



## Attachment to God: integrative review of empirical literature

Apego a Deus: revisão integrativa de literatura empírica

Hartmut August\*

Mary Rute Gomes Esperandio\*\*

### Abstract

This article presents a review of the empirical literature on Attachment to God. We used the integrative review method and collected data on existing publications in the period from 1980 to 2017, at BVS, CINAHL, CAPES Journal Portal, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, SciELO and SociINDEX databases. Search was performed in the “title” and “abstract” field. After examining the 254 found publications, 62 studies were selected for analysis and categorized into thematic units, according to the focus of each study: “construction or validation of scales”, “life cycles”, “mental health”, “religious experience”, and “counseling and spiritual care”. Parental attachment influences on how a person will build or not a relationship of attachment to God. Attachment to God may be a form to alleviate suffering and to repair internal working models of the person. People with secure Attachment to God present a healthy increase in spirituality and adopt behaviors that favor physical and emotional health. People with an insecure Attachment to God show instability in spirituality and report more distress, which may cause a decline in mental health. The concepts of a God who cares can be employed to promote greater autonomy and self-confidence. Considering the importance of religiosity in the Brazilian cultural context, the deepening of the theme would be of great relevance for the fields of Theology, Psychology and Religious Science.

**Keywords:** Attachment; attachment to God; psychology of religion; practical theology.

### Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma revisão da literatura empírica sobre o apego a Deus. O método utilizado foi a revisão integrativa, com levantamento das publicações existentes no período de 1980 a 2017, nas bases BVS, CINAHL, Periódicos CAPES, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, SciELO e SociINDEX. As buscas foram realizadas nos campos “título” e “resumo”. Após exame das 254 publicações encontradas, 62 estudos foram selecionados para análise. A discussão da temática foi realizada categorizando os trabalhos de acordo com os objetivos de cada estudo: “construção ou validação de escalas”, “ciclos da vida”, “saúde mental”, “experiência religiosa” e “aconselhamento e cuidado espiritual”. O apego parental influencia na maneira como a pessoa irá construir ou não uma relação de apego a Deus. O apego a Deus pode ser um meio para atenuar o sofrimento e para reparar os modelos internos de funcionamento da pessoa. Pessoas com apego seguro a Deus apresentam um aumento sadio da espiritualidade e adotam comportamentos que favorecem a saúde física e emocional. Pessoas com apego inseguro a Deus apresentam instabilidade na espiritualidade e reportam mais aflição, podendo sofrer um declínio na saúde mental. Os conceitos de um Deus que se importa e cuida podem ser empregados para promover maior autonomia e autoconfiança da pessoa. Considerando a importância da religiosidade no contexto cultural brasileiro, o aprofundamento do tema seria de grande relevância para os campos da Teologia, da Psicologia e das Ciências das Religiões.

**Palavras-chave:** Apego; apego a Deus; psicologia da religião; teologia prática.

---

Article submitted on 28 May 2018 and approved on 15 August 2019.

\* Doctor in Theology from PUCPR. Professor of Faculdade Fidelis and collaborating professor at PUCPR. Country of origin: Brasil. E-mail: hartmut.august@fidelis.edu.br

\*\* Doctor in Theology by the Faculdades EST. Adjunct Doctor of PUCPR. Country of origin: Brasil. E-mail: mary.esperandio@pucpr.br

## Introduction

Two people that are in love would hardly think that their passion is related to their personal history, that their passion has a certain 'style' or tends to develop a certain form of love relationship. The way in which a given love relationship develops can be analyzed in the light of the so-called "Attachment Theory", a construct presented by British researcher John Bowlby (1907-1990), a psychologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who was noted, in the middle of the last century, for his interest in child development. Moving away from classical psychoanalysis (BOWLBY, 2004a, p. 37), this psychiatrist realized the need to develop a new theory of motivation and behavior control - the Attachment Theory (BOWLBY 2002, 2004a, 2004b). The author states that this theory is based on developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, evolutionary biology, ethology and the theory of control systems.

John Bowlby grew up in an upper middle-class family in London. His father was a chief surgeon and therefore often absent. Bowlby was mainly cared for by a nanny and did not spend much time with his mother, as was the custom at that time. Before World War II, he worked with delinquent and misfit children in London. During the war, several events broadened his interest in the implications of separating children from their families, including the rescue of Jewish children by *Kindertransport*, the evacuation of children from London to keep them safe from air strikes and the use of nurseries to allow mothers of young children to contribute to the war effort. Immediately after the end of the war, Bowlby was invited by the World Health Organization to write an article about the difficulties faced by orphaned and homeless children. Thus, by the end of the 1950s, he had accumulated a significant body of theoretical and observational work that pointed to the importance of emotional ties with a caregiver.

Later, in contact with the Attachment Theory, Mary Ainsworth developed, in collaboration with Bowlby, studies on emotional development in the early years of childhood with children in Uganda. These two authors, therefore, were the pioneers in attachment studies.

Based on the Attachment Theory, some psychologists of religion, notably Kirkpatrick (2005) and others, developed the *Attachment to God Theory*. The present study aims to present an integrative literature review on the empirical studies on Attachment to God. First, however, the foundations of the *Attachment* and *Attachment to God* Theory are briefly presented.

## 1 Theoretical basis of Attachment and Attachment to God

In many cases, the word ‘attachment’ has a negative connotation, one of an immature and other-dependent relationship, indicating a relationship that diminishes the freedom of individuals. In the Attachment Theory, this negative connotation is associated with what is characterized as *insecure attachment*, which is the opposite of *secure attachment*. The latter is desirable, as it favors healthy reception and mutual support in intersubjective relationships.

Bowlby proposes that the most relevant element in the relationship between the child and his parents is the bond or attachment that is established between them from an early age (BOWLBY, 2004a, p. XVIII). For the author, “no form of behavior is accompanied by a stronger feeling than is attachment behavior” (BOWLBY, 2002, p. 259). Thus, Bowlby defines *attachment behavior* as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual” (2004a, p. 38), which over time, develops affective bonds or attachments (BOWLBY, 2004a, p. 38). Attachment behaviors are not considered stages to be overcome or something that develops only in childhood. The author states that attachment behavior is an integral part of the life cycle, as it contributes “to the survival of the individual” (BOWLBY, 2004a, p. 40), since the attachment figure or caregiver<sup>1</sup> protects and cares for the attached person.

Studies conducted by Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) have highlighted five characteristics to identify an attachment relationship: (1) the attached person seeks

---

<sup>1</sup> When referring to the attachment figure or caregiver, we refer to the person or persons responsible for the child’s care and education. Usually it is mother and father. However, many children are educated by other adults, such as grandparents, uncles, stepmothers and stepfathers, adoptive mothers and fathers, and so on. In adulthood, other people will assume the role of attachment figure or caregiver, as will be seen below.

closeness to the caregiver, mainly when frightened or alarmed; (2) the caregiver provides care and protection, functioning as a safe haven; (3) the caregiver provides a sense of safety, functioning as a secure base; (4) the threat of separation causes anxiety in the attached person; (5) loss of the attachment figure causes mourning in the attached person (KIRKPATRICK, 2005, p. 56). Therefore, in order for a relationship to be considered an attachment relationship, it must present all five mentioned characteristics.

In addition to the *attachment behavior*, there is also what the authors Mikulincer and Shaver (2010, p. 254) define as the *attachment system*: an interpersonal regulation device. This implies that individuals evaluate the progress they are making in obtaining support and comfort from the attachment figure, correcting the actions, if necessary, to achieve the objectives of obtaining support and comfort. People reach adulthood with a high propensity to maintain the same style of behavior identified as a child, for “attachment behavior in adulthood is a direct continuation of the behavior in childhood” (BOWLBY, 2002, p. 257). For this reason, it can be said that most love relationships are based on the attachment style that the person developed in childhood.

The attachment system can be considered secure or insecure. Secure attachment is characterized by the individuals’ confidence that their attachment figures will be available, responsive and helpful, in the event of “adverse or frightening situations” (BOWLBY, 1988, p. 167). Secure attachment is evidenced by a loving, light and affectionate behavior supplied in the attachment relationship. The behavior is characterized by balance, since there is ease with intimacy, while respecting the own and the other’s freedom and autonomy.

Insecure attachment is permeated by emotions such as fear and reluctance in intersubjective relationships and can be classified as *anxious*, *avoidant* or *anxious-avoidant (disorganized)*. Anxious attachment is characterized by the overactivation of the attachment system, because “the individual is uncertain whether his parent will be available or responsive or helpful when called upon” (BOWLBY, 1988, p. 167). This uncertainty leads to a behavior of struggle and protest to obtain attention, love and support from the attachment figure, whose availability is not assured. Over time,

strident demands for support begin to appear natural and necessary, and may become the cause of more relational conflicts and more emotional distress.

The avoidant attachment stands out for the repression or deactivation of the attachment system as the individual reacts to the unavailability of the attachment figure through emotional detachment. In the avoidant attachment style, “the individual has no confidence that, when he seeks care, he will be responded to helpfully; on the contrary, he expects to be rebuffed” (BOWLBY, 1988, p. 167). This behavior stems from the understanding that the attachment figure disapproves or punishes proximity and expressions of needs or vulnerabilities. In these situations, the search for proximity is weakened or blocked and the individual starts to deal with threats and dangers in a solitary way.

As for the anxious-avoidant (or disorganized) attachment, it is distinguished by conflicting, disoriented or fearful behaviors. When the attachment system is activated, the anxious-avoidant individual seeks proximity to the attachment figure, while fearing that proximity. This attachment pattern “is more common in maltreated babies, although it does not necessarily indicate maltreatment” (GRANQVIST *et al.*, 2017, p. 2). Unresolved traumas or losses from caregivers can also contribute to the children’s disorganized attachment, as the mother or father exhibits subtly frightening, scared or dissociative behavior towards the baby (GRANQVIST *et al.*, 2017, p. 2,3).

Thus, from the continuous process of building personal experience, our past history has left its mark over time, generating consequences and resulting in patterns and styles of personal meaning (ABREU, 2005, p. 14; HAZAN & SHAVER, 1987, p. 515).

From the studies initiated by Kirkpatrick, Shaver, Granqvist and colleagues (KIRKPATRICK & SHAVER, 1990, 1992; KIRKPATRICK, 1992, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2005; GRANQVIST, 1998, 2005, 2014; GRANKVIST *et al.*, 2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014), attachment has been conceptualized as a relevant aspect also in the relationship between the believer and God. These researchers used the Attachment

Theory perspective to bring the science of religion and cognitive psychology research fields closer together.

The pioneering study in this area was published by Kirkpatrick & Shaver in 1990. They researched the correlation between childhood attachment experiences and religious practices in adult life. Granqvist (1998) expanded the research on the influence of attachment in childhood on adult religiosity, concluding that it is possible “to have different pathways to religiosity for people who have different attachment qualities in childhood” (p. 343). Kirkpatrick later argued that “God really is an attachment figure for many believers” (2005, p. 55), because “for many people in many religions,[...] this attachment system is fundamentally involved in their thinking, beliefs, and reasoning about God and their relationship with God” (2005, p. 56).

Miner (2007) proposed to expand the concepts of the Attachment Theory in the light of Christian theology. She states that “the cognitive-affective model of attachment to God, as developed by Kirkpatrick and colleagues, holds that representations of God are based on experiences with primary caregivers” (MINER, 2007, p. 121). On the other hand, in considering the contemporary social theology of the Trinity<sup>2</sup>, it is possible to understand the existence of an attachment relationship between a believer and God. In this way, one can consider the Attachment to God as being mediated by interpersonal attachment experiences, as well as directly from the building of a person's bond to God from his or her religious experience (MINER, 2007, p. 121).

In Brazil, a pioneering study on Attachment to God is the article published under the title ‘Attachment Theory and Religious Behavior’ (ESPERANDIO & AUGUST, 2014). This article presents the main findings about the relationship between subjective constitution and religious behavior in the light of the Attachment Theory.

---

<sup>2</sup> The word ‘Trinity’ (in Latin, *Trinitas*) designates the understanding of a triune God, in which Father, Son and Spirit are three people who relate to each other in perfect harmony. Trinity theology understands that human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, bring with them a feeling of dependence on God and the search for a relationship with Him.

## 2 Methodology

The method used in the present study is the integrative literature review. This method allows synthesizing the “state of knowledge of a given subject, as well as pointing out knowledge gaps that need to be filled with new studies” (MENDES *et al.*, 2008, p. 759).

The guiding question of this research was related to the findings in the empirical literature on Attachment to God, on national and international scope. To this end, a survey of existing publications from 1980 to 2017 was carried out. The following databases were consulted: Virtual Health Library, CINAHL Database, CAPES Journal Portal, PsycARTICLES of the American Psychological Association, PubMed - US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, SciELO - Scientific Electronic Library Online, FAPESP and SocINDEX. The searches were conducted in the field ‘title’ and ‘abstract’ of the publications.

By using the terms ‘apego’<sup>3</sup> and ‘Deus’<sup>4</sup>, as well as ‘Bindung’<sup>5</sup> and ‘Gott’<sup>6</sup>, no publication was found on all bases consulted. However, by using the search terms ‘attachment’ and ‘God”, 254 publications were found. All these works were published in the English language. Of the searched databases, 33 publications were located at CINAHL, 61 at CAPES Journal Portal, 26 at PsycARTICLES, 47 at PubMed, 1 at SciELO and 86 at SocINDEX.

After a detailed analysis, works that did not directly relate to the subject, works that did not contain empirical studies on Attachment to God, repeated studies in the researched databases, and two studies that could not be accessed in its entirety were disregarded. After these exclusions, there were 62 empirical studies to be analyzed.

---

<sup>3</sup> Apego: attachment, in Portuguese

<sup>4</sup> Deus: God, in Portuguese

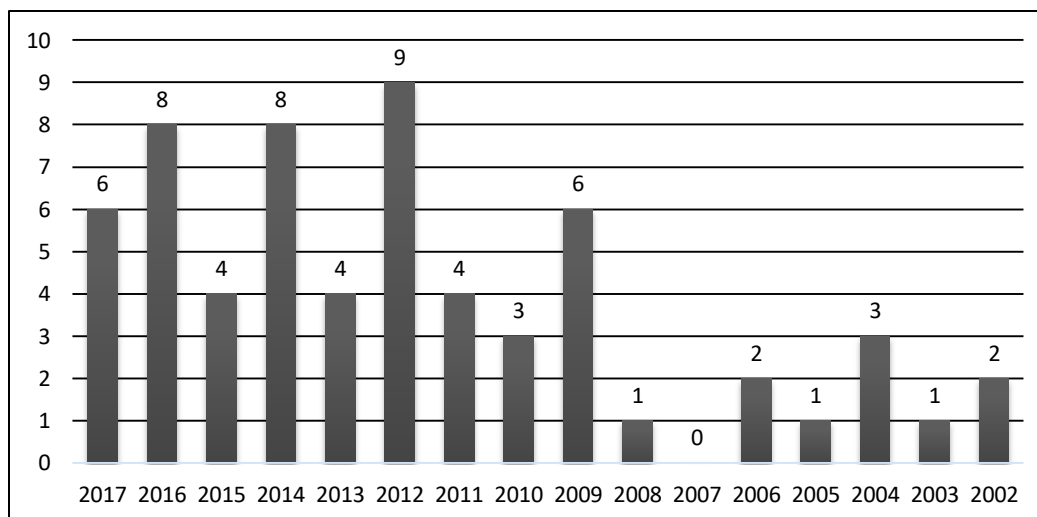
<sup>5</sup> Bindung: attachment, in German

<sup>6</sup> Gott: God, in German

### 3 Results

Although the search covered publications from 1980, the earliest empirical studies date back to 2002. Eighty-four percent of the works (52 studies) were published from 2009 forward. Graph 1 shows the publications per year.

**Graph 1 - Publications on Attachment to God, per Years<sup>7</sup>**



**Source: Search data, 2017.**

There is a clear domination of the USA (71%) and England (24%), as countries with the most publications of empirical works on Attachment to God.

Regarding the scale used for the data collection, the Attachment to God Inventory (BECK & MCDONALD, 2004) was used in 27 publications, 16 publications used the Dimensions of Attachment to God (ROWATT & KIRKPATRICK, 2002), the Three Brief Forced-choice Attachment-to-God Paragraphs (KIRKPATRICK & SHAVER, 1992) were used in 5 publications, the Attachment to God Measure (SIM & LOH, 2003) was used in 2 publications, the Relationship with God Scale (BELAVICH & PARGAMENT, 2002) was used in 2 publications, the God Attachment Interview Schedule (PROCTOR *et al.*, 2009) in one publication and the Muslim Spiritual Attachment Scale (MINER *et al.*, 2017) in one publication. Eight studies performed the data collection from a not validated instrument.

<sup>7</sup> For 2017, we considered publications until 07/12/17.



Publications can be organized into five broad categories: “construction or validation of scales”, “life cycles”, “physical and mental health”, “religious experience”, and “counseling and spiritual care”.

### 3.1 Construction or validation of Attachment to God measurement scales

Six works (ROWATT & KIRKPATRICK, 2002; SIM & LOH, 2003; BECK & MCDONALD, 2004; PROCTOR *et al.*, 2009; KIM *et al.*, 2017; MINER *et al.*, 2017) are about the construction or validation of Attachment to God measurement scales.

The Attachment to God Scale (AGS) was constructed by Rowatt & Kirkpatrick (2002, p. 647) from the three attachment categories described by Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1992): secure, avoidant and anxious. The authors have assumed that the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance in attachment to God are significant predictors for measuring this attachment (ROWATT & KIRKPATRICK, 2002, p. 647).

Sim & Loh (2003) constructed the Attachment To God Measure (AGM) scale based on the four characteristics of a relationship of attachment to God, proposed by Kirkpatrick (1999): God as a safe haven, God as a secure base, the pursuit and maintenance of proximity to God, and the response to God's separation (SIM & LOH, 2003, p. 379).

Using the instrument Experiences in Close Relationships Scale by Brennan *et al.* (1998) as a starting point, Beck & McDonald (2004) developed the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI). The AGI is an instrument that measures avoidance and anxiety in a person's relationship with God. Kim *et al.* (2017) validated the AGI with Korean Christians who immigrated to the United States. In their studies, the scale only presented reliable indexes after the exclusion of 17 of the 28 items. The hypothesis raised by the authors is that the original scale did not present a necessary adherence since Korean immigrants maintain different spiritual and religious traditions when compared to the American tradition (KIM *et al.*, 2017, p. 21), which may have influenced the answers to the items of the instrument (KIM *et al.*, 2017, p. 23).

The God Attachment Interview Schedule (GAIS) developed by Proctor *et al.* (2009) consists of a semi-structured interview protocol. It takes into account situations that occur in a person's relationship with God throughout the various phases of life, employing the perspective of the development of Attachment to God and seeking to identify situations that may characterize secure, anxious or avoidant Attachments to God.

Since the measurement instruments of Attachment to God available until now were constructed taking into account the understanding that Christian people have of God, Miner *et al.* (2017, p. 184) developed the Muslim Spiritual Attachment Scale (MSAS), aimed at Muslims (MINER *et al.*, 2017, p. 184). This scale contemplates the dimensions of search for proximity, safe haven, secure base, protest by separation, positive model of God and positive model of the *self*.

There is a good range of instruments available to measure Attachment to God. However, until recently, most of these scales had been built along Christian and predominantly Protestant communities. In recent years, validations have emerged that adapt these scales to other cultural contexts. This is the case of the validation of the AGI for Korea (KIM *et al.*, 2017).

### **3.2 Attachment to God and the cycles of life**

Twenty publications developed the subject of Attachment to God in the different cycles of life. These publications were grouped into the following cycles: 'childhood', 'adolescence and youth', 'adulthood' and 'elderly'.

#### **3.2.1 Childhood**

Three publications (REINERT; EDWARDS, 2009; LIMKE; MAYFIELD, 2011; CASSIBBA *et al.*, 2013) investigated the Attachment to God in childhood.

Reinert & Edwards (2009) found that verbal, physical, and sexual maltreatment are related to difficulties in understanding an individual's Attachment to God. Those who reported sexual maltreatment in childhood, when compared to those who

reported verbal or physical maltreatment, showed the most dramatic and adverse association with the variables of religiousness and tended to report greater evidence of a more insecure Attachment to God, as well as the presence of concepts of a less loving, more controlling and distant God (REINERT; EDWARDS, 2009, p. 30-31).

Limke & Mayfield (2011) investigated the influence of fathers and mothers on children's Attachment to God. Their conclusion was that “attachment to fathers predicted attachment to God. Moreover, attachment to God predicted both religious and existential well-being” (LIMKE; MAYFIELD, 2011, p. 122). Cassibba *et al.* (2013) came to a different conclusion by identifying that the feeling of God's closeness is predicted by the secure attachment of children to their mothers.

Although there is no consensus among researchers whether attachment to God is more influenced by the attachment of the child to the father or the mother, the cited authors are unanimous in the understanding that the parental affective relationships of the child play a key role in the way this child, when reaching adulthood, will build a relationship of attachment to God.

### 3.2.2 Adolescence and youth

Six studies (REINERT, 2005; BECK, 2006b; SIM; YOW, 2011; REINERT; EDWARDS, 2012; HORTON *et al.*, 2012; KNABB; PELLETIER, 2014) investigated relationships of attachment to God in adolescence or youth.

Reinert (2005) investigated, with a group of young seminarians, the correlation between their parental attachments in childhood and the subsequent representation of themselves and their relationships with God. In his research, “securely attached, compared with the other attachment groups, reported significantly high levels of awareness of God, indicating that secure attachment to mother led to a greater sense of connection with God” (REINERT, 2005, p. 235). On the other hand, “anxious attachment to mother was clearly associated with higher levels of disappointment with God” (REINERT, 2005, p. 235). Finally, the combination of avoidant attachment to the mother and anxious attachment to the father seems to be the “principal dynamic that

leads to higher levels of instability in the relationship with God” (REINERT, 2005, p. 235).

Focusing on the concept of God as a secure base, Beck (2006b) notes that study participants (university students, with an average age of 18 years) who saw God as a secure base were more engaged in theological exploration and were more tolerant about Christian beliefs that were different from theirs. These participants also reported more peace and less distress along their spiritual journey. However, in spite of this exploitation, these participants were fully engaged in the central doctrines of Christianity (BECK, 2006b, p. 125).

Sim & Yow (2011) identified that adolescents with secure attachment to God tend to have higher self-esteem, unlike adolescents with insecure attachment to God (SIM; YOW, 2011).

In order to deepen the understanding of the relationship between parental attachment and attachment to God, the research findings of Reinert & Edwards (2012) suggest that “attachment to God and the concept of God as a loving God, seem to be associated in both males and females with the security of their attachment to the same-sex parent rather than the opposite-sex parent” (REINERT; EDWARDS, 2012, p. 266), contrary to the findings of Limke & Mayfield (2011) and Cassibba *et al.* (2013). That is, the attachment to God of the male children would be influenced mainly by the attachment of the son with his father, whereas the attachment to God of the daughters would be influenced mainly by the attachment of the daughter with her mother.

Horton *et al.* (2012) identified that avoidant and anxious Attachments to God are associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption among young people. In addition, the anxious Attachment to God is associated with the use of marijuana, and the avoiding Attachment to God is associated with drug use before sexual intercourse. In a study with students at a Christian university, Knabb & Pelletier (2014) concluded that the anxious Attachment to God predicts both the problematic use of the Internet and emotional distress (KNABB; PELLETIER, 2014, p. 243). In both studies, the existence of secure Attachments with God is associated with a lower incidence of problematic behaviors in youth.

The authors of this group of works are unanimous in the understanding that the parental affective relationships of the adolescent or young person play a fundamental role in the way they will build a relation of Attachment to God. Adolescents and young people who are securely attached to God have shown greater self-esteem, significantly higher levels of God-consciousness, they are more engaged in healthy theological exploration, are more tolerant to other beliefs, and report more peace. On the other hand, adolescents with insecure attachments to their parents showed high levels of frustration with God, high levels of instability in the relationship with God, and more distress.

### 3.2.3 Adulthood

Six studies (BIRGEGARD; GRANQVIST, 2004; CASSIBBA *et al.*, 2008; SANDAGE *et al.*, 2015; NJUS; OKERSTROM, 2016; RASHIDI *et al.*, 2016, KENT *et al.*, 2016) investigated the Attachment to God in adulthood.

Surveys on adults, conducted by Birgegard & Granqvist (2004), Cassibba *et al.* (2008) and Sandage *et al.* (2015), agree that there is a correspondence between the attachment to father/mother and the attachment to God. Cassibba *et al.* (2008) identified that the secure attachment is positively related to the perception of God as loving (CASSIBBA *et al.*, 2008, p. 1760). And, for Sandage *et al.* (2015), “avoidant adult attachment correlated positively with God attachment avoidance, and anxious adult attachment correlated positively with the anxiety dimension of God attachment” (SANDAGE *et al.*, 2015, p. 803).

Njus and Okerstrom (2016), in correlating the Attachment to God with moral foundations, realized that people with an anxious Attachment to God gave more value on issues of loyalty, authority, and purity (NJUS; OKERSTROM, 2016, p. 237-240). On the other hand, people with an avoidant Attachment to God gave less value to the aspects of care, cordiality, authority, and purity (NJUS; OKERSTROM, 2016, p. 240). Kent *et al.* (2016) investigated the relationship between Attachment to God and professional satisfaction. The results of the research indicate that a secure attachment to God is a positive predictor of an affective commitment at work and of job satisfaction (KENT *et al.*, 2016, p. 356).

Rashidi *et al.* (2016) identified in their research that people with secure Attachment to God were more prone to forgive and empathize than people with avoidant and anxious Attachments to God (RASHIDI *et al.*, 2016, p. 18).

As already identified in previous phases, the Attachment to God in adulthood is related to interpersonal attachments. On the other hand, the style of Attachment to God influences the way one behaves in interpersonal relationships, being able to give greater or lesser value to moral issues such as loyalty, authority, purity, and cordiality, and being more prone to forgive and to be empathic.

### 3.2.4 Elderly

We have found 4 publications (CICIRELLI, 2004; BRUCE *et al.*, 2011; KENT *et al.*, 2017; BRADSHAW; KENT, 2017) that investigated the Attachment to God with the elderly.

Cicirelli (2004, p. 371) and Bruce *et al.* (2011, p. 224) agree that Attachment to God varies from one Christian denomination to another. Cicirelli also noted that “participants belonging to fundamentalist or evangelical Protestant denominations had a stronger attachment to God than those with other affiliations” (CICIRELLI, 2004, p. 371).

In studying the relationship between Attachment to God, prayer and psychological well-being among the elderly, Bradshaw & Kent (2017), confirming the findings of Ellison *et al.* (2014) concluded that people with a secure Attachment to God and who pray often have clear benefits to their mental health. People who pray often realize that God will be there to protect and comfort them so that they can find relief in prayer and may choose behaviors that promote health according to religious teachings or inspirations received during prayer. In contrast, people who, in difficult times, pray in an attempt to forge a relationship with another divine, that they do not believe to be there, may feel a deep sense of detachment and may suffer a decline in mental health (BRADSHAW; KENT, 2017, p. 14-17).

Kent *et al.* (2017) identified that among the elderly, secure Attachment to God is associated with increased optimism and self-esteem. Therefore, the security of the Attachment to God can contribute to positive mental well-being (as already identified by ELLISON *et al.*, 2014; BRADSHAW & KENT, 2017). In addition, for those who feel forgiven by God, more secure attachments to God are equivalent to higher levels of psychological well-being (KENT *et al.*, 2017, p. 17). There is also a substitution of attachment figures and a reduction in anxious attachments (KENT *et al.*, 2017, p. 17), and for some, God assumes the role of primary attachment figure (KENT *et al.*, 2017, p. 16).

Studies confirm that attachment figures are important for the adjustment to old age. At this stage of life, changes in attachment figures may occur, and a secure Attachment to God contributes to a behavior that favors health and increases optimism, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. In contrast, people with insecure attachments to God may have a deep feeling of detachment and may experience a decline in mental health.

### **3.3 Attachment to God and mental health**

Among the 20 studies found in this category, two themes stand out: dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders (with seven publications) and coping (with five publications).

#### **3.3.1 Dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders**

Seven publications (HOMAN & BOYATZIS, 2010; HOMAN, 2012; HOMAN & LEMMON, 2014; HOMAN & LEMMON, 2015; STRENGER *et al.*, 2016; KRAUSE & HAYWARD, 2016; BUSER & BIGSON, 2016) present the research results in the field dysmorphic disorder or eating disorders.

Homan & Boyatzis (2010) found that women with a secure attachment to God present reduced levels of eating disorders. The research also showed “that pressure to be thin and thin-ideal internalization predicted body dissatisfaction only for women with an anxious insecure attachment to God” (HOMAN & BOYATZIS, 2010, p. 239).

Homan (2012) conducted another study to test to what extent the style of Attachment to God mitigates the negative effects of exposure to the female ideal body image in the media. “Results of this study indicate that feeling loved and accepted by God moderates the negative feelings toward one’s body” (HOMAN, 2012, p. 328).

Homan & Lemmon (2014) conclude that “the more women felt unsure and anxious about their relationship with God, the more they tended to compare their own bodies [...] with their peers” (HOMAN; LEMMON, 2014, p. 352). Women with a secure Attachment to God had fewer negative feelings about the body and were less pressured by social comparison (HOMAN; LEMMON, 2014, p.355). Another study concluded that, “the more women compared their own bodies, eating choices, and exercise habits with those of their peers, the lower their body appreciation” (HOMAN & LEMMON, 2015, p. 434). This association was greater for women who felt uncertain about God’s love and responsiveness and less for women who felt unconditionally loved and accepted by God (HOMAN & LEMMON, 2015, p. 434). Strenger *et al.* (2016, p. 31) also identified that anxiety in women’s Attachment to God was associated with the symptoms of eating disorders.

Buser & Gibson (2016) observed significant links between anxious and avoiding attachments to God/Higher Power and bulimic symptoms, unlike Homan & Boyatzis (2010) who had not found support for the link between avoidant attachment to God and bulimia (BUSER & GIBSON, 2016, p. 131, 132).

Krause & Hayward (2016) noted in their research that participants with anxious Attachment to God are more likely to be obese if they receive little spiritual support from their co-religionists. However, data show that the relationship between the anxious Attachment to God and obesity weakens as the level of spiritual support by the religious community increases (KRAUSE; HAYWARD, 2016, p. 11).

Studies related to body-care demonstrate that the existence of a secure Attachment to God contributes positively to all issues related to the body and to the image of the ideal body. Therefore, feeling unconditionally loved and accepted by God helps to preserve the appreciation of the body by women amid the challenges of social comparison.



### 3.3.2 Coping

Five studies (BELAVICH; PARGAMENT, 2002; COOPER *et al.*, 2009; KELLEY; CHAN, 2012; ANO; PARGAMENT, 2013; CASSIBBA *et al.*, 2014) investigated the relationship between attachment to God and spiritual/religious coping.

Belavich & Pargament (2002) identified that people with a secure Attachment to God used “more Spiritual coping and had a more collaborative coping style”, and also “expressed lower levels of Religious Discontent” (BELAVICH; PARGAMENT, 2002, p. 24). People of anxious or avoiding attachment to God “expressed higher levels of Religious Discontent and manifested a more self-directing coping style”, which emphasizes the individual's responsibility to solve a problem without God's help (BELAVICH; PARGAMENT, 2002, p. 24). Moreover, people with an anxious Attachment to God “may have viewed the situation as evidence of God's inconsistent role in providing support and responded to this with anger rather than support seeking” (BELAVICH; PARGAMENT, 2002, p. 24).

Cooper *et al.* (2009) also identified anger as a reaction of those anxiously attached to God (COOPER *et al.*, 2009, p. 134). In addition, the authors realized that people with secure or anxious attachments to God “used more Christian activities and ideas in coping” (COOPER *et al.*, 2009, p. 134). Another finding was that people of secure attachment to God turned “to religion to avoid problems. Dismissing focused more on good works and also avoided any sense of pleading” (COOPER *et al.*, 2009, p. 134).

Kelley & Chan (2012) observed that “more secure style of attachment to God was directly and indirectly associated with lower depression and grief and increased stress-related growth” (KELLEY; CHAN, 2012, p. 199). On the other hand, people with unsecure attachment to God and neuroticism were more likely to make negative assessments of a stressful situation and to classify these events as spiritual battles (ANO; PARGAMENT, 2013, p. 419).

When studying the role of attachment to God in coping processes of patients with a serious disease, Cassibba *et al.* (2014) conclude that “security in one's

Attachment to God is related not only to religious/spiritual coping but also to secular ways of coping with a serious disease” (CASSIBBA *et al.*, 2014, p. 258). It was evidenced that “a secure attachment to God was linked to fighting spirit and tended to be linked to fatalism. In contrast, an insecure attachment to God tended to be linked to hopelessness and anxious preoccupation” (CASSIBBA *et al.*, 2014, p. 258).

The research, therefore, identified that people of secure Attachment to God used the spiritual and collaborative coping more in order to cope with the situations. They also had less religious discontent, less depression and grief, and increased stress-related growth. On the other hand, people of insecure Attachment to God expressed higher levels of religious discontent, manifested a more self-directed coping style, tending to classify stressful events as spiritual conflicts, giving way to anger, hopelessness, and anxious preoccupation.

### 3.3.3 Other studies on mental health

Nine studies (DUMONT *et al.*, 2012; ELLISON *et al.*, 2014; REINER *et al.*, 2010; WEI *et al.*, 2012; BRADSHAW *et al.*, 2010; ELLISON *et al.*, 2012; PROUT *et al.*, 2012; FERGUS; ROWATT, 2014; HOMAN, 2014) addressed different themes relating the Attachment to God with mental health.

Dumont *et al.* (2012) studied the relationship between the Attachment to God and an alcoholic family environment. Researchers identified that “secure attachment to God may override the effects of being raised in an alcoholic home” (DUMONT *et al.*, 2012, p. 51).

Both Bradshaw *et al.* (2010) as Ellison *et al.* (2012) investigated the association between Attachment to God and anguish. Both studies agree that a secure attachment to God is associated with the reduction of anguish and that a secure attachment to God dampens the damaging effects of stressful distressing events (BRADSHAW *et al.*, 2010, p. 1; ELLISON *et al.* 2012, p. 493).

Ellison *et al.* (2014) realized that people who often pray to a God that is perceived as a secure attachment figure, gain clear benefits to their mental health,

while those who pray to a God perceived as distant, experience high levels of anxiety-related symptoms (ELLISON *et al.*, 2014, p. 126).

Two studies (REINER *et al.*, 2010; WEI *et al.*, 2012) dealt with the relationship between Attachment to God and stress. The studies of Reiner *et al.* (2010) evidence the strong association between perceived stress, anxious and avoidant adult attachments, and anxious attachment to God. On the other hand, in his research with Chinese who migrated to the USA, Wei *et al.* (2012) identified a significant interaction between perceived stress and avoidant attachment to God, in terms of life satisfaction (WEI *et al.*, 2012, p. 162), given that the secure Attachment to God is directly associated with life satisfaction and positive affection (WEI *et al.*, 2012, p. 174).

In a research on Attachment to God and psychosis, Prout *et al.* (2012) noted that the secure Attachment to God can dampen the relationship between punitive parenting and the recovery. This finding provides support for the compensation hypothesis of Attachment to God (KIRKPATRICK; SHAVER, 1990; KIRKPATRICK, 2005). The results of this study also suggest that there are aspects of religion and spirituality potentially useful for patients with psychosis. The idea that the secure Attachment to God may weaken the relationship between the punitive representations of parental objects and the recovery is important for the concept of a holistic and spiritually integrative treatment for psychosis (PROUT *et al.*, 2012, p. 461).

Scrupulosity is a moral/religious subtype of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), characterized by “persistent doubts about sin and irresistible urges to perform excessive religious behavior” (FERGUS; ROWATT, 2014, p. 230). The authors identified that “scrupulous individuals are especially likely to experience attachment anxiety in relation close interpersonal relationships and in relation to God” (FERGUS; ROWATT, 2014, p. 234).

In an interesting survey on the role of self-pity in the relationship between Attachment to God and anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction, Homan (2014) realized that people “who respond to uncertainties about God's availability with either elevated distress (anxiety) or suppression of emotions (avoidance) are less likely to respond to their own shortcomings with gentleness and understanding” (HOMAN,

2014, p. 985). In this way, people treat themselves in a manner consistent with the way they perceive that they have been treated by their attachment figure, for “people develop a self-representation that integrates the figure’s qualities and responses” (HOMAN, 2014, p. 985). This self-representation allows people who see God as loving, receptive and available to maintain a sense of positive self-esteem as they recognize their own weaknesses and shortcomings. On the other hand, “people who have a history of interactions in which God is perceived as dismissing or disapproving will incorporate these qualities into their own self-concept, making it likely that they will treat themselves with disapproval or disdain” (HOMAN, 2014, p. 985).

The different studies collected in this category confirm a strong correlation between attachment styles and mental health. Research indicates that the unavailability of interpersonal attachment figures, stress, and other factors that intensify the attachment activation and increase the strength of the observed bonds between mental health and religion. The belief in a personal and loving God with whom one experiences a close and secure relationship contributes to one's mental health. Attachment to God can be an important means to alleviate suffering and to repair one's internal functioning patterns after a loss or because of experiences of abandonment by other attachment figures.

### **3.4 Attachment to God and religious experience**

The thirteen publications that researched the relationship between Attachment to God and religious experience were grouped according to the themes ‘Religious Behavior’ and ‘Life in Community’.

#### **3.4.1 Religious behavior**

We found nine publications (BECK, 2006a; HALL *et al.*, 2009; GRANQVIST *et al.*, 2012; HOUSER; WELCH, 2013; FREEZE; DITOMMASO, 2014; JANKOWSKI; SANDAGE, 2014; SANDAGE *et al.*, 2015; MONROE; JANKOWSKI, 2016; GHORBANI *et al.*, 2016) that researched religious behavior in connection with Attachment to God.

Beck (2006, p. 34) observed that the existence of the individual's communion and complaint in his or her contact with God are elements that can give this relationship an emotional dynamic similar to that observed in human romantic relationships.

In an attempt to clarify the correspondence or compensation models proposed by Kirkpatrick (2005), Hall *et al.* (2009) observed that people with a history of unsecure attachment in childhood tend to seek God as a way to fill the unfilled gaps in childhood, adopting the compensation model. On the other hand, people with a history of secure attachments in childhood tend to seek a relationship with God as a way of transferring their lived relationships, adopting the model of correspondence (HALL *et al.*, 2009, p. 227).

Granqvist *et al.* (2012) examined the implications of the Attachment Theory on psychological aspects of religion among Israeli Jews. Their findings indicate that more secure individuals have faster access to a positive/secure base of God's scheme, while avoidant individuals, and especially highly religious avoidant individuals, have quicker access to a negative/controlling base of God's scheme (GRANQVIST *et al.*, 2012, p. 812).

In their research with college students, Houser & Welch (2013) identified that people with a secure attachment to God expressed higher levels of hope and increased frequency in engaging in religious behavior, resulting in a strengthening of the Attachment to God (WELCH, 2013, p. 291). In researching a group of Baptists, Freeze & Ditommaso (2014) also concluded that “a secure attachment to God is associated with an increase in religiousness”, and therefore “a lessened emotional distress” (FREEZE; DITOMMASO, 2014, p. 699-700).

In their research, Houser & Welch (2013) found that the engagement in prayer and reading of the Scriptures is more directly related to a personal desire for connection with God, while participation in church services and going to Mass has not been shown to contribute to the security of the Attachment to God (HOUSER; WELCH, 2013, p. 293). They also realized that people anxiously attached to God are the best candidates to develop a compensatory Attachment to God by using God in

emotional regulation. In addition, people anxiously attached to God tend to develop a positive view of others, including God, which favors hope and greater engagement in religious behavior. On the other hand, diverging from the conclusions proposed by Kirkpatrick (2005) and Hall *et al.* (2009) that people with insecure attachments in childhood tend to develop a compensatory attachment to God, Houser & Welch (2013) realized that people with an avoidant Attachment to God did not fit into this hypothesis because they presented lower levels of hope and lesser frequency in engaging in religious behavior when compared to other styles of Attachment to God (HOUSER & WELCH, 2013, p. 292, 293). Melissa Kelley (2009), in her case study, had already pointed out that many people with insecure interpersonal attachments would tend to have difficulties in building a secure Attachment to God.

Jankowski & Sandage (2014) evaluated the correlation between attachment to God and humility. They realized that spiritual instability, understood as a lesser awareness of God and an increase in the experiences of frustration and disappointment in relation to God, is an indicator of the existence of an insecure Attachment to God (JANKOWSKI; SANDAGE, 2014, p. 78). Another study on humility conducted by Sandage *et al.* (2015) identified that “insecure attachment to God and idealization hunger are spiritual barriers that also undermine the development of humility” (SANDAGE *et al.*, 2015, p. 215). These studies converge to the understanding that humility is an element of relational individuality in which one has a proper self-assessment and a secure relationship with God.

Monroe & Jankowski (2016) studied the attachment behavior among participants in a program of intervention through prayer in a Pentecostal context. The participation in the program increased proximity to God, associated with an increase in positive affections and reduction of anguish (MONROE; JANKOWSKI, 2016, p. 237).

One publication (GHORBANI *et al.*, 2016) analyzed the Attachment to God in Islam. “Most generally, this study made it clear that attachment frameworks can supply useful insights into religious traditions outside the West” (GHORBANI *et al.*, 2016, p. 325). Therefore, the application in Islam of measuring instruments validated in Western Christian contexts needs to be conducted with caution, not only considering the cultural differences between the West and other cultures, but also

between the conceptions of God as revealed in the Bible and the conceptions of the divine in other religions.

### **3.4.2 Life in community**

Three publications (NAMINI; MURKEN, 2009; FREEZE; DITOMMASO, 2015; KENT; HERDENSON, 2017) investigated life in religious communities in connection with the Attachment to God.

Namini & Murken (2009) conducted a survey with people who joined recent religious movements in Germany, including participants from the Federation of Pentecostal Churches, New Apostolic Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. Adherence to these movements is “often preceded by some kind of (retrospectively reported) crisis and that well-being increases with involvement” in these movements (NAMINI; MURKEN, 2009, p. 61).

The research of Freeze & Ditommaso (2015) provides support in conceptualizing the person's relationship with his or her community of faith as a process of attachment (FREEZE; DITOMMASO, 2015, p. 60). The study suggests that, for people who believe, a secure Attachment to God and to the community of faith predicts greater well-being, while insecure attachment to God and to the family of faith predicts lesser well-being (FREEZE; DITOMMASO, 2015, p. 68). Kent & Henderson (2017) also studied the Attachment to God and the congregational life and demonstrated that intrapersonal characteristics structure the dynamics of religious congregations. Their research suggests that the secure attachment to God is positively associated with congregational participation, whereas anxious and avoidant attachments are negatively associated with such participation (KENT; HENDERSON, 2017, p. 1).

Therefore, studies of attachment and religious behavior confirm that secure attachments to God tend to be associated with more positive assessments of the communion with God, a correct assessment of God's attributes, to a sound humility, to an increased religiosity and spirituality, to a reduction of emotional anguish, and to attachment bonds to the community of faith. On the other hand, unsecure Attachment



to God tends to be associated with higher levels of psychological suffering, inadequate assessments of divine attributes, to classifying stressful situations as spiritual battles, to more distress, and to questioning the nature and relevance of God.

### 3.5 Attachment to God and counseling and spiritual care

Four publications (KELLEY, 2009; THOMAS *et al.*, 2011; RASAR *et al.*, 2013; OLSON *et al.*, 2016) dealt with the Attachment to God in the context of counseling or spiritual care.

From the analysis of two case studies in counseling, Kelley (2009) highlights possible implications of the Attachment to God in the spiritual care of grieving people. The patients' reports indicate a strong correspondence between their styles of parental attachment and Attachment to God (KELLEY, 2009, p. 101). From these case studies, the author identified three challenges for spiritually oriented psychotherapists. First, we must recognize that loss can shape a person's life in several ways and this may complicate the healing process. Secondly, we must ask ourselves how these losses may have shaped the person's ability to experience God. The third challenge is to be suppliers of hope. The sometimes meticulous process of feeling secure in a therapeutic relationship can yield enormous dividends in the domain of the divine (KELLEY, 2009, p. 102).

Thomas *et al.* (2011) analyzed the effects of a group psychotherapy, lasting eight weeks, on the image of God and the attachment to God of the participants. The therapy consisted of psychoeducational interventions, interpersonal and cognitive dynamics, allegorical bibliotherapy and interventions through art and music. At the end of psychotherapy, participants reported less anxiety and less avoidance in the Attachment to God (THOMAS *et al.*, 2011, p. 44). They conclude that the application of structured methods to change the Attachment to God can be an important tool in spiritual care.

Rasar *et al.* (2013) investigated the effectiveness of a treatment to change the image of God, attachment to God and religious confrontation, with students of Christian universities. The research was conducted through the creation of a spiritual formation group, a Bible study group and a control group. The results indicate the



value of small spiritual formation or Bible study groups, since both groups exhibited significant changes in all surveyed items, when compared to the control group (RASAR *et al.*, 2013, p. 274).

Olson *et al.* (2016) also focused their studies on images of God and Attachment to God by creating three groups, and working with them for 9 weeks. In the spiritual formation group, the used material dealt with the image of God and Attachment to God through psychoeducational interventions and discussion. In the Bible study group there were group discussions, memorization of Bible verses and incorporation of activities of spiritual formation. The third group was a control group. Contrary to the conclusions of the studies by Thomas *et al.* (2011) and Rasar *et al.* (2013), the research of Olson *et al.* (2016) suggests that changes in Attachment to God were more significant in the Bible study group (OLSON *et al.*, 2016, p. 277).

Research in the field of counseling and spiritual care point to the benefit of employing the concepts of Attachment to God. The concepts of a caring God can be employed by the counselor to promote greater client autonomy and self-reliance in coping with life's difficulties and emotional distress. If God is functioning as a secure attachment figure for the client, one can expect the client to find in this relationship a safe haven and a base for dealing with his or her world, particularly under stressful conditions.

## Conclusion

The present study shows that the empirical production on Attachment to God is growing, although it is still mostly concentrated in the USA and England. The construction and validation of scales to measure Attachment to God has favored empirical research, allowing to compare results of different research. The Attachment to God Inventory instrument, used in almost half of the analyzed publications, stands out.

The studies demonstrate the relevance of parental attachment in how a person will build a relationship of Attachment to God. Attachment to God can be an important means of alleviating suffering and repairing one's inner functioning patterns. People

with secure attachment to God present a healthy increase in spirituality and adopt behaviors that favor physical and emotional health. People with unsecure attachment to God have high levels of instability in their spirituality and report more distress, so that they may suffer a decline in mental health. The concepts of a caring God can be employed by the counselor to promote greater client autonomy and self-reliance in coping with life's difficulties and emotional distress.

The pioneering works published in Brazil on Attachment to God by Esperandio & August (2014) and August & Esperandio (2015) contribute to spread the concepts of Attachment to God with the Brazilian community. However, there is still no validated instrument to measure the Attachment to God in the Brazilian reality.

There is little empirical research that investigates the application of the concepts of Attachment to God in counseling and spiritual care. Therefore, new studies could point to ways in which therapists, counselors, and spiritual caregivers can apply the concepts of attachment and of Attachment to God in order to offer more effective care to those who seek spiritual guidance and support. Longitudinal studies would also be very useful, exploring how and in what circumstances individuals change (or not) their style of Attachment to God. Considering the importance of religiosity in the Brazilian cultural context, the deepening of the Attachment to God theme would be of great relevance to the fields of Theology, Psychology and Religious Sciences.

## REFERENCES

ABREU, Cristiano Nabuco de. **Teoria do apego**: fundamentos, pesquisas e implicações clínicas. São Paulo: Casa do Psicólogo, 2005.

ANO, Gene G.; PARGAMENT, Kenneth. Predictors of spiritual struggles: an exploratory study. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. **Journal Article**, v. 16, n. 4, p. 419-434, Apr. 2013.

AUGUST, Hartmut; ESPERANDIO, Mary Rute G. Teoria do apego: origem, desenvolvimento e perspectivas. In: COMISSÃO ORGANIZADORA DO V CONGRESSO DA ANPTECRE. **Anais do V Congresso da ANPTECRE “Religião, Direitos Humanos e Laicidade”**. Curitiba, v. 5, p. ST1111, 2015.

BECK, Richard. Communion and Complaint: attachment, object-relations, and triangular love perspectives on relationship with God. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 34, n. 1, p. 43-53, 2006a.

BECK, Richard. God as a secure base: attachment to God and theological exploration. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 34, n. 2, p. 125-133, 2006b.

BECK, Richard; MCDONALD, Angie. 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**, v. 32, n. 2, p. 92-103, 2004.

BELAVICH, Timothy G.; PARGAMENT, Kenneth I. The Role of Attachment in Predicting Spiritual Coping with a Loved One in Surgery. **Journal of Adult Development**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 13-29, Jan. 2002.

BIRGEGARD, A.; GRANQVIST, P. The correspondence between attachment to parents and God: three experiments using subliminal separation cues. **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin**, v. 30, n. 9, p. 1122-1135, Sept. 2004.

BOWLBY, John. **Apego**: a natureza do vínculo. 3. ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2002. v. 1. (trilogia Apego e Perda).

BOWLBY, John. **Perda**: tristeza e depressão. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004a. v. 3. (trilogia Apego e Perda).

BOWLBY, John. **Separação**: angústia e raiva. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004b. v. 2. (trilogia Apego e Perda).

BRADLEY, David F.; EXLINE, Julie J.; UZDAVINES, Alex. Relational reasons for nonbelief in the existence of gods: an important adjunct to intellectual nonbelief. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 9, n. 4, p. 319-327, 2017.

BRADSHAW, M.; ELLISON, C. G.; MARCUM, J. P. Attachment to God, Images of God, and Psychological Distress in a Nationwide Sample of Presbyterians. **The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion**, v. 20, n. 2, p. 130-147, 2010.

BRADSHAW, M.; KENT, B. V. Prayer, Attachment to God, and Changes in Psychological Well-Being in Later Life. **Journal of Aging and Health**, v. 30, n. 5, p. 667-691, Feb. 2017.

BRENNAN, K. A.; CLARK, C. L.; SHAVER, P. R. Self-report measures of adult romantic attachment - An integrative overview. In: J. A., Simpson; W. S. Rholes (ed.). **Attachment theory and close relationships**. Nova York: Guilford Press, 1998.

BRUCE, A. Jerry; COOPER, Laura B.; KORDINAK, S. T.; HARMAN, Marsha J. God and Sin After 50: Gender and Religious Affiliation. **Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging**, v. 23, n. 3, p. 224-235, Jul.-Sep. 2011.

BUSER, Juleen K.; GIBSON, Sandy. Attachment to God/Higher Power and Bulimic Symptoms Among College Women. **Journal of College Counseling**, v. 19, n. 2, p. 124-137, Jul. 2016.

CASSIBBA, Rosalinda; GRANQVIST, Pehr; COSTANTINI, Alessandro. Mothers' attachment security predicts their children's sense of God's closeness. **Attachment & Human Development**, v. 15, n. 1, p. 51-64, 2013.

CASSIBBA, Rosalinda; GRANQVIST, Pehr; COSTANTINI, Alessandro; GATTO, Sergio. Attachment and god representations among lay Catholics, priests, and religious: A matched comparison study based on the adult attachment interview. **Developmental Psychology**, v. 44, n. 6, p. 1753-1763, Nov. 2008.

CASSIBBA, Rosalinda; PAPAGNA, Sonia; CALABRESE, Maria T.; COSTANTINO, Elisabetta; PATERNO, Angelo; GRANQVIST, Pehr. The role of attachment to God in secular and religious/spiritual ways of coping with a serious disease. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 17, n. 3, p. 252-261, Mar. 2014.

CICIRELLI, V. G. God as the ultimate attachment figure for older adults. **Attachment & Human Development**, v. 6, n. 4, p. 371-388, Dec. 2004.

COOPER, Laura B.; BRUCE, A. Jerry; HARMAN, Marsha J.; BOCCACCINI, Marcus T. Differentiated styles of attachment to God and varying religious coping efforts. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 37, n. 2, p. 134-142, 2009.

DUMONT, Karin; JENKINS, David; HINSON, Victor; SIBCY, Gary. God's shield: the relationship between god attachment, relationship satisfaction, and adult child of an alcoholic (ACOA) status in a sample of evangelical graduate counseling students. **Journal of Psychology and Christianity**, v. 31, n. 1, p. 51-66, 2012.

ELLISON, Christopher G.; BRADSHAW, Matt; FLANNELLY, Kevin J.; GALEK, Kathleen C. Prayer, Attachment to God, and Symptoms of Anxiety-Related Disorders among U.S. Adults. **Sociology of Religion**, v. 75, n. 2, p. 208-233, 2014.

ELLISON, Christopher G.; BRADSHAW, Matt; KUYEL, Nilay; MARCUM, Jack. Attachment to God, Stressful Life Events, and Changes in Psychological Distress. **Review of Religious Research**, v. 53, n. 4, p. 493-511, 2012.

ESPERANDIO, Mary Rute G.; AUGUST, Hartmut. Teoria do apego e comportamento religioso. **Interações – Cultura e Comunidade**, Belo Horizonte, v. 9, n. 16, p. 243-265, jul-dez. 2014.

FERGUS, Thomas A.; ROWATT, Wade C. Examining a purported association between attachment to God and scrupulosity. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 6, n. 3, p. 230-236, Aug. 2014.

FREEZE, Tracy A.; DITOMMASO, Enrico. An examination of attachment, religiousness, spirituality and well-being in a Baptist faith sample. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 17, n. 7, p. 690-702, Aug. 2014.

FREEZE, Tracy A.; DITOMMASO, Enrico. Attachment to God and church family: predictors of spiritual and psychological well-being. **Journal of Psychology and Christianity**, v. 34, n. 1, p. 60-73, 2015.

GHORBANI, Nima; WATSON, P. J.; OMIDBEIKI, Mahsa; CHEN, Zhuo Job. Muslim Attachments to God and the “Perfect Man” (Ensān-e Kāmel): Relationships With Religious Orientation and Psychological Adjustment in Iran. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 8, n. 4, p. 318-329, Nov. 2016.

GRANQVIST, P.; LJUNGDAHL, C.; DICKIE, J. R. God is nowhere, God is now here: attachment activation, security of attachment, and God’s perceived closeness among 5-7-year-old children from religious and non-religious homes. **Attachment & Human Development**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 55-71, Mar. 2007a.

GRANQVIST, Pehr. Building a bridge between attachment and religious coping: tests of moderators and mediators. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 8, n. 1, p. 35-47, Mar. 2005.

GRANQVIST, Pehr. Mental health and religion from an attachment viewpoint: overview with implications for future research. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 17, n. 8, p. 777-793, Sep. 2014.

GRANQVIST, Pehr. Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: On the Question of Compensation or Correspondence. **Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion**, v. 37, n. 2, p. 350-368, Jun. 98.

GRANQVIST, Pehr; BROBERG, Anders G.; HAGEKULL, Berit. Attachment, religiousness, and distress among the religious and spiritual: links between religious syncretism and compensation. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 17, n. 7, p. 726-740, Aug. 2014.

GRANQVIST, Pehr; IVARSSON, Tord; BROBERG, Anders G.; HAGEKULL, Berit. Examining relations among attachment, religiosity, and new age spirituality using the Adult Attachment Interview. **Developmental Psychology**, v. 43, n. 3, p. 590-601, May 2007b.

GRANQVIST, Pehr; KIRKPATRICK, Lee A.; PARGAMENT, Kenneth I. (ed.); EXLINE, Julie J. (ed.); JONES, James W. (ed.). Religion, spirituality, and attachment. **APA handbook of psychology, religion, and spirituality**. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, 2013. v. 1. p. 139-155.

GRANQVIST, Pehr; MIKULINCER, Mario; GEWIRTZ, Vered; SHAVER, Phillip R. Experimental findings on God as an attachment figure: Normative processes and moderating effects of internal working models. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, v. 103, n. 5, p. 804-818, Nov. 2012.

GRANQVIST, Pehr; MIKULINCER, Mario; SHAVER, Phillip R. Religion as attachment: normative processes and individual differences. **Personality and Social Psychology Review**, v. 14, n. 1, p. 49-59, Feb. 2010.

HALL, Todd W.; FUJIKAWA, Annie; HALCROW, Sarah R.; HILL, Peter C.; DELANEY, Harold. Attachment to god and implicit spirituality: clarifying correspondence and compensation models. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 37, n. 4, p. 227-245, 2009.

HAZAN, C.; SHAVER, P. R. Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, v. 52, n. 3, p. 511-524, 1987.

HOMAN, Kristin J. A mediation model linking attachment to God, self-compassion, and mental health. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 17, n. 10, p. 977-989, Dec. 2014.

HOMAN, Kristin J. Attachment to God mitigates negative effect of media exposure on women's body image. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 4, n. 4, p. 324-331, Nov. 2012.

HOMAN, Kristin J.; BOYATZIS, Chris J. The protective role of attachment to God against eating disorder risk factors: concurrent and prospective evidence. **Eat Disorder**, v. 18, n. 3, p. 239-258, May-Jun. 2010.

HOMAN, Kristin J.; LEMMON, Valerie A. Attachment to God and eating disorder tendencies: The mediating role of social comparison. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 6, n. 4, p. 349-357, Nov. 2014.

HOMAN, Kristin J.; LEMMON, Valerie A. Perceived relationship with God moderates the relationship between social comparison and body appreciation. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 18, n. 6, p. 425-439, Jul. 2015. DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2015.1075481.

HORTON, K. D.; ELLISON, C. G.; LOUKAS, A.; DOWNEY, D. L.; BARRETT, J. B. Examining attachment to God and health risk-taking behaviors in college students. **Journal of Religion and Health**, v. 51, n. 2, p. 552-566, Jun. 2012. DOI: 10.1007/s10943-010-9380-5.

HOUSER, Melissa E.; WELCH, Ronald D. Hope, religious behaviors, and attachment to god: a trinitarian perspective. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 41, n. 4, p. 281-298, 2013.



JANKOWSKI, Peter J.; SANDAGE, Steven J. Attachment to God and humility: Indirect Effect and Conditional Effects Models. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 42, n. 1, p. 70-83, 2014.

KELLEY, Melissa M. Loss Through the Lens of Attachment to God. **Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health**, v. 11, n. 1/2, p. 88-106, 2009. DOI: 10.1080/19349630902864200.

KELLEY, Melissa M.; CHAN, Keith T. Assessing the role of attachment to God, meaning, and religious coping as mediators in the grief experience. **Death Studies**, v. 36, n. 3, p. 199, 2012.

KENT, Blake Victor; BRADSHAW, Matt; DOUGHERTY, Kevin. Attachment to God, Vocational Calling, and Worker Contentment. **Review of Religious Research**, v. 58, n. 3, p. 343-364, 2016.

KENT, Blake Victor; BRADSHAW, Matt; UECKER, J. E. Forgiveness, Attachment to God, and Mental Health Outcomes in Older U.S. Adults: A Longitudinal Study. **Research on Aging**, v. 40, n. 5, p. 456-479, May 2017.

KENT, Blake Victor; HENDERSON, W. Matthew. Attachment to God, Tenure, Race, and Participation in Congregational Life. **Review of Religious Research**, v. 59, p. 319-340, 2017.

KIM, Choong Yuk; KIM, Sangwon; BLUMBERG, Fran; CHO, Jihee. Validation of the Korean Attachment to God Inventory. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 79-89, 2017.

KIRKPATRICK, Lee A. A Longitudinal Study of Changes in Religious Belief and Behavior as a Function of Individual Differences in Adult Attachment Style. **Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion**, v. 36, n. 2, p. 207-218, Jun. 97.

KIRKPATRICK, Lee A. Attachment and religious representations and behavior. In: CASSIDY, J.; SHAVER, P. R. (ed.). **Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications**. New York: Guilford Press, 1999. p. 803-822.

KIRKPATRICK, Lee A. **Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion**. Nova York: Guilford, 2005.

KIRKPATRICK, Lee A. God as a substitute attachment figure: a longitudinal study of adult attachment style and religious change in college students. **Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin**, v. 24, n. 9, p. 961-974, Sept. 1998.

KIRKPATRICK, Lee A.; SHAVER, Phillip R. An attachment-theoretical approach of romantic love and religious belief. **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin**, n. 18, p. 266-275, 1992.

KIRKPATRICK, Lee A.; SHAVER, Phillip R. Attachment Theory and Religion: Childhood Attachments, Religious Beliefs and Conversion. **Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion**, v. 29, n. 3, p. 315-335, Sep. 90.

KNABB, Joshua J.; PELLETIER, Joseph. The relationship between problematic Internet use, God attachment, and psychological functioning among adults at a Christian university. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 17, n. 3, p. 239-251, Mar. 2014.

KRAUSE, Neal; HAYWARD, R. David. Anxious Attachment to God, Spiritual Support, and Obesity: Findings from a Recent Nationwide Survey. **Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion**, v. 55, n. 3, p. 485, 2016.

LEVINE, Amir; HELLER, Rachel S. F. **Apegados**. Ribeirão Preto: Novo Conceito, 2013.

LIMKE, Alicia; MAYFIELD, Patrick B. Attachment to God: differentiating the contributions of fathers and mothers using the experiences in parental relationships scale. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 39, n. 2, p. 122-130, 2011.

MENDES, Karina Dal Sasso; SILVEIRA, Renata Cristina de Campos Pereira; GALVÃO, Cristina Maria. Revisão integrativa: método de pesquisa para a incorporação de evidências na saúde e na enfermagem. **Texto contexto – enfermagem**, Florianópolis, v. 17, n. 4, p. 758-764, dez. 2008.

MINER, Maureen. Back to the basics in attachment to God: revisiting theory in light of theology. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 35, n. 2, p. 112-123, 2007.

MINER, Maureen; GHOBARY-BONAB, Bagher; DOWSON, Martin. Development of a Measure of Attachment to God for Muslims. **Review of Religious Research**, v. 59, n. 2, p. 183-206, Jun. 2017.

MONROE, Natasha; JANKOWSKI, Peter J. The effectiveness of a prayer intervention in promoting change in perceived attachment to God, positive affect, and psychological distress. **Spirituality in Clinical Practice**, v. 3, n. 4, p. 237-249, Dec. 2016.

NAMINI, S.; MURKEN, S. Self-chosen involvement in new religious movements (NRMs): well-being and mental health from a longitudinal perspective. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 12, n. 6, p. 561-585, Sep. 2009.

NJUS, David M.; OKERSTROM, Katrina. Anxious and avoidant attachment to god predict moral foundations beyond adult attachment. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 44, n. 3, p. 230-244, 2016.



OLSON, Trevor; TISDALE, Theresa Clement; DAVIS, Edward B.; PARK, Elizabeth A.; NAM, Jiyun; MORIARTY, Glendon L.; DAVIS, Don E.; THOMAS, Michael J.; CUTHBERT, Andrew D.; HAYS, Lance W. God image narrative therapy: A mixed-methods investigation of a controlled group-based spiritual intervention. **Spirituality in Clinical Practice**, v. 3, n. 2, p. 77-91, Jun. 2016.

PROCTOR, Marie-Therese; MINER, Maureen; MCLEAN, Loyola; DEVENISH, Stuart; GHOBARY-BONAB, Bagher. Exploring Christians' explicit attachment to God representations: the development of a template for assessing attachment to God experiences. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 37, n. 4, p. 245-265, 2009.

PROUT, Tracy A.; CECERO, John; DRAGATSI, Dianna. Parental object representations, attachment to God, and recovery among individuals with psychosis. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 15, n. 5, p. 449-466, Jun. 2012.

RASAR, Jacqueline D.; GARZON, Fernando L.; VOLK, Frederick; O'HARE, Carmella A.; MORIARTY, Glendon L. The efficacy of a manualized group treatment protocol for changing god image, attachment to god, religious coping, and love of god, others, and self. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 41, n. 4, p. 267-281, 2013.

RASHIDI, Mahsa; MOUSAVI, Fatemeh Sharif; ESMAEILI, Korosh. The Relationship between Styles of Attachment to God and Forgiveness and Empathy among Female Students in the City of Qom. **Health, Spirituality and Medical Ethics**, v. 3, n. 1, p. 18-24, 2016.

REINER, Sarah R.; ANDERSON, Tamara L.; HALL, M. Elizabeth Lewis; HALL, Todd W. Adult attachment, God attachment and gender in relation to perceived stress. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 38, n. 3, p. 175-186, 2010.

REINERT, Duane F. Spirituality, Self-Representations, and Attachment to Parents: A Longitudinal Study of Roman Catholic College Seminarians. **Counseling & Values**, v. 49, n. 3, p. 226-238, Apr. 2005.

REINERT, Duane F.; EDWARDS, Carla E. Attachment theory, childhood mistreatment, and religiosity. **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**, v. 1, n. 1, p. 25-34, Feb. 2009.

REINERT, Duane F.; EDWARDS, Carla. Sex Differences in Religiosity: The Role of Attachment to Parents and Social Learning. **Pastoral Psychology**, v. 61, n. 2, p. 259-268, 2012.

ROWATT, Wade; KIRKPATRICK, Lee A. Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs. **Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion**, v. 41, n. 4, p. 637-651, Dec. 2002.

SANDAGE, Steven J.; JANKOWSKI, Peter; CRABTREE, Sarah A.; SCHWEER, Maria. Attachment to God, adult attachment, and spiritual pathology: mediator and moderator effects. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 18, n. 10, p. 795-808, Dec. 2015.

SANDAGE, Steven J.; PAINE, David; HILL, Peter. Spiritual barriers to humility: a multidimensional study. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 18, n. 3, p. 207-217, Mar. 2015.

SIM, Tick N.; LOH, Bernice S. M. Attachment to God: Measurement and Dynamics. **Journal of Social and Personal Relationships**, v. 20, n. 3, p. 373-389, 6 Jan. 2003.

SIM, Tick N.; YOW, Amanda S. God attachment, mother attachment, and father attachment in early and middle adolescence. **Journal of Religion and Health**, v. 50, n. 2, p. 264-278, Jun. 2011. DOI: 10.1007/s10943-010-9342-y.

STRENGER, Alyssa M.; SCHNITKER, Sarah A.; FELKE, Thomas J. Attachment to God moderates the relation between sociocultural pressure and eating disorder symptoms as mediated by emotional eating. **Mental Health, Religion & Culture**, v. 19, n. 1, p. 23-36, Jan. 2016. DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2015.1086324.

THOMAS, Michael J.; MORIARTY, Glendon L.; DAVIS, Edward B.; ANDERSON, Elizabeth L. The effects of a manualized group-psychotherapy intervention on client God images and attachment to God: a pilot study. **Journal of Psychology and Theology**, v. 39, n. 1, p. 44-59, spring 2011.

WEI, Meifen; KU, Tsun-Yao; CHEN, Hwei-Jane; WADE, Nathaniel; LIAO, Kelly Yu-Hsin; GUO, Gwo-Jen. Chinese Christians in America: Attachment to God, Stress, and Well-Being. **Counseling and Values**, v. 57, n. 2, p. 162-180, 2012.