



BETWEEN EMOTIONS & FEELINGS:

**ATTACHMENT TO GOD, ATTITUDES TOWARD
GOD, AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

A presentation by [Victor Counted](#) at the 6th European Conference on Religion, Spirituality, and Health at Coventry University, UK (18 May, 2018).



Special thanks to **Western Sydney University** and **Stellenbosch University** for funding the conference travel.



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01.

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND RELIGION

- Internal working models of attachment (IWMs) are largely **unconscious** representations of attachment experiences (Maier et al. 2004).
- **Emotion** is central to attachment affiliation; this emotional bond connects one person to another across time and space (Ainsworth, 1973)
- Attachment **surrogates** are formed when human **attachment figures** are no longer (emotionally or geographically?) available (Counted, 2016b, 2016b; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016) based on individual differences
- God can serve as an attachment figure/surrogate among adults than infants due to their improved cognitive abilities (Cicirelli, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1999), meeting the following attachment criteria:
 - **Proximity** to God and turning to God as a response to separation anxiety
 - God as a **safe haven** to turn to in times of distress
 - God as a **secure base** for individual growth and exploration



02.

ATTITUDES THEORY AND RELIGION

- Shows how individual **beliefs** and **feelings** toward a significant object are influential to their psychological functions (Herek, 1987)
- This are **conscious** responses held by individuals because they are important and integral to their psychological functioning
- Individual can therefore have different attitudes toward God, i.e. beliefs that reflect how they feel about God (Wood et al. 2010).
- Wood et al. (2010) have proposed that attitudes toward God can either reflect positive or negative feelings and beliefs (Exline & Martin, 2005).



03.

ATTACHMENT, ATTITUDES, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

- (Secure) Attachment to God is related to reduced loneliness, distress, symptoms of anxiety-related disorders (Bradshaw, et al. 2010; Ellison et al. 2014) and increased psychological well-being and better mental and physical health outcomes (Koenig et al. 2001; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Kent et al. 2017; Bradshaw & Kent, 2017).
- Positive attitudes toward God is related to better health outcomes and utilized as a constructive coping style (Homan & Boyatzis, 2010; Hernandez et al. 2010)
- Negative attitudes toward God (e.g. concerns over the problem of evil and suffering in the world) may trigger negative emotions and feelings of frustration or being abandoned by God (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997; Exline et al. 2000; Exline & Martin, 2005)





04.

Study objective

To examine whether (secure) attachment to God is positively related to QoL, and the extent to which this relationship is based on positive or negative attitudes toward God.

Hypotheses

- Attachment to God will be positively related to QoL
- Positive attitudes toward God will be positively associated with QoL
- Negative attitudes toward God will be inversely related to QoL
- Attachment to God will be positively associated with QoL among individuals with positive attitudes toward God than with those with negative attitudes toward God

05.

Snowball sampling

- Recruiting participants from existing church community structures

Cross-sectional survey

- N=261 Christian church goers of African background in New South Wales (Australia) were recruited for this study from November 2016 to May 2017.

Age mean

- M=36.9, SD=11.7

Gender

- Female 54%; Male 46%

Length of residence in New South Wales

- Less than 5 years (30%); More than 5 years (70%)

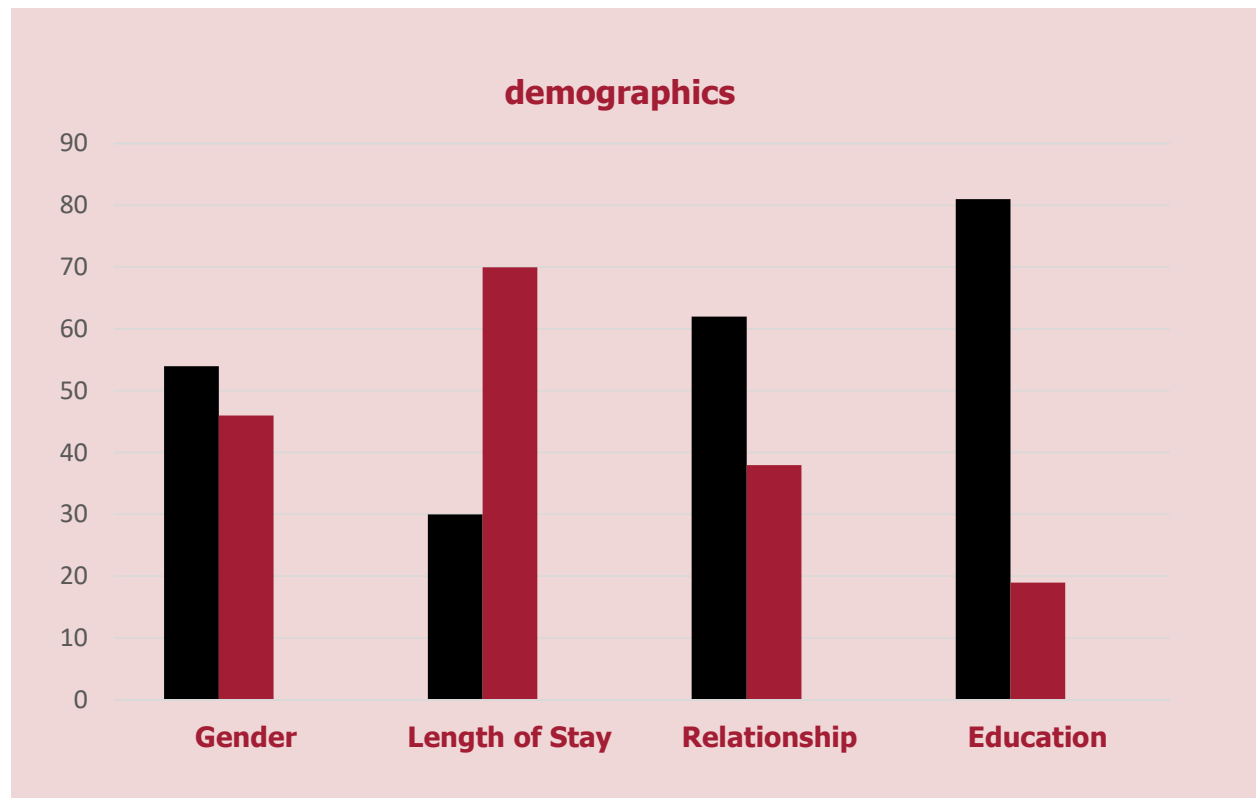
Relationship status

- 62% Married; 38% Single

Education background

- 81% tertiary; 19% high school

Participants



05

Measures

Attachment to God Measure (Sim & Loh, 2003)

Secure attachment to God measuring combined items of proximity to God, God as a safe haven, God as a secure base, and God as a response to separation anxiety (α .89)

Attitudes toward God Scale (Wood et al. 2010)

Positive attitudes toward God (α .84)

Negative attitudes toward God (α .71)

World Health Organization Quality of Life BREF (WHOQoL Group, 1998)

Psychological Health QoL (α .76)

Physical health QoL (α .77)

Social relationship QoL (α .71)

Environmental health QoL (α .79)

General QoL (α = .63)



06

Main effects results

Positive association between attachment to God and QoL

Attachment to God was positively associated with better outcomes of quality of life:

- environmental health, $b=0.296$, 95%CI: 0.149, 0.444; $p<.001$;
- psychological functioning, $b=0.213$, 95%CI: 0.054, 0.307, $p<.01$;
- physical health, $b=0.246$, 95%CI: 0.065, 0.427; $p<.01$;
- social relationship state, $b=0.470$, 95%CI: 0.273, 0.668; $p<.001$;
- general quality of life, $b=0.415$, 95%CI: 0.298, 0.531; $p<.001$).
- The effects sizes for attachment to God on outcomes of quality of life ranged from 0.281 (social relationship state) to 0.165 (physical health) in the standardized betas (β).

No relationship between negative attitudes toward God and QoL

We found no statistically significant relationship between negative attitudes toward God and outcomes of quality of life.

- This is expected since negative attitudes reinforced the effects of negative emotions

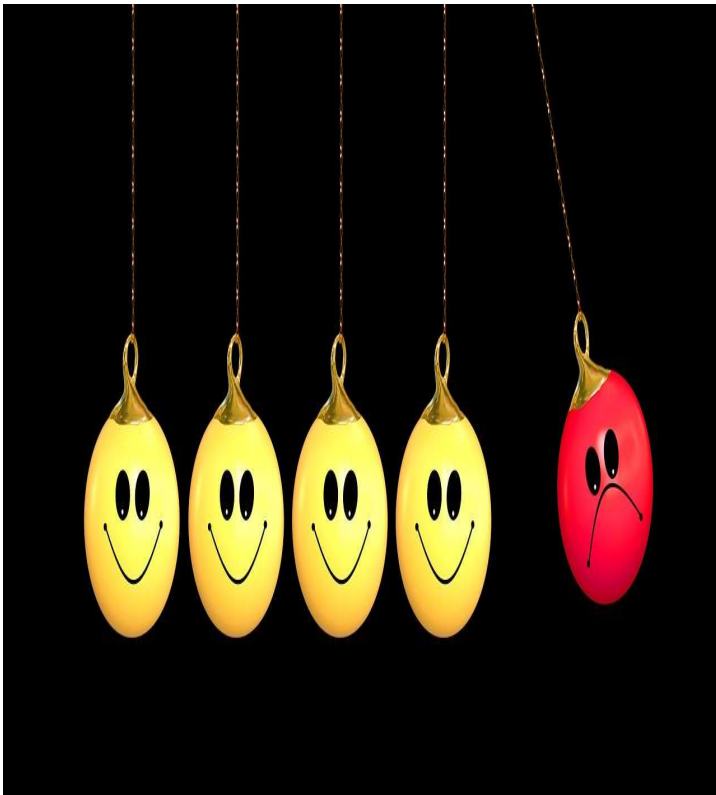
Negative relationship between positive attitudes toward God and QoL

Measure of positive attitudes toward God bears consistent inverse associations with three quality of life outcomes:

- environmental health, $b= -0.110$, 95%CI: -0.187, -0.032; $p<.01$;
- social relationship state, $b= -0.193$, 95%CI: -0.297, -0.089; $p<.001$;
- general quality of life, $b= -0.118$, 95%CI: -0.183, -0.054; $p<.001$.

06

Interactive effects results



The interaction effects of attachment to God and attitudes toward God on QoL

The interaction effects between attachment to God and positive attitudes toward God are negatively associated with outcomes of quality of life (with the exception of physical health which is not significant) and remained significant even after controlling for covariates.

- environmental health, $b = -0.028$, 95%CI: $-0.046, -0.009$; $p < .001$;
- physical health, $b = -0.024$, 95%CI: $-0.046, -0.001$; $p < .01$;
- social relationships state, $b = -0.046$, 95%CI: $-0.071, -0.021$; $p < .001$;
- general quality of life, $b = -0.030$, 95%CI: $-0.045, -0.015$; $p < .001$)



Discussions and questions

Although the effects of attachment to God contribute to better quality of life, this may change when attitudes toward God are considered. Study results suggest that secure attachment to God was associated with poor quality of life among individuals who reported positive attitudes toward God. **What could be the cause of this negative effect?**

Theologically ineffective feelings/attitudes

The interaction results may have revealed the positive coping effects of an attachment-based relational model in terms of attachment to God (heart-knowledge of God), compared to the cognitive model of attitudes toward God which seems to be theologically-driven and constructed based on one's head-knowledge of God (Davis et al. 2013).

Attachment to God appears to help the individual to have a deeper sense of a personal relationship with God as a reliable source to turn to in times of crisis while positive attitudes toward God seem to focus on one's cognitive disposition toward God.

The benefits of emotions over feelings

Another reason for the results could be because attachment to God is more about emotion while positive attitudes toward God may be linked to individual feelings.

A 'feeling' is a conscious and brief episodic emotional experience, as is the physical excitement or sensation that arouse laughter, pain, hunger, or positive attitude. In contrast, an emotion is a much stronger emotional experience than a feeling, in that it can endure the human experience and yet predispose to a variety of emotional options, beliefs, desires, and actions that strengthen or demoralise the individual (Burton, 2015).

Problem with the ATGS measure

Another issue to be considered is the measurement problem. Wood et al.'s (2010) ATGS scale is poorly developed and not reliable, lacking adequate theoretical model that informs the statements. A way to resolve this issue would be to develop and validate a scale of attitudes toward God that would draw on reliable attitudes-based theories.



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Thank you!