Religion as Attachment: The Godin Award Lecture

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Abstract

In this presentation, I delineate five refinements that I and my associates have introduced during the last decade to the literature on religion and spirituality from an attachment-theory perspective. First, I describe the principle of social correspondence as an addition to the idea that religiousness reflects generalizing working models of attachment. Second, I focus on what we have learned from studying implicit processes and utilizing experimental designs in religion-as-attachment research. Third, I describe results from research projects that have used developmentally validated attachment assessments, such as the Adult Attachment Interview. Fourth, I emphasize the need for engaging a wider developmental range in religion-as-attachment research and sum up what we have found using non-adult samples. Finally, I argue for employing a wider research perspective on the attachment-religion/spirituality connection than the central parameters of an attachment framework would suggest, by considering possible mediators between attachment and religious or spiritual outcomes.

Keywords

attachment; internal working models; the Adult Attachment Interview; religion/spirituality; absorption

"There is a crack, a crack, in everything,
That's how the light gets in."
(Leonard Cohen, "The Future")

The research on attachment and religion in which I have been engaged for more than a decade, and for which I am now the grateful recipient of the Godin Prize could not have been undertaken had it not been for a few individuals who first mapped out the territory. I would like to begin by honouring these people while at the same time offering an introduction to attachment theory and its original application to religion. In the main section, I will give an overview of why and how I have studied attachment and religion in the particular ways I have. This section is divided into five parts, each of which exemplifies what we have found in our research. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks and describe two studies that we have not yet completed.

A Tribute to John Bowlby and Other Founding Figures of Attachment Theory and Research

In order to understand the attachment-religion connection, we need to consider what is meant by "attachment figures" and "attachment relationships". Bowlby (1982/1969, 1973) and his collaborator Mary Ainsworth (1985) noted that attachment relationships are strong and enduring bonds of affection that manifest themselves in the selective maintenance of proximity by the attached person—usually a child—to his or her caregiver, who serves as a safe haven during distress and a secure base during exploration of the environment. Used in these ways, the attachment figure is implicitly perceived as stronger and more knowledgeable by the attached person.

It is important to note as well that, although immediate physical proximity is at first an important component of attachment, later on it normally becomes far less of an issue. Partly because of this developmental shift, a psychological sense of "felt security" has been suggested as a more viable criterion for attachment in older individuals (Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

According to Bowlby (1982/1969), the attachment behavioural system was naturally selected over the course of evolution because it potentiated gene survival in our evolutionary environments by protecting offspring from natural dangers. Consequently, the attachment system is activated by natural "clues to danger" (e.g., separation from the attachment figure, physical illness, or pain) and terminated by "clues to safety" (most notably, physical contact with the attachment figure).

Bowlby (1982/1969, 1973) maintained that early interactions with the attachment figure lay the foundation for what he termed "internal working models" (IWMs) of self and others in relationships. IWMs are the templates from early experience that guide our perception, expectations, and behaviours in future relationships. A factor in long-term adult pair-bonds, the attachment system is thus active from cradle to grave (Bowlby, 1973, 1980).

What has been so unusual about attachment theory is that a "deep" theory regarding normative processes was developed in close synchrony with a focus on individual differences and a massive empirical research program, which included the development of standardized assessment methods to assess such attachment-related individual variations.

For our purposes, the most important distinction is between secure and insecure attachment. According to the theory, at the core of secure attachment (typifying about 60 to 70% of normal samples) is a positive and coherent set of working models. This condition manifests itself in a behavioural balance between attachment and exploration in infants (Ainsworth, Waters, Blehar, & Wall, 1978) and in linguistic coherence in discussions of attachment-related memories in adults (Main, Goldwyn, & Hesse, 2003).

Insecure attachment (about 30 to 40% of normal samples) is often subdivided into three patterns. We need not be concerned with these distinctions here, except to note the assumption of a negative and incoherent set of working models at the core of insecure attachment (see Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Individual differences in attachment are predicted primarily by aspects of caregiving, most notably the caregiver's sensitivity to the child's signals (De Wolff & Van IJzendoorn, 1997).

A Tribute to Lee Kirkpatrick for the Attachment-Religion Connection

In my view, Lee Kirkpatrick (e.g., 2005) who reviewed more than a hundred years of research and thinking in the psychology of religion, performed a masterly feat, showing that many important findings accord well with an attachment-theory perspective. More specifically, he has made a convincing case for the idea that the perceived relationships between believers and God often tend to meet the established criteria for characterizing attachment relationships. For example, Kirkpatrick (2005) has reviewed findings showing that believers strive to establish and maintain a sense of proximity or closeness to God, most notably through prayer (at least in part a religious analogue to attachment behaviours); that people tend to turn to God as a safe haven when distressed

(e.g., in "religious coping" or sudden religious conversions); that religious people often use God as a secure base when exploring other aspects of the world, and that doing so confers the same sorts of psychological advantage as the use of other secure bases; and that God is viewed as stronger and wiser—indeed, as omnipotent and omniscient.

Kirkpatrick (2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990) derived two opposing hypotheses about how individual differences in attachment may relate to religiousness. First, based on Bowlby's (1973) notion of working models generalized across different attachment relationships, he suggested that such working models extend to religion, in particular to the individual's beliefs about and perceived relationship with God. An implication of this *mental models* or *correspondence* hypothesis is that securely attached individuals, who possess positive working models of themselves and others, will come to view God in a similar manner—as a reliable, secure base with whom one can have an enduring personal relationship.

On the other hand, insecure individuals may develop an attachment to God or other divine figures as surrogates for unsatisfactory human attachment figures (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). This *compensation* hypothesis was based on Ainsworth's (1985) discussion of the use of surrogate attachments among insecure children.

Kirkpatrick also carried out some pioneering empirical studies on how individual differences in attachment relate to religion (for a review, see Kirkpatrick, 2005). These studies were all correlational, based on self-report questionnaire methodology, and they used adult samples. In the first of these studies, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) found that participants reporting an insecure-attachment history were more likely to have experienced sudden religious conversion. They were also more religious in general, but this pattern held only at low levels of parental religiousness (i.e., parental religiousness acted as a moderator). These findings support the compensation hypothesis. In so far as participants reporting a secure-attachment history were religious in this study, they had typically grown up with religious caregivers.

Some Theoretical and Methodological Refinements

Of course, anyone who follows in the footsteps of theorists like Bowlby and Kirkpatrick should be very thankful for being provided with such a valuable conceptual foundation on which to build. As in the case of any such theory, however, it is too easy to do research that oversimplifies it and associates it in

other people's minds with careless and uninventive empirical work. I think this often happens in psychology, and occasionally in the psychology of religion as well. In psychology we have a few pioneering Mozarts who put together great and coherently orchestrated conceptions. And then along come the Salieris, who threaten to spoil it all by running an endless series of cross-sectional, self-report studies on small samples of convenience, by means of which they correlate a half-measure of the Mozart variable with anything between heaven and hell, mostly leaving behind them a sense of conceptual and empirical disarray. So-called "empirical research" is certainly not immune to sloppiness or carelessness, and it may well inadvertently lead to negative evaluations of the underlying conceptual ideas.

In my own research on attachment and religion, and especially in the more recent studies, I have tried my best to avoid that outcome. So, in this main section of the lecture, I will mention five things I have initiated or been involved in that I hope will redound in a beneficial way to the conceptual framework and associated body of research. I will review these theoretical and methodological refinements under five thematic headings: (1) the idea of social correspondence; (2) a focus on implicit processes and the use of experimental designs; (3) the use of coded semi-structured interview methodology; (4) the use of a wider developmental range; and (5) the use of a wider research perspective on the attachment-religion/spirituality connection than the central parameters of an attachment framework would suggest, by considering possible mediators between attachment and religious or spiritual outcomes.

The Idea of Social Correspondence

In what seems like a long time ago, when I was still a young graduate student, I suggested that the pattern of data that had emerged in support of the correspondence hypothesis didn't necessarily support the idea of mental-models correspondence. Instead, Berit Hagekull and I proposed the idea of socialized correspondence, suggesting that, in the case of secure attachment, religion reflects partial adoption of a sensitive caregiver's religion (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999). This interpretation, it seemed to us, was not only as consonant with the data that had emerged but also had several advantages in comparison to the correspondence hypothesis as it was first put forward.

First, the original formulations of the correspondence and compensation hypotheses implied that virtually any empirical outcome, save null results, would support attachment-theory predictions. That is, if secure individuals prove more likely to have theistic beliefs, it is due to generalized working models; on

the other hand, if insecure individuals more frequently have theistic beliefs, it is the result of turning to God for a more satisfactory attachment surrogate. The problem here, of course, is a Popperian one: the theory would seem to be nearly unfalsifiable. So we thought it would be wise to make more specific predictions by adding a moderator variable into the hypotheses.

Second, parental religiousness has repeatedly been shown to act as such a moderator, both in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) pioneering study and in my own first study (Granqvist, 1998, also see 2005), which essentially replicated Kirkpatrick and Shaver's. I should note, too, that many studies not explicitly based on attachment theory have found that parent-offspring similarity in religiousness is much greater if the parents had positive caregiving qualities (for a review, see Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009).

Third, much of the early attachment research suggested that secure children are more successfully socialized in general than other children. This was indeed the focus of some of Mary Ainsworth's pioneering studies (e.g., Stayton, Hogan, & Ainsworth, 1971). The conclusion from these studies was that socialization doesn't require special techniques of discipline but is a natural consequence of sensitive caregiving, which reliably takes into account the child's signals and needs.

Over the years, the idea of social correspondence has been supported in a succession of studies. Thus, secure attachment and estimates of parental sensitivity have been linked to a higher degree of offspring-parent similarity in religiousness (Granqvist, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990) and higher scores on a "socialization-based" religiousness scale (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist, Ivarsson et al., 2007). Such findings have also emerged regardless of how attachment was measured (i.e., explicit self-reports vs. more implicit measures).

However, as my understanding of the theory deepened and I learned more from the empirical research literature, I realized that, by dropping the notion of mental-models correspondence, we had effectively thrown the baby out with the bath water. So in the end we decided that it was wiser to keep that notion and just add the idea of social correspondence to it (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001).

In the current formulation of the hypotheses, we (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008) emphasize that the hypotheses refer to *pathways* to religion and to different modes of being religious, to underscore that we are dealing with developmental issues. First, with the correspondence pathway, we state that religion in the case of secure attachment develops from (a) generalized, positive representations of self and other (IWM aspect), and (b) partial adoption

of a sensitive caregiver's religion (social aspect). In other words, if parents have been observably religious, secure offspring are expected to be as well, in which case their perceptions of God will more or less mirror that of a reliably sensitive attachment figure. Second, with the compensation pathway, religiosity in the case of insecure attachment is held to develop from higher-order distress regulation strategies, characterized by the use of God as a surrogate attachment figure. This is very close to the original formulation, but we now emphasize two important suppositions: (1) distress regulation is at the core of religion as compensation, and (2) such regulation seems to be working at a higher-order or controlled level of processing (see below for clarification).

A Focus on Implicit Processes and the Use of Experimental Designs

Regarding the attachment-religion connection, it is one thing to find affirmative evidence for a relationship *post hoc*, and another to successfully predict religious outcomes from an attachment framework. To accomplish the latter, what could be more appropriate than to run experiments designed to activate the attachment system of religious believers and to reveal its effects on religious "outcomes"? It would be even better if that could be done without the participants' awareness of the activation, a condition implied by the term "implicit" in the above heading.

Such an arrangement may seem easier said than done, but a large literature in adult-attachment research demonstrates that it is possible to activate attachment at non-conscious levels by using various subliminal priming techniques borrowed from social cognition research, much of it by Mario Mikulincer and Phillip Shaver (2007). Attachment activation can be accomplished by using threatening words like "separation," "danger," or "death."

We figured there was no reason why we shouldn't apply this in the psychology of religion as well. Indeed, we (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004) felt that there were important advantages in doing so compared to relying on the correlational techniques and *post hoc* interpretations of the existing literature. First, it entails direct attachment activation and control (i.e., by using control groups). Second, it forestalls the participants' use of higher-order, controlled processes. Finally, it yields results far more convincing than conclusions drawn from a selective reading of the existing literature.

In the first set of experiments on attachment and religion, we used samples of young adults with theistic beliefs (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004). By means of a tachistoscope, the participants were subliminally primed with either an attachment-activating message ("God has abandoned me" or "Mommy is

gone") or an attachment-neutral message ("God has many names" or "People are walking"). We then looked at changes in their wish to be close to God from pre- to post-priming. The wish to be close to God was measured with a questionnaire both a few days before the laboratory procedure and immediately after the subliminal primes.

Participants in the attachment-activating condition increased more in their wish to be close to God from pre- to post-exposure than participants in the attachment-neutral conditions. The average effect across two experiments approached a medium-sized one (Cohen's d = .43). These experiments show that even at the level of unconscious processing, attachment-related separation primes increase believers' motivation to experience God's closeness.

We also examined whether memories of the caregiving they had received in childhood affected the experimental effects. Results from the first out of three experiments are shown in Figure 1. Participant memories of caregiving experiences are represented on the x-axis; their pre-to-post priming changes in "emotionally based religion" (the extent to which they draw on God to regulate distress; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999) are represented on the y-axis. Results in the attachment-activating condition ("God has abandoned me") are shown by the dotted line; results for the attachment-neutral condition ("People are walking") are shown by the solid line. Participants with memories of having been sensitively cared for by their parents increased in their use of God to regulate the distress presumably prompted by the message "God has abandoned me" whereas participants with memories of having been insensitively cared for decreased in their distress-regulating use of God in the same condition and as compared with participants in the control condition.

These experimental results were twice replicated, and identical results were produced when we used "Mother is gone" instead of "God has abandoned me" in the experimental condition and when we used "God has many names" in the control condition. These results run counter to what we would expect if the original compensation hypothesis were applicable.

Both the attachment-normative and individual-difference findings from these experiments have been conceptually replicated in an Israeli study using Jewish participants (Mikulincer, Gurwitz, Shaver, & Granqvist, 2008). In addition, we have found similar results in a study of children in Sweden (Granqvist, Ljungdahl, & Dickie, 2007; described below).

Thus, when implicit (as opposed to explicit) attachment-activating stimuli are used, results tend to support IWM correspondence (as opposed to compensation). Why this is the case is still a matter of speculation. Nevertheless,
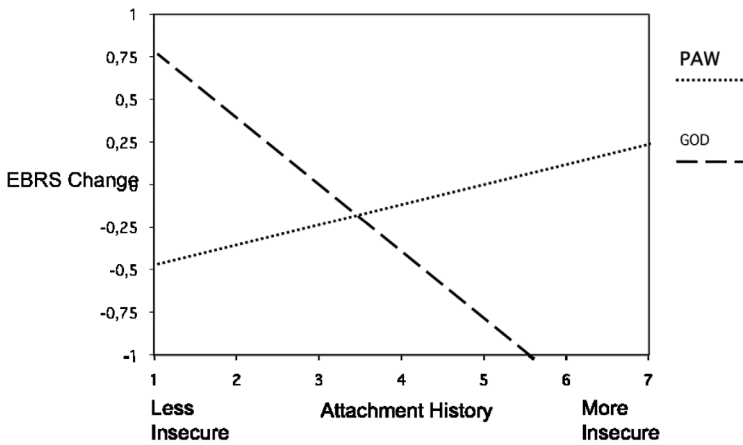
Fig. 1. Regression slopes for attachment history and pre-to-post experimental exposure change in emotionally based religiousness (EBRS) for participants under the "People are walking" (PAW) and "God has abandoned me" (GOD) conditions.

Results taken from Experiment 1, reprinted with the permission of SAGE Publications from 'The Correspondence between Attachment to Parents and God: Three Experiments Using Subliminal Separation Cues', A. Birgegard & P. Granqvist, (2004). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 1122-1135.

inspired by Bowlby's (1973, 1980) and Mary Main's (1991) characterizations of the working models of secure and insecure individuals, we (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008) have suggested that securely attached individuals may possess a *coherent* or *singular* God representation that is accessible at both conscious and non-conscious levels whereas insecurely attached individuals may possess an *incoherent* or *multiple* God representation that may be functional only at conscious levels. That is, religion would emerge from a higher-order, controlled effort at regulating distress that runs counter to how God is perceived at non-conscious levels.

The Use of Coded Semi-Structured Interview Methodology

Attachment is a highly private matter, inherently laden with strong affect as well as defensive manoeuvres. So we should not be surprised to find that self-reports, which are known to reflect social desirability and other self-presentation

biases, may not be the ideal method to use for studying attachment. Thus, self-reports of attachment have not been sufficiently developmentally validated; for example, and to the best of my knowledge, they have not been shown to be systematically related to behaviourally based infant-toddler attachment classifications. Indeed, if one asks the mothers of observed toddlers to rate their child's attachment relationship to them, one typically finds such ratings to be unrelated to an independent observer's classification of the child's attachment organization in relation to the mother (Van IJzendoorn et al., 2004).

More indirect methods are therefore highly attractive on grounds of developmental validity, such as the Strange Situation Procedure (Ainsworth et al., 1978) and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main et al., 2003). The semi-structured AAI consists of approximately 20 questions with standardized probes, asking about childhood and later relationships with parents and their enduring effects, and about experiences of abuse and loss through death. The interviews are tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim (ca. 15-50 pgs/ interview), and then coded by trained, certified coders (ca. 6-12 hrs of coding per interview). The interview protocols are scored for "probable experiences" with parents and current "attachment organization," based primarily on an evaluation of the form or coherence, rather than the content, of the discourse. In other words, an interviewee may well produce a coherent discourse in spite of recounting mostly negative experiences with parents (an outcome known as "earned security"). The AAI has been extensively validated developmentally, through replicated findings of intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns, for example, and long-term—including infancy to adulthood—continuity of attachment patterning within individuals (see Hesse, 2008).

In the first AAI-and-religion study ever conducted, we included 84 individuals drawn from religious and spiritual contexts in Uppsala, Sweden (Granqvist, Ivarsson et al., 2007). My fingers were trembling when I asked the computer for correlation coefficients because there was a real chance that the results would suggest that previous ones were due largely to attachment self-report biases. But luckily for us, that wasn't the case. In line with the hypothesized compensation pathway, we found that probable experiences with rejecting or role-reversing parents predicted distant God imagery and sudden increases in religiousness during life situations of marked emotional turmoil and at later ages. In line with the correspondence pathway, we found that probable experiences with loving (i.e., sensitive) parents predicted loving God imagery and gradual increases in religion marked by a positive influence of close relationships and occurring at early ages.

On the other hand, current attachment organization was unrelated to these religious pathways in this study. Partly for this reason, we suggested that some participants with negative attachment-related experiences may have "earned" some degree of attachment security from their compensatory religiousness, and we drew parallels to reparative experiences with a good therapist or a secure love partner that had previously been discussed in the attachment literature (e.g., Bowlby, 1988; Main et al., 2003).

A second, theoretically important AAI-and-religion study was soon to follow (Cassibba, Granqvist, Gatto, & Constantini, 2008). This study was designed and conducted by Rosalinda Cassibba and her research group in Bari, Italy; my contribution was limited to the analyses and the write-up. The participants in this study, a group of Catholic priests, nuns, and seminarians, likely represent an exemplar or prototype of a rare believer who experiences not just an attachment-like relationship to God but in fact a principal attachment to the divine. One of their vows is to abstain from "earthly" marriage (i.e., from what is the principal attachment relationship for most adults; Bowlby, 1980; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). And their daily lives are also to be "lived in Christ" in various ways that may seem extremely strict to an outsider. It is tempting to ask why on earth (or why in heaven, if you prefer) people would voluntarily seek out such a demanding religious life. In the study by Cassibba and colleagues, most of the priests, nuns and seminarians studied were secure: 77% had a secure AAI classification as compared with 60% of matched lay Catholics and 58% in a worldwide meta-analytic sample (Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996).

It should be noted as well that the mothers of these radically religious people were also estimated by independent interview coders to be generally high in loving sensitivity—indeed, higher than the mothers of the matched comparison group—on the pertinent probable experience scale. In addition, this study replicated some of the findings from the Swedish AAI-and-religion study.

The Use of a Wider Developmental Range

According to attachment theorists (e.g., Bowlby, 1982/1969), the attachment system is active from cradle to grave. Likewise, aspects of religiousness supposedly develop over the course of the lifetime. Bearing this in mind, it is somewhat surprising that nearly all of the early studies on attachment and religion included only adults. In fact, during certain life periods *other* than adulthood, both attachment and religious developments are especially noteworthy. Based on my own research, I will illustrate this with two age

periods, five to seven years of age and adolescence, after acknowledging that there is at least one other stage of life of utmost theoretical importance, namely old age, which is often characterized by the loss through death of one's principal attachment figure in adulthood (as see Brown, Nesse, House, & Utz, 2004; Cicirelli, 2004).

Let's start with the ages when the "living God" is born (to use Rizzuto's [1979] terminology), typically ages five to seven, which are also characterized by the child's moving away from parents into the outer world of school and peer relations. In this study (Granqvist, Ljugdahl, & Dickie, 2007), we told five-to-seven-year-old children stories about fictional, visually represented children who were in attachment-activating and attachment-neutral situations. In the attachment-activating stories, the fictional child was sick, hurt, or alone. In the attachment-neutral stories, the child was in a bad, good, or neutral mood. We also asked the participating children to select a symbol fashioned out of felt that could represent God (in the form of a cloud, a heart, or a grown-up).

After each story, participating children placed their God symbol at any location on a felt board that also bore a representation of the fictional child. The dependent variable was the physical distance between the fictional child figure and the God symbol. As predicted, the God symbol was placed significantly closer to the child when he or she was depicted in the attachment-activating rather than in the attachment-neutral situations.

These results have now been replicated across three cross-national samples (in the U.S. and Sweden; see Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). The average effect size across the three studies approached a medium level (*Cohen's d* = .44). These studies show that God is already viewed as a potential safe haven in the late preschool and early school years.

As we see in Figure 2, there was a significant two-way interaction between attachment-activating vs. neutral situations (x-axis) and secure vs. insecure attachment (squares and straight line, respectively) on children's perceptions of God's closeness to the fictional child. Secure children placed the God symbol closer in attachment-activating situations but farther away in attachment-neutral situations than did insecure children.

Another way to describe this interaction is that secure children discriminated to a larger extent between the two types of situations in their God placements than did insecure children. Paralleling secure children in the strange situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978), they gave greater emphasis to closeness to the attachment figure (i.e., God) when attachment concerns were raised, but
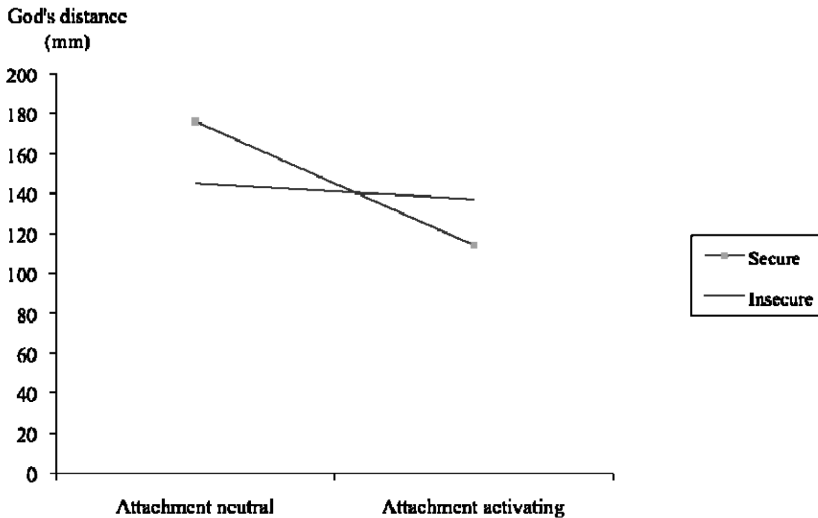
Fig. 2. Interaction between security of attachment (secure, insecure) and type of situation (attachment activating, neutral) on God's closeness to a fictional child.
Reprinted with the permission of Taylor & Francis from: Granqvist, P., Ljungdahl, C., & Dickie, J. (2007). God is nowhere, God is now here: Attachment activation, security of attachment, and God proximity among 5-7 year-old children. *Attachment & Human Development*, 9, 55-71.

less emphasis when such concerns were not made salient. So again we have results from implicit processes that support the correspondence hypothesis and run counter to the original formulation of the compensation hypothesis. The "implicit" aspect of this study lies in the reference to fictional children, both in the attachment measure (the semiprojective Separation Anxiety Test [Kaplan, 1987]), and in the distance-from-God variable.

Important developments in the attachment domain take place in adolescence, most notably the gradual replacement of attachment figures in the individual's life, ultimately resulting in the replacement of the parents by a long-term romantic partner or friend as the principal attachment figure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This may be a period of increased turbulence and uncertainty as far as attachment is concerned, which coincides with "the age of religious awakening" (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975), characterized by an increased probability of religious conversions as well as of apostasy.

In a short-term prospective longitudinal study (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2003), we followed adolescents over a 15-month time span, aiming to understand how attachment and contextual factors may be linked to religious changes during this important life period. We found that the religiousness of relatively insecure adolescents both waxed and waned more over time (Granqvist, 2002). In particular, we found that their religiousness increased with the need to regulate distress as indicated by the breaking up of a romantic relationship between the two religiousness assessments (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2003). These results supported the compensation pathway. Supporting the correspondence pathway, in contrast, was the finding that the religiousness of relatively secure individuals increased following the establishment of a new romantic relationship.

A Wider Perspective on the Attachment-Religion/Spirituality Connection, by Way of Mediators

Attachment theory has a relatively narrow conceptual focus. Another way to say this is that it is reasonably specific. It has to do with our proclivity to develop close and enduring affectional bonds as well as the implications of these bonds for relationship-related mental representations and distress-regulation strategies—but nothing else, really. In contrast, religion is a highly complex, multifaceted realm of phenomena that involves many aspects that are entirely orthogonal to the attachment construct: a code of ethics and the provision of existential meaning, to name but two of these features. In other words, attachment theory is not a comprehensive theory of religion; it cannot and should not be applied to every conceivable aspect of religion. I concur with Kirkpatrick (2005) that attachment theory is applicable primarily to the relational, representational, and distress-regulating aspects of religion.

However, I would like to add that attachment may still be *indirectly* linked to certain religious or spiritual "outcomes" that in themselves fall outside of the theory's conceptual framework. Such a relationship may arise, for example, when there is a mediating variable explaining the association between attachment and aspects of religion or spirituality (Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver, in press).

For a case in point, disorganized attachment appears related to "alternative" forms of spirituality by way of their mutual associations with dissociative inclinations. Although it typically doesn't offer any metaphysical attachment figure, New Age spirituality was of particular interest to us because, like disorganized attachment (e.g., Carlson, 1998; Hesse & Van IJzendoorn, 1999), it

had previously been found related to subtly dissociative alterations in consciousness ("absorption," possibly expressed in out-of-body experiences, trance states, susceptibility to hypnosis, etc.; Granqvist et al., 2005). Consequently, we have proposed and obtained empirical support for a mediating model, as illustrated in Figure 3. These results indicate that, although New Age spirituality itself is not captured by an attachment framework, it is related to a particularly serious form of insecure attachment; they are linked by their mutual association with a propensity to experience alterations in consciousness in general.

A similar mediating model (i.e., disorganized attachment as predictor, absorption as mediator) has also proved applicable to mystical experiences, which are characterized by markedly altered states of consciousness (Granqvist, 2009). Notably, such a model has *not* proved serviceable in relation to mainstream expressions of faith or religion, showing some specificity or discriminant validity for the model. For example, both disorganized attachment and absorption are unrelated to theistic beliefs and general degree of religiousness (Granqvist, 2009).

Of course, New Age spirituality and mystical experiences are but two examples of spiritual or religious outcomes that are indirectly linked to attachment—in this case, disorganized attachment. I encourage other researchers to explore the possibility of indirect relations between other aspects of attachment and other features of religiousness and spirituality, presumably by way of other mediators or moderators. At the same time, in order to discourage semantic dilution of the attachment-religion connection, I plead for caution and careful theoretical analysis in any such undertakings.
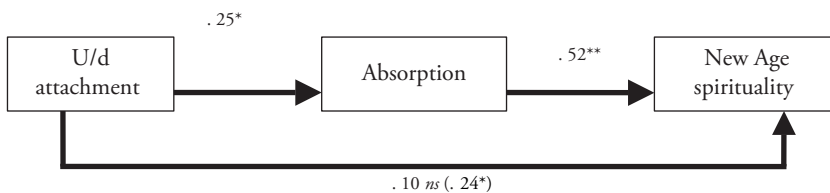

Fig. 3. Mediational model linking unresolved/disorganized (U/d) attachment, absorption, and New Age spirituality.

Reprinted with the permission of Taylor & Francis from: Granqvist, P., Fransson, M., & Hagekull, B. (2009). Disorganized attachment, absorption, and New Age spirituality—A mediational model. *Attachment and Human Development*, 11, 385-403.

Future Studies and Concluding Remarks

I wish to wrap up this presentation by briefly discussing two topics that we are currently investigating in regard to the attachment-religion connection. First, a large portion of the attachment-and-religion literature can rightly be accused of a kind of naive realism in that it has relied mostly on self-report questionnaires to assess religiousness (e.g., Wulff, 2006). There is no reason to assume that questionnaire measures of religiousness are not plagued by defensive responding, just as other self-report measures are. For example, the findings from the Swedish AAI study discussed above, according to which current attachment organization is unrelated to religion, may just as well have been due to the self-report mode of measuring religion as to an "earned security" effect. We (Granqvist & Main, 2003) have therefore devised a more implicit method to study perceived God relations, modelled after the AAI protocol, and given it to 60 of our AAI study participants in a three-year longitudinal follow-up. However, much work remains to be done before that part of the project is analyzed and ready to report.

Second, given that it is now reasonably well established that attachment processes are involved in religion, the time is ripe to examine how religious attachment is related to functioning in the secular world. Such a focus is motivated not only by a scientific curiosity but also by an unfortunate way that religion and God have been used throughout history and are still used in the present time: to exacerbate conflicts (see also Jones, 2008). Thus, in an ongoing series of experiments, we subject theistic participants to attachment-activating threat situations and then prime them in one of three ways: with a nurturant God, an authoritarian God, or a neutral control. For the dependent variables we use indices of prosocial and antisocial behavioural inclinations. We hypothesize that, when the attachment system is activated, the individual is particularly receptive to whatever message might come from his or her source of "felt security." A parallel series of experiments will most likely be conducted with Jewish participants in Israel. This project, too, is still underway.

In conclusion, attachment-and-religion research has contributed to attachment theory by highlighting the propensity among human beings to develop attachment-like relationships to unobservable, imaginary others. Such research has also benefited the psychology of religion by integrating important findings in the field within a well-established conceptual framework. Moreover, attachment theory has been of heuristic value in spurring empirical research on how and why people relate to God and why they embrace some "alternative" forms of spirituality.

   In view of the frequent complaints by psychologists of religion that our discipline isn't sufficiently respected in mainstream academic psychology, I wish to note that much of the research reviewed in this presentation has been published in well-reputed mainline psychology journals, including ones published by APA, as well as in edited handbooks (e.g., the journals *Attachment and Human Development, Developmental Psychology, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, and Personality and Social Psychology Review, and* the Guilford *Handbook of Attachment*). The implication is that mainstream academic psychology *may on occasion* be hospitable to the psychology of religion, but whether it will or will not be in any given instance will depend on what psychologists of religion do to deserve respect. Simply complaining won't be enough. Fortunately, there is at long last a growing tendency to integrate the psychology of religion with mainstream psychology (see Hood et al., 2009). But for those who want to accelerate this change, some words of advice may be offered (see also, Hill & Gibson, 2008). First, use theories that are both relevant to central (rather than peripheral) aspects of religion *and* firmly anchored in mainstream psychology. Secondly, utilize (or construct, if absolutely necessary) refined study variables with established psychometric properties in the research that is carried out. Finally, work hard, be patient, and cultivate an epistemic optimism regarding the possibility of producing replicable knowledge through systematic empirical research even in this complex domain of study.

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