

**Introduction**

It remains an open question whether or not a secure attachment with God favors adolescent identity work in the same ways as secure parental attachment. The objective of this project is to determine adolescent adaptational outcomes based on the interaction of parental and God attachment models. Identity formation is important to study in the context of God as an attachment figure because it may give further understanding to the work of identity formation. If an individual has an insecure attachment with a primary parent figure, attachment with God may be used as a compensatory attachment figure, providing a more hopeful foundation for identity development. If individuals without a secure parental attachment form a secure attachment with God, we can be confident that the adolescent will have a strong ego-identity and more adaptive integration in society.

Secure working models of self and other are prerequisites for healthy adjustment. In this study the other is not a parent, but God. As such, secure internal working models of self and other where the other involves God, should favor positive adjustment. On the other extreme, in insecure and disorganized attachment with God—where internal models between the self and other are problematic—we can expect poor adjustment and adaptational outcomes. It is less certain what to make of the outcomes in mixed situations. We predict the following table with Attachment to God horizontally and Attachment with Parent vertically:

	Secure	Insecure
Secure	Positive outcomes	<b>Mixed outcomes (?)</b>
Insecure	<b>Mixed outcomes (?)</b>	Negative outcomes

We hypothesize that attachment to God attains the same adaptational advantages or disadvantages as a parental attachment figure and facilitates the developmental work of

adolescents or emerging adults. Additionally we hypothesize that a secure attachment with God predicts high levels of identity formation. We will finally test the compensatory hypothesis, which suggests that God as a secure attachment figure may compensate for disorganized attachment with a parent, in relation to adolescent identity formation.

## **Background**

Identity work is an important challenge of adolescent development. There is not a single definition of identity, but Erik Erikson has theorized a multifactorial approach to describing identity. Considered to be the most significant developmental challenge of adolescence, many components define identity as a developmental achievement. The adolescent answers the question, “who am I?” to determine the structural component and role of one’s personality. The subjective or experiential component gives a foundation for continuity within the individual. The adolescent appraises the experiences of self and past, and considers the culture’s expectations while questioning its validity (Blasi, 1988). For identity to be continuous, the adolescent must feel that life makes sense and at home in their own body. There is also an existential component—the context for asking fundamental questions about life. This component is difficult to operationalize, but tends to focus on the exploration of what life means. Exploration refers to the degree of one’s self-examination about one’s values, beliefs, goals, and the degree of exploration of various roles in pursuit of determining commitment and fidelity. Commitment refers to the possession of a stable set of values and convictions (Marcia, 1966). According to Erikson, identity is a developmental outcome with developmental implications. Resolving the identity work of adolescence hinges on previous psychosocial development while also suggesting how future, post-adolescent, challenges are resolved. Identity work gives rise to

a sense of sameness and continuity, with flexible but durable commitments and a productive integration into society.

According to Marcia (1980), “the better developed [identity] structure is, the more aware individuals appear to be of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world.” Consequently, identity achievement is associated with many positive outcomes. A coherent and synthesized sense of identity is associated with a positive self-image (Cabin, 1966; Luyckx et al. 2005), positive social relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006), and lowered degrees of internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Schwartz 2007). Consequently, individuals who have a clear sense of who they are and where they are going in their lives are more likely to feel positive about themselves and to engage in enjoyable and caring relationships with others. They are also less likely to be distressed and worried or to engage in behavior that is harmful to others. Meanwhile, a confused sense of identity is associated not only with internalizing symptoms (Schwartz et al. 2009a), but also with externalizing symptoms, illicit drug use, and sexual risk taking (Schwartz et al. 2005c, 2008).

Because identity has been shown to be so central to an adolescent’s development (Marcia, 1980; Orlofsky, Marica, & Lesser, 1973), researchers are interested in the predictors of positive adolescent identity formation. Central to the development of an adolescent’s identity is the organization and operation of the family context (Constantine, 1987; Sabatelli & Mazor, 1958). Particularly, successful resolution of the adolescent identity task is influenced by the quality of attachment to caregivers, romantic partners, and other important relationships. These relationships are formed as part of the internal working model of the self and others, whereby the individual learns how self interacts with the world (Bowlby, 1969). The individual evaluates

aspects of the situation and makes attachment plans. Attachment is an active relational process with an attachment figure. According to Bowlby (1982) it is an expression of the individual's need for closeness and security to reduce anxiety and loneliness. The quality of this attachment is found to be related to identity formation—secure attachment being associated with higher levels of identity achievement (Kroger, 2000). Specifically in adolescents, the individual's attachment to parents impacts the quality of the adolescent's self-esteem, even more so than peer attachments (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983). Furthermore, secure attachment in adolescence has been related to ego resilience and curiosity (Arend, Gove, & Srouge, 1979).

Recently, God has been identified as an attachment figure similar to the parental attachment figure (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; 1992). Kirkpatrick explains that (1) perceived relationships with God are central to the religious belief of many people; (2) the emotional bond experienced in this relationship is a form of love akin to the infant-mother relationship; and (3) beliefs about God tend to parallel characteristics of secure attachment figures. As an individual would feel comforted by their attachment figures proximity, so to God's omnipresence; as an individual maintains contact with their attachment figure, so to with God in prayer (Reed, 1978). Furthermore, Kirkpatrick has also shown God as a haven of safety since individuals often turn to God in times of stress and use prayer as a coping mechanism (Ross 1950, Duke 1977; Gibbs & Achterberg-Lawlis, 1978; O'Brien 1982). The research demonstrates that God acts as a secure base and provides the same developmental outcomes as a secure attachment.

### **Methodology**

The research project will be conducted through the use of anonymous surveys emailed to a randomized sample of students at the University of Notre Dame. We will use the Close

Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) to assess the attachment style of each participant (secure, avoidant, preoccupied, fearful). To assess attachment with God we will use a similar categorical measure developed by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) that asks participants to identify with the statement that best matches their relationship with God. We will use the Separation Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA) to assess the salient dimensions of adolescent separation individuation (Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986). Berzonsky's (1992) Identity Style Inventory (ISI) will be used to assess the success of the respondent's identity style. Finally, these scales will be compared with how the individual scores on the subscales Autonomy, Positive Relations with Others, and Purpose in Life in the Psychological Well-Being measure developed by Ryff and Keyes (1989, 1995).

### **Schedule**

Data collection will begin in November 2012 and end by March 2013. By the end of Fall Semester 2012, the Introduction and Methods sections of the thesis will be complete. Data will progressively be analyzed through the experiment and the Results and Discussion sections will be written by the end of March 2013. The final thesis will be complete in April of 2013.

### **Description of Collaboration**

This study will constitute my Senior Thesis, which will be conducted under the direction and guidance of Professor Dan Lapsley. Professor Lapsley directs the Adolescent Psychology Lab. His interests lie in adolescent identity and moral development as well as the effects of dysfunctional separation individuation. He will meet with me, along with our lab group, at least once per week and provide aid as needed with all facets of the research.

### **IRB Approval**

IRB Approval Request has been submitted for the proposed study and is pending.

## References

- Arend, R., Gove, F. L., & Sroufe, L. A. (1979). Continuity of individual adaptation from infancy to kindergarten: A predictive study of ego-resiliency and curiosity in preschoolers. *Child Development, 50*(4), 950-959. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1129319>
- Armsden, G. C., & Greenberg, M. T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16*(5), 427-454.
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*(2), 226-244. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.226>
- Blasi, A. (1988). Social science and the foundation of morality. *PsycCRITIQUES, 33*(9), 800-801. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/026009>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment*. New York, NY, US: Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 52*(4), 664-678. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01456.x>
- Cabin, S. Ego identity status: a laboratory study of the effects of stress and levels of reinforcement upon self and peer evaluations. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1966
- Constantine, L. L. (1987). Adolescent process and family organization: A model of development as a function of family paradigm. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 2*(4), 349-366.
- Duke, E. H. (1977). *Meaning in life and acceptance of death in terminally ill patients*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University.

- Gibbs, H. W., & Achterberg-Lawlis, J. (1978). Spiritual values and death anxiety: Implications for counseling with terminal cancer patients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 25*(6), 563-569. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.25.6.563>
- Greenberg, M. T., Siegel, J. M., & Leitch, C. J. (1983). The nature and importance of attachment relationships to parents and peers during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 12*(5), 373-386. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF02088721>
- Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Shaver, P. R. (1990). Attachment theory and religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 29*(3), 315-334. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1386461>
- Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Shaver, P. R. (1992). An attachment-theoretical approach to romantic love and religious belief. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18*(3), 266-275. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167292183002>
- Kroger, J. (2000). Ego identity status research in the new millennium. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 24*(2), 145-148. doi:10.1080/016502500383250
- Levine, J. B., Green, C. J. and Millon, T. (1986). The separation-individual test of adolescence. *J. Personal Assess.* 50: 123-137.
- Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Soenens, B., Beyers, W., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2005). Identity statuses based on 4 rather than 2 identity dimensions: Extending and refining Marcia's paradigm. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 34*, 605-618.
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 551-558. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0023281>
- Marcia, J. E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (pp. 159-187). New York: Wiley.

- O'Brien, M. E. (1982). Religious faith and adjustment to long-term hemodialysis. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 21, 68-80.
- Orlofsky, J. L., Marcia, J., & Lesser, I. M. (1973). Ego identity status and the intimacy vs. isolation crisis of young adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, 211-219.
- Reed, B. (1978). *The dynamics of religion: Process and movement in Christian churches*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- Ross, M. G. (1950). *Religious beliefs of youth*. New York: Association Press.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(4), 719-727, doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719
- Sabatelli, R. M., & Mazor, A. (1985). Differentiation, individuation, and identity formation: The integration of family system and individual developmental perspectives. *Adolescence*, 20(79), 619-633.
- Schwartz, S. J. (2007). The structure of identity consolidation: Multiple correlated constructs or one superordinate construct? *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 7, 27-49.
- Schwartz, S. J., Pantin, H., Prado, G., Sullivan, S., & Szapocznik, J. (2005c). Family functioning, identity, and problem behavior in Hispanic immigrant early adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 25, 392-420.



Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Wang, W., & Olthuis, J. V. (2009a). Measuring identity from and Eriksonian perspective: Two sides of the same coin? *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91, 143–154.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M., & Petherick, J. (2006). Intimacy dating goals and relationship satisfaction during adolescence and emerging adulthood: Identity formation, age and sex are moderators. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 30, 167–177.