Does Religion Compromise Autonomy?

Maureen Miner and Martin Dowson

University of Western Sydney

Abstract

Close interpersonal relationships can provide a refuge in times of crisis, as well as a sense of security when engaging with life's difficulties. A person's relationship with God can also provide these functions that are characteristic of attachment bonds. However, one of the accusations against religious people is that they depend excessively on God and fail to exercise autonomy. This is an important issue in a global context where religious dependency might lead to passivity, or over-conformity to religious prescriptions. The proposed paper examines whether a secure attachment relationship with God implies dependency and lack of autonomy for a sample of Sydney Christians.

Introduction

In popular western discourse autonomy is contrasted with dependency. The strong, autonomous individual who is the author of his or her destiny is idealised, whereas the weak, dependent individual who is simply blown around by 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' (Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 111 Scene 1) suffers and is pitied. The contrast encapsulates a religious issue, for in the same speech Hamlet observes 'thus conscience does make cowards of us all'. Here dependency on religious prescriptions is aligned with fatalism: all lies in the hands of God and therefore one must submit and endure. On the other hand, in contemporary society dependency on God is also linked to religiously motivated but deplored behaviours. For example, people who claim they are depending on God are seen as depending on their religion's teaching about God, and hence failing to exercise independent judgment. The result is seen to be a spectrum of norm violating behaviours such as withdrawing into enclaves, confronting social practices (demonstrating against abortion clinics or gay marches), acts of terrorism or suicide. Thus autonomy is valued, whereas dependency on God is pitied or deplored.

Autonomy and dependency in Christian writings

In Christian theology the theme of dependency upon God is considered in debates about God's sovereignty and human freedom. Dependency often comes into focus in the treatment of predestination, or the capacity of humans to contribute to their salvation. Arguably, the best known writer on predestination is John Calvin (1559/1960) who emphasises God choosing some for eternal life and foreordaining others to eternal damnation. With respect to salvation, there is very little human freedom within such a Reformed tradition. Nonetheless, in the writings of Augustine (from whom Calvin drew key ideas about predestination) there is both divine

sovereignty and human freedom, where it is held that God predestines, or foreordains, those who will be saved, but through creation humans were free to choose whether to sin or not, and people in the eschatological age will enjoy the new freedom of inability to sin (McGrath, 2001). Dependency on God is recognized as the proper position of creature to creator (as in Augustine's use of the analogy of God as potter, and humans as clay), whereas human autonomy is also seen as God-given in the two-fold causality developed by Aquinas, where God is the primary cause but also exercises causality through the secondary causation of creatures (McGrath, 2001). Within modern and post-modern theology there is wide divergence in views concerning dependency on God. For example, Schleiermacher (1799/1928) argued that religion itself is best conceptualised as the feeling of absolute dependence on God. On the other hand, scientist-theologians such as Polkinghorne (2000) and Peacocke (1993) posit God's 'top down' causal action alongside human causality at the level of the whole person.

Dependency upon God versus human autonomy is also considered in related philosophical debates about divine omniscience. For some writers divine omniscience implies determinism, defined as "the view that everything that occurs, occurs necessarily, given the laws of nature and all antecedent conditions" (Taliaferro, 1998, p.110). However, acknowledgement of indeterminism in the physical sciences has led to a review of strict positions of determinism in the philosophy of religion. Hence, many theistic philosophers now argue for a compatibilist position in which God has sovereignty within the universe, but also does not constrain human actions (e.g., Tanner, 1994). Others take a libertarian perspective in which there is genuine co-creativity of humans with God (e.g., Berdyaev, 1960; Chisolm, 1960). There is no consensus position within contemporary philosophy, and hence the degree to which humans may be considered autonomous within a theistic belief system is an open question.

Dependency and autonomy in psychology

Within the discipline of psychology the argument about autonomy versus spiritual dependency plays itself out in a post-enlightenment context of Cartesian dualism, with the polarity of dependency upon God recognized as a spiritual stance and informed autonomy as a secular psychological stance. A clear example of this polarity is a debate between Allen E. Bergin and Albert Ellis in 1980, where Bergin argued (p.100) that psychologists should recognize 'theistic values' such as "God is supreme. Humility, acceptance of (divine) authority, and obedience (to the will of God) are virtues" and Ellis replied (p.636) with his 'clinical-humanistic-atheistic values' including "No one and nothing is supreme. To aggrandize or rate the self is to be disturbed. A balance between autonomy and living cooperatively with others and a balance between rejecting and over-conforming to external authority are virtues".

Psychologists generally define autonomy as a healthy adult stance: 'a type of healthy narcissism or self-investment that is characterized by personal independence, high self-aspirations, and resistance to social pressure' (Wink, Dillon, & Fay, 2005). In contrast, dependency is considered to be problematic and marked dependency is considered to be a personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Those with high levels of dependency are depicted as having difficulties with decision-making, clinging, excessively seeking reassurance with little capacity to be reassured, and excessively thankful for assistance. Theory from both psychodynamic

and cognitive-behavioural traditions supports the contribution of autonomy to overall health and well-being.

From a psychodynamic developmental perspective autonomy is valued as a healthy, second stage following early dependency. An important American analyst, Margaret Mahler, examined the process of development from a psychological unity with the mother to a separate self (see Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975). She argued that dependency is the biological and psychological reality in early infancy. Yet the healthy development of the child requires a degree of emotional separation from the caregiver and increasing autonomy. The process of cognitive-emotional separation is a transition from dependency to independent functioning termed 'separation-individuation'. Separation-individuation begins with differentiation: the child becomes aware of differences between self and object images. The next phase is practicing, where the child explores the wider world and experiences self esteem that allows further venturing. Then there is rapprochement, the return to home base when the child feels small and vulnerable in the large world. If there is welcome by the mother, the child is on track for individuation, where the child assumes his or her own unique characteristics. However, there is conflict between separateness and closeness, autonomy and dependency.

A number of different motivations towards separation-individuation are proposed. According to Mahler, the motivation towards separation-individuation is innate, but it is further prompted by the aggressive drive. Aggression is also acknowledged by Winnicott (1971) who developed theory concerning the important role of the mother in the process. In Winnicott's theory the mother has to be 'good enough' but her failures also motivate growth. The good enough mother provides a holding environment so that aggression and love can be fused, and hence it is possible to tolerate ambiguity and accept responsibility. If the holding environment is defective then aggression may result. However, it is also important for the infant's development that caregivers acknowledge 'spontaneous creative gestures' such as thumb sucking and smiling when satiated. If such autonomy is not encouraged then a 'false self' may develop based on identification with the object, leaving the self vulnerable and empty. Later object relations theorists such as Kohut (1985) emphasised a central motivation towards self-cohesion, and argued that there is a developmental path to narcissism (self esteem) through the function of an object that fosters experiences of selfhood. These examples point to the differing motivations towards autonomy, and the differing consequences of failures of the separation-individuation process.

An exception to these object relations theorists who seek resolution of the conflicts surrounding autonomy is the position of intersubjectivity. Here, the object is not simply a mental representation to be assimilated and integrated within the developing ego: the object is another person who is both independent and essentially unknowable. Although it is argued that there is an innate capacity to develop intersubjectivity, the goal is not individual selfhood but rather mutuality: identifications work to allow the integration of difference, preserving rather than assimilating different self-positions (Benjamin, 1995). Benjamin highlights and uses Mahler's 'paradox of recognition' to illustrate the tension between the self and the other. The paradox is that of the toddler wishing to move away from mother yet requiring recognition of her separateness - she wants the other to recognize her intent, aware of her separateness and so of her vulnerability: she can move from mother, but mother can move from her. Hence, Benjamin notes at the moment of realising our own independent will we are dependent upon another to recognise it. From

intersubjective theory 'the ideal 'resolution' of the paradox of recognition is that it continues as a constant tension between recognizing the other and asserting the self' (p.38).

From a social-cognitive perspective autonomy is linked to the twin goals of personality integration and self-regulation in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-regulation, where motivation is authentic and self-authored is contrasted with control by others, or external regulation. According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) important aspects of intrinsic motivation that characterises self regulation are competence, autonomy and relatedness. Perceptions of competence, a secure relational base and a sense of autonomy, or in internal perceived locus of causality, are *all* essential for self regulation. Hence it is argued that the satisfaction of innate needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy is necessary for self-regulation, and thence psychological well-being. As an example of meeting needs for autonomy Ryan and Deci (2000, p.74) cite environments where there is "a sense of choice, volition, and freedom from excessive external pressure toward behaving or thinking a certain way". However, they deny that autonomy within self-determination theory implies independence: "autonomy refers not to being independent, detached, or selfish but rather to the feeling of volition that can accompany any act, whether dependent or independent, collectivist or individualist" (p.74). Although Ryan and Deci (2000) locate processes that foster autonomy within environments rather than specific caregivers, they clearly emphasise the human need for autonomy as integral to self-integration, pursuit of intrinsic goals, and well-being.

Dependency and autonomy in the psychology of religion

In the history of the psychology of religion there have been attempts to consider the psychological impacts of dependency upon God. Generally, these assume a positive valuing of autonomy, and fail to take into account theological perspectives in which both dependency upon God and human autonomy are endorsed. Following Freud, some espouse the neurosis view of religion in which believers are depicted as having an unhealthy dependency upon God (e.g., Pfister, 1944); others take up the pre-Oedipal position of the object relations theorists such as Winnicott (1971) and consider religion to be an illusion, but a useful transitional object (e.g., Pruyser, 1977) or an inner representation formed from real, wished-for and feared parental images (e.g. Rizzuto, 1979).

Another strand emphasising autonomy versus dependency upon God can be found in the humanistic psychology of religion, represented by Maslow and Allport. Maslow (1970) developed a hierarchy of needs that, when filled, promote further growth. At the fourth level there are *esteem needs* including competence, independence and freedom; at the fifth and highest level there is a need for self-actualisation that, when satisfied, is often accompanied by mystical experiences. In Maslow's thinking, autonomy may conduce to a type of religiosity that is non-dogmatic but instead is a core experience of all human religions. In contrast, Gordon Allport (1950) considered autonomy to be a consequence of mature religiosity. As summarised by Wulff (1997, p.587) "According to Allport's second criterion, a religious sentiment is mature in proportion to the autonomy of its motives." Since a religious sentiment is a stable cognitive-affective component of personality, a mature person is consistently able to subdue bodily desires, defensive impulses and self-interest, in order to choose actions that promote higher ends such as self-

transformation, and full self-integration. For both humanistic psychologists, autonomy is related to the well-functioning, mature personality rather than dependency on God.

Since autonomy is valued so highly in psychology, including the psychology of religion, it is important to consider whether there are psychologically healthy ways of being religious whilst nonetheless recognizing the sovereignty of God, as attested by Christian theology. Are there positive ways of relating to God, ways that avoid excessive dependency and provide balanced autonomy? One area of theorising that has promise for bringing together issues of dependency and autonomy is attachment theory as applied to God.

Dependency and autonomy in attachment to God

The theory of attachment to God is based on the assumption that humans exhibit a need for proximity to God and a sense of protection by God (Kirkpatrick, 1997). The theory is analogous with Bowlby's (1958, 1969) conceptualisation of human attachment, where the basic need met by attachment behaviours is felt security in times of threat or danger. The drive for security is seen clearly during infancy when the temporary absence of an attachment figure produces separation protest and seeking of the person as a safe haven and secure base (Ainsworth, 1985). At this developmental stage the infant is wholly dependent upon the caregiver to meet physical and psychological needs. If the infant cannot depend upon the caregiver the result is an insecure attachment, where the relationship is marked by anxiety and/or avoidance (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). On the other hand, if the attachment system operates effectively, the infant develops a secure attachment to the caregiver who is experienced as reliable, available and nurturing (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978).

By analogy with human attachment, it is argued that if a person views God as unreliable, or unable to meet their needs for felt security, they develop an insecure attachment to God (Kirkpatrick, 1992; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Just as insecurity of infant attachment is marked by anxiety (with related ambivalent behaviours such as clinging) or avoidance (with defensive independence) or both (with highly disorganized behaviours), so insecurity of attachment to God is marked by anxiety over abandonment and/or avoidance of intimacy with God (Beck & McDonald, 2004). It is noteworthy that the theme of avoidance of intimacy with God is linked both to difficulty depending on God and a strong need to rely on oneself, thus contrasting autonomy with dependency. However, the autonomy associated with avoidance of intimacy with God is not a healthy autonomy, since it is associated with lower levels of well-being and insecure attachment to human figures (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

Insecure attachment to human figures directly predicts psychological disorders, including a range of personality disorders. For example, insecure attachment has been consistently associated with anxiety and depression (Crowell & Treboux, 1995; Lopez, Fuendling, Thomas, & Sagula, 1997; Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005; Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005); social anxiety (Eng, Heimberg, Hart, Schneider, & Liebowitz, 2001); and many of the personality disorders (e.g.; Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Crawford et al., 2006; Fonagy, 1991; Fonagy et al., 1996; Fossati et al., 2003; Nakash-Eisikovits, Dutra, & Westen, 2002; Westen, Nakash, Thomas, & Bradley, 2006). Attachment anxiety is specifically and consistently associated with Dependent

Personality Disorder (Fossati et al., 2003). This is not surprising since Dependent PD is characterized by "a pervasive and excessive need to be taken care of that leads to submissive and clinging behaviour and fears of separation" (APA, 2000, p.721). These characteristics of Dependent PD clearly fit closely the typical behaviours of those with an anxious-preoccupied style of attachment, where fear of abandonment leads to excessive proximity seeking behaviours (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

A circular failure of dependency can be seen in an attachment-related understanding of Dependent Personality Disorder. First, there is a deficiency related to dependency in early attachment relationships, such that the infant is unable to rely on their primary attachment figure to meet needs for proximity and security in face of danger. This leads to the development of internal representations of the self as unworthy of nurturing and protection, or the other as unable to provide protection (Bowlby, 1986, 1989). When later psychological threats arise the person is unable to use their attachment system to experience a safe haven and secure base, and responds with behaviours typical of Dependent Personality Disorder. Since God is an attachment figure for those who believe in a personal deity, and people may develop insecure attachment relationships with God, a similar pathway to Dependent Personality Disorders is hypothesized. A believer with an insecure attachment to God may develop negative internal representations of God, or of him/herself in relationship with God, and fail to find safety and security in God during the challenges of life. Internal representations of human attachment figures are likely to correspond to representations of attachment to God (Kirkpatrick, 1999) and the person is unlikely to find safety and support in others humans. As a result, the insecurely attached believer is more likely to manifest symptoms of Dependent Personality Disorder. Hence, it is predicted that insecurity of attachment to God will be associated with higher levels of symptoms of Dependent Personality Disorder.

Needs satisfaction and dependency

Although felt security is a primary need according to attachment theory and is related to healthy dependency amongst those with a secure attachment style (Brennan & Shaver, 1998), as discussed above three other basic human needs have been proposed: relatedness, autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory does not relate these needs specifically to dependence (whether healthy or otherwise). However, there is an empirical association between security of attachment and the perception that an attachment figure is meeting basic needs (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). Further, La Guardia et al. established a partial mediation effect by attachment security on the relationship between needs satisfaction and well-being. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that failure to perceive that one's basic psychological needs are met will contribute to psychological disorders, including personality disorders.

Since both attachment security and the meeting of basic needs are likely to affect psychological symptoms, and security of attachment to God has been shown to reduce indices of psychological disorders, it is important to consider whether God may be perceived as meeting needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence. In self-determination theory *relatedness* is concerned with feelings of being cared for, and connected to others (La Guardia et al., 2000). Such feelings are consistent with secure attachment to God, where people consider God as being present and providing care, and with Trinitarian theology that emphasises God as the ground of all relationality

(e.g., Edwards, 1999; Gunton, 1997; LaCugna, 1991; Torrance, 1996). *Competence* is related to feelings of self-confidence and the capacity to achieve one's goals, or efficacy. For Christian believers, confidence and efficacy derive from a sense of the empowering presence of Christ within, summarised in the declaration that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). *Autonomy* refers to feelings of volition, agency and initiative. Within Christian doctrines of creation there is space for human autonomy with respect to stewardship over the created world, and hence responsible agency (see (McGrath, 1997). Further, creation in the image of God implies both capacity for relatedness with God and humans, and the moral imperative to love in ways that mirror the character of God (Grenz, 1997). From these doctrines one can deduce that if God requires people to behave as moral agents in the world, then God must confer autonomy and support human autonomy. Thus it is consistent with Christian theology to assume that God may legitimately be perceived as meeting human needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy. Since each spiritual need is premised upon the creative and relational qualities of God, it is likely that they are strongly inter-related, and may operate together to affect psychological outcomes.

There is no published work relating attachment to God, the perception of God meeting human needs, and psychological symptoms. However, an unpublished study found that anxious attachment to God was associated with higher levels of anxiety symptoms, and lower levels of endorsement that needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy were met by God (Malone, 2006). Further, the perception that God met basic needs mediated the relationship between spiritual attachment insecurity and symptoms of anxiety. From these findings it is plausible to suggest that the perception that God meets human needs may also mediate the relationship between attachment to God and personality disorders marked by anxiety, including dependent personality disorder.

Hence, the hypotheses for the current study were the following:
1. Insecurity of attachment to God, as depicted by the dimensions of anxious and avoidant attachment, will be positively associated with symptoms of dependent personality disorder.
2. The perception that God meets needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy will be negatively associated with symptoms of dependent personality disorder.
3. The perception that God meets needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy will mediate the relationship between insecurity of attachment to God and symptoms of dependent personality disorder.

Method

Participants
Participants (N= 132) were adults from theological colleges and churches in Sydney, Australia. The mean age of participants was 41.52 (SD=16.083) ranging from 18 to 79, with 52.6% female respondents. The denominational affiliations of participants comprised Pentecostal (30.8%), Roman Catholic (15%), Baptist (13.5%), Orthodox (13.5%), Anglican (6%), Presbyterian (3%), Uniting (2.3%), with the remainder classified as Other (12%) and none (2.3%). All participants were screened to

determine whether they had a belief in the Judeo-Christian God, and were therefore suitable to participate in a study of attachment to God.

Measures

The Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004) was used as a measure of spiritual attachment. It comprises 28 items measuring the dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance. A typical item measuring Avoidance is "I prefer not to depend too much on God", and for the Anxiety dimension, "If I can't see God working in my life, I get upset or angry". In the current study Cronbach's alpha was α=.88 for the Attachment to God Anxiety sub-scale, and α=.82 for the Attachment to God Avoidance sub-scale, indicating strong internal consistency.

The Needs Satisfaction Scale (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000)was used to measure the perception of needs being met by God. It comprises 9 items measuring the degree to which participants experience support for their autonomy, competence and relatedness needs from a target figure. In the present study God was specified as the target figure. Sample items include "When I am with God I feel controlled and pressured to be certain ways (reverse scored)" (autonomy), "When I am with God I feel like a competent person" (competence) and "When I am with God I feel a lot of closeness and intimacy" (relatedness). In the present study the reliability of each sub-scale according to Cronbach's alpha was as follows: autonomy α=.43, relatedness α=.65, and competence α=.66. Since the autonomy sub-scale did not exhibit strong reliability and the three aspects of need satisfaction were of interest, a composite measure of satisfaction of needs by God was used in Structural Equation Modelling.

Symptoms of Dependent Personality Disorder were assessed using relevant 14 item sub-scale from the Personality Beliefs Questionnaire (PBQ – Beck & Beck, 1991). A sample items for the Dependent PD scale is: "I am needy and weak". In the current study, the measure exhibited satisfactory reliability with α=.86 according to Cronbach alpha.

Procedure

Letters were sent to leaders/heads of churches, theological colleges and other religious organizations requesting their cooperation in reaching adult believers who might be invited to participate. Participant Information Sheets and Questionnaires were distributed by the organizations' representatives and returned to a secure box to be collected by a researcher on the designated date.

Analysis of data

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were assessed by means of product moment correlations between the relevant variables. Structural Equation Modelling was used to test the mediation model. For the SEM only those items that had strong, significant loadings on the designated factors were used. Six items were retained for each of the ATG and PD dimensions, but all three items for each Needs Satisfaction dimension were retained. However, a higher-order factor, Needs Satisfaction by God, was used in the mediation analyses since the combined effect of needs satisfaction with respect to autonomy, competence and relatedness was of interest.

Results

Hypothesis 1, that the anxiety and avoidance dimensions of attachment to God would be positively associated with symptoms of dependent personality disorder, was partially supported. Symptoms were significantly, positively correlated with anxiety

with respect to attachment to God, but were unrelated to attachment avoidance (See Table 1 below).

Hypothesis 2, that the perception of God meeting needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence would be negatively associated with symptoms of dependent personality disorder was also partially supported. Symptoms were significantly, negatively correlated with the perception that God met needs for relatedness and competence, but were unrelated to autonomy needs (See Table 1)

Table 1. Intercorrelations between ATG Anxiety, ATG Avoidance, Need Satisfaction by God-Relatedness, Need Satisfaction by God- Competence, Need Satisfaction by God-Autonomy, and Dependent Personality Disorder.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. ATG Anx					
2. ATG Avoid	.05				
3. NSWG- Relatedness	-.28**	-.38**			
4. NSWG- Competence	-.30**	-.21*	.40**		
5. NSWG- Autonomy	-.21*	-.10	.25**	.38**	
6. DPD	.45**	-.08	-.35**	-.30**	-.13

Note n = 132, *p< .05, ** p < .01. ATG Anx= Attachment to God anxiety, ATG Av= Attachment to God Avoidance, NSWG-Relatedness= Need Satisfaction by God of relatedness, NSWG-Competence= Need Satisfaction by God of competence, NSWG-Autonomy=Need Satisfaction by God of autonomy, DPD= Dependent Personality Disorder.

Consistent with the mediation hypothesis, and using more robust and reliable measures of ATG and DPD, ATG Anxiety and Avoidance and Needs Satisfaction by God independently and significantly predicted Dependent Personality Disorder. Higher levels of ATG anxiety were associated with higher levels of symptoms of Dependent PD, whereas higher levels of ATG avoidance and higher levels of Needs Satisfaction by God were associated with lower levels of symptoms of DPD. Further, ATG Anxiety and Avoidance were significantly and negatively related to ratings of Need Satisfaction by God. These findings indicate mediation, with both direct effects of ATG upon PD symptoms and effects mediated by the perception of God meeting needs. Significant pathways are depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. ATG , Needs Satisfaction by God and Dependent PD
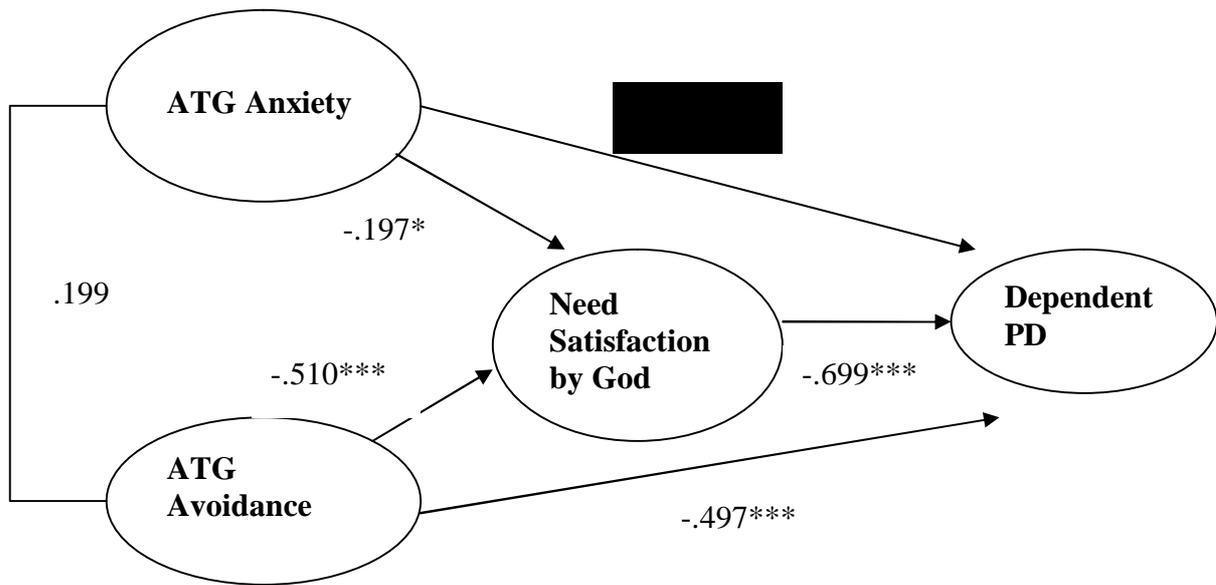
Discussion

As expected, anxiety with respect to a believer's attachment to God was associated with higher levels of symptoms of Dependent Personality Disorder. This finding is consistent with research linking adult attachment anxiety with symptoms of personality disorders (Bartholomew, Kwong, & Hart, 2001; Crawford et al., 2006). Those with an anxious attachment to God expect that God will be unavailable and angry, and may perceive themselves as unlovable (Brennan & Shaver, 1998). Hence it is not surprising that those with an insecure spiritual attachment will also exhibit anxious, needy behaviours with respect to human relationships.

Although attachment to God avoidance was unrelated to Dependent PD symptoms when product moment correlations were inspected, more robust measures of these variables together with modelling that removed common variance in the measurement of the attachment to God dimensions,revealed a significant negative association between ATG avoidance and Dependent PD. Those with an avoidant ATG were likely to have low symptoms of Dependent PD. This finding is consistent with views of attachment-related avoidance as indicative of self-reliance, lack of close relationship with God, and unwillingness to pursue emotional intimacy with God (Beck & McDonald, 2004). According to the correspondence view of human and spiritual attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1999) it is unlikely that people with an avoidant attachment to God would demonstrate the fearful, submissive and compliant qualities of those with Dependent PD (APA, 2000). The negative association might lead one to speculate that avoidant ATG is indicative of a healthy autonomy. However, since other work has established that avoidant ATG is also associated with high levels of avoidance in human relationships and low levels of well-being (Beck & McDonald, 2004) it is more reasonable to conclude that avoidant ATG might depict a defensive, unhealthy autonomy.

Those with insecure attachment to God were less likely to perceive that God met core needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy. This finding is consistent with analogous research relating human attachment and needs satisfaction (La Guardia,

Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000), and is further evidence that avoidant ATG is not a healthy form of attachment where autonomy and competence needs are met. In addition, inability to perceive God as meeting basic human needs was predictive of symptoms of Dependent PD. According to Ryan & Deci (2000) when human needs are fulfilled there is a basis for optimal growth and the development of sound interpersonal relationships. For believers, God is an important source of need satisfaction, and the felt absence of relatedness, competence and autonomy in relationship with God would hinder personal growth and interpersonal functioning.

The results indicate both direct effects of insecure ATG on Dependent PD symptoms, and mediated effects through the perception that God is not meeting basic human needs. Failure to experience relatedness, autonomy and competence in one's relationship with God partly explains how anxiety and avoidance of intimacy in relationship with God leads to dependency in human relationships. Those with anxious attachment to God perceive God as inconsistent and sometimes unresponsive to them (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Although they desire intimacy, they do not experience God as meeting their needs for connectedness and agency, and hence lack confidence in coping with adult life and relationships. Their primary method of coping is excessive passivity and compliance, seen in their Dependent PD symptoms. Those with avoidant attachment to God perceive God as impersonal, cold and generally unresponsive and they resist any sense of control by God (Beck & McDonald, 2004). Hence they may not regularly seek God to meet needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence. However, their lack of needs satisfaction by God leads to their seeking others to meet such needs. Without a firm spiritual source of a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness they may display the self doubt, avoidance of responsibility and truncated social networks of those with dependent PD.

In sum, these results point to a differentiated view of autonomy, dependency and religion. Foundational is a person's quality of attachment to God. An attachment style marked by anxiety is likely to lead directly to dependency of relating to others, as well as being intensified when God is perceived as unable or unwilling to meet their needs for autonomy and competence. An attachment style marked by avoidance, where some measure of autonomy might be expected, may also lead to dependency on others when God is similarly perceived as unable or unwilling to meet needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy. Since people with a dependent PD may quickly and indiscriminately attach themselves to another person when a relationship ends (APA, 2000), they may be targeted by persuasive religious groups, have difficulty expressing disagreement and comply with unreasonable demands, including anti-social acts and terrorism. Such behaviour illustrates one route to religious behaviour that is deplored or pitied, but is certainly not autonomous.

This study further addresses the paradox of new religious movements, where people in societies that value individualism sacrifice autonomy and adhere to highly specified, pre-packaged belief systems. To date, explanations have appealed to demand characteristics, such as human needs for clear prescriptions in the market-place of complex, competing beliefs (Balch, 1998; Balch & Taylor, 2002), and supply-side analyses of shifts in emphases by religious leaders from individualistic beliefs to group-based commitments as converts were socialized (Zeller, 2006). The present study helps to clarify the psychological and spiritual characteristics of people who are most susceptible to autonomy-suppressing religions: those with insecure spiritual attachments and perceive that God is failing to meet their basic needs.

These results must be replicated in future studies and cannot be generalised beyond Christian church attendees in Sydney. One of the limitations of the study is

that it did not use a clinical sample with a full range of symptoms of dependent personality disorder. However, symptoms of personality disorders lie on a continuum and the interest of this paper was to assess indications of dysfunctional relationships, and particularly dependency, in relation to autonomy indicators. Further, the measurement of autonomy in relation to God requires further development if it is to be used as a reliable and valid means of assessing how people perceive their needs for autonomy being met by God. On the other hand, the fact that respondents could answer the questions meaningfully suggests that it is appropriate to investigate autonomy in the context of one's relationship with God.

From a theoretical perspective the study points to the importance of secure attachment to God (low levels of anxiety and avoidance) for both the perception that God is fulfilling basic human needs and the kind of autonomy in interpersonal relationships marked by low levels of symptoms of Dependent Personality Disorder. Attachment theory holds that functions of the safe haven and secure base must be met at times of life crises, threats and difficulties if a person is to engage autonomously with the world. Further, ongoing engagement with the world requires periodic 'referencing' back to the attachment figure. The provision of proximity, safety and security as a basis for autonomy, then, depends upon an attuned, nurturing attachment figure to whom one can turn. Those with a secure attachment to God are more likely to perceive God as meeting their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and subsequently act with greater autonomy in their coping and interpersonal relationships. Their dependence on God as a fully adequate attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1999) allows them to experience autonomy and competence, and to continue healthy engagement in the world without the potentially stifling and destructive effects of human relationships marked by excessive dependency.

References

Ainsworth, M. D.
> 1985   Attachments across the life span. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 61*(9), 792-812.

Ainsworth, M. D., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S.
> 1978   *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Allport, G.
> 1950   *The individual and his religion*. New York: Macmillan.

American Psychiatric Association
> 2000   *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Balch, R. W.
> 1998   The Evolution of a New Age Cult: From Total Overcomers Anonymous to Death at Heaven's Gate. In W. W. Zellner & M. Petrowsky (Eds.), *Sects, Cults, and Spiritual Communities: A Sociological Analysis* (pp. 1-24). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Balch, R. W., & Taylor, D.
> 2002   Making Sense of the Heaven's Gate Suicides. In D. G. Bromley & J. G. Melton (Eds.), *Cults, Religions, and Violence* (pp. 209-228). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L.
> 1991   Attachment styles among the young: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,, 61*, 226-244.

Bartholomew, K., Kwong, M. J., & Hart, S. D.
2001   Attachment. In W. Livesley (Ed.), *Handbook of personality disorders* (pp. 196-230). New York: Guilford Press.

Beck, R., & McDonald, A.
2004   Attachment to God: The attachment to God inventory, tests of working model correspondence, and an exploration of faith group differences. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 32*, 92-103.

Beerdyaev, N.
1960   *The destiny of man* (N.Duddington, Trans.). New York: Harper and Row.

Benjamin, J.
1995   *Like subjects, love objects:Essays on recognition and sexual difference*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bergin, A. E.
1980   Psychotherapy and religious values. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 48*(1), 95-105.

Bowlby , J.
1958   The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 39*, 350-373.
1969   *Attachment. Vol1 of Attachment and Loss*. New York: Basic Books.
1986   The nature of the child's tie to his mother. In P. Buckley (Ed.), *Essential papers on object relations. Essential papers in psychoanalysis* (pp. 153-199). New York, NY, US; New York, NY, US: New York University Press; New York University Press.
1989   The role of attachment in personality development and psychopathology. In S. I. Greenspan & G. H. Pollock (Eds.), *The course of life, Vol. 1: Infancy* (pp. 229-270). Madison, CT, US: International Universities Press, Inc.

Brennan, K. A., & Shaver, P.
1998   Attachment styles and personality disorders: Their connections to each other and to parental divorce, parental death, and perceptons of parental giving. *Journal of Personality, 66*(5), 835-878.

Calvin, J.
1559   *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press [1960].

Crawford, T. N., Shaver, P., Cohen, P., Pilkonis, P. A., Gillath, O., & Kasen, S.
2006   Self-reported attachment, interpersonal aggression, and personality disorder in a prospective community sample of adolescents and adults. *Journal of Personality Disorders, 20*(4), 331-351.

Crowell, J. A., & Treboux, D.
1995   A review of adult attachment measures: Implications for theory and research. *Social Development, 4*(3), 294-327.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M.
1985   *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.

Edwards, D.
1999   *The God of evolution: A trinitarian theology*. New York: Paulist Press.

Ellis, A.

1980   Psychotherapy and atheistic values: A response to A.E. Bergin's "Psychotherapy and religious values". *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 48*(5), 635-639.

Eng, W., Heimberg, R. G., Hart, T. T., Schneider, F. R., & Liebowitz, M. R.
2001   Attachment in individuals with social anxiety disorder: The relationship among adult attachment styles, social anxiety and depression. *Emotion, 1*(4), 365-380.

Fonagy, P.
1991   Thinking about thinking: Some clinical and theoretical considerations in the treatment of a borderline patient. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 72*, 639-656.

Fonagy, P., Leigh, T., Steele, M., Steele, H., Kennedy, R., Mattoon, G., et al.
1996   The relation of attachment status, psychiatric classification and response to psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 64*, 22-31.

Fossati, A., Feeney, J. A., Donati, D., Donini, M., Novella, L., Bagnato, M., et al.
2003   Personality disorders and adult attachment dimensions in a mixed psychiatric sample: A multivariate study. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases, 1919*(1), 30-37.

Grenz, S. J.
1997   *The moral quest: Foundations of Christian ethics*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP.

Gunton, C.
1997   *The promise of trinitarian theology* (2nd ed.). London: T&T Clark.

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P.
1987   Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 52*(3), 511-524.

Kirkpatrick, L. A.
1992   An attachment-theory approach to the psychology of religion. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 2*(1), 3-28.
1997   An attachment-theory approach to the psychology of religion. In B. Spilka & D. N. McIntosh (Eds.), *The psychology of religion: Theoretical approaches* (pp. 114-133). Boulder, CO, US: Westview Press.
1999   Attachment and religious representations and behavior. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 803-822). New York: Guilford.

Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Shaver, P. R.
1990   Attachment theory and religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 29*(3), 315-334.

Kohut, H.
1985   *Self, psychology and the humanities*. New York: Norton.

La Guardia, J. G., Ryan, R. M., Couchman, C. E., & Deci, E. L.
2000   Within person variation in security of attachment: A self-determination theory perspective on attachment, need fulfilment, and well-being. . *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology., 79*(3), 367-384.

LaCugna, C. M.
1991   *God for us: The Trinity and Christian life*. New York: Harper Collins.

Lopez, F. G., Fuendling, J., Thomas, K., & Sagula, D.

1997   An attachment-theoretical perspective on the use of splitting defenses. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly, 10*, 461-472.

Mahler, M. S., Pine, F., & Bergman, A.
1975   *The psychological birth of the human infant.* New York: Basic Books.

Mallinckrodt, B., & Wei, M.
2005   Attachment, social competencies, social support, and psychological distress. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 358-367.

Malone, K.
2006   *Needs, attachment, and relationship of Christians with their God.* University of Western Sydney, Sydney.

Maslow, A. H.
1970   *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper and Row.

McGrath, A.
1997   *Christian theology: An introduction.* Oxford: Blackwell.
2001   *The Christian theology reader* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwells.

Nakash-Eisikovits, O., Dutra, L., & Westen, D.
2002   Relationship between attachment patterns and personality pathology in adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 41*(9).

Peacocke, A.
1993   *Theology for a Scientific Age* (2nd ed.). London: SCM Press.

Pfister, O.
1944   *Christianity and fear: A study in history and in the psychology and hygiene of religion* (W. H. Johnston, Trans.). London: George Allen & Unwin.

Polkinghorne, J.
2000   *Faith, science and understanding.* New Haven: Yale Nota Bene.

Pruyser, P. W.
1977   The seamy side of current religious beliefs. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic, 41*, 77-97.

Rizzuto, A. M.
1979   *The birth of the living God: A psychoanalytic study.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rowatt, W. C., & Kirkpatrick, L.
2002   Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 41*(4), 4638-4649

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L.
2000   Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78.

Schleiermacher, F.
1928   *The Christian faith* (H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, Trans. English translation of 2nd German edition of 1821 ed.). Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

Taliaferro, C.
1998   *Contemporary philosophy of religion.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Tanner, K. E.

1994   Human freedom, human sin, and God the creator. In T. Tracy (Ed.), *The God who acts*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Torrance, T.
1996   *The Christian doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark.

Wei, M., Shaffer, P. A., Young, S. K., & Zakalik, R. A.
2005   Adult attachment, shame, depression and loneliness: The mediation role of basic psychological needs satisfaction. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(4), 591-601.

Westen, D., Nakash, O., Thomas, C., & Bradley, R.
2006   Clinical assessment of atatchment patterns and personality disorders in adolescents and adults. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 74*(6), 1065-1085.

Wink, P., Dillon, M., & Fay, K.
2005   Spiritual Seeking, Narcissism, and Psychotherapy: How Are They Related? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 44*(2), 143-158.

Winnicott, D. W.
1971   *Playing and reality*. London: Routledge.

Wulff, D. M.
1997   *Psychology of religion: Classic and contemporary* (2nd, Trans.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Zeller, B. E.
2006   Individualism and salvation in a new religious movement. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, 10*(2), 75-102.