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# Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: On the Question of Compensation or Correspondence

PEHR GRANQVIST †

*The present study investigated the opposing hypotheses, derived from attachment theory, of adult religiousness as compensating for or corresponding to the quality of childhood relationships with parents. Questionnaires containing measures of childhood attachment quality and one's own and parental religiousness were completed by 203 students at Uppsala University, Sweden. The results supported the compensation hypothesis in that insecure respondents, to a larger extent than secure respondents, reported an increase in importance of their religious beliefs during adulthood. In addition, insecure respondents who had experienced low parental religiousness were more religious, were more likely to perceive themselves as having a close relationship with God, expressed more theistic beliefs, and reported a higher level of religious change during adulthood, whereas secure respondents were agnostics to a larger extent. However, if parents had been highly religious, secure respondents generally scored higher on the religiousness variables than insecure respondents, indicating a higher congruence between parents' and respondents' religiousness in the secure groups and also giving support for the correspondence hypothesis. The usefulness of attachment theory for understanding religiousness in comparison to the predominant psychodynamic conceptualizations was discussed, and the question of compensation or correspondence was elaborated.*

**T**he purpose of the present study was to investigate hypothesized connections between perceived quality of the childhood relationship with each parent and several aspects of the adult's religiousness. These connections were, on the basis of a previous study (Kirkpatrick and Shaver 1990), assumed to emerge in such a way that it would be meaningful to consider part of the adult's religiousness either as a compensation for or a continuation of the quality of child-parent relationships in childhood. The theoretical framework in which these issues were operationalized and discussed was attachment theory.

## *Attachment Theory and its Development*

Attachment theory was first formulated by John Bowlby (1969; 1973; 1980) in order to describe and explain how and why infants become emotionally tied to their primary caregivers, and also to clarify the effect of separation from these caregivers on the developing child. This emotional tie was considered from an ethological viewpoint to have evolved in order to secure the survival of the offspring by keeping them in physical proximity with caregivers and thereby protected from predators and other natural dangers. Children's early signal behaviors (such as clinging, crying, sucking, and smiling), as well as caregivers' responsiveness to such signals, were thus considered as serving an adaptive function.

Observations within this theoretical framework have largely been made by using the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al. 1978), a structured situation in a laboratory setting, in which the child-caregiver interaction during play, the child's reaction to a stranger, and

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above all, the child's reunion behavior after a brief separation from the caregiver are studied. Especially, children's use of caregivers as a secure base from which they operate and the function of caregivers as a haven of safety when children are distressed have been of major interest.

On the basis of observations in the Strange Situation, Ainsworth et al. (1978) described three distinct patterns of child-parent interaction. First, the secure pattern is characterized by infants' use of caregivers as a secure base during play and exploration and proximity seeking to caregivers when reunited. Second, infants in the insecure/avoidant pattern generally neglect caregivers during play, appear to be indifferent during separation, and avoid caregivers when reunited. These infants seem to deny the need of the caregivers. Third, the insecure/ambivalent pattern is characterized by infants "clinging" to caregivers, showing little exploration of the environment, extreme distress during separation, and ambivalence when reunited.

These individual differences in attachment organization have repeatedly been found to be related in theoretically expected ways to several variables of interest and also to be stable from infancy to at least 6 years of age (Main et al. 1985). Attachment quality has been shown to predict, for instance, behavior problems (Bohlin and Hagekull in press; Erickson et al. 1985), social competence, empathy (Elicker et al. 1992), mental health (Parkes 1982), and quality in emotional communication (Grossman and Grossman 1991). The stability is theoretically referred to the existence of the child's internal working models of relationships, which are assumed to originate from and reflect the quality of the child-caregiver relationship as described by the three attachment patterns (cf. "mental representations" in object-relational theory). Bowlby claimed these models to be activated "from the cradle to the grave" (Ainsworth 1985: 792).

Main et al. (1985) have reconceptualized the differences in attachment organization as individual differences in internal working models of relationships. The attachment perspective has thus been lifted from a behavioral to a cognitive-representational level, which has made possible retrospective studies of adults' attachment histories as reflected in the present internal working models of those relationships. It should be possible to conceptualize part of the adult's religiousness, such as the perceived personal relationship with God, as a phenomenon that is related to the quality of the adult's attachment history.

### *Attachment Theory and Religiousness: Theoretical Considerations*

The proposed link between the child's parental relationships and the adult's religiousness is hardly new. This connection has been suggested from several psychodynamic perspectives, beginning with Freud (1964 [1927]) who in a highly value-laden manner proposed that God was merely an illusory and regressive projection of the child's earthly father. Other theorists in this tradition, including Erikson (e.g., 1950) and the object-relationist Rizzuto (1979; 1991), have also applied their theoretical perspectives to explain this assumed link. However, psychodynamic perspectives are for theoretical, empirical, and methodological (e.g. Grunbaum 1984; Kazdin 1992; Popper 1962) reasons not well integrated within contemporary academic psychology, and neither is the psychology of religion in which they are highly influential. To achieve an integration (requested by, e.g., Batson et al. 1993; Gorsuch 1988; Spilka et al. 1985) of the psychology of religion with mainstream psychology, it appears necessary to use theories that can meet the methodological demands on which psychology as an empirical science is built. Attachment theory seems well suited for this purpose.

The images of God as well as the perceived relationships with God that are portrayed in believers' anecdotes and in religious literature often bear strong resemblance to attachment relationships in childhood. For instance, expressions such as "God is leading one

by his side" and "is always there when you need someone" (e.g., Wikström 1975) support this notion. In addition, adjective ratings describe God as the protective, loving, merciful, guiding, warm, forgiving, but also as the strong, firm, and powerful "Father" (Gorsuch 1968). These are also ideal parental traits that portray God in a manner that clearly meets Bowlby's (e.g., 1969) criterion of an attachment figure as a stronger, wiser other. Furthermore, God, like the child's parents, may in moments of distress function as a haven of safety to whom the believer can turn for emotional support. Empirical support for this claim is found in the frequently reported data on the connection between crises and religious conversions (e.g., Clark 1929; James 1902; Starbuck 1899). Also like parents, God may function as a secure base, from whom the religious individual explores the environment and to whom he/she regularly returns in worship, prayer, praise and other forms of dialogue (cf. Sundén's concepts "the general role of God" and "the general role of God's partner," 1959). Overall, then, it appears as if a prominent psychological function of God, just as that of the child's parents, is that he may be used as a haven of safety and a secure base in a strategy for maintaining or establishing felt security (cf. Kobak and Shaver 1987).

#### *Attachment Theory and Religiousness: Empirical Results*

Besides outlining the heuristic value of attachment theory as applied to religion, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) also investigated the empirical link between childhood attachment and adult religiousness. In this study, 213 adults who had responded to a newspaper survey were grouped on the basis of the three described attachment patterns, reflecting the perceived quality of the childhood relationships with mother and father. As dimensions of religiousness, respondents' current religious beliefs and activities were investigated, as well as the perception of having a close, personal relationship with God, and the experience of a sudden religious conversion, either during youth or adulthood.

Two, diametrically opposed, hypotheses were proposed, each derived from attachment theoretical considerations. First, the correspondence hypothesis assumed that early relationships provide the foundation upon which future relationships, including that with God, are built. Thus, the adult's religiousness was expected to correspond directly to his/her childhood relationships so that securely attached children as adults would be able to establish a higher degree of religiousness than adults with insecure attachment histories. This hypothesis was derived from Bowlby's (1969) notion of continuity in internal working models and should be analogous to Erikson's (e.g., 1950; Wulff 1991) notion of basic trust as the basis for later religiousness. There are also similarities with Rizzuto's (1979; 1991) object-relational line of reasoning. This hypothesis had previously been indirectly supported by findings of positive correlations between perceptions of parents and God (e.g., Hood et al. 1996). Second, the compensation hypothesis assumed that persons with an insecure attachment history would be in greater need of compensatory attachment figures (e.g., God). Thus, an inverse relationship between attachment security and religiousness was predicted. This hypothesis was derived from Ainsworth's (1985) discussion of attachment substitutes.

Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) results mainly supported the latter hypothesis. As a main effect of attachment, respondents classified as avoidant in the maternal relationship were more than four times as likely to have experienced sudden religious conversions, either during youth or adulthood, as were respondents classified as ambivalent or secure. For several other variables an interactive effect of attachment quality in the maternal relationship and maternal religiousness emerged. When maternal religiousness was perceived as high by the respondents, no significant differences in religiousness were found for the members of the three attachment types. However, when maternal religiousness was perceived as low, avoidant respondents scored significantly higher than their nonavoidant counterparts on several religiousness variables, including belief in a personal God and

perceived personal relationship with God. Similar, albeit weaker, patterns of results were reported as an effect of the corresponding paternal variables.

In order to clarify the recently debated usefulness (Kirkpatrick 1992; 1994; 1995; Noller 1992) of attachment theory as a research paradigm applied to religion, these results should be replicated. A second study was seen as needed for a number of reasons. First, more controlled sampling procedures and partly different measures were considered as necessary in order to get an indication of the generalizability of the findings. Second, in order to further investigate the general applicability of the attachment perspective with regard to religiousness, the cultural stability of the findings needed to be ascertained. Third, the supremacy of maternal variables over paternal variables in predicting the adult's religiousness needed to be confirmed, especially since this seems to contradict Freud's (1964 [1927]) notion of God as an exalted father figure. Finally, the validity of the compensation hypothesis needed to be further studied. This was considered as especially important since it appears to contradict the highly influential ego-psychological (e.g., Erikson 1950) and object-relational (e.g., Rizzuto 1979; 1991) thinking about the links between the quality of childhood relationships and the adult's religiousness.

The main research question asked in the present study was whether connections could be found between the perceived quality of the attachment relationships with mother and father in childhood and the adult's religiousness. It was asked whether such connections would support the compensation or the correspondence hypothesis. The question also entailed an examination of interactive effects on religiousness of attachment quality and parental religiousness.

## METHOD

### *Respondents and Procedure*

The sample consisted of 203 students at Uppsala University, Sweden. Sweden is a highly secularized country. Even though approximately 90% of the Swedish population are members of the Lutheran State Church of Sweden, barely 10% of the population are confessing Christians compared to 60% in the United States (Pettersson 1994). In order to obtain variation on the religiousness variables, a large proportion of the sample was drawn from a religious population, which included general theology undergraduate students ( $n = 50$ ), undergraduates in other fields of theology (Hebrew and Greek;  $n = 39$ ), members from an ecumenically based Christian students' union ( $n = 12$ ), and students in a dormitory ( $n = 25$ ) belonging to a Christian denomination. In addition, two undergraduate biology classes ( $n = 46$ ) and two psychology classes ( $n = 31$ ) participated. The sample consisted of 38% male and 62% female respondents. The mean age of the sample was 26 years, with a standard deviation of 6.7 (range = 20–50 years).

The data collections were made after lectures or other gatherings in April 1996, except for the dormitory students, who were individually visited on a Sunday evening and asked to fill out a questionnaire. The students in one of the psychology classes were asked to return the filled out questionnaires as soon as possible after the lecture, resulting in 12 returned and 18 unreturned forms. Three students could not participate (due to lack of time), and one student provided incomplete answers. Of 222 distributed questionnaires, 203 remained for analysis, yielding a total participation rate of 91%.

The author informed respondents of the anonymous and voluntary premises for participation. In order to conceal the purpose of the study, respondents were told that the study investigated secularization-related intergenerational differences and similarities in religiousness. Questionnaires were filled out during approximately 15 minutes and then handed in to the investigator in all cases but the one psychology group.

## Measures

The measurement instrument consisted of a questionnaire with 36 questions and statements in accordance with the following description.

*Background measures.* Gender, age, and present field of studies.

*Measures of childhood attachment to each parent.* These measures consisted of three categorical single-item descriptions, originally proposed by Hazan and Shaver (1986), purporting to tap the characteristic features of the attachment categories, as described by Ainsworth et al. (1978). This measure was also used by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990). Respondents marked the alternative most descriptive of the memory of their childhood relationship with mother and father, respectively:

- a) She/he was generally warm and responsive; she/he was good at knowing when to be supportive and when to let me operate on my own; our relationship was almost always comfortable, and I have no major reservations or complaints about it (Secure attachment).
- b) She/he was fairly cold, distant, and rejecting, and not very responsive; I often felt that her/his concerns were elsewhere; I frequently had the feeling that she/he just as soon would not have had me (Insecure/avoidant attachment).
- c) She/he was noticeably inconsistent in her/his reactions to me, sometimes warm and sometimes not; she/he had her/his own needs and agendas which sometimes got in the way of her/his receptiveness and responsiveness to my needs; she/he definitely loved me but didn't always show it in the best way (Insecure/ambivalent attachment).

*Measures of parental religiousness.* Each parent's level of religiousness (as perceived by the respondent) during the respondent's childhood was assessed on an 8-item scale. This scale consisted of statements concerning how often the parent prayed, read religious literature, attended church, and discussed religious questions with the respondent (e.g., "I seldom or never discussed religious questions with my mother"). Furthermore, statements were included regarding each parent's religious beliefs, the importance of this belief for everyday life, subjective judgments towards religion, and the level of religious socialization from parent to respondent (e.g., "Religion was important for my father in his everyday life"). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 4-step scale as to how appropriate each statement was considered to be, where 1 = not at all appropriate and 4 = very appropriate. Three of the statements (church attendance, religious discussion, and the importance of religion in everyday life) were chosen from Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) corresponding measures. Five of the statements were taken and elaborated from a factor analytically developed instrument for religious socialization (Pettersson et al. 1994). The internal consistency was established in Cronbach's correlation analyses (McKinnell 1970) which yielded high alpha coefficients for the 8-item religiousness scales (see Table 1).

*Measures of respondents' religiousness.* 1) Eight statements corresponding to those above (parental religiousness) were used to assess the respondent's own *Level of Religiousness*. The internal consistency was high (Table 1).

2) The perceived *Relationship with God* was assessed by having respondents indicate on a 4-step scale how appropriate the statement "I feel that I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and/or God" was considered to be (high value = personal relationship). Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) corresponding measure was categorical (yes/no).

3) *Belief in God* was assessed by a single item, in which the respondents were asked "Which of the following alternatives best describes your current belief about God?," with response alternatives: a) "God is a living, personal being who is interested and involved in human lives and affairs," b) "God created the universe, but is no longer active or involved in human lives and affairs," c) "God is an impersonal, transcendental force in the universe," d) "I do not know if I believe in God," and e) "I do not believe in God." Category a) was considered as a belief in a personal God (or theism), b) as deism, c) as pantheism, d) as

agnosticism, and e) as atheism. Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) corresponding measure contained only the three first response alternatives.

4) Religious change and conversion were assessed separately for the youth period (13–22 years of age) and the adult period (>22 years of age). First, respondents were asked to indicate on a 6-step scale how important their religious beliefs became in the youth period, ranging from “I did not have a religious belief during this period” (1) to “much more important” (6). Second, those respondents who indicated a religious change were asked to choose one of the following alternatives to describe the characteristics of this change: a) “An intense and sudden personal experience,” b) “A slow, gradual change with one or more relatively intense experiences and changes,” and c) “A slow, gradual change over a long period of time.” Respondents who indicated that their religious beliefs had become much more important (scale step 6) on the former item were considered as having experienced a *Youth Major Change*. Those who also chose response alternative a) on the latter item were considered as having experienced a *Sudden Youth Conversion*. This measure of conversion corresponded to that used by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990). Religious change that did not meet the criteria for major change or conversion was also investigated. To assess such *Youth Religious Change*, only the first of the above items was used. A parallel set of questions was used to assess *Adult Major Change*, *Sudden Adult Conversion*, and *Adult Religious Change*. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the different variables in the questionnaire.

TABLE 1  
CHARACTERISTICS OF MEASURES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Categorical Measures	No. of Items	Frequency in Each Category			
<i>Categorical predictor variables:</i>					
Maternal attachment	1	Secure: 153; avoidant: 6; ambivalent: 43			
Paternal attachment	1	Secure: 120; avoidant: 14; ambivalent: 65			
<i>Categorical outcome variables:</i>					
Belief in God	1	Theism: 99; deism: 3; pantheism: 39; agnosticism: 38; atheism: 18			
Youth major change	1	Major change: 38			
Adult major change	1	Major change: 18			
Sudden youth conversion	2	Sudden conversion: 3			
Sudden adult conversion	2	Sudden conversion: 4			
Continuous Measures	No. of Items	Scale-Range	M	SD	Alpha Coefficient
<i>Continuous predictor variables:</i>					
Maternal religiousness	8	1–4	2.19	.85	.92
Paternal religiousness	8	1–4	1.98	.91	.93
<i>Continuous outcome variables:</i>					
Level of religiousness	8	1–4	2.80	.93	.94
Relationship with God	1	1–4	2.52	1.32	n.a.*
Youth religious change	1	1–6	4.08	1.59	n.a.
Adult religious change	1	1–6	4.04	1.50	n.a.

\* n.a. = not applicable

*Narrative themes.* Respondents for whom a major religious change had occurred, either during youth or adulthood, were asked in the questionnaire to write about the factors in life that they assumed to be important for understanding these changes. Kirkpatrick and

Shaver (1990) used the same procedure, but only for respondents who met the criteria for a sudden religious conversion. First, the author derived specific themes from the narratives and classified the explicit statements about important life factors into the specific themes. Another observer then independently sorted the statements into the themes. On the basis of theoretical reasoning, the specific themes were next categorized into one of three global categories: themes of compensation, themes of correspondence, and other themes. Interobserver agreement in sorting statements into the specific themes was then separately computed for each of the global categories. Percentages of agreement and Cohen's (1960) kappa coefficients, which correct for chance agreement, were the indices of interobserver agreement utilized. Thereafter, the two independent observers classified respondents into one of four categories: compensation, correspondence, both compensation and correspondence, and other, and interobserver agreement was computed. Finally, observer discrepancies were resolved after discussion.

## RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 1, only six (3.0%) and 14 (7.0%) respondents were classified as avoidant in the maternal and paternal relationships, respectively. The two insecure groups were therefore aggregated<sup>1</sup>, yielding one insecure and one secure attachment group for each of the parental relationships. Furthermore, only seven respondents met the criteria for sudden religious conversion, either during youth or adulthood. Therefore, major and continuous religious change during youth and adulthood were analyzed. Similarly, deistic belief was only reported by three respondents and was therefore dropped from statistical analyses.

According to t-tests there were no significant gender differences on the religiousness variables (all  $p$ 's > .30).  $X^2$  goodness-of-fit tests did not quite reach the significance level for gender differences on the attachment variables (both  $p$ 's > .05 but < .07).

### *Effects of Attachment on Religiousness*

$X^2$  goodness-of-fit tests were performed to test main effects of attachment quality on the categorical religiousness variables. These analyses did not reveal significant differences between secure and insecure respondents on any of the response alternatives contained in the variable Belief in God (all  $p$ 's > .29). However, a significantly larger proportion of insecure respondents (16.3%) in the maternal relationship reported an Adult Major Change compared to respondents in the secure group (6.5%),  $X^2(.05, 1) = 4.38, p < .04$ . The result for Youth Major Change in the maternal relationship was not significant but pointed in the same direction just as the findings for youth and adult major change in the paternal relationship did (range of  $p$ 's .20–.52).

Multiple regression equations were constructed to test main effects of attachment as well as interactive effects of attachment and parental religiousness on the continuous religiousness variables. The predictor variables in each equation were standardized scores for maternal religiousness, maternal attachment quality (scored secure = 1 and insecure = 0), and an interaction variable representing the cross-product of standardized maternal religiousness and maternal attachment quality scores. Maternal religiousness and maternal attachment quality were entered first and then the interaction variable. The same analyses were made for the corresponding paternal variables.

The multiple regression analyses yielded no significant main effects of maternal attachment. Paternal attachment quality had main effects, although modified by the interactions to be described, on Relationship with God and Youth Religious Change (both  $p$ 's



< .04). In addition, there were significant main effects of parental religiousness (all  $p$ 's < .01) on all continuous religiousness variables except Adult Religious Change.

The multiple regression analyses also revealed significant interaction effects. The interaction of maternal religiousness and maternal attachment quality significantly predicted Level of Religiousness and Youth Religious Change (both  $p$ 's < .02), and the corresponding interaction of the paternal variables predicted Level of Religiousness ( $p$  < .02) and Relationship with God ( $p$  < .03). Thus, parental religiousness had a moderating effect (Baron and Kenny 1986) on associations between attachment quality and respondents' religiousness. To clarify these results, they will be described in two different ways below. Results for all scales will be presented for the sake of consistency.

#### *Parents' and Respondents' Religiousness in Attachment Groups*

One way of describing interactions is to investigate the relations within groups, in this case the correlations between respondents' and their parents' religiousness within the secure and the insecure attachment group. These data, along with correlations for the total sample, are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

**CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CONTINUOUS RELIGIOUSNESS VARIABLES AND PARENTAL RELIGIOUSNESS WITHIN SECURE AND INSECURE ATTACHMENT GROUPS.**

Religiousness Variables	Maternal Religiousness			Paternal Religiousness		
	Maternal attachment			Paternal attachment		
	Secure n = 153	Insecure n = 49	Total n = 202	Secure n = 120	Insecure n = 79	Total n = 199
Level of religiousness	.45**	.16	.39**	.50**	.02	.32**
Relationship with God	.38**	.15	.33**	.45**	.00	.27**
Youth religious change	.30**	.06	.24**	.32**	.10	.22**
Adult religious change <sup>a</sup>	.19	-.01	.13	.24*	-.04	.11

NOTE: \*  $p$  < .10; \*\*  $p$  < .05; \*\*\*  $p$  < .01; two-tailed.// <sup>a</sup>Due to 50 respondents (24.6%) not having passed the age of 22, n's on this variable for secure and insecure groups in the maternal relationship were 101 and 40, respectively. Corresponding n's in the paternal relationship were 82 and 57.

When attachment classification was not considered (column Total), there were several positive correlations between parents' and respondents' religiousness, indicating the main effect of parental religiousness. In the secure groups, these positive correlations remained significant. However, in the insecure groups there were no significant correlations, showing that the religiousness of the insecurely attached respondents was independent of their parents' level of religiousness. Note that the same pattern of results held with regard to both the maternal and the paternal variables, and also that the magnitude of the correlations was similar.

#### *Attachment and Respondents' Religiousness in High and Low Parental Religiousness Groups*

A second way of describing the results entailed splitting maternal and paternal religiousness at their respective scale means and performing t-tests to clarify whether the secure and insecure groups differed significantly at low and high parental religiousness.

TABLE 3

MEANS AND PROPORTIONS FOR PARENTAL ATTACHMENT TYPES ON RELIGIOUSNESS VARIABLES FOR LOW AND HIGH PARENTAL RELIGIOUSNESS GROUPS. RESULTS OF SIGNIFICANCE TESTS OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ATTACHMENT GROUPS.

Religiousness Variables	Means/Proportions for Parental Attachment Types					
	Maternal attachment			Paternal attachment		
	Secure n = 98	Insecure n = 37	t / X <sup>2</sup>	Secure n = 80	Insecure n = 63	t / X <sup>2</sup>
	<i>Low maternal religiousness</i>			<i>Low paternal religiousness</i>		
Level of religiousness	2.44	2.76	1.77 <sup>+</sup>	2.43	2.83	2.55*
Relationship with God	2.12	2.43	1.26	2.00	2.69	3.25**
Theism	33.3%	46.0%	1.83	31.7%	58.1%	9.88**
Pantheism	24.5%	18.9%	0.47	21.3%	17.5%	0.32
Agnosticism	27.1%	16.2%	1.73	29.1%	14.5%	4.22*
Atheism	13.5%	13.5%	0.00	13.9%	9.7%	0.59
Youth religious change	3.70	4.00	0.88	3.64	4.11	1.65
Adult religious change <sup>a</sup>	3.80	4.06	0.74	3.57	4.34	2.28*
	n = 51	n = 11		n = 36	n = 14	
	<i>High maternal religiousness</i>			<i>High paternal religiousness</i>		
Level of religiousness	3.44	3.06	1.74 <sup>+</sup>	3.51	2.70	4.02***
Relationship with God	3.31	3.00	0.86	3.39	2.29	3.26**
Theism	84.0%	63.6%	2.37	85.7%	42.9%	9.42**
Pantheism	7.8%	27.3%	3.41 <sup>+</sup>	8.3%	28.6%	3.43+
Agnosticism	6.0%	9.1%	0.14	5.7%	21.4%	2.70
Atheism	0%	0%	—	0%	0%	—
Youth religious change	4.76	4.36	1.12	4.75	4.50	0.81
Adult religious change <sup>a</sup>	4.44	4.00	1.01	4.37	3.91	1.43

NOTE: <sup>+</sup>p < .10; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001// <sup>a</sup> Due to 50 respondents (24.6%) not having passed the age of 22, n's on this variable at low maternal religiousness for secure and insecure groups in the maternal relationships were 64 and 31, and at high 36 and 8. Corresponding n's in paternal groups were 51, 44, 27, and 11// Note: X<sup>2</sup> goodness-of-fit tests were performed for the categorical variables theism, pantheism, agnosticism, and atheism. Expected frequencies for agnosticism were less than 5 at high parental religiousness for both secure and insecure groups and for Pantheism at high parental religiousness for insecure groups, thus p's for these are reported as outcomes of Fischer's exact tests.

Data from such analyses are presented in Table 3, which shows that when paternal religiousness was perceived as low, respondents with an insecure paternal relationship had a significantly higher Level of Religiousness than their secure counterparts. However, at high paternal religiousness, secure respondents reported a higher Level of Religiousness than insecure respondents. The effects of the corresponding maternal variables were similar but reached only marginal significance.

Table 3 shows the same pattern of results with regard to Relationship with God, that is, at low paternal religiousness, insecure respondents in the paternal relationship reported a higher degree of Relationship with God, whereas secure respondents reported a higher degree of Relationship with God at high paternal religiousness. Once again, the effects of the corresponding maternal variables did not reach significance.

To investigate the possibility of interaction effects of parental attachment quality and parental religiousness on Belief in God, separate X<sup>2</sup> goodness-of-fit tests were performed at low and high parental religiousness levels. These data are presented in Table 3, which shows that a significantly larger proportion of respondents with an insecure, as compared to a secure, paternal relationship reported theistic beliefs when paternal religiousness had been low. In the case of high paternal religiousness, secure respondents reported theistic beliefs to a larger extent than insecure respondents. The opposite results emerged for agnosticism, that is, at low paternal religiousness, respondents with a secure paternal

relationship were agnostics to a larger extent than respondents with an insecure paternal relationship, but no significant difference was found at high paternal religiousness. Neither pantheism nor atheism yielded significant differences. Finally, the pattern of results was similar, although differences did not reach the  $p < .05$  significance level, for the corresponding maternal variables.

No significant differences in Youth Religious Change were found (see Table 3). However, respondents with an insecure paternal relationship reported a higher degree of Adult Religious Change than their secure counterparts when paternal religiousness was perceived as low.

### *Analysis of Themes*

Analyses of written themes were made, based on the respondents who had indicated a major religious change and who had provided narratives about factors in life that they assumed to be important for understanding these changes. A total of 50 respondents indicated such changes (38 during youth, 19 during adulthood, and 7 during both periods); 28 (56%) provided narratives. Only statements that provided answers to the implied causal question of important life factors were classified. As one respondent only made a description of the change process, this narrative was deemed as irrelevant and was hence excluded, resulting in 27 narratives amenable to analysis.

Themes related to compensation and correspondence hypothesis reasoning were of particular interest and were defined as follows. Themes of compensation were found in statements indicating that religiousness fulfilled an emotionally supportive function for a person in need. Emotional turmoil related to relationships was considered as an especially important indicator for themes of compensation. Themes of correspondence were defined as themes indicating continuity between religiousness and a relationship, as well as themes related to socialization-based takeover of religiousness. Themes of correspondence did not describe a supportive function. Other themes were defined as any theme not meeting the definitions of the themes of compensation or correspondence.

The coding procedure described in the Method section yielded the results presented in Table 4. It should be noted that each person could provide more than one specific theme.

As can be seen in Table 4, a majority (63%) of the specific themes could be categorized into one of the global categories of compensation or correspondence. Moreover, interobserver agreements for these two global categories were high, with both kappa coefficients exceeding the rule of thumb for "excellent" agreement ( $> .75$ ; e.g., Bakeman and Gottman 1992). Also evident in Table 4 is that themes of compensation were more frequently mentioned than themes of correspondence.

Regarding specific themes within the compensation category, the most often reported incidents were related to relationship problems and death of significant others. God's supportive function was also frequently highlighted as were various themes of illness and crisis. Themes regarding meetings and relationships with Christians, experiences from confirmation or membership in Christian youth associations were predominantly mentioned within the correspondence category, whereas the influence of particular important relationships with nonreligious individuals was less frequently highlighted. Various forms of religious experiences were classified within the other themes category. Interesting to note is that these experiences were in three of the cases embedded in a context of other themes judged as themes of compensation, such as chaotic relationships and illness, longing for God and praying to Him for help, and after having been repeatedly molested as a child. Furthermore, common themes within the other themes category were related to cognitive/existential reflections, decisions to enter the clergy, and influences from divine service and various forms of Christian teachings.

TABLE 4

**NARRATIVE THEMES, GROUPED ACCORDING TO GLOBAL AND SPECIFIC CATEGORIES, AND INTEROBSERVER AGREEMENT ESTIMATES**

Global and Specific Categories	Freq. per Category	$P_0^a$	Kappa Coefficient
<i>Themes of compensation:</i>			
Relationship problems or divorce	7	80	.77
Bereavement or death of significant other	9		
Mental or physical illness	5		
First move from home	2		
God's love, help, or support/faith as providing meaning	7		
Acceptance, security or sense of belonging in rel. group	4		
Other themes of crisis or support	5		
<i>Themes of correspondence:</i>			
Therapy	3	92	.89
Personal or intimate relationships	2		
Meetings or relationships with believers	7		
Meetings or relationships with others	4		
Confirmation / membership in Christian youth association	7		
<i>Other themes:</i>			
Meditation	2	63	.59
Artistic activity	2		
Reflections / thoughts	5		
Calling or decision to enter the clergy	5		
Religious experience (incl. conversion, revelation, vision)	6		
Personal or spiritual development	4		
Divine service or Church related influence	5		
Reading of bible / theological studies / Christian teachings	5		
Miscellaneous	2		

<sup>a</sup>  $P_0$  = percentage of agreement

Based on the prominence of their types of specific themes, each respondent was classified into one of four categories: compensation, correspondence, both compensation and correspondence, and other. Interobserver agreement was once again high: percentage of agreement: 85, kappa: .79. After observer disagreements had been resolved, 11 respondents were classified in the compensation category, 8 in the correspondence category, 5 in the category of both compensation and correspondence, and 3 in the other category. Each of these categories will be described and exemplified below, accompanied by attachment theoretical considerations.

The 11 respondents classified into the compensation category seemed to describe major religious change as a strategy of coping with difficult life situations, or in attachment theory terms, of establishing felt security in the face of distress. For instance, a 21-year-old woman stated, after having indicated relationship problems within her family, that "My faith filled my life with something 'more' and provided a frame of reference for life events." Another respondent referred to his longing for God and wrote that "something happened" when he prayed to Jesus for help. He continued: "Ever since, I have been aware that God loves me and I have had a continuous personal relationship with Jesus Christ." Particularly striking, seen from an attachment theoretical viewpoint, was one man's mentioning of adolescent rebellion against parental faith and societal rules, whereafter he stated that "at 15 years of age I experienced a crash . . . My parents and God were then there and supported me." Note that God and this man's parents provided the same safe-haven and emotional-support functions. Several other respondents simply listed important life factors. For instance, one man wrote: "Ruined relationship. Have experienced unfaithfulness and

treachery. The death of a friend." Another man stated: "Death within family. Illness." A young woman listed several factors and life events: "Fire. My father died. Mental illness. Tumultuous and sick relationship. Abortion. Mental illness. Hospital stay at a psychiatric institution. Physically ill. Hospital stay. Tumultuous relationship."

The eight respondents in the correspondence category mostly described major religious change in terms of socialization processes. All respondents classified within this category referred to the influence of a religious group (such as the experiences from confirmation or Christian youth associations) or of other religious individuals. For instance, one man referred to "Meetings with classmates, their faith, and thoughts . . . Meetings with two priests during my period of atheism." One woman stated: "Meetings with people who have acted in accordance with their beliefs, been open for conversations and debates, and made impressions with their thoughts." Another young woman claimed not to have known anything about Jesus Christ until she went to U.S. "where I lived with a Christian family. They told me about Jesus and about what He has done for me . . . and that's the way it happened." It was difficult in some cases to distinguish between the influence of religious socialization and that of important relationships. For instance, one man referred to "people with faith who became my friends and showed what Christian belief means." Another respondent referred to a Christian friend with whom she often spoke about religious issues. Besides providing evidence for successful religious socialization, these themes may indicate a correspondence between important relationships and religiousness.

Prominence of both sets of themes was evident among the five respondents in the category of both compensation and correspondence. Two respondents mentioned the precedence of emotional turmoil (bereavement, divorce and relationship problems in one case and "personal crises" in the other) and thereafter pointed to the influence of therapy. The therapist may be considered as a person, who temporarily serves as a potentially, therapeutically effective secure base for an individual in a situation of need (e.g., Bowlby 1988; Rice and Cummins 1996). Once the therapy, or therapist, has been successful in providing this function and thereby reduced the psychological stress, a corresponding religiousness and relationship with God may be built. The combination of compensation and correspondence themes was particularly salient for a middle-aged man, who wrote: "Drastic change sort of a crisis . . . the death of a relative (parents) new contact girlfriend who was religious 23–24 years of age (sic)." In this case, the love relationship with a religious partner may have filled essentially the same function as the therapist in the above examples. An interpretation in terms of religious socialization may also be valid in this case. Finally, one woman simply stated: "To move from home. To meet other believers" and one man pointed to a sense of belonging and community, as well as the experience of meeting like-minded, in religious groups.

The other category contained three respondents who could not be classified into any of the above categories. Two of these respondents made few relevant statements; both mentioned a decision to work as priests and one referred to personal and spiritual development. Finally, one man listed therapy, meditation, and artistic activity as important factors but none of these were considered as sufficient for inclusion in any of the above categories.

## DISCUSSION

### *Summary and Conclusion*

The results of this study show that caution is warranted in making an interpretation of the ontogenesis of the adult's religiousness as either simply compensation for or correspondence to the quality of the child-parent relations in childhood. Support for the

compensation hypothesis emerged in a relatively straightforward way in that insecure respondents in the maternal relationship had experienced a major religious change during adulthood to a larger extent than secure respondents. In addition, more of the freely reported specific themes concerning these changes were analogous to compensation as compared to correspondence hypothesis reasoning and more respondents were classified into the compensation than into the correspondence category. However, for the other variables investigated, respondents' religiousness was found to be dependent upon the interaction of attachment quality and parental level of religiousness, that is, parental religiousness had a moderating effect on the link between attachment quality and religiousness. The religiousness of securely attached respondents was positively related to parental level of religiousness, whereas the religiousness of insecurely attached respondents was independent of parental level of religiousness. Furthermore, the paternal variables were more successful in predicting differences in religiousness of secure and insecure respondents than were the maternal variables. When paternal religiousness was perceived as low, insecurely attached respondents, in line with the compensation hypothesis, scored higher than secure respondents on the variables Level of Religiousness, Relationship with God, theism, and Adult Religious Change, whereas secure respondents were agnostics to a larger extent. However, the opposite pattern of results emerged at high paternal religiousness, that is, in line with the correspondence hypothesis, respondents with a secure paternal relationship scored higher than their insecure counterparts on the above variables, although the differences were not significant for the variables Adult Religious change and agnosticism.

Similarities and differences between the results of the present study and that of Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990), as well as connections to previous theorizing and research should be pointed out. First, both studies show that in order to describe the adult's religiousness in terms of an attachment phenomenon, it is necessary also to investigate parental religiousness, which in previous research has been shown to be the most powerful social background predictor of a person's religious involvement (e.g., Hoge and Petrillo 1978; Newcomb and Svehla 1937).

Second, results from the two studies were also similar in that insecure respondents, in line with the compensation hypothesis, scored higher than secure respondents on several religiousness variables at low levels of parental religiousness, which gives preliminary confidence to the generalizability and cultural stability of the findings. However, Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study revealed no differences between attachment groups at high parental religiousness, whereas the present study found higher religiousness for secure respondents and thereby also supported the correspondence hypothesis. This latter finding could be considered as support for Erikson's (1950) notion of basic trust as the basis for later religiousness, although this notion is contradicted by the findings at low parental religiousness.

Third, whereas differences in religiousness between secure and insecure groups in the present study generally were attributable to differences between secure and ambivalent respondents (see Note 1), the differences in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study were most apparent between secure and avoidant respondents. This difference is likely, at least in part, to have resulted from the smaller proportion of respondents reporting avoidant compared to those reporting ambivalent attachments in the present study. In addition, the two insecure groups were similar in religiousness in the present study, whereas the ambivalent groups scored in between the secure and avoidant groups in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study. These results may reflect cultural differences in upbringing, but more empirical data is needed for this issue to be resolved in the future.

Fourth, whereas the maternal variables were superior to the paternal variables in predicting respondents' religiousness in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study, results were

the opposite in the present study. There is no straightforward way of explaining this particular difference in theoretical terms, unless the Freudian (1964 [1927]) notion of God as an exalted father figure is drawn into the discussion. More parsimoniously, this difference may be interpreted as reflecting less preoccupation with the mother as the primary caregiver in the Swedish culture as compared to the situation in the U.S. A second and compatible alternative is that this finding may result from the larger variation in paternal, as compared to maternal, attachment classifications (see Table 1).

Fifth, the present study found counterintuitive results by suggesting that agnosticism, rather than atheism, is the opposite of theism. This was also reported in another study by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) that investigated links between adult attachment quality and religiousness. Finally, the narrative themes of compensation in the present study were strikingly similar to the themes reported in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study, although the former concerned major religious change and the latter only sudden religious conversions. However, themes of correspondence were also evident in the narratives of the present study.

Some of these results, and particularly the findings of insecure respondents being more likely to have experienced a major religious change, could be described by the proposed functions of God and religiousness as sources of compensation for persons with insecure parental relationships. This would mean that insecurely, compared to securely, attached individuals have more of an emotional need for a compensatory attachment figure (e.g., God) with whom a relationship can be established that is not susceptible to the same constraints as those encountered in early life with parents, and later on, presumably through the influence of derived internal working models of relationships, with peers (e.g., Elicker et al. 1992) and lovers (e.g., Collins and Read 1990; Feeney and Noller 1990; Hazan and Shaver 1987). In addition, people with an insecure, compared to those with a secure, attachment history may be more prone to experience crises and intense emotional distress when faced with threatening life circumstances (e.g., illness, the death of significant others, breaking up of relationships). Such a proneness for emotional distress may explain why insecure respondents were more likely than secure respondents to have experienced a major religious change in the present study and a sudden religious conversion in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study.

However, this relatively straightforward interpretation does not explain why secure respondents were more religious at high parental (i.e., paternal) religiousness in the present study. It is possible that persons with secure parental relationships are more influenced by parental beliefs and behaviors than individuals with insecure relationships (cf. Kagan 1984), regardless of which beliefs and behaviors that are investigated. This interpretation would explain the interaction findings of the present study, interpreted as moderating effects of attachment quality on the links between parents' and respondents' religiousness. Another way of stating this is that the religiousness of securely attached people corresponds to parental level of religiousness rather than to secure childhood attachment. This revised interpretation of the correspondence hypothesis is supported by the present study's themes of correspondence, which in most cases indicated a socialization-based takeover of religiousness rather than continuity between religiousness and important relationships.

A tentative conclusion is that there may be different pathways to religiousness for persons differing in childhood attachment quality. The religiousness of persons with an insecure attachment history may have more of an emotional ontogenesis, that is, religiousness may represent a compensation for insecure childhood relationships, whereas the religiousness of persons with a secure attachment history may be originating more from social circumstances and thereby correspond to parental level of religiousness. If valid operationalizations are made to test this particular hypothesis, it may well prove to be a fruitful area for future investigations. It is necessary to point out, though, that simply

applying the frequently used Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scales (Allport and Ross 1967) is not making a valid operationalization in this case, since these scales, besides measuring semantically and theoretically different constructs, purport to tap a committed versus a selfishly utilitarian religious orientation and are thereby both value-laden and heavily loaded with potential for social desirability as a confound of the outcomes (e.g., Batson et al. 1978).

### *Methodological Issues and Future Directions*

Regarding methodological issues, the present study had several advantages over the Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) study. To begin with, we had more control over the selection of our student population than Kirkpatrick and Shaver had over their self-selected newspaper sample. Also, the gender distribution in our sample was not as skewed (38% males); the Kirkpatrick and Shaver study contained only 15% males. Furthermore, although religiousness is probably not a unidimensional phenomenon (e.g., Batson et al. 1993), the inclusion of our variable Level of Religiousness for both respondents and parents made possible a direct investigation of correlations between respondents' and parents' religiousness and also provided the opportunity of testing whether attachment quality was related to "magnitude" of religiousness, which was expected on the basis of Kirkpatrick and Shaver's results. In addition, the continuous variable Relationship with God, which was categorical in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's study, was psychometrically advantageous as it permitted greater variation in responses; also the variable Belief in God, which did not contain atheism and agnosticism in Kirkpatrick and Shaver's study, permitted a more complete set of response alternatives. Finally, the present study had the advantage over Kirkpatrick and Shaver's study of inquiring into the religious changes that did not meet the criteria for conversion and also by providing various classifications and reliability estimates for the narratives of major religious change. The empirically derived specific themes of the present study may be helpful in future attempts at arriving at standardized questions regarding important life factors in connection to religious changes and conversions.

Although the present study had methodological advantages, several caveats need to be considered and implications for future studies given. As a first obvious point, since a correlational design was employed, the present study does not permit drawing causal inferences. Also, the potential problem of shared methodological variance can not be excluded as all measures were captured in one instrument and at a single point in time. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs and different modes of measurement to overcome this problem and to strengthen causal inferences.

Furthermore, the distributions of respondents on the attachment variables were more skewed, especially in the maternal relationships, than is usually the case in attachment research using similar operationalizations (see Baldwin and Fehr 1995). This may reflect an effect of social desirability, denial, or idealization on behalf of the population of insecure, particularly avoidant (Crowell et al. 1993; Steele and Steele 1994), persons, which may be a consequence of the straightforward attachment measures employed. In addition, a meta analysis (Baldwin and Fehr 1995) on the stability of scores on a similar measure of adult attachment quality (Hazan and Shaver 1987) revealed that approximately 30% of respondents changed response alternatives from one occasion to another, and that the greatest instability was associated with the ambivalent classification. One of the most crucial tasks for future investigators will therefore be to apply better measures of attachment quality. When considering the rigorously developed operationalizations of attachment quality in the history of attachment research, it is somewhat remarkable that the self-ratings and single item measures have come to enjoy such wide applications in recent years. Many previous findings need to be replicated in studies using measures that



do not take subjects' responses at face value. The best method to date for accomplishing this task appears to be the semi-structured Adult Attachment Interview (George et al. 1985), which has been developed to handle answers plagued by social desirability, denial, and idealization.

Finally, there is no possibility of making aprioric generalizations of these results to other than Western religious traditions. Although the monotheistic conceptualizations of God are particularly striking seen from an attachment theoretical viewpoint, future studies could contribute by relating attachment quality to religiousness in polytheistic and pantheistic traditions. Also, attachment distributions within the global Christian community could be investigated, for instance, between members of Pentecostal denominations and those of "mainstream" Christianity, such as Catholics and Lutherans.

Regarding further studies, a fruitful area would perhaps be to longitudinally inquire into the circumstances under which an individual first "finds" and develops an affectional bond to God, and also to determine which factors contribute to the dissolution (i.e., detachment) of these bonds. The focus of such an investigation could be on adolescence when new affectional bonds have been proposed to be sought (e.g., Bowlby 1969; Weiss 1982), and if such bonds to God were found likely to be developed during this period of life, it would highlight the need for establishing felt security with a new secure base and haven of safety. Related to this is the potential utility of further studying individuals who have experienced a sudden religious conversion, which is more often experienced during adolescence than during any other period in life (e.g., Hall 1904; Johnson 1959). In countries as heavily secularized as Sweden, these individuals must apparently be recruited from more "radical" religious groups than has been done in the present study. In such countries it might be useful to apply wider functional definitions of religiousness than the rather narrow substantial definition on which the present study was based. Future studies based on functional definitions could perhaps contribute by assessing links between attachment quality and memberships in such diverse phenomena as the heterogeneous new-age and psychotherapy movements and in various forms of political and other subcultures.

To return to the question of the utility of applying the compensation or correspondence hypothesis to adults' religiousness, we consider it important to be guided by the results of empirical investigations rather than solely by theoretical or ideological conceptions. More studies will obviously have to be performed before anything definitive can be said on the question of compensation or correspondence. We also realize that there is more to religion than attachment theory can conceptualize in a meaningful way, and so the compensation and correspondence hypotheses may be, not a misapplication, but an oversimplification of the matter. However, our findings do suggest that part of adult religiousness may be adequately described in terms of attachment. A crucial task for future studies in this area will therefore be to attempt to provide keys for unlocking the attachment-related aspects of the adult's religiousness and the above outlined distinction between emotionally and socially originated religiousness may be one such key. Finally, we would like to caution anticipatorily against solely turning the attachment theoretical conceptualization of religiousness into the sort of heuristically propped hermeneutical approaches that thus far has dominated the history of the psychology of religion and thereby, with a few exceptions, kept it isolated from the history of mainstream academic psychology. As the progress in developmental psychology has shown, as well as the results of this and Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study, it is both possible and fruitful to transcend heuristics by permitting empirical evaluations of the more or less complex predictions that should lie embedded in every form of scientific theorizing.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent analyses were first made without aggregation of the insecure groups. The results showed ambivalent and avoidant respondents to be similar on the religiousness variables, both at low and high parental religiousness. When plotted, there were generally no interactions between ambivalent and avoidant groups whereas both insecure groups showed disordinal interactions (see Shavelson 1988) with the secure groups. Thus, no information was lost by the aggregation of the insecure groups. The statistically significant results were in most cases attributable to differences between ambivalent and secure respondents both at low and high parental religiousness (mainly due to the greater *n*'s in the ambivalent as compared to the avoidant groups).

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