

## Attachment to God Predicts Psychological Well-Being

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Kirkpatrick (2005) proposed that for theists a representation of God can serve as an attachment figure—a safe haven in times of distress, a secure base from which one can venture into the world. He further proposed that the two dimensions of adult attachment (anxiety and avoidance) also apply to the attachment relationship with God.

Previous research has provided evidence that theists' attachment to God (ATG) is negatively related to depression (Miner, Dowson, & Malone, 2014), and positively related to self-esteem (Kézdy, Martos, & Robu, 2013; Zahl & Gibson, 2012).

The current study examines whether these associations between attachment to God and psychological well-being continue to exist after controlling for two other factors related to well-being: locus of control (LOC) and adult attachment.

### Method

#### Participants

Subjects ( $n=709$ ) participated online through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Sixty-three participants who did not pass attention and lie scales were removed from analysis, as were 292 participants who did not identify as monotheists. The final sample consisted of 243 females and 111 males ranging from age 18 to 75 ( $\bar{X} = 37.2$ ). Most participants (93%) identified as Christian.

#### Measures

Subjects completed a number of measures, one of which was the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures questionnaire (ECR-RS; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011). The ECR-RS taps avoidant and anxious attachment to one's mother, father, best friend, and romantic partner. Avoidant attachment is measured using 6 likert-type items for each attachment figure, and anxious attachment using 3 items for each attachment figure.

Subjects also completed the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), which measures avoidant and anxious attachment to God using a 14-item subscale for each attachment dimension.

The Control and Defense Scale which subjects completed measures locus of control using eight-items that produce two subscales: responsibility for success and responsibility for failure (Mirowsky & Ross, 1990). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) is a ten-item inventory with questions on a five-point Likert scale.

Finally, all subjects completed the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) Short Form, a ten-item measure in which participants indicate the number of days in the past week they have experienced a thought or emotion that is associated with depression (Cole, Rabin, Smith, & Kaufman, 2004).

### Results

Correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. Two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed, one on depression scores and the other on self-esteem scores. In each analysis, LOC was entered first, followed by the eight attachment variables (anxious and avoidant attachment to mother, father, romantic partner, and friend) in step 2. Finally, in step 3, the two ATG scales were entered.

As can be seen in Table 2, LOC accounted for significant variability in depression (9.6%). The combined adult attachment scales accounted for an additional 18.3 % of the variability in depression scores. Finally, after controlling for both LOC and adult attachment, attachment to God accounted for

8.2% of the variability in depression scores. Avoidant attachment to God was not significantly related to depression, but anxious attachment was positively associated with depression scores ( $\beta = .305$ ).

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression performed on self-esteem scores. As with depression, LOC accounted for a significant amount of variability in self-esteem scores in step 1 (15.9%). In step 2, the combined adult attachment scales accounted for an additional 12.4% of variability in self-esteem. Finally, in Step 3, ATG accounted for an additional 9.9% of variability in self-esteem. Both ATG avoidance and anxiety were significantly and negatively related to self-esteem ( $\beta = -.095$  and  $\beta = -.322$ , respectively).

## Discussion

Unsurprisingly, we found that locus of control was related to psychological well-being. Specifically, subjects who viewed the positive outcomes in their lives as being under their control reported lower depression and higher self-esteem. We also found that adult attachment—particularly avoidant attachment to one's mother and father and anxious attachment to one's romantic partner—was related positively to depression and negatively related to self-esteem.

Of particular interest, however, was our replication of previous research suggesting that Attachment to God is positively related to psychological well-being. Importantly, these relationships persisted after controlling for LOC and adult attachment, suggesting that theists' relationship with God provides a unique contribution to their well-being. Future research might explore how attachment to God is related to other aspects of well-being.

## References

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Table 1

*Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients*

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>1. Resp. for success</u>	--												
<u>2. Resp. for failure</u>	.95***	--											
<u>3. Self-esteem</u>	.55***	.21**	--										
<u>4. Depression</u>	-.44***	-.17*	-.85***	--									
<u>5. Mother Anxiety</u>	-.09	-.10	-.18**	.24***	--								
<u>6. Mother Avoidance</u>	-.07	-.04	-.29***	.31***	.66***	--							
<u>7. Father Anxiety</u>	-.17*	-.06	-.27***	.35***	.41***	.15*	--						
<u>8. Father Avoidance</u>	-.03	.03	-.30***	.26***	.18**	.30***	.03	--					
<u>9. Romantic Anxiety</u>	-.11	-.05	-.33***	.42***	.28***	.23***	.37***	.24***	--				
<u>10. Romantic Avoid.</u>	-.06	-.04	-.20***	.30***	.10	.22***	.18**	.24***	.52***	--			
<u>11. Friend Anxiety</u>	-.20*	-.06	-.27***	.35***	.20**	.20**	.23***	.19**	.42***	.39***	--		
<u>12. Friend Avoidance</u>	-.02	.03	-.30***	.26***	.03	.14*	.03	.22***	.10	.60***	.49***	--	
<u>13. ATG Anxiety</u>	-.14	-.03	-.46***	.46***	.12*	.08	.19**	.17**	.29***	.13*	.27***	.11	--
<u>14. ATG Avoidance</u>	-.20**	-.07	-.19**	.08	.04	.13*	.05	.13*	.04	.12*	.06	.10	.03

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

Note: all correlations have been corrected for unreliability of measures

Table 2

*Variance Accounted For and Changes in Variance Accounted For in Depression*

	$R^2$	$R^2_{\text{change}}$	<u>Subscale</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Regression Equation <math>F^a</math></u>	<u><math>R^2_{\text{change}} F</math></u>
<u>Step 1</u>						
Locus of Control	.096***				18.61***	
			Resp. for Success	-.341***		
			Resp. for Failure	.07		
<u>Step 2</u>						
Locus of Control and Adult Attachment	.279***	.183***			11.40***	9.33***
			Father Anxiety	.17*		
			Father Avoidance	.014		
			Mother Anxiety	-.043		
			Mother Avoidance	.178*		
			Romant. Anxiety	.179**		
			Romant. Avoidance	.091		
			Friend Anxiety	.103		
			Friend Avoidance	-.058		
<u>Step 3</u>						
Locus of Control, Adult Attachment, and Attachment to God	.361***	.082*			13.74***	18.74***
			God Anxiety	.305***		
			God Avoidance	-.009		

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

Table 3

*Variance Accounted For and Changes in Variance Accounted For in Self-Esteem*

	$R^2$	$R^2_{\text{change}}$	<u>Subscale</u>	<i>Beta</i>	<u>Regression Equation <math>F^a</math></u>	$R^2_{\text{change } F}$
<u>Step 1</u>						
Locus of Control	.159***				33.27***	
			Resp. for Success	.441***		
			Resp. for Failure	-.085		
<u>Step 2</u>						
Locus of Control and Adult Attachment	.283***	.124***			11.62***	6.36***
			Father Anxiety	-.049		
			Father Avoidance	-.15*		
			Mother Anxiety	.078		
			Mother Avoidance	-.181**		
			Romant. Anxiety	-.177**		
			Romant. Avoidance	.048		
			Friend Anxiety	-.104		
			Friend Avoidance	-.037		
<u>Step 3</u>						
Locus of Control, Adult Attachment, and Attachment to God	.382***	.099***			15.01***	23.39***
			God Anxiety	-.322***		
			God Avoidance	-.095*		

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