positively correlate with God as distant and God as cruel (RQ 1). Similarly, it was expected that God as loving would positively correlate with romantic relationship satisfaction and negatively correlate with God as distant and God as cruel (RQ 2). Results were opposite of this researcher’s expectations.

Given the literature review, the researcher's findings from RQ 3 and RQ 4 were also surprising. When hypotheses from previous research studies contradict the results in a new study,

there is an opportunity to examine possible reasons. It was expected that women would experience reduced relationship satisfaction and that because of emotional neglect, their image of God might be negatively affected. Further, it was hypothesized that perceiving God as loving would mediate the effect of romantic relationship satisfaction. The results showed the opposite effect. The researcher is left wondering what might account for this difference.

One hundred five participants selected Christianity or Judeo-Christian as their preferred religion. Eighty-three were either highly committed or moderately committed, and eighty-four had experienced emotional neglect, which may suggest that participants sought connective relationships outside the parental bond to compensate for this deficiency.

The literature speaks to various reasons individuals may fill an attachment void with a God-image. As modeled by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1979), attachment theory involves viewing God as a safe haven (Arriaga et al., 2014; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Granqvist et al., 2010; Moriarty & Davis, 2011). Attachment to God may serve as a compensatory attachment object when other primary attachments are unavailable or dangerous (Beck & McDonald, 2004). This compensation for deficient caregiver bonds fills the attachment void that may have been left by parental neglect (Beck & McDonald, 2004). Most participants said they had experienced emotional neglect, but more research would be needed to explore its effect on their religious faith.

Resiliency may be a factor in how women respond to childhood maltreatment, including emotional neglect. Hirshman (2020) measured the role of resiliency in how women function given various types of childhood adversity. According to Hirshman (2020), resiliency is a dynamic process. It may be difficult to measure, but it may be a protective factor that allows the maltreated individual to adapt positively to adversity. Hirshman suggests that faith and

spirituality may be at the core of an individual's resilience. In her qualitative study, the women she interviewed could point to individuals who contributed to a positive outcome when they were a child or adults.

Community support may contribute to resiliency when adverse circumstances create problematic outcomes. Communities can function as out of family support to the growth of individual members through social service resources (Ungar, 2011). Henley (2010) points to multi-layered "social resilience" as the coping capacity of the community to bridge the deficiency gap for individuals within the community (p. 296). Whether women from this study benefited from community resources is unknown, but it could contribute to how participants' answered the questions. Her research and this current study suggest that creating opportunities for mentorship with neglected children and emotional support for adults could be beneficial for building resiliency. Hirshman (2020) recommends further education for adults highly invested in children to be trained in positive interaction with children and parenting classes for parents to feel encouraged and supported.

Limitations of the Study

There is minimal research on relationship satisfaction for women who have experienced childhood emotional neglect mediated by God-image, so few comparisons can be made to previous studies. However, some limitations should be acknowledged. One limitation of this study included the lack of diversity in race (85.9% were white). Using MTurk may have been a delimitation in this study because about three-fourths of U.S. workers on MTurk are Caucasian (compared to two-thirds of the U.S. population) (Sheehan 2018). Another limitation is that 73.9% were Christian (Judeo-Christian). More than half of the participants (62%) were married, and 85.2% were employed. A third limitation included whether the participants understood the

question. If participants were not clear on answering the questions, the data might be less reliable. It's possible that asking participants to make connections to the variables was unfamiliar. Fourth, the sample size was small (142 participants), which may have affected the outcome of the results. Fifth, the survey was subject to voluntary participation on the MTurk platform. The sixth limitation is that religious bias may have been a factor in how participants answered the questions. Lewis et al., (2015) state that approximately half of all respondents on MTurk are secular compared to the General Social Survey (GSS) or a large student sample and that scholars need to account for this bias. Lewis et al., (2015) recommend that samples be larger to capture more religious individuals to account for possible bias. However, given the high percentage of participants who endorsed Christianity, the results don't appear to be biased. It's possible, however, that some participants answered questions in a socially acceptable way.

Implications for Research

This study used a quantitative, non-experimental cross-sectional survey to measure relationships between variables. The study is significant because it creates a scholarly conversation with little to no previous research on three domains: mental health (emotional neglect), religion, and relationship satisfaction. One cannot investigate empirical literature for this topic without traveling outside each discipline. The study suggests a unique perspective between emotional neglect, God, and romantic relationships.

Results from this study could be beneficial for pastoral counselors, professional counselors, counselor educators and supervisors, counselors in training, the social service community, primary care physicians, and interested scholars. Other populations could benefit from expanded research to offer more community-based services for women.

Implications for Practice: Counseling Strategies and Models

This study found no relationship between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction with or without God-image mediation, yet this is an unexplored research area. Counselors may benefit from counseling strategies and models for women who have suffered from neglectful parenting and face relationship difficulties.

Chapter One introduced evidence-based theoretical orientations that address past trauma and relationship dysfunction. These included psychoanalytic theory, psychodynamic theory, object relations theory, trauma models (EMDR), romantic attachment theory, and attachment theory. Schema therapy (Young et al., 2003), a blend between Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Psychoanalysis, Attachment Theory, and Emotion-Focused therapy re-parents the vulnerable child (within the adult) by providing emotional nutrients such as soothing, validation, reassurance, and praise (Bach et al., 2018; Rafaeli et al., 2011). This builds up the healthy and self-soothing adult part of the patient that have come from a lack of necessary nurturing.

Implications for Integrating Religion and Spirituality for Counselors

In recent years, Christian-accommodative counseling approaches have emerged that show promise, especially for Christian clients, but they lack empirical research and are still in their infancy (Worthington et al., 2013). It is important to remember that spiritual and/or religious themes should be addressed when *therapeutically relevant* (italics mine) (ASERVIC, 2016). Counselors' self-awareness and sensitivity to clients' needs are critical when making clinical decisions. Knowing when to engage in spiritual or religious themes is essential, particularly when there is an overlap between providing spiritual direction and integrating spirituality in counseling.

Even though organizations such as American Counseling Association (ACA) and CACREP require counseling professionals to follow ethical standards and best practices, counselors underutilize strategies for clients who seek support with religious or spiritual issues. This is a missed opportunity for clients who may want to discuss spirituality during the counseling process. Diallo (2013) found that Christians were more willing than non-Christians to include religious themes in their counseling, especially if the counseling was administered within a Christian setting. Bartoli (2007) contends that clients' comfort level in discussing issues around values and identity is connected to how the psychotherapist reacts to their history and worldview. Counselor education would benefit from more training in spirituality as a standard part of the counseling curriculum.

Implications for Integrating Religion and Spirituality in Counselor Education

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) grants certification to counseling programs that address ethical and culturally relevant counseling in multiple settings, in clinical supervision, counselor preparation, research, and leadership and advocacy efforts (CACREP, 2016). Yet, most counselors report rarely discussing religion and spirituality in their educational experiences (Bartoli, 2007). According to Adams et al., (2014), "Counselor training programs minimally or inconsistently address topics in religion and spirituality" (p. 45) (Cashwell and Young, 2004; Hage et al., 2006). Counseling students may feel uncomfortable addressing religious and spiritual themes with clients. Counselors-in-training may worry about blurring the lines between pastoral and professional counseling or integrating religion and spirituality into secular institutions (Adam et al., 2014). Little research has focused on faculty knowledge, preparation, and competence to address

religious and spiritual topics in counselor education programs (Adams et al., 2014). More research is needed to explore potential barriers and overcome obstacles (Adams et al., 2014).

In counselor training programs, clinical supervision is required to evaluate and support counselors in training. “A primary obligation of counseling supervisors is to monitor the services provided by supervisees” (American Counseling Association, 2014, p. 12). Counseling supervisors must address the role of multiculturalism and diversity in the counseling relationship, including religion and spirituality, which is currently linked to cultural diversity. Integrating religion and spirituality into supervision has implications for the supervisees' clients and the quality of the therapeutic relationship. Yet research on integrating religion and spirituality in supervision is lacking (Barto, 2018). Young et al., (2007) found that 70% of master’s level students and recent graduates agreed that training in addressing clients’ religion and spirituality issues was important. Yet, 43% of these students did not feel competent to address them in counseling practice (Young et al., 2007). Counselor educators can intentionally prepare students for religious and spiritual issues by addressing them in course content and facilitating discussions and activities (Barto, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a summary and discussion of the findings from the research study. The main findings indicate that women who had experienced emotional neglect perceived God as loving in the sample of 142 participants (RQ 1 and 2). In the mediation model, emotional neglect, God-image and romantic relationship satisfaction were all unrelated (RQ 3). In the hierarchical multiple regression model (RQ 4), God as loving was not related to romantic relationship satisfaction. Still, God as distant and God as cruel predicted positive romantic

relationship satisfaction. Yet, given the lack of association between emotional neglect and romantic relationship satisfaction, it did not have any effect on it.

Limitations of the study included small sample size, a lack of diversity, using the MTurk platform exclusively, and the possibility that participants answered questions in a socially acceptable way. Implications for research, counselors, and counselor educators were included to extend the research and understanding of this problem.

Summary of the Study

This quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey sought to determine the effects of childhood emotional neglect on romantic partner relationships by examining how women view God and their romantic partners. The problem addressed by this research study was to explore dysfunction in female adult relationships due to emotional neglect. Research questions from this study linked one's view of God to the problem of romantic relationship satisfaction.

This researcher/counselor/counselor educator views counseling and behavioral health from a pastoral perspective, informing how cases are conceptualized and treated. Because many clients have experienced dysfunctional primary relationships, they often project these onto God. Pursuing strategies for changing clients' images of God would be a significant outcome of this study. Counselors who understand the associations between spirituality and the effects of childhood emotional neglect may help prevent detrimental outcomes (Kosarkova et al., 2020). Support for spiritual and emotional health can be integrated with clinical outcomes to reinforce the therapeutic process.

As a counselor educator, this researcher is interested in evidence-based treatments that connect the best of faith-based approaches and traditional psychotherapy so that counselors-in-training are better prepared to evaluate and treat relationship dysfunction.

An additional outcome of this study would be to increase research and examine therapy treatments for adult women who have experienced emotional neglect and struggle to cope in romantic relationships. Research on this topic appears unexplored by women who have suffered emotional neglect. This study may stimulate more research, particularly in sub-populations most vulnerable to childhood maltreatment.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Title of the Project: God-image and Romantic Partner Relationships: Emotional Neglect and Adult Women

Principal Investigator: Danette Buchanan, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years old, be female, and reside in the United States. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between childhood emotional neglect in adult women, their romantic partner relationships, and the role of the Judeo-Christian God-image as a mediator.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

- 1. Complete an online survey. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and consists of demographic questions and three other sets of questions.**

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

The results from this study have treatment implications for counselors and counseling services.

Significant outcomes of this study could include increasing research on the topic, examining

therapy treatments for adult women who have experienced emotional neglect, and advocating for children and adult survivors of neglect. Also, the research may advance therapeutic treatments that integrate spirituality into counseling for emotionally neglected women.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked filing cabinet. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all physical records will be shredded.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will receive \$1.00 (U.S.) for completing this survey as arranged through Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform. Participants must complete the entire survey to be compensated.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Danette Buchanan. You may contact her at XXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, XXXX.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.

The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

APPENDIX B**Demographic Questions**

1. What is your gender?

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) Other

2. What religion do you most identify with?

- a) Christian/Judeo-Christian
- b) Buddhist
- c) Muslim
- d) Jewish
- e) Sikh
- f) Hindu
- g) Other
- h) No religion

3. What is your level of commitment to your selected religion, (including “other” and “no religion”?)

- a) High commitment
- b) Moderately committed
- c) Neutral commitment
- d) Not committed
- e) Definitely not interested/not committed

4. Are you employed?

- a) Yes
- b) No

5. What is your highest level of education?

- a) Less than high school graduate
- b) High school graduate
- c) Some college
- d) College degree
- (e) Tech school
- (f) Some master’s
- (g) Master’s degree
- (h) Doctor’s degree

6. Did you ever feel emotionally neglected in your childhood? (Ages 1-18)? Childhood neglect is defined as “the failure of caretakers to meet children’s basic emotional and psychological needs, including love, belonging, nurturance, and support” (Bernstein et al., 2003, p. 175).

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

7. What is your marital status?

- a) Married
- b) Single
- c) Divorced
- d) Widow
- e) Cohabiting

8. What is your race?

- a) Asian-Pacific Islander
- b) Black or African-American
- c) Latina/Hispanic
- d) Native American/Alaska Native
- e) White
- f) Mixed race
- g) None of the above

9. What is your age?

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-34
- c) 35-44
- d) 45-54
- e) 55-64
- f) 65 or older

Survey Questions

I. Instructions: Please rate each item on the God 10 Scale (Exline et al., 2013) by answering the following prompt, “Generally speaking, I imagine God as being...”

	0 (not at all)	to 10 (extremely)
A. Loving	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
B. Caring	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
C. Forgiving	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
D. Cruel	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
E. Unkind	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
F. Rejecting	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
G. Distant	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	
H. Remote	0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....	

- I. Unavailable 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....
 J. Uninvolved 0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10.....

II. Instructions: These questions ask about some of your experiences growing up as a child and a teenager, CTQ-short form (Bernstein, 1995). For each question, select the response that best describes how you feel. Please try to answer as honestly as you can.

A. When I was growing up,...

- | | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| 1. I didn't have enough to eat. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I knew that there was someone to take care of me and protect me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. People in my family called me things like "stupid", "lazy", or "ugly". | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. My parents were too drunk or high to take care of my family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. There was someone in my family who helped me feel important of special. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

When I was growing up,...

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. I had to wear dirty clothes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I felt loved. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I thought my parents wished I had never been born. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I got hit so hard by someone in my family that I had to go see a doctor or go to the hospital. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. There was nothing I wanted to change about my family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

When I was growing up,...

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. People in my family hit me so hard that it left me with bruises or marks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I was punished with a belt, a board, a cord (or some other hard object). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. People in my family looked out for each other. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. People in my family said Hurtful or insulting things to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I believe that I was physically abused. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

When I was growing up,...

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. I had the perfect childhood. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I got hit or beaten so badly that it was noticed by someone like a teacher, neighbor, or doctor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Someone in my family hated me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. People in my family felt close to each other. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Someone tried to touch me in a sexual way or tried to make me touch them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

When I was growing up,...

21. Someone threatened to hurt me or tell lies about me unless I did something sexual with them.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I had the best family in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Someone tried to make me do sexual things or watch sexual images.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Someone molested me (took advantage of me sexually)	1	2	3	4	5
25. I believe that I was emotionally abused.	1	2	3	4	5
When I was growing up,...					
26. There was someone to take me to the doctor if I needed it.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I believe that I was sexually abused.	1	2	3	4	5
28. My family was a source of strength and support.	1	2	3	4	5

III. The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree (ECR-Short Form; Brennan et al., 1998).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral Agree	Slightly Agree	Agree
1. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I need a lot of reassurance I am loved by my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I find that my partner doesn't want to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. I try to avoid getting too close
6 7
to my partner. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I don't worry about being
6 7
abandoned. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I usually discuss my problems
6 7
and concerns with my partner. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I get frustrated if my
6 7
romantic partner is not available when I need him. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I am nervous when my
6 7
partner gets too close to me. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I worry that a romantic partner
6 7
won't care about me as much I care about them. 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C

Demographic Criteria for Eligibility

This is how your task will look to Mechanical Turk Workers.

Researcher seeking women to evaluate their relationships, childhood experiences, and spirituality.

Requester: danette buchanan

Reward: \$1.00 per task Tasks available: 0 Duration: 15 Minutes

Qualifications Required: Gender - Female equal to true

Number of HITs Approved greater than or equal to 1000

HIT Approval Rate (%) for all Requesters' HITs greater than or equal to 95

Location is US

APPENDIX D

Permissions

Dear Danette,

Thank you for using the "Request a Protocol" service. This email confirms that we have received your request for a detailed version of the protocol "Childhood trauma questionnaire – short form (CTQ-SF) " in the article "Linking experiences of child sexual abuse to adult sexual intimate partner violence: the role of borderline personality features, maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation, and dissociation". We will contact the authors immediately and get back to you when we receive the authors' reply.

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact us.

Best Regards,
XXXXXXX