

Attachment to God in Emerging Adulthood:  
Relationship between Dyadic Attachment, Individuation, and Identity

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## ABSTRACT

The relationships between attachment with God and dyadic attachment, separation-individuation, identity development and psychological well-being were assessed in a sample of 320 ( $M_{age}=19.45$ ; 77% Catholic) emerging adults. Dyadic attachment was measured with the Close Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ). Attachment with God was assessed through an exploratory measure modeled off the CRQ. Identity orientation was measured with the Identity Style Inventory (ISI). Results showed that attachment with God significantly predicts identity formation such that participants with a secure attachment to God had a more committed identity, above and beyond the effect of dyadic attachment. Results also indicated that attachment to God is not implicated by separation-individuation, but by dyadic attachment. Results explore a new area of research, God as an attachment figure, recently emerging in the literature. Implications for future research are drawn.

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Identity work is an important developmental challenge of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Erik Erikson is the most famous theorist of identity. For Erikson (1968), identity is a multidimensional construct that defies easy definition. At its most fundamental level identity work is an attempt to answer the question “Who am I”? But identity development has several components. For example, Erikson (1968) writes of identity as a developmental outcome in the sense that how well adolescents resolve the identity task will hinge on how well previous developmental challenges have been negotiated (e.g., trust v. mistrust, autonomy v. shame and doubt). Furthermore, the identity negotiation will determine how well an adolescent navigates future, post-adolescent developmental tasks. Identity plays a structural role in the personality such that it organizes identifications, defense mechanisms, and dispositional preferences.

Furthermore, identity is a matter of psychosocial reciprocity in the sense that an individual does not achieve identity by oneself. This means that identity is achieved when one first identifies with a set of commitments (an ideology, a vocation, a way being in the world) but then is identified in turn by people who matter. Identity choices must make sense to one’s local society or community. In this sense, identity is a social achievement as much as an individual one. Identity also provides a context to ask existential questions such as “what is the meaning of my life?” This subjective or experiential component gives a foundation for continuity within the individual (Erikson, 1968). The adolescent appraises experiences of self and past, and considers the culture’s expectations while questioning its validity (Blasi, 1988). This experiential aspect of identity is captured by continuity—continuity between the way one was in the past and what one

promises to be in the future; continuity between one's talents and a role that makes room for them in the adult role structure of society; continuity between one's self-conception and how others view the self. Identity work gives rise to a sense of sameness and continuity, with flexible but durable commitments and a productive integration into society.

### **Identity Assessment**

Although Erikson's theory is complicated, there have been some attempts to assess core aspects of his identity theory. One of the most influential attempts to measure Eriksonian identity was developed by Marcia (1966). Marcia focused on how adolescents identify their place in the adult role structure of society. What commitments are they willing to make and how actively have they explored them? For Marcia the "identity crisis" was simply a period of exploration, and one achieved identity to the extent that one has made flexible but durable commitments. On the basis of exploration and commitment, then, Marcia identified four statuses: Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure, and Diffusion. Identity achievement requires the adolescent to explore identity options and then commit to one or more of them. An individual is in the identity moratorium status when one is actively considering identity options but has not yet made a commitment. In the identity foreclosure status, the adolescent makes a commitment without exploring any options. In the identity diffusion status, the individual has avoided exploration and did not make a commitment to an identity.

In contrast to Marcia's identity status approach, Berzonsky (1989) developed a model of identity that focused on the information-processing aspects of identity formation. The Identity Style Inventory (ISI) sorts individuals based on how they make decisions. The four identity-processing categories are information orientation, normative orientation, diffuse/avoidant orientation, and commitment (Berzonsky, 1989). An information orientation reflects actively

seeking out information and reflecting upon choices. A normative orientation reflects a more automatic adoption of expectations from significant others rather than personally exploring identity alternatives. A diffuse/avoidant orientation reflects a failure to thoroughly explore identity options and instead procrastinate decisions. Commitment refers to the achievement of identity. Identity orientation is distinct from identity style.

Though Berzonsky's identity orientations are distinct from Marcia's identity styles, measures of Berzonsky's identity orientation are shown to correlate with Marcia's identity styles. For example, Pittman and colleagues (2009) showed that diffuse/avoidant orientation is negatively associated with an achievement identity status and positively associated with a diffusion identity status. A normative orientation was negatively related to moratorium identity status. An informational orientation was positively associated with achieved identity status in achievement or ideological domains, such as political beliefs, but not in interpersonal domains, such as dating preferences. Similarly, each identity-processing orientation correlates differently with commitment. Information orientation and a normative orientation correlate positively to commitment and a diffuse/avoidant orientation correlate negatively to commitment (Berzonsky, 2003). This means that adolescents with an information or normative orientation commit strongly to their identity whereas adolescents with a diffuse-avoidant orientation do not.

### **Outcomes of Identity**

By these and other measures, researchers have been able to identify the advantages of identity achievement. According to Marcia (1980), "the better developed this 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 (Marcia, 1980, Marcia & Friedman,

1970). 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 a lower frequency 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 them self 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). Among adolescents with higher anxiety, Crocetti and colleagues (2009) found a lower increase of commitments and both higher levels and higher increases in reconsidering commitment. Furthermore, Luyckx and colleagues (2008) found high commitment identity statuses (achievement and foreclosure) to have substantially higher levels of adjustment than lower committed identity outcomes (moratorium and diffusion). These studies show that being committed is linked to higher levels of well-being and psychosocial functioning.

### **Family Context**

Because identity is shown to be central to an adolescent's development (Marcia, 1980; Orlofsky, Marica, & Lesser, 1973), researchers are interested in the predictors of positive adolescent identity formation. Pivotal to the development of an adolescent's identity is the organization and operation of the family context (Constantine 1987; Sabatelli & Mazor, 1958). It is widely accepted that adolescent identity formation depends heavily on parenting style (Adams & Jones, 1983; Quintana & Lapsley, 1987) as well as communication and information

processing patterns within the family (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Identity achievement is associated with a parenting style that encourages autonomy and enhances the individuation process (Adams & Jones, 1983). Furthermore, warm and supportive parental behavior is associated with advanced identity status (Quintana & Lapsley, 1987). Grotevant and Cooper (1985) confirm that a family context of permeability and mutuality, which allows the adolescent to redefine the parent-child relationship as distinct from others, correlates with successful identity formation. Higher levels of household responsibilities and the role of individuality and connectedness are additionally significant to identity formation (Benson & Johnson, 2009). It is clearly shown that factors related to personal growth within the family are particularly instrumental in a child's identity achievement in adolescence (Moin & Inge, 2012).

Additionally, separation-individuation within the family is linked to aspects of family functioning critical to the identity work of adolescence (Constantine, 1987). Blos (1967) asserts that separation consists of a disengagement from internal, infantile images of parents as omnipotent figures of authority. Adolescents become increasingly capable of independent self-regulation and are willing to take responsibility for their actions. As they further differentiate from parents, adolescents are then able to feel a real sense of individuality and more mature relationships with parents and others emerge (Smollar & Youniss, 1989). In enmeshed families, where separation-individuation is more difficult, adolescents struggle to answer the important question "who am I?" (Erikson, 1968). In these families, parents may resent identity formation.

On the contrary, Koepke and Denissen (2012) propose that in optimal separation-individuation parents enable children to test their new self-view without simultaneously withdrawing care and support. In this way, adolescents may interpret the loosening of boundaries as a foundation to prove an emerging mature identity. Successful separation-

individuation reinforces the positive parent-child emotional bond, expressing itself in mutual respect for each other's individuality and self-disclosure (Kagitcibasi, 1996). This allows for a certain degree of interdependence, increase in emotional attachment, and a stabilization of separateness critical to identity development (Kagitcibasi, 1996; White et al., 1983; Wintre et al., 1995).

Furthermore, there is a developing consensus that successful resolution of the adolescent identity task is influenced by the quality of dyadic 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 (Bowlby, 1969). The child develops internal models of what the self is like ("I'm lovable") and what one can expect from relationships ("I can trust others") on the basis of one's first relationship with caregivers. The quality of this first attachment relationship provides a template for self-in-relationship that is carried forward across the life-course (Bowlby, 1969). 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 dyadic attachment in adolescence is related to ego resilience and curiosity (Arend, Gove, & Sroufe, 1979).

### **God as Attachment Figure**

Recently, God has been identified as an attachment figure similar to the parental attachment figure (Kirkpatrick 1994, 1998b; 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. In the sense that an individual feels comforted by their attachment figure's proximity, an individual may feel comfort from God's omnipresence. Additionally, since an individual maintains contact with their attachment figure, they may also contact God through prayer (Reed, 1978).

Furthermore, Kirkpatrick (1994) 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). Research demonstrates that for many individuals a felt attachment to God may create feelings of God as a secure base and provide the same developmental outcomes as a secure dyadic attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Additionally, as an individual may have an insecure attachment relationship with a primary caregiver, an individual may also develop an insecure attachment relationship with God (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). It is a prediction of our study that individuals with an insecure attachment to God develop similar negative outcomes as those with insecure attachment to primary caregiver. Kirkpatrick (1994) even suggests that God could be the perfect attachment figure since He transcends the human downfalls of fallibility and limitation.

### **The Present Study**

It remains an open question whether or not a secure attachment with God may also favor adolescent identity work. Secure working models of self and other are prerequisites for healthy adjustment. But if the other is not a parent but God, does the adolescent have the similar advantages in navigating identity work? Does having a relationship with God help an adolescent achieve a successful identity outcome? Furthermore, does separation-individuation have implications for the relationship between attachment to God and adolescent identity? We

hypothesize that attachment to God conveys the same adaptational advantages or disadvantages as a parental attachment figure and facilitates the work of adolescents or emerging adults in the following ways:

1. There will be a significant relationship between dyadic attachment and attachment with God, such that individuals with a secure dyadic attachment will have more secure and less insecure attachment with God.
2. Secure internal working models of self and other where the other involves God, will favor positive psychological well-being. On the other extreme, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment with God—where internal models between the self and other are problematic—will result in poor psychological well-being.
3. Secure attachment with God predicts high levels of identity formation, such that securely attached adolescents will demonstrate commitment while avoidant and anxious/ambivalent individuals will struggle to answer the question, “who am I?”

Our final hypothesis is founded on separation individuation, which when navigated successfully demonstrates positive outcomes in adolescent identity formation (Constantine, 1987). As we hypothesize attachment with God is related to identity formation, so also we expect attachment to God to be related to separation individuation.

4. Separation-individuation will predict attachment with God such that individuals who successfully navigate separation-individuation will be more likely to have a secure attachment with God.

## METHOD

### Participants

A sample of 320 emerging adults completed the research protocol. Participants were from a random sample of students at a midsized Catholic university in the American Midwest. The mean age of the sample was 19.45 years ( $SD=1.34$ ). Approximately 34% ( $n=109$ ) of the sample was freshman; 29% ( $n=93$ ) sophomores; 16% ( $n=51$ ) juniors; 20% ( $n=64$ ) college seniors; and 1% ( $n=3$ ) in 5<sup>th</sup> year or beyond. About 77% ( $n=246$ ) of the sample identified as Catholic, 13.5 % ( $n=44$ ) identified with no religious affiliation, 4.4% ( $n=14$ ) identified as Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian, 3.1% ( $n=10$ ) identified as other Christian, and the remaining 2% ( $n=6$ ) identified as Buddhist, Muslim, or other non-Christian. As one might expect from a random sample, the ethno-racial and religious composition of the sample was broadly comparable to the general student body.

### Procedure

Participants responded to self-report assessments of identity processing orientation, dyadic attachment to significant other, attachment with God, separation-individuation, and psychological well being using a secure web-based format. The participants were informed before beginning the survey that it was completely voluntary and they retained the right to withdraw at any time. After completion, students were asked to provide an address (detached from data to ensure anonymity) and mailed \$5 cash as compensation.

### Measures

*Attachment indices.* The Close Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; validated for use with young adults) is a widely used measure of general

attachment patterns. The CRQ has four paragraphs, each describing a pattern of dyadic attachment:

- a. SECURE: It is easy to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.
- b. FEARFUL: I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
- c. PREOCCUPIED: I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.
- d. DISMISSING: I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

The participants are required to endorse the one paragraph that is most self-descriptive. The distribution of attachment styles in the present study is as follows: secure, 33% ( $n=105$ ); fearful, 39% ( $n=125$ ); preoccupied, 16% ( $n=52$ ); dismissing, 12% ( $n=38$ ). After endorsing one of these classifications, participants are also asked to rate dimensionally the self-descriptiveness of each of the four attachment styles. Using a seven-point Likert scale, responses range from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Hence, the CRQ yields both a categorical attachment style score and continuous ratings of each attachment style.

There is extensive literature on the assessment of attachment classifications, necessitating numerous theoretical (eg. Cassidy & Shaver, 1999) and methodological (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) reviews. The validity of the fourfold attachment categories has been demonstrated by theoretically relevant relationships with self-concept and interpersonal functioning, with peer attachment relations, and with family functioning (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Additionally, ratings for the four attachment patterns have demonstrated moderate stability over an 8-month test-retest period (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

An exploratory measure of attachment to God, modeled on the Shaver-Hazan parental attachment measure and developed by Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1992), was implemented.

Respondents were asked to respond to the question “Which of the following statements best describes your beliefs about God and your relationship with God?” by choosing one of the following response alternatives:

- a. SECURE: God is generally warm and responsive to me; He always seems to know when to be supportive and protective of me, and when to let me make my own mistakes. My relationship with God is always comfortable, and I am very happy and satisfied with it.
- b. AVOIDANT: God is generally impersonal, distant, and often seems to have little or no interest in my personal affairs and problems. I frequently have the feeling that He doesn't care very much about me, or that he might not like me.
- c. ANXIOUS/AMBIVALENT: God seems to be inconsistent in His reactions to me; He sometimes seems very warm and responsive to my needs, but sometimes not. I'm sure that He loves me and cares about me, but sometimes He seems to show it in ways I don't really understand.

This measure of attachment to God was utilized by Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1992) to conceptualize personal religion, like romantic love, in terms of attachment theory. The study showed that security of attachment to God was associated with security of adult attachment. Additionally, attachment to God was strongly and significantly related to mental and physical health outcomes.

After endorsing the most self-descriptive attachment to God classification, participants are also asked to rate dimensionally the self-descriptiveness of each of the four attachment styles. Using a seven-point Likert scale, responses range from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Hence, the attachment to God scale yields both a categorical score as well as continuous ratings of each attachment style. We grouped the participants based on selected attachment style

and used dimensional ratings as an additional indicator. The distribution of attachment to God styles in the present study is as follows: secure, 46% ( $n=147$ ); avoidant, 13% ( $n=41$ ); anxious/ambivalent, 41% ( $n=132$ ).

*Identity.* The revised Identity Style Inventory (ISI) was used to assess identity orientation (Berzonsky, 1992). The assessment has four ten-item subscales representing identity orientation: informational, normative, diffuse/avoidant, and commitment. Participants indicate on a five-point dimensional rating from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*) the self-descriptiveness of each statement. In the present study, the informational orientation subscale (e.g. “*I’ve spent a great deal of time thinking seriously about what I should do with my life*”) had internal consistency  $\alpha = 0.67$ . The normative orientation subscale (e.g. “*I prefer to deal with situations where I can rely on social norms and standards*”) had internal consistency  $\alpha = 0.67$ . The internal consistency for the diffuse/avoidant orientation subscale (e.g. “*I’m not really thinking about my future now; it’s still a long way off*”) was  $\alpha = 0.67$ . And finally, the commitment orientation subscale (e.g. “*I know what I want to do with my future*”) had internal consistency  $\alpha = 0.77$ . Berzonsky (1992) additionally provides reliability and convergent validity data in a larger sample ( $N=618$ ): diffuse/avoidant orientation,  $\alpha = 0.76$ ; informational orientation,  $\alpha = 0.70$ ; normative orientation,  $\alpha = 0.64$ ; commitment orientation,  $\alpha = 0.71$ .

*Separation-Individuation.* Participants completed three subscales of the Separation Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA; Levine et al., 1986). Items are scored on a five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*always true*) to 5 (*never true*). The Separation Anxiety subscale consists of 13 items that refer to a strong fear of abandonment and loss of important others (e.g. “*I worry about being disapproved of by others*”). In the present study, internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.75$ . The Engulfment Anxiety subscale consists of 7 items that reflect over independence

(e.g. *“I feel my parent’s roles restrict my freedom too much”*). In the present study, internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.82$ . The Healthy Separation subscale is comprised of 7 items (eg. *“Even when I am very close to another person, I feel I can be myself”*) and reflects adaptive separation-individuation. In the present study internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.66$ .

The Dysfunctional Individuation Scale (DIS) consists of 39 items that reflect difficulty in self-other differentiation as well as splitting and relation disturbances, manifested in terms of coercion, concerns about object constancy, and tolerating aloneness (Christensen & Wilson, 1985). More recently Lapsley and colleagues (2001) have reduced the assessment to a single factor 19-item scale. It reports strong reliability ( $\alpha = 0.88$  to  $0.93$ ) and evidence of convergent, discriminant, and concurrent validity. Sample items include *“People need to maintain control over others to keep them from being harmed,”* and *“I feel that people change whenever I get to know them.”* Items are rated along a 10-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more dysfunction in separation-individuation. In the present study internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.91$ .

*Psychological Well-Being: Purpose in Life.* Ryff’s (1989b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) purpose in life scale measures participants’ sense of direction, and whether they have set goals and aims for their lives. Participants rated items on a 7-point dimensional scale with higher scores indicating a greater sense of having purpose in life (20-item;  $\alpha = 0.88$ ). A sample item from the shortened 3-item scale is *“I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.”* In the present study, internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.45$ .

*Psychological Well-Being: Autonomy.* The Autonomy scale measures participants’ independence, and whether they are concerned with the expectations and evaluations of others. Participants rated items on a 7-point dimensional scale with higher scores indicating a greater sense of having autonomy (20 item;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ). A sample item from the shortened 3-item scale is

*“I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are very different from what other people think.”*

In the present study, internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.58$ .

*Psychological Well-Being: Positive Relation with Others.* The Positive Relation with Others scales measures participants' capability for strong and trusting relationships. Participants rated items on a 7-point dimensional scale with higher scores indicating a greater sense of having positive relations with others (20 item;  $\alpha = 0.88$ ). A sample item from the shortened 3-item scale is “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.” In the present study, internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.63$ .

## RESULTS

### **Plan of Analysis**

The first set of analyses assessed the association among the variables examined in this study. For dimensional variables we report patterns of correlation to determine bivariate relationships between attachment with God and indices of individuation, identity orientation, and psychological well-being. For categorical variables we report a chi-square test of the association between dyadic attachment and attachment with God. We next examined group differences between the four dyadic attachments (secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing) with respect to secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment with God. Three one-way between subjects analyses (ANOVA) with dyadic attachment as the grouping variable and attachment with God as the outcome variable are conducted. Three linear regression analyses next test the significance of attachment with God as a predictor for identity orientation, while controlling for dyadic attachment style. We end by testing the significance of separation individuation as a predictor for attachment to God.



### Correlational Analyses

We report patterns of correlation in Table 1 to determine bivariate relationships between attachment with God and indices of individuation, identity orientation, and psychological well-being. As one can see from Table 1, there is a small but statistically significant negative correlation of secure attachment to God with engulfment anxiety ( $r = -0.11, p < .05$ ). More secure attachment with God was associated with less feelings of engulfment anxiety. Additionally, avoidant attachment to God is negatively correlated with healthy separation ( $r = -0.23, p < .05$ ) and positively correlated with separation anxiety ( $r = 0.16, p < .05$ ), engulfment anxiety ( $r = 0.23, p < .05$ ), and dysfunctional separation-individuation ( $r = 0.22, p < .05$ ). This means that more avoidant attachment with God is associated with less healthy separation-individuation and greater separation anxiety, engulfment anxiety, and dysfunctional individuation. Anxious/ambivalent attachment to God is positively correlated with separation anxiety ( $r = 0.14, p < .05$ ) such that a more anxious/ambivalent attachment to God is associated with more separation anxiety.

We also see from Table 1 that there is a positive correlation between secure attachment to God and normative orientation ( $r = 0.45, p < .05$ ) as well as commitment ( $r = 0.25, p < .05$ ). Subjects who have a more secure attachment to God tended to have a more normative orientation to identity as well as greater commitment. On the contrary, there is a negative correlation between avoidant attachment with God and normative orientation ( $r = -0.24, p < .05$ ) as well as commitment ( $r = -0.24, p < .05$ ). This means that more avoidant attachment with God is associated with more normative orientation to identity and lesser commitment. Additionally, avoidant attachment to God was positively correlated with diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity ( $r = 0.20, p < .05$ ) such that participants with more avoidant attachment to God

demonstrated a stronger diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity. However, diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity is negatively correlated with anxious/ambivalent attachment with God ( $r = -0.16, p < .05$ ). Participant who had a more anxious/ambivalent attachment to God had a lesser diffuse/avoidant orientation.

As shown in Table 1, secure and anxious/avoidant attachment with God did not correlate significantly with the psychological well-being scales. Avoidant attachment to God, however, correlates negatively with purpose in life ( $r = -0.24, p < .05$ ) and positive relation with others ( $r = -0.26, p < .05$ ). Participants with a more avoidant attachment to God demonstrated less sense of purpose in life and less positive relations with others.

**Table 1:**  
*Correlation Matrix*

	Attachment with God		
	Secure	Avoidant	Anxious/Ambivalent
<b>Separation-Individuation</b>			
Separation-Anxiety	0.01	0.16*	0.14*
Engulfment Anxiety	-0.11*	0.23*	-0.03
Healthy Separation	0.07	-0.23*	-0.01
Dysfunctional Individuation	-0.07	0.22*	0.03
<b>Identity Style Inventory</b>			
Information Orientation	0.06	0.06	0.06
Normative Orientation	0.45*	-0.24*	-0.02
Diffuse/Avoidant Orientation	-0.06	0.20*	-0.16*
Commitment	0.25*	-0.24*	-0.02
<b>Psychological Well-Being</b>			
Purpose in Life	0.09	-0.24*	0.03
Autonomy	-0.02	-0.07	-0.07
Positive Relation with Others	0.30	-0.26*	0.02

\* $p < .05$

### Test of Independence

In order to examine the hypothesis that dyadic attachment and attachment with God are not independent variables we conducted a chi-square test. The categorical association between dyadic attachment and attachment to God is assessed. To decrease the likelihood of having categories with expected  $p$ -values  $< .05$ , we combined avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment with God into one category: insecure attachment with God. Similarly for dyadic

attachment, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing styles were combined to create one insecure dyadic attachment category. Table 2 reports the cross-tabulated frequencies of attachment to God and dyadic attachment. The results indicate a significant chi-square association between dyadic attachment and attachment with God ( $\chi^2 = 23.6, N = 320, p < .05$ ). Participants with a secure dyadic attachment were more likely to have a secure attachment with God than participants with an insecure dyadic attachment style. Though we cannot say much about the nature of the relationship, dyadic attachment and attachment to God are clearly not independent constructs.

**Table 2:**  
*Dyadic Attachment X Attachment with God*

	Secure attachment with God	Insecure attachment with God
<b>Secure Dyadic Attachment</b>	N=65	N=53
<b>Insecure Dyadic Attachment</b>	N=80	N=122

$\chi^2 = 23.6, N = 320, p < .05$

### Test of Means

In order to further assess the non-independent relationship between dyadic attachment and attachment with God, we tested whether attachment with God would vary among dyadic attachment conditions. To examine the hypothesis that individuals with a secure dyadic attachment will have a more secure and less insecure attachment with God, we first examined possible group mean differences between the four dyadic attachments (secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing) with respect to secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment to God. Table 3 reports the means for these results. We conducted three one-way between subjects analyses (ANOVA) with dyadic attachment as the grouping variable and dimensional rating of

attachment with God as the outcome variable. In the first ANOVA, we test group differences of the four dyadic attachment categories among participants with secure attachment to God. There was a significant mean difference between secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing dyadic attachment among secure attachment to God ( $F(3, 318) = 3.17, p = 0.02$ ). Although the Tukey HSD test demonstrates no significant individual differences between dyadic attachment groups, we can see from the means in Table 3 that more participants with a secure attachment to God had secure and preoccupied dyadic attachment than fearful and dismissing dyadic attachment.

The second ANOVA tested group differences of the four dyadic attachment categories among participants with avoidant attachment to God. There is a significant mean difference between secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing dyadic attachment among avoidant attachment with God ( $F(3, 319) = 3.22, p = 0.023$ ). Tukey's HSD test determined significant individual differences among the avoidant attachment with God group. Participants with a secure dyadic attachment demonstrate a less avoidant attachment with God than participants with a fearful dyadic attachment ( $p = 0.01$ ).

The third ANOVA tested group differences of the four dyadic attachment categories among participants with anxious/ambivalent attachment to God. There is a significant mean difference between secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing dyadic attachment among anxious/ambivalent attachment with God ( $F(3, 318) = 6.46, p = 0.0003$ ). Tukey's HSD test determined significant individual differences among the avoidant attachment to God group. Participants with a preoccupied dyadic attachment had a more anxious/ambivalent attachment with God than participants with a secure dyadic attachment ( $p = .0003$ ). Participants with a preoccupied dyadic attachment also had a more anxious/ambivalent attachment with God than participants with a fearful dyadic attachment ( $p = 0.009$ ). Additionally, participants with a

preoccupied dyadic attachment had a more anxious/ambivalent attachment with God than participants with a dismissing dyadic attachment ( $p = 0.003$ ). Hence, participants with a preoccupied dyadic attachment demonstrated a more anxious/ambivalent attachment to God than every other dyadic attachment group.

**Table 3:**

*Mean group differences of dyadic attachment with respect to attachment with God*

	<b>Dyadic Attachment</b>			
	Secure <i>M</i>	Fearful <i>M</i>	Preoccupied <i>M</i>	Dismissing <i>M</i>
<b>Attachment with God</b>				
Secure*	4.71	4.14	4.85	4.14
Avoidant**	2.12 <sup>1</sup>	2.76 <sup>1</sup>	2.37	2.50
Anxious/ Ambivalent***	3.84 <sup>2</sup>	4.10 <sup>2</sup>	5.07 <sup>2</sup>	3.78 <sup>2</sup>

*Note.* Means that share a common superscript are significant different from each other ( $p < .05$ )

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

In order to examine the hypothesis that individuals with a secure dyadic attachment will have more positive psychological well-being than individuals with insecure attachment to God, we tested whether attachment with God would vary among three psychological well-being conditions. Three one-way between subjects ANOVAs were conducted to compare mean differences in attachment with God on the Purpose in Life, Autonomy, and Positive Relation with Others subscales of psychological well-being. We consolidated attachment with God from three categories to two: secure attachment with God and insecure attachment with God (avoidant and anxious/ambivalent combined). There is a significant mean difference between attachment with God groups along the measure of Positive Relation with Others ( $F(1, 319) = 5.73, p = .018$ ). From the comparison of means in Table 4, we can interpret that participants with a secure attachment to God had more positive relations with others than did participants with an insecure attachment to God. There is no significant group difference between attachment with God groups along the measures of Purpose in Life and Autonomy.

**Table 4:***Mean group differences of psychological well-being with respect to attachment with God*

	Psychological Well-Being		
	Positive Relation with Others*	Purpose in Life	Autonomy
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
<b>Attachment with God</b>			
Secure	15.99 <sup>1</sup>	16.86	15.16
Insecure	15.03 <sup>1</sup>	16.34	15.10

*Note.* Means that share a common superscript are significantly different from each other ( $p < .05$ )

\* $p < .05$

### Linear Regression

The set of linear regression analyses examined orientation to identity as a criterion variable, predicted by secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment with God. We controlled for dyadic attachment in order to determine the additional predictive significance of attachment with God beyond dyadic attachment. In the first analysis, normative orientation is the criterion variable. Results indicate that attachment with God explains a significant proportion of variance in normative orientation,  $R^2 = 0.25$ ,  $F(6, 305) = 16.69$ ,  $p < .001$ . As we see in Table 5, a secure attachment with God significantly predicts normative orientation such that participants with a more secure attachment to God demonstrate a more normative orientation to identity. Additionally, an avoidant attachment with God significantly predicts normative orientation such that participants with a more avoidant attachment to God demonstrate a less normative orientation to identity.

**Table 5:**  
*Linear regression predicting identity orientation*

	Identity Orientation								
	Normative <sup>1</sup>			Diffuse/Avoidant <sup>2</sup>			Commitment <sup>3</sup>		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
<b>Controlled</b>									
Intercept	27.1	19.33***	< .001	23.30	14.99***	< .001	37.63	20.87***	< .001
Dyadic Attachment	-0.47	-0.87	0.38	1.50	2.55*	0.01	0.62	0.91	0.37
<b>Attachment with God</b>									
Secure	0.87	4.66***	< .001	0.33	1.62	0.11	0.47	1.97*	0.05
Avoidant	-0.39	-2.25*	0.03	0.81	4.18***	< .001	-0.74	-3.28**	0.001
Anxious/Ambivalent	-0.09	-0.59	0.55	-0.44	-2.69**	0.007	-0.25	-1.32	0.19

Note. <sup>1</sup>:  $R^2=0.25$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.24$ , ( $F=16.69$  on 6 and 305 DF),  $p < .001$ , <sup>2</sup>:  $R^2=0.10$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.08$ , ( $F=5.77$  on 6 and 304 DF),  $p < .001$ , <sup>3</sup>:  $R^2=0.11$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.10$ , ( $F=6.45$  on 6 and 307 DF),  $p < .001$   
\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

The second analysis examined the association between attachment with God and information orientation to identity. Attachment to God does not explain a significant proportion of variance in information orientation,  $R^2= 0.02$ ,  $F(6, 305) = 1.14$ ,  $p = 0.34$ . Attachment with God, then, is not a predictor of information orientation to identity.

In the third analysis, diffuse/avoidant orientation is the criterion variable. Results indicate that attachment to God explains a significant proportion of variance in diffuse/avoidant orientation,  $R^2= 0.10$ ,  $F(6, 304) = 5.77$ ,  $p < .001$ . As we see in Table 5, an avoidant attachment to God is a positive significant predictor of diffuse/avoidant orientation such that participants who have a more avoidant attachment to God demonstrate a more diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity. Additionally, an anxious/ambivalent attachment to God is a negative significant predictor of diffuse/avoidant orientation such that participants who have a more anxious/ambivalent attachment to God demonstrate a less diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity.

In the final linear regression of this set, the criterion variable was commitment. Attachment to God explains a significant proportion of variance in commitment to identity,  $R^2= 0.11$ ,  $F(6, 307) = 6.45$ ,  $p < .001$ . As seen in Table 5, secure attachment with God is a positive significant predictor of commitment such that participants with secure attachment to God

demonstrate more commitment to identity. In addition, results show that avoidant attachment with God is a negative significant predictor of commitment such that participants with avoidant attachment to God demonstrate less commitment to identity. Anxious/ambivalent attachment to God is not a statistically significant predictor of commitment. Furthermore, dyadic attachment is not a significant predictor of commitment though attachment with God did prove as a significant predictor.

To test our hypothesis that separation-individuation will predict attachment with God, we conducted a linear regression to assess attachment with God as a criterion variable, predicted by four indices of separation-individuation. We control for dyadic attachment. In the first analysis, secure attachment with God was the criterion variable. Results indicate that separation-individuation accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in secure attachment to God,  $R^2 = 0.05$ ,  $F(7, 298) = 2.07$ ,  $p = .04$ . However as we see in Table 6, secure attachment with God is not specifically predicted by separation-individuation.

The next analysis examines the association between avoidant attachment with God and separation-individuation. Results indicate that separation-individuation accounts for a significant proportion of the variance in avoidant attachment with God,  $R^2 = 0.11$ ,  $F(7, 299) = 5.07$ ,  $p < .001$ . As we see in Table 6, avoidant attachment with God is predicted by engulfment anxiety such that participants with greater engulfment anxiety demonstrate more avoidant attachment with God,  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t(299) = 2.87$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . Avoidant attachment with God is also predicted by healthy separation such that participants with more healthy separation demonstrate less avoidant attachment with God,  $\beta = -0.07$ ,  $t(299) = -2.69$ ,  $p = 0.007$ .

In the third and final linear regression analysis, we examine the association between anxious/ambivalent attachment with God and separation-individuation. Results indicate that



separation-individuation accounts for a significant proportion of the variance in anxious/ambivalent attachment to God,  $R^2= 0.04$ ,  $F(7, 298) = 2.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . However as we see in Table 6, anxious/avoidant attachment with God is not specifically predicted by separation-individuation.

**Table 6:**  
*Linear regression predicting attachment with God*

	Attachment with God								
	Secure <sup>1</sup>			Avoidant <sup>2</sup>			Anxious/Ambivalent <sup>3</sup>		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Intercept	3.24	2.63**	0.009	2.92	2.83**	0.005	2.87	2.23*	0.03
<b>Dyadic Attachment (control)</b>									
Fearful	-0.59	-2.22*	0.03	0.38	1.67	0.09	0.11	0.43	0.67
Preoccupied	-0.03	-0.12	0.91	0.10	0.37	0.71	0.96	2.89**	0.004
Dismissing	-0.56	-1.71	0.09	0.35	1.28	0.20	-0.07	-0.22	0.83
<b>Separation-Individuation</b>									
Dysfunctional Individuation	-0.001	-0.21	0.83	0.004	0.90	0.37	-0.001	-0.15	0.88
Separation Anxiety	0.03	1.45	0.15	0.01	0.58	0.56	0.03	1.35	0.18
Engulfment Anxiety	-0.03	-1.68	0.09	0.05	2.87**	0.004	-0.01	-0.50	0.62
Healthy Separation	0.04	1.26	0.21	-0.07	-2.69**	0.007	0.01	0.34	0.74

Note. <sup>1</sup>:  $R^2=0.05$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.02$ , ( $F=2.07$  on 7 and 298 DF),  $p = 0.04$ , <sup>2</sup>:  $R^2=0.11$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.09$ , ( $F=5.07$  on 7 and 299 DF),  $p < .001$ , <sup>3</sup>:  $R^2=0.06$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.04$ , ( $F=2.59$  on 7 and 298 DF),  $p = 0.007$

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between attachment with God and patterns of identity development among a university sample of emerging adults. This aim was predicated on the assumption that attachment with God and dyadic attachment would be closely related insofar as the ego developmental challenges of adolescence and emerging adulthood normally entail the revision of internal working models of the self and of others. We also examined the relative contribution of separation-individuation and psychological well-being, and we attempted to provide the first evidence concerning the relationship between attachment with God and identity development.

Results for the first research question show that dyadic attachment and attachment with God are not independent constructs. There is an association between dyadic attachment and

attachment with God. As expected, participants with a secure dyadic attachment were more likely to have a secure attachment with God than participants with an insecure dyadic attachment pattern. Similarly, participants with an insecure dyadic attachment were more likely to have an insecure attachment with God than participants with a secure dyadic attachment.

This pattern was also evident in ANOVA tests. There was a significant mean difference between secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing dyadic attachment among participants with a secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment with God. Participants with a secure dyadic attachment demonstrated a less avoidant attachment with God than participants with a fearful dyadic attachment. Furthermore, participants with a preoccupied dyadic attachment demonstrated a more anxious/ambivalent attachment with God than participants with a secure, fearful, or dismissing dyadic attachment.

It seems, then, that emerging adults with a positive view of self in relationship to others, where it is easy to become emotionally close and depend on others and have others depend on them (secure dyadic attachment), are more able to see themselves as positive in relationship with God and able to depend on Him. It also seems that emerging adults with a negative view of self in relationship with others, who want to be emotionally close but feel they are not valued by others (preoccupied dyadic attachment), tend to see God as inconsistent and have a difficult time understanding His love (anxious/ambivalent attachment with God).

This bivariate relationship between dyadic attachment and attachment with God is congruent with recent research that suggests there is a close relationship between attachment with others and attachment with God. According to Kirkpatrick (1994), for example, felt attachment to God may create feelings of God as a secure base and provide the same developmental outcomes as a secure attachment to others. The present data extends this

conclusion by documenting a similar relationship between dyadic attachment and attachment to God. The sense of security in dyadic attachment seems to be associated with the security of one's attachment with God. Dyadic attachment that is marked by a negative view of self in relationship is associated with patterns of insecure attachment to God. Similarly, a positive view of self in relationship is associated with secure attachment to God. However, the bivariate nature of this relationship precludes any casual interpretation of the direction of effect.

A second aim of this study was to examine the contribution of attachment with God to psychological well-being. Results indicated that there was a significant mean difference between the secure and insecure attachment to God groups along the measure of positive relation with others. As there was no significant difference between attachment with God groups in purpose in life nor autonomy, it seems that attachment with God does not differ the individual's psychological well-being in these ways. However, participants with a secure attachment to God did have more positive relations with others than did participants with an insecure attachment to God. This pattern was also evident in correlational analyses. Avoidant (an insecure attachment pattern) attachment with God was negatively correlated with positive relation with others and purpose in life ( $p < .05$ ). It seems, then, that emerging adults with a negative view of self in relationship to God, who feel He is impersonal and doesn't care about them (avoidant attachment with God), tend have less positive relations with others and less sense of purpose in their life.

Although much research has demonstrated the positive outcomes of adolescent religiosity, little research has explored the association between the quality of a specific attachment relationship with God and psychological outcomes. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) suggest that an insecure attachment with God may have similar negative outcomes as an insecure attachment with primary caregiver. The present data extends this research by documenting the

association of specific attachment to God patterns and specific psychological outcomes. The sense of security in attachment with God seems to be associated with psychological well-being. Attachment with God that is marked by impersonal and uncaring feelings is associated with poor relations with others and less life direction. Similarly, attachment with God that is marked by God as responsive and protective is associated with positive relations with others and a greater sense of purpose in life. The bivariate nature of this relationship precludes any casual interpretation of the direction of effect.

The third purpose of this study was to examine the contribution of attachment with God as a predictor of identity formation. Results indicated that attachment with God predicted a significant proportion of variance in normative orientation, diffuse/avoidant orientation, and commitment. Both secure and avoidant attachment with God significantly predicted normative orientation to identity. Participants who feel God is responsive to and protective of them (secure attachment with God), tended to automatically adopt expectations from significant others rather than personally exploring identity alternatives (normative orientation). Participants who feel that God is impersonal and doesn't care (avoidant attachment with God), tended not to automatically adopt expectations from significant others (less normative orientation). Instead, avoidant attachment with God significantly predicted diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity. These participants with an avoidant attachment to God, tended to procrastinate making identity decisions and fail to thoroughly explore identity options (diffuse/avoidant orientation).

Anxious/ambivalent attachment with God also predicted diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity, but in the opposite way. Participants with an anxious/ambivalent attachment with God, who tend to see Him as inconsistent and have a difficult time understanding God's love, were less likely to procrastinate making identity decisions (less diffuse/avoidant orientation). Finally,

secure and avoidant attachment with God predicted commitment in identity. Participants with a positive view of self in relationship with God, who feel that God is responsive to and protective of them, demonstrated more knowledge of what they wanted to do in the future (commitment). In contrast, participants with an avoidant attachment to God, who feel God is impersonal and doesn't care about them, demonstrated less commitment in identity. These results were found controlling for dyadic attachment in order to determine the additional predictive significance of attachment with God beyond dyadic attachment.

The above patterns regarding attachment with God and identity orientation were also evident in correlational analyses. Secure attachment with God was positively correlated with normative orientation to identity and commitment ( $p < .05$ ). Avoidant attachment with God was negatively correlated with normative orientation and commitment, but positively correlated with diffuse/avoidant orientation to identity ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, anxious/ambivalent attachment with God was negatively correlated with diffuse avoidant orientation ( $p < .05$ ).

It seems, then, that emerging adults who view God as responsive and protective generally have a more committed identity, while emerging adults with a view of God as impersonal and distant generally have a less committed identity. The pathway of identity differs by attachment to God as well. Emerging adults with a secure attachment with God, generally refrain from thoroughly exploring identity alternatives and instead automatically adopt the expectations of significant others (normative orientation). In contrast, emerging adults with an avoidant attachment to God, do not automatically adopt the expectations of significant others. However it also seems that these individuals do not thoroughly explore identity options and instead procrastinate making identity decisions (diffuse/avoidant orientation). These results hold true

above and beyond the dyadic attachment predictor, demonstrating that attachment with God is a significantly different predictor of identity orientation.

There has been research that dyadic attachment is a predictor of identity formation and psychological well-being (Arend, Gove, & Sroufe, 1979; Kroger, 2000). Research has also documented the contributions of attachment with God on developmental outcomes. Miner (2009) found significant effects of attachment with God on the prediction of positive adjustment above the effects of child-parent attachments. Other analyses showed that women with secure attachment to God experienced reduced levels of risk factors for developing an eating disorder (Homan & Boyatzis, 2010). Attachment with God is also significantly related to several mental health outcomes such as depression and life satisfaction (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992).

Similarly, research in the past decade has become increasingly interested in the relationship between faith, spirituality, and religiosity for the development of identity. For example, Gebelt and colleagues (2009) found that stronger faith and spiritual exploration was related to information orientation to identity while normative orientation was related to stronger faith and less value placed on religious doubts. Furthermore, Griffith & Griggs (2001) offer a religious identity model based on Erikson's notion of identity formation and suggest religious identity status can provide direction and guidance for therapists who wish to integrate spirituality in their practice.

The present results in our study extend this research by documenting the association between attachment with God and identity orientation. The results suggest that attachment with God is a predictor of identity formation. Attachment with God that is marked by God as responsive and protective seems to favor identity commitment whereas attachment with God that is marked by the sense of an impersonal and uncaring God, seems to hinder identity

commitment. Furthermore, a secure attachment with God seems to predict conforming behavior to the expectations of significant others. In contrast, avoidant attachment with God seems to predict neither conformity nor exploring identity alternatives, but instead procrastination of identity decisions.

The fourth and final aim of this study was to examine the contribution of separation-individuation to attachment with God. Results indicated that separation-individuation did determine a significant proportion in the variance of attachment with God. However, only two subscales of the separation-individuation test were found to be significantly associated with attachment to God. Participants with engulfment anxiety, who feel burdened by overly intimate relationships, demonstrated a self in relationship with God marked by the sense of God as impersonal and distant (avoidant attachment with God). In contrast, participants with more healthy separation, having an adaptive balance of expectations between self and other, demonstrated less avoidant attachment with God.

Similar patterns were also found in correlational analyses. Secure attachment with God was negatively correlated with engulfment anxiety ( $p < .05$ ). Avoidant attachment with God was positively correlated with separation anxiety, engulfment anxiety, and dysfunctional individuation while negatively correlated with healthy separation ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, anxious/ambivalent attachment with God was positively correlated with separation anxiety ( $p < .05$ ). It seems, then, that though separation-individuation is associated with attachment to God, attachment to God does not seem to be predicted by the individuation process. Rather, attachment with God is rooted in the attachment system (and hence the predictive power of dyadic attachment) and does not implicate other development processes such as individuation.

The implications of the present study pertain to the significant relationship between attachment with God and identity formation. The results suggest that the quality of attachment with God is important, beyond the quality of dyadic attachment, for identity formation in emerging adulthood. This study adds to our understanding of identity formation, a critical piece of an individual's development that has implications across the life-course. Because the present study documents that a secure attachment with God predicts normative orientation and identity commitment, we can start to explore the pathway of identity development as it pertains to an individual's relationship with God. Normative orientation to identity suggests an identity processing style with a conforming attitude. Individuals with a normative orientation automatically adopt the expectations of significant others and do not thoroughly explore alternatives. It makes intuitive sense, then, that emerging adults with a secure attachment to God are more likely to conform to the expectations of that relationship—specifically, religious affiliation. But despite lacking a thorough exploration, these emerging adults commit to an identity.

Contrary to expectations that thorough exploration benefits identity formation, individuals with an avoidant attachment to God predicted less normative orientation (and consequently, greater exploration) also had less commitment. Instead, avoidant attachment with God positively predicted diffuse/avoidant orientation. This means that individuals with an avoidant attachment to God may explore identity options but procrastinate making any identity decisions. Thus we can infer that emerging adults with an avoidant attachment to God tend to be non-conformists yet ignore making decisions and hence have a less committed identity, while those with a secure attachment to God tend to be conformists with a more committed identity.



This new knowledge may help clinicians who have clients with a negative view of God better understand the roots of a client's identity confusion and poor psychological outcomes.

Several limitations of this study deserve monitoring. First, the non-experimental nature of this project precludes any definitive statement regarding the direction of effect. For example, we are tempted to say on theoretical grounds that it is secure attachment with God that encourages identity commitment. Yet it is possible that is normative orientation and commitment to identity that encourages security of attachment with God. In addition, although the data follow theoretical explorations, due to the new nature of these topics in the literature, it is desirable to examine the relationship among these constructs with a wider selection sample. More studies with a culturally and religiously diverse sample are needed. Third, we used an exploratory measure to assess attachment with God. Though Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1992) used the test to report significant results, it is an ongoing project to confirm construct validation. Furthermore, constructs in this study were measured with self-reports and shortened to keep the length of the questionnaire brief. Future research will need to supplement these findings with additionally sources of information regarding the attachment background of participants. Future research will also need to use the full version of the various subscales to better ensure internal consistency. Finally, longitudinal studies are desirable to examine temporal stability of attachment with God classification and to chart the identity development process over time.

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