



# Disposition



- ✦ Brief overview of attachment theory and research
- ✦ Attachment, religion, and prayer
- ✦ Prayer and well-being
- ✦ The present study
- ✦ Method
- ✦ Results
- ✦ Discussion

# Brief overview of attachment theory and research

## *Defining criteria of attachment relationships*

A strong and enduring affectional bond, characterized by

- ✦ Proximity/closeness maintenance
- ✦ Safe haven
- ✦ Secure base
- ✦ AF is perceived as stronger and wiser

The attachment system potentiated gene survival in evolutionary environment(s) and is associated with a sense of "felt security"

Early interactions with attachment figure (AF) lay the foundation for "internal working models" (IWMs) of Self and Others in relationships

Attachment system is active "from the cradle to the grave", e.g., in long-term romantic relationships in adulthood (Bowlby, 1973)

# Individual differences in attachment



## Secure attachment (50-60%)

*Pos and coherent IWMs:*

Balance between attachment and exploration in infants  
(Ainsworth et al., 1978, strange situation, SS);  
linguistic coherence in discussions of attachment-related  
memories in adults (Main et al., 2003, Adult Attachment  
Interview, AAI).

# Attachment and well-being

Secure attachment is an important protective factor in development. For example, linked to absence of internalizing problems and loneliness (e.g., Sroufe et al., 2005).

In particular, secure attachment is highly underrepresented in clinical (ca 20%) versus non-clinical (ca 55%) populations (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009).

# Attachment, religion, and prayer



Why conceptualize the believer-God relationship as an attachment-like relationship?

- Proximity/closeness (e.g., prayer)
- Safe haven (e.g., religious coping, conversions)
- Secure base (e.g., God's attributes, predictions of well-being)
- Perceived as stronger and wiser (omnipotence and -science)

# The multidimensionality of prayer

1. *Meditative / contemplative prayer* – striving for closeness and unity w. God, harmony.
2. *Liturgic / ritual prayer* – reciting prayers or holy texts.
3. *Petitionary prayer* – praying for blessing and forgiveness.
4. *Material prayer* – "Lord, won't you give me a Mercedes Benz"

(see Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Spilka et al., 2003)

# Prayer and well-being

- ✦ Some forms of prayer (part petitionary prayer) are triggered by some forms of stress (cf. coping device). Thus, suffering causes prayer.
- ✦ Some forms of prayer (esp. meditative/contemplative prayer) help alleviate distress and aid well-being.
- ✦ Other forms of prayer are more akin to social referencing (re-connecting, e.g., after a busy day), presumably w less implications for well-being.
- ✦ Some forms of prayer are ritualized, mechanical and obsessive undertakings, w. negative implications for well-being.
- ✦ Distant, intercessory prayer also seems rather useless.

*Thus, complex and bi-directional relations, depending on type of prayer, type of well-being, and type of situation studied (see Hood et al., 2009).*

# The Present Study



- ✦ Prospective long study originally designed to test relations between attachment and religion, but used here to explore whether:
  - 1) dimensions of attachment predict dimensions of prayer and well-being
  - 2) dimensions of prayer are related to dimensions of well-being, and
  - 3) prospective change in well-being is predicted by dimensions of attachment and/or prayer

# Method



✦ Participants (Ps):

$N = 62$ ; 40 % males;  $M$  age = 32 years; drawn from religion/spirituality relevant groups in Uppsala, Sweden.

✦ Procedures:

At Time 1 (T1), Ps interviewed individually with the hour-long semi-structured AAI (Main et al., 2003)

3 years later, at Time 2 (T2), Ps were sent questionnaires, incl Qs about prayer and well-being; continuation-rate = 74 %.

# T1: AAI



- 1) *Probable attachment-related experiences w. "loving" (cf sensitive) caregivers in childhood (aggregated M-F score;  $r = .69$ ).*
- 2) *Current coherence/security of attachment discourse (state of mind); the extent to which interviewee provides internally consistent, free-flowing, and collaborative discourse.*

Interobserver agreements; .65-.70 (intraclass  $r$ s)

# Outcome questionnaires

## *Prayer (Only T2)*

Hood, Morris, & Watson's (1989) private prayer and meditation scale, 8 items, 5-point scale (never to daily). PCA yielded 3 dimensions: *Meditative, liturgical/petitionary, and material prayer.*

## *Well-being (Both T1 and T2)*

- 1) 7-item abbrev UCLA *Loneliness* scale (Oshagan & Allen, 1992),  $\alpha = .87$
- 2) 20-item Trait *Anxiety* Inventory (Speilberger et al., 1970),  $\alpha = .92$
- 3) 5-item abbrev *Self Esteem* scale (Rosenberg, 1979)  $\alpha = .75$
- 4) 20-item CES- *Depression* Scale (Radloff, 1977),  $\alpha = .91$

# Results



## *1) Attachment and prayer*

Attachment dimensions gen unrelated to prayer, w. 2 (/6)  
exceptions:

Parental loving predicted higher material ( $r = .32, p < .05$ )  
and liturgical/petitionary prayer ( $r = .24, p < .10$ ).

# Attachment and well-being

2) Attachment dimensions gen unrelated to well-being, w. 2 (/8) exceptions:

Parental loving and current coherence/security predicted lower loneliness ( $r_s = -.24$  and  $-.22$ , resp.,  $p_s < .10$ ).

# Prayer and well-being



3) Prayer gen unrelated to well-being, w. 1 (/12) exceptions:

Liturgical/petitionary prayer was linked to lower loneliness  
( $r = -.27, p < .05$ )

4) No support for prediction of change in loneliness (regression residual, cf T2-T1)

	Loneliness regr resid.
<b>T1 parental loving</b>	-.08
<b>T1 security/coherence</b>	-.16
<b>T2 liturgic/petitionary Prayer</b>	-.13

n.s.

# Discussion



## *Summary*

- 1) "Favorable" dimensions of attachment were prospectively linked to higher prayer and lower loneliness
- 2) Liturgical/petitionary prayer was contemporaneously linked to lower loneliness.
- 3) However, these modest associations were an exception: 21/26 correlations were n.s.
- 4) Neither attach, nor prayer predicted prospective change in loneliness

# Why such modest findings?

1) Religion is not typically a "refuge" in marked Welfare states where "stress" is low AND social agencies are omnipotent, -scient, and -present...

$r > -.50$  for governm welfare spending visavi religious participation across nations (e.g., Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004).

Sweden is an internationally extreme case in point: The strong welfare state has made it into a spiritual freezer!

# Why such modest findings?

- 2) Statistical power was limited (N=62): small-but-true relations lost to n.s.
- 3) AAI is often unrelated to self-reports of well-being in normal populations (unlike clinical vs non-clinical status): True attachment security  $\neq$  self-stated "happiness" (cf. Hesse, 2008).
- 4) Normative aspects of attachment may be more important than individual differences for understanding prayer and well-being.
- 5) Relations between prayer and well-being are likely complex and bi-directional. As we included prayer only at T2, we can't disentangle process directions.

# Additional limitations – Future directions

- ✦ Use multiple assessment points for each construct to study and understand change
- ✦ To maximize relations with religion: Study carefully defined populations facing relevant stressors in the absence of supportive, secular institutions.

## A major strength of study: *Independent constructs / assessments*



- ✦ Relied on independent assessment of attachment (AAI). Attachment self-reports would likely have yielded "stronger" results (i.e., due to shared method variance and self-report biases).
- ✦ Similarly, frequency of different kinds of prayer is not "valenced" (unlike "*intrinsic* religiosity", "*loving* God image", "*positive* religious coping"), making the interpretation of relations to well-being less ambiguous.



*Thank you for your attention!*