ATTACHMENT TO GOD: PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE

AND POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2021

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Ellis, Heidi M. *Attachment to God: Pathways to Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth.* Master of Science (Psychology), August 2021, 127 pp., 5 tables, 7 figures, 1 appendix, references, 150 titles.

Having a secure attachment to God may act as a buffer against stress. Secure attachment to God has been positively associated with adaptive outcomes following stress, such as higher levels of stress-related growth and fewer maladaptive symptoms including depression, prolonged grief, and traumatic distress. However, relatively few studies have empirically tested the relationship between attachment to God and resilience and posttraumatic growth. Thus, the current study explored the potential associations and pathways through which attachment to God is associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth in a sample of 303 suddenly and/or traumatically bereaved individuals. The current study found that (a) God attachment avoidance is a unique negative predictor of resilience and posttraumatic growth even when controlling for adult attachment, (b) self-compassion and meaning-making mediate the association between God attachment anxiety and resilience/posttraumatic growth, (c) secure attachment to God is associated with higher levels of resilience than insecure attachment styles, but not with posttraumatic growth, and (d) an increased number of secondary losses is associated with lower levels of resilience. I conclude by discussing my findings in light of the extant literature on attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth. By better understanding attachment to God and how it may relate to resilience and posttraumatic growth, clinicians will be better equipped to interact with clients of diverse religious/spiritual (R/S) identities, potentially utilizing R/S as a strength or addressing maladaptive aspects of R/S in the wake of life stressors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its initial development, research on attachment theory has expanded from examining parent-child attachment to also include a variety of other attachment relationships such as sibling, peer, and romantic attachments (Ainsworth, 1989; Brennan et al., 1998). Attachment to God is one such attachment relationship that has begun to receive attention in research (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Although there is a growing body of research examining attachment to God, one aspect that has received little attention is whether attachment to god is associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth in the context of a stressful life event.

Following a stressful life event, a secure attachment to God may act as a protective factor, allowing one to lean on god for safety and comfort (i.e., safe haven behaviors) and experience a sense of security as they move forward in their life (i.e., secure base behaviors). For individuals with anxious attachment to God, the experience of a stressful life event may cause them to feel rejected or punished by God. Their response to the stressor could be fearful or angry and could result in them trying to appease God's perceived anger toward them. Individuals with avoidant attachment to God may choose not to rely on god and may be self-reliant in coping with the stressful life event. These reactions could in turn influence whether an individual demonstrates resilience or experiences posttraumatic growth.

Existing research has shown that secure child and adult attachment are positively associated with increased resilience and result in more adaptive mental health outcomes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Stovall-Mcclough & Dozier, 2016). Additionally, religion/spirituality has also been shown to influence resilience and posttraumatic growth in both

positive and negative ways (Faigin & Pargament, 2011; Foy et al., 2011). However, few studies have specifically examined attachment to god and resilience and posttraumatic growth. In general, studies have shown that secure attachment to god is negatively associated with outcomes such as depression, anxiety, distress and positively associated with life satisfaction, but more research is needed to understand the relationship between attachment to God and resilience and posttraumatic growth (Bradshaw et al., Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

The overall purpose of this thesis is to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the construct of attachment to God and its impact on resilience and posttraumatic growth. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the extant literature on attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress. Specifically, I reviewed all empirical studies, including unpublished studies, that included a measure of attachment to God and a measure of an adaptive outcome following stress including resilience, posttraumatic growth, stress-related growth, grit, and spiritual fortitude. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5 I present an empirical study that examined the relationship between attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth. In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings from my empirical study in the context of the existing literature, provide suggestions for future research, and discuss implications for clinical practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Experiencing stressful life events is common (Schneiderman et al., 2005; Sheerin et al., 2018; Tibubos et al., 2020). However, despite the universality of experiencing significant life stressors, stress can have a profound impact on an individual (Schneiderman et al., 2005; Sheerin et al., 2018). For example, following stressful life experiences, some individuals can experience mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety, acute stress disorder (ASD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Schneiderman et al., 2005; Sheerin et al., 2018). However, not all individuals experience negative effects following a significant life stressor, and some individuals even report experiencing positive effects following a stressful life experience (Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Because of these differences in how individuals respond to stress, psychologists have begun to study how some individuals adapt positively in the face of stress, leading to thriving literatures on constructs such as resilience (Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003), stress-related growth (Park et al., 1996), posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), grit (Stoffel & Cain, 2018), and spiritual fortitude (Van Tongeren et al, 2019). Although each of these adaptive stress responses is slightly different from one another, there is a common theme present in each—following a stressful life event, individuals experience psychological benefits (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Park et al., 1996; Stoffel & Cain, 2018; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Van Tongeren et al., 2019).

Because of the variability in how individuals respond to stressful life events, it is important to examine possible factors that might predispose an individual to experience negative

or positive mental health effects following a stressor. For example, there is a large body of literature examining biological and psychological factors that are positively and negatively associated with resilience (Wu et al., 2013). Some of the positively associated psychological factors include emotion regulation (Southwick et al., 2011; Troy & Mauss, 2011), personality factors such as extraversion (Miller & Harrington, 2011; Oshio et al., 2018; Southwick et al., 2011), social support (Wu et al., 2013) secure attachment (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012; Simeon et al., 2007) and religion and spirituality when engaged in positive religious coping (Faigin & Pargament, 2011; Foy et al., 2011).

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality (R/S) is one potential contributing factor that may help make sense of why people experience different outcomes following stressful life events (Faigin & Pargament, 2011; Pargament, 2002; Southwick et al., 2011). Specifically, R/S may serve as a protective factor for mental health in the face of a stressful life event (Seybold & Hill, 2001).

Although research examining R/S in the field of psychology has increased over the years, there is still debate on how to define the concepts of R/S (Oman, 2014). One prominent definition proposes that R/S involves the "search for the sacred" (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, p. 35). Spirituality often focuses on the individual or group search for or experience of the sacred, whereas religiousness focuses on how the search for the sacred unfolds in a traditional context (e.g., institution, church, denomination).

Early research in the psychology of R/S often measured R/S using global indices such as self-reported religiousness or church attendance (Hill & Pargament, 2003). However, these broad approaches had limitations and failed to accurately assess the complexity for how R/S impacted psychology and behavior. As research in this field has progressed, one interesting extension has

been to assess aspects of one's relationship with God as having similar properties to interpersonal relationships (Davis et al., 2009).

Within this relational spirituality framework, the primary focus is on how an individual seeks and experiences their relationship with the sacred in their life as demonstrated by spiritual dwelling (i.e., relating to the sacred/deepening the relationship), spiritual seeking (i.e., exploring relationship to the sacred/working through existential questions), and spiritual struggles (i.e., distress or conflict in relationship with the sacred) (Sandage et al., 2020). In examining one's religiosity and spirituality in terms of a relationship with a higher power, researchers are able to better explore how relationships with others and the sacred influence one another, creates space to explore both adaptive and maladaptive relationships with a higher power, explores differences in dwelling with versus seeking out a sacred, and is a more wholistic examination of religion and spirituality (Sandage et al., 2007). One particularly interesting line of research within this field has been attachment to God, which is derived from attachment theory (Kirkpatrick, 1999).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby in the process of studying a child's instinctual drive to seek comfort from and remain near to their mother (Bowlby 1969/1982; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). Bowbly theorized that these tendencies could be understood in the context of the Attachment Behavioral System, in which attachment behaviors are exhibited to maintain proximity to an attachment figure, someone who can provide safety in crisis or security for exploration (Bowlby 1969/1982; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). Bowlby theorized that these attachment experiences were then internalized into internal working models that shape how an individual views themselves and others in the world and were stable across one's lifespan (Cassidy, 2016).

To further understand parent-child relationships, Mary Ainsworth defined the criteria of an attachment bond. She explained that in order for a bond to qualify as an attachment bond, the bond 1) must be persistent across time, 2) there is a specific individual involved (attachment figure), 3) the bond is emotionally significant, 4) proximity seeking occurs, 5) separation anxiety is present when prevented from maintaining proximity, and 6) the individual is used to seek comfort and security in times of distress. Ainsworth conducted the well-known Strange Situation study, in which she examined individual differences in attachment behaviors and attachment figures by activating the attachment behavioral system of children and coding the patterns of responses (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Cassidy, 2016). She found three groups of attachment patterns: (1) insecure-avoidant; (2) secure; and (3) insecure-ambivalent/resistant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Secure infants demonstrated comfort with exploring their environment when their mother was present and distress when their mother left the room, but were happy and easily appeased when reunited (Ainsworth, et al., 1978). Ambivalent/resistant infants demonstrated clingy behavior toward their caregiver and fear of exploring their environment even with their mother present and more intense distress upon separation from their mother (Ainsworth et al., 1978). During the reunion with their mother, they tended to approach their mother but resist physical contact (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Avoidant infants were comfortable exploring their environment with or without their mother present and showed little distress or change during separation and reunion with their mother (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Main and Solomon (1990) documented a fourth attachment style in their research, referred to as disorganized attachment, in which the child does not have consistent, organized attachment behaviors. A disorganized child would act in unpredictable ways such as freezing, or approaching and retreating from the mother (Main & Solomon, 1990).

In studying attachment in adulthood, Brennan et al. (1998) conceptualized two underlying dimensions of attachment: attachment-anxiety and attachment-avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998; Mikulincer et al., 2003) Attachment-anxiety is characterized by a fear of rejection and need for approval, and attachment-avoidance is characterized by a fear of interpersonal intimacy and depending on others (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Wei et al., 2007). Within this dimensional frameworks, secure attachment can be better understood as low levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). What was originally referred to as ambivalent/resistant attachment is often now conceptualized as preoccupied or anxious attachment and consists of high levels of attachment-anxiety and low levels of attachment-avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Dismissing-avoidant attachment is characterized by high levels of attachment-avoidance and low levels of attachment-anxiety (Mikulincer et al., 2003). What was conceptualized as disorganized attachment is now often referred to as fearful-avoidant and is characterized by high levels of both attachment anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowits, 1991; Mikulincer et al., 2003).

Attachment to God

As attachment theory has continued to expand, researchers such as Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) explored the idea that religious individuals view a supernatural power as an "exalted attachment figure" that often is associated with a parental role of mother or father (p. 918). Granqvist and Kirkpatrick theorized that a relationship with God could meet the criteria for an attachment relationship similar to a parent-child attachment relationship as evidenced by a believer's (1) *seeking proximity* to God through prayer and faith in his omnipresence (i.e., God is present everywhere), (2) utilizing God as a *safe haven* through prayer and as a *secure base* through faith in biblical or spiritual beliefs such as God will protect and be with the individual,

and lastly (3) *fearing separation* from God after death in hell or losing communion with him on earth (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Some researchers theorized that an individual's attachment to God would correspond with or mirror their adult attachment style, whereas others suggested attachment to God might serve as a compensatory relationship for insecure attachments with others (McDonald et al., 2005). Support for both the correspondence and compensatory hypotheses have been found for adult and parent-child attachment, and attachment to God (McDonald et al., 2005). Hall et al. (2009) theorized that the mixed findings could be due to lack of clarity in the conceptual model of the correspondence and congruence hypotheses and suggested an alternative conceptualization in which correspondence occurs at the implicit level of spiritual experience and one's internal working model affects their relationship with God, but that at the explicit level, individuals' spiritual functioning is not dictated by other attachment relationships (Hall et al., 2009). For example, within this framework, an individual might implicitly or subconsciously project internalized experiences from other attachment relationships into their attachment to God such as fear of rejection or others will hurt me (internalized working model messages). However, at the explicit or conscious level, the individual is able to actively control their spiritual functioning and may utilize a higher power as a compensatory relationship. More research is needed to further clarify the relationship between human and God attachments.

When exploring relationships, it is valuable to consider how and when the relationship was formed, therefore in the context of attachment to God, the conversion process is important to consider. Studies have shown that conversions are most likely to occur in adolescence and early adulthood (Granqvist, 2003). At this time in life, individuals tend to begin transition attachment-related functions from their caregiver to peers and romantic partners (Friedlmeier and Granqvist

2001; Fraley & Davis 1997). Granqvist (2003) proposed that the increase in religious conversions are potentially more likely to occur during this stage because of the attachment transitions that take place. As attachments are shifting, some individuals may be inclined to turn to a higher power as an attachment figure for security. Studies have also found that conversions can occur in differing ways such as a slowly growing faith or a sudden and immediate adoption of faith. In the context of sudden conversions, individuals often report experiencing distress (Kirkpatrick, 1992). The distress experienced may activate an individual's attachment behavioral system and could potentially motivate the distressed person to engage in conversion to utilize God as a safe haven (Granqvist, 2003). Studies suggest that individuals with secure attachments are more likely to experience a gradual religious conversion, while those with insecure attachments are more likely to experience a sudden religious conversion (Granqvist, 2003). In addition to type of conversion, time since conversion may be relevant to conceptualizing attachment to God, and it may be beneficial to explore differences between new converts' attachments to God and long-term believers' attachments to God. For example, Paloutzian (1981) found that new converts had a sharp increase in purpose in life the first week of conversion followed by a decrease one month later. Following the decrease, purpose in life once again increased and was stable within six months after conversion (Paloutzian, 1981). More research is needed specifically exploring recent versus long-term conversion.

Attachment and Outcomes

Child and adult attachment styles have been shown to act as a protective and risk factors for psychopathology (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016). Insecure child and adult attachment have been positively associated with reduced resilience for coping and higher risk for mild to severe psychopathology such as depression and anxiety, and insecure

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adult attachment has also been positively associated with higher risk for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and PTSD (Bosmans et al., 2010; Bosquet & Egeland, 2006; Cantazaro & Wei, 2010; Doron et al., 2009; Duggal et al., 2001; Ein-Dor et al., 2010; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016). However, secure child and adult attachment has been found to increase resilience and result in more adaptive mental health outcomes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016). There are several identified mediating factors through which adult attachment styles influence psychological outcomes including self-representations, emotion regulation, and interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012).

When specifically examining attachment to God, research suggests that having a secure attachment to God may also act as a buffer for stressors (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Secure attachment to God has been positively associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety, and greater life satisfaction, whereas anxious attachment to God has been positively associated with neuroticism and negative affect (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Bradshaw et al. (2013) found that anxious attachment to God was positively associated with distress and that secure attachment to God and distress were inversely related. Following a stressful life event, a secure attachment to God may act as a protective factor, allowing one to lean on God for safety and comfort (i.e., safe haven behaviors) and experience a sense of security as they move forward in their life (i.e., secure base behaviors). For individuals with anxious attachment to God, the experience of a stressful life event may cause them to feel rejected or punished by God. Their response to the stressor could be fearful or angry, and could result in them trying to appease God's perceived anger toward them. Individuals with avoidant attachment to God will likely not rely on God and may be self-reliant in coping with the stressful life event.

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the research that has

been conducted on attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following a stressful life event.

After reviewing the key findings, I provide guidance and insight for future research and practical

implications for clinical work with individuals who have experienced a stressful life event.

Method

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In this literature review, all empirical studies were included that examined the constructs

of attachment to God and one of the following adaptive responses following stress: resilience,

stress-related growth, posttraumatic growth, grit, and spiritual fortitude. Theoretical papers and

case studies were not included. To reduce the impact of publication bias, both published and

unpublished studies (e.g., theses, dissertations) were included. Also, both quantitative and

qualitative studies were included. Finally, studies not in English were excluded from the review.

Literature Search

The studies included in the literature search were collected from the following databases

as of February 25, 2021: PsycINFO, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, and Google

Scholar. The searches included the key term "Attachment to God" and one key term for each

variable measuring an adaptive response following stress: Resilienc* (On Google Scholar, this

was searched as Resilience or Resiliency), Stress Related Growth, Posttraumatic Growth, Grit,

and Spiritual Fortitude. Once the studies were collected, the references section for each study

was reviewed to search for missing studies that should be included. Finally, the respective

authors were contacted and requested to send any related research that might have been missed

or may be unpublished. Ten empirical studies were found that met inclusion criteria, but one

study was excluded due to not examining the relationship between the variables of attachment to God and the adaptive outcome variable; and two unpublished studies were excluded due to overlap with published versions of the studies. In sum, nine studies were identified that met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final literature review.

Results

The results of this literature review is divided into two sections. First, I review the methods utilized by the included studies. Second, I review the empirical findings reported by the included studies.

Review of Methodology

Research Design

Of the nine empirical studies reviewed, one utilized mixed-methods, six were quantitative, and two were qualitative. The quantitative studies reviewed utilized surveys consisting of at least one measure of attachment to God and one measure of an adaptive responses following stress (e.g., resilience, stress-related growth, posttraumatic growth, grit, and spiritual fortitude). Two studies included a forced choice attachment to God measure in addition to an attachment to God survey measure. The mixed-method study and one qualitative study utilized inductive content analysis and the other qualitative study implemented deductive content analysis. Six of the studies utilized cross-sectional research designs and one study implemented a longitudinal study across a span of three months.

Participants.

All studies reported sample size. The total number of participants in the nine studies was 1,396, with the smallest study consisting of 18 participants and the largest sample consisting of

participants 374. Nine studies were conducted in the United States, one study was conducted in Zambia, and one was conducted in Iran. All studies provided some basic demographic information for the participants. Five of the studies were conducted with bereaved individuals, two studies were conducted with individuals who had experienced suffering or trauma, one study was conducted with college students, and one study was conducted with individuals who were waiting on a loved one in surgery. Regarding gender, over half the participants identified as female (64%). Race/ethnicity was only reported in five studies; 60% of participants identified as White/European American, 18% Black/African American, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, <1% Native American, 5% Bi/Multi-Racial, and 2% identified as "Other." Regarding age, four studies reported the average age of the sample, and four studies reported frequencies in age ranges, and one study did not provide participant ages. The overall mean age for the studies that provided average age was 34 years. The studies reporting age range frequencies reported that 45% of participants were between the ages of 13 – 24; 13% were between 30 – 39 years; 16% were between 40 – 49 years; 14% were between 50 – 59 years, and 11% were 60+ years. Five studies reported religious affiliation; 51% of participants identified as Christian (e.g., Roman Catholic and Protestant), 6% spiritual but not religious, 6% agnostic, 5% "other", 4% atheist, 3% not religious, 2% Muslim, 1% Jewish, 1% Buddhist, 1% Hindu, and <1% Mormon. None of the included studies provided information regarding participants' sexual orientation or time since conversion.

Measures of Attachment to God

The nine quantitative/mixed-method studies utilized various surveys to assess style of attachment to God, such as the Relationship with God Scale (Belavich 1998, Belavich & Pargament, 2002). Three studies used the Relationship with God Scale, which consists of 12

statements on a Likert scale of 1 – 5 with 1 indicating *strongly disagree* and 5 indicating *strongly agree* (e.g. God is generally warm and responsive to me; God often seems to have little or no interest in my personal affairs or problems). Belavich and Pargament (2002) reported an acceptable alpha range of .80 for secure God attachment and .81 for avoidant God attachment; however, anxious God attachment demonstrated low reliability with an alpha of .48. Of the two studies that did not use the Relationship with God Scale, one study used the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), and one study did not report which measure of attachment to God was used.

Belavich and Pargament (2002) derived the Relationship with God Scale items from Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1992) forced choice attachment to God measure. Two studies utilized this forced choice attachment to God measure in addition to the Relationship with God Scale, in which participants are given three paragraphs describing ways of relating to God and asked to indicate which one best described their relationship with God. The three paragraphs reflect secure attachment, avoidant, or anxious attachment to God. For example, the paragraph describing secure attachment states, "God is generally warm and responsive to me. He always seems to know when to be supportive and protective of me, and when to let me make my own mistakes. My relationship with God is always comfortable, and I am very happy and satisfied with it" (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). Kirkpatrick and Shaver based their measure on Hazan and Shaver's (1987) measure of romantic attachment. Kirkpatrick and Shaver reported a significant relationship between adult attachment and God attachment, but noted the relationship was not strong. However, when examining parent-child attachment and God attachment, they found a strong relationship between individuals reporting insecure maternal attachment and insecure adult and God attachment, but a non-significant relationship between secure maternal attachment

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and secure adult and God attachment.

Measures of Adaptive Stress Response

Three of the six quantitative studies examined stress-related growth, two examined posttraumatic growth, and one examined resilience. All studies utilized surveys. For example, the three studies examining stress-related growth used the Stress Related Growth Scale (Park et al, 1996) or the Stress Related Growth Scale—Revised (Boals & Schuler, 2018). The Stress Related Growth Scale is a 50-item self-report measure that asks participants to respond to questions regarding positive outcomes that might occur following a stressful life event (Park et al.,1996). The Stress Related Growth Scale consists of statements such as "I have developed relationships with supportive others" and "I have become more accepting of others," that participants respond to on a 3-point Likert scale with 0 indicating "not at all," 1 indicating "somewhat," and 2 indicating "a great deal" (Park et al., 1996). Park et al. (1996) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .94 and a test-retest reliability of .81 for the total score of stress related growth. For the two other studies, one study did not specify which measure of resilience was used and two administered the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Review of Empirical Findings

Overall, there were nine studies that examined the relationship between attachment to God and adaptive outcomes to stressful life events (see Table 1). The empirical findings of the studies are organized into four sections: (a) secure attachment to God, (b) avoidant attachment to God, (c) anxious attachment to God, and (d) potential mediating variables.

Secure Attachment to God

All studies measuring secure attachment found that it was positively associated with

adaptive outcomes following stress (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020). Specifically, individuals with a secure attachment to God endorsed higher levels of stress-related growth and resilience in the reviewed studies. Furthermore, maladaptive responses such as increased depression, prolonged grief, and religious discontent were negatively related to secure attachment to God (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan 2012). For example, Kelley (2003) found that secure attachment to God was negatively correlated with depression and traumatic distress, and was positively correlated with stress-related growth and positive religious outcome.

Insecure Attachment to God

When examining insecure God attachment as a whole (i.e., avoidant and anxious attachment styles together), the research suggests that an insecure attachment style is more likely to result in negative outcomes following stress. For example, Kelley (2003) found that bereaved individuals with avoidant or anxious attachment styles were more likely to experience negative outcomes following loss and less likely to experience positive outcomes. Jueckstock (2018) found in a qualitative analysis that individuals with insecure God attachment tended to view God as distant, unloving, and responsible for the tragedy, and that these viewpoints were more often associated with a more difficult grief process. Jueckstock observed that responses depicting insecure attachment to God occurred more often with individuals attempting to "cut off God" and hypothesized that cutting off God could result in more difficult grief experiences that should be studied in future research. Although examining insecure God attachment as one construct can provide some helpful insight and overall trends, individually examining avoidant attachment toward God and anxious attachment toward God highlights some interesting and unexpected findings.

God Attachment Avoidance

Although research clearly demonstrates that secure attachment to God has positive outcomes, the majority of research on avoidant attachment to God found that it was either unrelated or negatively related to adaptive outcomes following stress. For example, both Belavich and Pargament (2002) and Kelley (2003) found that avoidant attachment was not significantly related to stress-related growth. Nosrati et al. (2020), on the other hand, found that avoidant attachment to God was associated with lower levels of resilience in a sample of college students. Captari et al. (2020) and Zeligman et al. (2020) both found avoidant attachment to God was negatively associated with posttraumatic growth. Interestingly, Captari et al. (2020) also noted that while God attachment avoidance was negatively associated with posttraumatic growth, it was also negatively associated with prolonged grief. Thus, participants who exhibited God attachment avoidance did not necessarily report severe grief reactions following the stress of losing a loved one, but they also did not report significant benefits.

God Attachment Anxiety

Somewhat surprisingly, although higher levels of God attachment anxiety were associated with various negative effects such as more severe grief, it was either not significantly related or positively related to adaptive outcomes following stress (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Bock, 2020; Captari et al., 2020; Kelley 2003). For example, Captari et al. (2020) reported that higher levels of attachment anxiety toward God were associated with increased levels of identity distress and shattered assumptions, contributing to more severe grief reactions rather than a more adaptive grief response; however, the relationship between God attachment anxiety and posttraumatic growth was not significant (Captari et al., 2020). Bock (2020) also found that God attachment anxiety was not significantly associated with stress-related growth in a sample of

trauma survivors. On the other hand, an interesting and somewhat unexpected finding occurred in two studies in which anxious attachment was positively associated with stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley 2003). Belavich and Pargament (2002) found that anxious attachment was related to negative spiritual coping, but was also related to higher levels of stress-related growth. Kelley (2003) also found a positive relationship between anxious attachment to God and stress-related growth.

Potential Mediating Variables

In examining the studies that explored the relationship between attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress, the researchers highlighted two possible mediating variables, which are reviewed below.

- *Religious/spiritual coping.* One potential mediating variable is religious/spiritual coping, which was explored in three studies. First, there is evidence that secure attachment to God is related to positive religious coping and avoidant and anxious God attachment are related to negative spiritual coping (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley, 2003). Positive religious/spiritual coping served as a mediator between secure attachment to God and higher levels of stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan 2012). For example, Belavich and Pargament (2002) found that secure attachment predicted higher positive spiritual coping, which in turn was associated with higher stress-related growth. Kelley and Chan (2012) also found that positive religious coping mediated the relationship between secure attachment to God and stress related growth.

Interestingly, researchers noted that although anxious God attachment can lead to negative religious/spiritual coping, it still is associated with higher levels of stress-related growth in some samples (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley 2003). For example, Belavich and

Pargament (2002) found that anxious attachment was associated with negative spiritual coping but still resulted in higher levels of stress-related growth. Kelley (2003) also found a positive association between anxious attachment to God and higher levels of stress-related growth. Belavich and Pargament found that avoidant attachment was not significantly related to either positive or negative religious/spiritual coping, but Kelley found that avoidant attachment was negatively associated with positive religious/spiritual coping.

- *Meaning.* A second potential mediation variable is meaning, which was explored in three studies. For example, Kelley (2003) found that secure attachment to God was positively correlated with personal meaning and that anxious and avoidant attachment to God were negatively correlated with personal meaning. In addition, Jueckstock (2018) discusses meaning-making in one's relationship with God as a key characteristic among securely attached individuals when discussing their grief experiences. Jueckstock (2018) found that responses indicative of insecure attachment to God (i.e. characterized by viewing God as distant, unloving, and responsible for the tragedy) were often associated with severe grief. However, Kelley and Chan (2012) found that although meaning mediated the relationship between secure attachment to God and grief, meaning was not a significant predictor of stress-related growth, and was not a significant mediator between attachment to God and stress-related growth. Despite this finding, studies did support that (a) meaning was related to attachment to God and (b) meaning mediated the relationship between attachment to God and other mental health outcomes. Thus, exploring the role of meaning in the relationship between attachment to God and adaptive responses to stress could be an interesting area for future research.

Discussion

Several important findings emerged in the literature review. First, secure attachment to

God consistently served as a protective factor against the potential negative effects caused by stressful life experiences. As expected, the research consistently suggested that secure attachment to God was positively associated with adaptive outcomes following stress. This finding supports the idea that individuals who are securely attached to God are able to draw on their relationship with God for support, comfort, and safety and somewhat buffer against negative outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Secure attachment to God is characterized by low levels of avoidance and anxiety toward God, enabling one to navigate life in a confident and secure manner. Knowing God will be there in the mundane, happy, and difficult times in life as a secure base and safe haven when needed provides stability and a feeling of security in life (Brennan et al., 1998; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Second, anxious attachment to God may be a risk factor for experiencing the negative effects of stressful life experiences. The research consistently suggested that individuals with anxious attachment to God demonstrated higher levels of distress following a stressful life event. This finding supports the idea that individuals who are anxiously attached to God may perceive the life stressor as God abandoning or punishing them, resulting in higher levels of symptomology (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). However, two studies reported that anxious attachment was related to higher levels of negative spiritual/religious coping but also higher levels of stress-related growth. Although this finding might seem counter-intuitive at first, the Meaning-Making model helps explain this phenomenon (Park, 2011; Park, 2013). The higher levels of stress-related growth in those with anxious God attachment could potentially be due to the individuals having to wrestle with the event to make meaning of what is happening in their relationship with God since their perceived punishment and/or abandonment. This also may

explain why individuals with avoidant attachment to God appear to experience less distress but also less stress-related growth. In avoidant attachment to God, the individual does not experience the distress of perceiving God as abandoning them or punishing them, but they are also not pushed to create meaning out of the experience. The struggle with making meaning of the situation in individuals with anxious attachment to God may help lead to the stress-related growth (Park, 2013).

Finally, several factors such as religious/spiritual coping and meaning-making are associated with attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress. These relationships should continue to be explored in future models examining attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress. For example, as described above, The Meaning-Making Model (Park, 2011) may help one understand the relationship between attachment to God and adaptive and maladaptive outcomes following stress. Secure attachment was strongly related to meaning, but it is possible that when a person has an anxious/attachment God attachment, one's relationship with God might cause them to experience difficulty making sense of the situation and cause a search for meaning. In those with avoidant attachment style toward God, on the other hand, there appears to be a lack of meaning following the stressful life event, but whether this is due to a lack of crisis in meaning or avoiding turning to others to help make sense and cope with the events is unclear. Additionally, positive and negative religious/spiritual coping appear to mediate the relationship between attachment to God and stress-related growth. An individual's attachment to God seems to influence the ways in which they cope with the stressor. If an individual views God as available and willing to help, they may be able to utilize that relationship as a resource during the stress, whereas an individual who feels God is unwilling and unavailable will not view their relationship with God as a source of support and comfort.

Limitations

The results of the literature review should be interpreted in the context of some of the limitations of the included studies. The research designs implemented in the reviewed studies have some important limitations, such as lack of comprehensive/varying methodologies and diverse participant samples. With the exception of one three-month longitudinal study, all quantitative studies used cross-sectional designs, so causal conclusions should not be made. Additionally, the five studies that reported race/ethnicity of their samples consisted of primarily bereaved White Christians, which decreases the generalizability of the findings to non-Christians and racial/ethnic minority individuals. Additionally, none of the studies reported time since participants' religious/spiritual conversion.

The methods of measuring attachment to God also have some limitations. The measures used were all surveys utilizing Likert Scales, with two studies also including a forced-choice attachment to God measure, which may be prone to response bias (Leak & Parsons, 2001; Paulhus, 1991). Additionally, the measures generally examined attachment anxiety and avoidance as separate dimensions, and this strategy may miss out on nuance that could be gained from examining how these dimensions interact together. For example, there may be differences between fearful-avoidance and dismissing-avoidance that are being overlooked. Whereas fearful-avoidant attachment is characterized by both high attachment anxiety and avoidance, dismissing-avoidant attachment is characterized by lower attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Finally, some studies did not fully report the demographic information for their samples. For example, none of the studies reviewed provided any information regarding sexual orientation of their participants.

Areas for Future Research

Future research on attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress should first work to better measure one's attachment to God. In measuring attachment relationships, tasks and activities such as The Strange Situation are often utilized to accurately observe and assess attachment behaviors (Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, in researching attachment to God, it is impossible to physically observe attachment behaviors. Although self-report and forced choice measures of God attachment are valuable, they are not without response bias. Qualitative research may offer some benefits in studying one's attachment to God. Additionally, adult attachment styles can be assessed using semi-structured interviews such as the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al.,1996). Attachment to God may be able to be assessed or corroborated in a similar fashion, utilizing an interview type assessment to examine attachment related cognitions and behaviors. For example, Proctor et al. (2009) developed the God Attachment Interview Schedule and conducted an a-priori study, but validation of the attachment profiles is still needed. Additionally, future research should examine differences between fearful-avoidant and fearful dismissing attachment styles. Siefert and Haggerty (under review) created the Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence (IIA), which can help identify fearful-avoidant attachment styles. Adapting or creating a similar measure for attachment to God could further understanding on fearful-avoidant attachment to God.

In addition to improving assessment of God attachment style, future research should seek to utilize more varied and complex research designs. Most of the existing studies are cross-sectional, and although beneficial for increasing the body of literature, they prevent researchers from drawing casual inferences. Future research should include longitudinal and experimental research designs.

Future research should also seek to improve the diversity of its samples to increase the generalizability of the findings. Future research should incorporate the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities, as well as individuals from other religious groups. Additionally, most of the samples studied were bereaved individuals. Because of this, the studies seem to emphasize safe haven behaviors (i.e., seeking God in times of trouble) more so than secure base behaviors (i.e., using God as security for growth and exploration in life). It would be interesting for future research to examine attachment to God and resilience in other populations and examine more closely how individuals utilize God as a secure base without the present of a stressor. For example, Beck (2006) conducted a study in which he examined the secure base behavior of theological exploration in the context of attachment to God.

Finally, future research should seek to expand the understanding of attachment to God in light of many related constructs such as attachment theory, the relational spirituality framework, the conversion experience, religious/spiritual coping, and meaning-making, among others. As more information is gathered, models of attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress should grow more complex as research shows how these varied constructs fit together.

Clinical Implications

For clinicians, understanding how attachment to God can be either a protective or risk factor for clients experiencing a life stressor can influence therapeutic work by informing case conceptualization, providing direction for therapy, and psychoeducation to increase insight. Clinicians should be curious about their clients' religious/spiritual identities just as they would with other facets of identity in conceptualizing a client's case. Some clients may benefit from psychoeducation on attachment and the exploration of their own attachment styles. Understanding these relational patterns and internalized views of themselves and others can help

increase insight and understanding. Understanding a client's attachment to God can provide the clinician with information regarding how the client views themselves and others, potential religious coping strategies the client might be inclined to use, and insight into the client's meaning-making process. For example, a client with an anxious/preoccupied attachment to God may struggle with feeling unworthy of love or afraid of losing God's favor, whereas an avoidant God attachment could suggest the individual feels unable to depend on anyone but themselves in life.

Additionally, understanding a client's attachment to God can provide insight into religious coping strategies and help make sense of why a client might utilize positive or negative religious coping when faced with a stressor. Attachment to God also offers insight into a client's meaning-making processes. For example, perhaps a client is anxiously attached to God and experiences a significant life stressor; and makes meaning of the situation by believing they are being punished for something they did wrong. Another example could be an individual with avoidant attachment to God viewing God as distant and not involved in the world. In case conceptualization, understanding one's attachment to God can help clinicians better conceptualize a client's view of themselves and others, potential positive or negative coping strategies they might be prone to engage in, and insight into making meaning of the stressor. With this information, a clinician can then draw upon attachment to God as a strength or a potential area for therapeutic work.

In clients with secure attachment to God, their religious/spiritual identity could be a source of strength and comfort and should be highlighted in therapy. However, for individuals with an insecure attachment to God, addressing some of the internalized beliefs and negative coping styles could be therapeutic and healing. However, it is important to remember that

anxious attachment to God was found to be associated with stress-related growth in two studies, possibly due to one's struggle in making-meaning or adapting to the stressor (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley 2003). Because of this phenomenon, it may be beneficial in therapy to avoid "rescuing" an anxiously attached client from the distress experienced in their relationship with God, but rather create a space in which they can explore that discomfort and foster stress-related growth.

<center>Conclusion</center>

The purpose of this paper was to provide an overview on the existing research on attachment to God and adaptive outcomes following stress and provide suggestions for future research. The reviewed studies demonstrate that attachment to God is an important factor in adapting healthily to a stressful life event with secure attachment acting as a protective factor, and insecure attachment resulting in more negative outcomes. However, future research should expand and include more complex models to better explain why and how these relationships are occurring.

CHAPTER 3

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Death affects everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic status (SES). In 2018, there were roughly 2,800,000 reported deaths in the United States, and the number of friends and family members affected by those deaths is even greater (Xu et al., 2020). Despite death being a natural and unavoidable part of life, it can cause significant distress and increases risk for the development of psychopathology (Frumkin & Robinaugh, 2018). Most individuals experience some distress following death of a loved one, but over time they usually experience less bereavement distress and no long-term impairments (Jordan & Litz, 2014). Although experiencing the death of a loved one is difficult no matter the circumstances, when the death is unexpected and sudden, such as by suicide, homicide, or accident, it may result in unique challenges for the bereaved (Keyes et al., 2014). Unexpected loss has been associated with symptoms of depression and future onset of psychiatric disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder, depression, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social phobia, and alcohol use disorder (Brent et al., 1994; Burton et al., 2006; Kaplow & Layne, 2014; Melhem et al., 2011).

Although much remains to be understood about bereavement, the Dual Process Model of Coping (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) offers insight on typical grief processes. In this model, individuals alternate between a focus on the experienced loss and a focus on restoring other aspects of one's life. This shift in focus creates balance, allowing an individual to engage with and retreat from the stress associated with loss, eventually coming to a place of acceptance of the loss and reengagement in life (Jordan & Litz, 2014; Stroebe & Schut, 1999). As individuals

engage in the grief process, they demonstrate varying levels of resilience or the ability to "thrive in the face of adversity" (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 76). For example, Bonanno et al. (2002) reported that 45% of their sample of people whose spouse had died demonstrated resilience.

Some individuals who experience bereavement not only report a return to normal functioning, but also endorse posttraumatic growth or positive outcomes following the death (Michael & Cooper, 2013). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) explain that in the wake of a difficult life experience, an individual may engage in a growth process, resulting in increased functioning following the stressor. Whereas resilience is often used to refer to an ability to adapt and continue functioning at one's baseline level despite a hardship, posttraumatic growth signifies significant positive changes due to experiencing the hardship (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Types of posttraumatic growth reported include 1) increased appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities, 2) increased intimacy and warmth in relationships, 3) increased personal strength, 4) perception of new possibilities and/or paths for one's life, and 5) spiritual development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Tedeschi and Calhoun explain that this growth process likely occurs due to one's understanding and beliefs about the world being challenged (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2014). This experience is characterized by cognitive engagement in an effort to develop a new schema and understanding of the world (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2014). Factors such as optimism, extraversion, and social support have been associated with posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2014)

Although the majority of individuals experience eventual declines in bereavement distress, 8-15% of individuals experience chronic grief that remains acute and impairing despite the passage of time (Boelen et al., 2019). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—Fifth Edition (DSM-5) labeled this more severe grief reaction "Persistent Complex

Bereavement Disorder" (PCBI) (APA, 2013). The DSM-5 describes PCBI as a, "severe and persistent grief and mourning reaction," that includes symptoms such as persistent yearning for the deceased, intense sorrow/emotional pain, and marked difficulty accepting the loss (APA, 2013, p. 289). Although there is likely no single protective or risk factor that can explain why some individuals react more adaptively than others, several factors have been associated with differences in bereavement outcomes, including secondary losses, attachment, meaning-making, and self-compassion (Mahon, 1999; Shear, 2015).

Secondary Losses

Experiencing the death of a loved can be associated with numerous secondary losses in addition to the primary loss of the loved one (Mahon, 1999). Secondary losses may include loss of hopes and dreams, loss of support, loss of identity, and other factors such as income, property, and health that elicit additional grief reactions (Mahon, 1999; Rando, 1993). Experiencing a higher number of secondary losses following the death may be a potential risk factor for complicated grief (Shear, 2015), as an increase in secondary losses is likely more taxing on an individual than experiencing few secondary losses.

Attachment

Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding bereavement experiences. Bowbly (1980) theorized that how an individual responds to grief is impacted by childhood experiences with their attachment figures. Across the life span, individuals can form a variety of attachment relationships that contribute to their attachment behavioral system. The attachment behavioral system consists of attachment behaviors that are exhibited to maintain proximity to an attachment figure (i.e. someone who can provide safety in crisis or security for exploration) (Bowlby 1969/1982; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). These attachment behaviors are organized by

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internal working models (IWMs) of how an individual views themselves and others in the world (Cassidy, 2016).

The combination of one's IWM and attachment behaviors have been categorically and dimensionally classified into attachment styles (Cassidy, 2016). Categorically, attachment styles can be 1) secure, 2) anxious/preoccupied, 3) dismissing/avoidant, and 4) fearful-avoidant or disorganized (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Dimensionally, attachment can be understood along the dimensions of attachment-anxiety and attachment-avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998; Mikulincer et al., 2003) Attachment-anxiety is characterized by a fear of rejection and need for approval, and attachment-avoidance is characterized by a fear of interpersonal intimacy and depending on others (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Wei et al., 2007). Within this dimensional frameworks, secure attachment can be better understood as low levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Anxious/preoccupied attachment consists of high levels of attachment-anxiety and low levels of attachment-avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Dismissing-avoidant attachment is characterized by high levels of attachment-avoidance and low levels of attachment-anxiety, and fearful-avoidant attachment is characterized by high levels of both attachment anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowits, 1991; Mikulincer et al., 2003).

As attachment theory has continued to expand, researchers such as Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) explored the idea that religious individuals can view a supernatural power as an "exalted attachment figure" that often is associated with a paternal role of mother or father (p. 918). Research has demonstrated that God attachment is a unique attachment relationship with unique impacts (Sim & Loh, 2003). Some researchers theorized that an individual's attachment to God would correspond with or mirror their adult attachment style, whereas others suggested attachment to God might serve as a compensatory relationship for insecure attachments with

others (McDonald et al., 2005). Support for both the correspondence and compensatory hypotheses have been found (McDonald et al., 2005). Hall et al. (2009) theorized that the mixed findings could be due to lack of clarity in the conceptual model of the correspondence and congruence hypotheses and suggested an alternative conceptualization in which correspondence occurs at the implicit level of spiritual experience and one's internal working model affects their relationship with God, but that at the explicit level, individuals' spiritual functioning is not dictated by other attachment relationships (Hall et al., 2009). For example, within this framework, an individual might implicitly or subconsciously project internalized experiences from other attachment relationships into their attachment to God such as fear of rejection or others will hurt me (internalized working model messages). However, at the explicit or conscious level, the individual is able to actively control their spiritual functioning and may utilize a higher power as a compensatory relationship. More research is needed to further clarify the relationship between human and God attachments.

Research on adult attachment and both resilience and posttraumatic growth suggest that attachment processes can help explain differences in individual outcomes following a difficult and significant life event. Research suggests that secure adult attachment is associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth (Craparo et al., 2018; Salo et al., 2005; Simeon et al., 2007). Similarly, research on attachment to God and resilience and posttraumatic growth suggest that secure attachment to God is associated with more adaptive outcomes following a significant life stressor such as resilience, posttraumatic growth, and stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020). In contrast, research examining insecure attachment has demonstrated that insecure attachment generally results in less adaptive outcomes following a significant life

stressor (Kelley, 2003; Jueckstock, 2018). Additionally, studies have found that utilizing a spiritual/religious belief system may lower risk for complicated grief (Chiu et al., 2010; Seirmarco et al., 2012). It may be that individuals can utilize a secure attachment to God as a means of coping with secondary losses, and that having a secure attachment relationship may increase an individual's resilience and posttraumatic growth in the midst of these losses.

Meaning-Making

One potential mechanism through which Attachment to God may influence resilience and posttraumatic growth is meaning-making. Park's (2016) Meaning-Making Model conceptualizes individuals as having two levels of meaning (i.e. global and situational) and they experience distress when discrepancies occur between these levels of meaning. Global meaning refers to one's beliefs about themselves and the world, whereas situational meaning refers to interpreting and reacting to specific situations, including assigning meaning to experiences, assessing whether there are discrepancies between situation and global meaning, and reconciling such differences (Park, 2016). Meaning-making refers to attempts to reconcile these discrepancies (Park, 2008). Following a traumatic or highly stressful life event, such as bereavement, individuals appraise their experience and often engage in a process of assimilating the negative event into their global meaning.

Kelley (2003) found that secure attachment to God was positively correlated with personal meaning, and that anxious and avoidant attachment to God were negatively correlated with personal meaning. In addition, Jueckstock (2018) discusses meaning-making in one's relationship with God as a key characteristic among securely attached individuals when discussing their grief experiences. Jueckstock (2018) found that responses indicative of insecure attachment to God (e.g., characterized by viewing God as distant, unloving, and responsible for

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the tragedy) were often associated with severe grief. Often, one's religious/spiritual beliefs assist in creating meaning, and studies have found religious-meaning-making to be associated with resilience (Park, 2013; Park, 2016; Wadsworth et al., 2009).

Self-Compassion

Another possible mechanism through which attachment to God may influence resilience and posttraumatic growth is self-compassion. Self-compassion is a concept derived from Buddhist psychology (Neff, 2003). Neff (2003) conceptualizes self-compassion as having three primary components: 1) self-kindness vs self-judgment, 2) feelings of common humanity vs isolation, and 3) mindfulness vs over-identification. Self-kindness is the ability to practice care and understanding with oneself, common humanity is the ability to recognize mistakes and failures as a part of human nature, and mindfulness is having a balanced awareness of painful thoughts and experiences (Neff, 2003). One's ability to practice self-compassion may influence the grief response of a bereaved individual. Vara and Thimm (2020) found that lower levels of self-compassion were associated with the severity of complicated grief symptoms. Practicing self-compassion in the context of grief may assist in addressing maladaptive thought processes and increasing emotion regulation (Glickman et al., 2016).

Secure God attachment has been associated with higher levels of self-compassion, whereas both anxious and avoidant God attachment have been associated with lower levels of self-compassion (Homan, 2014; Varghese, 2015). This could be a reflection of individuals treating themselves similarly to how they perceive God treats them in insecure relationships (Homan, 2014). Building on these associations between God attachment and self-compassion, researchers have also examined self-compassion as a mediator between Attachment to God and outcome variables such as anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being (Homan, 2014;

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Varghese, 2015). Homan (2014) found that self-compassion mediated the relationship between God attachment anxiety and avoidance and anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction, and Varghese (2015) found that self-compassion partially mediated the relationship between God attachment anxiety and avoidance and psychological well-being.

Self-compassion has also been positively associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth. For example, Wong and Yeung (2017) found that self-compassion had a significant effect on posttraumatic growth through the cognitive processes of acceptance, positive reframing, and the presence of meaning. Chan et al., (2019) found that self-compassion was positively correlated with posttraumatic growth and found that self-compassion moderated the relationship between posttraumatic growth and depression, anxiety, and stress. Bluth et al. (2018) found that in adolescents, self-compassion was highly associated with resilience, and that this relationship was moderated by gender.

Purpose of the Current Study

Since relatively few studies have examined the potential impact of attachment to God on resilience and posttraumatic growth, this aim of this study is to contribute to this gap in research by exploring the potential associations and pathways through which attachment to God might influence resilience and posttraumatic growth. This study is especially relevant in the midst of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. There have been a reported 200,499 deaths involving COVID-19 as of October, 2020 (Provisional Death Counts for Coronavirus Disease 2019 [COVID-19]). Additionally, many have experienced negative mental health effects due to the pandemic and associated factors (e.g., isolation, economic hardships) (Salari et al., 2020). Exploring whether attachment to God may increase resilience and posttraumatic growth could be especially relevant in the wake of increased number of COVID-19 related deaths.

The present study explores five primary hypotheses. First, I hypothesize that God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be significantly associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth, even when controlling for adult attachment. Specifically, secure attachment to God will be positively associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, and high levels of God attachment anxiety and God attachment avoidance will be negatively associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Second, self-compassion will mediate the relationship between God attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance, and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, in Model 1, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of self-compassion, which in turn will be related to lower levels of resilience. In Model 2, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of self-compassion, which in turn will be related to lower levels of posttraumatic growth.

Third, meaning-making will mediate the relationship between God attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, in Model 1, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of meaning-making, which in turn will be related to lower levels of resilience. In Model 2, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God-attachment avoidance will be related to lower levels of meaning-making, which in turn will be related to lower levels of posttraumatic growth.

Fourth, when the dimensions of God anxiety and avoidance are categorized into discrete attachment styles, (a) secure God attachment will be associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, (b) anxious God attachment will be associated with lower levels of

resilience and posttraumatic growth, (c) avoidant God attachment with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, and (d) fearful-avoidant God attachment will be associated with the lowest levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Finally, secure attachment to God will moderate the association between secondary losses in bereavement and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, in Model 1, the negative association between secondary losses and resilience will be weakened (i.e., buffered) when an individual experiences low levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance than when an individual experiences high levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance. In Model 2, the negative association between secondary losses and posttraumatic growth will be weakened (i.e., buffered) when an individual experiences low levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance than when an individual experiences high levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Religious/Spiritual Diversity

Religion and spirituality (R/S) are important aspects of identity for many people, with roughly 80% of Americans endorsing a religious and/or spiritual identity (Pew Research Center, 2017). In clinical work, psychologists will frequently encounter clients with unique R/S experiences, beliefs, and values, making R/S an important aspect of diversity in which psychologists should be increasing their multicultural competence (Vieten et al., 2013). To highlight the need for multicultural competence relating to R/S identities, the American Psychological Association outlined 15 competencies psychologists should strive for as they navigate R/S diversity in the field of psychology, including competence to assess and help a client utilize their R/S strengths and resources, as well as competence to assess when R/S may be detrimental to a client's psychological health (Vieten et al., 2013),

R/S identities can have both positive and negative effects in life, and studying an individual's attachment to God can assist clinicians in better understanding their clients' experiences (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Schieman et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). For individuals with a secure attachment to God, their R/S beliefs may serve as a valuable source for meaning, a positive means of coping, a source of community, and purpose in life (Schieman et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). For these individuals, R/S can be adaptively used as a strength by drawing on God as a secure base and safe haven in life (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

However, for individuals with an insecure attachment to God, R/S may have detrimental effects (Schieman et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). Some of these effects may include engaging in negative R/S coping and distress caused by conflicting identities. For example, some individuals may be raised to believe it is a "sin" to be a member of the LGBTQ + community, yet grow up to find they hold an identity they stigmatize. This can create internal conflict within the individual as they navigate dissonance between their R/S identity and their sexual orientation (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). Another example of when R/S beliefs may cause conflict within an individual may occur when a client experiences bereavement via suicide yet holds the belief that suicide is an unforgiveable sin (Vandecreek & Mottram, 2009). This can create severe distress as a client navigates their R/S identity while grieving a loss. In these instances, R/S beliefs could increase one's distress.

Additionally, it is important to recognize the effects of intersectionality when examining R/S identities (Banton, 2011). For example, individuals who hold minoritized R/S identities may experience discrimination due to their R/S identity. If a client holds multiple marginalized

identities, they may experience several forms of discrimination, and it is important to recognize how R/S discrimination and other experiences of discrimination may interact.

This study seeks to increase knowledge and understanding of R/S identities via attachment to God by examining pathways to resilience and posttraumatic growth. Better understanding how R/S may be related to positive and negative outcomes when faced with a stressor will enable clinicians to better understand the adaptive and maladaptive aspects of their client's R/S identities.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Design

This study used a cross-sectional, correlational design.

Participants

An a priori power analysis using the software package GPower indicated that a sample size of 276 would be needed in order to achieve 80% power. Data from this study are drawn from a larger data set collected by the University of North Texas Family Attachment Lab in 2018. This study uses a subset of data consisting of 303 adults who reported experiencing the sudden or violent death of a family member or close friend and endorsed a religious or spiritual identity. Undergraduate psychology students were given the opportunity to earn extra credit by participating in research. All participants were also provided the opportunity to write a dedication in memory of their deceased loved one to be included with the study in Appendix A.

Participants ($N = 303$) were mostly cis-female (77.3%; 22.4% cis-male, 0.3% transgender, 4 missing) ranging in age from 18 to 72 years old ($M = 27.20$, $SD = 12.27$, 2 missing). Participants were mostly White (54%), with others identifying as Black/African American (17.5%), Asian/Pacific Islander (4.3%), Latinx/Hispanic/Mexican American (17.2%), Native American (0.3%), Biracial/Multiracial (5%), Other (1.7%). One participant did not provide their racial/ethnic identity.

Because this study focused on one's attachment to God, participants who identified as not at all religious and spiritual (n = 71) were not included in this study. Participants identified as either very religious/spiritual (23.8%), fairly religious/spiritual (30.4%), somewhat religious/spiritual (24.4%), and a little religious/spiritual (21.5%). Participants then selected their

religious affiliation, with most participants identifying as Christian (70%), and others identifying as Agnostic (5.9%), Atheist (0.7%), Buddhist (1.3%), Jewish (1.0%), Hindu (1.0%), Mormon (0.7%), Muslim (2.3%), Spiritual, not Religious (10.2%), Neither Spiritual or Religious (0.3%), and Other (6.6%).

Regarding education level, participants mostly reported having some college experience (55%), with others reported having a bachelor's degree (9.9%), a technical/2-year degree (13.2%), a high school diploma or GED (15.6%), a graduate degree (6%), less than a high school diploma or GED (0.3%). Participants mostly reported an income of below $15,000 (56.2%), with others endorsing $15-30 k (17.4%), $30-34 k (8.7%), $45-60 k (7.7%), $60-75 k (4%), and more than $75 k (6%).

When asked about the nature of their relationship to the bereaved, participants endorsed the loss of a grandparent (24.8%), close friend (17.5%), aunt/uncle (12.9%), child (7.9%), cousin (7.6%), parent (6.9%), spouse (5.6%), romantic partner (2.3%), sibling/step-sibling (4%), niece/nephew (3.6%), other (6.9%). Time since death ranged from less than 6 months to greater than 10 years, with most participants endorsing the death occurred within the past 5 years (75.5%; 24,5% reported death occurred within 6 to 10+ years). Causes of death included natural causes (e.g. heart attack, stroke) (49.2%), accident (16.3%), suicide (15.6%), homicide (4.7%), premature delivery/stillbirth (1.3%), other (10.6%), and unknown (2.3%) (2 missing).

<div align="center">Measures</div>

Demographic Questionnaire

All participants were administered a background information questionnaire to gather relevant demographic data, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, religious affiliation, loved one's cause of death, and time since loved one's death.

Adult Attachment

Participants were administered the Experiences in Close Relationships—Revised scale (ECR-R Fraley et al., 2000) to assess adult attachment anxiety and avoidance. The ECR-R consists of 36 items regarding an individual's relational patterns that participants are prompted to respond to on a 7-point Likert Scale with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree." The ECR-R provides an anxiety subscale (18 items; e.g., "I am afraid that I will lose my partner's love") and an avoidance subscale (18 items; e.g., "I am nervous when partners get too close to me"), with higher scores indicating higher levels of avoidance or anxiety. Although Fraley (2012) recommends examining attachment anxiety and avoidance in dimensional form, if necessary, it is possible to assign participants into attachment groups based on the median scores for anxiety and avoidance. The ECR-R demonstrates evidence for internal consistency, with both anxiety and avoidance subscales yielding $\alpha = .90$ and test-retest reliability (anxiety: $\beta = .92$, avoidance: $\beta = .90$) (Fraley, 2012; Sibley et al., 2005). The ECR-R also demonstrates evidence for convergent and discriminative validity, with the ECR-R predicting attachment anxiety and avoidance experiences during social interactions (Sibley et al., 2005). An average score for each subscale is computed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of attachment-anxiety or attachment-avoidance relating to close others. This study utilized both the attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance subscales. For the current study, the Cronbach's alphas were .94 for attachment anxiety and .92 for attachment avoidance.

Attachment to God

Participants were administered the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) to assess attachment patterns in an individual's relationship with God. The AGI was modeled after the ECR (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Fraley et al., 2000). Participants

were asked to rate statements regarding their attachment to God as being applicable or nonapplicable to them on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being *disagree strongly* and 7 being *agree strongly*. The use of the generic term "God" allows individuals of various religious/spiritual affiliations to respond according to their personal beliefs. The AGI is a 28-item self-report questionnaire that provides two subscales—attachment anxiety (14 items; e.g., "I worry a lot about my relationship with God") and attachment avoidance (14 items; e.g., "I prefer not to depend too much on God"). Beck and McDonald (2004) note that although the AGI is dimensional in nature, the dimensions could be categorized into attachment styles if typological examination is preferred. The AGI demonstrates evidence for internal consistency (AGI-Anxiety $\alpha = .86$; AGI-Avoidance $\alpha = .87$) and construct validity, with higher levels of anxiety and avoidance correlating with lower levels of religious well-being and existential well-being (Beck & McDonald, 2004). Additionally, Beck and McDonald found that Anxiety and Avoidance subscales shared only 6.1% of their variance. An average score for each subscale is computed with higher scores indicating higher levels of attachment-anxiety or attachment-avoidance relating to a Higher Power. This study utilized both the attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance subscales. For the current study, the Cronbach's alphas were .90 for God attachment anxiety and .88 for God attachment avoidance.

Self-Compassion

Ten items from the Self-Compassion Scale—Short Form (SCS-SF; Raes et al., 2011) were administered to assess for one's tendency to practice self-compassion for one's self over self-criticism. The SCS-SF is a 12-item self-report questionnaire that provides an Overall Self-Compassion Scale in addition to 6 subscales—Self-Kindness (e.g., "I try to be understanding an patient toward those aspects of my personality I don't like."), Self-Judgment (e.g., "I am

disproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies"), Common Humanity (e.g., "I try to see my failings as part of the human condition"), Isolation (e.g., "When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am"), Mindfulness (e.g., "When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation."), and Over-Identification (e.g., "When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy") (Raes et al., 2011). The self-judgment subscale was intentionally left due to concern regarding sensitivity for the bereaved participants. Each subscale is comprised of two statements which participants rate as being applicable or non-applicable to them on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being "Almost Never" and 5 being "Almost Always" (Raes et al., 2011). The Total Self-Compassion Scale is comprised by reversing the negative subscales (self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification) and calculating the mean of all subscale scores. Following reverse scoring, higher scores reflect higher levels of self-compassion, and lower scores indicate lower levels of self-compassion. Although the SCS-SF is a shortened version of the 26 item "Self-Compassion Scale," it exhibits a strong correlation to the full measure ($r \geq .97$) and to their intended subscales (r's ranged from .86-.93) (Raes et al., 2011). The full measure demonstrated evidence for construct validity, with higher levels of self-compassion being negatively correlated with self-criticism ($r = -.65$) and positively correlated with social connectedness ($r = .41$) (Neff, 2003). The SCS was also positively correlated with the three subscales of the Trait-Meta Mood Scale: Attention ($r = .11, p < .05$), Clarity ($r = .43, p < .01$), and Repair ($r = .55, p < .01$) (Neff, 2003). Additionally, Raes et al., reported a .71 test-retest reliability over a 5-month span for the SCS-SF. The SCS-SF Total Self-Compassion scale demonstrates high levels of internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.86$), however, the individual subscales tended to be a bit less internally consistent, with inter-item correlations ranging from 0.54 to 0.75. This study utilized the Total

Self-Compassion score of the 10 items administered therefore, the lower internal consistency found within the subscales should not affect the overall results of the present study. For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the ten SCS-SF items administered was .73.

Meaning-Making

The Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale (ISLES; Holland et al., 2010) was administered to assess the degree to which an individual has made meaning of a particular life event. The ISLES consists of 16 self-report items that examine one's ability to make meaning out of life stressors. The ISLES is comprised of two subscales: footing in the world (i.e., feeling oriented or disoriented in the world following a stressful event; 11 items; e.g., "My beliefs and values are less clear since this event") and comprehensibility (i.e., making sense of or comprehending a stressful event; 5 items; e.g., "I am perplexed by what happened"). Participants rate each statement as being true or untrue of them on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being "Strongly Agree" and 5 being "Strongly Disagree." The ISLES total score is found by reverse scoring specified items and finding the mean of the responses. Higher scores reflect greater ability to adaptively construct meaning following stressful experiences. Holland et al. (2010) demonstrate evidence for construct validity, with higher ISLES scores being significantly associated with higher levels of sense-making and perceived health and lower levels of psychological distress in both general stress and bereaved samples. In examining the ISLES in relation to benefit finding, the general stress population demonstrated a positive association, whereas the bereaved sample did not demonstrate a significant association (Holland et al., 2010). In the bereaved sample, the ISLES was also found to be negative associated with prolonged grief symptoms (Holland et al., 2010). The ISLES also demonstrates evidence for internal consistency (Footing in Word $\alpha = .94$ in bereaved samples; Comprehensibility $\alpha = .94$ in bereaved samples;

Total ISLES α = .94 in bereaved samples) and moderate test-retest correlations (Holland et al., 2010). For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the ISLES total score was .94.

Resilience

The Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25; Connor & Davidson, 2003) was administered to assess participants' ability to cope with stress. The CD-RISC consists of 25 items that assess qualities associated with maintaining one's well-being through adversity (e.g., "Able to adapt to change" and "Tend to bounce back after illness or hardship"). Participants rate the statements according to their experiences the past month on a 5-point Likert scale with 0 being "rarely true" and 4 being "true nearly all of the time." The CD-RISC provides an overall resilience score (range 0-100) with higher scores indicating higher levels of resilience. Connor and Davidson (2003) provide evidence for internal consistency (α = .89) and test-retest reliability (intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.87). Additionally, Connor and Davidson report evidence for convergent and divergent validity with the CD-RISC being positively correlated with increased hardiness and negatively associated with perceived stress in psychiatric outpatients. In a combined sample, the CD-RISC was negatively associated with stress vulnerability and positively associated with social support in a combined sample (Connor & Davidson, 2003). For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the CD-RISC total was .95.

Posttraumatic Growth

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) was administered to assess posttraumatic growth. The PTGI consists of 21 items that assess positive outcomes one might report following a traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Participants respond to items on a 6-point Likert scale with 0 being "I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis" and 5 being "I experienced this change to a very great degree as the result of

my crisis." The PTGI consists of five factors: Relating to Others (7 items; e.g. "I accept needing others"), New Possibilities (5 items; e.g. "I developed new interests"), Personal Strength (4 items; e.g. "Knowing I can handle difficulties"), Spiritual Change (2 items; e.g. "I have a stronger religious faith"), and Appreciation of Life (3 items; e.g. "Appreciating each day") (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). A total PTGI score is calculated by finding the mean of all responses. Factor scores can be calculated by finding the mean of the items included within each factor. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) provide evidence for internal consistency (overall $\alpha = .90$; New Possibilities $\alpha = .84$; Relating to Others $\alpha = .85$; Personal Strength $\alpha = .72$; Spiritual Change $\alpha = .85$; Appreciation of Life $\alpha = .67$). Additionally, the PTGI demonstrates acceptable test-retest reliability ($r = .71$). The PTGI demonstrates concurrent and discriminative validity with PTGI scores being unrelated to social desirability, positively correlated with optimism, and positively correlated with religiosity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Tedeschi and Calhoun tested construct validity by comparing results of individuals who had experienced trauma to those who had experienced ordinary life events; results suggested that participants who had experienced trauma demonstrated higher scores on all factors except spiritual change. In this study, the overall PTGI scale was used for analyses. For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the PTGI total was .96.

Secondary Losses

An 8-item scale was developed for the present study, and was included to ask participants to indicate the types of secondary losses they experienced following their loss. The scale was adapted and modified from the Bereavement Risk Questionnaire by Ellifritt et al. (2003) and the Prolonged Grief Disorder Evaluation Instrument by Coelho et al. (2015). It states, "To what degree have you experienced any of the following secondary losses since the death," followed by

these eight items: loss of income/financial security; loss of support system; loss of hopes and dreams; loss of identity; loss of faith; loss of confidence; loss of property; and/or loss of health. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being *not at all* and 5 being *extremely*. The mean of the number of secondary losses was calculated for analyses. For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the Secondary Loss measure was .89.

Procedure

This study utilized archived data drawn from a larger study conducted by the University of North Texas Family Attachment Lab. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and participants were recruited via snowball sampling on public social media and websites, grief support groups in North Texas, and undergraduate psychology courses. Participants were asked to anonymously complete a 30-50-minute survey via Qualtrics. Participants were asked to complete to an informed consent statement and were made aware they could end participation at any time without negative consequences. The Qualtrics survey utilized skip logic so that the Attachment to God Inventory was only be administered to individuals who endorse a religious/spiritual identity. Upon completion of the surveys, participants received a debriefing document. Following data collection, data was transferred to SPSS 24.04 software for cleaning.

Hypotheses and Planned Analyses

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to specifically examine potential associations between the demographic variables of age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status and the primary variables of interest. Any significant demographic variables were controlled for when testing hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1

Statement

God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be significantly associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth, even when controlling for adult attachment. Specifically, secure attachment to God will be positively associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, and high levels of God attachment anxiety and God attachment avoidance will be negatively associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Justification

Research on adult attachment and both resilience and posttraumatic growth suggest that attachment processes can help explain differences in individual outcomes following a difficult and significant life event. Research suggests that secure adult attachment is associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth (Craparo et al., 2018; Salo et al., 2005; Simeon et al., 2007).

When examining insecure adult attachment along the dimensions of adult attachment anxiety and adult attachment avoidance, anxious adult attachment is associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, whereas avoidant adult attachment yields mixed findings regarding whether adult attachment insecurity directly effects resilience and posttraumatic growth. For example, Captari et al. (2020) found that attachment anxiety was not predictive of posttraumatic growth, but that adult attachment anxiety and avoidance were both related to higher levels of shattered assumptions, which was in turn associated with lower levels of posttraumatic growth. Additionally, Dodd et al. (2015) found that in individuals with spinal cord injuries, adult attachment anxiety was associated with lower levels of perceived resilience, whereas attachment avoidance was not directly related to resilience but was indirectly related to

resilience through social support. Avoidantly attached participants reported lower levels of social support, which was associated with lower levels of perceived resilience (Dodd et al., 2015).

Similarly, research on attachment to God and resilience and posttraumatic growth suggest that secure attachment to God is associated with more adaptive outcomes following a significant life stressor such as resilience, posttraumatic growth, and stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020). Although some of the research examining the individual components of God attachment anxiety and God attachment avoidance with positive adaptation to stress has been mixed (e.g., Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Captari et al., 2020; Kelley 2003), there have only been nine studies that examine God attachment and adaptive outcomes following stress, so more research is needed to understand the relationship between these variables.

Although the research on secure adult and secure God attachment both play a role in the outcomes of resilience and posttraumatic growth, the question emerges, does one account for greater variance? Research has demonstrated that God attachment is a unique attachment relationship with unique impacts (Sim & Loh, 2003). For example, Reiner et al. (2010) found that attachment to God had incremental validity over adult attachment when examining the effects of attachment and gender on perceived stress. Additionally, Njus and Okerstrom (2016) found that God attachment predicted one's moral foundations above and beyond romantic attachment and best friend attachment. Sim and Loh (2003) also found that attachment to God demonstrated incremental validity over mother and father attachment when examining optimism. Because of the uniqueness of a relationship with God, I expect that even when accounting for variance explained by adult attachment, attachment to God will be significantly associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Planned Analyses

This hypothesis was analyzed using two hierarchical regression analyses with resilience and posttraumatic growth as dependent variables. In Step 1, adult attachment anxiety and adult attachment avoidance was entered as predictors. In Step 2, God attachment anxiety and God attachment avoidance was entered as predictors. In order to account for potential family-wise error, a Bonferroni correction was utilized.

Hypothesis 2

Statement

Self-Compassion will mediate the relationship between God attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance, and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, in Model 1, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of self-compassion, which in turn will be related to lower levels of resilience. In Model 2, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of self-compassion, which in turn will be related to lower levels of posttraumatic growth. The hypothesized mediation effect can be seen in Figure 1.

Justification

As the body of literature on attachment to God is expanding, research has begun to better describe how God attachment is related to personal characteristics such as self-compassion and resilience. Research on attachment to God and resilience and posttraumatic growth suggest that secure attachment to God is associated with more adaptive outcomes following a significant life stressor such as resilience, posttraumatic growth, and stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020). In contrast, research examining insecure attachment has demonstrated that insecure attachment

generally results in less adaptive outcomes following a significant life stressor (Kelley, 2003; Jueckstock, 2018).

Secure God attachment has been associated with higher levels of self-compassion, whereas both anxious and avoidant God attachment have been associated with lower levels of self-compassion (Homan, 2014; Varghese, 2015). This could be a reflection of individuals treating themselves similarly to how they perceive God treats them in insecure relationships (Homan, 2014). Building on these associations between God attachment and self-compassion, researchers have also examined self-compassion as a mediator between Attachment to God and outcome variables such as anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being (Homan, 2014; Varghese, 2015). Homan (2014) found that self-compassion mediated the relationship between God attachment anxiety and avoidance and anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction, and Varghese (2015) found that self-compassion partially mediated the relationship between God attachment anxiety and avoidance and psychological well-being.

Additionally, self-compassion has been positively associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth. For example, Wong and Yeung (2017) found that self-compassion had a significant effect on posttraumatic growth through the cognitive processes of acceptance, positive reframing, and the presence of meaning. Chan et al., (2019) found that self-compassion was positively correlated with posttraumatic growth and found that self-compassion moderated the relationship between posttraumatic growth and depression, anxiety, and stress. Bluth et al. (2018) found that in adolescents, self-compassion was highly associated with resilience, and that this relationship was moderated by gender.

Understanding that attachment to God has been associated with self-compassion, and that self-compassion in turn has been associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth, it is

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plausible that self-compassion may mediate the relationship between attachment to God and resilience/posttraumatic growth. Specifically, secure attachment to God may result in higher levels of self-compassion, which in turn may be associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth. In individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety, their insecurity in relationships may make it difficult for them to practice self-compassion, which in turn may result in lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth. Similarly, in individuals with avoidant God attachment, lower levels of self-compassion will likely occur, resulting in lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth. No studies to date have specifically tested self-compassion as a mediator between attachment to God and resilience or posttraumatic growth.

Planned Analyses

This hypothesis was tested using the steps for mediation outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, I tested whether there is a significant relationship between the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the dependent variables (i.e., resilience and posttraumatic growth). However, the absence of a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables does not exclude the potential for a mediated relationship to occur (Agler & De Boeck, 2017). Second, I tested whether there is a significant relationship between the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the mediator variable (i.e., self-compassion). Third, controlling for the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance), I tested whether there is a significant relationship between the mediator variable (i.e., self-compassion) and the dependent variables (i.e., resilience and posttraumatic growth). In this final step, I also note whether the relationship between the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the dependent variables (i.e., resilience and posttraumatic growth) is reduced. I test the significance of the mediated

effect using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). In order to account for potential family-wise error, a Bonferroni correction was utilized.

Hypothesis 3

Statement

Meaning-making will mediate the relationship between God attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, in Model 1, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of meaning-making, which in turn will be related to lower levels of resilience. In model 2, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God-attachment avoidance will be related to lower levels of meaning-making, which in turn will be related to lower levels of posttraumatic growth. The hypothesized mediation effect can be seen in Figure 2.

Justification

Another potential path through which Attachment to God may influence resilience and posttraumatic growth is meaning-making. Kelley (2003) found that secure attachment to God was positively correlated with personal meaning, and that anxious and avoidant attachment to God were negatively correlated with personal meaning. In addition, Jueckstock (2018) discusses meaning-making in one's relationship with God as a key characteristic among securely attached individuals when discussing their grief experiences. Jueckstock (2018) found that responses indicative of insecure attachment to God (e.g., characterized by viewing God as distant, unloving, and responsible for the tragedy) were often associated with severe grief.

Meaning-making may also may play a significant role in resilience and posttraumatic growth. Park's (2016) Meaning-Making Model conceptualizes individuals as having two levels of meaning: global and situational. Global meaning refers to one's beliefs about themselves and

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the world while situational meaning refers to interpreting and reacting to specific situations including assigning meaning to experiences, assessing whether there are discrepancies between situation and global meaning, and reconciling such differences (Park, 2016). Following a traumatic or highly stressful life event, individuals appraise their experience and often engage in a process of assimilating the negative event into their global meaning. In extreme instances, one's global meaning has to significantly change to accommodate the new experience. Often, one's religious/spiritual beliefs assist in creating meaning, and studies have found religious-meaning-making to be associated with resilience (Park, 2013; Park, 2016; Wadsworth et al., 2009).

Although meaning has not been tested as a mediator for attachment to God and resilience and posttraumatic growth, Kelley and Chan (2012) found that meaning was not a significant predictor of stress-related growth, and was not a significant mediator between attachment to God and stress-related growth. Despite this finding, studies did support that (a) meaning was related to attachment to God and (b) meaning mediated the relationship between attachment to God and other mental health outcomes. Thus, exploring the role of meaning in the relationship between attachment to God and adaptive responses to stress is needed in this area of research. No studies to date have explored meaning-making as a mediator for the association between attachment to God and resilience or posttraumatic growth.

Planned Analysis

This hypothesis was tested using the steps for mediation outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, I tested whether there is a significant relationship between the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the dependent variables (i.e., resilience and posttraumatic growth). However, the absence of a significant relationship between

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the independent and dependent variables does not exclude the potential for a mediated relationship to occur (Agler & De Boeck, 2017). Second, I tested whether there is a significant relationship between the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the mediator variable (i.e., meaning-making). Third, controlling for the independent variables (i.e., God attachment anxiety and avoidance), I tested whether there is a significant relationship between the mediator variable (i.e., meaning-making) and the dependent variables (i.e., resilience and posttraumatic growth). In this final step, I also note whether the relationship between the independent variables (i.e., God attachment) and the dependent variables (i.e., resilience and posttraumatic growth) is reduced. I test the significance of the mediated effect using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). In order to account for potential family-wise error, a Bonferroni correction was utilized.

Hypothesis 4

Statement

When the dimensions of God anxiety and avoidance are categorized into discrete attachment styles, (a) secure God attachment will be associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, (b) anxious God attachment will be associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, (c) avoidant God attachment with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, and (d) fearful-avoidant God attachment will be associated with lowest levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Justification

Although Beck and McDonald (2004) explain that the Attachment to God Scale can be categorized into attachment styles, most researchers focus on the dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance. In order to assess whether results may be different for individuals who

are only high in attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance and those who exhibit high levels of both attachment avoidance and anxiety, this study also categorizes the dimensions of God attachment anxiety and avoidance into attachment style categories: (1) Secure, (2) Anxious/Preoccupied, (3) Dismissing-Avoidant, and (4) Fearful Avoidant (Mikulincer et al., 2003). The Attachment to God Inventory was based on the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale, and although ECR author Fraley does not encourage individuals to use categorized ECR scores, he provides some direction for how to do so (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Fraley et al., 2000; Fraley, 2012). Okozi (2010), Homan and Boyatzis (2010), Buser and Gibson (2012), and other researchers have categorized the Attachment to God Inventory to examine either the four specific attachment styles or secure vs insecure categories.

Planned Analysis

To categorize the attachment dimensions into the four attachment styles, Fraley (2012) suggests one way to assign people to attachment groups is to base the assignments on the median of each dimension. The median for attachment avoidance and the median for attachment anxiety was computed. The secure attachment category consists of participants whose anxiety and avoidance scores fall below the median. The dismissing-avoidant category consists of participants whose anxiety score is below the median but whose avoidance score is above or equal to the median. The fearful-avoidant category consists of participants whose anxiety score is above or equal to the median and whose avoidance score is above or equal to the median. The anxious/preoccupied attachment category consists of participants whose anxiety score is above or equal to the median and whose avoidance score is below the median. The categorizations utilized in this study were compared to those reported in other studies to ensure results are somewhat congruent and not an extreme sample. Following the categorization of participants,

two analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine the relationship between attachment style categories and resilience and posttraumatic growth. If the overall ANOVAs are significant, I used post-hoc tests with a Bonferroni correction to evaluate the specific differences between groups.

Hypothesis 5

Statement

Secure attachment to God will moderate the association between secondary losses in bereavement and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, in Model 1, the negative association between secondary losses and resilience will be weakened (i.e., buffered) when an individual experiences lower levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance than when an individual experiences high levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance. In Model 2, the negative association between secondary losses and posttraumatic growth will be weakened (i.e., buffered) when an individual experiences lower levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance than when an individual experiences high levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance. The hypothesized effect can be seen in Figure 3.

Justification

Experiencing the death of a loved can be associated with numerous secondary losses in addition to the primary loss of the loved one (Mahon, 1999). Secondary losses may include loss of hopes and dreams, loss of support, loss of identity, and other factors such as income, property, and health that elicit additional grief reactions (Mahon, 1999; Rando, 1993). Experiencing a higher number of secondary losses following the death may be a potential risk factor for complicated grief (Shear, 2015). It is plausible that one may utilize a secure attachment to God as a means of coping with secondary losses, and that having a secure attachment relationship may

increase an individual's resilience and posttraumatic growth in the midst of these losses. Secure

attachment to God has been associated with more adaptive outcomes following a significant life

stressor such as resilience, posttraumatic growth, and stress-related growth (Belavich &

Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020).

Additionally, studies have found that utilizing a spiritual/religious belief system may lower risk

for complicated grief (Chiu et al., 2010; Seirmarco et al., 2012). The current hypothesis is based

on the assumption that having a secure attachment to God will significantly impact the

relationship between secondary losses and resilience and posttraumatic growth. For instance,

utilizing God as a safe haven in times of loss may serve as a protective factor against secondary

losses that often accompany death of a loved one.

Planned Analysis

This hypothesis was tested using the steps for moderation analysis outlined by Baron and

Kenny (1986). In Model 1, secondary losses is the predictor variable, resilience is the dependent

variable, and God attachment security is the moderator variable. In Model 2, secondary losses is

the predictor variable, posttraumatic growth is the dependent variable, and God attachment

security is the moderator variable. Secure God attachment is defined as having both anxiety and

avoidance scores that are both below the median, and insecure God attachment is defined as

having anxiety and/or avoidance score(s) above the median. When testing each model, I center

the continuous predictor variable to reduce multicollinearity. Second, I create a product term by

multiplying the centered predictor and moderator variables. Third, I conduct a hierarchical

regression analysis with the predictor variable and moderator variable entered into the first step,

followed by the interaction term (secondary losses x secure God attachment) in the second step.

If the interaction is significant, I graphed the interaction and conduct simple slopes analyses

(Aiken & West, 1991) to describe the interactions. In order to account for potential family-wise

error, a Bonferroni correction was utilized.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Data Cleaning

Prior to conducting the primary analyses, the data were cleaned by checking for missing

data, outliers, and normality. After eliminating incomplete surveys, 74 additional participants

were excluded due to validity concerns such as infeasible completion time and evidence of

random responding. To test for randomness of missing data, Little's MCAR test was run and

found to be significant, χ^2 (8148, $N = 376$) = 8723.96, $p = .000$, however, the test tends to be

sensitive with larger samples (Hair et al., 2010). The missingness for cases ranged from 0.8% to

3.8% (1 to 5 responses across the study), which is considered within the normal range missing at

random (MAR; Hair et al., 2010). To input values for missing data, expectation maximization

(EM) was used accommodating for MAR data and providing unbiased and efficient parameters

(Graham et al., 2003). There were a small number of outliers on three of the scales used in the

primary analyses. Outliers were recoded to 3 standard deviations above or below the mean.

Normality of data was checked by noting the skewness and kurtosis for each variable (see Table

2). The data did not demonstrate evidence of non-normality, so no data transformations were

utilized. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between all variables can be found in

Table 3.

Preliminary Analyses

A series of preliminary analyses using correlations and t-tests were run to test whether

there were significant associations between certain demographic variables of interest and the

main study variables.

Age

Age was significantly associated with adult attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance, secondary losses, and meaning-making. Specifically, participants who were older in age reported lower levels of adult attachment anxiety ($r(299) = -.18$, $p = .002$), lower levels of God attachment avoidance ($r(299) = -.11$, $p = .002$), higher levels of secondary losses ($r(299) = .47$, $p < .001$), and lower levels of meaning-making ($r(299) = -.29$, $p < .001$).

Income

Income was significantly associated with adult attachment anxiety, secondary loss, and meaning-making. Participants who reported greater income reported lower levels of adult attachment anxiety ($r(297) = -.19$, $p = .001$), higher levels of secondary losses ($r(297) = .27$, $p < .001$) , and lower levels of meaning-making ($r(297) = -.22$ $p = <.001$).

Gender

Gender was significantly associated with secondary losses. Specifically, participants who identified as female reported significantly higher levels of secondary losses ($M = 1.80$; $SD = 0.844$) than male participants ($M = 1.52$; $SD = 0.73$, $t(121.26) = -2.68$, $p = .008$).Gender was not significantly associated with resilience, posttraumatic growth, adult attachment anxiety or avoidance, God attachment anxiety or avoidance, meaning-making, or self-compassion (all p's > .060).

Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity was significantly associated with posttraumatic growth, adult attachment avoidance, God attachment anxiety, secondary losses, and meaning-making. Specifically, participants who identified as an ethnic/racial minority reported significantly higher levels of

posttraumatic growth ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.15$) than white participants ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.25$, $t(300) = 2.32$, $p = .021$).

Participants who identified as an ethnic/racial minority also reported higher levels of adult attachment avoidance ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.06$) and God attachment anxiety ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.36$) than white participants (Adult Attachment Avoidance $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.14$, $t(300) = 2.41$, $p = .016$; God Attachment Anxiety $M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.13$, $t(268.46) = 2.27$, $p = .024$).

Additionally, participants who identified as an ethnic/racial minority reported lower levels of secondary losses ($M = 1.58$; $SD = 0.69$) and higher levels of meaning-making ($M = 3.53$; $SD = 0.82$) than white participants (Secondary Losses $M = 1.87$; $SD = 0.90$, $t(296.84) = -3.16$, $p = .002$; Meaning-Making $M = 3.32$; $SD = 0.95$, $t(299.90) = 2.04$, $p = .042$)

Race/ethnicity was not significantly associated with resilience, adult attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance, or self-compassion (all p's > .308).

Hypothesis 1

My first hypothesis was that God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance would be significantly associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth, even when controlling for adult attachment. This hypothesis was tested using two hierarchical regression analyses with resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2) as the dependent variables, age, income, and race/ethnicity controlled for in Step 1, adult attachment anxiety and avoidance entered in Step 2, and God attachment anxiety and avoidance entered in Step 3. This hypothesis was partially supported (See Table 4 [Model 1] and Table 5 [Model 2]).

For Model 1 (i.e., resilience), in Step 1, age, income, and race/ethnicity accounted for about 2% of the variance in resilience ($R^2 = .02$, $F(3, 293) = 1.52$, $p = .210$). In Step 2, adult attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted an additional 14% of the variance in resilience

(ΔR^2 = .14, $\Delta F(2, 291)$ = 23.06, p < .001). In Step 3, controlling for adult attachment anxiety and avoidance, God attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted an additional 5% of the variance in resilience (ΔR^2 = .05 $\Delta F(2, 289)$ = 8.51, p < .001). In the final model, age, (β = -.20, p = .005), adult attachment anxiety (β = -.25, p < .001), adult attachment avoidance (β = -.16 p = .003), and God attachment avoidance (β = -.21, p < .001) were significant negative predictors of resilience. Income (β = .07, p = .316), race/ethnicity (β = -.03, p = .560), and God attachment anxiety (β = -.07, p = .206) were not significant predictors in the final model.

For Model 2 (i.e., posttraumatic growth), in Step 1, age, income, and race/ethnicity accounted for about 3% of the variance in resilience (R^2 = .03, $F(3, 293)$ = 3.14, p = .026). In Step 2, adult attachment anxiety and avoidance did not significantly predict posttraumatic growth (ΔR^2 = .01, $\Delta F(2, 291)$ = 1.78, p = .170. In Step 3, controlling for adult attachment anxiety and avoidance, God attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted an additional 5% of the variance in posttraumatic growth (ΔR^2 = .05, $\Delta F(2, 289)$ = 7.39, p = 001). In the final model, race/ethnicity (β = -.16, p = .010) and God attachment avoidance (β = -.19, p = .001) were significant predictors of posttraumatic growth. Age (β = -.02, p = .815), income (β = .13, p = .062)., adult attachment anxiety (β = .09, p = .137), adult attachment avoidance (β = -.09, p = .105), and God attachment anxiety (β = -.11, p = .080) were not significant predictors in the final model.

Hypothesis 2

My second hypothesis was that self-compassion would mediate the relationship between God attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance, and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). I controlled for age and race/ethnicity this analysis. This hypothesis was partially supported.

In Model 1 (i.e., resilience), the direct associations between the predictor variables (God

attachment anxiety and avoidance) and criterion variable (resilience) were significant (Anx β = -.17, p = .003; Avd β = -.24, p < .001, See Figure 4). Also, the direct association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the mediator variable (self-compassion) was significant (Anx β = -.24, p < .001), but the association between predictor variable God attachment avoidance and the mediator variable (self-compassion) we not significant (Avd β = -.11, p = .064). Finally, controlling for the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance), the association between the mediator variable (self-compassion) and the criterion variable (resilience) was significant (β = .52, p < .001). In this final regression analysis, there was no longer a significant association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the criterion variable (resilience) (Anx β = -.05, p = .345), but God attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of the criterion variable (resilience) (Avd β = -.19, p < .001).

To test whether the mediated effects of God attachment anxiety and avoidance on resilience through self-compassion were significant, I utilized the bootstrapping procedure outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 resamples, I found that, while controlling for age and race/ethnicity, the indirect effect of God attachment anxiety on resilience through self-compassion was significant (Anx *est.* = -.06, *SE* = .02, *95% CI* = -.11 to -.03). However, the indirect effect of God attachment avoidance on resilience through self-compassion was not significant (Avd *est.* = -.03, *SE* = .02, *95% CI* = -.06 to .00). Using the R^2 effect-size measure for mediation analysis (Fairchild et al., 2009), about 16% of the variance in resilience was explained by the mediated effect of God attachment anxiety and avoidance through self-compassion when controlling for age and race/ethnicity.

In Model 2 (i.e., posttraumatic growth), while controlling for age and race/ethnicity, the direct association between the predictor variable (God attachment avoidance) and the criterion

variable (posttraumatic growth) was significant (Avd β = -.20, p = .001); however, the direct association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) was not significant (Anx β = -.08, p = .180; See Figure 4). The direct association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the mediator variable (self-compassion) was significant (Anx β = -.24, p < .001). However, the association between predictor variable God attachment avoidance and the mediator variable (self-compassion) was not significant (Avd β = -.11, p = .064). Finally, controlling for the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance), the association between the mediator variable (self-compassion) and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) was significant (β = .20, p < .001). In this final regression analysis, there was not a significant association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) (Anx β = -.03, p = .619), but God attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) (Avd β = -.17, p = .002).

To test whether the mediated effects of God attachment anxiety and avoidance on posttraumatic growth through self-compassion were significant, I utilized the bootstrapping procedure outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 resamples, I found that, while controlling for age and race/ethnicity, the indirect effect of God attachment anxiety on posttraumatic growth through self-compassion was significant (Anx $est.$ = -.05, SE = .02, 95% CI = -.10 to -.02). However, the indirect effect of God attachment avoidance on posttraumatic growth through self-compassion was not significant (Avd $est.$ = -.02, SE = .01, 95% CI = -.06 to .00). Using the R^2 effect-size measure for mediation analysis (Fairchild et al., 2009), about 6% of the variance in posttraumatic growth was explained by the mediated effect of God attachment anxiety and avoidance through self-compassion when

controlling for age and race/ethnicity.

<div align="center">Hypothesis 3</div>

My third hypothesis was that meaning-making would mediate the relationship between God attachment anxiety, God attachment avoidance and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, higher levels of God attachment-anxiety and God attachment-avoidance will be related to lower levels of meaning-making, which in turn will be related to lower levels of resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). I controlled for age and race/ethnicity in this analysis. This hypothesis was partially supported.

In Model 1 (i.e., resilience), the direct associations between the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and criterion variable (resilience) were significant (Anx β = -.17, p = .003; Avd β = -.24, p < .001, See Figure 5). The direct associations between the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the mediator variable (meaning-making) were significant (Anx β = -.29, p < .001; Avd β = -.13, p = .016). Finally, controlling for the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance), the association between the mediator variable (meaning-making) and the criterion variable (resilience) was significant (β = .37, p < .001). In this final regression analysis, there was not a significant association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the criterion variable (resilience) (Anx β = -.06, p = .284), but God attachment avoidance was a significant predictor of the criterion variable (resilience) (Avd β = -.19, p < .001).

To test whether the mediated effects of God attachment anxiety and avoidance on resilience through meaning-making were significant, I utilized the bootstrapping procedure outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 resamples, I found that, while controlling for age and race/ethnicity, the indirect effect of

<div align="center">66</div>

God attachment anxiety on resilience through meaning-making was significant (*est.* = -.06, *SE* = .01, *95% CI* = -.09 to -.03). However, the indirect effect of God attachment avoidance on resilience through meaning-making was not significant (*est.* = -.03, SE = .01, 95% *CI* = -.05 to .00) Using the R^2 effect-size measure for mediation analysis (Fairchild et al., 2009), about 15% of the variance in resilience was explained by the mediated effect of God attachment anxiety and avoidance through meaning-making when controlling for age and race/ethnicity.

In Model 2 (i.e., posttraumatic growth), the direct association between the predictor variable God attachment avoidance and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) was significant (Avd β = -.20, *p* = .001, See Figure 5), however, the direct association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) was not significant (Anx β = -.07, *p* = .180). The direct associations between the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance) and the mediator variable (meaning-making) were significant (Anx β = -.29, *p* < .001; Avd β = -.13, *p* = .016). Finally, controlling for the predictor variables (God attachment anxiety and avoidance), the association between the mediator variable (meaning-making) and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) was not significant (β = -.14, *p* = .030). In this final regression analysis, there was not a significant association between the predictor variable God attachment anxiety and the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) (Anx β = -.12, *p* = .052), but God attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of the criterion variable (posttraumatic growth) (Avd β = -.21, *p* < .001).

To test whether the mediated effects of God attachment anxiety and avoidance on posttraumatic growth through self-compassion were significant, I utilized the bootstrapping procedure outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 resamples, I found that, while controlling for age and race/ethnicity,

the indirect effect of God attachment anxiety on posttraumatic growth through meaning-making was significant (Anx *est.* = .04, *SE* = .02, *95% CI* = .01 to .08). However, the indirect effect of God attachment avoidance on posttraumatic growth through meaning-making was not significant (Avd *est.* = .02, SE = .01, 95% *CI* = .00 to .05). Using the R^2 effect-size measure for mediation analysis (Fairchild et al., 2009), about 4% of the variance in posttraumatic growth was explained by the mediated effect of God attachment anxiety and avoidance through meaning-making when controlling for age and race/ethnicity.

Hypothesis 4

My fourth hypothesis was that when the dimensions of God anxiety and avoidance are categorized into attachment styles, (a) secure God attachment will be associated with higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, (b) anxious God attachment will be associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, (c) avoidant God attachment will be associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, and (d) fearful-avoidant God attachment will be associated with lowest levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Participants were assigned to attachment groups based on the medians of each dimension as suggested by Fraley (2012) (*M* anx = 2.77; *M* avd = 3.57). The secure attachment category consists of participants whose anxiety and avoidance scores fall below the median (*n* = 77; 26.2%). The dismissing-avoidant category consists of participants whose anxiety score is below the median but whose avoidance score is above or equal to the median (*n* = 69; 23.5%). The fearful-avoidant category consists of participants whose anxiety score is above or equal to the median and whose avoidance score is above or equal to the median (*n* = 82; 27.9%). The anxious/preoccupied attachment category consists of participants whose anxiety score is above or equal to the median and whose avoidance score is below the median (*n* = 66; 22.5%). Prior

studies report a God attachment anxiety median/cut off score ranging from 38 – 49 when utilizing the sum total of the AGI anxiety subscale (Buser & Gibson, 2012; Dumont et al., 2012; Homan & Boyatzis, 2010; Okozi, 2010). In the present sample, the sum total median for God attachment anxiety was 39. Prior studies report a God attachment avoidance median/cut off score ranging from 39 – 49 when utilizing the sum total of the AGI avoidance subscale (Buser & Gibson, 2012; Dumont et al., 2012; Homan & Boyatzis, 2010; Okozi, 2010). In the present sample, the sum total median for God attachment avoidance was 50. Prior studies reported a range of 30-63% securely attached participants and 37-70% insecurely attached participants (Buser & Gibson, 2012; Dumont et al., 2012; Okozi, 2010). Okozi (2010) provides percentages regarding specific types of insecure attachment with 23% of participants endorsing anxious/preoccupied attachment, 21% dismissing-avoidant attachment, and 26% fearful-avoidant attachment.

Following the categorization of participants, I tested this hypothesis using two one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) with resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2) as the dependent variables and attachment style categories as the independent variable, while controlling for age, income, and gender. This hypothesis was partially supported.

In Model 1 (i.e., resilience), there was a significant difference in resilience based on the attachment categories, $F(3, 293) = 9.97$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc tests with a Bonferroni adjustment revealed that the secure attachment group reported significantly higher levels of resilience ($M = 4.02$; $SD = 0.62$) than the dismissing-avoidant attachment group ($M = 3.61$; $SD = 0.60$, $p < .001$), the anxious/preoccupied attachment group ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 0.71$, $p = .005$), and the fearful-avoidant attachment group ($M = 3.52$; $SD = 0.63$, $p < .001$). The dismissing-avoidant, anxious/preoccupied, and fearful-avoidant attachment groups were not significantly different

from each other (all p's > .734).

In Model 2 (i.e., posttraumatic growth), there was not a significant difference in posttraumatic growth based on attachment categories, $F(3, 293) = 2.964$ $p = .033$.

Hypothesis 5

My fifth hypothesis was that secure attachment to God would moderate the association between secondary losses in bereavement and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2). Specifically, the negative association between secondary losses and resilience (Model 1) and posttraumatic growth (Model 2) would be weakened (i.e., buffered) when an individual experiences low levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance than when an individual experiences high levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance. I tested this hypothesis using two hierarchical regressions as outlined by Aiken and West (1991). The predictor variable was standardized to reduce multicollinearity and aid interpretation. This hypothesis was not supported.

In Model 1 (i.e., resilience), age, income, race/ethnicity, and gender were included as covariates and predicted about 2% of the variance in resilience in Step 1 ($R^2 = .02$, $F(4, 288) = 1.322$, $p = .262$). In Step 2, secondary losses and attachment to God predicted an additional 17% of the variance in resilience ($\Delta R^2 = .17$, $\Delta F(2, 286) = 29.142$, $p < .001$). The addition of the interaction term in Step 3 did not predict a significant amount of additional variance in resilience ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 285) = .027$, $p = .870$). However, as an exploratory analysis, I graphed the interaction and conducted simple slopes analyses (see Figure 6). Within the context of both secure attachment and insecure attachment, secondary losses was a significant negative predictor of resilience (Secure $\beta = -.31$, $p = .005$; Insecure $\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$).

In Model 2 (i.e., posttraumatic growth), age, income, race/ethnicity, and gender were

entered as covariates and predicted about 4% of the variance in posttraumatic growth in Step 1 ($R^2 = .04$, $F(4, 288) = 2.625$, $p = .035$). In Step 2, secondary losses and attachment to God predicted an additional 2% of the variance in posttraumatic growth ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(2, 286) = 3.163$, $p = .044$). The addition of the interaction term in Step 3 did not predict a significant amount of additional variance in posttraumatic growth ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $\Delta F(1, 285) = .003$, $p = .954$). However, as an exploratory analysis, I graphed the interaction and conducted simple slopes analyses (see Figure 7). Within the context of both secure and insecure attachment, secondary losses was not a significant predictor of posttraumatic growth (Secure $\beta = .05$, $p = .676$; Insecure $\beta = .07$, $p = .305$).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to address a gap in research by exploring the potential

associations and pathways through which attachment to God might influence resilience and

posttraumatic growth in a sample of suddenly and/or traumatically bereaved individuals.

Specifically, I explored (a) whether attachment to God was associated with resilience and

posttraumatic growth above and beyond adult attachment, (b) whether self-compassion and

meaning-making might mediate any potential associations between attachment to God,

resilience, and posttraumatic growth, (c) whether individuals who were categorized as having

secure attachment to God were significantly different in levels of resilience and posttraumatic

growth than individuals who were categorized as having anxious/preoccupied, dismissing-

avoidant, and fearful-avoidant attachment styles, and (d) whether secure attachment to God

would moderate the potential associations between secondary losses, resilience, and

posttraumatic growth.

Predictors of Resilience/Posttraumatic Growth

The present study explored whether God attachment anxiety and avoidance were unique

predictors of resilience and posttraumatic growth, even when controlling for adult attachment

anxiety and avoidance. While adult attachment anxiety and avoidance were significantly

associated with resilience, neither were significantly associated with posttraumatic growth. When

controlling for adult attachment, only God attachment avoidance was a significant and unique

negative predictor of resilience and posttraumatic growth. God attachment anxiety was not a

significant and unique predictor of either resilience or posttraumatic growth.

Consistent with prior research, adult attachment anxiety and avoidance were significantly

associated with resilience (Craparo et al., 2018; Simeon et al., 2007). However, the finding that adult attachment anxiety and avoidance were not significantly associated with posttraumatic growth is contrary to some prior research (Dekel, 2007; Salo et al., 2005). This finding supports the research suggesting that resilience and posttraumatic growth, while similar constructs, hold unique properties and associations.

God attachment avoidance was a significant and unique negative predictor of resilience and posttraumatic growth when controlling for adult attachment. This is consistent with what was hypothesized, and consistent with studies conducted by Captari et al. (2020) and Zeligman et al. (2020). This finding is somewhat contrary to the studies conducted by Belavich and Pargament (2002) and Kelley (2003) that avoidant attachment was not significantly related to stress-related growth. However, the current findings are consistent with Captari et al. (2020) and Zeligman et al. (2020) who found God attachment avoidance was negatively associated with posttraumatic growth.

God attachment anxiety was not a significant predictor for resilience or posttraumatic growth, which is contrary to what was hypothesized and contrary to some prior research conducted by Belavich and Pargament (2002) and Kelley (2003), who found anxious attachment to be positively associated with stress-related growth. This current finding is consistent with Bock (2020) who found God attachment anxiety was not significantly associated with stress-related growth in a sample of trauma survivors. More research is needed to fully understand the mixed findings in the research, such as potential mediators or moderators that could be impacting associations between God attachment anxiety and avoidance and resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Prior research regarding God attachment anxiety and negative religious coping may

potentially help make sense of why God attachment anxiety is not a unique predictor when controlling for adult attachment. Researchers have found that anxious God attachment can lead to negative religious/spiritual coping, but anxious God attachment has also been positively associated with higher levels of stress-related growth in some samples (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley 2003). For example, Belavich and Pargament (2002) found that anxious attachment was associated with negative spiritual coping but still resulted in higher levels of stress-related growth. Kelley (2003) also found a positive association between anxious attachment to God and higher levels of stress-related growth. However, Belavich and Pargament found that avoidant attachment was not significantly related to either positive or negative religious/spiritual coping, but Kelley found that avoidant attachment was negatively associated with positive religious/spiritual coping. This positive association between God attachment anxiety and negative religious coping may confound the association between God attachment anxiety and resilience/posttraumatic growth. Theoretically, the effects of adult attachment anxiety may remain, but the effects of God attachment anxiety may be mitigated by engaging in negative religious/spiritual coping. Although negative religious/spiritual coping is less ideal than positive religious/spiritual coping, it still can foster more adaptive outcomes such as stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Kelley 2003). However, God attachment avoidance was found to be either insignificantly or negatively associated with negative religious/spiritual coping. Avoidant individuals are theoretically more likely to engage in self-reliant coping and distance themselves from God in addition to other individuals, which may explain the unique impact of avoidant God attachment on resilience/posttraumatic growth—not only are they avoiding utilizing support from others in coping, but they are also avoiding turning to God for support.

Self-Compassion and Resilience/Posttraumatic Growth

The present study explored self-compassion as a potential mediator of the associations between God attachment anxiety and avoidance, and resilience and posttraumatic growth. For both resilience and posttraumatic growth, self-compassion significantly mediated the relationship between God attachment anxiety and resilience/posttraumatic growth. However, self-compassion was not a significant mediator of the relationship between God attachment avoidance and resilience/posttraumatic growth. Thus, God attachment anxiety may be associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth partly because it is associated with lower levels of self-compassion. However, although God attachment avoidance also is associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, self-compassion does not appear to be a mechanism of this relationship.

The associations observed between God attachment anxiety, self-compassion, and resilience/posttraumatic growth are consistent with the hypothesized directions and past research. However, contrary to the hypothesis and past research, self-compassion did not mediate the association between God attachment avoidance and resilience/posttraumatic growth. While no other studies to date specifically examine self-compassion as a mediator between attachment to God and resilience/posttraumatic growth, prior research has shown attachment to God to be significantly associated with self-compassion, and that self-compassion in turn has been associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth (Chan et al., 2019; Homan, 2014; Varghese, 2015 Wong & Yeung, 2017). Specifically, God attachment anxiety and avoidance have been associated with lower levels of self-compassion (Homan, 2014; Varghese, 2015). This could be a reflection of individuals treating themselves similarly to how they perceive God treats them in insecure relationships (Homan, 2014). Additionally, self-compassion has been positively

associated with resilience/posttraumatic growth. For example, Wong and Yeung (2017) found that self-compassion had a significant effect on posttraumatic growth through the cognitive processes of acceptance, positive reframing, and the presence of meaning, and Chan et al., (2019) found that self-compassion was positively correlated with posttraumatic growth and found that self-compassion moderated the relationship between posttraumatic growth and depression, anxiety, and stress. Bluth et al. (2018) found that in adolescents, self-compassion was highly associated with resilience, and that this relationship was moderated by gender. Prior research has also found support for self-compassion as a mediator between Attachment to God and outcome variables such as anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being (Homan, 2014; Varghese, 2015). This finding may suggest that in individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety, their insecurity in relationships may make it difficult for them to practice self-compassion, potentially contributing to lower levels of resilience. However, while God attachment avoidance was negatively associated with self-compassion, self-compassion did not mediate the association between attachment to God and resilience.

In considering why self-compassion is a significant mediator for God attachment anxiety, but not for God attachment avoidance, it is helpful to reflect on the internal working models that tend to be associated with different attachment styles. Individuals with high levels of adult attachment avoidance/low levels of adult attachment anxiety tend to hold negative views and beliefs regarding others and more positive views of self, while individuals with high levels of adult attachment anxiety/low adult attachment avoidance tend to hold negative views of self and positive views of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Self-compassion may be a mediator between anxious attachment to God and resilience/posttraumatic growth potentially due to this internalized negative view of self and tendency to experience grief more intensely than

securely/avoidantly attached individuals (Stroebe et al., 2005). However, more avoidantly attached individuals likely hold a more positive view of self and negative view of others and are less likely to exhibit strong grief reactions (Stroebe et al., 2005). Their avoidant style of coping and engaging with their emotions may decrease the significance of self-compassion because they are not necessarily negatively evaluating themselves and likely avoid rather than ruminate on the negative emotions experienced in grief.

<div align="center">Meaning-Making and Resilience/Posttraumatic Growth</div>

The present study also explored meaning-making as a potential mediator of the associations between God attachment anxiety and avoidance, and resilience and posttraumatic growth. The findings for meaning-making were similar to self-compassion. For both resilience and posttraumatic growth, meaning-making significantly mediated the relationship between God attachment anxiety and resilience/posttraumatic growth. However, meaning-making was not a significant mediator of the relationship between God attachment avoidance and resilience/posttraumatic growth. Thus, God attachment anxiety may be associated with lower levels of resilience partly because it is associated with lower levels of meaning-making. When examining posttraumatic growth, despite God attachment anxiety being associated with lower levels of meaning-making, the mediated effect was associated with higher levels of posttraumatic growth. God attachment avoidance was also associated with lower levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth, but meaning-making does not appear to be a mechanism of this relationship.

The associations observed between God attachment anxiety, meaning-making, and resilience are consistent with the hypothesized directions. However, contrary to the hypothesized direction, God attachment anxiety was related to less meaning-making, which in turn was related

to higher posttraumatic growth; and meaning-making did not mediate the association between God attachment avoidance and resilience. While no other studies to date specifically examine meaning-making as a mediator between attachment to God and resilience/posttraumatic growth, Kelley and Chan (2012) found that meaning was not a significant predictor of stress-related growth, and was not a significant mediator between insecure attachment to God and stress-related growth. Despite this finding, past research suggested (a) meaning was related to attachment to God and (b) meaning mediated the relationship between attachment to God and other mental health outcomes. For example, Kelley (2003) found that secure attachment to God was positively correlated with personal meaning, and that anxious and avoidant attachment to God were negatively correlated with personal meaning. In addition, Jueckstock (2018) discusses meaning-making in one's relationship with God as a key characteristic among securely attached individuals when discussing their grief experiences. Jueckstock (2018) found that responses indicative of insecure attachment to God (e.g., characterized by viewing God as distant, unloving, and responsible for the tragedy) were often associated with severe grief.

Park's (2016) meaning-making model may provide insight as to why meaning-making is a significant mediator for God attachment anxiety but not God attachment avoidance. Park's meaning-making model conceptualizes individuals as having two levels of meaning: global and situational. Global meaning refers to one's beliefs about themselves and the world while situational meaning refers to interpreting and reacting to specific situations including assigning meaning to experiences, assessing whether there are discrepancies between situation and global meaning, and reconciling such differences (Park, 2016). Following a traumatic or highly stressful life event, individuals appraise their experience and often engage in a process of assimilating the negative event into their global meaning. In extreme instances, one's global meaning has to

significantly change to accommodate the new experience. Often, one's religious/spiritual beliefs assist in creating meaning, and studies have found religious-meaning-making to be associated with resilience (Park, 2013; Park, 2016; Wadsworth et al., 2009). However, individuals with high levels of attachment avoidance tend to engage in avoidant coping and distance themselves from their emotions (Stroebe et al., 2005). This distancing may minimize the impact of meaning-making. However, individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety may engage in more rumination and intense grief (Stroebe et al., 2005). This reaction may result in anxiously attached individuals creating maladaptive negative meanings in the context of their grief, potentially leading to lower levels of resilience. However, the struggle to make meaning may also have some positive benefits of increasing growth through the adversity.

<div align="center">Categorical Attachment Styles and Resilience/Posttraumatic Growth</div>

The present study also explored whether individuals with secure God attachment (i.e., low levels of God attachment anxiety and avoidance) would report significantly higher levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth than the other attachment style categories. Consistent with hypotheses, securely attached participants reported significantly higher levels of resilience than the other attachment style categories. However, the anxious/preoccupied, dismissing-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant attachment groups were not significantly different from one another and there were no significant differences in reported levels of posttraumatic growth based on attachment categories.

Consistent with prior research, secure attachment was associated with higher levels of resilience than the insecure attachment styles (i.e., preoccupied, dismissing-avoidant, fearful-avoidant). Past research on attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth have found secure attachment to God to be associated with more adaptive outcomes following a significant

life stressor such as resilience, posttraumatic growth, and stress-related growth (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020). While the current finding is consistent with the hypothesized directions and prior research, I also anticipated significant differences would emerge between fearful-avoidant attachment (i.e., high levels of anxiety and avoidance), anxious/preoccupied attachment (i.e., high anxiety, low avoidance), and dismissing-avoidant attachment (i.e., low anxiety, high avoidance), but no additional significant differences between insecure attachment groups were observed. Additionally, contrary to what was expected and prior research, there were not a significant difference in reported levels of posttraumatic growth based on attachment categories. This finding again supports the idea that resilience and posttraumatic growth, while both similar constructs, do not show the same relationships with attachment to God.

Resilience typically refers to an ability to adapt and continue functioning at one's baseline level despite a hardship, whereas posttraumatic growth signifies significant positive changes due to experiencing the hardship (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The current findings suggest that while secure attachment to God may assist individuals in coping with their grief, it does not necessarily facilitate the additional positive changes associated with posttraumatic growth including: (1) increased appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities, (2) increased intimacy and warmth in relationships, (3) increased personal strength, (4) perception of new possibilities and/or paths for one's life, and (5) spiritual development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

The lack of significant difference of reported posttraumatic growth within the attachment categories was unexpected and could potentially be due to the subjective nature of "growth." Prior research has suggested "illusory posttraumatic growth" may be a defensive phenomenon

utilized by individuals with increased levels of neuroticism and/or an immature defense style in which they report growth without demonstrating growth (Börner, 2016). Many of the statements measuring posttraumatic growth are related to perceived changes, whereas the statements measuring resilience are more focused on specific attributes. For example, the PTGI asks participants to rate the statement, "I know better that I can handle difficulties," whereas the CD-RISC asks participants to rate a similar but more concrete statement, "I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties." Individuals may endorse illusory growth on the PTGI instead of actual changes in their functioning (Boals & Schuler, 2017). It is also possible that a person with an insecure attachment to God may assess that they are better able to handle difficulties than they were in the past, but may not necessarily consider themselves a "strong" or resilient person when compared to others. Additionally, an individual with secure attachment to God who demonstrates resilience may perceive that they have consistently adapted to difficulties in life without significant decreases in functioning and endorse low levels of growth due to pre-existing coping skills.

<div align="center">Secondary Losses and Resilience/Posttraumatic Growth</div>

The present study explored whether secondary losses would be associated with resilience and posttraumatic growth, and whether secure attachment to God would moderate (i.e., buffer) that association. Secondary losses was a significant negative predictor of resilience, but secure attachment to God did not moderate the association between secondary loss and resilience. Secondary losses was not a significant predictor of posttraumatic growth, and secure attachment to God did not moderate this association.

The present finding is consistent with prior research that has found that experiencing a high number of secondary losses may be a risk factor for maladaptive outcomes, such as

complicated grief (Shear, 2015). In the present sample, higher levels of secondary losses were associated with lower levels of resilience. However, contrary to my hypothesis, secure attachment to God did not buffer the association between secondary losses and resilience. Additionally, secondary losses was not significantly associated with posttraumatic growth. These are somewhat surprising findings considering the prior research that found attachment to God to be a potential protective factor in promoting adaptive outcomes following stress (Belavich & Pargament, 2002; Fenske, 2009; Kelley, 2003; Kelley & Chan, 2012; Nosrati et al., 2020).

In individuals who are securely attached to God and view God as a secure base and safe haven, the loss of a loved one may be experienced as an attachment injury and induce an increase in temporary attachment anxiety and avoidance in their relationship with God. In individuals who expected God to protect them from grief or expected God to answer their prayers, the relational pain may be especially strong. Even within religious texts, people of faith have been shown wrestling with God during times of grief. For example, in the Christian faith, within the story of Job, a man who was likely very securely attached to God, is seen questioning God in the wake of grief and a high number of secondary losses. However, following his grieving process, Job experienced healing in his relationship with God and once again demonstrated secure God attachment. Additionally, it is possible that the types of secondary losses experienced may impact this association. For example, individuals may be less likely to utilize their relationship with God in coping with secondary losses that are more related to basic needs such as loss of income, financial security, and loss of property, than secondary losses that are more related to identity such as hopes, dreams and confidence.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are several limitations to note in the present study. First, due to the utilization of a

cross-sectional design, no causal conclusions can be made. Although the current study can shed some light on the associations observed between attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth, a longitudinal or experimental design study is needed to infer causation.

Second, the measures utilized in the current study were all self-report. While self-report measures can provide useful data, they are also prone to socially desirable responding and other types of response biases (John & Robins, 1993). It is also possible that participants may have had difficulty responding to retrospective questions regarding their grief experiences (e.g. memory distortions). Additionally, the Secondary Loss measure was adapted for the purposes of this study and lacks prior evidence or reliability and validity.

Third, due to participants completing the measures online rather than in a controlled setting, there is a risk that responses may have been influenced by participants' environments, potentially leading to haphazard responding or the influence of other individuals in responding. However, to attempt to decrease the risk of including participants who answered haphazardly, one validity check question was included in the survey.

Fourth, the current sample primarily consisted of individuals who identified as White, cis-gender female, and Christian. Due to the demographics of the current sample, these findings may not generalize to other populations characterized by different identities and their intersectionality.

Areas for Future Research

Research examining attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth is sparse, and there are several areas in need of further research and exploration. First, future research should examine whether the length of one's relationship with God impacts associations observed between attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth. Given that secure attachment

to God can be a protective for individuals, it is important to understand how secure attachment to God is formed and how that relationship in various stages of development could potentially effect resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Second, more research is needed regarding how to increase attachment security in one's relationship with God. Since attachment to God is a protective factor, it is important to further explore how to facilitate attachment security and corrective attachment experiences for individuals who are not securely attached to God in order to promote resilience and posttraumatic growth. This could be an opportunity for psychologists and religious/spiritual leaders to engage in collaboration. A religious/spiritual leader's role is typically to facilitate spiritual growth and encourage a healthy and meaningful relationship with God. Psychologists should take advantage of the unique insight offered by religious/spiritual leaders as they engage in future research on attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth.

Third, future research should continue exploring attachment to God using both dimensional and categorical approaches. Although observing attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance as separate dimensions is beneficial, it also loses some nuances in the interaction between the two dimensions (i.e., attachment categories). Future research on the unique differences between the four attachment categories (i.e., secure, anxious/preoccupied, dismissing avoidant, fearful avoidant) is beneficial for understanding the unique attachment experiences of individuals. For example, it may be beneficial to further examine differences between fearful-avoidant and fearful dismissing attachment styles. Siefert and Haggerty (under review) created the Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence (IIA), which can help identify fearful-avoidant attachment styles. Adapting or creating a similar measure for attachment to God could further understanding on fearful-avoidant attachment to God.

Fourth, future studies on attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth could benefit from utilizing different modes of assessment and a variety research designs. Attachment relationships have traditionally been measured via behavioral analysis such as The Strange Situation, but unfortunately, it is not possible to physically observe how one interacts with God Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, qualitative research may offer some benefits in measuring one's attachment to God. Just as adult attachment styles can be assessed using semi-structured interviews such as the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al.,1996), attachment to God could potentially also be assessed or corroborated in a similar fashion, utilizing an interview type assessment to examine attachment-related cognitions and behaviors. For example, Proctor et al. (2009) developed the God Attachment Interview Schedule and conducted an initial study, but validation of the attachment profiles is still needed. Additionally, future research should seek to implement longitudinal and experimental designs in order to draw causal conclusions regarding attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth.

Finally, future studies may benefit from including participants from a variety of contexts and diverse range of demographics. For example, increasing the diversity of religious/spiritual beliefs represented would increase the generalizability of findings. Additionally, many studies on attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth have been conducted in grief samples or college populations; it would be beneficial to explore other contexts and how the specific context may impact the associations found between attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth.

Clinical Implications

Religion and spirituality (R/S) are important aspects of identity for many people, with roughly 80% of Americans endorsing a religious and/or spiritual identity (Pew Research Center,

2017). In clinical work, psychologists will frequently encounter clients with unique R/S experiences, beliefs, and values, making R/S an important aspect of diversity in which psychologists should be increasing their multicultural competence (Vieten et al., 2013). To highlight the need for multicultural competence relating to R/S identities, the American Psychological Association outlined 15 competencies psychologists should strive for as they navigate R/S diversity in the field of psychology, including competence to assess and help a client utilize their R/S strengths and resources, as well as competence to assess when R/S may be detrimental to a client's psychological health (Vieten et al., 2013), The present findings are helpful for clinicians seeking to better understand the negative and positive impact of one's R/S identities.

Past research has shown that for individuals with a secure attachment to God, their R/S beliefs may serve as a valuable source for meaning, a positive means of coping, a source of community, and a source of purpose in life (Schieman et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). For these individuals, R/S can be adaptively used as a strength by drawing on God as a secure base and safe haven in life (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The present study builds on these findings suggesting that secure attachment to God is positively associated with resilience.

However, for individuals with an insecure attachment to God, past research has shown R/S may have detrimental effects (Schieman et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). The current findings demonstrate that insecure attachment to God may be associated with lower levels of resilience, and God attachment avoidance may uniquely contribute to lower levels of posttraumatic growth. Because of the potential impact attachment to God may have on clients' lives, it is important to assess a client's religious/spiritual identities just as one would explore other aspects of identity with openness, acceptance, and curiosity. Discussing and processing

one's relationship with God could be beneficial for clients, similarly to exploring other relationships clients are or have engaged in.

Depending on the individual client's needs and desires, incorporating religious/spiritual texts into therapy and/or collaborating with religious/spiritual leaders may also be beneficial. In taking a wholistic approach to treatment, it is important to fully acknowledge a client's R/S needs and take steps to address those needs in therapy, collaborate with other professionals, and utilize community resources. Additionally, the current study found that self-compassion and meaning-making mediate the relationship between anxious attachment to God and resilience. Exploring self-compassion and meaning-making in therapy by working with clients to engage in greater self-empathy and adaptive ways of constructing meaning could be potential therapeutic goals. Finally, although the focus in therapy tends to be on a client's R/S identities, it is important for clinicians to reflect on their own R/S identities and attachment to God. As clinicians, it is important to bring internalized beliefs, whether positive or negative, into awareness and consider how those beliefs may impact the therapeutic relationship.

Conclusion

The current study explored potential associations between attachment to God, resilience, and posttraumatic growth. This study found that (a) God attachment avoidance is a unique predictor of resilience and posttraumatic growth even when controlling for adult attachment, (b) self-compassion and meaning-making mediate the association between God attachment anxiety and resilience/posttraumatic growth, (c) secure attachment with God is associated with significantly higher levels of resilience than insecure attachment styles, but not posttraumatic growth, and (d) an increased number of secondary losses is associated with lower levels of

resilience. Further research in this area will contribute to better understanding God attachment

dynamics and resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Table 1

Attachment to God and Adaptive Stress Outcomes: Studies Included in Literature Review

Study	Study Design	Sample	Attachment to God Measure	Adaptive Outcome Measure	Summary of Findings
Bock (2020)	Quantitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 215 Adults who endorsed a traumatic experience; 41% f, 59% m, Age M = 34; Recruited and completed surveys via online survey platform.	Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004)	Stress Related Growth Scale—Revised. The SRGS-R (Boals & Schuler, 2018	Anxious God attachment was not significantly related to stress-related growth
Belavich, & Pargament (2002)	Quantitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 155 Adults waiting on loved one in surgery; 67% f, 33% m; Age M = 44; Recruited and completed surveys in waiting room of hospital during a loved one's surgery.	• Forced Choice Attachment to God Measure (Kirkpatrick and Shaver, 1992) • The Relationship with God Scale (Belavich, 1998; Belavich & Pargament, 2002)	Stress-Related Growth Scale (Park, Cohen, and Murch, 1996)	• Secure God attachment was significantly related to stress-related growth. • Secure God attachment was associated with higher levels of positive spiritual coping. • Anxious God attachment was associated with higher levels of negative spiritual coping. • Both positive and negative spiritual coping were associated with stress-related growth suggesting spiritual coping serves as a mediator for attachment to God and stress-related growth. • Avoidant God attachment was not significantly related to positive or negative spiritual coping or stress-related growth.
Captari, Riggs & Stephen (2020)	Quantitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 374 Adults who were unexpectedly or traumatically bereaved; 73.8% f, 25.9% m; Age M = 26.49; Recruited via snowball sampling and non-probability methods and completed surveys on Qualtrics	Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004)	Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)	• Anxious God attachment was not significantly associated with Posttraumatic growth. • Avoidant God attachment was associated with lower levels of Posttraumatic Growth.

Study	Study Design	Sample	Attachment to God Measure	Adaptive Outcome Measure	Summary of Findings
Fenske (2009)	Qualitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 18 Women who had lost at least one parent to AIDS, Age Range: 13-22; Recruited via snowball sampling methods	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Twelve participants endorsed their relationship with God as how they are able to carry on, suggestive of God as surrogate attachment figure potentially contributing to their resilience.
Jueckstock (2018)	Qualitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 25 Parents who experienced death of a child; 80% f; 20% m; Age Range Distribution: 44% ages 30 - 39; 44% ages 40 - 49; 8% ages 50 - 59; 4% ages 60+; Recruited via non-probability sampling methods	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	• Individuals with responses indicative of secure attachment to God often co-occurred with recovery and resilience/ • Responses indicative of insecure attachment to God more commonly co-occurred with more challenging grief experiences.
Kelley (2003)	Mixed Method, Longitudinal	N = 94 at first data collection and 34 at 3 month follow up; Adults who experienced a significant loss within the year; 77% f; 23% m; Age M = 45.6; Recruited via non-probability sampling methods	• Forced Choice Attachment to God Measure (Kirkpatrick and Shaver, 1992) • The Relationship with God Scale (Belavich, 1998; Belavich & Pargament, 2002)	Stress-Related Growth Scale (Park, Cohen, and Murch, 1996)	• Secure attachment to God was positively associated with higher levels of stress-related growth. • Anxious attachment to God was also positively associated with higher levels of stress-related growth. • Avoidant attachment was not significantly associated with stress-related growth.
Kelley & Chan (2012)	Quantitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 93 Adults who experienced a significant loss within the year; 77.4% f; 22.6% m; Age M = 46.1; Recruited via non-probability sampling methods	The Relationship with God Scale (Belavich, 1998; Belavich & Pargament, 2002)	Stress-Related Growth Scale (Park, Cohen, and Murch, 1996)	• Secure attachment to God was positively associated with higher levels of stress-related growth directly and indirectly through positive religious coping. • Only secure God attachment was examined in this study.
Nosrati, Batavani, Ghobari-Bonab & Masjedsaraee (2020)	Quantitative-Cross-Sectional	N = 200 Students in Tehran University; 50% f, 50% m; Recruited via cluster sampling methods	Not Specified	Not Specified	• Secure God attachment was positively associated with resilience. • Avoidant God attachment was negatively associated with resilience.
Zeligman, Ataga & Shaw (2020)	Quantitative, Cross-Sectional	N = 222 Students who identify as trauma survivors; 66% f; 33% m; 1% other; Recruited via university research course credit program	The Attachment to God Scale (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002)	Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)	Avoidant God attachment was negatively associated with posttraumatic growth.

Table 2

Skewness, Kurtosis, and Range of Responses of Adult Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance, God Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance, Secondary Losses, Meaning-Making, Self-Compassion, Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth

Variable	M	SD	Skewness (Standard Error)	Kurtosis (Standard Error)	Range
1. Adult Attachment Anxiety	3.77	1.46	0.03 (.14)	-0.78 (.23)	5.89
2. Adult Attachment Avoidance	3.87	1.11	-0.87 (.14)	-0.15 (.23)	6.00
3. God Attachment Anxiety	2.92	1.25	0.66 (.14)	-0.3 (.23)	5.64
4. God Attachment Avoidance	3.52	1.25	0.22 (.14)	-0.36 (.23)	6.00
5. Secondary Losses	1.73	0.82	1.38 (.14)	1.15 (.23)	3.26
6. Meaning-Making	3.42	0.89	-0.25 (.14)	-0.30 (.23)	4.00
7. Self-Compassion	2.99	0.64	-0.08 (.14)	0.45 (.23)	3.93
8. Resilience	3.70	0.66	-0.13 (.14)	-0.26 (.23)	3.32
9. Posttraumatic Growth	2.43	1.22	-0.14 (.14)	-0.80 (.23)	5.00

Table 3

Intercorrelations of Continuous Variables included in Analyses

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Adult Attachment Anxiety	3.77	1.46	-								
2. Adult Attachment Avoidance	3.87	1.11	.18**	-							
3. God Attachment Anxiety	2.92	1.25	.39**	.06	-						
4. God Attachment Avoidance	3.52	1.25	.14*	.12*	.14*	-					

(table continues)

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Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. Secondary Losses	1.73	0.82	.32**	.16**	.11	-.02	-				
6. Meaning-Making	3.42	0.90	-.30**	-.19**	-.28**	-.13*	-.60**	-			
7. Self-Compassion	2.99	0.64	-.42**	-.29**	-.25**	-.14*	-.27**	.34**	-		
8. Resilience	3.70	0.66	-.31**	-.22**	-.19**	-.25**	-.31**	.42**	.55**	-	
9. Posttraumatic Growth	2.43	1.22	.00	-.10	-.09	-.21**	.06	-.05	.24**	.40**	-

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Resilience (Model 1)

	Predictor	ΔR^2	β	sr^2
Step 1	Age		-.13	.01
	Income	.02	.11	.01
	Race/Ethnicity		-.03	.00
Step 2	Age		-.17*	.02
	Income		.06	.00
	Race/Ethnicity	.14	-.05	.00
	Adult Attach. Anxiety		-.30**	.08
	Adult Attach. Avoidance		.18***	.03
Step 3	Age		-.20**	.02
	Income		.07	.00
	Race/Ethnicity		-.03	.00
	Adult Attach. Anxiety	.05	-.25***	.05
	Adult Attach. Avoidance		-.16**	.02
	God Attach. Anxiety		-.07	.00
	God Attach. Avoidance		-.21***	.04

Note: Race/Ethnicity was coded as 1 = racial/ethnic minority and 2 = white; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Posttraumatic Growth (Model 2)

	Predictor	ΔR^2	β	sr^2
Step 1	Age		.01	.00
	Income	.03	.13	.01
	Race/Ethnicity		-.16*	.02
Step 2	Age		.01	.00
	Income		.12	.01
	Race/Ethnicity	.01	-.17**	.02
	Adult Attach. Anxiety		.03	.00
	Adult Attach. Avoidance		-.11	.01

(table continues)

	Predictor	ΔR^2	β	sr^2
	Age		-.02	.00
	Income		.13	.01
	Race/Ethnicity		-.16**	.02
Step 3	Adult Attach. Anxiety	.05	.09	.01
	Adult Attach. Avoidance		-.09	.01
	God Attach. Anxiety		-.11	.01
	God Attach. Avoidance		-.19***	.03

Note: Race/Ethnicity was coded as 1 = racial/ethnic minority and 2 = white * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. ***$p < .001$
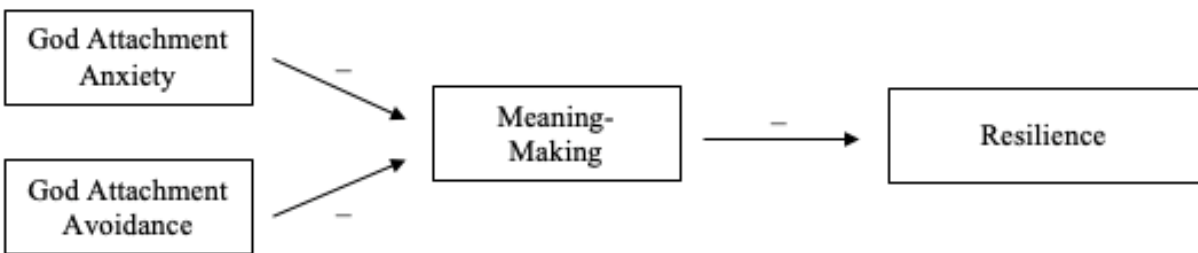
Figure 1

Hypothesized Directions of Paths in Mediation Models 1 and 2 Predicting Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth from God Attachment Anxiety and God Attachment Avoidance and Self-Compassion
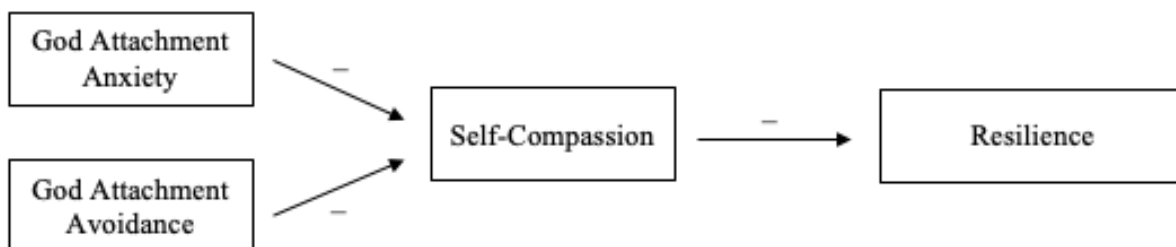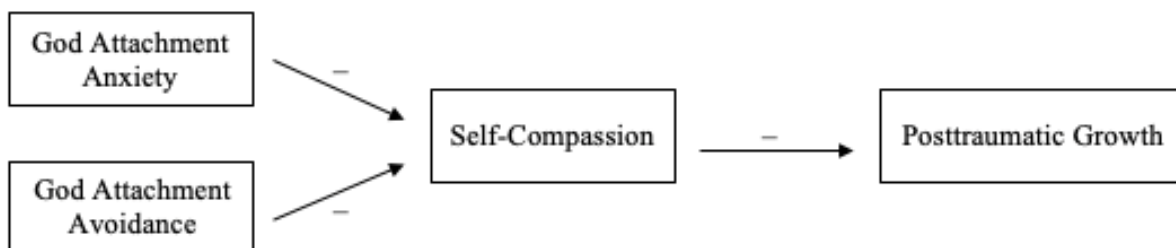
Figure 2

Hypothesized Directions of Paths in Mediation Models 1 and 2 Predicting Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth from God Attachment Anxiety and God Attachment Avoidance and Meaning-Making
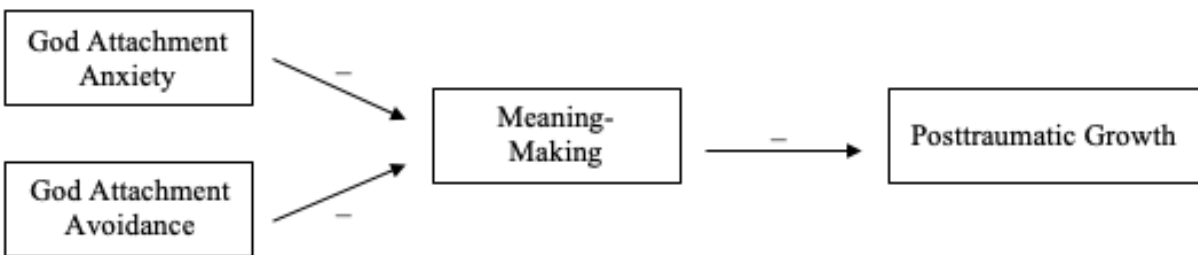
Model 1

| God Attachment Anxiety | |
| God Attachment Avoidance | → | Meaning-Making | − → | Resilience |

Model 2

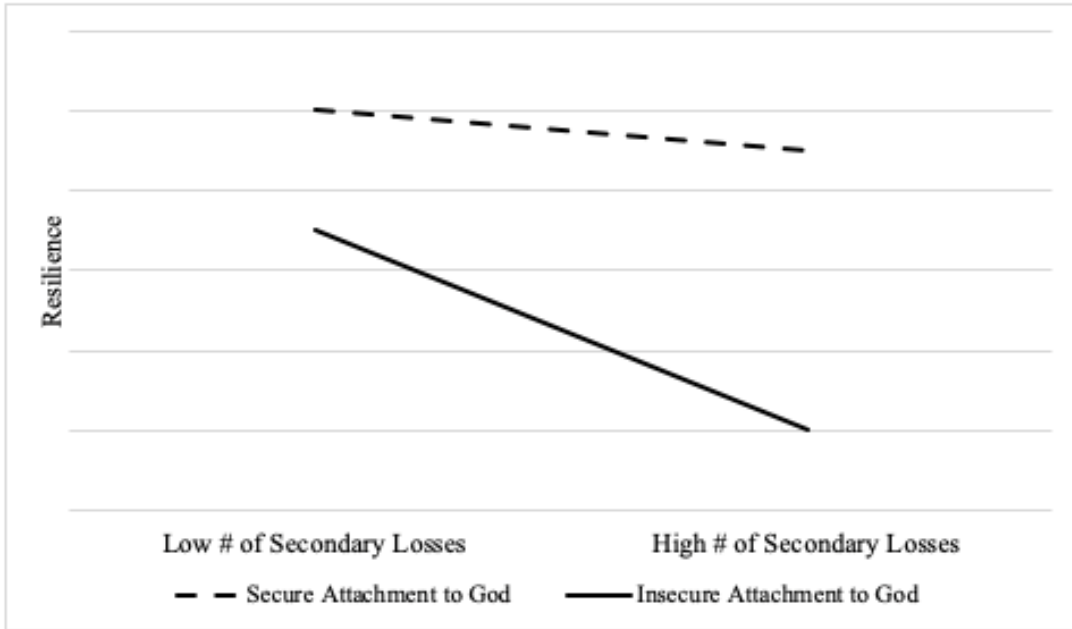| God Attachment Anxiety | |
| God Attachment Avoidance | → | Meaning-Making | − → | Posttraumatic Growth |

Figure 3

Hypothesized Effect of Secure Attachment to God on the Association between Secondary Losses in Bereavement and Resilience (Model 1) and Posttraumatic Growth (Model 2).
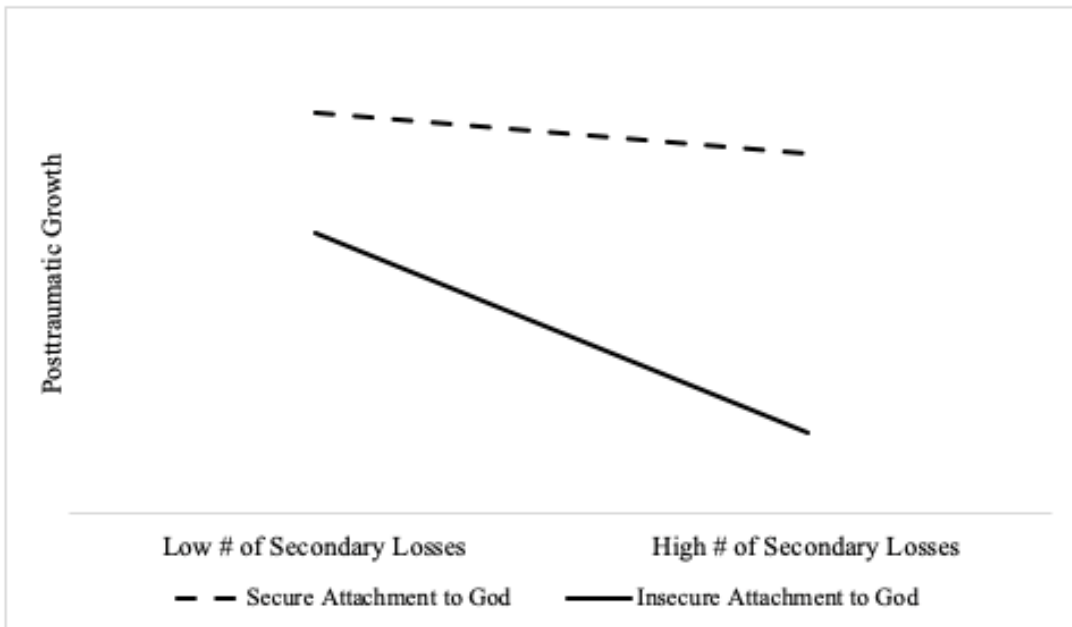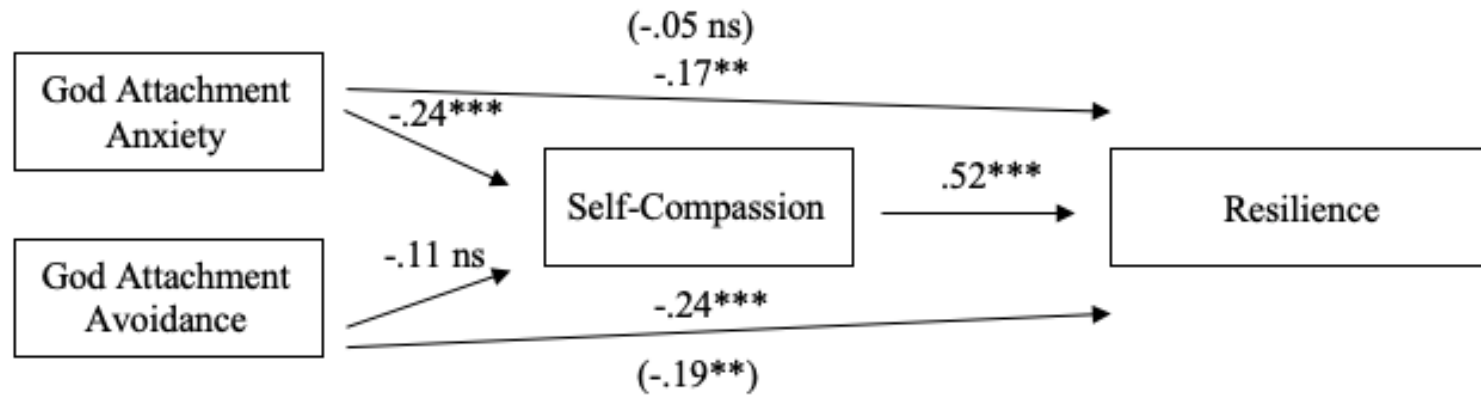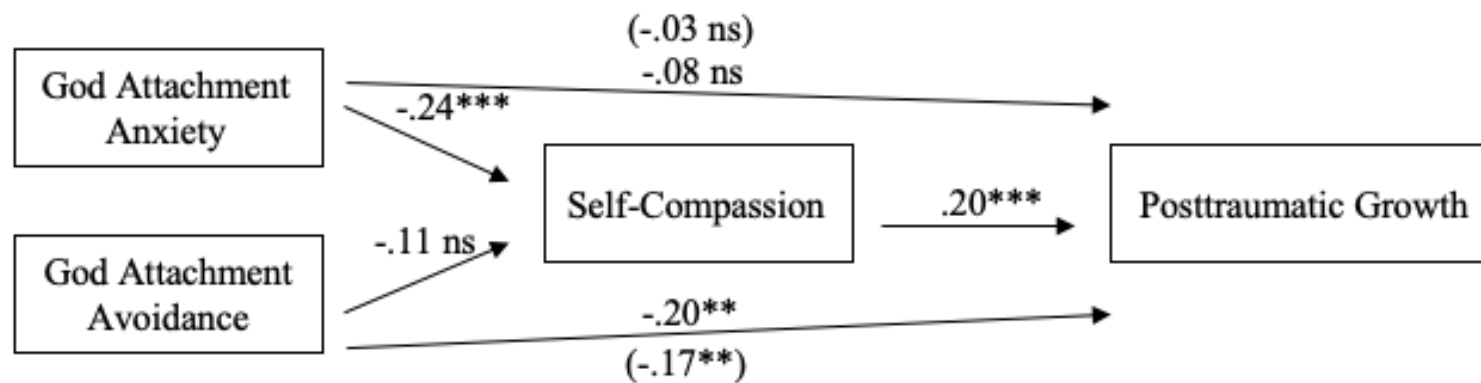
Model 1

Model 2

Figure 4

Observed Directions of Paths in the Mediation Model Predicting Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth from God Attachment Anxiety, God Attachment Avoidance, and Self-Compassion
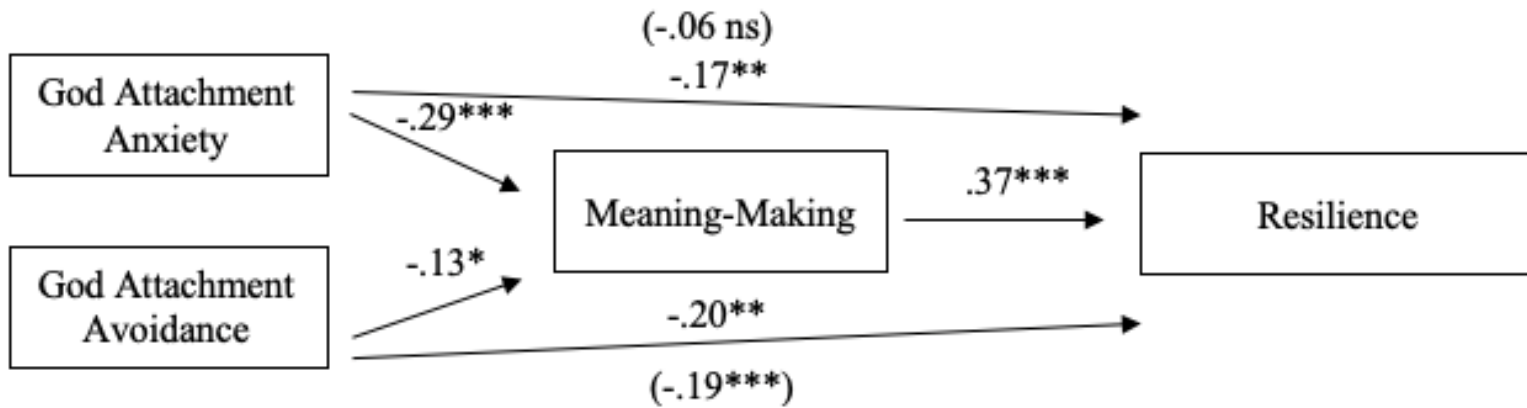

Note. Results in parentheses indicate the direct paths in the final model when the mediator variable was included; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. ***$p < .001$
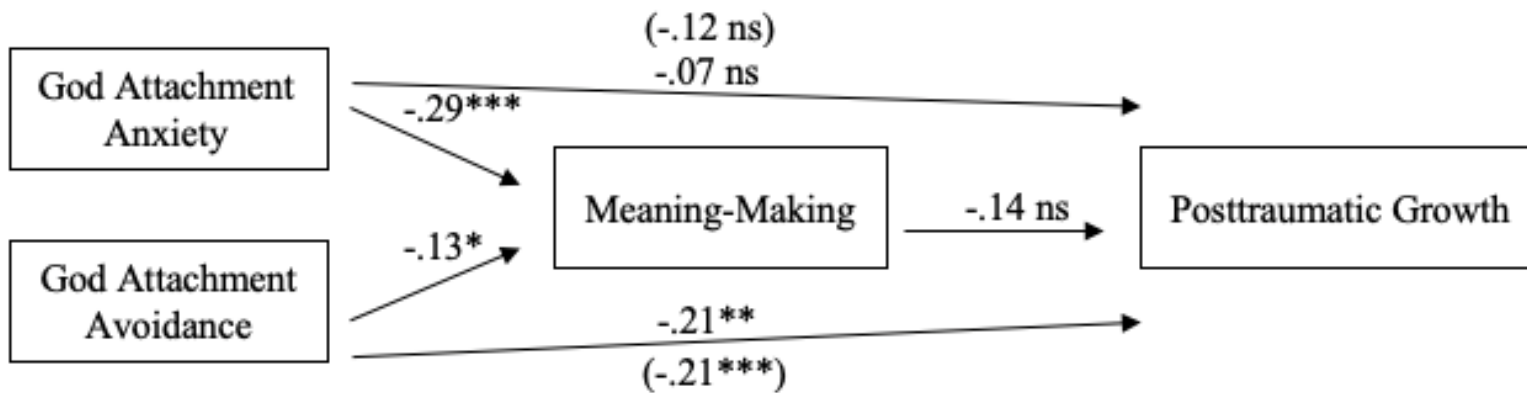
Figure 5

Observed Directions of Paths in the Mediation Model Predicting Resilience (Model 1) and Posttraumatic Growth (Model 2) from God Attachment Anxiety and God Attachment Avoidance and Meaning-Making

Note: Results in parentheses indicate the direct paths in the final model when the mediator variable was included; * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. ***p* < .001)

Figure 6

Model 1: Resilience: Observed Effect of Secure Attachment to God on the Association between Secondary Losses in Bereavement and Resilience
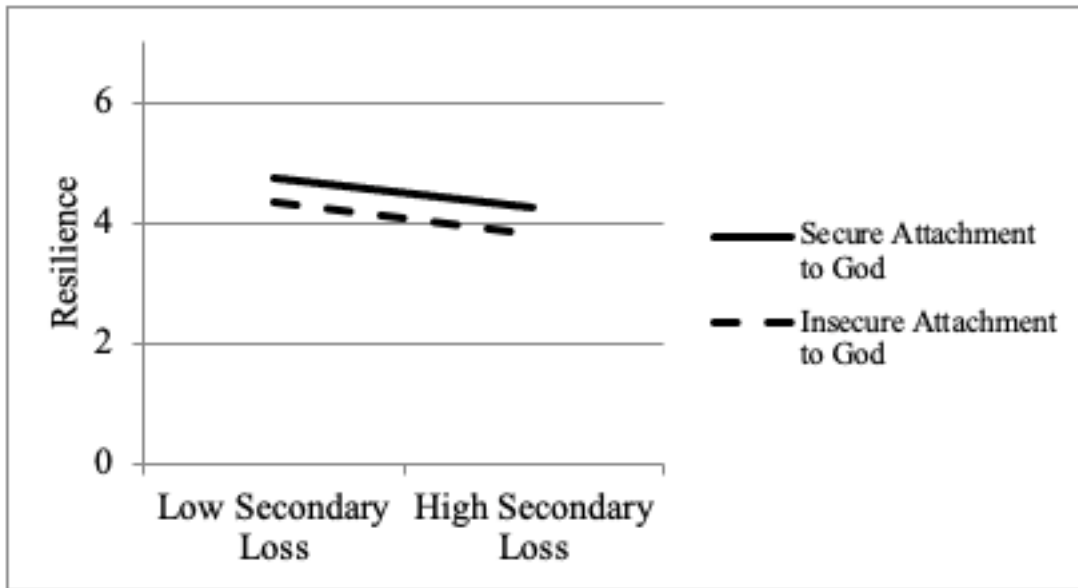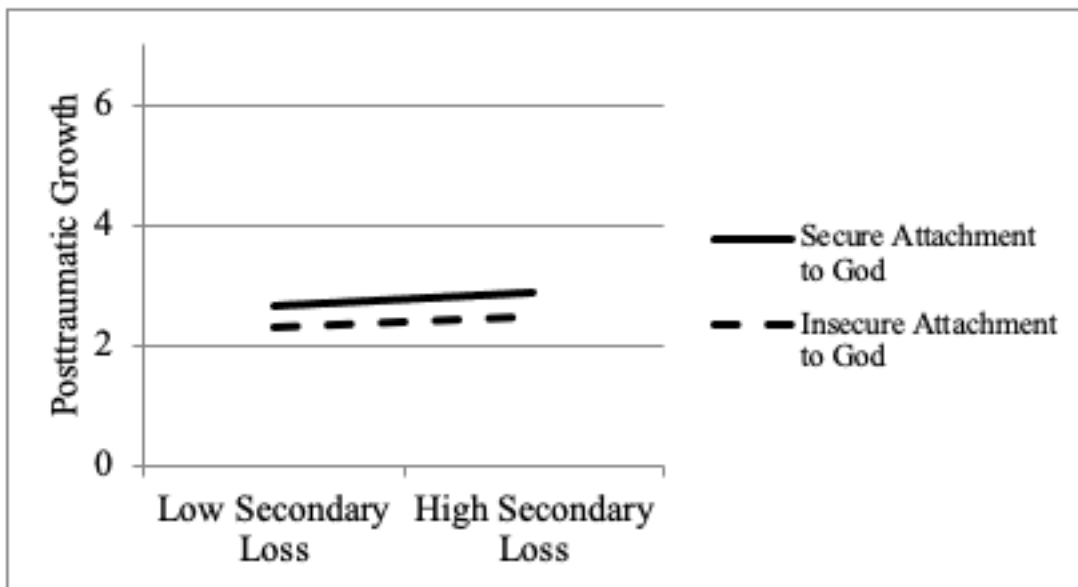

Figure 7

Model 2: Posttraumatic Growth: Observed Effect of Secure Attachment to God on the Association between Secondary Losses in Bereavement and Posttraumatic Growth

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APPENDIX

IN MEMORY

All research participants were given the opportunity to dedicate their involvement in the study in memory of their loved one(s). Their epitaphs are included below:

To my fellow mourners: You are strong. You are worthy. You are loved unconditionally. Always be brave and always be kind. To my mother: You were strong. You were worthy. I have always loved you unconditionally and I always will.

My beautiful 26-year-old daughter Danielle touched this world and left such a mark on it that she will never be forgotten. The man that so brutally stole her from this life failed because in the end she is with God, and remembered every second of every day for the amazing mother, daughter, sister, friend and teacher that she was. Evil can never erase goodness and beauty. Danielle's soul was filled with beauty and goodness. Until we are together again I will honor her life in all I do.

Mom,
You were so incredibly strong, and had a beautiful soul, your laughter was infectious and your heart had no limits. I miss you every day, but I am reminded of your love and lasting presence whenever I see a flutterby.

In loving memory of Cesar Gonzalez. My heart will ache in sadness and my tears will forever flow, what it meant to lose you nobody will ever know.

To my dearest Katie. May our grief experience allow others to heal.

My Son
As long as I can dream
As long as I can think
As long as I have memory
I will love you
Our gracious God will never let us part.

Dad,
In your life you taught me who I should be. After your death I was forced to implement it. I hope you are as proud of who I have become now as you were of me every day we were together. I'll see you again.

David Lee Rea,
    Just Because...
    Just because
    It appears you are not here
    You are
    In my heart
    My mind

My soul
You are here!
Just because
It seems I cannot see you
I do
In my heart
My mind
My soul
I see you!
Just because
Life keeps going on and on
I never stop
Thinking, living, and experiencing
Your being
Your life
Just because
The pain seems
Too deep
The price is too steep
To say you
Are gone
Because
You are NOT!
Just because
I don't understand
The bigger plan
I can
Choose to breathe
And relieve
The need
For answers
And just
Be thankful
For you.
Just because
The longer I live The more I know
I do not know Anything—really— Except
What IS
Just because.
I love you so much!

Mom

My grandfather was a good man who worked for his children and loves his grandchildren.

My Grandfather was one of the best men I've ever known. It's truly a blessing that I got to know him. I wish you could have too.

I want to send love to my aunt in Heaven. Thank you for being my second mother, for taking care of me when she was not able to and for loving me and teaching me how to forgive and love as well. You radiated love in who you were and to each person who knew you. I love and miss you every day.

Grandmother, you were a joy to be around. I hope you are over the moon with Granddaddy.

To my uncle that was never understood, I will forever stand by your memory and grieve. I will remember you for who you were and not as what they made you out to be.

Putz,
    To the love of my life, I love you and miss you very much. I'm looking forward to the day that we'll be together again!
-Dweeb

My Papa was an outstanding man with infinite character. He truly touched every life that he came across. In Loving Memory Freddy Pierce.

To my sweet, loving, free spirited Grandma Mindy. I hope you know how much you are missed and how much you are loved and thought about daily. There is not a breath that I take where I am not missing you, but I know soon we will meet again. I love you.

Randy,
I love you. I hope you heard me singing to you while you were on your hospital bed. It was so hard for me but I know you aren't in pain anymore and you're okay. I love you.
She sung to me on every birthday that I had.

Margaret,
I wish I had another chance to say goodbye... I bid farewell to the woman who was a true role model for me as a child, and who lived every moment I knew her to the fullest. To those who read this, never take those who give a shit about you lightly. You never know how your life will change in the span of an hour. Take every moment of your life and make the most of it, and never ever waste a second being anything less than what you are capable of.

Thanks you for all that you did for us. -David

I'll never forget sitting on your lap, and letting you blow-dry and brush my hair after baths as a kid. Love you Gramps.
    Chloe Marie Bencivengo 2.9.99 - 1.20.17

Forever in our hearts.

We miss you baby.

You will be missed

Tika,
I love and miss you. I hope you're in a happier place.

Noriah and Laylanee, Mommy loves you from the bottom of my heart. I hope me and your brothers make you proud in everything that we do!

Mom, you were such an example to me in my life, and I hope that someday I can live up to that and be the person you wanted me to be.

GFWDGN!

You were, are, and will continue to be beautiful. Until we meet again...

Rest in Peace Grandpa.

Katelynn Roberts, you were the best thing that ever happened to me, and I wish it would have been me to die at 17 and not you. Daniel Reulbach, you were the best uncle I could have asked for. You were my dad when I didn't have one. Jeff Samms, I know life was hard, so you took yours away but you will always be in my heart. Cecelia Cross, you fought so hard against cancer. You were an amazing woman. Sammy Roberts, thank you for being you.

To my daughter,
Corey. I loved you from the moment you became a part of me. It never mattered that you weren't who you wanted to be or who you thought I wanted you to be. You were you and that was the precious gift God gave me. I will treasure you for the rest of my days. I love you for all of both of our lives and beyond. You will always be my baby girl. And I will always be your Mom.

I'll always miss you Allie. I'm sorry that I wasn't better.

In memory of Papa.... you are loved and missed.

My Dad was such a happy guy and you would be hard pressed to find someone that ever had anything bad to say about him. Everyone loved him. He absolutely LOVED his family, especially his grandkids. He loved fiercely and I will do the same, in his honor. I was pregnant when he passed and named my daughter after him. I have had a Charlie to love my entire life.

Thanks for being there, I miss you but I know you're doing fine...

Love you Aunt Becky.

Love you.

Casey,

This is for you. Years later, and you're still making an impact on this world. I love and miss you more than you could ever know.

All of my love, OOG. You are missed and loved each and every day.

My daughter Kayla Nichole Franzoni was an amazing woman and mother. Sadly, her life took some unexpected and unfortunate turns that led to some wrong choices. She was so smart and sweet. We miss her more than words can ever express, and her daughters love and miss her. Her absence is remembered every single day. Kayla had a smile that could light up the world, and a contagious laugh. We miss you and can't wait to see you again!

Will you, Elizabeth DeGray King, forever rest your worn body into our beautiful earth.

I love you more than life and I miss you every day. I can't wait to see you again. Thank you for watching over me, I know you're always there.
Love you forever kid.

Nicole you are an amazing person, I will do my best to make you proud. You have always been so kind, thoughtful and loving. You have made me proud to call you my daughter. I will see you again, and please look out for me I still need you. Love you more Princess.
-Collee

I love you Kyle. I know you were in a bad place in the time of your suicide but I hope you've found peace.

Hi everyone,
        Meet my beloved brother named James Barry who was stabbed to death by his ex-girlfriend who couldn't accept the fact that my brother wanted to move on with his life. She was his first and only girlfriend. James was Born May 28, 1995, and his life was taken away from him on November 17, 2016.
        The very same day of the breakup she removed her belongings from my mother's house. She was there all the time. My brother texted one of my parents that evening letting them know that he was no longer dating that girl, and he tried making things work but she did stuff in the relationship that caused the break up. My brother did nothing but love that girl. We also treated her as if she were a part of the family. Little did he know that she would end up killing him with NO regard for his life, and she left them there to die.
        That very same night she was stalking the house waiting for everyone in the house hold to fall asleep. My brother's best friend slept over that night to support my brother too, you know keep him company just like best friends do.
        We still do not know how she got in to the house that night which is frustrating. Until we have our trial which is still undetermined we will find out. What we do know is that she came in thru the back door and James fought for his life, James didn't see it coming with her stabbing him right near his heart leaving him to die within 60 secs. He ended up dying in his best friend's arms. She left the scene right away, and she left for her home state Maryland; thinking that she

would get away with this. My brother wouldn't ever hurt a fly. He was just a person who was full of love. He didn't have a dark side; he truly was a perfect son. The night I received the phone call from my father around 1am I knew immediately something was wrong. Maybe someone in the family was going to the hospital, but not my brother getting murdered. It's just something I thought could never happen, not to him! Not my brother! Well it did.

In memory of Rachael J. Strader, Mom, Grammy, wife, friend, artist and woman of boundless energy. I am proud and grateful to be your daughter and will strive to pass on your wisdom, your determination, and most importantly your love to your grandchildren as you gave them to me.
I love you, Mom

Miss you and love you still Zach!!! <3

My Johnny Trevino,
You were the Jack of all trades. You are dearly missed and needed my love. Until we meet again…

In loving Memory of Shannon Hill Polster. She was a loving daughter and a gifted caregiver who was taken away at way too young of an age.

In Loving Memory of Ronald Edward Hill. He was a wonderful husband and a loving grandfather whom without, I'd be noting in life. He gave me everything I needed and wanted and all of me wished I could've had 20 more years with him, but I will forever cherish my 17 years of life he was there always supporting and loving me, no matter my faults.

For Wood Rehling, my dad. I miss you every single day.

RIP Auntie. I've never cried so hard in my life and I can't believe that you are gone. I love you. See you later

I love you so very much and I wish we could've talked more especially after everyone found out that I was pregnant. I wanted to hear your voice, but I had no idea that you were sick. I thought you were just ignoring me/avoiding me. I miss you and I love you, and thank you so much for your talks because they have helped me grow. You showed me how to be more accepting of myself and to strive to be my best because it is by far more important than being the best. You were so wise and so funny. I hope you're enjoying heaven. Rest in Paradise.
You were like a parent to me, I love you grandpa

For my uncle Bobby, who gave me a place to hang out when my parents fought, listened to every short story I wrote, and never told me that I couldn't do it.

I know I'll see you again

For Duncan Sadat Robertson:
I sincerely hope that you are free from the pain that caused your departure and that you are doing your best to heal and mend the hearts you have left behind. I love you and will always miss you.

Your wife ~ Erica

Willis,
I miss you. You were an amazing person thank you for knowing me.

I will not let you guys down, I know it's hard to see that with all this chaos in my life going on. Just remember everything settles. I miss you.

To my amazing cousin, Alondra, you were so sweet and caring and your life ended way before it should have. It's been a year and a half and I still miss you. Everyone still takes care of your crazy pets and garden. I hope you're resting peacefully in heaven.

RIP Jordan Thompson, love and miss you bud.

My last ally was lost when you left, Papa.

I want you to know that we all miss you deeply. And I will never forget you one bit; I will never forget your horror stories you used to tell us, you're smile you always carried even when things in your life weren't perfect. You were so strong. I still have the stuffy animal you bought me, and I promise I will keep it forever

Corey,
You are still loved, and we miss you every day. Though we have all moved on, we will always love you.

Brenda was a beautiful woman who loved life. She was a great wife, mom, sister, daughter & friend to so many people. She loved her family, her friends, and her community. The out pouring of love and all the people who showed up at her funeral showed me and others how much she was loved.

I remember my son, Neal, 27, my grandson, Devon, 7, and my grandson, Ian, 3 1/2. My beautiful boys. All murdered in 2007. Always loved.

Rest in Peace Christine Maria. She was only 24 and "died" of a broken heart. Her boyfriend passed away of heroin overdose too. Heroin took my only sibling to heaven. She is missed every day. Life doesn't seem the same without her here.

You left before I could say goodbye. Tell Whitney to sing to you in heaven.

Free Byrd. He will fly high.

I have actually lost three friends due to suicide. I didn't realize that until actually taking this study. There is so much pain in this world, however, there is a promise. Revelation 21:4 states, "And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things of the past have passed away.

Love Life

My husband and my son were lights in the darkness. They loved and laughed. They gave the best that they had to anyone that had a need. They made the world a better place.

I know my baby is safe in the arms of God, and I hope to be with my baby in Heaven one day.

I love you Paw Paw! I miss you every day, and the song you sang to me rings loud in my heart every day!! I love you and miss you!!
Rest in peace Jim.

I wish that I could write him in on my ballot for the next president. There are men like John Wayne, Augustus McCrae, the Lone Ranger and his Indian friend... but there will never be another man like him. I love you Grandpa!

To Shannie:
I'm sorry for not being closer. You were pure of heart and clearly too good for this world. I can't wait to see you again, my friend.

You were, are, and will continue to be
Beautiful
Until we meet again...

March 13, 2015 - the day the world became a little darker. I will love and miss you forever, Sister.

My most loved mother, my goodness I miss you - and need you. I can't bear the thought of never seeing your face or hearing your voice again. Very little is a joy for me, since you left. I wish you would have left me a note of love. But nothing. I can't imagine that you had no last words for me. We were so close - and "loved" each other. Why mother???

Gabe,
You where one of the few things I ever got right. You where loved by more people than you know. We miss you ever day. Many of your friends have gotten sober and may stand a fighting chance. I wish I could have taken your Bipolar depression from you, or at least gotten you to take the meds that you hated. Your life mattered. We are proud of you and we will always miss and love you. We have all tried to forgive you and hope that you at peace with yourself and life. Till we meet again.

Thank you, Daddy, for being the person I strive every day to be like.

Rest well, Isiah. I'm so sorry with how everyone, especially your family, misunderstood and mistreated you. You deserved better. I really wish I could have done a better job helping you find something to live for.

Miss you always Glen. Much love x.

Was truly blessed to have met, married and have 3 children with my husband. I'm glad he is at peace now and look forward to see him again one day.

In loving memory of a man who, despite his own struggles, was able to light up any room and bring joy to all those around him; no matter the circumstance.
Robby Joe Stewart III 1980-2013

Uncle Clarence,
I miss you and the whole family misses you, but we know that you are alright and not in any pain. Thank you for being a wonderful person and loving everyone that you met.

My best friend Joe was the kindest, most radiant and loving person that I've ever known. It was an honor to be his friend. I'll always carry him in my heart.

Tom,
> Words can't begin to describe all of you, or your essence. You have a very loving heart, a heart I saw and felt from the day we knew love was between us. You had great patience, were affectionate, easy, gentle, a great sense of humor, and always a gentleman to me, taking me under your wing. You were loved by others more than you realized. You served your country proudly for 20 years. You were an excellent master welder, and I was so proud of your skill. You showed me your life, where you grew up, told me your secrets, had many adventures with me, shared your fondest memories - memories of climbing the mountains near your Native American home, your friends, and escapades. You told good stories about your football and athletic achievements, the fun of fishing with your Dad, how he taught you skills you were proud of, shared your heritage with me and the different way of life you had with all your relatives, making me think that I was right there living it all with you. Mostly, you took me places no one has ever taken me. You opened me up with your music - and I laughed at the enigma of your hard rock to your country music. Your life was rich. We enjoyed nature together and we enjoyed our banter. We were content just to be together, even if we did nothing. I watched you grow and overcome many personal obstacles. I am proud of the man you were and became to be in every way. I found my real playmate, soulmate, partner in all things in life with you. You added to my life. You left your mark and emblazoned your soul into mine. I am honored that you chose to love me. I am and always was in awe of you. You are my heart. I am yours, forever. I miss you fiercely, love you dearly like no other, and I look forward to when we will be together again.
-Laurie

Betty Joe Winton
Preston was the greatest big brother anyone could ask for. Even though we argued constantly, we had an emotional connection that I will never find in anyone else. He was ridiculously witty, charismatic and could pretty much get anything he wanted in life just by smiling, haha. He was so caring towards his family and friends; he would do absolutely anything for his loved ones. I miss his big bear hugs and late night conversations. This experience has caused me great pain and confusion, but I'm thankful that I have become more motivated than ever to live to my fullest

potential in order to make you proud. Even though it pains me that you're gone, I'm so happy to have been graced with your brotherly love for 19 years. I love you so much, Bubba.

I'm sorry we couldn't mend our relationship

Kacey Smith

My brother Dan died. My mother died. My father died.

Have a martini for me Uncle Bob; it's five o'clock somewhere.

In Loving Memory & Honor of USMC SGT & Irving Police Officer Cesar Villanueva #Remember999

To Benjamin Donahue, you will always be the "Life of the Party."

Learn to love, forgive, and, cherish others.

I miss you more than you could ever imagine and hope I get to see you again -Love you Grandma

Tio Alfredo, we will always remember you and keep you in our hearts.

Matilde Ybarra

To my son Kevin Bosnick, life will never be the same without you! Love you forever and ever!

For my father, Trent Carmichael. An amazing father, brother, and son who was lost too soon.

Forever in my heart. I love and miss you daddy!

Rest in Peace, Timmy D. I hope you found your way up there.

You are always in my heart never to be forgotten. I love you dearly.

Mom, I wish you could see the person I've become today. I became someone who has treasured relations only treating my girlfriend the way you taught me. I've come a long way to play college hockey and to be the first in the family to graduate from college. I just wish you were here to witness everything with not only me, but with my sister and father. We love you and miss you. Gus Demetriades II was a great man, husband, friend and dog lover, and I wish that he would have lived longer to enjoy this beautiful life. He made one small mistake, which snowballed into a huge mess and the best way he knew how to stop it was suicide. For all who read this, contrary to some popular belief, my husband wasn't selfish, nor stupid for committing suicide. He thought it was the best option to end the mess he was in. Gus had a degree in History from The Citadel and was working on his MBA. He loved coins, antiques, to travel and most of all, me. He was a

fantastic human being and I will always be thankful for the time we had. Until we meet again...I loved you more.
Andi Demetriades

My grandmother was an incredible godly woman that loved her family, unconditionally. Although, as a child, I didn't understand her wisdom and grace, as I grew into being a young woman I was able to learn more about myself through her wise lessons and life experiences. She truly was and always will be a soul that one could feel from afar. Her laugh and smile was contagious, her classy ways were enviable and her love for God was undoubtedly admirable. I will always believe that Gods plan is the best plan over all others, knowing that creating my grandmother and allowing her to work in my life ultimately led to her being brought home after a short but incredible 64 years. A funeral with 500 plus people in attendance says all that there is to be said about what kind of woman she was. Love you Phoebie Jean.

My daughter Rachael Salmon was brilliant, incredibly funny, beautiful, strong-willed, and loving. At the age of 14 she lost her battle with bi-polar depression when she was overwhelmed by a pain that none of those around her could comprehend. Her death as forever changed the lives of everyone who knew her, and has inspired many to choose life. Though it has become easier to live without her as time passes, I will never stop missing her or wishing that she was still here.

Until We Meet Again, Josh Daniel, Forever 30. Sunrise 4/16/2016 - Sunset 6/26/2016. Love you FOREVER.

To my dad—I carry your heart.

Thank you for choosing me as your mum. I love you and miss you.

Thank you Aunt Karrie for being strong and showing me how much to appreciate life.

Det man förlorar på gungorna tar man igen på karusellen. Jag älskar dig mormor och farmor.

For Katidid—Who made me a better person and this world a better place.

Fly high Max, we love and miss you.

I love you dearly and will miss you forever. I know you will always be in my heart. Thank you so much for the huge impact you have put on my life.

No one can tell you who you are, but you. - Aunt Lucy

We love you, forever and always.

Love you Uncle Candy Paint, fly high

Rest in Peace to my dear uncle John-John. He passed away from Cerebral Palsy and he will always be remembered as an angel. He could not speak, barely could hear, and could partially see which I believe makes him an angel. I will forever miss you and I love you so much.

I miss you Grandma, thank you for loving me.

My husband was my soulmate in every way possible. I didn't know what real love was like before I met him. I had been through a horrid first marriage, an abusive childhood, and I didn't plan to ever marry again or trust anyone again. He changed all of that and as soon as I saw him, something in me responded to him. It was the same for him. He had never married and was worried that he would never meet "the one." So, we were there for each other as great supporters. We agreed to disagree if we could not come to an accord. We talked and communicated so well with one another. The more I knew him, the more I loved him. We treated each other with respect and most of all we had fun. We loved to play silly games and flirt over chat rooms. We found ways to use humor to help us focus on what was important in our relationship. He was a veteran, a philosopher, a composer, a humorist, my partner, my lover, and my best friend. He is just a part of me. He made my life better and reading his journals shows how much I made his life better. I will always love him. That love is just a part of me now.

From the moment Athena's daddy and I met, I we knew we wanted her. We never wanted children but when Athena came we had never been so sure of something in our lives. Reviving the sparkling memories of my husband reading the pregnancy test to the day that I hit 36 weeks to the moment she was born at full term, 39 weeks. Nine beautiful heavy months of true love. Belly rubbing, shower planning and life changing events. She had been born healthy gorgeous, soft and smelling like bliss but she was sleeping not to ever be awaken. Our beautiful sleeping beauty. Daddy's little girl. My strong warrior of a husband stood tall with me as we picked up our daughter from the cemetery. We had decided to continue living loving and growing as she would be us forever. Since November of 2013, my husband and I have witnessed phenomenal events and items shared by our daughter. We now raise Mammoth and Bush Sunflowers for Athena and those who may accompany her in Valhalla. We had been gifted a scrapbook that the heart felt nurses created for us. It was amazing. They had given us an option for pictures and we said yes. It was and is the only way we see her now. We now collect items for our local hospitals and families called Athena's Scrapbooking in memory of her. If you ever need a friend and your heart is in the right spot, just think of wide heavy sunflowers waving in the wind and maybe just maybe you will also feel her magic. If you believe in love, anything is possible.

You will always be on my mind Stephanie and Kevin

Love life!

Christopher Charleston, you will forever be missed.

I love you, Grandpa. Thank you always, for the lessons in hard work and patience you continually teach me.

Jeffrey Lance Rizzo was a beautiful person who made a positive impact on many people's lives. Especially mine and his children's. I loved him dearly before he left us and I still love him today. He is truly missed every day.
RIP 3-21-1972 to 12-23-2011

Her legacy is love.

Jeremy D. Smith

In memory of the best daddy and soulmate anyone could ever hope to have. You are in my heart always. May God keep you in his loving arms until I see you again.

Shelby Grace Ann Cole... you are my hero... forever in my heart and always on my mind.

As long as I'm living my babies you'll be. Allyson and Brooklyn Nepote 5/24/09

I know you look over me all the time Ammama. I love you.

To Papa--my grandpa, teacher, role-model, and the best tickle monster whoever was: You inspire me every day. Your humility, honesty, and drive to improve the world while uniting factions reminds me to work together with other people, to empower others, and to always strive to do the right thing. Gone, but never forgotten, and still improving the world.

Mr. Johnson and Socie you guys were far too young. Although there were many factors that lead to the decision you all made. I wish instead of hitting the bottle you would have hit me up to talk or chat. You will be missed, and thank you for your teachings.

Our son, Johnathan, through his life and his death is impacting lives. Through his struggles, he opened our eyes and hearts, to be better people. Less judgmental, more compassionate and forgiving. Since our loss of Johnathan, there are at least a dozen people who are in active recovery. People reach out to us for support by sharing our son's life. He is very much alive, within us, and by the grace of God we continue his work. In memory of our amazing Johnathan, whom we are so proud of, we are blessed to call you our son.

To Tyler, I'll live every happy moment to hope it makes it to your heart somehow.

Uncle Roy I love you so much, you were so great in our wonderful and God has received another lucky individual in heaven. When my time here is done, I'll be waiting to see you.

My grandfather took care of me until I was five years old. His last few years on this earth he only enjoyed his long walks to the neighborhood bar to talk and to think. He was taken from this world by a carless driver who hit him on the side walk.

To my father, my daddy, Daniel Melone, I love you and miss you every day, every moment. I wish you could be here to share this life with me and know your son-in-law and granddaughter, but we do our best to include you in our family even without you here. Thank you for all that you

have taught me. "My step is sure, and I know my name. I'm strong just like you prayed I'd be."
To my cousin, my brother, Joe, you were my soulmate and my best friend. I lost a part of my identity when I lost you, and I often feel like a wanderer without you. You will forever be in my heart (and next to me in the car blaring NSYNC). You were my little brother, but you taught me so much. Most importantly, you taught me to love and be loved, and I try every single day.

I love you Dad and I miss you every day.

To my Uncle Andrew, Gone way too soon. Happy Birthday. Love you always.

John expressed his love for me in our 28 years together in a way that taught me what earthly love is supposed to be. I thank God for the precious gift of my husband.

I love and miss you Patricia Brown always and forever!

Jack Greene, he was my hero and my grandpa.

Tissia Ann Reed

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