

Comparing Parental Attachment Development and Attachment to God

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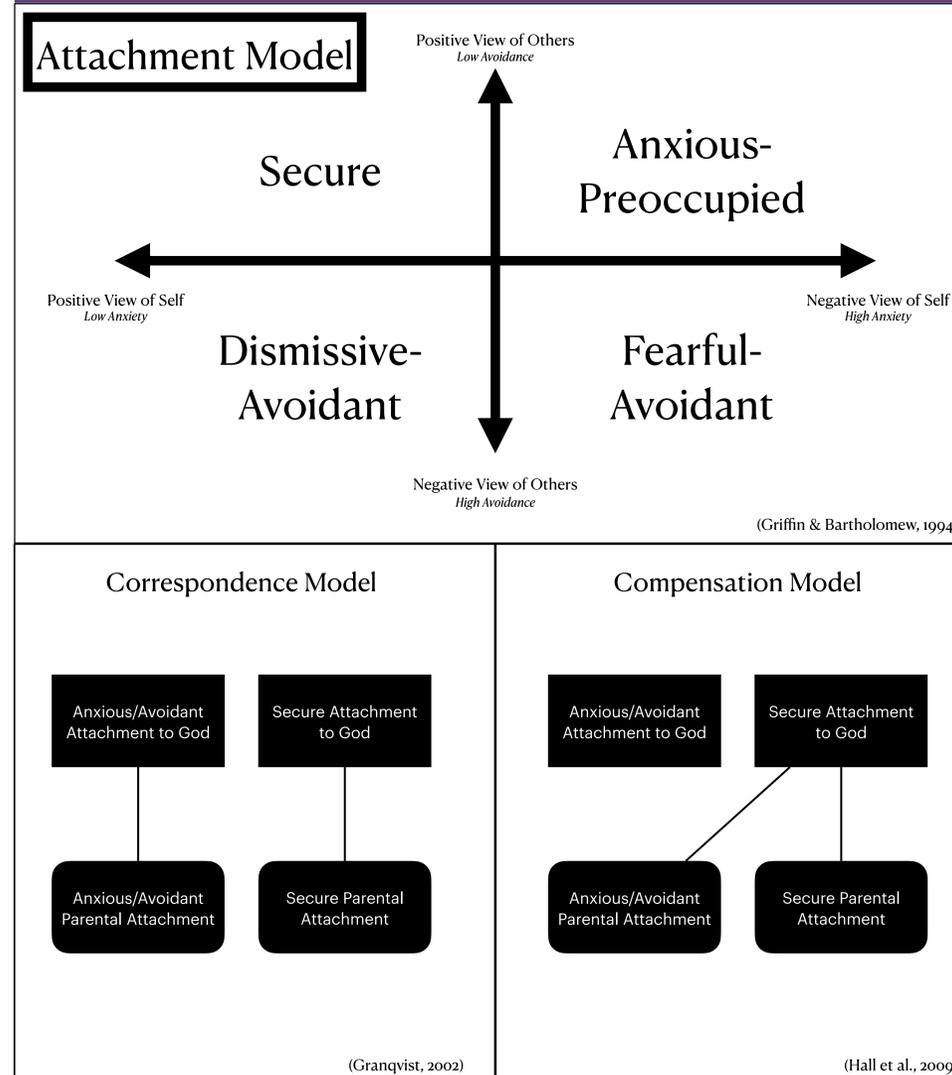
Abstract

Counselors are trained to emphasize a holistic wellness approach in working with clients. Wellness includes the eight domains of: physical, emotional, cognitive, social, financial, occupational, environmental, and spiritual (SAMHSA, 2016). Attachment theory is an approach to the therapeutic process (Bock et al., 2021) that highlights the importance of how patterns of relating to others are constructed from one's early childhood experiences (Ainsworth, 1985; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). This theoretical approach has been extended beyond human relationships to conceptualize how an individual relates or connects to God (Belavich & Pargament, 2002). Two prominent models (i.e., Correspondence and Compensation) have been applied in counseling to conjecture spiritual attachment patterns of relating to God. The purpose of this presentation is to offer a literature review of the two models and the implications for the counseling profession.

Literature Review

- Spirituality can be conceptualized as ways of relating to God (Shults & Sandage, 2006).
- Bowlby (1969) proposed early childhood attachment bonds generate patterns of connection for all future relationships.
- Spiritual attachment mirrors the patterns proposed by attachment theory with explicit application to relating to God (Ainsworth, 1985; Counted, 2016).
- Adverse childhood experiences impact a person's relational attachment to parental figures and God (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992).
- The Attachment to God Inventory identifies one's attachment bond with God (Beck & McDonald, 2004), and The God-10 measure categorizes a person's perspective of God's character (Exline et al., 2013).
- If a person perceives their parent as cruel, that person's relationship with God seems to correspond (Exline et al., 2013).
- Adults who perceived their childhood attachment figures as stronger and wiser seem to perceive God as stronger and wiser (Kimball et al., 2013).

Models



Case Study Application

Jeremy, a 20-year-old male university student, reported being raised by a Christian family in a rural community. He presented to counseling exhibiting depressive symptoms (i.e., hopelessness, worthlessness, sadness, sleep disturbance, etc.) and describing difficulty maintaining meaningful relationships. Jeremy discloses that his parents were very strict and enforced appropriate but frequent punishments. He claims to value his faith and relationship with God. Upon further exploration, he reveals that he sees God as cruel and vengeful.

Jeremy seems to fit the Correspondence Model conceptualization of spiritual attachment. His childhood attachment pattern (Fearful-Avoidant Style) with his parents corresponds with his attachment and perception of God.

Discussion

- Attachment styles are developed in early childhood, and one's attachment style exhibited with God seems to mirror their parental attachment pattern.
- The Correspondence Model seems to be the natural pattern of progression.
- The Compensation Model seems to require an intervention.
- A person's attachment to God also seems to influence their spiritual wellness which affects the other 7 factors of mental wellness.

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