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Between God and self: exploring the attachment to God and authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies of South African Christian youths

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the relationship between attachment to God (AG) and authenticity/inauthenticity among Christian youths in relation to a range of socio-demographic variables. Cross-sectional data were collected from 100 South African Christian youths using measures of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity. The correlation results reveal that feelings of insecurity in terms of having anxiety in a relationship with God is positively related to self-alienation (feeling out of touch with oneself) and accepting external influences (conforming to the standards and expectations of others), but negatively correlated to authentic living (being in tune with one's self). Feelings of insecurity in terms of avoidant God-attachment was also related to self-alienation. In addition, demographic differences were observed for gender and church denomination. These results suggest that insecurity with God may either be linked to feelings of authenticity or self-estrangement among Christian youths and have broad implications, both for clinical usage and further cross-cultural research.

Introduction

Attachment tendencies[1] and their connection to religion and self-authenticity have been an important topic of discussion in social psychology and psychology of religion (cf. Counted, 2016b, 2016c; Davis, 2010; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 1994, 1998, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Attachment and authenticity may be the two greatest psychosocial and/or spiritual needs in terms of experiencing and integrating meaning in life through developing a sense of connectedness with self, others, or through connection to a power greater than one's self – whether it be to a primary care-giver or a divine entity. This notion is consistent with the ideas of Neufeld and Mate (2006) who stressed the importance of attachment as a developmental process that empowers one to exist authentically through experiences with parents in terms of being one's self while functioning based on the programming of early childhood years. The needs for attachment and authenticity may as well explain Frankl's (1946/2006) concern for ultimate

meaning since both constructs aid in integrating and forging meaning in life through proximity to forces greater than one's self and desiring the need to stay true to self.

This paper informs important theoretical concerns about the relationship between attachment to God (AG) and authenticity, arguing that the need for attachment may relate to the extent to which people stay true to themselves and search for meaning in life. Data were collected from Christian youths ($n = 100$) in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa, with the aim of addressing the research question: "What is the nature of the relationship between the God-attachment and authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies, and how are these experiences manifested in their lives in relation to gender, church denomination, religious background, and ethnicity/race?"

Attachment tendencies and AG

Bowlby (1979) and Rizzuto (1979) describe the development of attachment as an early contact relationship with a caregiver. This relationship is formed through "bodily sensations, behavioral impulses, emotional surges, and perceptions" (cf. Badenoch, 2008, p. 4), making the receiver of care draw close to their attachment figure at an emotional, physiological, relational, largely nonverbal, or usually implicit level (Noffke & Hall, 2007). Bowlby (1969) acknowledges that the attachment between a person and their attachment figure may last for a long period of time, depending on the needs that can be met by the attachment figure in relation to the self and its environment. The early contact experience with a caregiver, usually a parent, often develops into representations of the self, or what Bowlby calls "internal working models". This representation may continue between a person and their attachment figures based on the nature of their internal working models which influence the character of future social relationship and expectations from encounters with attachment surrogates.

Drawing from the post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory on religion (cf. Freud, 1939, 1961), Rizzuto (1979) describes perceptions of God in terms of how a child perceives a parent through images of affection and representations of proximity that enhance the believer's emotional security. Rizzuto reasons that God representations enable the believer to perceive the divine as a secure base for exploring the world of danger and a safe haven to turn to in times of danger. This post-Freudian idea of relational spirituality was further amplified in the study of Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) who reasoned that religion is a belief in a divine entity who is represented as a substitute attachment figure playing a unique role as a surrogate caregiver in place of a parent. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) further strengthened this claim in their recent review, arguing that religious behaviour can be understood as an attachment process, on the basis that the bond of affection that exists between a believer and the divine meets the criteria of an attachment bond. Hence, the feelings of love experienced in the context of a relationship with the Christian God, for example, would resemble the prototype of parental attachment (Counted, 2016b; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). AG is an important subject central to the belief in most monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity, where believers prioritise the importance of seeking a personal relationship with God. In the Christian religion, the personal relationship component with God seems to be a pattern of attachment-religion connection and reiterates "the centrality of the emotion of love in people's perceived relationships with God and in religious belief systems more generally" (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016,

p. 918). This attachment-religion tenet in Christianity has an impact in how Christians in general evaluate and experience their faith in terms of proximity and devotion to God. Since our study is with Christian participants, we reason that a relationship with an abstract yet anthropomorphised God may as well satisfy the attachment criteria since God is often perceived and theologised in Christianity as almighty, a haven of safety, a secure base, a target for closeness, or a source of comfort in moments of despair.

The interaction between an attachment figure and an individual is a result of the emergence of an unconscious psychological structure known as the internal working model which regulates the pattern of attachment used in relationships. This can be in the form of anxious, avoidant, or disorganised attachment style (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990). When the attachment system is activated in a relationship with the divine, God then functions as an attachment surrogate. However, frequent repetition of this attachment interaction results in the manifestation of specific affective attitudes towards God, ranging from establishing a secure attachment with God, where the individual does not avoid God nor have an anxiety with God, to an insecure attachment experience, where individuals either avoid God, become anxious about their relationship with God, or manifest both a fearful and dismissing disorganised attitude towards the divine. These are the different attachment tendencies that are adopted in a relationship with attachment figures which are sometimes used to cope with the harsh realities of attachment.

Authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies

In contrast, authenticity is the unhindered operation of one's self-experiences in relation to one's feelings, thoughts, and/or behaviours (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). This understanding of self via authenticity theory is grounded in a modern/essentialist view of the self (Vitz & Felch, 2006) that reflects such concepts as *core self* (Rogers, 1961; Stern, 1985), *true self* (Winnicott, 1965), *real self* (Masterson, 1985, 1988, 2005), *self-actualisation* (Maslow, 1968), *self-determination* (Deci & Ryan, 1985), *self-made man* (Vitz, 2006), *hyphenated self* (Jeroncic, 2008), *unified ego* (Lacan, 2001), *weak-self integration* (Moltmann, 1976), and *renaissance man* (Vitz, 2006). Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, and Joseph (2008) have discussed authenticity as the congruity between three inter-related self-components: a person's primary experience, symbolised awareness, and outward behaviour/communication. They came to this conclusion based on Barrett-Lennard's (1998) earlier conceptualisation of authenticity as the quality of expressing a congruity between a person's primary experience, symbolised awareness, and outward behavioural expressions which facilitate authenticity at a particular state (Davis, 2010; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008). Authenticity/inauthenticity is demonstrated by the nature of congruence between different self-experiences in relation to the phenomenal field of the individual that embodies the totality of conscious and unconscious experience, and the human capacity for subception which perceives incoming sensations at a level below conscious awareness (Wood et al., 2008).

A person's primary experience aligns with their *self-alienation* tendency, which is the profound mismatch or congruence between what is called conscious awareness and actual experience (Wood et al., 2008). Primary experience is a dimension of authenticity that suggests the ability to distance oneself from an emotional activity to discover one's

true self. Wood et al. (2008, p. 386) reason that "perfect congruence between these aspects of experience is never possible" and therefore the extent to which a person can understand themselves in actual emotional and psychological traumas or states, compose this first aspect of authenticity. Wood et al. measured this primary experience using the self-alienation dimension in their Authenticity Scale (AS) instrument, as a way of measuring the subjective experience of feeling out of touch with oneself. On the other hand, symbolised awareness is measured using the *authentic living* dimension, suggesting emotions that are consistent with one's physiological states, beliefs, and cognitions. This is an authenticity tendency that is represented in the consistency between one's conscious awareness and actual behaviour, revealing how people are true to themselves in accordance with their values and beliefs (Davis, 2010; Wood et al., 2008). The third dimension of authenticity is the outward behaviour and communication, suggesting the extent to which one can accept the influence of others or how a person's belief system conforms to the expectations of others. Wood et al.'s AS measures this dimension using the *Accepting External Influences* variable. Both Schmid (2005) and Wood et al. (2008) contend that people's outward behaviours impact the first two dimensions of authenticity, that is, self-alienation and authentic living, on the basis that humans are largely influenced by their environment. Authenticity/inauthenticity reflect a coherent, durable, autonomous, rational, unique-to-the-person, masterful, agentic self that is embodied in its biological and environmental configurations (cf. Counted, 2016a; Vitz, 2006; Vitz & Felch, 2006).

Attachment and authenticity: theory and research

Recent studies show that attachment relations with caregivers are outlets through which individuals form their authentic self-behaviours, cultivate their identity, and regulate their social relationships (Counted, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Davis, 2010; Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010). In situations where the individual is struggling to cope with their attachment difficulties and insecurities due to experiences of abandonment, emotional betrayal, separation from an attachment figure, or due to unavailability or inaccessibility of a relational partner, their self-actualisation and authenticity can come under attack, having a huge impact in the way they see themselves when dealing with others and the world around them. Counted (2016a, 2016d) studied how this breakdown can lead to a *weak*-self integration and an identity crisis, making the self split into different fragmented pieces, as a coping mechanism to maintain authenticity and regulate negative attachment experiences. Barry, Nelson, Davarya, and Urry (2010) argue that the way individuals are drawn to attachment figures at a relational level is the key outlet for the cultivation and activation of their authenticity.

In addition, several studies have examined the connection between authenticity and attachment relationships in terms of experiencing one's real self with a relational partner. Harter and colleagues (1997) in their study with a community sample ($n = 3282$) found that participants with highest levels of perceived validation-support from their romantic partners equally had higher tendencies of authenticself-behaviour. In examining the associations between daily self-esteem, psychological-need satisfaction, and felt authenticity, Heppner, Leong, and Chiao (2008) found significant evidence that links the daily self-esteem of college students ($n = 116$) based on psychological need of satisfaction and authenticity. Lopez and Rice (2006) did a similar study that predicted about 44% variance

in relationship satisfaction based on several determinants which included two attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety), intimate risk taking, and gender differences. Barry, Seager, and Brown (2015) saw gender differences as a determinant in the association between adult relationship satisfaction and caregiver–child attachment styles. In their study, female participants had stronger avoidant attachment compared to males. Results also reveal that effect of attachment on adult relationships was weaker for females than males in anxious attachment (Barry et al., 2015). Gender differences was observed as an important factor in a study conducted by Munson, McMahon, and Spieker (2001) who found that insecure attachments may lead to externalising self behaviour in females than males.

Other demographic-related factors such as ethnicity and religious identity may also be considered as possible determinants of attachment and authenticity tendencies. In a study on racial differences on organisational attachment, Kashefi (2004) found nonsignificant association between race and organisational attachment, even though he reported minor but significant racial differences between Black and White employees in the United States. A similar line of thinking may emphasise parenting issues in Black versus White families as the cause of the variation in attachment development between races. In expanding the attachment research in terms of ethnicity, religious denomination, and country of origin, Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) saw variance in attachment patterns based on ethnicity and country of origin, but not for religious denomination. In contrast, Schwartz and Huismans (1995) reason that religious denomination may play a role in the development of attachment, especially when such faith community theologises the need for being a safe haven and a secure base for one another through communal orientation. It seems that most studies have provided evidence that supports the variation in attachment as a function of several demographic factors such as ethnicity/race, gender differences, and religious background among others.

In his treatment of attachment-authenticity connection in religion, Davis (2010) examined the relationship between authenticity and AG among adult evangelical Protestant Christians in the United States ($n = 225$), recording partial correlations on several dimensions. For example, Davis' AG anxiety was correlated with several measures of global-dispositional authenticity tendencies: overall level of authenticity ($r = -.55$), awareness ($r = -.46$), unbiased processing ($r = -.53$), authentic behaviour ($r = -.49$), authentic relational orientation ($r = -.31$), externalised self-perception ($r = .63$), silencing the self ($r = .43$), and divided self ($r = .57$). In the same study (Davis, 2010), the avoidant God-attachment also correlated with scores of authenticity in several dimensions: overall level of authenticity ($r = -.28$), awareness ($r = -.21$), unbiased processing ($r = -.24$), authentic behaviour ($r = -.22$), relational orientation ($r = -.22$), externalised self-perception ($r = .21$), silencing the self ($r = .24$), and divided self ($r = .25$). At the moment, it appears that Davis (2010) unpublished dissertation is the only empirical research that links the landscape of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity experiences. Our present study makes a unique contribution; in that it stretches the discussion beyond Davis' empirical research in a difference cultural context.

The abovementioned results support the idea of a linkage between authenticity behaviour in terms of the idea of being true to self based on one's values and identity (which might include but is not limited to gender, ethnic, religious, psychological, among others) and healthy attachment connections. We reason then that psychological need

for attachment protection may be associated to feelings of authenticity, and may as well be the function of one's gender, ethnicity, and religious background. In other words, attachment relationships enable the individual to meet their need for autonomy, competence, and survival through feeling in tune with their authentic self.

Purpose of study and hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to investigate the representations of God and self amongst African Christian youths in relation to their AG and authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies, respectively. Most importantly, the study attempts to link the tendencies of authenticity and AG whilst also observing the power of socio-demographic relationships that underlie the *lived* realities of Christian youths. Given that authenticity may be the product of relationship experiences based on our study conceptualisations, it is hypothesised that there is a statistically significant relationship between tendencies of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity among African Christian youths in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa. Hence, insecure God-attachment tendencies may create a sense of inauthenticity, leading to conforming to the expectation of others and feeling out of place with one's self. Additionally, it is likely that when self-alienation becomes a norm, Christian youths may likely have an insecure God-attachment experience, such that they avoid God as a caregiver and feels anxious about their relationship with God. Secondly, it is further hypothesised that the variation in AG and self-authenticity tendencies will be statistically significant in terms of gender differences, race/ethnicity, church denomination, and religious upbringing of Christian youths in the study. We reason that these theoretical underpinnings and hypotheses may form the foundation for understanding the operationalisation (how it is measured) and conceptualisation (how it is defined) of the interplay between tendencies of God-attachment and self-authenticity.

Methods

Procedures and sample

The Ethics Committee of the University of Stellenbosch approved the current study. Access to specific youth groups in different church denominations were carried out by contacting their church leaders, group coordinators, or pastors at the sample sites. An informed consent was obtained from each *gatekeeper* on behalf of their church or youth community. Once community consent was given, written informed consent was requested from the participants before distributing the survey questionnaire. The objectives and voluntary nature of the research were explained before administering the surveys. No compensation was offered to the participants or to the hosting churches. However, a feedback seminar was organised by the first author where the outcome of the study was shared with the various churches and leaders involved in the research. The seminar theme was *Youth identity crisis: Finding god without losing yourself*, and the event took place on 24 April 2015 at the Hofmeyer Hall Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted to explore the tendencies of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity among Christian youths ($n = 100$) living in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa. A random sampling method was used to select the youths

who participated in the survey. In order to participate in the survey, all youths were invited by their respective church leaders to complete the survey questionnaire after their Sunday worship service. Some of the surveys were completed immediately, while others were brought back the next Sunday. The inclusion criteria for taking part in the survey was that a participant should be an active member of their youth fellowship group, aged between 18 and 30 years, able to read and write in English, and living in Stellenbosch. Male ($n = 48$) and female ($n = 52$) participants were selected from the Dutch Reformed Church ($n = 41$), Roman Catholic Church ($n = 31$), and Pentecostal Church ($n = 28$) denominations in Stellenbosch. Four ethnic/racial groups were represented in this sample. The participants were of Black ($n = 14$), White ($n = 57$), Coloured ($n = 28$), and Indian ($n = 1$) racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Measures and variables

To assess the tendencies of God-attachment and self-authenticity among the participants ($n = 100$), the 28-items Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) (Beck & McDonald, 2004) and the 12-items AS were used to generate statistical data from the participants. The participants completed the survey questionnaires and measures in the following order:

Socio-demographic variables

The demographic information was designed to obtain pertinent data from the sample in relation to their gender (1 = females; 2 = males), race/ethnicity (1 = Black African; 2 = Coloured African; 3 = Indian African; 4 = White African), denominational affiliation (1 = Dutch Reformed Church; 2 = Roman Catholic Church; 3 = Pentecostal/Charismatic/Holiness Church), and religious background/upbringing (1 = Born to a Christian parent; 2 = Not born to a Christian parent). The demographic information generated the independent variables used for the study.

AG tendencies

The Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) (Beck & McDonald, 2004). The 28 items of the AGI measure attachment levels of anxiety with God and avoidance of God. These two dimensions were used as the dependent variables. Attachment anxiety with God indicate a possible abandonment of God or a perceived feeling of strong fear and uneasiness with God, while attachment-avoidance with God reflects an attendant compulsive self-reliance and a tendency to evade intimacy with God. Higher scores in this test reflect higher levels of each construct (Beck & McDonald, 2004). Each of the God-attachment *anxiety* or *avoidance* dimension contains 14 items, which Gibson (2007, p. 241) rated as the strongest measure for exploring AG behaviours. These two dependent variables could be divided into four attachment typologies: secure (low avoidance – low anxiety), preoccupied (low avoidance – high anxiety), dismissive (high avoidance – low anxiety), and fearful/disorganised (high avoidance – high anxiety). Concerning the respective items, only 26 items of the AGI were used in this study. The researcher omitted items 14 and 16 as advised by Beck and McDonald (2004) since both items strongly correlate with the anxiety factor. The remaining 26 items of the AGI measure were presented on a 7-point Likert Scale from "Disagree Strongly" to "Agree Strongly". Hence, the AGI-avoidance dimension was 12 items

only, while the AGI-anxiety dimension was 14 items. The study showed alpha ranging from .79 to .80 for the AGI subscales.

Authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies

The Authenticity Scale (AS) (Wood et al., 2008). The 12-items of the AS were used to measure the authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies of participants. This assessment tool comprises three inter-related dimensions of self-authenticity which were used as additional dependent variables for the study. These dimensions are: *self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influences* (Wood et al., 2008). The *self-alienation* dimension contains four items that measure the extent to which an individual is "out of touch" with themselves, tapping on their inauthenticity. The second dimension, *authentic living* contains four items examining the extent to which behaviours are consciously consistent with one's internal experience. Higher scores on the *authentic living* subscale show better chances of attaining authenticity. The *accepting external influence* dimension also contains four items that determine the degree to which social relationships and other external factors influence one's inauthentic behaviours (Davis, 2010). Participants responded accordingly using the 7-point scale ranging from "Does not describe me at all" to "Describes me very well". Higher scores in the "self-alienation" dimension show that the participants are out of touch with themselves. Higher scores in accepting external influences suggest less of a tendency to conform to the expectations of others, while behaving in accordance with one's values will equally potentiate higher scores in the "Authentic Living" dimension. Authenticity corresponds to high levels of authentic living, and low levels of the self-alienation and accepting external influence dimensions (Wood et al., 2008). Wood et al. sampled undergraduate students in their study and reported alphas for the three dimensions ranging from .69 to .78. In the current study, alphas ranged from .72 to .80 for the three dimensions.

Psychometric properties of scales

The level of the alpha coefficient was very positive at .806, because values greater than .70 suggest that a scale is internally consistent and reliable (cf. Fan & Thompson, 2001; Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009). Reliability analysis showed Cronbach's alpha of .808 for scores of the AGI-Anxiety dimension, while the AGI-Avoidance tailed at an alpha of .796. The Cronbach's alpha values for the two AGI dimensions showed satisfactory levels of reliability. The same applies to the values of the AS dimensions, indicating a positively impressive reliability alpha of .804 for AS-Authentic Living. The AS-Accepting External Influence and AS-Self Alienation follow suit with equally acceptable alpha scores of .729 and .782, respectively. Hence, the alpha values for the five dependent variables exceeded the minimal acceptable test value of .70, showing a strong positive reliability assumption.

Data analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using version 21.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the demographic profile of the participants in relation to the dependent variables. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed to test and analyse for the association between the

tendencies of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity. The differences on the participants' AG and authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies based on their demographic profile were estimated using ANOVA and *t*-test along with *post hoc* tests, Levene's test, and Dunnett's *T*3-test, with *p*-values of *<.05 and **<.01 or less considered significant. A summary of the results of the data analyses are presented in Tables 1–3. Furthermore, subsequent paragraphs demonstrate how data screening was conducted in the study and how issues related to the adequacy of the sample size was addressed.

Data screening

During the data screening phase, the following were addressed: (a) accuracy of data collected; (b) procedures for addressing issues related to the missing data; (c), procedures of

Table 1. Demographic data and AG of the Respondents (*N* = 100).

Demographic variables	*n* (%)	God anxiety M(SD)	*p*	God avoidance M(SD)	*p*
Gender					
Male	48 (48.0)	47.6 (14.0)	.854	38.3 (12.0)	.002*
Female	52 (52.0)	48.1 (12.7)		31.2 (10.9)	
Race/ethnicity					
White African	57 (57.0)	44.3 (9.49)	.755	33.7 (10.3)	.075
Coloured African	28 (28.0)	47.8 (16.1)		29.9 (11.8)	
Black African	14 (14.0)	48.7 (12.8)		36.9 (12.0)	
Indian African	1 (1.0)	49.0 (.)		42.0 (.)	
Church denomination					
Dutch Reformed Church	41 (41.0)	47.5 (13.6)	.792	36.5 (13.1)	.000*
Roman Catholic Church	31 (31.0)	49.2 (10.7)		39.0 (8.84)	
Pentecostal/Charismatic Church	28 (28.0)	46.9 (15.6)		26.9 (9.67)	
Religious Upbringing/background					
Born to a Christian parent	87 (87.0)	48.7 (13.1)	.086	35.4 (12.2)	.078
Not born to a Christian parent	13 (13.0)	41.9 (13.3)		29.2 (9.17)	

Table 2. Demographic data and authenticity/inauthenticity of the respondents (*N* = 100).

Demographic variables	*n* (%)	Authentic living M(SD)	*p*	Self-alienation M(SD)	*p*	External influences M(SD)	*p*
Gender							
Male	48 (48.0)	22.9 (4.89)	.216	11.5 (6.12)	.353	12.4 (4.92)	.733
Female	52 (52.0)	24.1 (4.59)		10.4 (5.64)		12.8 (5.80)	
Race/ethnicity							
White African	57 (57.0)	23.8 (6.17)	.467	8.71 (7.22)	.096	11.2 (6.65)	.524
Coloured African	28 (28.0)	22.4 (6.26)		13.0 (6.84)		12.3 (5.66)	
Black African	14 (14.0)	24.0 (3.33)		10.5 (4.73)		13.2 (4.93)	
Indian African	1 (1.0)	26.0 (.)		7.0 (.)		9.0 (.)	
Church Denomination							
Dutch Reformed Church	41 (41.0)	24.5 (3.15)	.194	11.12 (5.16)	.941	13.02 (5.15)	.115
Roman Catholic Church	31 (31.0)	22.5 (4.74)		10.65 (6.34)		13.68 (5.26)	
Pentecostal/Charismatic Church	28 (28.0)	23.2 (6.34)		11.04 (6.48)		10.89 (5.61)	
Religious Upbringing/background							
Born to a Christian parent	87 (87.0%)	23.8 (4.34)	.215	10.8 (5.81)	.492	12.7 (5.41)	.776
Not born to a Christian parent	13 (13.0%)	22.0 (6.90)		12.0 (6.35)		12.2 (5.33)	

Table 3. Correlations between AG and authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies.

Variables	Anxious God-attachment		Avoidant God-attachment	
	r	p	r	p
Authentic living	−.196**	.051	−.168	.094
Self-alienation	.279**	.005	.204*	.041
Accepting external influences	.324**	.001	.178	.077

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

measurement for dependent variables; (d) sufficiency of the sample size for each statistical procedure; and (e) degree to which statistical assumptions have been met for each statistical procedure.

To ensure accuracy of data, each participant provided answers to the self-report questionnaires without the help of their church or youth leaders. To capture accurate responses from participants, some were allowed to fill out the questionnaire in their own spare time. In other words, some questionnaires were collected on the spot, while other participants were given time to complete the survey and return it the following week. Hence, it is believed that the data collected during the course of this research is an accurate reflection of the responses of participants. We identified missing data by conducting a visual scan of the collected data. In scenarios where a participant fails to respond to a significant number of items, the participant was removed from the data set (cf. Hertel, 1976). Owing to this procedure, one sample was deleted from the data set. Missing data were randomly replaced using the means imputation procedure (Allison & Gorman, 1993). This procedure is "the estimation of a missing value and the subsequent use of that estimate in statistical analyses" (Allison & Gorman, 1993, p. 85). In other words, items means were replaced for cases with missing values. This function helped in maximising the amount of data collected and simultaneously minimising the effects of missing data. Assigning either an item or scale mean for a missing data maximises the amount of data collected and minimises the effects of missing data. Replacing missing data with its constant is also encouraged by Cohen and Cohen (1983) because of the data output which considerably lose the smallest amount of statistical power and act as a conservative approach when dealing with missing data (Allison & Gorman, 1993; Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). For the overall screened sample ($n = 100$), there were four missing values in the AGI-Avoidance and AGI-Anxiety dimensions. Hence, in order to collate the attribute of the missing values, the missing values were replaced using the mean of the entire series by applying the means imputation function on SPSS. No missing value was recorded in the AS measures.

Adequacy of sample size

According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1995), the sample size in each cell ought to surpass the number of dependent variables to be sufficient for analysis. Therefore, an adequate sample size for this study would warrant at least two participants for each of the dependent variables. Data are reported for 100 participants. Thus with five dependent variables, the minimum sample size would be 10 participants. The cross-tabulation procedure in SPSS was reviewed and the results showed that the smallest group size to be used in the statistical comparisons was 12. Therefore, if the smallest sample size exceeded the number of dependent variables, which in this case is five, then the sample size of 100

participants was adequate for the study. Thus, it is unlikely that negative findings can be attributed to a limited sample size, albeit caution is recommended before placing too great a significance on the results without also considering effect sizes.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 summarised the results of the descriptive statistics, showing the effect of AG and self-authenticity based on differences in gender, race/ethnicity, religious background, and church denomination across the sample size.

Socio-demographic factors and AG of Christian youths

AG tendencies of the participants were assessed using the AGI which assessed two dimensions of AG: attachment anxiety with God and avoidant God-attachment. As summarised in Table 1, female participants reported higher scores of attachment anxiety with God with mean score of 48.1 (SD = 12.7), compared to male participants (M = 47.6, SD = 14.0). In contrast, scores of avoidant God-attachment were significantly higher in male Christian youths (M = 38.3, SD = 12.0) than in female Christian youths (M = 31.2, SD = 10.9). In terms of the ethnicity differences, anxiety with God scores were higher with Indian African Christian youth (M = 49.0) and with Black African Christian youth (M = 48.7, SD = 12.8), but slightly lower among Coloured African (M = 47.8, SD = 16.1) and White African (M = 44.3, SD = 9.49) Christian youths. In addition, God avoidance scores were also higher with Indian African Christian youth (M = 42.0) and Black African Christian youth (M = 36.9, SD = 12.0) than it was for White African (M = 33.7, SD = 10.3) and Coloured African (M = 29.9, SD = 11.8) Christian youths. Coloured African Christian youths seem to report the lowest tendency of avoidant God-attachment than youths from other racial ethnic groups.

Anxiety with God scores were significantly higher among Christian youths in the Roman Catholic Church (M = 49.2, SD = 10.7) than those from the Dutch Reformed Church (M = 47.5, SD = 13.6) and Pentecostal/Charismatic Church (M = 46.9, SD = 15.6). Christian youths in Pentecostal/Charismatic Church seem to report lower scores of the avoidant God-attachment but higher among Christian youths from the Roman Catholic Church (M = 39.0, SD = 8.84) and Dutch Reformed Church (M = 36.5, SD = 13.1). Participants born to a Christian parent who had religious upbringing reported higher scores of anxiety with God (M = 48.7, SD = 41.9) than those who were not raised in a Christian home and without religious upbringing (M = 41.9, SD = 13.3). Similar pattern of insecurity was observed in the avoidant God-attachment scores, showing Christian youths with religious upbringing reporting higher scores of God-attachment avoidance (M = 35.4, SD = 12.2) than those without a religious upbringing (M = 29.2, SD = 9.17).

With p-values less than the significance level (a = .05), we confirm our hypothesis for gender and denominational/church affiliation, showing statistically significant differences with p-values of .002 and .000, respectively. Ethnicity/race and religious upbringing were not observed to be statistically significant factors since the p-values (.075 and .078) are greater than the significance level respectively (a = .05). Hence, it can then be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of gender differences and denominational affiliation in relation to tendencies of AG among Christian youths in Stellenbosch.

Socio-demographic factors and authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies of Christian youths

Authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies were assessed using the AS, composed of three variables: authentic living, self-alienation, and accepting external influences. The means scores of the participants are summarised in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, female Christian youths exhibit higher tendency of authentic living than the male Christian youths with mean scores of 24.1 (SD = 4.59) and 22.9 (SD = 4.89), respectively. This means that females demonstrated more authenticity than males. In addition, scores of self-alienation were higher in male participants ($M = 11.5$, SD = 6.12) than with females ($M = 10.4$, SD = 5.64), whereas both male and female Christian youths ($M = 12.4$, SD = 4.92; $M = 12.8$, SD = 5.80) seem to have almost an equal tendency of accepting external influences. As reflected in Table 2, Christian youths of all racial groups reported almost the same scores of authentic living, whereas Coloured African Christian youths had more self-alienation tendency ($M = 13.0$, SD = 6.84) than those of other racial groups ($M = 10.5$, SD = 4.73; $M = 8.71$, SD = 7.22; $M = 7.0$). Tendency of accepting external influences was lower with Indian Christian youth ($M = 9.00$), but higher for White ($M = 11.2$), Black ($M = 13.2$), and Coloured ($M = 12.3$) Christian youths. Black African Christian youths seem to have higher tendency of accepting external influences than youths from other ethnic and racial groups.

Interestingly, Christian youths from all the church denominations shared almost the same scores of authentic living, self-alienation, and accepting external influences, as shown in Table 2. Not much statistical differences were shown in the way the participants stay true to self in terms of the Church denomination they belong. The same pattern of homogeneity of variance was observed for the religious upbringing of Christian youths in the study in relation to the tendencies of authentic living and accepting external influences. However, data revealed that those who were not born to a Christian parent or had a religious upbringing were more likely to distance themselves from their own feelings with higher scores of AS-self alienation ($M = 12.0$, SD = 6.35), compared to those who were born to a Christian parent and had religious upbringing ($M = 10.8$, SD = 5.81).

Furthermore, after testing our hypotheses and analysing collected data we were not able to uphold our hypotheses for the differences in the variation of authenticity/inauthenticity tendencies in relation to socio-demographic factors.

Relationship between AG and authenticity/inauthenticity of Christian youths

To examine the association between the God-attachment and self-authenticity tendencies of Christian youths, correlation analysis was done using scores from the AGI and AS, respectively. Table 3 provides a summary of the result of the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. As shown in the table, AGI-Avoidance and AS-Self Alienation show a statistically significant correlation ($r = .204$, $n = 100$, $p < .041$). This result also shows that the two variables share about 4% of common variance, hence implying that the avoidant God-attachment tendency among Christian youths was positively related to their self-alienation tendency. Likewise, AGI-Anxiety is also positively correlated with the AS-Accepting External Influences ($r = .324$, $n = 100$, $p < .001$), commonly sharing approximately 10% of variance. This correlation suggests that feelings of anxiety in a relationship

with God among Christian youths is related to them accepting external influences in terms of wanting to seek affirmation and acceptance from other people. AGI-Anxiety also showed a positive correlation with and AS-Self Alienation, $r = .279$, $n = 100$, $p < .01$, with a 7% commonality of variance. This means that feeling anxious in a relationship with God may be related to feeling alienated from one's true self. In other words, anxiety in a believer–God relationship is associated to feelings of being disconnected with one's values and self identity. In addition, a marginally negative correlation was found between AGI-Anxiety and AS-Authentic Living, $r = -.196$, $n = 100$, $p < .05$. This inverse relationship suggests that lower scores in experiencing anxiety with God among Christian youths may be related to higher scores of authentic living tendency in terms of being authentic to who they are.

In contrast, no significant correlation was observed for measures of avoidant God-attachment in relation to authentic living ($r = -.168$, $n = 100$, $p < .094$) and accepting external influences ($r = .178$, $n = 100$, $p < .07$). Owing to the fairly partial statistical power observations in our zero-order average correlations, caution is recommended before placing too great a significance on the results without also considering effect sizes. Nonetheless, we are convinced that our estimations may have confirmed our primary hypothesis since the partial results support that there are, to some extent, statistically significant relationships between tendencies of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity in our sample.

Discussion

The overarching goal of this study was to explore the relationship between tendencies of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity among Christian youths in relation to several demographic factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, church denomination, and religious upbringing. Attachment and authenticity theories have been instrumental for building the foundational theory and hypotheses for explaining the challenges experienced by Christian youths in their relationship experience with God, and how this attachment and other psychological effect can influence their sense of authenticity/inauthenticity. AGI (measuring anxious and avoidant God-attachments) and AS (assessing authentic living, self-alienation, and accepting external influences) were used to assess different dimensions of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity, demonstrating a reliable internal consistency for the Cronbach alpha's and significant correlations between the measures.

The first assessment inquiry in this study was to measure the effect of AG as a function of demographic factors: gender, ethnicity/race, church denomination, and religious upbringing. Demographic differences were observed for gender and church denomination, whereas the values for religious upbringing and ethnicity were not statistically significant. Our findings were consistent with that of Lopez and Rice (2006), Barry et al. (2015), and Munson et al. (2001) who saw gender differences as an important factor in terms of the variation in attachment relationships. In our study, there were significant differences in the way males and females experienced their AG. For example, male participants reported higher scores of avoidant God-attachment than their female counterpart. This means that Christian boys are more likely to want to avoid a relationship with God than Christian girls, who seem to be more dependent on God than boys. We reason that Christian females may be more needy in their relationships than males who seem to be more dismissive in relationships. The finding seems to fit with the common beliefs about gender differences

in terms of attachment tendency which sees men as less emotional and less willing to bond with others than women (Bem, 1993; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Geary (1998) reported a similar finding, suggesting that men are far less likely than women to express emotions associated with social bonding and attachment affiliation, and less likely to seek emotional support when dealing with difficulties (Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002). Feingold (1994) reasons that this gender differences in terms of attachment affiliation is because men are less trusting and more dismissive than women in emotional situations. This variation has also been linked to social role theory which describes the different socialisation processes in which men and women both undergo that determine their gender roles in the society (Wood & Eagly, 2002). For example, women are often socialised to show emotions, open to nurturing, and express warmth affection, meanwhile stereotypical gender roles men are supposed to be strong, confident assertive, and not show emotions.

The finding on ethnicity/race may have been consistent with the study of Kashefi (2004) who reported similar nonsignificant correlation between race and attachment. While we did not observe ethnicity in our sample in terms of the effect of attachment, we note that this might not be the case in another sample. In contrast, Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) have found an opposite result in their study, showing a variation in attachment patterns based on ethnicity/race in a study with university students ($n = 465$) who were of White (39.2%), Black (7.8%), Hispanic (18.7%), Asian (18.5%), and Indian (11.6%) backgrounds.

Interestingly, religious upbringing was not observed for AG. Meanwhile the observed value for church denomination was significant in terms of the variation in AG tendencies. Even though the findings of Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) do not support our results on the variance of attachment based on religious denomination, our findings seem to correspond with the findings of Schwartz and Huismans (1995). They reason that a community-orientated religious denomination is very much likely to facilitate attachment development in adults since such sense of community may arouse a sense of security among members of the denomination. This may explain why Christian youths from the Pentecostal Church reported lower attachment insecurity that those from other two denominations. The conceptualisation of Schwartz and Huismans may help us understand what might be happening here. Perhaps the theology and praxis within Pentecostal settings may have a community-oriented undertone than that of other denominations. This may have played a role in how the Christian youths in these churches responded differently to the way they relate to God as an attachment figure. It is possible that the Pentecostal Church may be emphasising the need for community than the other churches, which helps in enhancing the needs for attachment-security among its young members.

In the second assessment inquiry, our study demonstrates that AG bears significant correlations with aspects of self-authenticity among Christian youths in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa. In particular, higher scores of anxious God-attachment were positively related to higher scores of accepting external influences ($r = .324$, $p < .001$) and self-alienation ($r = .279$, $p < .005$) among Christian youths. Similar result was reported by Davis (2010) who observed correlations between anxious God-attachment and externalised self-perception which is the extent to which one judges him/herself through external standards ($r = .21$, $p = .001$). The positive correlation between having an anxiety in a relationship with God and accepting external influences or externalising self-perception

suggests that Christian youths are likely to conform to the expectations of others and may judge themselves on account of what they see in the world around them because they are insecure and anxious in their relationships. This goes to show that Christian youths may likely shape their identity and perceive themselves based on external comparisons and standards, especially when they are insecure and feeling abandoned in their relationship with God. The positive association between anxious God-attachment and self-alienation ($r = .279$, $p < .01$) reveals that when Christian youths are feeling anxious about their relationship with God this insecurity may make them feel like strangers to themselves, unaware of their own intrapsychic processes.

In contrast, anxious God-attachment was negatively correlated to authentic living. This was consistent with the findings of Davis (2010) who saw negative correlations between anxious God-attachment and overall level of authenticity ($r = -.55$, $p < .001$), authentic behaviour ($r = -.49$, $p < .001$), and authentic relational orientation ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$). This negative correlation result indicates that the more feelings of insecurity experienced by Christian youths in their relationship with God the less of a tendency for them to experience authentic living and stay in tune to self. Additionally, avoidant God-attachment scores was positively related to self-alienation, $r = .204$, $p < .05$, 2-tailed. This result is consistent with the findings of Davis (2010) who saw similar correlation between God avoidance and the divided self in his study ($r = .25$, $p < .001$). The idea of the divided self refers to an outsider, estranged self in terms of when one cannot experience either him/herself or others as "real" (Lang, 1969). The divided self is therefore a self that is alienated from itself. This result corresponds to that of Davis and suggests that feelings of avoidant God-attachment or the tendency to avoid God among Christian youths may likely lead to developing inauthentic tendencies and feelings of self-estrangement where the youth is in disharmony with themselves and not true to who they are.

Overall, our correlation results suggest that insecure attachment experience with God is related to inauthenticity and an absence of a sense of authenticity among Christian youths. In addition, we observed variation in AG tendencies based on the gender differences and church denomination of Christian youths in the study. These studies support the idea of a linkage between authenticity tendencies in terms of the idea of being true to self and healthy attachment connections. We reason that psychological need for attachment protection may be linked to feelings of authenticity based on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which focus on how social and cultural factors either facilitate or undermine motivational behaviour and engagement with activities that are outlets for human survival. In other words, the more secure a relationship is in terms of providing the right environment for personal growth, the more likely it is for the individual to meet their need for autonomy, competence, and survival through feeling in tune with their authentic self.

Limitations and concluding remarks

Even though our study show evidence that links tendencies of AG and authenticity/inauthenticity among Christian youths, one of the limitation of the study is that we failed to explore the global attachment levels of the participants in close relationships with their human caregiver which would have added a valuable stock of insight to our study. Some additional measures may be crucial for one to appropriately interpret the

meaning of the observed relations given that the explored tendencies developed in one domain may form a basis for other domains. Moving forward, we would like to see future cross-cultural empirical studies that will continue to push the boundaries of what is traditionally known in the theories of "attachment" and "authenticity". Methodologically, it would be nice to see multiple empirical studies using larger and even representative samples and experiments that allow for replication and generalisable insights on the links between tendencies of attachment and authenticity, which may offer clinical and/or practical implications for social relationships in terms of achieving improvements in mental health, building healthy relationships, and staying true to who we are.

Note

1. The term "tendencies" has been used in this study in order to suggest the malleability of attachment-related representations. Secondly, the term "tendencies" suggest more variability across the board in general especially as it has to do with participation and relationships. This approach is consistent with theoretical foundations on personality tendencies (cf. Mischel & Shoda, 2008) and on attachment tendencies (cf. Davis, 2010).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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