
COMMUNION AND COMPLAINT: ATTACHMENT, OBJECT-RELATIONS, AND TRIANGULAR LOVE PERSPECTIVES ON RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

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The present study attempted to find empirical connections between the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love perspectives as they apply to relationship with God. Attachment to God and object-relations perspectives on God have already been extensively investigated in the literature. In this study, it was observed that the triangular love model (Sternberg, 1986) could also be applied to relationship with God. Using established instruments from each literature—attachment, object-relations, triangular love—it was observed that two factors best explained the correlations among these instruments. The first factor, “Communion,” describes the degree of intimacy, closeness, dependency, and trust in the God-relationship. The second factor, “Complaint,” describes the degree of disappointment and/or frustration involved in the God-relationship. Because these two factors—Communion and Complaint—are orthogonal, it is argued that the commingling of Communion and Complaint in the God-relationship is one feature that can imbue this relationship with an emotional dynamic similar to that observed in human love relationships.

What does it feel like to love God? If human love relationships (romantic or familial) provide any analog, then love relationships with God could be either satisfying or conflicted. For example, as in human relationships, we could struggle with intimacy issues, failures to communicate, and a lack of passion in our relationship with God. On a positive note, believers also report that loving God can be characterized by experiences

that typify the best of human love relationships: passion, excitement, trust, intimacy, and empathic companionship. In sum, it seems that believers appear, at least partially, to understand their love relationship with God via the human love experience. The Old and New Testaments also support this conclusion where relationship with God is often described as either a parent/child relationship (e.g., Isaiah 49:15, 64:8, 66:13; Hosea 11:1, 3; Matthew 6:9) or a spousal relationship (e.g., Isaiah 54:5, 62:5; Ephesians 5:25; Revelation 19:7-8). Further, in Scripture God often expresses His feelings toward His people in marital or parental images.

Over the years, personality researchers have developed a host of theoretical models and assessment strategies to describe the various experiences of love in human affairs. Gradually, given the reasoning above, psychology of religion researchers have begun to use these same models and assessment strategies to better understand how believers experience love and relationship with God. The goal of the present study was to compare three dominant love theories as they apply to relationship with God: object-relations theory, attachment theory, and the triangular love model. More specifically, it was the hope of this research to identify a psychometric structure that might link the three approaches. If links could be forged between these three theories, a framework of interpretation might be erected which could facilitate communication and comparison for research groups working with the different models. To date, most of the literature concerning love relationship with God has focused on the object-relations or attachment perspectives. The addition of the triangular love theory was a novel contribution in this study.

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Loving God: The attachment perspective

Attachment in love relationships. As most are aware, attachment theory has flourished ever since Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) pioneering work. Early on, Mary Ainsworth (1985) described the four features that describe the attachment bond between a child and caregiver. Specifically, the caregiver is considered to be a *secure base of exploration* and a *haven of safety* for the child. Consequently, the child attempts to maintain proximity with the caregiver and experiences separation anxiety when the caregiver departs or cannot be located. Ainsworth's unique contribution to attachment theory was, through her use of the Strange Situation, the identification and description of unique *attachment styles* in children. Attachment styles are particular emotional and behavior responses to separation and reunion, as well as reactions to the presence of strangers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Initially, Ainsworth described three attachment styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Later, a fourth style, disorganized, was added to this taxonomy.

Prior to late 1980s, attachment theory was largely the domain of child psychologists. During the last two decades, the attachment perspective began to be applied to adulthood love relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990). These researchers argued that as children grow they form internal models of both themselves and their attachment figures. These internal models, good or ill, were believed to describe that child's unique attachment style. For instance, if a child internalized the expectation that caregivers are unreliable and unresponsive (negative view of caregiver), the child should attempt to become self-reliant and depend less on external emotional support. This dynamic, clearly, would produce the avoidant attachment style. Conversely, if the child internalized a negative view of him or herself, the child, due to perceived intrinsic faults and failures, should begin to fear potential abandonment from the caregiver. This dynamic should produce the anxious attachment style. Adulthood attachment researchers suggested that these early internal models would persist into adulthood and manifest themselves in adult love relationships. Thus, securely attached lovers (positive views of both self and lover) would be comfortable with both intimacy and trust. Preoccupied lovers (positive view of other but negative view of self) would be desirous of intimacy, but

this communion would be tainted by anxious fears manifested in neediness, jealousy, and fears of potential abandonment. Finally, dismissing lovers (positive view of self but negative view of other) would be dismissive of intimacy and tend to be emotionally distant and compulsively self-reliant.

Since the 1980s the adulthood attachment literature has flourished (see Simpson & Rholes, 1998, for a comprehensive overview of the field). A recent advance has been the identification of the experiential structure undergirding most adulthood attachment classification schemes and assessment instruments. Specifically, Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) have noted that the four-fold attachment typology can be reduced to two underlying dimensions: *Anxiety about Abandonment* and *Avoidance of Intimacy*. These dimensions can be dichotomized to create the four attachment types: Secure (low anxiety and low avoidance), *Preoccupied* (high anxiety and low avoidance), *Dismissing* (low anxiety and high avoidance), and *Fearful* (high anxiety and high avoidance). These labels, from the adulthood attachment literature, differ somewhat from the childhood attachment literature. To prevent confusion, Table 1 correlates the attachment style labels across the research groups (adulthood vs. childhood researchers) according to the attachment dimensions of Anxiety and Avoidance. To operationalize the Anxiety and Avoidance dimensions, Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) developed the Experience in Close Relationships (ECR) scale to assess adulthood romantic attachments using this two-dimensional model.

Attachment to God. Given that relationship with God in the Judeo-Christian tradition is often described as either a parent/child relationship or a spousal relationship; it seemed natural to psychology of religion researchers that attachment theory could provide a means for describing relationship with God. Initially, Kirkpatrick (1999) made a strong theoretical case that believers do experience relationship with God as an attachment bond. Kirkpatrick also did early work examining the associations between adulthood and parental attachment styles with religiosity variables (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, 1992). Others have also examined how attachment styles relate to spirituality (Granqvist, 1998; TenElshof & Furrow, 2000).

Even more recently, attachment with God has been assessed directly and compared to other attachment measures or measures of religiosity (Beck &

TABLE 1
Correspondence of Attachment Style Labels According to Attachment Dimension

Attachment Dimension		Attachment Style Labels	
Anxiety about Abandonment	Avoidance of Intimacy	Childhood Literature (Parent/Child Bond)	Adulthood Literature (Adult Romance)
Low	Low	Secure	Secure
High	Low	Anxious	Preoccupied
Low	High	Avoidant	Dismissing
High	High	Disorganized	Fearful

McDonald, 2004; McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norworthy, 2005; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). This research has begun to illuminate, from the attachment perspective, how loving God is experienced by believers. An examination of the content of Beck and McDonald’s (2004) *Attachment to God Inventory* (AGI) highlights the diversity of experiences involved in loving God. For example, persons scoring high on the Anxiety about Abandonment subscale of the AGI report that their love relationship with God is characterized, at times, by: jealousy, preoccupation/worry, angry protest/resentment, concerns over one’s lovability, and fears of potential abandonment. Alternatively, persons scoring high on the Avoidance of Intimacy subscale of the AGI report that their love relationship with God is hampered, at times, by: a reluctance to communicate, avoidance of emotionality, and compulsive self-reliance. However, those scoring low on the AGI Anxiety and Avoidance subscales (i.e., the securely attached), report that their love relationships with God are relatively free from the angst captured by the AGI scales.

To summarize, the attachment perspective on loving God suggests that relationship with God can be as complicated and conflicted as human romances (or parent/child relationships). The research now clearly suggests that a significant portion of the religious population can experience jealousy and resentment with God. Many others struggle with being fully intimate with God or dependent upon God. Of course, many believers do not report such experiences in their relationship with God. Regardless, the attachment to God literature has illuminated the potentially stormy and chaotic relationships many experience with God. As with human love, loving God can be blissful and fulfilling; but it

appears, at times, that loving God can also be frustrating and emotionally draining.

Loving God: The object-relations perspective

Object-relations theory. Object-relations theory, a close conceptual cousin to attachment theory, flows out of the psychodynamic tradition. Selected theoreticians in this area include: D.W. Winnicott, Melanie Klein, Otto Kernberg, and Henry Kohut. According to object-relations theory, as the infant begins to explore his or her world, the infant encounters various “objects,” including his or her own body. Obviously, the most influential “objects” in the child’s world are the presence and activity of caregivers. Consequently, as cognitive and emotional development proceeds, the child creates “object representations.” Object representations are internal schemas that aid the child in making their unfolding world explicable. Further, the child begins to find definition as a relational being, developing prototypes for “object relations.” These object-relation schemas sketch out how relationships with significant others, and people in general, are to be managed and negotiated. This process parallels the attachment formation of “internal working models” of both self and other. As noted above, the child can form either positive or negative representations of self-as-object or other-as-object. Consequently, should the child experience fairly consistent and supportive relationships with caregivers; the child should internalize generally healthy and stable internal representations of self and relationships in general. However, should trauma intervene or should caretaking be inconsistent, emotionally disconnected, or abusive the child may internalize generally negative representations of self-as-object (e.g., “I am a bad child.”) or other-as-object (e.g., “Mommy

doesn't love me."). These schemas are often tacit and difficult to articulate, but they do tend to find narrative expression in early childhood memories that evoke strong feelings. These primal scenes of childhood structure how the child, and the eventual adult, understands both individual personhood and relationships with others.

God-as-object. When growing within a religious community, a child will encounter another "object" fairly quickly and consistently: God. Consequently, during development the child forms internal representations of both God (object representation) and individual relationship with God (object relation). However, since God is not very scrutable to the young child, the object-representation schema of God is formed, initially, though relationship with others: This implies that God-representations are often built atop the preexisting internal working models of Self and Caregiver. However, representations of God are also formed by spiritual communities and private moments of transcendent or mystical experience.

A great deal of attention has been devoted to *God-representation* (God imagery) and its development, but more recent work has begun to study *God-relations* from the object-relations perspective (Hall, Brokaw, Edwards, & Pike, 1998; Hill & Hall, 2002). Recently, Hall and Edwards (1996, 2002) have developed the *Spiritual Assessment Inventory* (SAI), an instrument that assesses relationship with God from an object-relations perspective. Again, the emphasis in the SAI is less about *object-representation* than about *object-relations*: how one behaves in relationship with God. For example, the Realistic Acceptance subscale of the SAI assesses how a person handles disappointment with God. Low scores on the Realistic Acceptance subscale indicate that when a person becomes disappointed or frustrated with God they tend to blame themselves or want to "give up" on the relationship. Obviously, this reflects a fairly immature relational style. In short, as can be seen in this example, the SAI moves past God-representation and attempts to assess how individuals experience and behave within their relationship with God.

Loving God: The triangular love perspective

The triangular love theory. A third influential love theory, Sternberg's (1986, 1988) triangular love

theory, has yet to be exploited by psychology of religion researchers to assess love relationships with God. Sternberg proposes that love relationships can be understood as a combination of three different components: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. Intimacy refers to the feelings of closeness and connectedness in the relationship. Passion can involve physical and sexual attraction, but it also encompasses the degree of excitement and idealization in the relationship. Finally, decision/commitment involves both the short-term choice to be involved in the love relationship and the long-term commitment involved in maintaining the relationship over the long haul.

Metaphorically, Sternberg locates each component—intimacy (I), passion (P), decision/commitment (D)—at the vertices of a triangle. Consequently, a love relationship can be described, in this geometric metaphor, as a "location" on the "love triangle" indicating both the amount and mixture of the various love components. For example, *consummate love* involves a mixture of high passion, intimacy, and passion. A *liking* relationship occurs when there is high intimacy but low mixtures of passion and decision/commitment. *Infatuated* love involves high passion but low levels of intimacy and commitment. Sternberg goes on to describe other love types such as: *empty* (high D, low I and P), *fatuous* (high P and D, low I), *romantic* (high I and P, low D), *companionate* (high D and I, low P), and *non-love* (low I, P, and D).

Since the initial theoretical proposal of the triangular love theory, Sternberg (1997) constructed the *Sternberg Triangular Love Scale* (TLS). The TLS is comprised of three subscales corresponding to the intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment dimensions. Each subscale has 12 items. In the TLS, each item contains a blank to be filled in with the name of the targeted romantic/spousal partner.

The triangular love theory and God. What is intriguing about the TLS is that for 24 of its 36 items, "God" can be inserted into the blank space reserved for the romantic/spousal partner without loss of interpretability. See Table 2 for this list of items. In addition, most of the 12 remaining items of the TLS not found in Table 1 can be easily modified to fit the God love relationship.

This observation concerning the TLS provides good face theoretic evidence that the love experience with God is often understood, described, and experienced as a human love relationship. A

TABLE 2

Items from Triangular Love Scale (TLS; Sternberg, 1997) used to create TLS-God Version

Triangular Love Scale Items for God Version
<p><u>Intimacy Items:</u></p> <p>I have a warm and comfortable relationship with ____.</p> <p>I experience intimate communication with ____.</p> <p>I received considerable emotional support from ____.</p> <p>I am able to count on ____ in times of need.</p> <p>I value ____ greatly in my life.</p> <p>I am willing to share myself and my possessions with ____.</p> <p>I experience great happiness with ____.</p> <p>I feel emotionally close to ____.</p>
<p><u>Passion Items:</u></p> <p>I cannot imagine another person making me as happy as ____ does.</p> <p>There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with ____.</p> <p>I cannot imagine life without ____.</p> <p>I adore ____.</p> <p>I find myself thinking about ____ frequently during the day.</p>
<p><u>Decision/Commitment Items:</u></p> <p>I expect my love for ____ to last for the rest of my life.</p> <p>I can't imagine ending my relationship with ____.</p> <p>I view my relationship with ____ as permanent.</p> <p>I would stay with ____ through the most difficult times.</p> <p>I view my commitment to ____ as a matter of principle.</p> <p>I am certain of my love for ____.</p> <p>I have decided that I love ____.</p> <p>I am committed to maintaining my relationship with ____.</p> <p>I view my relationship with ____ as, in part, a thought-out decision.</p> <p>I could not let anything get in the way of my commitment to ____.</p> <p>I have confidence in the stability of my relationship with ____.</p>

simple reading of Table 2 clearly demonstrates that most of the love descriptions used for human love relationships find easy application and extension to God. That is, the triangular love dimensions of intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment also appear to describe love experiences with God. However, despite the clear theoretical applicability of the triangular love model to relationship with God, little work has been done with this model.

Comparing the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love models

As the preceding review has suggested, the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love theories provide conceptually rich models that can describe the love relationship with God. Overall, despite their theoretical differences, each theory is attempting to describe a relationship which is captured by the simple declarative sentence uttered by millions of believers

across the millennia: "I love God." Clearly, as our review of literature suggests, this simple statement is emotionally rich and variable. The love experience with God can be, at times, anxious, dismissive, jealous, infatuated, empty, unstable, or disappointed. Yet, it can also be, at times, exciting, intimate, warm, and committed. In short, loving God is an extraordinarily complex love experience.

Since the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love theories, despite their conceptual and operational differences, are describing the same love relationship; there is reason to believe that these theories could have structural linkages. Should correlations be discovered between these theories, researchers working with different conceptual models could more easily synthesize the God relationship literature to better communicate conceptual innovations in a given area. Consequently, the goal of the current study was to use commonly used assessment instruments from the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love theories to identify structural (factor analytic) connections between the models. It was hoped that any observed connections would, in the future, be exploited by researchers to deepen a collective understanding of relationship with God.

METHODS

Participants and procedure

Participants were 225 undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses at Abilene Christian University. Fifty-four percent of the sample was female. The mean age of the participants was 19.05 ($SD = 1.59$). The sample was largely Caucasian (85.3%) with smaller percentages of African American (8.3%) and Hispanic (4.7%) students. The religious affiliation breakdown was: 59% Church of Christ, 13% Baptist, 10% Non-denominational, 5% Catholic, and 2% Methodist. The sample was highly religious: When asked to indicate how many years they had been involved with a church, the mean response was 16.20 years.

Participants completed measures (described below) assessing relationship with God from the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love theories.

Assessment instruments

Attachment to God Inventory. The *Attachment to God Inventory* (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) is a 28-item scale based on the *Experiences in*

Close Relationships Scale, developed by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998). It contains 14 items on the Anxiety about Abandonment subscale (Cronbach alpha of .87 with the current sample), and 14 items on the Avoidance of Intimacy subscale (Cronbach alpha of .88). Examples of the Anxiety items are: "I often worry about whether God is pleased with me", and "I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong." Examples of the Avoidance items are: "I prefer not to depend too much on God", and "I just don't feel a deep need to be close to God."

Spiritual Assessment Inventory. The *Spiritual Assessment Inventory* (SAI; Hall & Edwards, 1996, 2002) is a 54-item self-report scale that assesses relationship with God from an object-relations perspective. The four subscales used from the SAI in this study were: the Disappointment, Instability, Awareness, and Realistic Acceptance subscales. The Disappointment subscale assesses disappointment and/or frustration with God (e.g., "There are times when I feel disappointed with God"). The Instability subscale assesses the degree of anxiety and fear of abandonment/rejection involved in a person's relationship with God (e.g., "I worry that I will be left out of God's plans"). The Awareness subscale assesses awareness of God's presence and communication (e.g., "God's presence feels very real to me"). Finally, the Realistic Acceptance subscale assesses an individual's capacity to work through difficult experiences with God (e.g., "When I feel disappointed with God 'I still desire to put effort into our relationship'"). The Disappointment, Instability, Awareness, and Realistic Acceptance subscales generated, in this sample, Cronbach alpha coefficients of .82, .76, .87, and .70 respectively.

Triangular Love Scale-God Version. Sternberg's *Triangular Love Scale* (TLS; Sternberg, 1997) is a 36-item self-report scale assessing the triangular love dimensions of passion, intimacy, and decision/commitment. Each item of the TLS has a blank where the romantic partner's name is to be inserted (e.g., "I adore _____"). As noted earlier and shown in Table 1; 24 of the TLS items can be used, without modification, when God is written in as the targeted partner (e.g., "I adore God."). Thus, the items in Table 2 were used to create the *Triangular Love Scale-God Version* (TLS-GV). As mentioned earlier, the remaining 12 items of the TLS (those not found in Table 2) could easily have been altered to fit the relationship with God. (For example, the item

TABLE 3

Zero-order correlations between Attachment to God Inventory, Spiritual Assessment Inventory, and Triangular Love Scale-God Version

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. AGI-Anxiety	.23*	-.14	-.10	.66**	.52**	-.24**	-.17	-.16
2. AGI-Avoidance		-.64**	-.51**	.20*	.23**	-.69**	-.74**	-.61
3. SAI-Awareness			.56**	.02	-.09	.70**	.74**	.60**
4. SAI-Realistic Acceptance				-.12	-.25**	.61**	.57**	.60**
5. SAI-Instability					.49**	-.21*	-.11	-.13
6. SAI-Disappointment						-.26**	-.18*	-.26**
7. TLS-GV-Intimacy							.85**	.86**
8. TLS-GV-Passion								-.79**
9. TLS-GV-Commitment								

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

Note: AGI = Attachment to God Inventory; SAI = Spiritual Assessment Inventory; TLS-GV = Triangular Love Scale-God Version

“Just seeing _____ excites me”, could be rephrased as either “Worshiping God excites me” or “Being with God excites me”.) However, such changes could have introduced thematic material and shades of meaning that Sternberg would not have included in this scale’s content. That is, introducing reworked items might have harmed the theoretical integrity of the scale. So, as a conservative procedure and rather than redrafting Sternberg’s items, a simple subset of his items was used. The TLS-GV Passion, Intimacy, and Decision/Commitment subscales generated alpha coefficients of .88, .87, and .91 respectively.

RESULTS

The zero-order correlations between all measures are presented in Table 3. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a fair degree of redundancy among the measures. This observation suggests that, theoretical frameworks aside, the attachment, object-relations, and triangular love theories may share structural linkages. Such redundancy bodes well for integrative attempts to synthesize and integrate the diverse literature regarding relationship with God.

Given the shared variance observed in Table 3, an exploratory principal components analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted on all the measures.

Based upon a scree test, two factors were deemed to best fit the data. Overall, these two factors were an excellent fit for the data set, explaining 73.07% of the variance in Table 3. The factor loadings and factor eigenvalues are presented in Table 4.

Based upon the pattern of loadings in Table 4, the first factor was labeled “Communion.” The Communion factor was indicated by high scores on all three Triangular Love subscales, mixing to create what Sternberg labels “consummate love” for God (high Intimacy, Passion, and Decision/Commitment). Further, Communion was indicated by the SAI subscales of Awareness and Realistic Acceptance. Finally, Communion was negatively indicated by the AGI-Avoidance of Intimacy subscale. All told, this pattern of indicators suggests that the factor label of Communion was apt. That is, high scores on the Communion factor were associated with a strong sense of God’s presence in one’s life. Further, this presence was experienced as trusting and intimate. In many ways, then, the Communion factor appears represent the goal state or ideal of what relationship would God should “feel” like: a constant, warm, trusting, and intimate “communion.”

Referring back to Table 4, the second factor was labeled “Complaint.” The Complaint factor

TABLE 4

Principal components with Varimax rotation statistics for Attachment to God Inventory (AGI), Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI), and Triangular Love Scale-God Version (TLS-GV)

Variables:	Factor 1 "Communion"	Factor 2 "Complaint"
TLS-GV-Passion	.92	-.07
TLS-GV-Intimacy	.91	.18
TLS-GV-Commitment	.88	-.11
SAI-Awareness	.84	.01
AGI-Avoidance	-.80	.20
SAI-Realistic Acceptance	.73	.10
SAI-Instability	-.05	.87
AGI-Anxiety	.10	.86
SAI-Disappointment	-.16	.78
Factor eigenvalues:	4.65	1.93
% of variance:	51.67%	21.40%

was positively indicated by SAI-Instability, SAI-Disappointment, and AGI-Anxiety about Abandonment. The factor label Complaint was selected because this pattern of indicators suggested that high scores on this factor were associated with some sort of dissatisfaction with God. This dissatisfaction could be about God's lack of attention, love, involvement, promise-keeping, or care. This experience in the Judeo-Christian tradition seems best captured, poetically speaking, in the Old Testament "complaint psalms" where the Psalmist essentially "complains" about experiences similar to those captured in the SAI and AGI subscales. For example, the most famous complaint psalm, Psalm 22, begins with these words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?"

A reading of the items comprising the SAI-Instability, SAI-Disappointment, and AGI-Anxiety about Abandonment subscales should reveal that these scales nicely capture the complaint of the Psalmist in Psalm 22. Thus, the factor label—Complaint—seemed psychometrically, experientially, and theologically appropriate.

DISCUSSION

The observations of this study suggest one path—there are undoubtedly many others—to integrate various theoretical perspectives concerning relationship with God. Specifically, each paradigm examined in this study assessed one or two facets observed in relationship with God, Communion and Complaint. Communion, the facet assessed by all three paradigms, reflects the degree to which the believer reports having a consistent, close, warm, and intimate relationship with God. Consequently, assessment instruments that attempt to capture these themes can be grouped, loosely, as Communion indices. Conversely, the Complaint dimension (only assessed by the attachment and object-relations instruments in this study) reflects themes of dissatisfaction and disappointment with God. Again, assessment instruments that attempt to capture these or related themes of complaint, as witnessed in the complaint Psalms of the Old Testament, can be loosely grouped as Complaint indices. These observations suggest that there may be a framework, Communion and Complaint, by which researchers working with different theoretical models might communicate some of their findings. This framework might allow researchers working with different

instruments and literatures to more fully view each other as partners in a common enterprise.

However, the observations of the present study solely pertain to psychometric relationships. The Communion and Complaint dimensions are, at present, atheoretical. Consequently, attachment, object-relations, and triangular love theories must not be abandoned. Only deep theories provide both explanatory structure and a repository of rich research questions. Thus, the goal of the present study is not to replace prior theories with a “meta-theory,” flattening rich literatures into a uniform, but theoretically barren, landscape. Rather, the goal of this study was to provide an empirically derived vocabulary through which researchers and clinicians, versed in very different theoretical paradigms, can communicate and collaborate.

For example, where does Complaint come from? Relational immaturity? Negative view of self? From primal experiences with God or from current experiences with God? Or some other factor? Theories will differ in how they frame the etiology of Complaint. Further, theories will differ in the degree to which they diagnose Complaint as “healthy” versus “pathological.” That is, is Complaint a sign of spiritual immaturity? Clearly, as operationalized in the current study, Complaint from the attachment and object-relations perspectives is a sign of relational dysfunction or immaturity: But are these the only perspectives on Complaint? Can Complaint have a mature facet as well? Wouldn’t a total lack of Complaint in relationship with God indicate a kind of Pollyannaism that might also be a symptom of relational immaturity? The resolution to these questions is currently an outstanding research problem.

Limitations

To date, little work has been done on the stability of the God relationship over time. For example, does one’s attachment style with God change over time? There is some evidence that older believers are more securely attached than college-age believers (Beck & McDonald, 2004). This seems reasonable. As in a marriage, where a couple grows more stable in their relationship over time, we might see a similar dynamic in play during faith development. Beyond simple longitudinal work across the lifespan, there is also a need to determine the stability of the God relationship across days, weeks, and months. Intimacy with God (feeling “close” to God) might not be a

stable experience but, rather, may ebb and flow. Worship experiences and spiritual practices might pull us toward God. Neglect of worship experiences and spiritual practices might lead to a cooling of the relationship. Life events, good or ill, might also affect relationship with God. In short, research such as the current study involves only taking a simple “snapshot” of the God relationship. Future research is needed to fully capture the complexity of the God relationship as it grows and changes over time.

Future work also needs to be conducted on the construct validity of the Triangular Love Scale-God Version. The use of the TLS-God Version in this study was justified on face theoretic grounds (i.e., God could be used as the target of the items in Table 2). Future research will need to investigate the psychometric properties if the TLS-God Version if it is to be used extensively in future research. The performance of the TLS-God Version, in this study, suggests that scoring the separate decision, intimacy, and passion subscales would not be justified: Those subscales collapsed into the Communion factor. Does this mean that a triangular love structure is not applicable to the God relationship? Only future research with the triangular model will be able to address questions such as this.

“I love God.”

So, what does it feel like to love God? The results of the current study suggest that one dynamic involved in relationship with God might be expressed as interplay between Communion and Complaint. Given that these dimensions are orthogonal, these factors do not represent polar opposites where the love relationship with God simply oscillates between periods of Communion and periods of Complaint. Rather, Communion and Complaint can *coexist*, intermingling to create a rich tapestry of experiences. That is, Complaint can occur in the presence of Communion. How might this happen? Simply put, the Complaint is taken directly to God and not voiced elsewhere. This dynamic has always characterized the best in human love relationships. I don’t take my dissatisfactions with my spouse to a co-worker or friend. I, ideally, take them directly to my spouse: I express my complaints (petty, neurotic, or legitimate) in the relational space of trusting, intimate communion. Only then can the relationship acquire depth, resiliency, and maturity. This dynamic—Complaint coexisting with Communion—is also reflected in the

Old Testament complaint psalms. Structurally, although these psalms begin with Complaint, they almost always end with Communion. For example, although Psalm 22 begins with the Complaint, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"; we find the following words toward the end of the Psalm: "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him!" Clearly, as a piece of qualitative datum, the Psalmist here demonstrates how Complaint can coexist with Communion. Thus, the observations of this study suggest that an interplay of Communion and Complaint creates one of the many dynamics that makes the love experience with God the rich adventure so many people report it to be.

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