

The God Image, the God Concept, and Attachment

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The God Concept

- Definition:
 - The God Concept is a person's cognitive understanding of God (Lawrence, 1997)
 - In general, this is based on what a person learns about God through cognitive means.
 - Generally, it develops primarily through what a person is taught about.
 - The God Concept is typically more closely associated with a person's theology.

The God Image

- The idea of the God Image emerged from the work of Ana Marie Rizzuto (1979) building from Freud's theory.
- It can be defined as a person's experiential understanding of God.
- The God Image develops parallel to the God Concept, but through different means.
- While the God Concept develops from what people are taught, the God Image develops through what people experience.

The God Image (cont.)

- Traditionally, it has been viewed that the God Image develops primarily through how a child experiences their primary care giver or parents.
- The God Image is generally theorized to be more of a latent construct, while the God Concept is more of a manifest construct.

Attachment

- Attachment theory, which emerged from the work of Bowlby, recognizes four types of attachment
 - 1) Secure
 - 2) Avoidant
 - 3) Ambivalent/Resistant (Anxious)
 - 4) Disorganized

Attachment (cont.)

- The child's attachment style emerges from their early relationships with their parents.
 - An important factor in determining the attachment style is the parents' attunement to the child's need.
 - If a child's parents are attuned to the child's need, they are likely to develop a secure attachment.
 - If a child's parents are not attuned to the child's need, they are more likely to develop one of the three types of insecure attachment.

Attachment and the God Image

- According to Rizzuto's theory, a child's attachment to their parents would be a better predictor of the God Image than the God Concept.
- In other words, what is taught to children about God by their parents, Sunday School, and church will not influence how they experience God as much as the child's relationship with their parents.

The Current Study

- The current study is intended to be a preliminary examination of Rizzuto's theory with college age students.
- While previous study's have supported the predicted connection between parental relationships and the God Image, none were found which used attachment as the primary paradigm for understanding the individual's parental relationships.

Measures & Preliminary Limitations

- A primary limitation in the current study was the measures which were utilized.
- The researchers had concerns about each of the measures which were selected, but proceeded with the study as a preliminary study.
- The initial justification for continuing with the current measures, was that if significant results were found, future research would include the development of more appropriate measures for two of the three constructs.

Measures & Preliminary Limitations (cont)

- As the results do provide justification, the development of an attachment scale and improve measure of the God Concept is underway.

The God Image Scales

- The 36-item version of the God Image Scales (Lawrence, 1997) was used for the current study.
- The computerized scoring developed by Jay Gattis was utilized for scoring (see www.godimage.org)
- This includes three subscales:
 - Presence - “Is God there for me?”
 - Challenge - “Does God want me to grow?”
 - Acceptance – “Am I good enough for God to love?”

The God Image Scales (cont.)

- The 36-item version was used because of the stronger factor structure than the 72-item version.
- There are an additional 3-scales (Benevolence, Influence, and Providence) on the 72-item version.
- A important limitation in the currents study is the exclusion of the three additional scales, in particularly the Benevolence Scale.

Measures & Preliminary Limitations (cont)

- While the Acceptance scale addresses, “Am I good enough for God to love?”, which focuses on the individual’s self-worth, the Benevolence scale addresses, “Is God the sort of person who would want to love me?”, which focuses on the characteristics of God.
- In examining the relationships of the experience of God and the experience of parents, the Benevolence scale would be more useful.
- This scale would be preferable in future studies which include a larger sample.

Religious Concept Survey (The God Concept)

- The Religious Concept Survey was developed by Gorsuch (1968).
- It includes a list of 91 adjectives which could be used to describe God.
- Five initial factors were developed:
 - Traditional Christian
 - Deisticness
 - Wrathfulness
 - Omni-ness
 - Irrelevancy

Religious Concept Survey (The God Concept)

- A major limitation of this measure is the number of items included on each factor.
 - Four of the factors had between 4-15 items, the Traditional Christian scale had 50 items.
 - In the preliminary statistical analysis no control was included to balance this.
 - In the ongoing data analysis to be written up, we will attempt to control for this.
 - However, in the current study, there is a strong bias toward the Traditional Christian scale suggesting the results pertaining to this scale should be interpreted cautiously.

Religious Concept Survey (The God Concept)

- An additional critique of this scale is pertains to language issues.
 - Some of the terms may outdated (Feeble, Fast, and Meek, for example)
 - Additionally, new terms which may be reflective of contemporary theology are not included, in particularly terms which may view God as more fluid and nurturing.
 - Finally, it could be maintained that the terms reflect a white, male bias.
 - An attempt to correct this will be made in the development of a new God Concept Scale.

Adult Attachment Scales

- The Adult Attachment Scales (Collins & Read, 1990) measures adult attachment.
- Herein lies the most significant weakness in the current study.
- The attachments measures which examine early childhood relationships which have established empirical support have been developed in an interview format.

Adult Attachment Scales

- The current study utilized the adult attachment construct with the assumption there would be a close, albeit imperfect relationship with childhood attachment.
- Results from the current study could furthermore provide evidence that it would be worthwhile pursuit to develop a better attachment measure.
- A further limitation is that this measure only include 3 of the 4 attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant relationship between the God Image and Attachment.

- Part A: Secure Attachment will have a positive relationship with Presence and Acceptance on the God Image Scales.
- Part B: There will be a negative relationship between Avoidant and Anxious Attachment and the Presence and Acceptance God Image Scales

Hypothesis 2: There would be no significant relationship between the God Image and the God Concept.

Methods

- See Figure 1

Results

- See Table 1
- Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.
- Part A of Hypothesis 1 predicted that a secure attachment would be positively related to Presence and Acceptance on the God Image Scale.
 - This was supported by the results
 - Secure attachment also had an additional positive relationship with the Challenge Scale

Results (cont.)

- Hypothesis 1, Part B predicted a negative correlation between Avoidant & Anxious Attachment and the Presence & Acceptance God Image Scales
 - This was not supported
 - Avoidant attachment did not have a significant positive or negative correlation with any God Image Scales
 - Anxious Attachment had a positive correlation with Acceptance (and also Challenge) on the God Image Scales

Results (cont.)

- Hypothesis 2, based on the literature review and theory, predicted that there would be no significant relationship between the God Image and the God Concept.
 - This hypothesis was not supported
 - Several factors on the God Image correlated with the God Concept

Conclusion

- Q&A
- View our website at:
<http://www.vanguard.edu/gradpsych/>
- More information on the God Image and God Image Assessment available at:
- www.godimage.com &
- www.godimage.org

Figure 1

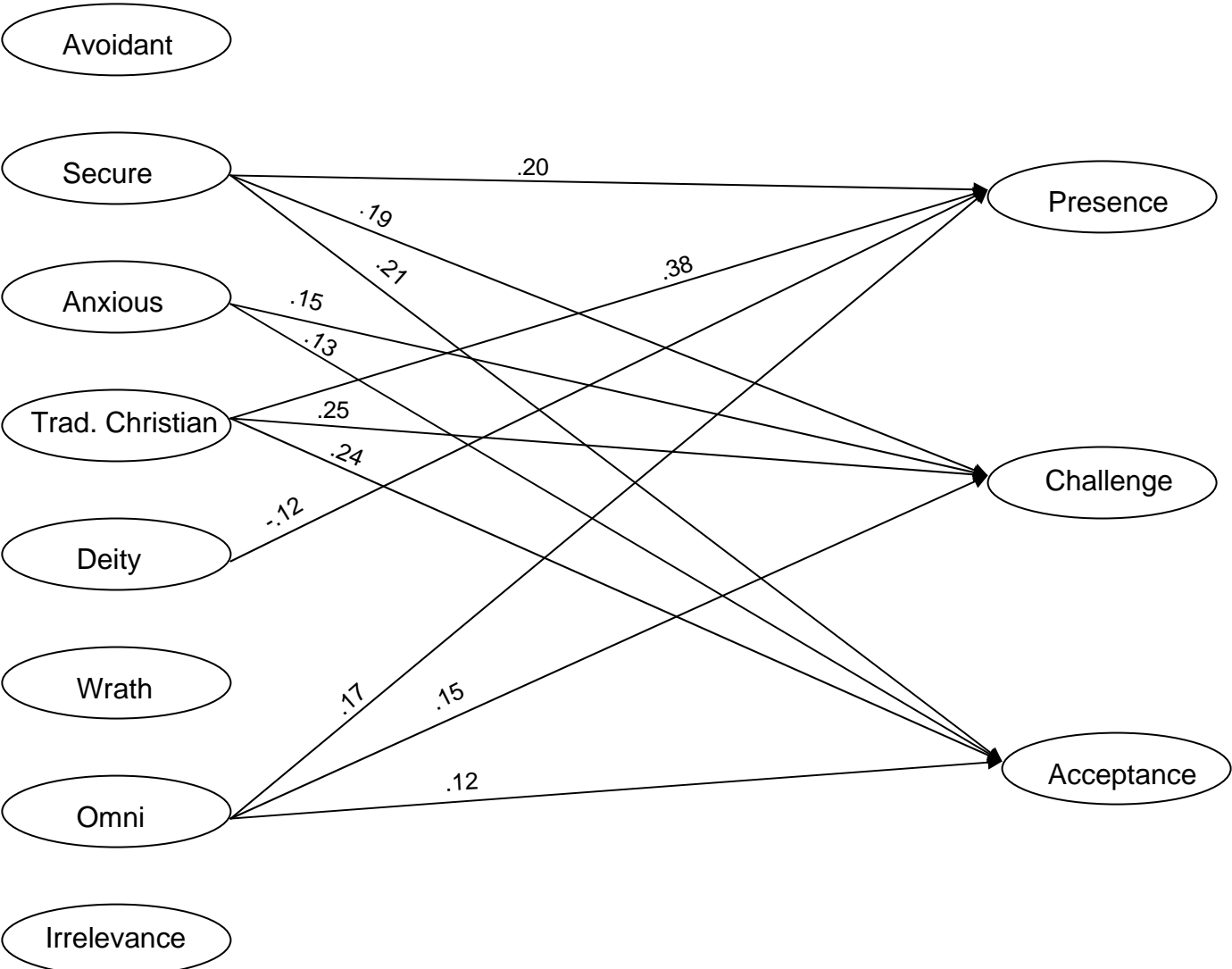


Figure 1

Descriptions of Scales

Label	Construct	Description
<u>Attachment Scales</u>		
Avoidant	Avoidant Attachment	Avoidant adult attachment.
Secure	Secure Attachment	Secure adult attachment.
Anxious	Anxious Attachment	Anxious adult attachment
<u>God Concept Scales</u>		
Trad. Christian	Traditional Christian God Concept	This scale is composed of adjectives with traditional Christian descriptions of God (Absolute, Eternal, Patient)
Deity	Deity God Concept	This scale is compose of adjectives referring to a conception of God as being remote and not involved in the world (Impersonal, Inaccessible, Distant)
Wrath	Wrathfulness	This scale is composed of adjectives describing God as judging, angry, and punishing (Avenging, Hard, Punishing)
Omni	Omni-ness	This scale contains items which describe God in terms of the omni's, such as all powerful, all knowing, etc.(Infinite, Omnipotent , Omniscient)

Figure 1 (continued).

Label	Construct	Description
Irrelevance	Irrelevancy	This scale, which has been found to have a weak factor structure, focuses on descriptions of God as not being perfect or relevant in the world (Feeble, Weak, Worthless)
<u>God Image Inventory</u>		
Presence	God Image - Presence	“Is God there for me?” This scale focuses on the experience of God as being present for the individual.
Challenge	God Image – Challenge	“Does God want me to Grow?” This scale focuses on a person experiencing God as wanting them to grow.
Acceptance	God Image – Acceptance	“Am I good enough for God to love?” This scale focuses on the experience of themselves as being lovable to God (as opposed to God loving them even if they are not lovable).

Note. The questions from the God Image Inventory descriptions were quoted from Lawrence, R. T. (1997). Measuring the Image of God: The God Image Inventory and the *God Image Scales*. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25, 214-226.

Table 1.

Correlations from the Path Analysis

Attachment & God Concept Scales	God Image Presence	God Image Challenge	God Image Acceptance
Avoidant	ns	ns	ns
Secure	.20	.19	.21
Anxious	ns	.15	.13
Traditional Christian	.38	.25	.24
Deity	-.12	ns	ns
Wrathfulness	ns	ns	ns
Omni-ness	.17	.15	.12
Irrelevancy	ns	ns	ns

Note: ns = non-significant correlations. All other correlations significant to $p < .05$.

References

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- Rizzuto, A. M. (1979). *The birth of living God; A psychoanalytic study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.