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According to Attachment Theory, emotional bonds with others are critical for survival. This theory also provides a framework for understanding individual difference in response styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) to emotional events and perceived threats from the environment. These differing styles of attachment are formed in infancy as a synergistic response between the infant and their caregiver that aid in the survival of the offspring, as well as their psychological well-being. Furthermore, beyond just survival needs, research indicates that these early-formed attachment styles provide the working model for interpersonal relationships formed later in life as well, including romantic relationships.

The evolutionary basis of the attachment system as a means of creating inter-dependency between individuals mirrors certain aspects of the proposed evolution of religion as a secure social system through which group cohesion may develop. For example, a handful of studies support the notion that God may serve as an attachment figure for some individuals, linking the evolutionary development of the attachment system to the development of religious attachment. While the notion of attachment to God has been researched previously through behavioral measures, more direct measures of brain responses can provide insight into the early, automatic processes of attention allocation when the threat of separation from God is made salient. By tapping into the early attention allocation processes via measurements of brain electrical activity, for example, we can gain a better understanding of immediate, automatic perceptions of God as a potential attachment figure.

In the present study, moderately to highly religious individuals listened to attachment-related sentences where God was centered as the attachment figure. The sentences either portrayed God as accepting (e.g., "When I am having a difficult time, God is supportive.") or as dismissive (e.g., "When I am having a difficult time, God is absent."). At the same time, recordings of brain electrical activity tracked attention allocation to the target words (i.e., "supportive" or "absent"). A significant difference was observed in a specific electrical brain response (the late positive potential waveform) in moderately to highly religious subjects, but only if they were currently in a romantic relationship. The pattern of findings suggest that individuals with an anxious attachment style allocate more attention to threatening statements about their God compared to those with secure or avoidant attachment styles. Such findings offer supporting evidence for the correspondence model of religious attachment to God, such that the attachment style that one forms in infancy persists as the model by which we attach to significant others as well as to God. The finding that this occurred only for individuals currently engaged in a romantic relationship provides further support for this conclusion, as past research has shown that engaging in a romantic relationship primes the salience of attachment-related scenarios, especially for anxious individuals.