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NEW ASSOCIATE EDITOR INTRODUCTION

As the Editor of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* (*JPC*), I'd like to enthusiastically introduce you to the newest Associate Editor, Dr. Brad Strawn, who will be serving on the *JPC* Editorial Board in this salient role as of Winter 2024. Dr. Strawn, a licensed psychologist and pastor, will lead the "Case Studies in Integrative Practice" column, joining Drs. Siang-Yang Tan ("Intervention in Research and Practice"), Kenneth Wang ("Assessment in Research and Practice"), Kutter Callaway ("Theology in Research and Practice"), and Christin Fort ("Justice in Teaching, Research, and Practice"). In two regular issues per year, each Associate Editor publishes a column that elucidates timely, relevant topics in their respective areas.

With the newest column, "Case Studies in Integrative Practice," Dr. Strawn will lead the way in exploring the intersection between psychology and Christianity in an applied manner. My hope is that this column will help Christian practitioners—whether psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, or professional or pastoral counselors—learn from in-depth case material as we humbly strive to serve a diverse public with Christlike compassion.

What follows is a short biography of Dr. Strawn to introduce—or, for many, reintroduce, given he's been an active member and contributor to CAPS and *JPC* for some time now—him to the *JPC* readership.

Please continue to send manuscripts to https://jpc.scholasticahq.com/.

Joshua Knabb, PsyD, ABPP
Editor, *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*

"Case Studies in Integrative Practice"

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Exiting the Cursus *Honorum*: The Psychology of Social Status and Christian Interpersonality

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The psychology of social status has become a pivotal framework for understanding human behavior and social systems. Despite the complex relationship between humans and their desire for status, research consistently shows that, when given the opportunity, people will nearly always pursue higher status as if it were a fundamental need. This paper explores these often-overlooked dynamics within Christian life, arguing that early Roman Christian communities implicitly understood the need to subvert status-cravings due to prevalence of social hierarchies within their ethos. In the modern West, this prevalence persists, though less ostensibly, and it is exacerbated by a wide array of factors. The thesis contends understanding status psychology will help mental health providers (MHPs) navigate their patients' interpersonal relationships, and even facilitate healthier interpersonality in ecclesial spheres. Through tracing the genealogy of status psychology and theology's implications, this paper culminates in a rectified approach toward Paul's subversion of the *cursus honorum*, Christ's kenosis, and the benefits of the discipline of secrecy.

Introduction

The psychology of social status, though a relatively recent field of study, has emerged as a compelling mode for understanding human behavior, conflict, and interpersonality. In its basic form, it declares that humans have a "fundamental need" to acquire social recognition or reputational affirmation from those within their social groups and, by extension, society at large (Anderson et al., 2015). Cecilia Ridgeway defined status as a "comparative social ranking of people groups or objects in terms of the social esteem, honor, and respect accorded to them" (Ridgeway, 2019, p. 1). While the logistical exactitude to status dynamics on a universal scale remains somewhat elusive, the growing body of empirical research affirms, at the very least, the simple notion that human beings, when given the chance, will just about always pursue higher levels of status and, once obtained, will continue pursuing further notoriety (Anderson, et al., 2020a). It is not simply that people desire respect—this notion has long been understood (Baumeister & Leary, 1996)—they also desire being *more* respected than others, especially over those within similar social spheres (Buss, 2019; Santamaría-García, 2017).

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During my literature review, I was continually troubled by how these dynamics are overlooked within Christian psychology, ecclesiology, and social relationships. Thus, in the second half of this paper, I will discuss a number of scriptural and theological examples that, I believe, elucidate an impetus toward a kenotic subversion of one's own social status. Status-based conversations would have been highly relevant for early Roman Christian communities because they came into being in a world "where honor was everything" (Hellerman, 2013, p. 30)—a social environment that Dio Chrysostom dubbed "*cursus honorum*" ("race for honors"). In this ethos, Christian communities would have understood implicitly the clear incentive to exit the *cursus honorum*—so much so that, I believe, explicit imperatives toward its relevance throughout the New Testament are scarce due to obviousness or redundancy. Since the West finds themselves within an epoch that, albeit less explicitly, prizes status—thanks in part to status ranking systems like social media (Haidt, 2024), myriad forms of "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1898), or noticeable wealth disparities (Sandel, 2020)—I believe it is vital to reincorporate kenotic postures within ecclesial contexts that will undermine this drift toward rigid social hierarchies.

My thesis is that, while the overlooking of status dynamics inhibits subjective well-being, gaining a broader control over our orientation to status-seeking behaviors will incentivize a healthier ontology with God and others. Ac-

cordingly, gaining this understanding will also provide smooth directives for Christian mental health providers (MHPs) in practice. Specifically, I believe the remedy to these measures is simple Christocentric awareness of the maladies brought on by participation in status games—an awareness that will be aided by kenosis and intentional practices to diminish status-cravings. Further, because status-cravings create subtle hierarchies within systems that, when left unchecked, create inferiority complexes, mental health detriments, and even physical maladies, I hope to briefly demonstrate how this intersects with ecclesial contexts. The overall aim, then, is to provide basis for Christian MHPs or leaders to encourage individuals and groups to exit the *cursus honorum*.

To begin, I will review the basic genealogy of the psychology of social status. I will then examine the ways in which status practically effects culture and ecclesial contexts. Afterwards, I will work theologically through status dynamics, before assessing the broad implications for Christian psychology in general. Finally, I will weave together the inferences laden throughout this project into didacticisms on how to refine Christian interpersonal relations.

Psychology of Social Status

The psychology of social status, epitomized wonderfully in the book of the same name edited by Anderson et al. (2014), spiked in interest after the inception of Anderson et al.'s (2015) study, "Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive?" While several researchers had noted the human inclination toward social status in the decades prior, many of these were only interested in status as an ancillary variable (Fiske, 2011; Solnick & Hemenway, 1998). As their original and subsequent work has demonstrated (Anderson et al., 2015), people generally show a preference for higher status over and above other desires such as money, leisure, or material possessions (Anderson & Hildreth, 2016; Frank, 1995).

There are three subsets of status-craving behavior that I will briefly touch on: status detection, status benefits, and status and power.

Status Detection

Based on existing research, it is fair to conclude that humans cannot *not* notice status (Anderson et al., 2014). Humans are wired to ascertain others' status, much like what Leary has termed a "social barometer" or "sociometer" (Leary, 2007), or what others have called a "status detection signal" (Anderson et al., 2014) or "status instinct" (Asp & Quartz, 2015). Some anthropologists guess that our social barometers are a leftover instinct from our hunter-gatherer days (Breuning, 2011)—it helped us navigate social situations by discerning how to avoid behaviors that might ostracize us from society (Fiske & Markus, 2012). To offer theological speculation on this notion, I would assume that God designed humans to find their fulfillment through their social standing within God's sight, but the fall and original sin have now perverted that search for fulfillment so that instead of finding our fulfillment in God's sight, we now search for it relentlessly from ulterior sources.

While some refer to status as a universal game (Breuning, 2021; Storr, 2022) played among individuals in the same "ponds" (Frank, 1987), status dynamics may be more akin to language than a game. As Ridgeway argued, status is as human as linguistics, "a social form that is deeply cultural and socially learned" (Ridgeway, 2019, pp. 3-4). This makes sense considering past research on how individuals modify behaviors in light of status differentials. When interacting with figures that have higher status, people will tend to copy their body language, mood, and frequency of their voices (de Waal, 2005). When interacting with those with lower status, people will tend to assume whichever postures and behaviors seem most natural to them (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Nearly everything can be interpreted as a status signal: clothing brands, body language, tastes in music or television, the garden or lack thereof in front of homes, and so on (Fussell, 1992; Veblen, 1898). People are always detecting status and unconsciously adjusting our orientations accordingly (Boyd, 2010).

In sum, humans relate to status as if it were both a game played among those in their ponds, as well as a language we cannot help but speak.

Status Benefits

The sense of gaining or losing status comes with surprisingly big reactions. Gaining status—getting a promotion, winning the playoff, earning a crush's affection—brings deep satisfaction, a sense of belonging, and the feeling of "matter-

ing" (McCullough & Rosenberg, 1981) within one's social sphere (Leary & MacDonald, 2005). Losing status—the dream college rejects one's application, one gets laid off—can evoke neurological pain on par with physical harm and, in many cases, can produce depression, anxiety, and suicidality (Leary & Macdonald, 2005; Steckler & Tracy, 2014). Our brain rewards status ascent, such as receiving a flattering comment from someone we admire, with a blend of endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. Conversely, if one experiences status descent, such as when a neighbor purchases a newer model of our car, one might incur an influx of stress-inducing cortisol (Martina, 2011; Zink, 2008).

However, these above examples of ways individuals may incur status ascent or descent could be entirely relative since people are readily able to define status according to different metrics or spheres.[1] Some could hardly care less about their status at work but be intimately obsessed with their social ranking at their church of fitness club (Mahadevan et al., 2019b). Some might care deeply about how they are respected by peers but care little about whether their peers see them as socially above them in terms of rank (Anderson et al., 2012).

While Adam Smith suggested that money was the most sought-after resource, he may have mixed up wealth with the social placement wealth affords (Smith, 1776). Many consider status ascent a larger benefit than monetary gain. As Anderson et al. (2015) found, 70% of office employees preferred a job title upgrade over a significant pay raise.

In Solnick and Hemenway (1998), they asked 257 students, staff, and faculty at Harvard School of Public Health this question: "A: Your current yearly income is $50,000; everyone else's is $25,000; B: Your current yearly income is $100,000; everyone else's is $200,000; Q: Which one would you choose?" (p. 378). Over half picked option A. Others have also demonstrated that money is often secondary to the desire of social rank (Boyce et al., 2010; Frank, 1995). Though John Harsanyi (1966) famously opined that "apart from economic payoffs, social status seems to be the most important incentive and motivating force of social behavior" (p. 357), research demonstrates that economic payoff is often ancillary to status payoff (Martina et al. 2011). Humans appear to be less concerned with riches than being richer than others (Frank, 1995; Sen, 1992).[2]

Next, I will discuss ways status interacts with power.

Status and Power

Status dynamics pose immeasurable influence on power constructs. Status is typically won through displays of competency, generosity, and commitment toward the greater good of the social group (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). As Cho and Keltner's (2019) work on power dynamics found that force, violence, and punishment are not necessarily the best ways to gain power, kindness, altruism, and empathy are a far better force for working up the social or professional ladder. Anderson and colleagues (2020b) demonstrated that disagreeableness, which includes dispositions such as combativeness, selfishness, and manipulation, is not actually the best way to work up a corporate ladder—as it was once popularly thought to be. But fascinatingly, Keltner found that after people gain power through the typical avenues of altruism and service, they tend to become *less* servile and altruistic (Keltner, 2017). Their high status gives way to a hubris that self-justifies impulsive actions like driving erratically, lying, cheating, and believing they should be able to bend the rules (Callaghan & Kraus, 2016). Once one acquires power and status, their influence increases abundantly, and, thus, negative or selfish behaviors are more likely to spread like a social contagion.

This effect is seen in a concept that circulates many academic fields that goes by several names; though all are somewhat distinct from each other, there are many similarities. Some call it "mimicry" (Fischer & Hess, 2013) or "the chameleon effect" (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999); others might call it "mimetic desire" (Girard, 2001; Palaver, 2013) or even "prestige bias" (Brand et al., 2021). Each concept expands upon a similar assumption: humans copy those they admire. The highest-ranking members of any system usually sets the trajectory of the sys-

[1] Some prefer status, which is placement on a vertical hierarchy; others might prefer "inclusion," which is their ability to mingle and cohabitate within a system (Mahadevan et al., 2019a).

[2] As Bertrand Russell observed, "Even if all actors received the same salary, a man would rather act the part of Hamlet than that of the First Sailor" (Russell, 1938).

tem. They do not have to enforce rules to make changes; their status already makes their actions, dispositions, and behaviors difficult to resist. The more status one is assigned, the more power they have to influence the masses. High-status is not harmless (DeCelles & Norton, 2016); if the one with the high-status carries themselves poorly, crowds often cannot help but follow.

Resistance to Adoption of Status Psychology

Despite all research mentioned thus far, there remains a conflation of skepticism or trepidation over the verity of considering status such a fundamental variable of interpersonal relationships. Abraham Maslow, perhaps the first psychologist to take social status seriously, included "esteem" on his infamous hierarchy, but was heavily criticized for this choice, with many suggesting his suspicions of esteem were inflated for the purposes of drawing conclusions.[3] Leary and others have since suggested that esteem plays a greater role in human life than Maslow's critics would have been comfortable to admit (Leary & Downs, 1995; Leary, 1995; Kirkpatrick & Ellis; 2001). Breuning theorized that status dynamics are overlooked within academia because of the penchant to idealize humans as more complex than animals (Breuning, 2021). Status games are easy to discern within monkeys, who often pummel or shame low ranking members of their tribe (Shively, 2000), or lion packs, whose high-ranking members relax while their females or subordinates do the hunting and grazing (Morris, 1995). Anthropologists also often note the prevalence of status hierarchies within premodern societies (Buss, 2019). Languages like French and Japanese even have specific pronouns to communicate status differentials (Breuning, 2021). Although status dynamics are easily recognizable in these realms, many remain skeptical about the prevalence of these tendencies within us.[4]

Another suggestion as to why status games go unnoticed is because they tend to occur within unconscious processing and, therefore, a lack of self-awareness could easily leave one convinced that status is an unimportant feature of human interaction (Boyd, 2010). Generally speaking, humans like to picture themselves altruistically, as if they are heroes in a story (McKay & Tappin, 2017). To admit to being motivated by status places the illusion of our innate benevolence into question. Renè Girard insisted that prestige-related conflicts go understudied within the social sciences because it is more popular to assume that status-based conflicts are an accident brought on by immaturity rather than a natural outgrowth of basic human nature (Girard, 2001). Girard wrote that this "phenomenon is so common, so well known to us, and so contrary to our concept of ourselves, thus so humiliating, that we prefer to remove it from our consciousness and act as if it did not exist" (Girard, 2001, pp. 8-9). Further, many Westerners take pride in their efforts toward egalitarianism, and, thus, admitting to status hunting would entail admitting that one is less intimately concerned with social equality than the dominant cultural narrative suggests they be (Hummer, 1993). However, as Anderson and Hildreth (2016) have demonstrated, people generally prefer situations in which the majority of the population live equally while they themselves are socially or economically elevated above that majority. Though public-facing beliefs often corroborate this desire toward total equality, many do not prefer equality in practice (de Botton, 2004; Fussell, 1992). Further, although empirical studies on this matter exist, they are difficult to place within a universal metric; their shape is inherently elusive due to factors of subject honesty, the Hawthorne Effect, variations in cultural values, or that status psychology may currently be operating in isolation from other social science disciplines (McCambridge et al., 2014; Richardson, 2005).

Many suggestions persist; yet, the common denominator is that this notion is somewhat uncomfortable. However, I would assert that denying status as an innate human desire might be superfluous. As Marx (2022) noted, "The benefits of higher status are so obvious that a hypothetical person born without an innate drive for status would still seek a higher position out of pure rational calculation" (p. 8). Status matters

[3] Maslow was, of course, also criticized heavily in general for lack of empirically verifiable research and unreliable sources. However, his inclusion of esteem on the hierarchy might have been somewhat ahead of its time based on how the understanding of human need for social esteem has evolved.

[4] Further work on the desire for social esteem can be found in Leary and Baumeister's work (Baumeister & Leary, 2000).

to human perception; it is simply the extent to which status matters that is left up for debate.

Status in Culture

Though status metrics remain somewhat obscured from the pith of cultural conversations, its effects are, in some ways, becoming a larger concern (Wetherall et al., 2019). Sandel (2020) connected the widespread mental health epidemic in the West to many feeling that they no longer have "dignity" in the larger culture. Sandel assumes that because status differentials are becoming more apparent, and because the barriers contemporary Westerners must hurdle to achieve cultural success are becoming higher, the likelihood of being mentally consumed by one's lack of status is more likely (Sandel, 2020). This is dangerous, because perceiving oneself as having low status increases the chances of depression and causes people to isolate themselves from the perceived cultural competitions around them (Steckler & Tracy, 2014). Isolation is a well-known contributor to both internalizing and externalizing disorders (Haidt, 2024).

While mental health benefits of possessing high status are obvious, there is a less obvious but nonetheless clear benefit to physical health. This has been called a "social gradient," and it essentially states that, on average, people in higher status positions will live longer, healthier lives than those below them (Fourie, 2019). This gradient stratifies quite evenly among social classes (Clougherty et al., 2010). Marmot (2014) found that workers at the bottom fourth of the organizational hierarchy have a risk of death four times more likely than those at the top. Mortality rates move in proportion to each rung of the social hierarchy (Demakakos, 2008), meaning that those second from the bottom will, on average, live longer than those at the absolute bottom (Marmot, 2014).

Status markers within contemporary culture are not harmless; as fixation on status increases, so will a culture's level of dissatisfaction, unrest, and disparity in mental and physical health.

Status and Ecclesiology

In many ecclesial contexts, ostensible righteousness can function almost like a status signal—a sign that God has refined one's character and placed them further down the spiritual formation track than others (France, 1985; Willard, 1988). Status-cravings, widely considered an embarrassing feeling as is, pose—at least by popular perception—as the kind of behavior that will hamper one's righteousness, both in one's own eyes and the larger group's (Fussell, 1992; Leary, 2007; Vanhoozer, 2010). In an ethos such as this, one could scarcely be blamed for housing a suspicion that admitting to one's own less-than-righteous ambitions might guarantee their own status descent. This may be why, despite evidence of status craving being fundamental, it still remains unnoticed in many ecclesial communities.

But status hunger can be uniquely damaging within church. Groups that give in to status games typically create unhealthy social hierarchies that reward those who succeed and directly or indirectly punish those who do not measure up (Breuning, 2021; Sandel, 2020). This initiates a karmic framework that blames people for their own lot in life, alienating those who fail and hallowing those who succeed.

This, however, is not a novel situation in light of church history. In the fourth century, the Edict of Milan's legalization of Christianity created, for perhaps the first time, a paradigm in which the Christian religion could play out in the public sphere in a way that allowed church leaders to gain status both inside and outside of ecclesial institutions. The Desert Fathers movement began simply as a retaliation against the way the institutionalization of Christianity facilitated an ethos marked by celebritisation or popularity (González, 2014a; Gooch, 2024). Similar effects of celebritisation continued on through the Reformation era, and the way the Church of England abused such status metrics arguably became one variable Luther sought to deconstruct; by extracting spiritual authority from the corrupt institutions, Luther helped incite an equanimity of spiritual authority by siphoning it into the hands of the laypeople (González, 2014b).

These examples, among countless others, evoke a notion that churches that are not active "anti-cultures" run the risk of absorbing traits from their parent culture (Humbert, 2011; Shakespeare, 2016). When this happens, there opens the possibility of cultural identities, or markers of value, to insinuate themselves within Christian values, merging the two into one

(Assman, 1992). Left unchecked, the cultural identity may take over and become dominant, since the majority of persons surrounding the church community will display the supposed values of cultural identity, making those values easier to mimic (Bauman, 1993). This, then, creates a sort of sacralization of the cultural behaviors (Volf, 2019). Non-Christlike behaviors then become acts of piety (Volf, 2019). Within a culture as inordinately status obsessed as the modern West (Brand et al., 2021; Haidt, 2024; Veblen, 1898), the kinds of behaviors its churches are predisposed to mimic are likely to include the selective treatment of individuals based on each's perceived social position. This is deeply threatening to the social cognates upon which the church was founded.

The early church demonstrated the unique ability to bring together ostensibly segregated by economic power, race, culture, or ideology (Neutel, 2015; Yee, 2005). This was one of Christianity's most compelling aspects: its propensity to unite different social groups, tribes, ethnicities, and economic classes (Holland, 2019; Stark, 2011). It is through the Christian revolution alone that concern for the proverbial "losers" of society arose, sparking the ubiquitous compassion toward the disadvantaged or "victim" known today (Girard, 2001; Holland, 2019). But status obsession stands to make churches more homogeneous (Smith et al., 2014), an inclusive country club for the in-group that repels those who do not conform to the high bar set.

Perhaps unrelated and speculative, but analyses from Burge (2019) found that the bottom fourth of the American income scale is leaving the church faster and in larger numbers than any other demographic. Whether status is the cause, correlate, or just a side variable is, of course, debatable. It is nonetheless a telling phenomenon: The demographic with the lowest status is not finding refuge in the Western church.

In order to mitigate these trends, a refined approach to interpersonal status-seeking is in order. At last, I will now move to the theological.

Theological Inferences

I will now examine three theological point that provide basis for subverting status craving: Paul's critique of the *cursus honorum*, Christ's *kenosis*, and the discipline of secrecy.

Cursus Honorum

In the Roman world, honor was such a coveted resource that Dio Chrysostom described social life as *cursus honorum*, meaning "race for honors" (Chrysostom, 66.18; Hellerman, 2005). They were not subtle about it either; all gatherings, both public and private, seated people according to both "ascribed honors" (status inherited from lineage or generational wealth) and "acquired honors" (one's personal achievements) (Hellerman, 2013). This may shed light on why James rebuked churches for giving nice seats to the rich while seating the poor at their feet (James 2:1-4). Status games were so normalized that it was not easy to leave them by the church doors (Hellerman, 2013).

While every Roman church wrestled with honor-obsession, Hellerman argued that the foremost was Philippi—the most Roman of the Roman churches (Hellerman, 2013). It had the kind of culture where elites would announce their list of accomplishments before public speaking to establish credibility and even emblazoned tombstones with commemorative notes of their achievements (Hellerman, 2013). So, it is extremely significant that when Paul addressed the Philippians, he wrote, "If anyone thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more" (Phil. 3:4, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2016). It is as if he was declaring, "If anyone is winning this honors race, it would be me."

Then in the same exact style, a Philippian would announce their achievements out loud or on a headstone (Hellerman, 2015), Paul listed off his ascribed honors. He was born in the right tribe, at the right time, to the right race; he followed with his acquired honors: he surpassed all his peers in righteousness, passion, and justice (Phil. 3:5-6, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2016). But rather than listing his honors to establish status, it is for the sake of subverting the *cursus honorum*. He was explicitly drawing attention to its futility. Paul went on to compare his honors to worthless *rubbish* (σκυβαλον) because his standing in Christ was the only marker of actual status (Phil. 3:7-10, *English Standard Version Bible, 2016*).

What this implied for church communities, both then and now, is pivotal. It provides an escape from the *cursus honorum*. All were cherished in God's sight, and all were knit within the same family. This familial dynamic is espe-

cially important. By offering a new family for each person within the εκκλησιά, it provided for them a new basis for which to stop comparing or competing with one another for the highest social status. As Hellerman noted, Paul's positioning of the εκκλησιά as a "surrogate family" intentionally exonerated churches from status games because it was well established among Roman colonies that "adversarial competition" was prohibited amongst brothers and sisters of the same household (Hellerman, 2013, p. 191). Therefore, by their adoption into a new family, their ascribed and acquired honors were truly emptied of worth because competition amongst siblings was undignified.

In this, Paul was invoking an often-overlooked feature of Christ's character: His intentional efforts to minimize His own social status for the sake of others (Lendon, 1997).

Kenosis

When Jesus' disciples argued about which of them was the "greatest"—a typical status game—Jesus told them, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:26-27, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2016). This is a truly brilliant and tactile response; not only did it force the disciples to forfeit their fight for higher ranking, but it showed them how to play the status game like He did (Takle, 2017). It was Jesus' way of demonstrating that true status or power is only won through kenosis (Matt. 23:11-12, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2016). This was not simply a means of "reversing" the hierarchical flow of power, so to speak, but of abolishing the rigid flow all together (Foster, 1978).

Returning to Paul, his example of Christ's character in Phil 2:5-11 is the centerpiece of kenotic theology (Nimmo & Johnson, 2022). Its literary structure is often referred to as a "hymn," but it is likely more in line with a Roman encomium—a speech of praise crafted to extol the greatest attributes of the person in subject (Ruemann, 2008). Except rather than signal Christ's industrious deeds or worldly magnanimity, it hallows His humble nature (Hellerman, 2015). Christ did not consider His equality with God something to use selfishly to His own advantage (Moessner, 2009)—as was typical behavior among this epoch's aristocrats making use of their ascribed power (Fee, 2010). Rather, He allocated all of that power toward emptying Himself of all privileges and even the status granted to Him by His equality with God (Hansen, 2009). This does not necessarily mean that He surrendered His status or identity, but that He emptied Himself of all of its pragmatic uses or power in lieu of servanthood (Barth, 2002; Laporte, 1997).

It is also significant that this encomium describes Christ as having the "form of God" (μορφή θεού). Hellerman, Peter O'Brien, and others noted that the μορφή θεού of Philippians 2:5 might be more in view of the status that comes with one's clothing or appearance as opposed to a monotone assertion of divine nature (Hellerman, 2009; O'Brien, 1991; Oakes, 2001). Paul then detailed how Christ, entitled to the status of God, intentionally took on the status (μορφή) of a slave (Witherington, 2011). We might consider this a lived diatribe against "upward social mobility"—the natural tendency to accumulate more money, more prestige, and more power as life progresses. If anything, Jesus' trajectory was more in line with what Henri Nouwen called "downward mobility" (Nouwen, 2012). Jesus had every opportunity to use His power, but at every single turn He seemed to undermine His own status (Stark, 2011). The ontological claim is that, in Christ, social status not only should not be a high priority but *is not* a high priority. It is something that may as well be intentionally emptied upon any occasion where status might be used to one's advantage or expediency.

The Discipline of Secrecy

Jesus' frequent critiques of religious hypocrisy elucidate a clear dialectic against using piety to raise social status (John 5:44; Matt. 23:23). Perhaps this sheds light on part of what Jesus had in mind when, before moving into the Antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, He warned that unless one surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, they will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:19). This warning is not simply a "repudiation of the main aspects of Jewish piety," as France (1985, p. 122) has suggested, but a warning against the "ostentation in their performance."

Later in the sermon, Jesus seems to have offered a lesson on how to surpass pharisaical faith: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them" (Matt. 6:1, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2016). If one prays, fasts, or gives to the needy for the pur-

pose of amassing social capital, one might impress others, but *will* lose all reward from God. In light of our modern understanding of status psychology, this warning seems extremely adroit. If status is a fundamental desire, then Jesus' practical teaching is not at all hyperbolic. It offers a modality by which Christ followers can pursue righteousness unhindered by incessant vying for social position.

Hannah Arendt commented on this verse, "The moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness…Goodness can exist only when it is not perceived" (Arendt, 2018, p. 74). This process of making good works clandestine has sometimes been referred to throughout Christian history as the spiritual discipline of secrecy (Foster, 1978; Willard, 1988). The discipline of secrecy is instrumental in allocating a genuine righteous posture toward God and others; it provokes the simple assurance that our altruism bends toward God's will rather than the preservation or elevation of our own social standing, ultimately invoking the futility of amassing status as a natural byproduct. As Aquinas insisted, "honor" was one of the four main idols that captivate and distort our desires (Barron, 2011). Forgoing the accumulation of honor through hidden works is a simple yet thorough way to reduce the idol of status.

Secrecy may be helpful, because, according to some literature, there appears to be evidence that subjects are able to define success or social status by their perceptions, even in ways that might differ from the larger parent culture's perceptions (Mahadevan et al., 2019a). Ridgeway argued that a unique kind of status can even be won through "minor acts of non-conformity that do not violate the group's basic standards for behavior" (Ridgeway, 2019, p. 106). Non-conformity, then, could be a simple way to train our minds to refrain from letting the cultural social hierarchy dominate our thinking. The discipline of secrecy would theoretically help in this regard, as it is a means of betraying our personal thoughts of self-elevation in favor of defining success in terms of love toward God and others, ultimately mitigating status cravings in general.

As the Hawthorne effect has demonstrated, people modify their behaviors depending on their being watched; if one acquaints themselves with the discipline of secrecy, they may be able to refine their authentic motivations by intentionally rejecting to modify their piety in light of audiences. This may prove even more healthy for the social media age.

Lastly, secrecy may even help mitigate extrinsic motivations, which would create more intrinsic motivation and thus boost subjective well-being (Moltafet et al., 2010).

Integration Into Christian Psychology

Since "all psychological research programs" are "theology-laden," it is a necessity to see how these theological inferences inform practical psychology (Murphy, 2005, p. 26). Vanhoozer opined that the role of the Christian psychologist may be most in line with behaving as an "acting coach" (2010, p. 9) that directs patients to participate in the drama of Scripture. This is of direct importance to our discussion because, as Vanhoozer has already, thankfully, suggested, this might entail training imaginations to perceive themselves as people who find their hunger for social status fulfilled in God. This may involve leading patients or groups through imaginative exercises that envision the process of justification—of dying and being raised with Christ—as a declaration of our sharing in His "status" so that other avenues of identity will be more naturally rejected (Vanhoozer, 2010, p. 13). This, ideally, would also help them think theologically about themselves and others, which could incentivize a humbler interpersonality due to the ways in which, as Polkinghorne (2001) has suggested, all theological thinking draws us into a greater humble awareness of "our limitation and ignorance in the face of the Divine Mystery" (p. 105). A theologically driven mental framework could provide basis for the continual realization of one's own innate intellectual and even social insufficiency, ultimately drawing them perpetually to reliance upon the Spirit of God.

While Vanhoozer assumed status anxieties can be mitigated through steeping our imaginations in the biblical canon, I believe present cultural differences (such as widespread adoption of achievement culture) and inundations by modern technologies (social media, for example) may require a specific intentionality toward combatting status obsession, which cannot be easily ascertained through scriptural dramaturgy. This is not to condescend on the beauty of encouraging patients to see themselves as dramatically participating in Scripture. It is

simply to suggest that our present contexts may require a more *specific* attention to these matters and cannot easily be resolved through a "killing two birds with one stone" mentality that assumes status seeking will be alleviated naturally through scriptural focus. While saturating the mind in Scripture is pillar of Christian life, a psychotherapist should consider further embodied practices for transformation—namely, practices that go beyond mental exercises and intentionally integrate the heart and body in tandem with the imagination (DeGroat, 2010; Willard, 1988). This may include the aforementioned discipline of secrecy as well as several further modifications that will be discussed in our conclusion. Providing corresponding practices to a patient's answers to questions about what role status-obsession plays in their daily experience, how it might integrate within their immediate and larger social communities, its appearance within basic daily cognition, and the ways in which the desire or obsession appears in relation to other parts of their being could also prove helpful (DeGroat, 2010). Leading patients or groups into repentance surrounding this matter could be one tangible avenue to bring about transformation. Through probing above questions, this could lead a patient into a healthy conviction of the sin of finding self-worth through status-seeking and social comparison. From there, the MHP could help guide them by the work of the Holy Spirit into a renewal of the mind through admission of guilt and a request for Divine help (Zuiddam, 2022).

Counseling may be aided and developed further by a focus on both a "kenotic imperative"—an MHP's encouragement toward self-emptying—and an "agapeic imperative"—an encouragement toward self-sacrificial love (Hackney, 2010, p. 26). Building on Laporte's (1997) theory of kenosis as a key to spiritual maturity, the counselor or mentor should seek to demonstrate their own freedom from "underlying self-seeking, manipulation, or impingement" (p. 244). Modeling kenotic postures could allow space for them to exercise their own self authenticity. Displaying a lack of desire for accumulating social status—and possibly even the joys of willfully emptying oneself of it—could provide healthy basis to enact these behaviors in their own lives. This self-demonstration could provide an impetus for the patient to pursue "noncoercive and non-domineering personal relations" (Murphy & Ellis, 1996, p. 143) among their interpersonal sphere. Through this, theoretically, an MHP could boost subjective well-being, effectively alleviating ancillary dispositions of anxiety or depression due to a widening of patient's mental and spiritual focus away from themselves and toward others (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Palaver, 2013).

As Swallow and Kuiper (1988) have demonstrated, monitoring one's social standing—or "keeping up with the Jones'"—tends to incite anxiety and depression, while Lyubomirsky (1995) confirmed that continuous monitoring of the performance or accolades of others leads to more unhappiness within subjects. Therefore, in simplest form, this brand of kenotic therapizing stands to possibly amplify a patient's subjective well-being—and potentially reduce anxiety or depression—through rudimentary recommendations to mitigate social comparisons. This may run contrary to certain self-esteem models of counseling, but it will, nonetheless, supply a more rooted sense of worth among subjects due to the way it encourages patients to think of themselves less and their standing in Christ more.

Lastly, this individual could potentially act as a Girardian scapegoat figure for their entire social system. Girard noticed that the majority of social conflict stemmed from "mimesis" or mimetic desire—our insatiable temptation to desire what our neighbor desires, a condition which may be the force driving social comparison, jealousy, envy, and status-seeking (Palaver, 2013). Christ became the figure to overcome the tyranny of mimesis, becoming a model of all social resolutions through His kenosis. As Christ bore the weight of sin on the cross, exposing and bringing to light the corruption of evil and violence (Girard, 2001), the one who ostensibly crucifies their own status could become a scapegoat for the hunger for status itself, making a public spectacle of its insufficiencies.

Conclusion: "How Then Shall We Live?"

In conclusion, we should be aware of the importance of assigning honor to all within the community—even going out of one's way to show appreciation toward low status members—which is essential. This would an effective means of spreading kenotic behaviors in ecclesial contexts. Practically speaking, within ecclesial systems, the leadership or high-status

members should lead by example in displaying kenotic behaviors so that the rest of the system will better learn said behaviors because of the predisposition toward mimicry (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Perhaps this is already well demonstrated within Quaker denominations, who pursue poly-centric models of leadership that rely less on three or more coleaders as opposed to one "celebrity" leader (Gooch, 2024). The simple presence of poly-centric leadership smooths out the rigidity of an entire organization's hierarchy through its structural arrangement toward a less vertical status-ladder.

It may be of value to supply less ostensibly successful individuals more responsibility; empirical evidence suggests that the more control or responsibility low-status individuals are given, the less predisposed they will be toward psychic and physical maladies (Stansfeld et al., 2003). It is generally understood that individuals desire to be rewarded in proportion to their efforts (Marmot, 2014; Siegrist, 1996). Looking more closely, there are three major categories of "reward" that people long for: money, esteem, and opportunities (as in career or social opportunities for upward momentum) (Bosma, 1997). While churches can easily provide benevolence funds to those who need money, it is important that we also bestow esteem upon all individuals, and provide opportunities whenever possible, so that people will feel their efforts are valued. This may involve requesting that low-status members become elders or are given positions of authority or responsibility. It could also mean leaving the proverbial edges of your fields unharvested (Lev. 23:22), allowing others to glean. For example, a head pastor might allow someone who is not afforded much opportunity to teach or lead outreach to take charge over some of the pastor's speaking or leadership engagements; similar opportunities could be afforded by high-status individuals working in worship departments or even business fields.

Though Niebuhr's vision for ecclesial spaces that reject drawing social lines between race, ethnicity, class, or gender remains unrealized (Niebuhr, 1954), there persists an intellectual pull toward this end that I hope will continue heartily; and perhaps with a renewed focus on not treating people different according to social position, this dream will come closer into reality. And for Christian MHPs, we can establish and teach a pattern of viewing "God, the world, and ourselves according to the strange new status symbol of the cross" (Vanhoozer, 2010, p. 14). If kenotic behaviors can become the system's most admirable trait, it will make a public spectacle of the *cursus honorum*, theoretically making it easier for individuals to exit the honors race to resign into Christocentric status metrics.

In sum, I have hoped to demonstrate the ways in which the psychology of social status intersects with theology for purposes of seeing how the theological might inform a practical response. In conclusion, there is still much more research that needs to be done about the extent to which status metrics impact both individuals and organizations and more research done on the relationship between status psychology and Christian theology. But for now, this paper's discussions of the ways in which the overlooking of status psychology harms individuals and groups is a functional beginning.

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Distinct Mediating Effects of Scrupulosity Across Types of Christian Perfectionists

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While perfectionism, especially in the religious sphere, has often been associated with negative outcomes, there has been growing literature demonstrating that religious perfectionism is multifaceted with both adaptive and maladaptive aspects. This study examined the relationship between perfectionist types, scrupulosity, and psychological indicators among 223 adult Christians. The two key facets of religious perfectionism, zealous religious dedication and religious self-criticism, differentially linked with study variables supporting their adaptive and maladaptive nature, respectively. Three different profile types of religious perfectionist groups were identified in this Christian sample: adaptive religious perfectionists, maladaptive religious perfectionists, and non-perfectionists. Adaptive religious perfectionists fared best in regard to religious and psychological wellbeing, evident through their higher religious dedication, lower religious self-criticism, lower scrupulosity, and lower burnout. In contrast, maladaptive religious perfectionists were associated with more negative characteristics. Moreover, scrupulosity significantly mediated the links between religious self-criticism and two negative psychological indicators (burnout and anxiety). Yet, when this model was tested between the religious perfectionist types, this link between religious self-criticism and scrupulosity was significant for maladaptive religious perfectionists and non-perfectionists, but not adaptive religious perfectionists, suggesting that the latter was a protective factor. Practical implications across both clinical and clergy contexts were discussed.

In the United States, where approximately 64% of the population identifies with the Christian faith (Pew Research Center, 2022), many individuals rely on their faith for finding meaning and purpose as well as to cope with stressors (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Within this Christian community, a subset comprises highly religious individuals who often also exhibit traits of perfectionism. Perfectionism is multidimensional with a focus on either striving to meet extremely high standards or an excessive focus on one's inadequacies (Slaney et al., 2001). Early scholars have suggested that perfectionistic religious individuals who rigidly follow dogmatic religions may be more likely to hold rigid religious beliefs and experience emotional disturbance (Ellis, 1986). Crosby et al. (2011) have suggested that religiousness (also referred to as religiosity) and perfectionism may be related through shared emphasis on high standards and psychological inflexibility. The connection between perfectionism and religiousness may be due to certain biblical teachings among some Christians in the West, such as the verse, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Heise & Steitz, 1991; *New International Version Bible*, 2011, Matt. 5:48).

Perfectionism literature has focused more on its negative impact on religious individuals (Crosby et al., 2011; Steffen, 2014). Yet not all perfectionists are alike, and researchers have found different dimensions of perfectionism in which individuals experience differing psychological outcomes (Lo & Abbott, 2013). This differentiation also applies to perfectionism that specifically pertains to the religious domain (Wang et al., 2020). Thus, this study aims to understand the relationship between perfectionism and psychological outcomes from both variable- and person-centered approaches.

Multidimensionality of Perfectionism From a Variable-Centered Approach

Perfectionism has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct and its associa-

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tions with other variables have been analyzed through a variable-centered approach (Frost et al., 1990; Hamachek, 1978, Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Through a systematic review, Stoeber and Otto (2006) concluded with empirical evidence that perfectionism has both adaptive and maladaptive aspects. The adaptive aspect of perfectionism (also referred to as positive perfectionistic strivings) is characterized as striving to achieve high standards, which has been positively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction (Slaney et al., 2001). In contrast, the maladaptive aspect of perfectionism (also referred to as negative perfectionistic concerns) has been positively correlated with distress (e.g., depression and negative affect). Maladaptive perfectionism is characterized by the notion of discrepancy (Slaney et al., 2001), which is a tendency to focus on the gap between one's performance and one's ideal, and is associated with feelings of guilt and shame (Fedewa et al., 2005; Rice & Slaney, 2002).

The two aspects of perfectionism associate differently with religious variables. For example, Crosby et al. (2011) found adaptive perfectionism to be significantly correlated with intrinsic religiousness, and maladaptive perfectionism with extrinsic religiousness, with psychological inflexibility as the mediator between the latter two. Furthermore, Judd et al. (2020) found that the experience of God's grace among Latter-Day Saints was positively correlated with adaptive perfectionism and negatively correlated with maladaptive perfectionism.

Perfectionism is also multidimensional in regard to the different domains where perfectionism is present and impactful. For instance, one can strive for perfectionism in specific domains, such as work, study, social relationships, hygiene, and the like (Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009). Furthermore, one could have perfectionistic tendencies in multiple domains or specifically in a single domain. However, in a study examining the various domains (e.g., Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009, listed 22 domains), religion was not included, despite religiousness having been shown to be impacted by perfectionism (Allen et al., 2015; Crosby et al., 2011; Ellis, 1986).

As a result, there has been a recent development in measuring the multidimensionality of perfectionism specific to the religious domain: the Religious Perfectionism Scale (RPS; Wang et al., 2020), which includes two dimensions—Zealous Religious Dedication and Religious Self-Criticism. The Zealous Religious Dedication subscale measures an individual's adherence and commitment to one's religion and was found to be an adaptive aspect of religious perfectionism, positively correlating with life satisfaction and happiness (Wang et al., 2020). In contrast, religious self-criticism represents a maladaptive aspect of religious perfectionism that focuses on inadequacy and was found to positively correlate with anxiety and somatization symptoms. The RPS was initially developed with a Chinese sample of Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims (Wang et al., 2020) and later evaluated with Christians in the U.S. (Wang et al., 2023). These findings support the multidimensionality of religious perfectionism from a variable-centered approach that parallels the construct of general perfectionism. These findings support the importance of further examining religious perfectionism in a religious, Christian context, especially the multidimensionality of the construct with its adaptive and maladaptive aspects.

Classifying Types of Perfectionists With a Person-Centered Approach

Most earlier studies were conducted from a variable-centered approach in that they examined the relationship between perfectionism and other variables (e.g., through correlation, regression). Later, researchers identified various individuals exhibiting specific perfectionistic traits and explored how they differed in their psychological well-being using a person-centered approach (Slaney et al., 2001). Utilizing the combined profile scores of the multidimensionality of perfectionism, a person-centered approach focuses on classifying individuals into different types of perfectionists. Individuals have been classified into perfectionist types that align with Hamachek's (1978) early theory differentiating healthy (adaptive) and neurotic (maladaptive) perfectionists. Healthy perfectionists are those who, despite striving to achieve excellence, can still feel a sense of pleasure in what they do. In contrast, neurotic perfectionists are those who constantly feel inadequate and unsatisfied.

Empirical research has classified individuals into different perfectionist types (adaptive perfectionists, maladaptive perfectionists, and

non-perfectionists) based on their perfectionism dimensions (Rice & Slaney, 2002). Adaptive perfectionists have the desire to strive towards high standards but are not discouraged when these standards are not always met (high-standards, but low-discrepancy) and mirror the healthy perfectionists described by Hamachek (1978). Maladaptive perfectionists not only strive towards high standards but also constantly focus on their inadequacies (high-standards and high-discrepancy), which reflects what Hamachek described as neurotic perfectionists. Finally, non-perfectionists are those who score low on both the perfectionism dimensions of standards and discrepancy. In a later study, these different types of perfectionists were investigated among Latter-Day Saints and compared with various psychological outcomes (Allen & Wang, 2014). Adaptive perfectionists reported higher levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with life along with lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to maladaptive and non-perfectionists. The current study aims to examine whether different types of religious perfectionists exist (in contrast to simply types of perfectionists) by utilizing a person-centered approach, which has yet to be empirically studied in the current literature.

Scrupulosity as a Linking Factor Between Perfectionism and Psychological Outcomes

Recent findings show implications for a more nuanced relationship between psychological well-being and the nature of an individual's religious beliefs. The literature on religious individuals suggests that perfectionism, as a personality trait, has a significant relationship with burnout, anxiety, and well-being, with scrupulosity as a significant linking factor in this relationship (Allen & Wang, 2014; Allen et al., 2015). Scrupulosity is characterized by pervasive fears and obsessive religious behaviors related to sin even in the absence of any wrongdoing (Abramowitz et al., 2002). This encompasses obsessive fears of unintentionally committing sins and apprehensions about facing divine punishment from God. These obsessions can lead to scrupulous behaviors of religious rituals to assuage fears of transgression, such as excessive praying and repetitive recitals of Bible verses. Individuals with high levels of scrupulosity tend to avoid stimuli and situations that could lead to committing sin in an attempt to be perfect in the eyes of God. In a study by Allen and Wang (2014), scrupulosity was found to be a significant mediating factor in the relationship between perfectionistic discrepancy and negative psychological outcomes (i.e., anxiety, depression, and dissatisfaction with life) among Latter-Day Saints. In another study, also with Latter-Day Saints, scrupulosity was found to be a mediator between legalistic religious views and both shame and guilt (Allen et al., 2015). More specifically, scrupulosity fully mediated the link between legalism and guilt and partially mediated the link between legalism and shame. These studies exemplify how the inclination to magnify imperfection, as evidenced by perfectionistic discrepancy, emerges as a significant precursor to religious scrupulosity. This underlying role of scrupulosity in the relationship between religious perfectionism and psychological wellbeing is worth further examining.

The Current Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the different types of perfectionists, scrupulosity, and well-being. First, we explore how different dimensions of religious perfectionism are associated with religious commitment, scrupulosity, burnout, and well-being from a variable-centered approach through correlations. Second, we identify different profile types of religious perfectionists and non-perfectionists from a person-centered approach. These identified religious perfectionist groups are then compared on study variables. Third, we examine the mediating role of scrupulosity in the link between the personality trait of religious perfectionism (i.e., religious self-criticism) and psychological outcomes (e.g., anxiety/burnout). Lastly, our investigation extends to examine this mediation model across the different profile types of religious perfectionists using a moderated-mediation model (see Figure 1).

Method

Participants

The participants were 223 adult Christians. The majority of the sample identified as female (n = 143), and the average age range of the participants was 35.01 years-old and ranged from 18 to 70 years. The ethnic distribution of the sam-

ple was White at 43.5%, Black at 26.5%, Asian/Indian subcontinent at 19.7%, Hispanic at 4.5%, Middle Eastern at 1.8%, multi-racial at 1.3%, and other at 2.2%. In regard to Christian affiliation, 94.6% of the participants identified as Christian/Protestant while the remaining 5.4% identified as Catholic. The majority of the sample (41.7%) resided in California, followed by Texas (22.0%), Washington (13.5%), and Missouri (6.7%), and the rest were scattered across 18 other states.

Procedure

Recruitment for this sample used snowball sampling through social media and email distribution, following approval obtained from the researchers' institution's Human Subject Review Committee. The survey, administered online via Qualtrics, presented the participants with a brief description of the study and informed consent before beginning. A total of 255 participated, but the data were cleaned to only include those who identified as Christian, which resulted in a final sample size of 223 participants.

Measures

Religious Perfectionism Scale

The Religious Perfectionism Scale (RPS; Wang et al., 2020) was used to measure perfectionism related to religious beliefs and practices. The RPS consists of nine items where participants respond on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The RPS includes two dimensions: Zealous Religious Dedication (ZRD; five items) and Religious Self-Criticism (RSC; four items). Sample items include "I could sacrifice my life for my religious faith" (ZRD) and "Even though I already try very hard, I still feel like I do not live out my religion well enough" (RSC). The Cronbach's alphas of ZRD scores ranged from .76 to .78, and those of RSC scores ranged from .71 to .73 in a Chinese sample of Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims (Wang et al., 2020).

Duke University Index of Religion

The Duke University Index of Religion (DUREL) was administered to measure religiousness of the participants (Koenig et al., 1997). The DUREL consists of five items where participants respond to statements with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*definitely not true*) to 5 (*definitely true of me*). The first item measures attendance of religious services. The second item measures time spent on religious activities. Finally, items 3-5 measure religious commitment on a "subjective" or "intrinsic" level (Koenig, et al., 1997). The Cronbach's alphas for this scale are adequate, ranging from .78 to .91 (Koenig & Büssing, 2010).

Penn Inventory of Scrupulosity

The Penn Inventory of Scrupulosity-Revised (PIOS-R; Olatunji et al., 2007) was used to measure scrupulosity associated with religiousness (Abramowitz et al., 2002). Abramowitz and Jacoby (2014) suggested that scrupulosity is a thematic presentation of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), along with other types of obsessions (i.e., germs or violent images). Their conceptualization of scrupulosity exists on a "continuum of psychopathology" where individuals can have subclinical symptoms of OCD that may not be significantly interfering with their function (Abramowitz et al., 2002; p. 836). The PIOS-R consists of 15 items in which participants respond to statements related to fear of God and sin by using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*constantly*). Only the five items from the Fear of Punishment From God subscale of the PIOS-R were included in this study. Sample questions included "I am afraid that I will disobey God's rules/laws" and "I am afraid my thoughts are unacceptable to God." This subscale has an adequate Cronbach's alpha of .91 (Olatunji et al., 2007).

Maslach Burnout Scale (MBI)

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used to measure the level of burnout among participants (Maslach et al., 1997). For this study, only the nine Emotional Exhaustion subscale items were included, which were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*everyday*). Sample items included "I feel emotionally drained" and "I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day." The Emotional Exhaustion subscale has good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .87 (Wheeler et al., 2011).

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

The short version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) was used to measure anxiety (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Only the seven items from the anxiety subscale were included in this study. Items were rated on a 4-point

Likert scale from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much*). Sample items included "I felt scared without any good reason" and "I felt I was close to panic." The Cronbach's alpha for the Anxiety subscale is .84 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS; Haver et. al., 2015) was used to measure mental well-being among the participants. The SWEMWBS consists of seven items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all of the time*). Sample items included "I've been feeling optimistic about the future" and "I've been feeling close to other people." This scale has a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 (Haver et al., 2015).

Results

Correlations

We conducted intercorrelations between all study variables (see Table 1). The two religious perfectionism subscales, Zealous Religious Dedication (RPS-ZRD) and Religious Self-Criticism (RPS-RSC), were positively correlated with each other. However, these two dimensions of religious perfectionism had different correlation patterns with other study variables. Religious self-criticism was positively correlated with scrupulosity, burnout, and anxiety, supporting its maladaptive nature. In contrast, zealous religious dedication was positively correlated with well-being, supporting its adaptive nature. Both religious perfectionism dimensions were positively correlated with religious commitment and scrupulosity, but the zealous religious dedication had a stronger association with religious commitment and religious self-criticism had a stronger association with scrupulosity. Scrupulosity was positively correlated with burnout and anxiety, and it was negatively correlated with well-being.

Cluster Analysis

Cluster analyses were utilized to categorize participants into different types of religious perfectionists and religious non-perfectionists based on the two RPS dimensions. We used a two-step method that first involved a hierarchical cluster analysis followed by a non-hierarchical cluster analysis. The first step utilized the Ward's linkage method (Murtagh & Legendre, 2014) with the Squared Euclidean Distance measure. Standardized scores of the RPS-ZRD and RPS-RSC were used as variables for the cluster analysis, and we followed guidelines by Hair and Black (2000) to determine the most appropriate number of clusters. There were relatively large increases in the agglomeration coefficient by 35% and 37% during the steps when the solution decreased from four to three clusters and three to two clusters, respectively, suggesting for us to stop because heterogeneous clusters were combined during those steps. Therefore, we ran both a four-cluster and three-cluster

Table 1

Intercorrelations Between Study Variables

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	RPS-ZRD	**.80**						
2	RPS-RSC	.31***	**.87**					
3	DUREL	.59***	.18**	**.80**				
4	Scrupulosity	.14*	.60***	.13	**.87**			
5	Burnout	-.12	.16*	-.09	.24***	**.89**		
6	Anxiety	-.07	.15*	-.11	.21**	.49***	**.84**	
7	Wellbeing	.14*	-.10	.14*	-.21**	-.58***	-.43***	**.77**
	Mean	20.39	14.99	4.10	8.22	22.73	3.42	23.66
	S.D.	5.05	4.87	0.83	3.95	8.20	4.02	3.75

Note. $N = 223$. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, two-tailed. Coefficients alpha are presented in boldface along the diagonal. RPS-ZRD – Zealous Religious Dedication, RPS-RSC – Religious Self-Criticism, DUREL – Religious Commitment.

solution. After comparing these two solutions, the three-cluster solution yielded three meaningful groups that paralleled the perfectionist literature of two types of perfectionists along with a group of non-perfectionists (Hamachek, 1978; Rice & Slaney, 2002) and, therefore, was chosen for this study.

A nonhierarchical k-means cluster analysis was run with a three-cluster solution. The RPS-ZRD and RPS-RSC cluster means from the previous step were set as starting points for the k-means analysis. A three-cluster k-means solution converged in six iterations. The three-cluster k-means analysis placed 45 participants in the first cluster (20%), 120 participants in the second cluster (54%), and 58 participants in the third cluster (26%). Participants in the first two clusters had significantly higher RPS-ZRD scores than those in the third cluster, suggesting that the former two clusters contained religious perfectionists, whereas the third cluster contained non-perfectionists. The two groups of perfectionists were distinguished by the second cluster having significantly higher RPS-RSC scores; thus, the first cluster was labeled adaptive religious perfectionists, and the second cluster maladaptive religious perfectionists. We tested to see if there were gender differences across the three clusters. Results indicated no significant difference on gender distribution across the three groups, χ^2 (2, N = 233) = 1.13, p = .57.

ANOVA

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) were conducted with the cluster groups as the between-subjects factor to examine if there were any significant differences between the adaptive, maladaptive, and non- religious perfectionists on the study variables: religious commitment, scrupulosity, burnout, anxiety, and well-being scores. Univariate ANOVAs revealed statistically significant differences for religious commitment, scrupulosity, and burnout. Effect sizes (η^2) for the statistically significant mean differences ranged between .04 to .29. The two religious perfectionist groups reported higher religious commitment than the non-perfectionist group (η^2 = .24). The adaptive religious perfectionists reported significantly lower burnout than the maladaptive and non-perfectionists (η^2= .04). The maladaptive perfectionists reported significantly higher scrupulosity than the other two groups (η^2 = .29). The results, as well as the Tukey post hoc comparisons, are presented in Table 2.

Mediation and Moderated-Mediation Analyses

We used the PROCESS 3.0 macros (Hayes, 2018) in SPSS to run the mediation and moderated-mediation analyses with two outcome variables (i.e., burnout and anxiety) that were significantly correlated with religious self-criticism. In other words, we did not examine well-being due to its non-significant correla-

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations by Cluster Groups

	Adaptive religious perfectionists n = 45		Maladaptive religious perfectionists n = 120		Non-perfectionists n = 58			
Subscale	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	η^2
RPS-ZRD	23.68 a	2.79	22.29 b	3.39	13.90 c	3.20	161.66***	.60
RPS-RSC	10.45 a	2.95	18.49 b	2.60	11.27 a	3.95	169.34***	.61
DUREL	4.54 a	.50	4.25 a	.61	3.44 b	1.03	34.47***	.24
Scrupulosity	5.80 a	3.19	10.17 b	3.35	6.06 a	3.49	43.88***	.29
Burnout	19.62 a	7.27	23.53 b	8.19	23.50 b	8.44	4.17*	.04
Anxiety	2.39	3.78	3.88	3.91	3.28	4.32	2.35	.02
Wellbeing	24.68	4.03	23.41	3.83	23.38	3.25	2.12	.02

Note. RPS-ZRD – Zealous Religious Dedication, RPS-RSC – Religious Self-Criticism, DUREL – Religious Commitment. F tests were based on df = 2, 220. Values with differing superscripts indicate significant within-row mean score differences between the clusters of perfectionists, using Tukey post hoc comparisons significant at p < .05.

tion with religious self-criticism. PROCESS utilizes bootstrap estimates for calculating bias-corrected confidence intervals for the mediation and moderated-mediation effects. For this study, we estimated the 95% confidence intervals (CI) of indirect effects derived from the mean of 5,000 bootstrap samples. In other words, when upper and lower bounds of the CI do not include zero, an indirect effect can be concluded with 95% confidence.

We examined the indirect effect of scrupulosity on the association between religious self-criticism and burnout (see Table 3). Bootstrapping results indicated that scrupulosity fully mediated the link between religious self-criticism and burnout (95% CI [.07, .40]; indirect effect = .23, *SE* = .08, $p < .05$; total effect = .27, *SE* = .11, $t = 2.41$, $p = .017$; direct effect = .04, *SE* = .14, $t = 0.303$, $p = .77$). In other words, the burnout that Christians may experience, in response to religious self-criticism, is mediated through the fear of sin and God. More specifically, higher levels of religious self-criticism are associated with higher levels of scrupulosity, which in turn are associated with higher levels of burnout.

We also followed the same method to examine the indirect effect of scrupulosity on the relation between religious self-criticism and anxiety. Bootstrapping estimates indicated that scrupulosity also fully mediated the link between self-criticism and anxiety (95% CI [.03, .17]; indirect effect = .09, *SE* = .04, $p < .05$; total effect = .12, *SE* = .05, $t = 2.25$, $p = .03$; direct effect = .03, *SE* = .07, $t = 0.42$, $p = .68$). Similarly, higher levels of religious self-criticism are associated with higher levels of scrupulosity, which, in turn, are associated with higher levels of anxiety.

Lastly, we examined whether this mediation model would differ across religious perfectionist types. In other words, we tested the moderation effect of religious perfectionist types on the link between religious self-criticism and scrupulosity in the mediation models (see Figure 1). Bootstrapping results using PROCESS model 7, presented in Table 4, indicated an overall interaction between perfectionist types and religious self-criticism on predicting scrupulosity, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(2, 217) = 3.00$, $p = .05$. The link between religious self-criticism and scrupulosity was significant for both maladaptive religious perfectionists ($t = 4.60$, $p < .001$) and non-perfectionists ($t = 4.00$, $p < .001$), but was not significant for adaptive religious perfectionists ($t = 0.26$, p = .80). See Figure 2.

Table 3

Regression Results for Mediation: Panel A (Religious Self-Criticism → Scrupulosity → Burnout) and Panel B (Religious Self-Criticism → Scrupulosity → Anxiety)

	Panel A: DV = Burnout ($R^2 = .06$)			
Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	18.27	10.74	10.49	.000
Religious Self-Criticism	0.04	0.14	0.30	.766
Scrupulosity	0.47	0.17	2.76	.006
	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI	
Indirect effect	0.23	0.08	[.07, .40]	
	Panel B: DV = Anxiety ($R^2 = .05$)			
Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	1.40	0.86	1.63	.105
Religious Self-Criticism	0.03	0.07	0.42	.676
Scrupulosity	0.19	0.08	2.32	.021
	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI	
Indirect effect	0.09	0.04	[.03, .17]	

Note. $N = 223$. All *p* values, two-tailed. DV = dependent variable; CI = confidence interval.

Table 4

Regression Results for Conditional Indirect Effect: Religious Self-Criticism → Scrupulosity → Burnout/Anxiety (Moderator, Religious Perfectionist Type)

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Mediator model (DV = scrupulosity)				
Constant	8.39	0.48	17.51	.000
Religious Self-Criticism	0.51	0.11	4.60	.000
W_1	-0.77	0.74	-1.04	.299
W_2	-2.41	0.98	-2.45	.015
Religious Self-Criticism × W_1	-0.09	0.15	-0.58	.564
Religious Self-Criticism × W_2	-0.47	0.19	-2.41	.017
	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI	
Adaptive Perfectionists	0.04	0.16	[-.27, .36]	
Maladaptive Perfectionists	0.51	0.11	[.29, .72]	
Non-perfectionists	0.42	0.10	[.21, .63]	

Note. $N = 223$. All p values, two-tailed. Coding of Categorical Moderator: [W_1 = non-perfectionist = 1, adaptive & maladaptive perfectionists = 0]; [W_2 = adaptive perfectionists = 1, maladaptive & non- perfectionists = 0]. DV = dependent variable; CI = confidence interval. For the mediator model $\Delta R^2 = .02$; for the outcome model $R^2 = .39$.

Figure 1

Moderated Mediation Model Examining the Moderating Effect of Religious Perfectionist Types on the Mediation of Religious Self-Criticism and Burnout/Anxiety by Scrupulosity

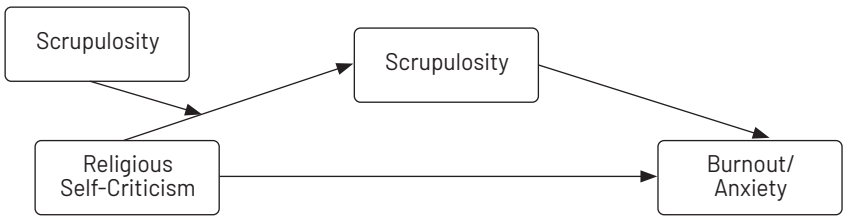
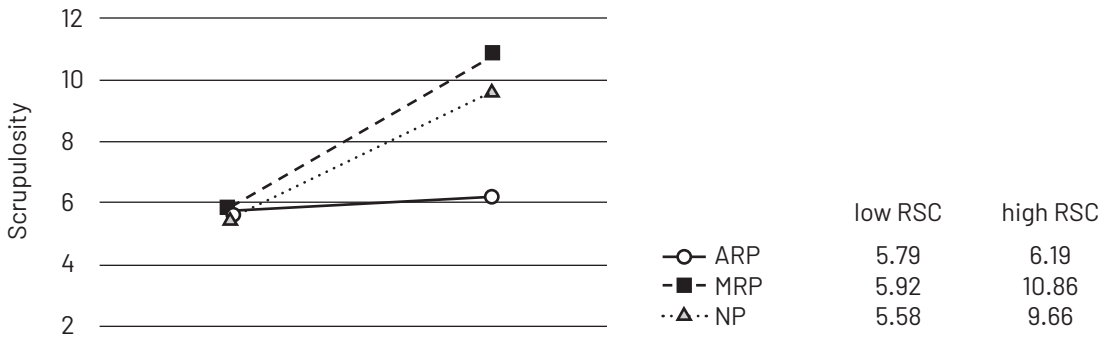


Figure 2

Moderation Effect of Perfectionist Type on the Link Between Religious Self-Criticism and Scrupulosity



Discussion

Adaptive and Maladaptive Dimensions of Religious Perfectionism

Our first aim was to examine the dimensions of religious perfectionism using a variable-centered approach. This exploration presented meaningful relationships between the adaptive (zealous religious dedication) and maladaptive (religious self-criticism) dimensions with associated variables supporting their distinct nature. Our finding was in line with previous studies on religious perfectionism (Wang et al., 2020) and perfectionism in general (Rice & Slaney, 2002).

Supporting the existing literature on distinguishing the adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism (Stoeber & Otto, 2006), the more adaptive dimension of religious perfectionism, zealous religious dedication, was significantly associated with religious commitment and well-being, indicating beneficial effects of greater involvement and practice of one's religious beliefs on mental health. The weak but positive link between zealous religious dedication and scrupulosity was not expected but not surprising as Christians who are zealously dedicated might be more sensitive to sinning. However, zealous religious dedication's positive correlation with well-being supports the adaptive nature of this dimension. In sum, these associations point to the adaptive effects of religious dedication.

On the other hand, religious self-criticism showed a pattern of significant correlations that fit the maladaptive nature of religious perfectionism. Although religious self-criticism was significantly associated with religious commitment, this dimension was most strongly associated with scrupulosity, which is congruent with the self-critical tendencies of religious self-criticism. This finding is similar to a previous study in which the maladaptive aspect of perfectionistic discrepancy was associated with scrupulosity among Latter-Day Saints (Allen & Wang, 2014).

Different Types of Religious Perfectionists

Our second aim was to determine types of religious perfectionists using a person-centered approach. This approach successfully classified Christian participants into different profile types of religious perfectionists that were in line with the perfectionism theoretical framework (Hamachek, 1978) and empirical research literature (e.g., Allen & Wang, 2014; Rice & Slaney, 2002). While different types of perfectionists have been robustly identified in the research literature with the general (e.g., Rice & Ashby, 2007; Rice & Slaney, 2002) and religious (Allen & Wang, 2014) populations, this is the first study that assesses perfectionism in the specific domain of religion.

Our results suggested that adaptive religious perfectionists fared best in regard to religious and psychological well-being among the three profile groups, evident through not only having higher religious commitment but also lower religious self-criticism, scrupulosity, and burnout. Overall, this perfectionist group in our study had similar characteristics with the adaptive perfectionists found among Latter-Day Saints using a general perfectionism scale (Allen & Wang, 2014). The adaptive religious perfectionists appeared to be a group of committed Christians who were much at peace with their faith, relationship with God, and general psychological state.

In contrast, maladaptive religious perfectionists were associated with more negative characteristics than the adaptive sub-type. Characteristically, the maladaptive group scored highest on religious self-criticism and scrupulosity in comparison to the adaptive and non-perfectionist groups. Along with non-perfectionists, the maladaptive subtype had higher burnout than adaptive religious perfectionists. The maladaptive perfectionists appeared to be a group with a high level of religious commitment accompanied with insecure and exhausted feelings in their faith. In line with perfectionism theoretical framework (Hamachek, 1978; Rice & Ashby, 2007) and our variable-centered correlational analysis, these three religious perfectionist profiles exemplify distinct characteristics of the different dimensions of religious perfectionism.

Differential Mediation Effects of Scrupulosity Among Perfectionist Types

The third aim of this study was to examine how scrupulosity might mediate the link between religious self-criticism and the two psychological indicators (i.e., burnout and anxiety). Results of our mediation analyses suggesting scrupulosity as a mediator were in line with past studies that

also found scrupulosity to mediate how perfectionistic discrepancy was associated with other psychological outcomes (i.e., anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction) in Latter-Day Saints (Allen & Wang, 2014). This link between religious self-criticism and burnout can potentially be explained through an unhealthy and disproportionate amount of focus being placed upon sinning as well as an over-sensitivity to falling short of one's perceived expectation from God. In essence, the religious perfectionistic trait leads to obsessive thoughts and a heightened fear of committing sin, resulting in anxiety and burnout.

Additionally, we also combined our variable-centered and person-centered research approaches through moderated-mediation analyses. We examined whether the type of religious perfectionist would have distinct relationships with the mediating role of scrupulosity. We found that there was a significant link between religious self-criticism and scrupulosity in the mediating model for the maladaptive religious perfectionists and non-perfectionists, but not the adaptive religious perfectionists. This moderated-mediation finding adds to studies that found different paths linking the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism dimensions with outcome variables (Umandap & Teh, 2020). Specifically, Umandap and Teh (2020) found adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism differentiated self-compassion's mediation role on personal growth initiatives. Our finding also sheds light on how maladaptive perfectionism intensifies the detrimental impact of certain factors on one's mental health (Allen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2013). For example, family discrepancy (a form of maladaptive perfectionism from one's family) was found to exacerbate the link between interpersonal risk factors and suicidal ideation (Wang et al., 2013) as well as the link between scrupulosity and shame (Allen et al., 2015). Our study is an advancement from these previous moderation and mediation studies that examine perfectionism as a moderator (variable-centered approach), as our study used perfectionist type as the moderator (person-centered approach). Our findings underscore the importance of differentiating between adaptive and maladaptive types of religious perfectionists, especially around how to address and intervene with scrupulosity.

Clinical Implications

Scrupulosity is defined as an unwarranted and excessive fear or anxiety about sin, which then leads to more anxiety (Abramowitz & Jacoby, 2014). This may be due to an understanding that if people are not perfect in their faith, they will be punished. As our study found, not all perfectionists are scrupulous. In other words, scrupulosity, or the fear of sin and God, drives their desire for certainty about whether or not they have committed a sin. However, it is often not possible to reach certainty on such matters, which may fuel their fear and obsessions. Abramowitz and Jacoby (2014) posited that the difference between healthy and unhealthy religious devotion is faith. With faith, those with healthy religious devotion can weather normal doubts about their religious standing, while those with scrupulosity demonstrate an intolerance to uncertainty about matters that are inherently uncertain, such as religious beliefs and doctrines (i.e., salvation through faith). Those with scrupulosity and OCD require certainty and a certain level of performance in situations that are inherently ambiguous and uncertain. This highlights treatment implications for those with maladaptive religious perfectionism and scrupulosity. As maladaptive thoughts and beliefs lie central to scrupulosity and religious self-criticism, cognitive behavioral therapy is suggested. The use of thought records, psychoeducation on cognitive distortions, and exposure and response prevention are some interventions that may help to address maladaptive beliefs, increase tolerance for uncertainty, and decrease compulsive behaviors of scrupulosity.

The Religious Perfectionism Scale appears to be a promising measure to use in helping Christians better understand how they are approaching their faith values and commitments. More specifically, it would be helpful to conceptualize their attitude towards faith with the three-perfectionist-profile framework in regards to their levels of anxiety and burnout. In clinical interventions, it is important to differentiate the type of religious perfectionist so as not to paint all religious perfectionists with the same brush. A lay notion of religious perfectionism may have too much focus on zealous religious dedication as maladaptive. However, our results show evidence for the adaptive benefits of zealous religious dedication that is linked with better

well-being. Thus, in clinical work, it may be helpful to support the positive aspect of religious commitment by highlighting how Christ himself was full of zeal (e.g., when he cleansed the temple; cf. John 2:13-17) and Christians are exhorted to "never be lacking in zeal" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Rom. 12:11). It may also be helpful to distinguish this from the zeal of Pharisees that was focused on external acts without internal renewal through Christ.

In contrast, maladaptive religious perfectionists have high religious self-criticism, a negative evaluation of their faith and religious behavior, and greater scrupulous thoughts on their religious status or position with God. This scrupulosity could increase levels of shame and guilt which would further their obsessive focus on their shortcomings. In clinical interventions, therapists can work with maladaptive religious perfectionists through a focus on increasing grace, forgiveness, and self-compassion for oneself to counteract high levels of self-criticism.

Interestingly, non-perfectionist Christians did not show much better psychological outcomes than maladaptive religious perfectionists, scoring just as high on burnout. For both maladaptive- and non-perfectionists, cognitive-behavioral approaches can be utilized to assess the individual's maladaptive core beliefs of the self, world, and God. With this knowledge, thought records can be used to help the patient increase awareness of their biases and misappraisals of events. Furthermore, our study found that scrupulosity mediates burnout and anxiety. Clinicians can help individuals with high scrupulosity build insight on their high levels of worry surrounding their sins and relationship with God. For example, thought records can help the patient who is highly scrupulous to identify their thought patterns of believing in salvation through works. Once identified, the patient may work towards restructuring their inaccurate schemas of faith through prayer, Scripture, and reflection.

The clergy plays an important role in providing religious guidance and support for those struggling with scrupulosity and burnout, as they are often the first line of support sought out by Christians. Clergy members may help the scrupulous question their self-critical nature by digging deeper into their beliefs about Christ's salvation, sanctification, and redemption. To illustrate, imagine an individual who struggles with self-criticism and shame due to their sin and, thereby, copes through scrupulous behavior. This person may inaccurately believe that it is their own works that earn them salvation, which is what was commonly believed by the Pharisees and motivated their zeal. It may be helpful to guide them through questioning what Christian perfection may be and how it may be gained according to Scripture. When individuals feel that their conscience is ridden with guilt, they can be reminded that "if our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts," (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, 1 John 3:20), that God "does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Psalm 103:10), and that God will keep us firm to the end so that we so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, 1 Cor. 1:5-8). This provides support for a faith-based salvation that does not rely on works, as Christ has already redeemed our sins, and this understanding becomes the new foundation for religious zeal and commitment that leads to human flourishing (Pennington, 2018).

In addition, those who are scrupulous may struggle with an increased self-focus as they strive for perfection. Therefore, gaining a greater perspective of what it means to be Christian may help shift this self-focused view. Jesus was clear on the greatest commandment: love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Matt. 22:36-40). In contrast, one Bible verse that is often cited for fostering perfectionistic tendencies is: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Matt. 5:48), and many have interpreted this to mean moral perfection. Yet, this interpretation needs to be nuanced with the context of the passage that it is found in and what the word means in its cultural background. Pennington (2018) described that the word "perfect" means "wholeness, completeness, or singular devotion" (p. 80). As such, he argued that Jesus is demonstrating that being "perfect" or "complete" is not about "moral perfection but wholehearted orientation toward God" (Pennington, 2018, p. 78), and not primarily about external matters of purity and behavior

as Pharisees had come to understand holiness as. In fact, Scripture has demonstrated that God is more interested in the heart of mercy and compassion towards others than he is in adherence to rituals (Hosea 6:6). Stassen and Gushee (2003) similarly argued that the word "perfect" means "complete or all-inclusive, in the sense of love that includes even enemies" (p. 112, emphasis theirs). In other words, being "complete" encompasses a person who loves both neighbors and enemies, just as God loves all of mankind without discrimination. With this in mind, clergy members can encourage these self-focused individuals to gain perspective on their scrupulosity and self-criticism and make room in their lives to love with all their heart, soul, and mind (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Matt. 22:37) as well as to receive God's love and grace to overcome their hardships. In sum, a potential strategy is to divert critical self-focus towards attending to others instead.

Limitations and Future Directions

There were a few limitations to the current study. First, this study exclusively examined Christians in the United States; thus, findings of religious perfectionism from this study cannot be generalized to those of other religions and from other nations. Secondly, the cross-sectional methodology of this study places limits on inferring causation on our findings, and future studies may benefit from longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the predictive effect of the present results. Lastly, this study's sample size was a limitation in developing clinical cutoff points for the different profiles of religious perfectionists. While the current findings provide general direction for characteristic levels of zealous religious dedication and religious self-criticism using the RPS (Wang et al., 2020), clinical judgment will play a larger role in determining an individual's religious perfectionist subtype until a clinical cutoff is established. Thus, future research with greater sample sizes may be important in developing detailed descriptions and cutoffs for religious perfectionist profiles.

Conclusion

Our study used a variable-centered approach to distinguish between the two dimensions of religious perfectionism: zealous religious dedication and religious self-criticism. This approach reaffirmed zealous religious dedication's positive associations with religious commitment and well-being, as well as religious self-criticism's link to scrupulosity, anxiety, and burnout. Furthermore, our person-centered approach found two different types of religious perfectionists, with the adaptive group exhibiting lower burnout and the maladaptive group being characterized by scrupulosity. The mediation analysis highlighted scrupulosity as a mediator between religious self-criticism and psychological indicators, such as anxiety and burnout. Further combining variable-centered and person-centered approaches, our study identified a significant link between religious self-criticism and scrupulosity in maladaptive religious perfectionists and non-perfectionists, but not in adaptive religious perfectionists. These findings emphasize the need for tailored interventions based on religious perfectionist types, offering insights for clinicians and clergy to address the nuanced challenges associated with perfectionism among Christians in the U.S.

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Benevolent Sexism and Attitudes Toward Rape Victims: The Mediating Role of Purity Culture Beliefs

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Sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes against women; moreover, survivors of sexual assault are often held responsible for the occurrence of this crime. In a variety of populations, stronger endorsement of sexist beliefs (benevolent sexism in particular) appears to predict less responsibility/blame on the perpetrator in acquaintance rape situations. Among Christian individuals in the United States (U.S.), particularly within conservative sectors of Christianity, higher endorsement of purity culture beliefs is linked to beliefs related to victim-blaming, including domestic violence and rape myths. Furthermore, strong adherence to just world beliefs appear to predict victim-blaming, as individuals may blame victims of crimes, such as sexual assault, to maintain a sense of control and protect their belief that the world is inherently just. The purpose of this study is to examine whether benevolent sexism has both direct and indirect effects on victim-blaming attitudes, with the indirect effect through purity culture among an online sample of Christian adults (N = 115), and whether these relations are moderated by just world beliefs. Results of our study supported the hypothesis that benevolent sexist beliefs have an indirect effect on victim-blaming through purity culture beliefs, such that stronger benevolent beliefs is related to stronger purity culture beliefs, which in turn is associated with stronger victim-blaming attitudes towards a hypothetical victim of acquaintance rape even when controlling for other common related variables of victim-blaming (i.e., rape myth acceptance beliefs and traditional/egalitarian sex role attitudes). Moreover, just world beliefs did not appear to have any potentiating effects on the aforementioned direct and indirect effects. Results highlight the importance of addressing purity culture teachings when designing stigma-reduction interventions for Christian populations in the United States.

Sexual assault and rape are among the most prevalent crimes against women universally. In a recent study, almost 1 in 5 women in the United States (19.6%) reported being a victim of contact sexual violence (i.e., rape, sexual assault, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact) by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime (Leemis et al., 2022). Moreover, 27.1% of female victims of intimate partner violence reported that they were first victimized before the age of 18 and 72.3% reported before the age of 25. Despite the high prevalence rate of sexual assault, it continues to be underreported, with nonreporting estimates ranging from 40%-60% (Morgan & Truman, 2019; Rennison, 2002).

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Sexual assault encompasses a wide range of behaviors and is generally defined as any attempted or completed sexual act committed against someone without their consent; this may include anything from unwanted sexual touch to rape (Basile et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2017). Being a victim of sexual assault is associated with an increased risk of negative psychological outcomes (Dworkin et al., 2017). Almost 50% of both men and women who experience sexual assault meet the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in their lifetime (Kessler et al., 1999). The National Women's Study Replication (N = 3,001), found that forcible rape was associated with the risk of a major depressive episode (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Research indicates that being a victim of sexual assault is associated with stronger endorsement of "rape myths," such as the belief that women secretly desire to be forced into having sex (Kennedy & Prock, 2018). Therefore,

it is crucial to understand the indirect pathways that could increase victim-blaming attitudes toward survivors.

The current study aims to explore the relationship between purity culture, benevolent sexist beliefs, and victim-blaming attitudes, with the focus on understanding these relationships within Christian populations in the United States. Specifically, this study will investigate how purity culture may provide an indirect pathway between benevolent sexist beliefs and victim-blaming attitudes among Christian participants. Previous research has indicated that higher endorsement of purity culture beliefs among Christians is linked to beliefs related to victim-blaming attitudes (Owens et al., 2021); benevolent sexist beliefs may play a role in this relationship. Additionally, strength of just world beliefs may moderate the aforementioned indirect relationship, as high endorsement of just world beliefs is shown to be related to victim-blaming attitudes.

Victim Blaming

Victim-blaming is the phenomenon where crime victims are wrongly judged by outsiders as being responsible for their victimization (Whatley, 1996). Heider's (1958) attribution theory proposes that people are active participants in how they interpret events in their lives and are biased toward attributions that make them feel as if they have some control over the world. Internal attributions link behavior to internal factors, while external attributions involve situational and contextual factors. In the context of a rape scenario, internal attributions linked to the victim may contribute to victim-blaming, assigning responsibility to the victim, such as blaming their choice of clothing. Conversely, external attributions shift the focus to factors beyond the victim's control, emphasizing the perpetrator's decision to victimize. Understanding these attributions is crucial for grasping perceptions of responsibility in sexual assault cases, providing insight into why some may blame the victim rather than the perpetrator.

Rape myths are beliefs about rape that are untrue, but are widely held, persist over time, and serve to justify or excuse male sexual aggression toward women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape myths often assign blame to the victim, absolve the perpetrator of responsibility, express skepticism toward reports of rape, and claim that rape only happens to certain types of women (Bohner et al., 2009; Burt, 1980; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Examples of rape myths include "Only bad girls get raped" and "Rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Other common misconceptions perpetuate the belief that sexual assault always involves physical force, and if a victim was heavily intoxicated during the incident, they are considered at least partially responsible for not being in control (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018). Rape myths often focus on internal attributes of victims such as "When women go to parties wearing 'slutty' clothes, they are asking for trouble." These beliefs have real world consequences. Rape myths impact decisions made by jury verdicts, shaping public policies and affecting the way people interact with victims (Edwards et al., 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Endorsement of rape myths is linked to the tendency to assign blame to the victim, with many studies reporting a positive correlation between rape myth acceptance and victim-blaming (Abbey et al., 1998; Lambert & Raichle, 2000; Mason et al., 2004; Yamawaki, 2009).

It is important to differentiate rape myth acceptance from specific expressions of victim-blaming. This is similar to how prejudiced attitudes in general can predict specific attributions of blame and responsibility in particular situations. In addition to being associated with rape myth acceptance attitudes, rape victim-blaming may also be associated with situational (e.g., a victim's clothing; Cassidy & Hurrell, 1995) and historical-contextual (e.g., prior relationship between victim and perpetrator; Krahé et al., 2007) factors.

The Role of Sexism in Victim Blaming

Sexist beliefs may fuel victim-blaming. Men engage in more victim-blaming than women regardless of the victim's gender (Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Bendixen et al., 2014; Strömwall et al., 2014; Yamawaki & Tschanz, 2005). Women also engage in victim-blaming, although to a lesser extent than men (Strömwall et al., 2013; Viki & Abrams, 2002; Whatley, 2005). Gender socialization processes, shaped by cultural gender-role expectations, contribute to the distinct responses of men and women toward

victims of sexual assault (Krumov & Larsen, 2013). Sociocultural gender roles further influence individuals' self-perception, shaping their beliefs and behaviors in the context of sexual assault (Grubb & Turner, 2012). The theory of ambivalent sexism by Glick and Fiske (1996) explains that sexism is a form of prejudice, but is uniquely marked by extensive ambivalence, rather than solely antipathy, toward women. The nature of sexism encompasses not only hostile sexism, which is understood as antipathy toward women, but also benevolent sexism, which is a positive demeanor of protection and idealization toward women. According to Grubb and Turner (2012), hostile sexism is an attitude toward women that promotes punishing women for challenging traditional sexual roles. On the other hand, benevolent sexism is an attitude that "feminine" women who abide by traditional sexual roles should be revered and protected. Benevolent sexist messages promote the idea that women must be protected and upheld as innocent and pure. Women who do not live up to the standard of benevolent sexism are not deemed worthy of being protected by men.

Men often report more sexist beliefs than women, vacillating between their desire to dominate women and their internal conflicting dependence on women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Incidentally, women also hold sexist views toward other women (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Glick et al. (2000) conducted a cross-cultural assessment using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) in 19 countries, revealing extremely high correlations (.80 to .90) between hostile and benevolent sexism. Across cultures, both forms of sexism associated with decreased beliefs in gender equality. Women, in comparison to men, were shown to reject hostile sexism more than benevolent sexism. Moreover, in nations with high levels of sexism, women, relative to men, were shown to accept benevolent sexism. The four nations with the highest mean sexist scores, Botswana, Cuba, Nigeria, and South Africa, women were found to endorse benevolent sexism significantly more than men, suggesting a tolerance for benevolent prejudice. It was suggested that women, endorsing benevolent sexism might serve as a self-protective mechanism against male hostile beliefs, assuring protection for adhering to traditional gender roles.

Individuals who are high in benevolent sexism tend to assign more blame to victims of acquaintance rape than individuals low in benevolent sexism; there is no correlation with victim-blaming when the perpetrator is a stranger (Abrams et al., 2003). Viki et al. (2004) conducted two studies using vignettes to explore how benevolent sexism influences responses to perpetrators of acquaintance and stranger rape. Findings showed that higher benevolent sexism scores correlated with recommending shorter sentences for perpetrators in acquaintance rape scenarios, indicating that benevolent sexism moderates attributions of blame and sentencing recommendations. This pattern did not hold for stranger rape scenarios, suggesting that benevolent sexism may lead individuals to consider extralegal factors, such as the victim's behavior, rather than legal factors such as nonconsensual intercourse (Abrams et al., 2003).

Furthermore, victims perceiving benevolent sexist beliefs in the perpetrator may adopt less active coping responses, as demonstrated by Duran et al. (2014). College-age women in their study read scenarios of sexual assault within intimate relationships, varying the perpetrator's sexist beliefs (benevolent, hostile, or controlled [i.e., information on the perpetrator's sexist beliefs were not provided]). Women showed less active coping responses when the perpetrator held benevolent sexist beliefs. The study also revealed that women had a diminished reaction to violence by a benevolent sexist partner, perceiving the behavior as a sign of the perpetrator's interest and attraction. These findings suggest that the perceived characteristics of the perpetrator contribute to the strength of victim-blaming attributions.

Purity Culture

Many conservative sectors of Christianity believe that sex is meant to take place only within marriage. Various passages in the Old and New Testament indicate this belief, including Genesis 2:24, Deuteronomy 22:13-28, Galatians 5:19, Hebrews 13:4, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (Ortiz, 2018). As a result, many Christians hold the belief that they are called to abstinence before marriage, and that sex outside of marriage is sinful (Ortiz, 2018). Additionally, many Christians believe that abstaining from sexual activity before marriage will lead to positive outcomes,

such as decreased risky sexual behavior and increased sexual satisfaction, which is supported by research (Hardy & Willoughby, 2017; Hernandez et al., 2011; Pargament et al., 2005).

Purity culture distorts Christian teachings on sexuality by prioritizing external standards, such as maintaining premarital abstinence, over internal motivations, such as one's relationship with God (Ortiz, 2018). Purity culture gained popularity within conservative Christian communities in the 20th century as a response to increasingly "liberal" societal movements, such as second-wave feminism and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling (Anderson, 2015). Purity culture conveys sexual double standards that women should be held to a higher standard than men to maintain sexual boundaries, and therefore women are disproportionately blamed when a sexual boundary is crossed (Schleicher & Gilbert, 2005). Somehow men are exonerated because they have slightly stronger sexual desires than women (Hyde, 2005). However, purity culture abuses this gender difference by taking the extreme notion that women should be free from any sexual desires (Anderson, 2015; Barbee, 2014; Field, 2016), and, in turn, it excuses men as having no control over their sexual desires (Ortiz, 2018). This false belief upholds women as sexual gatekeepers—thus, assigned proportionally more blame and responsibility to maintain abstinence and purity for themselves and their male sexual partners (Schleicher & Gilbert, 2005). Furthermore, purity culture conveys the message that the female body is inherently sinful in being a source of temptation for men, and therefore it should be covered or hidden (Anderson, 2015). This promotes the usage of extreme modesty to regulate sexual activity within religious communities. Purity culture manipulates modesty to shame the female body by making women feel self-conscious and hyper-aware of their bodies and how they dress as a means to not tempt men or to be shamed by others (Ortiz, 2018). Additionally, it teaches that a woman is irreparably damaged after engaging in premarital sex or sexual activity, even if the woman did not provide consent (Anderson, 2015; Beck, 2006). This can invoke feelings of guilt and shame related to sexual assault.

Studies on the perception of sexual violence among religious groups indicate that conservative sectors of Christianity have higher rates of rape myth endorsement compared to groups with no religious affiliation, such as atheists or agnostics (Barnett et al., 2018). In addition, religious commitment is positively correlated with rape myth acceptance, even when controlling for conservative political ideology (Barnett et al., 2018). Barnett et al. (2018) suggested that individuals who are more "religious" (i.e., have a greater frequency of attendance and involvement in church activities) are more exposed to patriarchal teachings. Similarly, Prina and Schatz-Stevens (2020) found that religiosity was strongly related to rape myth acceptance in a sample composed primarily of Christians, atheists, and agnostics. Another study found that religious intolerance, characterized by stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against specific religious groups or their members, was associated with rape myth acceptance (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Furthermore, religious fundamentalism, defined as beliefs based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, was linked to sexist views and negative attitudes toward rape victims (Sheldon & Parent, 2002).

Just World Beliefs

Research has provided strong evidence of "just world beliefs" as a correlate of victim-blaming (Furnham, 2003; Thomas et al., 2016; VanDeursen et al., 2012; Yamawaki, 2009). Just world theory suggests people want to believe the world is a "safe" and "fair" place, which gives them a sense of control within their life and environment (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990; Lerner & Miller, 1978). A "just world" means good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people (Lerner, 1980). This just world belief blames victims of crime (such as sexual assault) in order to make sense of their and others' experiences. When events occur that threaten their simplistic belief in a just world, such as when an innocent victim has been violently attacked, individuals find this reality unacceptable and make sense of their world by attributing blame to the victim in hopes of mitigating their internal terror elicited by thoughts about evil and suffering befalling innocent victims, such as themselves (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021).

Sociocultural movements can affect the variability of just world beliefs. The #MeToo movement, for example, gained widespread attention in 2017 and appears to have impact-

ed both social consciousness and legislative actions concerning sexual assault (Williams & Tippett, 2022). It brought to light the prevalence of sexual violence across various sectors, leading to increased accountability and more survivor-centered approaches in discussions about power dynamics and intersectionality. The #MeToo movement has prompted significant changes in research and policy, emphasizing power dynamics and intersectionality in studies and leading to legislative reforms like the ban on mandatory arbitration clauses in sexual harassment cases, which protect survivors and amplify their voices. Thus, it remains to be seen if just world beliefs will have a moderating effect on victim blaming attitudes given more widespread awareness of sexual violence in public and private areas of life.

Summary and Current Study

Benevolent sexism is associated with greater victim-blaming tendencies (Abrams et al., 2003). Concurrently, stronger endorsement of purity culture is associated with stronger endorsement of victim-blaming attitudes (Owens et al., 2021). However, no study has examined whether benevolent sexism has both a direct and indirect effect on victim-blaming attitudes, with the indirect effect through purity culture. Moreover, just world beliefs may encourage victim-blaming in order to protect against events, such as rape, that threaten one's belief that the world is just. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to determine whether (a) a direct effect exists between benevolent sexism and victim-blaming, (b) an indirect effect exists between benevolent sexism and victim-blaming through purity culture, and (c) just world beliefs act as a moderator in the relationships between benevolent sexism and victim-blaming and between purity culture and victim-blaming. Endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs and rape myth acceptance may influence benevolent sexist beliefs (Abrams et al., 2003). Therefore, these variables will be considered as covariates when looking at the relationship between purity culture and victim-blaming. Consequently, the following hypotheses are offered: (a) higher endorsement of benevolent sexist beliefs will be associated with greater victim-blaming attitudes (direct effect); (b) higher endorsement of benevolent sexist beliefs will be associated with greater agreement with purity culture beliefs, which, in turn, will be associated with greater victim-blaming attitudes (indirect effect); (c) higher endorsement of just world beliefs will increase the strength of the relationship between benevolent sexist beliefs and victim-blaming attitudes; and (d) higher endorsement of just world beliefs will increase the strength of the relationship between purity culture and victim-blaming.

Method

Participants and Procedure

After obtaining IRB approval (S23-044), participants were recruited via Prolific, an online research participant recruitment platform. To be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to be 18 years or older, reside in the United States, and self-identify as a Christian. Participants were compensated ($13.90/hr).

G*Power version 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2009) was used to conduct an a priori power analysis. In order to have 80% power to detect a small to medium moderation effect size (d = 0.08), the plan was to recruit 110 participants in order to have a minimum sample size of 101 participants (accounting for 10% attrition). A total of 131 participant responses were recorded. Fourteen participants were excluded due to not meeting the following inclusionary criteria: (a) did not meet the minimum time of five minutes or went over the maximum time of 45 minutes, (b) did not correctly respond to the attention check, or (c) showed a fixed responding pattern. With the excluded responses, a total sample size comprised of 117 individuals remained. A visual examination of the missing data pattern frequency chart indicated that the most common pattern involved no missing values across the variables of interest in the study. Univariate outliers were assessed using SPSS. Two participants were removed as univariate outliers in the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form (IRMA-SF), leaving a sample size of N = 115 participants (see Table 1 for demographic information).

The final sample consisted of 51.3% female identifying participants, 46.1% male identifying participants, and 2.6% participants who did not identify as male or female (i.e., outgoing, genderflux, and nonbinary). Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 71 years with a mean age of

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	*n*	%	*M*	*SD*
Gender				
Female	59	51.3		
Male	53	46.1		
Other	3	2.6		
Age			42.2	12.43
Racial/ethnic background				
White	80	69.57		
Black or African American	13	11.3		
Latinx or Hispanic	11	9.57		
Asian	7	6.09		
Multiracial	3	2.61		
Native American or Alaska Native	1	0.87		
Denomination				
Catholic	35	30.43		
Protestant	22	19.13		
Baptist	16	13.91		
Non-Denominational	14	12.17		
Methodist	5	4.35		
Evangelical	4	3.48		
Pentecostal	4	3.48		
Assembly of God	3	2.61		
Lutheran	3	2.61		
Orthodox	2	1.74		
Presbyterian/ Church of Christ	<1	<1		
Other	5	4.35		
Marital status				
Married	51	44.35		
Single	39	33.91		
In a committed relationship	15	13.04		
Divorced	7	6.09		
Widowed	2	1.74		
Other	1	.87		
Education				
Bachelor's degree	44	38.26		
High school diploma	39	33.91		
Master's degree	18	15.65		
Juris Doctor	2	1.74		
Doctor of Philosophy	2	1.74		
Other	10	8.70		

42.2 years (*SD* = 12.43). Participants' racial background consisted of 69.57% White, 11.3% Black or African-American, 9.57% Latinx or Hispanic, 6.09% Asian, 2.61% multiracial, and 0.87% Native American or Alaska Native. Participants' Christian denomination affiliation consisted of 30.43% Catholic, 19.13% Protestant, 13.91% Baptist, 12.17% Non-Denominational, 4.35% Methodist, 3.48% Evangelical, 3.48% Pentecostal, 2.61% Assembly of God, 2.61% Lutheran, 1.74% Orthodox, < 1% Presbyterian and Church of Christ, and 4.35% representing other denominations. Marital status of participants consisted of 44.35% married, 33.91% single, 13.04% in a committed relationship, 6.09% divorced, 0.87% other specified, and 1.74% widowed. Participants' highest level of education consisted of 38.26% bachelor's degree, 33.91% high school diploma, 15.65% master's degree, 8.70% other, 1.74% juris doctor, and 1.74% doctor of philosophy.

Measures

Benevolent Sexism Subscale—Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (BS-ASI)

Glick and Fiske (1996) created the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory to assess participants' beliefs in sexist ideologies; only the Benevolent Sexism subscale will be used in the present study. The Benevolent Sexism subscale consists of 11 items. Responses are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A higher score indicates a greater endorsement of the corresponding sexist beliefs. The overall ASI score, as well as the benevolent sexism subscale possess acceptable to good internal consistency reliability with the alphas falling between .80 and .90 (Glick & Fiske, 1997). A sample item on the inventory includes "A good woman should be set on a pedestal." For convergent validity, the ASI was correlated with other measures of sexism, such as the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972), and the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995). Comparisons with other sexism scales, such as the Neo-sexism Scale (NS; Tougas et al., 1995) have shown acceptable discriminant validity for the scale of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In the present study, the alpha was .86.

Purity Culture Belief Scale (PCBS)

Ortiz et al. (2023) created the Purity Culture Belief Scale to assess participants' beliefs in purity

culture teachings. The scale consists of 19 items, and responses are given using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A higher score indicates a greater endorsement of purity culture. Sample items on the inventory include "Women should dress modestly to avoid sexually tempting men" and "Having premarital sex will make you unattractive to your future spouse." In the original sample, the scale had excellent internal consistency, with the alpha at .95. Ortiz et al. (2023) established convergent validity through correlations between the PCBS and the Complementary Gender Differentiation subscale (r = .37, p < .001) and Heterosexual Intimacy subscale (r = .32, p < .001) of the Benevolent Sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), the Hostile Sexism subscale of the ASI (r = .41, p < .001), the Sexual-Spiritual Integration Scale (SSIS) subscales of Sexual Attitudes/Beliefs (r = .47, p < .001), Sexual Congruence/Incongruence (r = .38, p < .001), and Sexual Awareness/Repression (r = .52, p < .001). Discriminant validity was also established by non-significant correlations between the PCBS with the Manifestation of God in Sexuality Scale, Sacred Qualities of Sexuality Scale, Christian Orthodoxy Scale, and both subscales of the PANAS. In the present study, the alpha was .89.

Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS)

Lipkus (1991) created the GBJWS to assess participants' beliefs in a just world. The scale consists of seven items, and responses are given using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strong disagreement*) to 6 (*strong agreement*). Scores are summed and range from 7 to 42. A higher score indicates a greater endorsement of just world beliefs (e.g., "I basically feel that the world is a fair place"). The GBJWS has demonstrated adequate internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alphas between .65 and .89 (Hellman et al., 2008; Liao et al, 2016). The GBJWS has been found to possess strong factorial, convergent, and divergent validity. Lipkus' (1991) study confirmed the unidimensional structure of the GBJWS through factor analysis, while convergent validity was supported by positive correlations with other measures of belief in a just world. A higher global belief in a just world correlates positively with internal locus of control, r(129) = .46, p < .001); overall trust, r(129) = .26, p < .001; trust in institutions, r(129) = .20, p < .05; and perceived sincerity in others, r(129) = .21, p < .05. Furthermore, the GBJWS was positively correlated with the three domains of the Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale (MBJWS; Furnham & Proctor, 1988): personal, r(269) = .25, p < .001; interpersonal, r(269) = .42, p < .001; and political justice, r(269) = .44, p < .001. In the present study, the alpha was .91

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale Short Form (MCSDS-SF)

Reynolds (1982) created the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale Short Form, a commonly used measure of social desirability that historically has yielded strong reliability, with good internal consistency (α = .73-.88; Robinson et al., 1991); it is significantly correlated with Lie scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). It is a one-dimensional scale comprised of 13 items (e.g., "No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener") scored in a true-false format. Relevant items are reverse coded. An average score is calculated, with higher scores indicating a social desirability response tendency. In the present study, the alpha was .82.

Traditional/Egalitarian Sex Role Scale (TESR)

Larsen and Long (1988) created the TESR to assess participants' views of traditional gender roles. The TESR consists of 20 items and uses a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors of *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. The scale assesses traditional (e.g., "In groups that have both male and female members, it is more appropriate that leadership positions be held by males") and egalitarian (e.g., "The belief that women cannot make as good supervisors or executives as men is a myth") attitudes toward the sex roles of men and women. Items that represent traditional attitudes are reverse-coded. An average scale score is then calculated, with higher scores indicating more egalitarian attitudes toward sex roles. The scale demonstrates good internal consistency, with α values ranging from .84 to .93 (Franklin, 2016; Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Klonis et al., 2005; Ortiz et al., 2023). In the present study, the alpha was .91.

Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form (IRMA-SF)

Payne et al. (1999) created the IRMA-SF to measure rape myths. The scale consists of

20 items and uses a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A higher score indicates a greater acceptance of rape myths. There are seven subscales in the IRMA-SF: (a) "She asked for it," (b) "It wasn't really rape," (c) "He didn't mean to," (d) "She wanted it," (e) "She lied," (f) "Rape is a trivial event," and (g) "Rape is a deviant event." Sample items on the inventory include "If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control" and "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men." A Cronbach's alpha of .87 represents adequate internal consistency in the original sample. In the present study, the alpha was .82.

Rape Vignette

Participants were exposed to one vignette to assess for victim-blaming attitudes (Felson & Palmore, 2021). The vignette was constructed to describe a situation that meets the legal definition of rape. Specifically, the vignette described an acquaintance rape:

On a Friday night, Rachel goes to a bar, meets a guy, and invites him back to her apartment. At her apartment, they kiss and engage in limited sexual activity. When she tells him she wants to stop, the man holds her down and rapes her.

After reading the vignette, participants were asked three items measuring victim-blaming, based on Felson and Palmore's (2021) items. Items included "While the majority of the blame obviously goes to the offender, Rachel deserves some of the blame for the outcome," "Rachel should not have put herself into that situation," and "How irresponsible was Rachel?" All items are scored on a 4-point Likert type scale. Responses to the first two items range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*), while the response to the last item ranged from 1 (*not at all irresponsible*) to 4 (*extremely irresponsible*). In the original measure, the third item is reverse coded and higher total score for all three items indicate less victim-blaming. For ease of interpretation, we reverse-coded the first and second item so that higher total score for all three items indicate more victim-blaming. In the present study, the alpha was .83.

Data Analysis Procedure

Diagnostic Checks and Missing Data Imputation

Initially, three variables (social desirability, MCSDS-SF; rape myth acceptance, IRMA-SF; and traditional/egalitarian gender roles, TESR) were proposed as covariates in the moderated mediation model. However, social desirability was excluded as a covariate because it did not have a statistically significant relationship to purity culture beliefs and victim-blaming attitudes in preliminary bivariate correlations. Thus, only rape myth acceptance beliefs and traditional/egalitarian gender role beliefs were included as covariates in all analyses. Variance-inflation factor values, tolerance values, condition indices, and variance proportions statistics suggested issue of collinearity among antecedent variables and these covariates in the regression models. Table 2 displays summary statistics for these variables.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Predictor and Outcome Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. BS-ASI	3.46	1.00	1	.54**	.32**	-.55**	.30**	.13
2. PCBS	2.17	0.68	.54**	1	.26**	-.71**	.49**	.42**
3. GBJWS	3.11	1.10	.32**	.26**	1	-.37**	.20*	.12
4. TESRS	4.00	0.72	-.55**	-.71**	-.37**	1	-.51**	-.35**
5. IRMA-SF	1.92	0.70	.30**	.49**	.20*	-.51**	1	.48**
6. BLAME	2.05	0.77	.13	.42**	.12	-.35**	.48**	1

Note. BS-ASI = Benevolent Sexism Subscale-Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; PCBS = Purity Culture Belief Scale; GBJWS = Global Belief in a Just World Scale; IRMA-SF = Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form; TESRS = Traditional/Egalitarian Sex Role Belief Scale; BLAME = Degree of Blaming Victim.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

In this final sample of 115 participants, 98 participants had no missing data, 13 participants had 1.03% missing data, and 4 participants had 2.06% missing data. To maximize power, data were imputed using multiple imputation procedures via Fully Conditional Specification (FCS) with the MICE algorithm in R (Van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). Multiple imputation is a robust procedure that requires the least stringent assumption about missing data patterns (Enders, 2010). Imputation was conducted at the item-level of imputation and one imputed dataset was randomly selected for further analysis.

Moderated Mediation Model

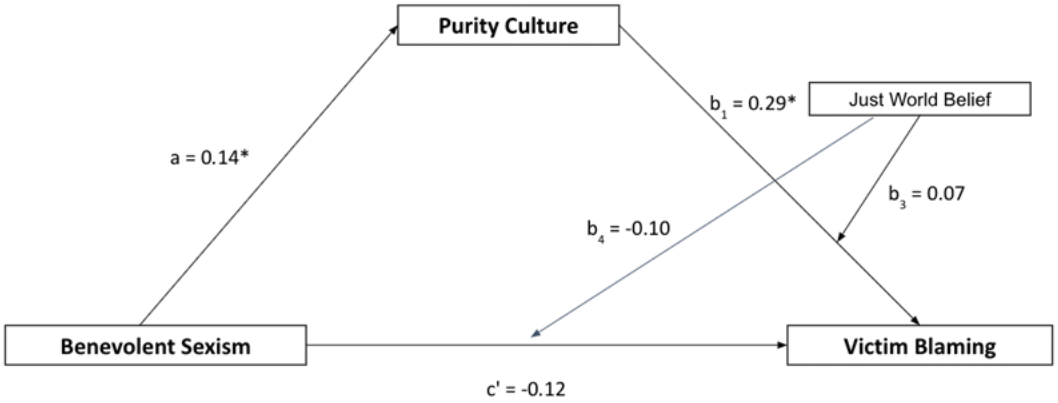
Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Macro (Model 15) was used to test the hypothesized moderated mediation model (Figure 1) with the following variables: benevolent sexism, purity culture beliefs (mediator variable), just world beliefs (moderator variable), and victim-blaming attitudes (outcome variable). Rape myth acceptance and traditional/egalitarian gender role beliefs were entered as covariates in the aforementioned model. Hayes' PROCESS macro constructs a comprehensive analytical model that integrates the mediation and moderation analyses. This involves assessing whether the (a) indirect effect of benevolent sexism beliefs on victim-blaming attitudes through purity culture beliefs, and (b) direct effect of benevolent sexism on victim-blaming attitudes systematically vary based on just world beliefs, constituting a moderated mediation analysis or conditional process analysis. Following Hayes' (2018) recommendation, the index of moderated mediation utilizes a bootstrap confidence interval approach to obviate making the assumption that the conditional indirect and direct effects are normally distributed. Specifically, if the 95% bootstrap confidence interval of the conditional does not overlap with zero, we can be 95% confident that the conditional indirect (or direct) effect is appreciably different from zero.

Results

To discuss the results of the conditional process model, it is pertinent to first ascertain whether the direct and indirect effects were moderated by just world beliefs. On one hand, if just world beliefs moderated the direct and indirect effects, discussion of the direct and indirect effects should be conditioned upon just world belief levels. On the other hand, if just world beliefs did not moderate the direct and indirect effects, discussion of these effects will not be conditioned upon just world belief levels. Therefore, results for Hypotheses 3 and 4 (questions of moderation) are reviewed prior to results for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (questions of direct and indirect effects) because discussion of the latter results will be dependent upon findings from the former.

Figure 1

Moderated Mediation Model of Victim Blaming Attitudes



Note. Traditional gender roles and rape myth acceptance beliefs were entered as covariates into the model. * $p < .05$.

Table 3

Model Coefficients for the Moderated Mediation Model in Figure 1

		Consequent						
		M (PCBS)				Y (BLAME)		
Antecedent		Coeff.	*SE*	*p*		Coeff.	*SE*	*p*
X (BS-ASI)	a	0.14	.05	.008	c'	-0.12	.08	.15
M (PCBS)		—	—	—	b_1	0.29	.14	.04
W (GBJWS)		—	—	—	b_2	0.001	.06	.90
M × W		—	—	—	b_3	0.07	.11	.51
X × W		—	—	—	b_4	-0.10	.07	.18
Covariate 1 (IRMA)		0.17	.07	.02		0.42	.11	< .001
Covariate 2 (TESRS)		-0.47	.08	< .001		-0.07	.14	.63
Constant	iM	.000	.04	1.00	iY	2.07	.07	< .001
		R^2 = .55				R^2 = .30		
		$F(3,111) = 45.56$, $p < .001$				$F(7,107) = 6.64$, $p < .0001$		

Note. BS-ASI = Benevolent Sexism Subscale-Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; PCBS = Purity Culture Belief Scale; GBJWS = Global Belief in a Just World Scale; IRMA-SF = Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form; TESRS = Traditional/Egalitarian Sex Role Belief Scale; BLAME = Degree of Blaming Victim. Related variables were mean-centered prior to being entered into the Moderated Mediation Model.

Hypothesis 3—Higher Endorsement of Just World Beliefs Will Increase the Strength of the Relationship Between Benevolent Sexist Beliefs and Victim-Blaming Attitudes

The interaction between benevolent sexism and just world beliefs was not statistically significant (b = -0.10, p = .18; see b_4 in Table 3). Contrary to Hypothesis 3, higher endorsement of just world beliefs did not strengthen the direct effect of benevolent sexist beliefs on non-victim-blaming attitudes (assuming such a direct effect was present).

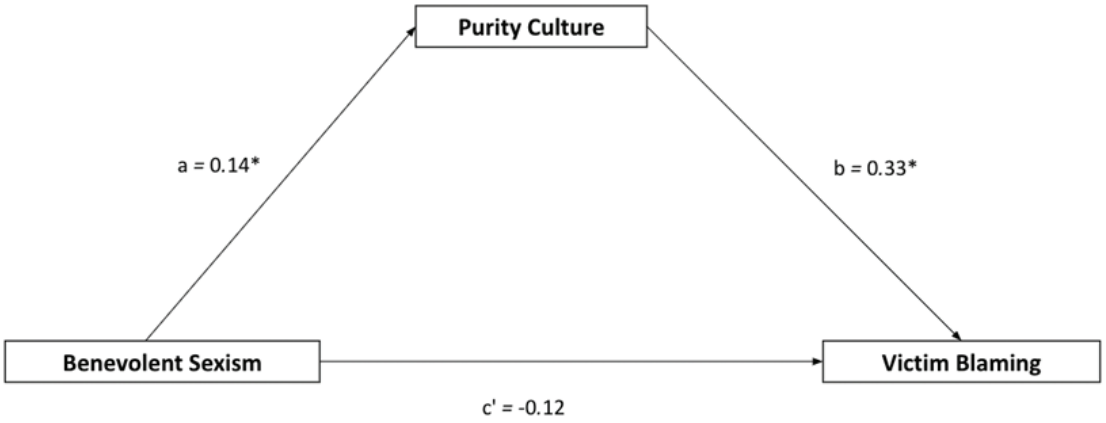
Hypothesis 4—Higher Endorsement of Just World Beliefs Will Increase the Strength of the Relationship Between Purity Culture and Victim-Blaming

The interaction between purity culture and just world beliefs was not statistically significant (b = 0.07, p = .51; see b_3 in Table 3). Contrary to Hypothesis 4, higher endorsement of just world beliefs did not strengthen the relationship between purity culture and non-victim-blaming attitudes. Not surprisingly, then, the proposed indirect effect of benevolent sexism on non-victim-blaming through purity culture was not dependent on just world belief levels. Specifically, the moderated mediation index (index = 0.01, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.04]) was not statistically significantly different from zero.

Because just world beliefs did not moderate the direct or indirect effects of the proposed mediation model, we conducted a post-hoc analysis to determine if gender could function as an additional moderator in the proposed moderated mediation model (which would make it a moderated moderation mediation model; see Model 19 in Hayes, 2018). However, we encountered indices (i.e., statistically significant mean difference between genders on purity culture, low tolerance values, and high variance inflation factor) that suggested collinearity concerns between gender and purity culture. Thus, it was concluded that gender would not provide additional incremental explanatory variability, over and above purity culture, when looking at associations with victim-blaming attitudes. Thus, we pruned the mediation model by enabling the direct and indirect effects (if they existed) to be linearly dependent on their respective variables. This essentially transforms the moderated mediation model into a simple mediation model (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Simple Mediation Model of Victim Blaming Attitudes



Note. Traditional gender roles and rape myth acceptance beliefs were entered as covariates into the model. * $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 1—Higher Endorsement of Benevolent Sexist Beliefs Will Predict Greater Victim-Blaming Attitudes (Direct Effect)

Controlling for rape myth acceptance and traditional/egalitarian sex role beliefs, higher benevolent sexist beliefs was not associated with stronger endorsement of victim-blaming attitudes (c′ = 0.12, p = .12; see c′ in Table 4). While higher benevolent sexist beliefs was not strongly associated with endorsement of victim-blaming attitudes directly, it is important to note that an indirect effect can exist without a significant direct effect, such as when the direct and indirect effects are different in valence (positive versus negative) or the indirect effect is statistically different from zero and estimated with considerable certainty but the direct effect is small and estimated with a lot of uncertainty (Hayes, 2018; Zhao et al., 2010). The test for an indirect effect between benevolent sexism and victim-blaming through purity culture is described below.

Hypothesis 2—Higher Endorsement of Benevolent Sexist Beliefs Will Predict Greater Agreement With Purity Culture Beliefs, Which in Turn, Will Predict Greater Victim-Blaming Attitudes (Indirect Effect)

Accounting for rape myth acceptance and traditional/egalitarian sex role beliefs, higher benevolent sexist beliefs was associated with stronger endorsement of purity culture (b = 0.14, p = .008; see *a* in Table 4). Specifically, a one unit increase in benevolent sexist beliefs led to a 0.14 unit increase in purity culture beliefs when rape myth acceptance and traditional egalitarian sex role beliefs were held constant across participants. Similarly, higher purity culture beliefs was associated with stronger endorsement of victim-blaming attitudes (b = 0.33, p = .02; see *b* in Table 4). Specifically, a one unit increase in purity culture beliefs led to a 0.33 unit increase in victim-blaming attitudes when rape myth acceptance and traditional egalitarian sex role beliefs were held constant across participants.

Lending support to Hypothesis 2, there appeared to be an indirect effect of benevolent sexist beliefs on victim-blaming attitudes, through purity culture beliefs. Specifically, the mediation index (index = 0.05) was statistically significant because the 95% CI did not include zero. Taking into consideration the previously mentioned *a* and *b* effect sizes (pathways in the indirect affect), this suggests that stronger benevolent sexist beliefs is associated with stronger purity culture beliefs, which, in turn, was associated with stronger victim-blaming attitudes toward the victim.

Discussion

The current study sought to explore the potential direct and indirect effects benevolent sexism has on victim-blaming attitudes, partic-

ularly examining the indirect effect through purity culture among Christian individuals. Results of the data analysis supported Hypothesis 2. In the current sample, individuals with higher endorsement of benevolent sexist beliefs endorsed stronger purity culture beliefs, which was associated with greater victim-blaming attitudes (Hypothesis 2). Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 did not yield statistical significance as the direct effect from benevolent sexist beliefs to victim-blaming attitudes was not statistically significant and just world beliefs were not shown to moderate the direct and indirect effects of benevolent sexist beliefs (through purity culture) on victim-blaming attitudes.

The indirect effect of benevolent sexism on victim-blaming through purity culture that was found in our study is also consistent with previous studies on the relationship between purity culture and victim-blaming (Klement et al., 2022; Owens et al., 2021). As noted, endorsement of purity culture beliefs predicted domestic violence and rape myth beliefs (Owens et al., 2021; Ortiz et al., 2023). Adding to the literature, our study highlights the robust effect of purity culture in relation to victim-blaming attitudes, considering the influence of benevolent sexist beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and traditional/egalitarian sex role beliefs. Results of our study support the theoretical significance of purity culture as a distinct and influential construct in shaping attitudes toward victims of sexual assault when working with Christian populations. The significance of purity culture in relation to victim-blaming attitudes suggests that interventions and prevention strategies aimed at reducing stigma associated with being a victim of sexual assault should consider addressing and challenging purity culture beliefs within Christian communities. By recognizing the impact of purity culture on victim-blaming attitudes in this population, interventions can be created to promote a more supportive environment for survivors, ultimately contributing to tailored, emic approaches to sexual assault prevention and support within Christian contexts.

Moreover, just world beliefs did not demonstrate any moderation effect on victim-blaming among Christian adults in our sample. This result is contrary to studies that report a positive relationship between just world beliefs and victim-blaming in various crime-related scenarios, some involving sexual assault (e.g., Pinicotti & Orcutt, 2021; Yamawaki, 2009) and others not involving sexual assault (e.g., Thomas et al., 2016; VanDeursen et al., 2012). Similar to our current study, most quantitative studies examining the relationship between just world beliefs and victim-blaming used a vignette followed by items to measure victim-blaming attitudes (Pinicotti & Orcutt, 2021; VanDeursen et al., 2012; Yamawaki, 2009). Additionally, the scale used to

Table 4

Model Coefficients for the Simple Mediation Model in Figure 2

		Consequent						
		M (PCBS)				Y (BLAME)		
Antecedent		Coeff.	*SE*	*p*		Coeff.	*SE*	*p*
X (BS-ASI)	a	0.14	.05	.008	c'	-0.12	.08	.12
M (PCBS)		—	—	—	b	0.33	.14	.02
Covariate 1 (IRMA)		0.17	.07	.02		0.40	.10	< .001
Covariate 2 (TESRS)		-0.47	.08	< .001		-0.04	.13	.74
Constant	iM	.000	.04	1.00	iY	2.05	.006	< .001
			R^2 = .55				R^2 = .29	
			$F(3,111) = 45.56$, $p < .001$				$F(4,110) = 11.29$, $p < .0001$	

Note. BS-ASI = Benevolent Sexism Subscale-Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; PCBS = Purity Culture Belief Scale; IRMA-SF = Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form; TESRS = Traditional/Egalitarian Sex Role Belief Scale; NONBLAME = Degree of Blaming Victim. Predictor variables were mean-centered prior to being entered into the Moderated Mediation Model.

assess just world beliefs varies across studies; GBJWS (Lipkus, 1991) and the Just World Belief Scale (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) are commonly used scales in the literature (Catlin & Scherr, 2022; Furnham, 2003; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021).

These different findings, however, could be attributed to different rape scenarios across studies (ranging from rape by an acquaintance while victim was intoxicated to rape by a stranger in a public setting), limited generalizability beyond college samples, and lack of specificity to Christian populations. In contrast, our study used a sample that was not constrained to college sample, focused on Christian respondents, and involved responses to an acquaintance rape scenario that did not involve alcohol intoxication. More specifically, our respondents were mostly married (42.5%), had a high school diploma (34.82%) or bachelor's degree (39.29%), had an approximately equal representation of females (51.3%) and males (46.1%), and had ages that ranged from 19 to 71 years of age. In summary, these results suggest that purity culture may be a more important construct to account for than just world beliefs when studying variables associated with victim-blaming attitudes among Christian individuals in the United States.

The study underscores the critical intersection of gender and religion, adding to the literature on how benevolent sexism and purity culture uniquely impact women in Christian contexts by perpetuating victim-blaming attitudes. Clinically, it may be helpful for mental health providers to help their clients identify and disambiguate purity culture teachings that often equate a woman's value with sexual purity, reinforcing harmful biases. Addressing these issues in therapy can help mitigate the unique psychological burdens placed on women in Christian settings.

Moreover, it is important to reflect on how purity culture aligns with Christian teachings. While purity culture aligns with a biblical call to sexual abstinence before marriage, purity culture also introduces additional rules that emphasize outward behavior over inner motives. This can lead to legalism, as warned against in Galatians 5, where human-made rules are imposed on the gospel of grace. Paul critiqued this approach, emphasizing that such additions undermine the freedom offered through Christ. Jesus also criticized the Pharisees for their focus on outward appearances while neglecting inner virtues (Matthew 23:23). Christian doctrine teaches that true spirituality involves internal transformation by the Holy Spirit, not just external compliance. It is crucial for Christian communities to distinguish between biblical principles, which call for purity rooted in a relationship with God, and cultural practices that impose unnecessary restrictions. By focusing on internal change and avoiding legalistic practices, Christian communities can uphold teachings on sexual ethics that better align with Scripture.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the cross-sectional design restricts our ability to infer causal relationships between variables, as mediation analyses assume a temporal order that cannot be established in a single snapshot. Additionally, the non-experimental nature of the study prevents us from conclusively ruling out potential confounds through experimental manipulation, limiting our capacity to infer causal effects. While our interpretation uses consistent language (i.e., indirect effects rather than mediation effects) to acknowledge these limitations, future research could enhance causal inference by experimentally manipulating purity culture beliefs. For example, Christian participants could be randomly assigned to read vignettes or engage in a task that may foreground purity culture beliefs (e.g., read a scenario that reinforces stereotypes about men needing to protect women; complete a brief written assignment about women as gatekeepers of sexuality). Moreover, the use of hypothetical vignettes, while allowing for controlled examination of specific situational features, may not generalize to how respondents may respond to real-life phenomena. Furthermore, our focus on a single scenario, acquaintance rape, may limit the generalizability of our findings to other sexual assault scenarios. Future studies should explore a broader range of vignettes (e.g., sexual assault perpetrated by a stranger, sexual assault involving alcohol intoxication) to assess the robustness of the observed effects across different contexts.

Conclusion

The study addresses a critical gap in the growing literature of purity culture by examining the

relationships between benevolent sexism, purity culture beliefs, and victim-blaming attitudes in a Christian population in the United States. The study exhibits several strengths that contribute to the reliability of its findings. Compared to college student samples commonly utilized in previous studies, the use of Prolific for participant recruitment facilitates a more diverse sample in terms of age, gender, and denominational backgrounds. The study's sample size, determined through power analysis, ensured we had enough power to detect proposed effect sizes. Additionally, this study employed well-established measures with known psychometric properties, rigorous missing data handling procedures, and a comprehensive library of regression diagnostic checks to underscore the methodological rigor of this investigation. Our findings highlight the significance of purity culture as a culture-specific construct to understand victim-blaming attitudes related to sexual assault within Christian populations in the United States.

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Sexual Guilt, Anxious Attachment, and Spiritual Instability: Compensatory Strategies and an Internalization Model of Sexual Satisfaction

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The current study compared two populations regarding their sexual attitudes, perceived sexual compatibility with a partner, and self-reported sexual satisfaction. The first study was conducted with graduate students with a mean age of 36 years. The majority identified as Christian and were married. The second study included undergraduate students with diverse religious, spiritual, and non-religious perspectives, with a mean age of 20 years. Sexual guilt was associated with spiritual and relational factors, including defensiveness towards God, romantic attachment anxiety, and spiritual grandiosity. Sexual guilt was higher in those who endorsed insecure maternal attachment and paradoxically related to higher sexual satisfaction. Sexual compatibility varied by demographic markers, suggesting a layered ecological model. Christians within the sample reported lower sexual compatibility, but not lower sexual satisfaction, than non-religious participants. The current study helps to undermine ageist assumptions often connected to sexuality. Unlike former research, there were no age differences in sexual satisfaction, and the younger population endorsed more conservative beliefs, which connected to both resilience and pathology. A binary view of conservatism was not supported, for while sexually conservative attitudes were associated with authoritarianism and spiritual grandiosity, they also correlated with greater awareness of God's presence in one's everyday life and a sense of noting divine communication and influence. Sexual practices implied psychospiritual motives and potential compensatory strategies. Higher sexual frequency was associated with higher instability in one's relationship with God and greater levels of anxiety and avoidance in romantic attachment. These findings suggest the need for additional research regarding the spiritual mediation of human sexuality within a multidirectional ecology.

While Augustine's promotion of celibacy suggested a view of divine restoration and grace, and he may not have deemed sensual sin as more blameworthy than other shortcomings (Hunter, 1994), the Western Christian tradition has at times suffered a demarcation between the physicality of being and spiritual transcendence, prompting compartmentalization and rejection of the spiritual elements of sexuality. In addition, the Freudian notion of repression has often been misapplied with respect to views of sexuality in the West. Such incomplete perspectives fail to note Freud's more mature theories that focused on repression as a turning away from — a distancing from wishes towards inhibitions, with primal recollections from early childhood being a source of adult conscious detachment (Boag, 2006). Nevertheless, these cultural adaptations have contributed to a division in the self, which restrains spiritual awareness from interacting freely with sensuality; such deficits are further aggravated through ageist and gendered stereotypes in the dominant culture.

The current study sought to explore the relationship between sexuality and religious commitment, including the intimate features of an encounter with the divine. Instability with God, religious grandiosity, romantic attachment, spiritual defensiveness, and sexual guilt were considered in this empirical study that compared nonequivalent groups. Juxtaposed with a novel theory of sexuality and internalization, this study

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also uses a lens of dynamic ecological systems to understand sociodemographic variations and self-construal as related to sexual experience.

Literature Review

Religiosity and Sexuality

Despite the compelling narrative in the Song of Songs regarding the inherent goodness of sexual pleasure, emphasizing sensual experience for women (Walsh, 1998), it is not uncommon to encounter self-punitive associations between unconscious, neurotic guilt and religious belief (Kjellqvist, 2000). In previous research, sexual shame has been shown to be associated with religiosity (Marcinechová & Záhorcová, 2020), especially for unmarried persons (Leonhardt et al., 2020). Higher sexual guilt has also been observed in Christian women whose sexual debut occurred prior to marriage (Ortiz et al., 2022). Prior research has demonstrated that sexual satisfaction may be positively or negatively impacted by religiosity; additionally, in some studies, no relationship has been found (Leonhardt et al., 2020, 2023; Marcinechova & Zahorcova, 2020). Sexual satisfaction has been shown to be higher when sexual sanctification is also present (Leonhardt et al., 2023), and qualitative analyses have shown the potential for transcendent and unifying experiences of the sacred during sexual intimacy in Christians (MacKnee, 2002). Sexual sanctification can include the notion that the family is sacred, as seen in Mahoney's (2010) theory of relational spirituality.

One of the limits of prior research on sexuality and spirituality concerns the truncated ways that the latter has been measured. The studies by Leonhardt et al. (2020, 2023) mentioned above measured religiosity with a four-item tool that was behaviorally-oriented, lacking information on object relations and attachment factors that could intersect with spiritual life. A research study by Dew et al. (2020) found in a sample of married adults that sexual satisfaction for husbands was related to shared religious activities in the home, as well as commitment. This study used a single item to measure the marital sexual satisfaction, and the measures of religiosity were behavioral and limited to three questions. Prior research has not examined the interaction between the aspects of spirituality explored in the Spiritual Assessment Inventory and sexuality. Thus, information is lacking related to the potential intersection of sexual satisfaction with awareness of God. In addition, while narcissism is known to be harmful to long-term relationship quality due to the tendency to derogate others (Wurst et al., 2017), it has been shown to be positively correlated with increased sexual satisfaction (Klein et al., 2020) and early romantic success (Wurst et al., 2017). The potential connections between spiritual grandiosity and sexuality require more investigation.

Sexual Behaviors and Religiosity

In a study by Young et al. (1998), sexual satisfaction was shown to be to related to sexual frequency, but the sample was not exclusively Christian, and religiosity did not predict sexual satisfaction. Other research has shown that, in a predominantly secular sample, those who were more religious reported lower sexual frequency, but higher sexual satisfaction (Peri-Rotem & Skirbekk, 2023). On the other hand, Woo et al. (2012) found that sexual guilt mediated the relationship between sexual desire and religiosity. Religiosity has been shown to have varying effects, with intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, but not quest, being linked to higher levels of sexual concern (Cowden & Bradshaw, 2007). McFarland et al. (2011) found that sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction were unrelated to religiosity, but a weak relationship was observed between daily integration of spirituality and perceived sexual pleasure. However, this study asked only a single question about daily spiritual practices, as well as a demographic self-classification of religious affiliation and a question about frequency of church attendance. The sample was not exclusively Christian and related to older adults.

When a sample of female nurses was examined, Davidson et al. (1995) found that frequency of church attendance was unrelated to sexual satisfaction, but it did predict a higher age for first intercourse, and a number of additional sexual behaviors were initiated later in regular attenders. In a longitudinal study of Norwegian young adults, fewer sexual partners, lower pre-coital exploration, lower premarital cohabitation, and older age for initiation of sexual intercourse was observed among Christians than among those who reported non-involvement in church, disbelief in God, or religious detachment (Pedersen, 2014). Higher sexual satis-

faction is correlated with a smaller number of sexual partners (Higgins et al., 2011). More information is needed regarding the potential influence of sexual frequency and experience on sexual satisfaction in conservative Evangelical young adults in America.

Sexually conservative attitudes may be more common in those who are also more concerned with social desirability (Guerra et al., 2012). Females have been shown to attend church more frequently, also reporting more conservative sexual attitudes, but the relationship between church attendance and sexual conservatism may be less powerful for females than for males (Mercer & Kohn, 1979). While increased age has been shown to be associated with more conservative sexual attitudes, "recent studies indicate that age itself may not be the most relevant predictor of sexual satisfaction of older adults, with relationship status emerging as a more relevant factor than age itself" (Vasconcelos et al., 2021, p. 250). In addition, Vasconcelos et al. (2021) found that higher conservatism had a negative association with sexual satisfaction, mediating the relationship between age and the latter outcome.

Individual Differences and Sexual Compatibility

Younger adults tend to report higher levels of sexual satisfaction than older adults, although numerous intervening variables are at play, such as relationship satisfaction, health, sexual function, and sexual practices (Miguel et al., 2024). However, the relationship between age and sexual satisfaction has been shown to be mediated by conservative sexual attitudes in a sample of Portuguese women (Vasconcelos et al., 2021). Sexual attitudes are potentially also impacted by authoritarianism (Peterson & Zurbriggen, 2010), although greater research is needed in this area to clarify the relationship between authoritarianism and sexual satisfaction. In terms of current relationship status, engaged and exclusively dating individuals have reported higher sexual satisfaction than those who are single or exploring casual sexual relationships, and the association between attachment avoidance, intimacy and sexual satisfaction varies across relationship types (Birnie-Porter & Hunt, 2015).

Fewer studies have examined sexual compatibility in terms of overall wellness and sexual satisfaction (Ahmadnia et al., 2023), but the former has been shown to relate to sexual companionship, as well as individual differences in self-awareness, development, and body concept. Religious compatibility is important for overall relationship satisfaction and intimacy, as shown in a Brazilian sample (Cassepp-Borges, 2021). Some research suggests that males generally report greater sexual and emotional satisfaction than females (Mark et al., 2015), especially at midlife (Carpenter et al., 2009). Sexual motive factors appear to be more significant predictors of sexual satisfaction for women (Stephenson et al., 2011). For example, while both men and women reported that love, self-construal, resources, and commitment are associated with sexual satisfaction, women also acknowledged the importance of experience-seeking, the need for sexual expression, and pleasure. Sexual compatibility has been shown to be predicted by the frequency of intercourse, relationship quality, and consistency of orgasm (Klapilová et al., 2015).

Statement of Purpose

The current study sought to contribute to the literature by expanding the understanding of connections between object relations principles of spiritual formation and sexual experience, focusing on prior deficits in measurement of religiosity. In addition, the current study offers new insight into relationships among sexual guilt, parental and romantic attachment, religious grandiosity, God awareness, and authoritarianism within an Evangelical population, also exploring gender differences. Despite the importance of sexual functioning for overall well-being, there has been a lack of comprehensive theoretical models to address sexual satisfaction (del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014). Thus, the current study is theoretically grounded in a novel theory, the internalization model of sexual satisfaction (Freeman, 2020).

Internalization Model of Sexual Satisfaction

In brief, this model contextualizes sexual satisfaction as a process of attachment-founded identity formation, rooted in developmental, associationistic, spiritual, and neurocognitive learning factors, such that spiritual pathology and religiously-mediated resilience are both impactful, being influenced by submerged authoritarianism and counterfactual thinking. The

model is compatible with the ecological viewpoint discussed by del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes et al. (2014), who built on the work of Henderson et al. (2009). For example, in an investigation of lesbian/bisexual and heterosexual women, Henderson et al. (2009) used an ecological model, constructed from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1994, as cited in Henderson, 2009, p. 51), which served as a theoretical basis for the structural equation modeling that examined gender socialization, relationship quality, depression, and social intimacy as related to sexual satisfaction. A call for renewed interest in theoretical models of sexual satisfaction was articulated by del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes et al. (2014), and is explored in the current project.

Freeman's (2020) *internalization model of sexual satisfaction* posits that perceived sexual satisfaction is a function of several intervening variables that intersect with cultural values, identity formation, resilience, and navigation of developmental tasks. The internalization model is rooted in the notion that theories of sexual functioning that synthesize object relations theories with cognitive appraisal models and neural network theory may yield a more holistic understanding of the human-in-sexual-field. Preverbal, attachment-based learning is thought to contribute to the formation of early maladaptive schemas, which may later alter the cognitive search and memory systems in ways that predispose the development of psychosexual guilt and authoritarian notions of sexuality. As maladaptive sexual schemas, which are associated with guilt, become well-learned and reinforced, and as classically-conditioned, orgasmic associations are forged, neural networks change in response, leading to persistence of sexual pathology.

General resilience factors may prove to be protective for the emergent sexual and gender system in ways that intersect with spiritual health. For the purpose of the internalization model, spirituality is defined broadly to include transcendent experience, felt meaning, acceptance of uncertainty, hope, gratitude, intimacy, and the quest for symbolic immortality. In religiously committed individuals, the unique factors that connect to spiritual systems are likely to operate in idiosyncratic ways upon sexual functioning, necessitating more nuanced definitions of the spiritual forms, practices, and beliefs that are specific to that subculture. The outmoded assumption that religiosity necessarily predicts lower sexual satisfaction calls for modernization, with the notion that both spirituality and religiosity operate according to principles of resilience, varying on a continuum of experiences embedded within culture and language.

General factors which are predicted to reduce perceived sexual satisfaction include sexual guilt, attachment anxiety, authoritarianism, relational avoidance, low stability in adult romantic attachment, and spiritual pathology. Of these variables, sexual guilt may mediate the largest effect. Forms of spiritual pathology thought to be associated with reduced sexual satisfaction include defensiveness, chronic anger, low transcendent awareness, and emotional-spiritual instability. Authoritarianism is thought to promote lower sexual satisfaction through its relationship with hypergender ideology, hostile sexism, social dominance orientation, and grandiosity, which can be manifest through the quest for nonverbal dominance, artifacts of power, attraction to sexual language that demeans/objectifies, and low sexual sensitivity to a partner (Kenrick et al., 2007).

The relationship between the extent of sexual experience and sexual satisfaction is likely affected by the interpretive valence given to that experience, which is affected by religious commitments and embeddedness of religious identities. Counterfactual thinking is likely to affect the interpretive valence afforded to prior sexual experiences. If conservative attitudes predict lower sexual satisfaction, this is likely to be the result of mediation through guilt, grandiosity, and authoritarianism, rather than related to conservatism per se. It is predicted that the relationship between psycho-spiritual factors and sexuality will increase over the span of relationship length for religiously-committed persons. While there may be a strong correlation between perceived sexual compatibility and reported sexual satisfaction, this relationship may be modified through religious beliefs, such that sexual compatibility will be de-emphasized in conservative religious groups in favor of an effort-based construct related to sexual performance.

The internalization model relates to the hypotheses in a number of ways. As a culturally-mediated and contextualized value system,

Christianity is likely to impact the individual and the dyad in sexual responses and expressions in dynamic, multi-directional ways. With a view that capitalizes on the forms of resilience that can emerge for the religiously-committed person, it is proposed that adaptive religiosity will positively impact sexual satisfaction and compatibility, while working models rooted in guilt, identity damage mediated by insecure attachment, and fundamentalism may harm sexuality. Developmental tasks related to generativity, sensed meaning, trust, and the pursuit of intimacy are likely to interact with the sense of completeness and transcendence that can accompany sexual union.

Hypotheses

- H1: In the total sample, males with report higher sexual satisfaction and perceived sexual compatibility than females (Carpenter et al., 2009; Mark et al., 2015, Richters et al., 2022), also showing less conservative sexual attitudes (Mercer & Kohn, 1979).
- H2: In the total sample, Christian religious classification will be associated with lower scores on sexual satisfaction and compatibility (Cowden & Bradshaw, 2007; Woo et al., 2012) and higher conservatism in sexual attitudes (Mercer & Kohn, 1979).
- H3: In the undergraduate sample, higher God awareness, and lower spiritual grandiosity, will be linked to higher sexual satisfaction, in line with expectations based on sexual sanctification (Leonhardt et al., 2023; MacKnee, 2002; Peri-Rotem & Skirbekk, 2023).
- H4: In the undergraduate sample, higher sexual satisfaction will correspond to lower sexual experience (Auslander et al., 2007) and higher sexual frequency (Young et al., 1998) and current relationship status (Birnie-Porter & Hunt, 2015).
- H5: In the undergraduate sample, higher sexual compatibility will connect to lower sexual experience (Higgins et al., 2011), higher sexual frequency (Klapilová et al. 2015; Young et al., 1998), and current relationship status (Birnie-Porter & Hunt, 2015).
- H6: In the total sample, greater age will correlate with more conservative sexual attitudes (Vasconcelos et al., 2021) and higher sexual satisfaction and perceived sexual compatibility (Liu, 2003; Quinn-Nilas, 2020; Richters et al., 2003; Schmiedeberg & Schröder, 2016).

Methods

Participants

Data were collected in two studies, with a total sample size of 96 participants. The study was approved by two university-affiliated Institutional Review Boards (IRB). The first study (n = 31) evaluated graduate student participants who participated in a research methods class at a private, religiously-affiliated university in the United States. These students volunteered to participate in the study as part of an optional class activity. The principal investigator (PI) and a team of graduate students conducted the research after receiving approval from the IRB housed in the religious university. The graduate student researchers were supervised by the PI, as well as the professor who was teaching a research methods class in which they were enrolled. All participants were given the option to complete an alternative activity rather than joining the study. The participants were provided an informed consent document prior to participation. Paper packets of items were completed anonymously.

The second study (n = 65) expanded the methods to include a larger number of tools and collected data from undergraduate students at a public university. The PI, working with undergraduate research assistants, received IRB approval from the public university prior to data collection. In addition, an administrator for the research participant pool at the public university offered written approval for the principal investigator to collect data within the pool. These participants were offered assignment credit for an introduction to psychology course in exchange for participation within a program that allowed them alternative options to earn the credit if they opted out of participation. The second study included three data collection sessions.

Rationale for Study Organization

The first study examined sexual satisfaction, sexual compatibility, and sexual attitudes, as well as demographic factors, in a group of graduate students. These preliminary results were analyzed as a pilot study, and the principal in-

vestigator continued to gather theoretical and empirical evidence after this initial research. Following this deepened understanding of the nuances of religiosity and sexuality, the author pursued a second, and more comprehensive, investigation with a more religiously-diverse sample. While the cross-sectional, correlational design would not allow for random assignment to conditions, it was felt that the comparison of nonequivalent groups could offer some interesting information regarding the potential relationship between demographic factors and sexuality. In some places in the analysis, the whole sample was used in order to deliver more statistical power, supporting the usage of MANOVA and comparisons relevant to age and gender.

Demographics

The mean age for the total group was 25.82, with a standard deviation of 9.79 and a range from 18 to 58 years. There was a significant difference in age between the two studies, $t_{(96)} = 11.10$, $p < .001$, graduate sample mean age = 36.45, $SD = 10.47$; undergraduate sample mean age = 20.75, $SD = 3.19$. All participants in the graduate sample self-identified as Christian, while 41 (63%, $n = 65$) participants in the undergraduate sample described themselves as either non-religious or other spirituality. Data from the total sample revealed that there were 38 males (39.6%, $n = 96$), 56 females (58.3%, $n = 96$), and 3 who declined to report a gender. The racial composition of the group was 75% White, 6% African-American, 7% Latino, 4% Asian, and 7% other/bi-racial/multi-racial. The total sample included the following religious affiliations: 2.1% Jewish, 21.6% Catholic, 3.1% Orthodox Christian, 1% Hindu, 1% Muslim, 48.5% Protestant Christian, 2.1% atheist, 11.3% agnostic, 6.2% other. There was a similar level of ethnic diversity between the two samples. The total sample was 91% heterosexual, with 1% describing themselves as gay/lesbian and 3.1% identifying as bisexual.

Relationship Status

In the undergraduate sample, 20 (31%, $n = 65$) participants reported that they were not currently involved in a romantic relationship and, thus, evaluated a former relationship when asked about sexuality. In the graduate sample, all participants were involved in a current relationship. In the undergraduate sample, 4 (6%, $n = 65$) were married; in the graduate sample, 30 (97%, $n = 31$) were married. The relationship length data indicates the length of time of either the current relationship, or the former relationship that was being evaluated. The graduate sample was notable for longer relationship length, as shown by a Chi Square Test of Independence (with Yates' Continuity Correction), $\chi^2 = 27.68$, $p < .001$, phi = .592. The groups did not differ in terms of sexual frequency or total number of sexual partners, as shown by Chi Square analyses. Relationship length data are presented in Table 1. Participants who were not cur-

Table 1

Self-Reported Relationship Length (N = 79)

Relationship length	Valid percent (total sample)	Graduate sample (raw)	Undergraduate (frequency)
Less than one month	3.8	0	3
1-3 months	11.4	2	7
4–6 months	8.9	2	5
7-9 months	5.1	1	3
10-12 months	3.8	0	3
1-2 years	25.3	5	15
3-5 years	17.7	3	11
6-10 years	7.6	4	2
11-15 years	5.1	3	1
16 years or more	11.4	9	0

Note. Missing demographic data = 18 participants.

rently involved in a romantic relationship were asked to evaluate their sexual experiences, including satisfaction and compatibility, based on a significant former relationship.

Procedures

Standardization Across Studies

In both studies, participants arrived to a classroom setting. They were provided with an informed consent document and told that participation was voluntary, they were free to cease participation at any time, and that their responses would be anonymous. After signing the informed consent, the information with participant names remained separated from the questionnaires. All participants were provided with paper packets that contained the questionnaires and demographics details. They completed this work at their desks, while research assistants sat at the front of the room. Following participation, the respondents submitted their work and received a debriefing form that articulated campus resources regarding counseling if the study elicited stress. The name and contact information of the principal investigator was provided. The participants were thanked for their participation.

Study 1

The graduate student researchers who collaborated with the faculty principal investigator for study one were enrolled in a research methods course. Their work was supervised by two psychologists—the current author and the former instructor of the graduate research methods course. The first study, which sampled graduate students at a conservative religious institution, included the following instruments: Index of Sexual Satisfaction, Hurlbert Index of Sexual Compatibility, Sexual Attitudes Scale, experimental items, and demographics.

Study 2

Participants in the second study received a larger array of surveys than those in the first study. These surveys were presented in a counterbalanced order. The second study, which sampled undergraduate students in a more religiously diverse sample at a secular university, included all of the measures from Study 1, in addition to the measured listed below under the section entitled Study 2.

Study 2 Likert Procedures. Given the large array of questionnaires that were administered to the undergraduate sample, the PI prepared a consistent Likert scale across all questionnaires in order to help participants to provide more accurate responses, without toggling between various Likert sequences and anchors. The goal was to improve the attention to the content of the items, rather than frequently shifting rating scales, attempting to reduce measurement error. The graduate sample in Study 1 was given the inventories in the original Likert versions recommended by the tool authors. This seemed appropriate in light of the fact that the total number of questionnaires was far smaller for the graduate sample and there was a desire to retain the version that would align with former psychometric analyses offered by the tools' authors. When aligning the two data sets in order to allow for combined analyses, Likert transformations were used, rather than z-score conversions. The author chose to retain the original shape of the distributions for each sample, as a normalized z distribution would be undesirable for a small sample.

Instruments

Tools Used in Both Studies

Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson et al., 1981). The ISS is a 25-item tool that measures general sexual desire. It has shown good discriminant and convergent validity (Hudson et al., 1981) and does not appear to be particularly prone to social desirability response sets (Apt & Hurlbert, 1992). At the time of data collection for the undergraduate sample (Study Two), these items were evaluated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 7 (*all of the time*) in the undergraduate sample. These scores for the undergraduate sample were later transformed to match that Likert that was used for the earlier graduate sample, which ranged from 0 (*all of the time*) to 4 (*never*). The graduate sample was given the inventories in the original Likert versions recommended by the tool authors. A formula was embedded into Excel to transform the undergraduate Likert scores for individual items to align with the Likert used for the graduate sample. When interpreting the item mean for the total scale, it is noted that a lower score is indicative of higher satisfaction. In prior research, the ISS has been shown to have a Cronbach's alpha

of .89, and a test-retest reliability of .68 (Mark et al., 2014). For the current sample, a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .84$ was attained for the ISS.

Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS; Hudson et al., 1983). The SAS-short form is a 25-item survey that evaluates the level of adherence to liberal versus conservative beliefs about sexuality (Hudson et al., 1983). Internal consistency reliability has been shown to be $\alpha = .92$, with a standard error of measurement ranging from 4.04 to 4.55. Discriminant validity has been demonstrated with a coefficient of .73. Good factorial, convergent, and construct validity have been shown. At the time of data collection, the undergraduate sample responded with a Likert that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). These scores were later transformed to align with the Likert used by the graduate sample, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A higher score is indicative of greater conservatism. For the current sample, a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .92$ was observed.

The Hurlbert Index of Sexual Compatibility (HISC; Hurlbert et al., 1993). The HISC is 25-item tool that measures self-report of perceived sexual compatibility in relationships (Hurlbert et al., 2000). It has been shown to have test-retest reliability of .87, Cronbach's alpha of .81, and split half reliability of .84 (Hurlbert et al., 1993). At the time of data collection, these items were evaluated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 7 (*all of the time*) in the undergraduate sample. These scores were later transformed to match that Likert that was used for the graduate sample, which ranged from 0 (*all of the time*) to 4 (*never*). A formula was embedded into Excel to transform the undergraduate Likert scores for individual items to align with the Likert used for the graduate sample. When interpreting the item mean for the total scale, it is noted that a lower score is indicative of higher perceived sexual compatibility with one's partner. For the current sample, a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .91$ was attained on the HISC.

Experimental Items. Four experimental items were authored by the research team (the PI and three graduate students). These items measure self-report regarding (a) sexual performance impairment, (b) the impact of illness on sexual behaviors, (c) satisfaction with sexual frequency, and (d) attitudes towards masturbation. The Likert used ranged from 0 (*all of the time*) to 4 (*never*) for items a, b, and c. For item d, a Likert of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) was used. These items were included in the analyses for the ISS (items a, b), HISC (item c), and SAS (item d).

Demographics. Across both studies, demographics were collected regarding religious affiliation, relationship status, gender, ethnicity, age, and relationship length.

Measures Used Only in Study 2

Sexual Guilt Scale (Freeman, 2005). The Sexual Guilt Scale is a 10-item tool that measures experiences of guilt regarding sexual behaviors, sexual impulse control, and lack of congruence between values and sexual expression. Participants responded with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Internal consistency reliability was acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .74$, $SD = 13.05$, $SEM = 6.6$.

Religious Belief Survey (Freeman, 2005). The Religious Belief Survey (RBS) is a 9-item tool that measures the extent to which individuals report belief in a singular, personal God, versus deism, polytheism, or pantheism. Additional items on the RBS measure agnosticism and atheism. showed correlations with other measures of religiosity. Internal consistency reliability for each subscale was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, showing the following results for subscales: Belief in a Personal God, $\alpha = .89$, Deism, $\alpha = .98$, Pantheistic-Personal God $\alpha = .64$, Agnostic $\alpha = .73$. A five-item composite total score for the RBS was $\alpha = .86$. The total RBS correlated at .40 with conservatism, .26 with extrinsic religiosity, .57 with intrinsic religiosity, -.47 with the Quest scale total score, -.26 with existential questions on the Quest scale, and -.43 with the doubt as positive subscale on Quest. RBS subscale correlations include Personal God and Low Realistic Acceptance from the SAI (-.75) and RWA total and Personal God (.52).

Experiences with Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR; Fraley et al., 2000). The ECR is a 36-item tool that measures preoccupied (anxious) versus avoidant attachment styles in adult romantic relationships. Items refer to the extent to which one fears abandonment, experiences self-doubt, fears intimacy, and is reluctant to trust the romantic partner. This tool was administered with a Likert

scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). The ECR has been analyzed with item response theory, showing that the tool may be more sensitive to insecure forms of romantic attachment (Fraley et al., 2000). This tool has been shown to explain 30%-40% of the variance in diary entries related to attachment experiences (Sibley et al., 2005). The tool showed a two-factor solution. Wei et al. (2007) found 3-week test-retest reliabilities of .82 for the Anxiety subscale and .89 for the Avoidance subscale. The internal consistency reliability for the Anxiety subscale was .77 and the Avoidance subscale was .78. For the current sample, a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .93$ was revealed.

Parental Attachment Scale (Freeman, 2005). The Parental Attachment Scale (PAS) is an 8–item tool that measures self-report of the level of attachment with one's mother and father, both in childhood and adulthood. The PAS showed good internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .85$, $SD = 14.2$, SEM = 5.55. For the subscales, Cronbach's alpha scores were Maternal Attachment $\alpha = .86$, Paternal Attachment $\alpha = .80$, Childhood Parental Attachment $\alpha = .74$, and Adult Attachment (to mother/ father) $\alpha = .27$. The PAS did not correlate highly with the Experiences with Close Relationships Scale- Revised (EC-R; Fraley et al., 2000), a measure of romantic attachment. This is not surprising because the PAS measures recollection of attachments to parents within one's family of origin, rather than romantic attachment. Sibley et al. (2005) have pointed out that the EC-R predicted experiences with romantic partners, as shown by diary analysis, more than attachments with other family members. The PAS was administered with a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Maternal attachment correlated at $r = .28$ with paternal attachment.

Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI; Hall & Edwards, 1996). The SAI was designed to examine spiritual maturity through the lens of object relations theory, considering relationship quality with God and awareness of God's presence (Hall & Edwards, 1996). The tool has demonstrated a five-factor structure, including these subscales with their respective Cronbach's alphas: Defensiveness (.91), Grandiosity (.52), Instability (.88), God Awareness (.90), and Realistic Acceptance (.76). The construct validity of the SAI was supported through correlations with the Bell Objective Relations Inventory. Test-retest reliability estimates included the following: Awareness .90, Grandiosity .56, Realistic Acceptance .59, Instability .88, Defensiveness, .91.

Items on two subscales were recoded so that a higher total SAI score would be indicative of lower spiritual health. The revision to the SAI by Hall and Edwards (2002) found internal consistency estimates of Awareness, .95; Disappointment, .90; Realistic Acceptance, .83; Grandiosity, .73, and Instability, .84. In the current study, this tool was administered with a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Items on the awareness and realistic acceptance subscales were reverse-coded in order to have the option of examining a total SAI composite score that would be indicative of lower spiritual maturity. For the current sample, Cronbach's alpha scores were as follows: Instability = .80, Defensiveness = .92, God Awareness = .94, Realistic Acceptance = .89, Grandiosity = .23.

Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religiosity-Revised (IE-R). The 14-item revised version of the Religious Orientation Scale is based on the modifications made by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) to Allport and Ross's (1967) tool. The revised version sought to use language that would offer readability across age groups and educational levels and combined the extrinsic-personal and social scales into a single scale, unlike the recommendation offered by Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990) and Kirkpatrick (1989). The extrinsic items may offer lower reliability than the intrinsic, but the tool has been widely used for decades and provides adequate psychometric properties. This tool was administered with a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Internal consistency of the intrinsic scale has been shown to be good (.83), but the extrinsic scales may correlate with social desirability, having marginal internal consistency (.63/.64) in some studies (Trimble, 1997). In the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha for the Intrinsic scale was $\alpha = .90$, but the Extrinsic scale was $\alpha = .44$.

Quest. The Quest scale (Batson & Shoenrade, 1991a, 1991b) was designed to measure a dimension of religiosity that is independent of intrinsic and extrinsic forms, focusing on the desire to wrestle authentically with existential

questions, without reducing these conflicts to simplistic terms or dichotomies. The ability to sit with ambiguity, face uncertainty and death anxiety, ask questions about meaning in life, and admit a lack of understanding is associated with questing. This measure has been shown to have low correlations with intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, but seminary students scored higher on Quest than non-theology undergraduates, and charismatic individuals scored higher than those attending traditional Bible studies (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b). Factor analysis has revealed a 3-factor solution for the Quest 12-item tool, with an internal consistency reliability of .81 (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a). The test-retest reliability of the six-item version was .63. The 12-item version of this tool was administered with a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). For the current sample, a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .76$ was observed.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) Scale—Short Version. The RWA was designed by Altemeyer (1998) and revised by Rattazzi et al. (2007). Cronbach's coefficients were .77 for the 14-item scale. For a Conservatism subscale, composed of 7-items, the alpha was .75. The submission and Authoritarian Aggression subscale showed an alpha of .72. Factor analysis suggests a two-factor model. This tool was administered with a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). For the current sample, a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .91$ was attained.

Sexual Experiences Demographics. A tool was designed by the principal investigator to assess the extensiveness of sexual experiences. Participants were first asked to identify whether their responses would be retrospective from a former relationship or based on a current relationship. Participants identified whether this relationship was sexually active and described whether they had formerly engaged in intercourse at any time, including within a relationship not currently being used for the analysis. From a list of seven behavioral options presented in a checklist, participants who had never experienced intercourse identified which sexually-oriented practices they had formerly engaged in with any partner at least once. For those who were sexually active, they identified the typical frequency of intercourse from a ten-option list, which ranged from several times per day to once per year. Participants indicated the number of former sexual partners, being presented with 13 choice options that described various ranges. When evaluating the current or target retrospective relationship, participants evaluated the timing of the sexual debut, ranging from a choice of "on the first date" to "not until we were married" or "we have not yet engaged in sexual intercourse." Relationship status was evaluated, with a checklist with seven options pertaining to the commitment level and exclusivity of the partnership. Relationship length and sexual orientation were identified, as well as gender (cis or transgender) status.

Religiosity Demographics. The P.I. developed a demographic tool to measure a range of religious commitment factors, including behavioral self-report about frequency of attendance of religious services, prayer, reading sacred texts, missionary trips, and ministry hours per week. Participants identified their parents' religious affiliation and their own childhood religious orientation, as well as their current religiosity status, choosing from an array of ten choices that also included options for agnostic and atheist. Participants were asked about the age of conversion to their current religious faith, if relevant. In addition, the subjects reported whether they had attended public, private-secular, or private-religious schools previously, or whether they were homeschooled (religious vs non-religious).

Qualitative Coding Procedures

A qualitative coding process was used to classify participants into three categories of religiosity for the purpose of inter-group comparisons, based on the religiosity demographics tool. Relevant data were missing for three participants. The coding system was developed collaboratively between the principal investigator and an undergraduate research intern through a series of conversations and construction of a decision-making rubric. This coding system revealed that the sample was 53% Christian, 38% other spirituality, and 8.5% non-religious. From this classification, the skewness was .76 and kurtosis was -.45.

Data Cleaning Procedures

Data entry into Excel for Study 2 was completed by two research assistants under supervision, and this work was later audited by a third research intern who assisted with extensive

data cleaning for both studies. The principal investigator audited all data cleaning work and conducted additional analyses with SPSS Explore, checking for normality, assumptions for parametric tests, and outliers.

Power Analysis and Assumptions Regarding Sample Size

Combined Analyses

T-tests were used to compare males to females for the combined sample and to compare the study one sample to the study two sample. Within SPSS, a power analysis was conducted for an independent samples *t*-test. Given an effect size of .64 for unequally sized groups, with a non-central t distribution and a two-sided approach, the recommended sample size would be $n = 52$ for the sample in Study 1 and $n = 32$ for Study 2. A MANOVA was used with the combined sample, using an independent variable with 3 levels (religiosity status) and 3 dependent variables, which results in 9 cells, with 10.2 per cell. Pallant (2016, p. 291) recommended a minimum sample size per cell for MANOVA should be equivalent to the number of dependent variables being applied. As an estimate, a power analysis was conducted in SPSS for ANOVA, with a noncentral *F* distribution and Cohen's f being reported. With an effect size of .5, an alpha of .05, and a power set at .80, an estimate of 34 participants across groups was rendered.

Separate Group Analyses

Power analysis for linear regression was conducted with a sample size calculator through SPSS, revealing that the recommended size for a power estimate of .80, with 4 predictors and an effect size of .5, would be $n = 30$. This was provided with fixed predictors, using Cohen's f squared, and with the intercept term included. Using SPSS, a power analysis for a Pearson product moment correlation was inputted with a coefficient of $r = .3$, using Fisher's z transformation and normal approximation with bias adjustment and a two-sided test, suggesting an $n = 84$ for a power of .8, with an alpha of .05.

Pallant (2016) described a guideline of 15 participants per predictor for multiple regression, based on the work of Stevens (1996, as cited in Pallant, 2016, p. 151). In contrast, Pallant (2016) described the recommendation of Tabachnick and Fidell (2013, p. 213), who offered the formula of $n > 50 + 8m$ for multiple regression. In the case of the current study, four predictors would require 82 participants with the latter model, but 60 participants with the former benchmark.

Rationale for Approach to Reducing the Probability of Type I and Type II Errors

Stevens (1996, as cited in Pallant, 2016, p. 210) suggests that, when sample sizes are small and power may be insufficient, one compensatory strategy can be to adjust the alpha to .10 or .15, rather than the standard .05. However, in the current study, the more conservative .05 was retained, despite lower power to detect medium effect sizes. In addition, a Bonferroni adjustment was used for the MANOVA, to account for the potential increase in Type I errors associated with multiple analyses.

Data Analysis Strategy

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships among variables associated with religious experience, sexual experience, self-reported attachment history, and sexual guilt. In addition, the study sought inter-group comparisons, which considered the independent variables of age differences and variations linked to biological sex, as pertinent to the dependent variables of sexual satisfaction, sexual compatibility, and level of conservatism for sexual attitudes. Lastly, the study aimed to provide descriptive information regarding sexual experiences for religious and nonreligious participants.

Total Sample Analyses

Total sample analyses were conducted in consideration of the larger power that could be achieved, thereby reducing the probability of a Type II error. These total sample analyses used MANOVA to examine religious classification grouping as an independent subject variable. The dependent variables were sexual satisfaction, sexual compatibility, and sexual attitudes. A Bonferroni adjustment was applied. In addition, the total sample was used to compare males to females on dependent variables connected to sexuality, which helped to ensure adequate sample size in each cell. The total sample was also used to compare sexuality-related dependent variables across age groups by comparing the graduate students to the undergraduates.

Study 2 Analyses

Because Study 2 was an expansion of the methods used in Study 1, it was possible to in-

vestigate a wider range of variables with the undergraduate sample, with tools that were not administered in Study 1. In order to explore the ability of religious variables to predict sexual satisfaction, a multiple regression was performed. The predictive ability of former sexual experience as a pre-existing subject variable was examined through two regressions that used sexual outcome dependent variables. Lastly, potential relationships between sexual guilt, relational attachment in the family of origin, and sexuality were examined with Pearson correlations, as these constructs were pertinent to the internalization theory.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Combined Groups

Data on sexual frequency are reported in Table 2. Participants evaluated their sexual frequency on the basis of either a current relationship or a former significant relationship if they were currently single. Data on the number of sexual partners are reported in Table 3. For the total sample descriptive statistics, the sexual satisfaction score was indicative of high satisfaction (*M* = .89, *SD* = .57; Likert from 0 [*all of the time*] to 4 [*never*]). For the total sample descriptive statistics, the elevation on the Hurlburt Sexual Compatibility Scale was indicative of somewhat high perceived compatibility with one's current or former partner (*M* = 1.64, *SD* = .58; Likert from 0 [*always*] to 4 [*never*]). For the total sample, the mean score on the Sexual Attitude Scale was indicative of somewhat low conservatism (*M* = 2.02, *SD* = .61; Likert from 1 [*strongly disagree*] to 5 [*strongly agree*]).

Table 2

Self-Reported Sexual Frequency (N = 92)

Sexual frequency in significant relationship	Valid percent
Several times per day	7.6
Once per day	7.6
3-5 times per week	32.6
1-2 times per week	27.2
A few times per month	17.4
Once per month	2.2
Once per year	1.1
Other	4.3

Note. Missing data = 5 participants.

Table 3

Self-Reported Number of Sexual Partners (N = 94)

Total number of partners reported	Valid percentage
0	6.4
1-2	33
3-5	18.1
6-10	23.4
11-15	5.3
16-20	5.3
21-35	7.4
36-50	1.1

Study 2

More extensive demographic data was available for the second study (*N* = 65). From this group, 89% of the sample reported a high level of prior sexual experience, as noted from a qualitative coding process that was used to evaluate a range of self-reported behaviors. Eleven percent of this group reported a medium level of prior sexual experience, and 63% stated that they were currently in a relationship. Twenty-two percent reported that they were currently sexually active.

Descriptive statistics regarding psychological measures can be seen in Table 4; note that all items were administered to Study 2, using a Likert that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*).

Parametric Statistics

Combined Sample

Gender and Sexual Satisfaction. Using data from the total sample, which had been converted to the 0-4 Likert, an independent samples *t*-test was used to compare ISS scores between males (*M* = .82, *SD* = .49, *N* = 36) and females (*M* = .90, *SD* = .60; *N* = 54; *t* [88] = -.69, *p* = .51, two-tailed). Levene's test for equality of variances showed significance (*F* [88] = 4.23, *p* = .043), indicating that females showed higher variance (*VAR* Male = .24, *SD* Male = .49, *SE* Male = .08, Skewness male = 1.9;

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations Across Instruments

Tool/subscale	Mean	Standard deviation
Low awareness of God	5.14	2.06
Spiritual grandiosity	1.92	1.08
Sexual guilt	3.21	1.27
Instability with God	3.13	1.34
Quest	4.80	1.31
Openness to Change	5.24	1.62
Existential Questions	4.30	1.71
Doubt as Positive	4.85	1.71
Low realistic acceptance	4.70	2.07
RWA total	3.73	1.48
Authoritarian aggression	4.01	2.01
Conservatism	3.56	1.55
Extrinsic religiosity	4.36	.98
Intrinsic religiosity	4.50	2.20
Parental attachment	6.7	1.60
Religious Belief Scale	7.14	2.22
Agnostic	2.86	2.18
Deism	4.68	1.64
Personal God	7.14	1.64
Pan-personal	3.03	1.74
ECR attachment anxiety	3.62	1.64
ECR attachment avoidance	3.52	1.59
Number of sexual partners	3.39	1.70

Note. Likert scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*).

VAR Female = .36, *SD* Female = .598, *SE* Female = .08, Skewness Female = .97). On an independent samples t-test with unequal variance assumed, there was no significant difference in ISS scores across genders (p = .51, two-sided). The magnitude of difference between the means (mean difference = -.08, 95% CI [-.31 to .15]) was small (eta squared = .005, Cohen's d = -.14, CI [-.56 to .29]). Thus, only .5% of the variance in ISS scores was explained by gender differences. No significant differences were observed between genders on sexual attitudes or perceived sexual compatibility. These findings were inconsistent with H1, which had predicted that males would score higher on sexual satisfaction and compatibility, and less conservatively on sexual attitudes, within the total sample.

Religiosity and Sexual Satisfaction. A one-way, between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare groups classified by religiosity status on three dependent variables—the ISS, HISC, and SAS—for the total sample. The three group statuses were Christian, other spirituality, and non-religious. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to evaluate multicollinearity, outliers, normality, and homogeneity of covariance matrices. No significant concerns were observed. There was a significant difference between the groups on the composite dependent variable, $F(6, 170) = 7.26$, $p < .001$; Wilks' Lambda = .63, partial eta squared = .2. When the dependent variables were examined separately, only the HISC showed statistical significance, as evaluated by a Bonferroni adjusted alpha of .017, $F(2, 87) = 16.07$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .27. An inspection of the means showed that the participants who were identified as Christian scored slightly lower on self-reported sexual compatibility (M = 2.14, SD = 1.12) than the other spirituality category (M = 1.00, SD = .69) and the non-religious group (M = .99, SD = .58). Note that the converted Likert is reversed in terms of the direction of the scale. H2 was only partially confirmed, as assessed for the total sample.

Age Comparisons/Nonequivalent Groups. Given the differing demographics of the two studies, cross-study comparisons were performed. Independent t-tests were used to compare the two groups on the three sexuality measures. The undergraduate sample (M = 1.04, SD = .67, SED = .08) reported higher sexual compatibility, $t(93) = -12.9$, $p < .001$ than the graduate sample (M = 2.91, SD = .65, SED = .12, Cohen's d = .66, CI of the difference = -2.16 to – 1.58). In addition, the undergraduate sample (M = 2.19) showed more conservative sexual attitudes on the SAS, $t(94) = 2.51$, $p < .001$, than the graduate sample (M = 1.84). The two groups did not differ in self-reported sexual satisfaction. These findings were inconsistent with H6.

Study 2 Parametric Analyses

God Awareness, Spiritual Grandiosity and Sexual Satisfaction. H3 was addressed by using

religiosity as a subject variable to predict sexual satisfaction. In an analysis conducted only with the undergraduate sample, a standard multiple regression was performed to evaluate the ability of two spirituality variables, God awareness and spiritual grandiosity (SAI), to predict sexual satisfaction. Preliminary analyses of assumptions were conducted without concerns. The model showed that these spirituality measures predicted only 3.1% of the variance in sexual satisfaction, $F(2, 58) = .92$, $p = .41$, with neither variable contributing to a significant degree (awareness beta = -.099, $p = .49$; grandiosity beta = -.19, $p = .19$). This was inconsistent with H3 for the undergraduate sample.

Sexual Experience, Sexual Frequency and Satisfaction. To assess H4, sexual experience was used to predict sexual satisfaction. Standard multiple regression was used to evaluate the combined ability of four measures of sexual experience (level of experience coding classification, number of sexual partners, sex frequency, and presence of current relationship) to predict the level of sexual satisfaction on the ISS within the undergraduate sample. Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, linearity, and normality. The total variance explained by the model was 11%, $F(4, 56) = 1.67$, $p = .17$. Although none of the independent variables achieved statistical significance, sexual frequency contributed the most (beta = .32, $p = .089$). This was inconsistent with H4.

Perceived Sexual Compatibility and Sexual Experience/ Frequency. In a second standard multiple regression with the undergraduate sample, the combination of these same four independent variables (level of experience coding classification, number of sexual partners, sex frequency, and presence of current relationship) were used to predict sexual compatibility on the HISC. In this model, 22% of the variance in HISC scores were explained by the combination of sexual experience, number of partners, frequency, and relationship status, $F(4, 56) = 3.88$, $p = .007$. In the final model, only the level of experience (beta = -.47, $p = .014$) and current relationship status (beta = -.29, $p = .022$) were statistically significant. H5 was partially supported with the undergraduate sample. Inconsistent with predictions, higher levels of experience were associated with higher perceived compatibility. Consistent with the H5, those who evaluated a current relationship scored higher on the HISC within the undergraduate sample. Higher instability in one's relationship with God was associated with higher sexual frequency ($r_{(65)} = .26$, $p = .045$), as shown by a Pearson correlation with the undergraduate sample.

Sexual Attitudes. Data from Pearson correlations revealed that more conservative sexual attitudes were observed for those who reported greater awareness of God for the undergraduate sample ($r_{(65)} = -.49$, $p < .001$); more spiritual grandiosity ($r_{(65)} = = .29$, $p = .02$); more sexual guilt ($r_{(65)} = .43$, $p < .001$); lower openness to change ($r_{(65)} = -.276$, $p = .026$), and lower endorsement of the idea that religious doubt can be beneficial ($r_{(65)} = -.271$, $p = .029$). Higher endorsement of items indicative of authoritarian aggression were associated with more conservative attitudes on the SAS ($r_{(65)} = .528$, $p < .001$, CI = .34 to .69), with the total RWA score being particularly related to sexual conservatism ($r_{(65)} = .72$, $p < .001$, CI = .59 to .83).

Sexual Guilt. Pearson correlations were computed with Study 2 to examine the relationship between sexual guilt and other variables for the undergraduate sample. The reader is reminded that lower scores on sexual satisfaction and sexual compatibility are indicative of higher endorsement of the domain, which alters the interpretation of negative correlations. Higher guilt was associated with: higher sexual satisfaction ($r_{(65)} = -.42$, $p < .001$); higher sexual compatibility ($r_{(65)} = -.44$, $p < .001$); higher defensiveness in one's relationship with God ($r_{(65)} = .34$, $p = .006$); greater conservatism ($r_{(65)} = .387$, $p = .002$); higher extrinsic religiosity ($r_{(65)} = .25$, $p = .046$); greater intrinsic religiosity ($r_{(65)} = .35$, $p = .005$); higher attachment anxiety ($r_{(65)} = .36$, $p < .001$); higher realistic acceptance in one's relationship with God ($r_{(65)} = -.41$, $p < .001$, note reverse-scoring); higher God awareness (note reverse-scoring; $r_{(65)} = -.39$, $p = .002$), higher spiritual grandiosity ($r_{(65)} = .45$, $p < .001$) and higher authoritarianism ($r_{(65)} = .46$, $p < .001$). Sexual guilt correlated with more insecure maternal attachment ($r_{(65)} = -.27$, $p = .02$), but did not relate with paternal attachment.

Relational Attachment. Higher levels of attachment avoidance in romantic relationships was associated with higher sexual compatibility ($r_{(65)} = -.42$, $p < .001$) and higher sexual satisfaction ($r_{(65)} = -.49$, $p < .001$), as shown by Pearson correlations with the undergraduate sample.

Attachment avoidance also related to higher sexual compatibility (-.69), more instability in the relationship with God ($r_{(65)}$ = .35, p = .005), and higher sexual frequency ($r_{(65)}$ = .44, p < .001). Attachment anxiety was associated with higher sexual satisfaction ($r_{(65)}$ = -.49, p < .001), higher frequency of existential questions on the Quest ($r_{(65)}$ = .398, p = .001), and more endorsement of doubt as potentially positive ($r_{(65)}$ = .32, p = .01).

Discussion

Summary of Findings Regarding Hypotheses

Combined Sample and Group Comparisons

Contrary to expectations based on prior research, males did not report higher sexual satisfaction or sexual compatibility in the total sample and did not differ in sexually conservative attitudes (H1). Prior research on gender and sexual satisfaction has been mixed, with some studies showing variation with older adults (Beutel et. al., 2002), and numerous intervening variables potentially impacting the relationship between biological sex and sexual satisfaction (Heywood et al., 2018).

In the current findings, H2 was only partially supported, with Christian religious classification predicting lower scores on sexual compatibility, but not higher conservatism nor lower sexual satisfaction. H6 was also not supported, as the undergraduate sample showed more conservative attitudes and higher perceived sexual compatibility, but the groups did not differ in terms of sexual satisfaction.

Study 2 Findings

While non-hypothesized results regarding spirituality and sexuality were observed (see sections below), confirmation was not attained for the notion that higher God awareness and lower spiritual grandiosity would relate to higher sexual satisfaction (H3). However, higher levels of instability with one's relationship with God was associated with higher sexual frequency, rendering the possibility of sexual behavior as a form of existential compensation. While it was hypothesized that higher sexual satisfaction would be associated with lower sexual experience and higher sexual frequency (H4), this was not the case. H5 was only partially confirmed, as higher sexual compatibility was observed by participants who evaluated a current relationship rather than offering retrospective analyses. Contrary to expectations, higher levels of sexual experience correlated with higher perceived sexual compatibility in the undergraduate sample, which was relatively sexually experienced.

Conclusions

Spirituality, Guilt and Sexuality

The current study examined a population of graduate and undergraduate students. The majority of the sample was White and identified as Protestant Christian or Catholic, although a sizable minority described themselves as atheist or agnostic. Within this sample, it was evident that sexual guilt correlated with a range of spiritual variables, including defensiveness, higher realistic acceptance, and more anxious attachment to others. Realistic acceptance connotes an individual who can maintain consistent relationship with God and others over time, being able to manage internal conflict with a sense of hope while tolerating ambivalent emotions and disappointment (Hall & Edwards, 1996). When describing the construct of realistic acceptance, Hall and Edwards (1996, p. 238) state, "those individuals organized at the Realistic Acceptance level have a sense of resolving conflict within themselves and with others, and of maintaining relationship continuity over time". Defensiveness in the SAI was felt to represent a form of socially desirable responding, whereby an individual was unwilling to acknowledge disappointment in the relationship with God. Sexual guilt was found to be higher in those who had more insecure maternal attachment, consistent with an object relations perspective.

Sexual guilt also related to higher sexual satisfaction, suggesting that individuals may have experienced conflict regarding pleasurable sensations linked to the sexual experience.

Christians within the sample reported lower sexual compatibility, but not lower sexual satisfaction. Potentially, Christian participants may view sex as connected to commitment more than compatibility, with overall relational quality being associated with satisfaction more than similarity. This would be consistent with the work of Hurlbert et al. (2000), who found that sexual motivation, positive orientation towards fantasy, and marital satisfaction were related to sexual satisfaction more than compatibility. Sexual satisfaction was also unrelated to God awareness

or spiritual grandiosity, which could imply a form of compartmentalization of experience or difficulty in bringing together the spiritual aspects of mental life into the domain of sexuality. The concept of God awareness in the SAI reveals an ability to savor and attend to the sense of God's presence, observing ways that divine communication may occur within internal experiences, and also through relationships with others (Hall & Edwards, 1996). It was notable that the internal consistency reliability for the grandiosity subscale was low in the current project.

Sexual Attitudes

Higher levels of sexually conservative attitudes were associated with both signs of health and potentially maladaptive indicators. For example, authoritarianism and aggression were correlated with more conservative attitudes, as well as spiritual grandiosity. On the SAI, such grandiosity connotes vacillation between extremes of idealization and devaluation, with a sense that one is spiritually superior to others (Hall & Edwards, 1996). However, the grandiosity scale must be interpreted with caution. On the other hand, more conservative sexual attitudes were also associated with greater awareness of God's presence in one's everyday life, with a sense of noting divine communication and influence (Hall & Edwards, 1996).

Sexual Experience, Sexual Recollection and Frequency

Higher sexual frequency was associated with higher instability in one's relationship with God and greater levels of anxiety and avoidance in romantic attachment. Theoretical foundations of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) emphasize the notion of instability as an inability to bring together polarities in concepts of self, other, and God, with a tendency towards splitting and projection (Hall & Edwards, 1996). Higher spiritual instability was also observed in those who reported higher sexual compatibility. The relationship between sexual frequency and instability could imply a compensatory mechanism, such as a strategy to find interpersonal closeness and existential closure through a sexual means. Fraley et al. (2011) suggested that individuals develop working models that are relationship-specific, varying across people and contexts. These attachment-related experiences contribute to self-concept and views of the romantic partner in ways that can intersect with sexual memories and selective attention. Sexual memories related to a current relationship were associated with higher perceived compatibility, but not higher levels of satisfaction. An interesting area for future research would be to investigate the possibility of recollective heuristics and reconstructive memory in personal narratives about sexual experiences.

Higher levels of sexual experience were not associated with higher levels of satisfaction, contrary to popular cultural accounts. However, more experienced persons perceived greater compatibility with their current partner. Higher sexual frequency was not associated with increased sexual satisfaction or perceived compatibility. Contrary to former research (Carpenter et al., 2009; Mark et al., 2015; Mercer & Kohn, 1979), males reported equivalent sexual satisfaction, and did not hold more permissive beliefs or perceive lower compatibility with their partners. Unlike former research (Cornelius et al., 2009; Miguel et al., 2024; Twenge et al., 2015), there were no age differences in sexual satisfaction, and the younger population endorsed more conservative beliefs. This is in contrast to former findings from a generational cohort analysis between 1972 to 2012, which found that sexual attitudes are becoming less conservative over time (Twenge et al., 2015). The relationship between increased age and higher sexual conservatism is likely mediated by attitudes towards closure and openness to novel experiences (Cornelius et al., 2009).

Sample Differences and Sociodemographic Factors

While not universally found, prior research has demonstrated that sexual satisfaction tends to decrease with age (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997; Quinn-Nilas, 2020; Shahhosseini et al., 2014), although in long-term and stable relationships, relationship satisfaction may continue to increase through midlife (Quinn-Nilas, 2020) and learning effects may also influence sexual satisfaction positively over time (Liu, 2003). In addition, awareness of ageist stereotypes may negatively impact sexual functioning, especially in middle and late adulthood (Gocieková et al., 2024).

In addition, relationship quality has been shown to covary with sexual satisfaction, but sometimes shows different patterns for males

than females (Richters et al., 2003). Some mixed findings have been reported in prior literature on the relation between age and sexual satisfaction, as many factors related to conflict resolution, health status, and emotional intimacy can interact with findings and the association between relationship duration and sexual satisfaction may be nonlinear (Schmiedeberg & Schröder, 2016).

In older age groups, males report higher sexual dissatisfaction than females (Stenntagg et al., 2021), with the converse being observed in younger samples, but dependent on how measurements were taken (del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes et al, 2014). For middle-aged women, relational and psychological well-being have been shown to correspond to sexual satisfaction (Dundon & Rellini, 2010). Sexual satisfaction in women may also connect to sociocultural factors, changes in role obligations, educational level, and pathophysiological factors (Shahhosseini et al., 2014). In college and adolescent samples, the presence of fewer sexual partners and lower interpersonal rejection sensitivity has been shown to predict higher sexual satisfaction (Auslander et al., 2007).

The graduate sample had a mean age of 36 years, while the undergraduate sample presented with a mean age of 20 years. The graduate sample was predominantly married, while only 6% of the undergraduates were married, and the former had a longer relationship duration. The undergraduate sample was less religious, with a larger percentage claiming to be nonreligious or describing spirituality outside of Christian religion, while 97% of the graduate sample reported Christian religious affiliation. It was notable in light of these differences that the undergraduates were more conservative in their sexual attitudes and reported higher sexual compatibility, but there were no differences in sexual satisfaction between the groups, and no gender differences were observed on sexual satisfaction. Given that the graduate sample was still young enough to experience higher levels of physical health and sexual performance, it was counterintuitive to observe the lower perceived sexual compatibility in this group, as the relationship stability and duration was also longer. However, it could be the case that religious samples will tend to de-emphasize sexual compatibility in favor of a "make-it-work" or effort-based mentality.

Clinical Implications

The findings underscore the importance of offering contextualized sex therapy interventions with spiritual and religious clients, such that instability and defensiveness in the relationship with God can be addressed, especially in situations were high sexual frequency may be compensatory for anxiety and avoidance in romantic attachments. The experience of sexual guilt may paradoxically connect to sexual satisfaction and pleasure, while also relating to a range of spiritual and attachment-related variables. Thus, a clinical approach that does not ignore the psychospiritual subjectivities of the patient, especially as they intersect with sexuality, is supported. Sexual satisfaction will ultimately connect to internalized standards and comparisons, which are culturally contextualized. The internalization of authoritarian and aggressive models into conservative attitudes may be important to explore clinically, especially as related to unresolved sexual guilt that drives compulsivity and obsession. The working models that are forged in early parental representations are relevant to a contextualized psychosexual treatment within an internalization model. The impact of working models on both sexual and global identity formation should be considered. Moving beyond stereotyped assumptions regarding age and gender as related to sexual satisfaction is an important manifestation of the layered ecological model (Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019), demonstrating recognition of the phenomenology of the individual, the malleability of sexual memories and appraisals, and the culturally-situated dynamic systems that transcend sociodemographic predictions.

Limitations, Ideas for Future Research, and Conclusion

Limitations in the current design relate to sample size and reduced statistical power, homogeneity of the sample demographics, an inability to establish causation due to a cross-sectional design with nonequivalent groups, and reliance on self-report tools. It will be important to pursue additional psychometric validation of novel tools. Validation of the findings with a mixed methods replication that includes obser-

vational data of dyadic interactions, interviews, and partner rating scales is recommended. In addition, it will be important to find recent comparison samples that explore other populations in terms of religious commitment, age, and neuroticism, for cohort comparisons with this archival sample. The exploration of qualitative and phenomenological data is warranted.

The current findings lend support to an object-relations perspective of sexual health that considers romantic attachment, sexual guilt, awareness of God, the maternal bond, and spiritual grandiosity as potentially meaningful constructs. An integrative view of sexuality that incorporates the transcendent, relational, and spiritual components of intimacy is advocated for.

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Attachment to God as a Moderator Between Positive Body Image and Social Media Use

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Studies have demonstrated the potential positive function of secure attachment to God as a protective factor against the negative effects of social media on body image. However, no study has specifically examined attachment to God as a moderator between social media use and body image in young men and women. The present study's purpose was to investigate whether an individual's attachment to God moderates the impact of social media use on body image. We surveyed 1,024 undergraduate students (66% female, 34% male) at a Christian university in California. Participants completed online measures of social media use, positive body image, and attachment to God. We found that anxious attachment to God was related to measures of body image above and beyond social media use in men and women. We also found that anxious attachment to God significantly moderated the relationship between social media and body appreciation in men and between social media and appearance body esteem in women. Avoidant attachment to God did not moderate the relationship between social media and measures of body image in men or women. We conclude that attachment to God may influence the impact of social media use on body image in young men and women and discuss the implications of our findings.

Substantial research has demonstrated the negative effects of social media use on body image (Barron, et al., 2021; Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Butkowsky et al., 2019; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). In response, studies have examined factors that might mitigate this relationship such as how secure attachment to God might serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of traditional media on body image, particularly on body dissatisfaction (Homan, 2012). While the negative effects of social media on body image are substantial, having a more secure attachment to God might aid in serving as a protective factor against detrimental, long-term effects on well-being and body image in young adults (Homan, 2012; Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Levin, 2010). However, no study has yet specifically examined how one's attachment to God moderates—or essentially alters—the effects of social media use on body image. This study contributes to the current literature by examining these relationships and whether an individual's attachment to God moderates the negative effects of social media on body image.

Author Note

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and that there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced the outcome.

We received funding through the university and approval from the university's IRB to conduct this study (Protocol #: SIRB_060603). Additionally, we obtained participant consent before each participant completed the survey. Due to the nature of this research, participants of this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data for replication is not available.

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Body Image

Body image is an important concept because of its potential far-reaching impact on health and well-being. The *American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology* (2018) defines "body image" as the "mental picture one forms of one's body as a whole, including its physical characteristics (body percept) and one's attitudes toward these characteristics (body concept)." According to the National Eating Disorders Association (n.d.), body image concerns begin at a young age and endure throughout an individual's lifetime.

For decades, researchers have focused on the sources and symptoms of negative body image. Negative body image is conceptualized as body dissatisfaction, body shame, and low body esteem and is particularly linked to low self-es-

teem and low general well-being in young adults and adolescents, often leading to eating disorders (Gattario & Frisén, 2019; National Eating Disorders Association, n.d.). The National Eating Disorders Association (n.d.) estimated that about 69-84% of women and 10-30% of men experience body dissatisfaction.

In contrast, a more recent trend in body image research has investigated positive body image, described as a multifaceted construct shaped by social identities and includes factors like body appreciation (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b). More specifically, body appreciation is the appreciation of "the features, functionality, and health of the body," which extends far beyond an individual's physical and outward appearance (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b, p. 122). Importantly, Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015b) argued that clinicians and psychologists are best equipped to treat negative body image issues by promoting and understanding positive body image, especially when faced with the negative effects that social media use might have on young adults' body image.

The Effects of Social Media Use on Body Image

For many decades, the term "media" encapsulated a broad variety of outlets including magazines, TV shows, and film. A wealth of research studies examining the relationship between traditional media and body image has made clear that traditional media's consistent portrayal of ultra-thin models and actors influences disordered-eating characteristics, body dissatisfaction, and the drive for thinness (Bissel & Zhou, 2004; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Homan, 2012). In more recent years, however, media has expanded to hand-held devices. Social media includes online applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, which are often readily accessible and viewed by individuals on their cell phones. Unlike most other forms of media, social media is accessible simply by swiping one's smartphone. Social media is an important modern medium for psychologists to study because its nature is inherently more interactive, personalized, customizable, and connective than traditional media (Perloff, 2014). In addition, social media allows users to feel present online, where videos and images transport an individual into the world of their social connections (Perloff, 2014). Taken together, these aspects of social media distinguish it from traditional media and foster a more accessible, personalized, and idealized type of interaction.

In today's society, the greater accessibility of social media has led to more exposure to the thin-ideal of Western society among young adults. Research findings demonstrate consistent evidence that social media use is associated with body image concerns in young adults, particularly because the material that individuals post includes an idealized version of themselves and that social media interaction may cause direct appearance-based comparisons of one individual to another (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Individuals might then engage in dieting and unhealthy habits to achieve that thin standard, which eventually may lead to an eating disorder.

Unfortunately, for many adolescents and young adults, the influences of social media have a profound negative effect on body image and may initiate disordered eating habits, which eventually spiral into an eating disorder. In a study of 177 female Instagram users between the ages of 18 and 30 years, Butkowsky et al. (2019) found that women who posted selfies on their Instagram pages were likely to experience high levels of body dissatisfaction and a drive for thinness. Moreover, in a study of 130 female undergraduate students, exposure to "fitspiration" images (social media content intended to inspire exercise and healthy eating habits) resulted in lower state appearance self-esteem and greater body dissatisfaction than exposure to neutral travel-related content (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). In addition to these studies, a wealth of other studies found that exposure to "thin-ideal" images on social media relates to negative body image outcomes, such as greater self-objectification and body dissatisfaction (Barron, et al., 2021; Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Nelson, et. al, 2022; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). Study results such as these have led researchers on a mission to study and uncover protective factors against the negative effects of social media use on body image.

Religious Beliefs and Body Image

Studies have suggested that religion and spirituality may be related to body image by assisting in the formation of positive body image. For

instance, Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) observed that college women reported body acceptance—a measure of positive body image—because they believed that their bodies were created uniquely by a higher power. Similarly, Pope et al. (2014) found that Black adolescent girls who believed in God viewed their bodies as "gifts from God" and, in return, positively perceived their bodies as part of their spirituality. Moreover, a study of 345 women between the ages of 18 and 69 years found that participation in religion and spirituality was related to a positive body image (Tiggeman & Hage, 2019). By using measures of religion and spirituality, in addition to measures of body appreciation, gratitude, and self-objectification, they found that the more religiously active and spiritual women were, the higher their levels of positive body image.

This body of research studies suggests that religion and spirituality contribute to higher levels of body-related well-being. What is less clear is which aspect(s) of religion and spirituality, in particular, contribute to well-being and positive body image.

Attachment to God as a Potential Protective Factor

One aspect of religiosity and spirituality that could potentially serve as a protective factor against negative body image is a sense of secure attachment to a higher power. Originally proposed by John Bowlby (1969), attachment refers to the tendency of children to seek connection with comforting caregivers (an "attachment figure") when vulnerable and frightened. Ideally this attachment figure provides emotional support resulting a child's having a sense of security, or a secure attachment style. If the attachment figure does not provide the necessary emotional support, it may result in the child's development of an insecure attachment, or anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Attachment styles are typically measured along two dimensions: anxious and avoidant. On one end, individuals with anxious attachment fear rejection and abandonment, and they desire "approval, connection, and reassurance from others, but are uncertain that they will receive it" (Robinson et al., 2015, p. 141). On the other end, individuals with avoidant attachment are uncomfortable with dependence on others, and they, instead, desire independence and autonomy (Robinson et al., 2015). Finally, individuals with secure attachment score low on both anxiety and avoidance and tend to trust and rely on others (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Similar to body image (National Eating Disorders Association, n.d.), research studies have demonstrated that attachment styles persist throughout one's lifetime (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982). Researchers have theorized that individuals hold "internal working models" of attachment based on their early experiences with their attachment figure that later translate to other attachments throughout life such as with sibling, friends, and romantic partners (Bowlby, 1969, 1982; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Pietromonaco and Feldman Barrett (2000) summarized this concept by stating that internal working models allow "individuals to generate expectations about future interpersonal situations," whether consciously or subconsciously (p. 160).

Attachment theory has also been applied to a relationship with God, since God is seen as a paternal figure in Judeo-Christian contexts (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Kirkpatrick, 1992). Psychological research findings have demonstrated that attachment theory can explain the positive benefits of religion as a protective factor in mental well-being (Kirkpatrick, 1992). Individuals with secure attachment perceive God as a source of comfort and strength, with lower levels of avoidance and anxiety associated with less psychological distress and increased optimism and self-esteem (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Ellison et al., 2012; Henderson & Kent, 2021; Kent et al., 2018). Individuals with anxious attachment have an uncertain relationship with God and fear of abandonment by God, and evidence demonstrates that an anxious attachment to God exacerbates the harmful effects of stress (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Ellison et al., 2012; Henderson & Kent, 2021). Finally, individuals with avoidant attachment avoid seeking a relationship with God (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Henderson & Kent, 2021).

Henderson and Kent (2021) theorized that individuals with either secure or avoidant attachment styles to God are relatively settled in their connection with God—producing less psychological distress—whereas individuals with anxious attachment to God are unsettled in their connection—producing more psychological distress (Henderson & Kent, 2021). This theory suggests

that those with secure and avoidant attachment to God are settled in their beliefs, whereas those with anxious attachment to God are more uncertain with where they stand in their relationship to God (Henderson & Kent, 2021).

Studies on Attachment to God and Its Potentially Protective Effects on Body Image

Some research studies suggest a relationship between various forms of attachment to God and body image. Homan and Cavanaugh (2013), for example, studied the relationship between a secure versus anxious and avoidant attachment to God on body image in 104 undergraduate women at a Christian liberal arts college. They found that less anxious attachment to God related to body appreciation, acceptance of their bodies' functions, and adaptive eating behaviors. Interestingly, they also found that avoidant attachment to God did not significantly relate to well-being variables. In sum, the young women with a more secure attachment to God were less likely to have body image concerns, and their secure attachment to God served as an asset in healthy psychological functioning (Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013).

Furthermore, young women who have a secure attachment relationship to God are also less likely to seek external approval about their bodies (Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013), which suggests a possible relationship to social media use. Homan (2012) conducted an experimental study investigating how attachment to God can serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of media on body image in college women. Homan found that young women who were exposed to ultra-thin models had lower body satisfaction scores than the group exposed to images of healthy, normal weight models, and those within the ultra-thin group who had a more secure attachment to God had higher body satisfaction scores than those who had an anxious attachment.[1]

Thus, because previous research findings suggest that secure attachment to God serves as a protective factor to foster positive body image generally, when confronted with ultra-thin traditional media (Homan, 2012; Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013), it is logical to predict that secure attachment to God may be a protective factor against the negative effects of social media use on body image.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether an individual's attachment to God moderates the impact of social media use on body image. At least one prior study demonstrated the positive function of secure attachment to God as a protective factor against the negative effects of traditional media on body image, particularly on body dissatisfaction (Homan, 2012). However, we are not aware of any study that has specifically examined how one's attachment to God moderates—or essentially alters—the effects of social media use on body image. Therefore, the present study aimed to contribute to the current literature by looking at these variables in combination.

In addition, because studies using these variables have not analyzed avoidant attachment to God and its relationship to social media and body image, we included an analysis of this dimension in the current study (Homan, 2012). Furthermore, studies of the relationship between attachment to God and body image (Homan, 2012; Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013) have been limited by a focus specifically on young female participants, so investigating these variables in a sample that includes male participants will also contribute to the current literature. Finally, although previous studies investigating attachment to God has examined body appreciation and body dissatisfaction (Homan, 2012; Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013), measures of body esteem have not yet been included. The present study operationalized body image as both body appreciation and body esteem.

We hypothesized the following: (a) consistent with prior research that has revealed that women with a more secure attachment to God were less likely to have body image concerns (Homan, 2012; Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013), we expected that anxious and avoidant attachment to God would relate to body appreciation and body esteem above and beyond social media use; (b) based on a prior study indicating that attachment to God mitigated the relationship between traditional media and body image (Homan, 2012), we theorized that anxious attachment to God would moderate the relationship between

[1]It is important to note for the purposes of the present study that Homan (2012) did not analyze how avoidant attachment to God interacts with these variables.

social media use and positive body image; and (c) consistent with research suggesting that attachment is measured along two dimensions (anxious and avoidant) and a lack of research studying the moderating effect of avoidant attachment as it relates to body image and social media (Homan, 2012; Robinson et al., 2015), we hypothesized that avoidant attachment to God would moderate the relationship between social media use and positive body image. We also explored possible gender differences, but we did not include any specific hypotheses as previous studies have not yet examined these variables in males.

The present study is important because it addresses two concepts (body image concerns and attachment to God) that persist throughout an individual's lifetime (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982; National Eating Disorders Association, n.d.). The results might improve our understanding of how attachment to God can serve as a protective factor against the adverse effects of social media on body image, thereby contributing to the prevention of the development of negative body image and its harmful long-term consequences.

Method

Participants

Participants included 1,097 students at a small Christian liberal arts university in Southern California. We eliminated 61 participants who did not complete two or more dependent measures. We also eliminated an additional 12 participants who either did not respond to our question about gender identification (n = 8) or who either preferred not to say or did not identify as male or female (n = 4) in order to examine gender effects. Thus, our final sample included 1,024 students with a 29% response rate. Females comprised 66% (n = 675) of the sample, and males comprised 34% (n = 349) of the sample. The mean age was 19.99 years old, with a standard deviation of 1.27. As for class standing, 31.7% of the sample was third-year, 23.5% first-year, 22.6% second-year, 18.1% fourth-year, and 0.1% fifth-year or above. The ethnic composition was as follows: 56.6% Caucasian (n = 580), 21.1% Asian (n = 216), 8% Multiracial (n = 82), 7.2% Latinx (n = 74), 4% African American (n = 41), and 2.5% other (n = 26). Finally, self-reported religious affiliation included 39.8% Protestant (n = 408), 18.6% other (n = 190), 17.6% Catholic (n = 180), 9.7% agnostic (n = 99), 7% none (n = 72), 3.5% atheist (n = 36), 1.6% Buddhist (n = 16), .5% Hindu (n = 5), .6% Jewish (n = 6), and .5% Muslim (n = 5). We included non-religious and non-monotheistic religions in the current study because similar studies have done so in order to control for these variables (e.g., Frei-Landau et al., 2020), which we discuss further below.

Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey sent to all undergraduates at the university (N = 2,843) as a part of a larger study on college student behavior. The response rate for the current study was 29%. Participants accessed the survey via a link sent to students' university emails. Participants completed the survey after reading and agreeing to the informed consent form. The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. For the current study, participants completed the measures in the following order: demographic questionnaire, Social Media Use Survey, the Body Appreciation Scale-2, Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults, and the Attachment to God Inventory. After the completion of the survey, participants received one convocation credit toward the university's requirement of 14 credits. The university's Institutional Review Board approved the current study.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire that assessed information about participants' age, year in college, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation.

Social Media Use Survey

Participants completed a social media use survey which assessed overall social media use per day and the social media applications they use most frequently. The Social Media Use Survey is a multiple-choice questionnaire comprised of seven different social media outlets (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, Pinterest, and other). Participants were asked to indicate how many hours they spend on an average day on these social media outlets, choosing between five two-hour increment options ranging from 0-2 hours to > 10 hours. Participants' social media use scores were

calculated by adding the lowest number in the range of each social media option and adding all scores to obtain the social media use score. Higher numbers indicated a greater amount of time spent on social media.

Body Appreciation Scale-2

The Body Appreciation-2 Scale was used to measure attitudes about trait body appreciation in the participants (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a). The BAS-2 is a 10-item scale that assesses positive attitudes in an individual towards his or her body. Examples of the items include "I respect my body" and "I appreciate the different and unique characteristics of my body." Participants rated each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The BAS-2 is scored by finding the mean of the scores across all items, with high scores indicating higher levels of body appreciation. The internal consistency reliability of the BAS-2 has been examined in previous research and was shown to be excellent (α = .94 for women and .93 for men; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a). The internal consistency reliability for the current study was excellent (α = .96).

Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults

The Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults is a 23-item body esteem questionnaire that includes three subscales that measure (a) feelings about appearance (e.g., "I wish I looked like someone else" and "I like what I see when I look in the mirror") (Appearance Body Esteem); (b) satisfaction with weight (e.g., "I am satisfied with my weight" and "weighing myself depresses me") (Weight Body Esteem); and (c) perceptions of how others see an individual's own body (e.g., "other people consider me good looking" and "I'm as nice looking as other people")(Attribution Body Esteem) (Mendelson et al., 2001). Participants rated each item on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*) based on how frequently they agreed with each statement. Each subscale is scored by finding the mean across all items, with high scores indicating more positive body esteem. The Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults has demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability in a previous study for all three subscales: Appearance Body Esteem = .92, Weight Body Esteem = .94, and Attribution Body Esteem = .81 (Mendelson et al., 2001). The internal consistency reliability for the current study was also strong: Appearance Body Esteem α = .73, Weight Body Esteem α = .79, and Attribution Body Esteem α = .76.

Attachment to God Inventory

The Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004) is a 28-item scale that assesses an individual's attachment to God. The inventory includes two subscales: Avoidance of Intimacy and Anxiety About Abandonment. Each item is rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Example items include "It is uncommon for me to cry when sharing with God" (avoidance of intimacy) and "I crave reassurance from God that God loves me" (anxiety about abandonment). Each subscale is obtained by summing responses for each item for the subscale to obtain scores reflecting both avoidant and anxious attachment to God. Seven of the items are reverse scored. High scores on the subscales represent anxious and avoidant attachment to God, whereas low scores denote secure attachment. Beck and McDonald (2004) found good internal consistency for the subscales (avoidant attachment to God α = .86; anxious attachment to God α = .87). The internal consistency reliability for the current study was also good to excellent (avoidant attachment to God α = .85, anxious attachment to God α = .91; George & Mallery, 2019). Although secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment each have distinct characteristics, attachment is best understood along a dimension, rather than categorically (Robinson et al., 2015).

Analyses

We conducted preliminary analyses to examine the relationship between demographic variables and the dependent variables. In particular, we were interested in examining differences between males and females on dependent measures, since research studies centered on body image and attachment to God have been limited to strictly female samples (Homan, 2012; Homan & Cavanaugh, 2013). We were also interested in examining the differences between the four self-reported religious affiliations (non-religious, Catholic, Protestant, and other religious) on dependent measures, since previous similar studies controlled for religious affiliation (Frei-Landau et al., 2020). Participants were divided into these four groups as follows: non-religious, Catholic, Protestant, and other religious. Participants who identified

as agnostic, atheist, or none were categorized into the non-religious group. Participants who identified as Catholic or Protestant were categorized in the Catholic and Protestant groups, respectively. Participants who identified as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, or other were categorized into the other religious group. Finally, we conducted moderation analyses, separately for females and males, to determine if anxious and avoidant attachment to God related to body appreciation and body esteem (appearance, attribution, and weight) above and beyond social media use and to determine whether anxious and avoidant attachment to God moderated the relationship between social media use and body appreciation and body esteem (appearance, attribution, and weight).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

First, we conducted descriptive statics for each of the measures included in the analyses. These statistics, including psychometric properties for each measure, are presented in Table 1.

We conducted several independent samples *t*-tests to analyze the difference between men and women on all dependent measures. Results from these analyses indicated that men and women significantly differed on body appreciation, avoidant attachment to God, and weight body esteem scores, with women scoring lower than men across all measures. Given the significant differences between males and females on these measures, we conducted separate regression analyses for male and female participants.

We also conducted a multivariate analysis of variance to analyze the difference between self-reported religious affiliations on dependent measures and results were significant, $F(3, 824) = 14.26$, $p = .000$, $\eta p2 = .11$, indicating that these groups significantly differed on both anxious and avoidant attachment to God subscales and social media use, but no other dependent measures.[2] Given these significant differences between self-reported religious affiliations, we controlled for religious affiliation in all subsequent analyses and dropped the non-religious participants from subsequent analyses.

The Moderation Effects of Attachment to God on Social Media Use and Body Image

We conducted eight hierarchical regression analyses each, for males (see Models 1-8, Tables 2 and 3) and females (see Models 9-16, Tables 4 and 5), controlling for religious affiliation, to determine whether attachment to God scores would moderate the relationship between social media use and body image. For each model, we used Hayes' (2017) moderation process analysis whereby we centered both our independent and moderator variables, calculated interaction terms, and conducted hierarchical regression

[2]Analyses examining gender and religious affiliation group differences are available on request.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties for Study Variables

Measure	Men		Women		Range	Cronbach's α
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Anxious attachment	47.52	15.87	48.35	15.41	14-94	.91
Avoidant attachment	56.08	12.21	52.65	14.65	16-95	.85
Body appreciation	3.69	.88	3.52	.89	1-5	.96
Appearance body esteem	2.36	.66	2.29	.61	.70-5.00	.73
Attribution body esteem	3.24	.72	3.19	.67	1.00-5.00	.76
Weight body esteem	2.72	.78	2.54	.78	.63-5.00	.79
Social media use	8.85	3.22	8.54	2.04	7-42	
Religious affiliation D1	.25	.43	.18	.39	0-1	
Religious affiliation D2	.21	.41	.16	.37	0-1	
Religious affiliation D3	.37	.48	.42	.49	0-1	

analyses. We entered religious affiliation (recoded into a system of three dummy variables) at Step 1, we added social media use and either anxious or avoidant attachment to God at Step 2, and then finally we added the interaction term for social media use and attachment to God (either anxious or avoidant) in Step 3. We attempted to examine relationships for each of the four dependent variables including body appreciation and each body esteem subscale (Appreciation, Attribution, and Weight). Given that we conducted 16 moderation analyses, we used the Bonferroni correction to control the family-wise error rate with $\alpha\_corrected = .003$. Results of the analyses for males are shown in Table 2 (Anxious Attachment to God) and Table 3 (Avoidant Attachment to God). The results of the analyses for females are shown in Table 4 (Anxious Attachment to God) and Table 5 (Avoidant Attachment to God). We discuss the statis-

Table 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Summary Relating to Body Image Variables from Social Media Use and Anxious Attachment to God in Males, Controlling for Religious Affiliation

	B	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2	*B*	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
	Body Appreciation Scores (Model 1)					Attribution Body Esteem Scores (Model 2)				
Step 1				.001	.001				.007	.007
Religious Affiliation	-.02	.05	-.03			.06	.04	.08		
Constant	3.72	.14				3.07	.11			
Step 2				.02	.02				.02	.01
Religious Affiliation	.01	.05	-.01			.05	.04	.07		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.10			-.01	.01	-.07		
Anxious Attachment	-.10	.05	-.12			.04	.04	.06		
Constant	3.70	.14				3.12	.12			
Step 3				.05	.3				.04	.02
Religious Affiliation	.03	.05	.04			.07	.04	.09		
Social Media Use	-.003	.01	-.02			-.001	.01	-.01		
Anxious Attachment	-.12	.05	-.13*			.03	.04	.05		
Social Media Use × Anxious Attachment	.09	.03	.18*			.07	.03	.16*		
Constant	3.61	.15				3.06	.12			
	Appearance Body Esteem Scores (Model 3)					Weight Body Esteem Scores (Model 4)				
Step 1				.002	.002				.000	.000
Religious Affiliation	.03	.04	.04			-.01	.05	-.01		
Constant	2.29	.10				2.72	.12			
Step 2				.05	.05				.03	.03
Religious Affiliation	.07	.04	.10			.03	.05	.04		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.10			-.01	.01	-.10		
Anxious Attachment	-.14	.04	-.22***			-.11	.05	-.15*		
Constant	2.23	.10				2.68	.13			
Step 3				.05	.001				.03	.004
Religious Affiliation	.07	.04	-.11			.04	.05	.05		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.08			-.01	.01	-.07		
Anxious Attachment	-.14	.04	-.22***			-.12	.05	-.16*		
Social Media Use × Anxious Attachment	.02	.03	.04			.03	.03	.07		
Constant	2.22	.11				2.65	.13			

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

tically significant results below as well as those that were marginally statistically significant, given the conservative nature of the Bonferroni correction (Dunn, 1961).

Moderation Effects for Males

We found one marginally significant moderation effect observed for males. Anxious attachment to God marginally moderated the relationship between social media use and body appreciation (Model 1). When religious affiliation was entered alone, it did not significantly relate to body appreciation scores ($F(1, 279) = .18$, $p = .67$, adjusted $R^2 = -.003$). When social media use and anxious attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they did not significantly improve the relationship, R^2 change = .02, $F(2, 277) = 2.80$, $p = .063$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$. When the interaction between social media use and anxious attachment to God was added to the regression, it significantly improved the relationship, R^2

Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Summary Relating to Body Image Variables from Social Media Use and Avoidant Attachment to God in Males, Controlling for Religious Affiliation

	B	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2	*B*	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
	Body Appreciation Scores (Model 5)					Attribution Body Esteem Scores (Model 6)				
Step 1				.002	.002				.004	.004
Religious Affiliation	-.04	.05	-.04			.04	.04	-.06		
Constant	3.77	145				3.11	.11			
Step 2				.040	.04				.02	.01
Religious Affiliation	-.07	.05	-.08			.03	.04	.04		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.10			-.01	.01	-.08		
Avoidant Attachment	-.18	.06	-.18**			-.07	.05	-.09		
Constant	3.93	.15				3.19	.12			
Step 3				.041	.000				.02	.01
Religious Affiliation	-.07	.05	-.08			.03	.04	.04		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.10			-.01	.01	-.06		
Avoidant Attachment	-.18	.06	-.18**			-.07	.05	-.09		
Social Media Use × Avoidant Attachment	.01	.07	.01			.07	.06	.07		
Constant	3.93	.15				3.19	.12			
	Appearance Body Esteem Scores (Model 7)					Weight Body Esteem Scores (Model 8)				
Step 1				.001	.001				.000	.000
Religious Affiliation	.02	.04	.03			-.003	.05	-.004		
Constant	2.31	.10				2.78	.12			
Step 2				.01	.01				.02	.02
Religious Affiliation	.01	.04	.02			-.02	.05	-.03		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.08			-.01	.01	-.09		
Avoidant Attachment	-.05	.05	-.07			-.10	.05	-.11		
Constant	2.38	.11				2.83	.13			
Step 3				.01	.001				.02	.001
Religious Affiliation	.01	.04	.02			-.02	.05	-.03		
Social Media Use	-.01	.01	-.09			-.01	.01	-.10		
Avoidant Attachment	-.05	.05	-.07			-.10	.05	-.11		
Social Media Use × Avoidant Attachment	-.03	.05	-.04			-.03	.06	-.03		
Constant	2.38	.11				2.84	.13			

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

change = .03, $F(1, 276) = 7.67$, $p = .006$, adjusted R^2 =.03, indicating that anxious attachment to God marginally moderated the relationship between social media use and body appreciation. As portrayed in Figure 1, for the participants with higher anxious attachment to God scores (a more insecure attachment to God), body appreciation scores are more consistent regardless of social media use, whereas lower levels of anxious attachment to God scores (a more secure attachment to God) have more of an effect, with higher social media use correlated with lower levels of body appreciation.

Although there were no other significant moderation effects when examining the predictor and outcome variables, the analyses suggested two additional main effects. In the hierarchical multiple regression model relating to appearance body esteem from anxious attachment to God (Model 3), when social me-

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Summary Relating to Body Image Variables from Social Media Use and Anxious Attachment to God in Females, Controlling for Religious Affiliation

	B	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2	*B*	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
	Body Appreciation Scores (Model 9)					Attribution Body Esteem Scores (Model 10)				
Step 1				.004	.004				.001	.001
Religious Affiliation	-.53	.04	-.06			-.02	.03	-.03		
Constant	.08	.11				3.25	.08			
Step 2				.12	.12				.03	.03
Religious Affiliation	.01	.04	.01			.004	.03	.01		
Social Media Use	-.03	.01	-.13**			-.004	.01	-.02		
Anxious Attachment	-.23	.04	-.31***			-.11	.03	-.16***		
Constant	.01	.10				3.20	.08			
Step 3				.13	.004				.03	.003
Religious Affiliation	.01	.04	.01			.003	.03	.004		
Social Media Use	-.03	.01	-.12**			-.01	.01	-.04		
Anxious Attachment	-.28	.04	-.32***			-.11	.03	-.16***		
Social Media Use × Anxious Attachment	-.08	.05	-.07			.05	.04	.05		
Constant	`.00	.10				3.20	.08			
	Appearance Body Esteem Scores (Model 11)					Weight Body Esteem Scores (Model 12)				
Step 1				.000	.000				.002	.002
Religious Affiliation	.01	.03	.02			-.04	.03	-.05		
Constant	2.27	.07				2.65	.09			
Step 2				.03	.03				.03	.03
Religious Affiliation	.03	.03	.06			-.01	.03	-.02		
Social Media Use	.002	.01	.01			-.02	.01	-.09*		
Anxious Attachment	-.11	.03	-.18***			-.10	.03	-.13**		
Constant	2.21	.07				2.64	.10			
Step 3				.04	.01				.03	.000
Religious Affiliation	.03	.03	.06			-.01	.03	-.02		
Social Media Use	-.001	.01	-.01			-.02	.01	-.09*		
Anxious Attachment	-.10	.03	-.17***			-.10	.03	-.13**		
Social Media Use × Anxious Attachment	.09	.04	.11*			.003	.04	.003		
Constant	2.21	.07				2.64	.10			

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

dia use and anxious attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they significantly improved the relationship, R^2 change = .05, $F(2, 282) = 7.42$, $p = .001$, adjusted R^2 =.04, with anxious attachment to God relating to appearance body esteem scores above and beyond social media use scores ($p = .000$). This model related to 5% of the variance in appearance body esteem scores. In the hierarchical multiple regression model relating to body appreciation from avoidant attachment to God (Model 5), when social media use and avoidant attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they marginally improved the relationship, R^2 change = .04, $F(2, 280) = 5.66$, $p = .004$, adjusted R^2 = .03, with avoidant attachment to God marginally relating to body appreciation scores above and beyond social media use scores ($p = .003$). This model related to 4% of the variance in body appreciation scores.

Table 5

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Summary Relating to Body Image Variables from Social Media Use and Avoidant Attachment to God in Females, Controlling for Religious Affiliation

	B	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2	*B*	*SEB*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
	Body Appreciation Scores (Model 13)					Attribution Body Esteem Scores (Model 14)				
Step 1				.003	.003				.000	.000
Religious Affiliation	-.05	.04	-.05			-.01	.03	-.02		
Constant	3.64	.11				3.22	.08			
Step 2				.03	.03				.001	.001
Religious Affiliation	-.08	.04	-.10*			-.01	.03	-.02		
Social Media Use	-.03	.01	-.13**			-.004	.01	-.03		
Avoidant Attachment	-.09	.04	-.11*			.002	.03	.002		
Constant	3.81	.11				3.23	.09			
Step 3				.04	.001				.001	.000
Religious Affiliation	-.08	.04	-.10*			-.01	.03	-.02		
Social Media Use	-.03	.01	-.13**			-.004	.01	-.03		
Avoidant Attachment	-.10	.04	-.12*			-.18	.06	-.03		
Social Media Use × Avoidant Attachment	-.04	.05	-.04			.001	.03	.002		
Constant	3.81	.11				3.23	.09			
	Appearance Body Esteem Scores (Model 15)					Weight Body Esteem Scores (Model 16)				
Step 1				.03	.001				.001	.001
Religious Affiliation	.02	.03	.03			-.03	.03	-.04		
Constant	2.26	.07				2.62	.09			
Step 2				.03	.000				.01	.01
Religious Affiliation	.02	.03	.03			-.04	.04	-.05		
Social Media Use	.000	.01	.01			-.02	.01	-.09*		
Avoidant Attachment	-.003	.03	-.01			-.02	.03	-.03		
Constant	2.26	.08				2.69	.10			
Step 3				.09	.01				.01	.000
Religious Affiliation	.01	.04	.02			-.04	.04	-.05		
Social Media Use	.003	.01	.02			-.02	.01	-.09*		
Avoidant Attachment	-.02	.03	-.03			-.02	.03	-.03		
Social Media Use × Avoidant Attachment	.09	.04	.10*			.01	.05	.01		
Constant	2.24	.13				2.69	.10			

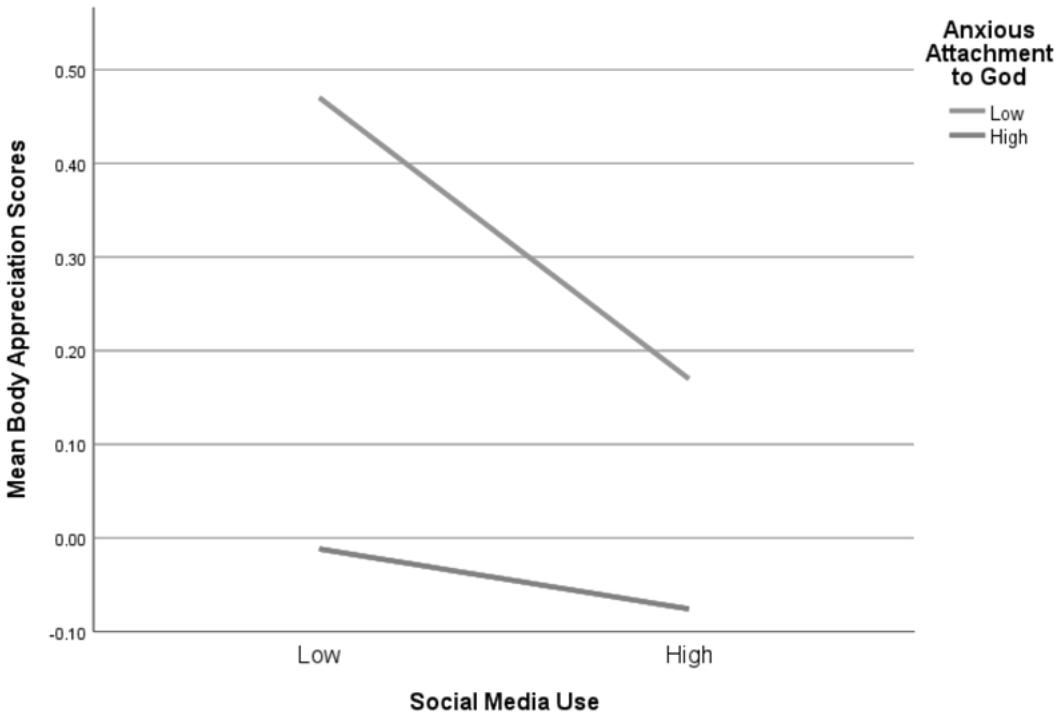
Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Moderation Effects for Females

One moderation effect was observed for females. We found that anxious attachment to God moderated the relationship between social media use and appearance body esteem (Model 11). When religious affiliation was entered alone, it did not significantly relate to appearance body esteem scores ($F(1, 466) = .23$, $p = .63$, adjusted $R^2 = -.002$). When social media use and anxious attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they significantly improved the relationship, R^2 change = .12, $F(2, 565) = 4.26$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .024$, with anxious attachment to God scores relating to appearance body esteem scores above and beyond social media use scores ($p = .000$). When the interaction between social media use and anxious attachment to God was added to the regression, it significantly improved the relationship, R^2 change = .01, $F(1, 564) = 8.45$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$, indicating that anxious attachment to God moderated the relationship between social media use and appearance body esteem. A significant main effect for anxious attachment to God was also observed in this model ($p = .000$). However, as indicated by R^2, this model only related to 4% of the variance in appearance body esteem scores, with anxious attachment to God being the strongest relationship ($p = .000$). As portrayed in Figure 2, for the participants with lower anxious attachment to God scores (a more secure attachment to God), appearance body esteem scores are more consistent regardless of social media use, whereas higher levels of anxious attachment to God scores (a more insecure attachment to God) have more of an effect, with higher social media use correlated with higher levels of appearance body esteem.

Figure 1

Differing Levels of Anxious Attachment to God Scores on the Relationship Between Social Media and Body Appreciation Scores in Males

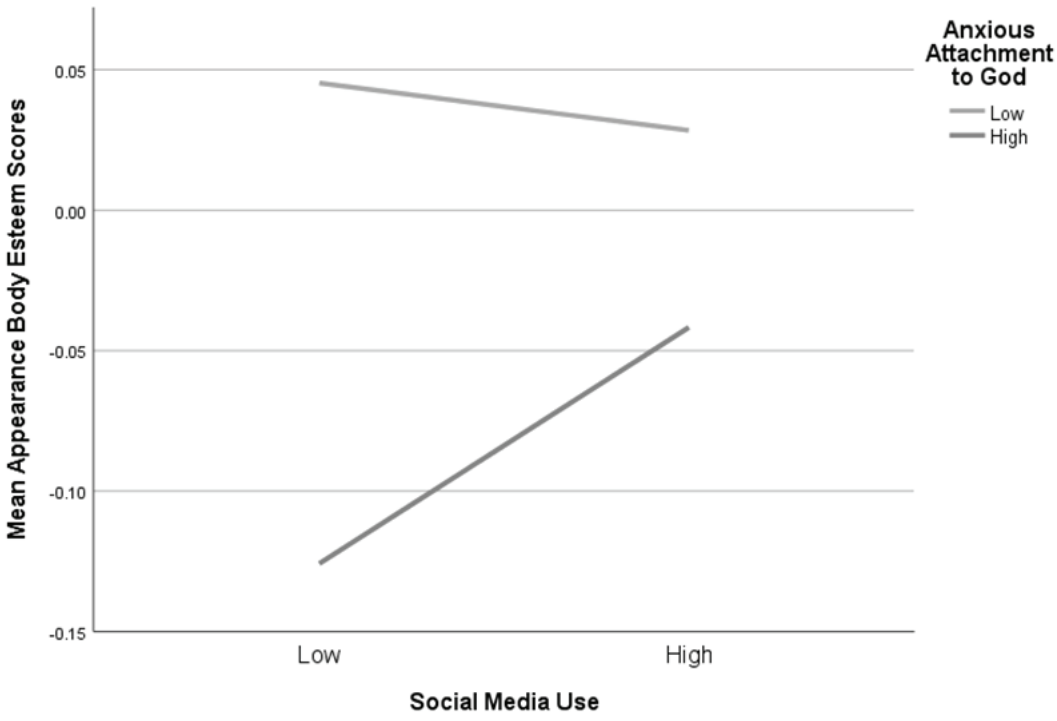


Note. All numbers are presented using grand means centered.

Although there were no other significant moderation effects when examining the predictor and outcome variables, the analyses suggested several additional main effects. In the hierarchical multiple regression model relating to body appreciation from anxious attachment to God (Model 9), when social media use and anxious attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they improved the relationship, R^2 change = .12, $F(2, 557) = 37.28$, $p = .000$, adjusted R^2 =.12, with anxious attachment to God scores best relating to body appreciation scores (p = .000 and .004, respectively). This model related to 13% of the variance in body appreciation scores. In the hierarchical multiple regression model relating to attribution body esteem from anxious attachment to God (Model 10), when social media use and anxious attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they significantly improved the relationship, R^2 change = .03, $F(2, 565) = 7.82$, $p = .000$, adjusted R^2 = .02, with anxious attachment to God scores relating to attribution body esteem above and beyond social media use scores (p = .000). However, as indicated by R^2, this model only related to 3% of the variance in attribution body esteem scores. In the hierarchical multiple regression model relating to weight body esteem from anxious attachment (Model 12), when social media use and anxious attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they significantly improved the relationship, R^2 change = .03, $F(2, 565) = 7.92$, $p = .000$, adjusted R^2 =.02, with anxious attachment to God scores best relating to weight body esteem scores (p = .002). However, as indicated by R^2, this model only related to 3% of the variance in weight body esteem scores. In the hierarchical multiple regression model relating to

Figure 2

Differing Levels of Anxious Attachment to God Scores on the Relationship Between Social Media and Appearance Body Esteem Scores in Females



Note. All numbers are presented using grand means centered.

body appreciation scores from avoidant attachment to God (Model 13), when religious affiliation was entered alone, it did not significantly relate to body appreciation scores ($F(1, 560) = 1.65$, $p = .20$, adjusted $R^2 = -.001$). When social media use and avoidant attachment to God scores were added to the regression, they significantly improved the relationship, R^2 change = .03, $F(2, 558) = 8.81$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$, with social media use scores best relating to body appreciation scores ($p = .000$). This model related to 3% of the variance in body appreciation scores.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how an individual's attachment to God relates to both social media use and body image. We hypothesized that (a) anxious and avoidant attachment to God would relate to body appreciation and body esteem above and beyond social media use; (b) anxious attachment to God would moderate the relationship between social media use and positive body image; and (c) avoidant attachment to God would moderate the relationship between social media use and positive body image. We also explored the influence of gender on these relationships.

Regarding our first hypothesis, some of our findings supported the notion that attachment to God related to measures of positive body image above and beyond social media use for both males and females, where moderation was absent. In particular, anxious attachment to God was significantly related to the various measures of body esteem. Anxious attachment to God related to appearance body esteem for males and attribution and weight body esteem for females above and beyond social media use. For both males and females, less anxious attachment to God was associated with greater body esteem. In these models, anxious attachment accounted for 3% to 5% of the variance in body esteem. In the model including body appreciation among females, anxious attachment to God accounted for 13% of the variability in participants' scores, suggesting that less anxious attachment to God was related to greater body appreciation among females. Finally, our main effects demonstrated avoidant attachment to God was marginally related to body appreciation scores above and beyond social media use in male participants, but that social media use was related to body appreciation above and beyond avoidant attachment to God in female participants. Avoidant attachment to God accounted for 3% to 4% of the variance in body appreciation. Our results parallel the studies conducted by Homan and Cavanaugh (2013), who found that anxious attachment to God was related to measures of positive body image in young women. Additionally, our results contribute to the literature because they suggest that avoidant attachment to God creates a main effect on the relationship between social media use and body image in men and women. Our findings, although significant, suggest that both anxious and avoidant attachment to God have relatively weak unique relationships with positive body image in males, but stronger relationships in females, especially as measured by body appreciation.

With regard to our second hypothesis, findings from our hierarchical regression analyses indicated that anxious attachment to God moderated the relationship between social media use and body appreciation scores marginally among males and between social media use and appearance body esteem among females. This result represents a new finding of this relationship among males and is also consistent with the studies conducted by Homan (2012) and Homan and Cavanaugh (2013) that found that anxious attachment to God moderated the effects of media on young women's body-related well-being.

Among males, the patterns for those with low anxious attachment to God were consistent with our hypotheses: high social media use correlated with low body appreciation scores. However, results for the high anxious attachment to God group were difficult to interpret because they present novel results. Higher levels of anxious attachment to God resulted in more consistently low body appreciation scores regardless of social media use (see Figure 1). When looking at the specific items on the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2), the wording of one of the items in the measure was specifically geared toward women. Item 10 states: "I feel like I am beautiful even if I am different from media images of attractive people (e.g., models, actresses/actors)." Words like "beautiful" and "models" might be more often associated with women than with men, potentially causing

some confusion for men with regard to how to a few items. We suggest modifying this item to use more gender-neutral terms such as "attractive" instead of "beautiful."

Among females, our results demonstrated that women with low levels of anxious attachment to God had consistently high levels of appearance body esteem, regardless of social media use. This relationship may be partially explained by prior findings indicating that more secure attachment to God serves as a protective factor against the negative effects of social media. As demonstrated by the studies conducted by Henderson and Kent (2021), Homan (2012), and Homan and Cavanaugh (2013), secure attachment to God may serve as a protective factor to foster mental and physical well-being, including body image. Furthermore, the findings of Tiggemann and Hage (2019) indicated that participating in spiritual activities (e.g., meditation, mindfulness) is positively related to positive body image, in addition to lower levels of self-objectification. Finally, as indicated by Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) and Pope et al. (2014), women who believe that their bodies were uniquely created by a higher power were more likely to express positive views of their bodies. These findings suggest that a less anxious attachment to God may serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of social media on body image, even if it does not significantly moderate the relationship. Our results, however, did not conclude that more secure attachment to God in women *improved* their levels of positive body image, but rather that they remained consistent.

In contrast, among those with higher levels of anxious attachment to God, our findings indicated that higher levels of appearance body esteem were correlated with higher social media use, which is inconsistent with findings from prior studies. Although we can only conjecture as to why this might be, one potential explanation might arise from the finding by Homan and Cavanaugh (2013) that women with a lower anxious attachment to God are less likely to seek external approval of their bodies. Therefore, it might be logical to conclude that those with high anxious attachment to God might be more likely to seek external approval from sources like social media—and considering our participants with high anxious attachment to God had high appearance body esteem, perhaps the social media avenues they accessed influenced more positive attitudes toward their bodies. With the relatively recent rise of body-positive social media, studies have demonstrated that body-positive social media might be a protective factor in combatting negative body image in women (Cohen et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2022). Thus, perhaps the positive nature of the social media content viewed by our participants resulted in higher levels of appearance body esteem. Future studies would be useful to explore how body-positive social media use might impact attachment to God and body image.

With regard to our third hypothesis—that avoidant attachment to God would moderate the relationship between social media use and positive body image—we did not find a significant moderation result after using a Bonferroni correction. Our findings did not indicate that avoidant attachment to God significantly moderated the relationship between social media and positive body image in young men or women. This result may support the proposition by Henderson and Kent (2021) that avoidant attachment to God is more similar to the secure attachment style, since those with these styles of attachment are more certain of their relationship with God than those with anxious attachment, who are more unsettled about their relationship with God. Therefore, our results here support Homan and Cavanaugh's (2013) finding that avoidant attachment to God does not have a significant relationship with positive body image.

In conclusion, anxious attachment to God in both men and women was related to some measures of positive body image above and beyond social media use. In particular, anxious attachment to God was related to several forms of body esteem including appearance body esteem (in males) and attribution body esteem and weight body esteem (in women). Anxious attachment to God was also related to body appreciation in women. Avoidant attachment to God did not significantly relate to measures of positive body image above and beyond social media use. Anxious attachment to God also moderated the relationship between social media use and positive body image. In men, anxious attachment to God marginally moderated the relationship between social media use and body

appreciation. In females, anxious attachment to God moderated the relationship between social media use and appearance body esteem. No significant moderation effects were observed for avoidant attachment to God among males and females. These findings suggest that an individual's relationship with God might explain how young adults interact with or react to social media. Future studies would be helpful in identifying the causes for these gender differences. Ultimately, our study contributes to the current literature because it is the first study to our knowledge (a) to study the moderation effects of attachment to God in young men and (b) to incorporate the variables of avoidant attachment to God and measures of body esteem.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our study was not without its limitations. To begin, our sample did not have a diverse representation of ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and ages, limiting our study's generalizability to all racial groups, people of different gender identities, and individuals older than the age of 25 years. Additionally, our social media use scale, created for the current study, included multiple-choice options, which may have diluted the effects of social media use. Furthermore, our study did not use an experimental design, limiting any causal interpretations of the relationships between attachment to God, social media use, and body image. However, we included moderation analyses, which allows for more of a causal interpretation than other statistical analyses such as correlations (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In particular, a moderating variable (attachment to God) affects the strength of the relationship between an independent variable (social media use) and a dependent variable (body image) (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, moderation analyses implicate the strength—rather than the presence—of a relationship.

We found significant differences between religious affiliations (e.g., non-religious, Catholic, Protestant, and other religious) on anxious and avoidant attachment to God and social media use. More specifically, we found medium and large effects of anxious and avoidant attachment to God, respectively, on differences between religious affiliations and a smaller effect of social media on differences between religious affiliations. Such large effects suggest that, depending on religious affiliation, one's faith may significantly affect one's attachment to a higher being. Because of these significant differences, we controlled for religious affiliation in our subsequent analyses. Future studies should further examine the differences between these groups and how they relate specifically to body image and social media. In addition, researchers should develop broader measures of attachment to God consistent with different religious traditions and examine how attachment to God is associated with body appreciation and self-esteem within different religious groups. Such findings would enhance the quality of our understanding of how religion can be a potential protective factor in the relationship between social media use and body image.

Future studies should aim to improve upon the current study's limitations by obtaining better racial, gender, and age representation in their samples. Future studies should also include a more specific estimate of participants' social media use. Moreover, future studies should conduct experimental studies whereby participants are exposed to different social media conditions and then asked to answer questions about their social media use, attachment to God, and body image in order to establish cause-and-effect relationships among variables. We also suggest that future studies analyze the relationship between attachment to God and social media by using different dimensions of body image (e.g., body satisfaction, body esteem, body appreciation, negative body image). Finally, we encourage future researchers to include male participants as well as female participants to further our understanding of gender differences in attachment to God and measures of positive body image.

Implications

Our findings suggest that different attachment to God styles may contribute differently to how social media use affects measures of positive body image in young men and women. Therefore, it would be helpful for individuals to become aware of their attachment style to God in order to increase self-awareness about its impact on social media use as it relates to their own body image or general well-being. Faith-based solutions, such as interventions to improve secure attachment to God combined

with recommendations about mindfulness and social media use, may be a solution to negative body image and disordered eating. More specifically, church youth groups could hold sessions catered towards understanding the potential impact that social media use has on body image and how young adults can use their faith communities as a support system and resource.

Ultimately, the results of our study help us gain insight into the relationship between attachment to God, social media, and body image. While it is clear that attachment to God has some moderating effects on measures of positive body image in young men and women, researchers need to further examine the relationship between these variables in order to more conclusively identify the causes for these relationships. We hope that our findings encourage a new wave of studies into how an individual's attachment to God may serve as a protective or detrimental factor in its relationship to social media use and body image.

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Intervention in Research and Practice

Exploring the Role of Self-Compassion in the Relationship Between Perfectionism, Burnout, and Psychological Well-Being in Helping Professionals

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Burnout

In recent years, burnout has gained significant attention due to its increasing prevalence in modern society and its adverse effects on health. The term "burnout" refers to a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that results from prolonged exposure to stress in demanding environments (Hill & Curran, 2016). According to Maslach et al. (1996), burnout involves three core symptoms: (a) depletion of emotional resources (emotional exhaustion); (b) the development of an impersonal or cynical/uncaring attitude (depersonalization); and (c) reduced competence, accomplishment, or efficacy in one's work. In other words, individuals experiencing burnout often feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet demands and deadlines, which can lead to decreased productivity, cynicism, and detachment from work and personal responsibilities. If burnout progresses untreated, it can substantially impact mental and physical health, resulting in symptoms of chronic fatigue, anxiety, depression, and physical illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes (Hill & Curran, 2016).

High rates of burnout have been found across many occupational domains. However, it is a rising concern among those who work in various helping professions, wherein the demands of providing services to many people during a given workday often outweigh an individual's emotional resources and capacity to cope (Maslach et al., 2001). Within the academic context, studies have found a significant amount of stress and burnout among educators and teachers due to the task of caring for students, as well as the pressure to meet intensive work deadlines (Moate et al., 2016). In the medical profession, more than half of the physicians and nurses practicing in North America have reported professional burnout, which places them at increased risk for malpractice and medical errors, decreased empathy, and low patient satisfaction scores (Shanafelt et al., 2019).

There is also well-established literature that links burnout to the field of counselling and psychotherapy due to the interpersonal nature of the work. A recent study found that 49% of an international sample of 443 clinical and counselling psychologists reported moderate-to-high levels of burnout (Simpson et al., 2019). Religious leaders, clergy, and pastors in Christian ministry also frequently experience burnout and report feelings of self-doubt, disillusionment, inadequacy, and emotional exhaustion (Frederick et al., 2018).

The experience of burnout has been largely attributed to the imbalance of professional obligations and the availability of supportive resources. Among helping professionals, Cummins et al. (2007) highlighted four aspects of job burnout: (a) the amount and type of work helping professionals do, (b) having a high number of distressing cases, (c) too much overtime, and (d) inadequate supervision and support. This, in turn, leads to diminished job performance, absenteeism, and low morale. The cumulative effects of burnout can result in overall professional impairment and unethical behaviour in the provision of services (Figley, 2002).

In addition to work conditions, research has begun to explore the role of individual and personality factors in the vulnerability to distress and burnout. One emerging personality factor that has gained empirical attention is perfectionism. While there are some adaptive benefits to having perfectionistic tendencies, such as higher levels of motivation, task mastery, and academic achievement, the corresponding self-criticism, fear of failure, and evaluative stress likely attenuates these benefits (Childs & Stoeber, 2012). Furthermore, most empirical findings point to the heavy toll that perfectionism has on physical and mental health (Linnett & Kibowski, 2020). It is widely reported that perfectionism also results in a decreased capacity

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to cope and regulate emotions. Perfectionists commonly utilize avoidance-based coping strategies known to exacerbate and perpetuate the stress response, which, in turn, poses a risk for developing symptoms of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Smith et al., 2022). Interestingly, the connection between perfectionism and burnout among helping professionals has mainly come from studies that incidentally found the personality trait to be among the internal stressors documented (D'Souza et al., 2011).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism has been previously defined as "the disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable" (Taris et al., 2010, p. 1). In recent years, the availability of more reliable and valid measures has broadened the understanding of its origins and operation. Indeed, research on perfectionism has evolved from a unidimensional construct to the development of several multidimensional conceptualizations (Kobori & Tanno, 2005).

Hewitt et al. (1991) developed the first multidimensional model, which recognized that perfectionism is influenced by both the self and social contexts. Accordingly, it proposed three dimensions: self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism (SOP) stems from an internal motivation to adhere to self-imposed standards that are unrealistically high and impossible to attain (Hewitt et al., 1991; Stoeber, 2018). Other-oriented perfectionism (OOP) is marked by the tendency to impose unrealistically high standards on others. Other-oriented perfectionists expect others to be perfect and are highly critical when others fail to meet established goals (Stoeber, 2018). Socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP) stems from an external motivation to meet the unrealistically high expectations imposed by others. Therefore, socially prescribed perfectionists believe that others (e.g., a partner, friend, or parent) expect them to be perfect and, consequently, bear the burden of measuring up to the expectations of others (Antony & Swinson, 2009; Hewitt et al., 1991).

Several studies have suggested that self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism might be a crucial personality factor that makes individuals more prone to burnout due to the internal compulsion to set high standards and the fear of failure (Childs & Stoeber, 2012). The tendency for perfectionists to be concerned with making mistakes especially in the face of others leads to high effort and expenditure (e.g., workaholism), harsh self-judgements, and, in turn, high levels of physical and emotional exhaustion and burnout. Consequently, a positive relationship between perfectionism and the development of burnout has been observed across numerous occupations, especially helping professions (Zhang, et al., 2007).

In a recent study, Richardson et al. (2020) investigated the associations between depression, self-critical perfectionism, and burnout among 119 participants in clinical psychology doctoral programs and found that participants who scored higher on self-critical perfectionism reported higher levels of depression and burnout. Similarly, Moate et al. (2016) explored the relationship between levels of burnout and perfectionism in a sample of 188 counselor educators. The findings showed that those with perfectionistic concerns reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress, personal burnout, and work-related burnout. D'Souza et al. (2011) also examined the relationship between perfectionism, stress, and burnout in 87 Australian clinical psychologists. The results indicated that the participants who endorsed higher levels of perfectionism were more prone to experiencing professional burnout.

Self-Compassion

Although many studies have highlighted the negative outcomes associated with perfectionism, there is also a growing literature that demonstrates how self-compassion might mitigate the deleterious effects of perfectionism and burnout among helping professionals. It is widely known that perfectionists are exceptionally hard on themselves and find it difficult to treat themselves with kindness, compassion, and unconditional acceptance (Ewert et al., 2021). As such, empirical evidence demonstrates that the ability to be compassionate and kind toward oneself is beneficial for managing distressing emotions and buffering against a range of negative psychosocial outcomes, including burnout. Self-compassion has also been linked to numerous positive mental health benefits, such as happiness, optimism, person-

al growth initiative, and overall psychological well-being across diverse populations (Crego et al., 2022).

Neff (2003) conceptualized self-compassion according to three interrelated components: (a) self-kindness (vs. self-judgment), which involves treating oneself with kindness and understanding, rather than being self-critical or self-judgmental; the self is offered warmth and unconditional acceptance akin to how one would engage with a close friend; (b) mindfulness (vs. over-identification), which involves self-awareness and an openness to one's thoughts and feelings; mindfulness allows individuals to connect with their emotions without overidentifying with them, which means that painful experiences are handled in a balanced way in which thoughts are not engaged with or changed but rather observed objectively; and (c) common humanity (vs. isolation), which involves perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger shared human experience, rather than viewing them as isolating or marginalized events; this also entails a recognition that all people fail or make mistakes and that human imperfection is universal. In essence, self-compassion implies learning "to accept our present-moment experience as it is without resistance while still holding our pain in the warm embrace of compassion" (Neff & Dahm, 2015, p. 21).

In line with Neff's (2003) conceptualization, research has shown that self-compassion promotes resilience when faced with feelings of inadequacy and failure associated with self-oriented perfectionism, as well as negative performance evaluations associated with socially prescribed perfectionism. Warren et al. (2016) pointed out that self-compassion provides several ways to reduce self-criticism and the stress associated with making mistakes. For instance, being kind and accepting when confronting personal inadequacies (e.g., "It's okay not to be perfect") can buffer against harsh self-talk. Likewise, mindfulness of emotional pain or suffering can facilitate a warm response (e.g., "What can I do to take care of myself right now?"), which can in turn lessen the intensity of painful feelings and the tendency toward self-blame. Similarly, remembering that failure is part of the human experience (e.g., "Everyone makes mistakes sometimes") can minimize feelings of isolation (p. 20). Altogether, self-compassion has a potential protective effect against distressing emotions, especially in response to failure. The self-soothing qualities of self-compassion engender a greater capacity for emotion regulation, successful coping, and more affirming self-perceptions (Neff et al., 2007).

Overall, there is ample evidence to suggest that self-compassion positively impacts psychological health, wherein higher scores on self-compassion correspond with lower levels of depression, psychological distress, and burnout (Finlay-Jones et al., 2017). Beaumont et al. (2016) conducted a study that investigated the relationships among self-compassion, compassion fatigue, burnout, and well-being in a sample of 54 student counsellors and student cognitive-behavioural psychotherapists. Although conceptually similar, compassion fatigue differs from burnout in that it occurs primarily among practitioners working with victims of traumatic events. The deep sense of sorrow resulting from the desire to alleviate the client's suffering may result in compassion fatigue and a reduced capacity for empathy. The study found that those who scored high on self-compassion had less compassion fatigue and burnout, as well as greater well-being (Beaumont et al., 2016).

Holden and Jeanfreau (2021) examined the nature of the relationship between compassion fatigue, burnout, and multidimensional perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed) among marriage and family therapists (MFTs). The results showed that self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism were positively correlated with burnout and compassion fatigue (Holden & Jeanfreau, 2021). Similarly, Richardson et al. (2020) found that self-compassion acted as a partial mediator in the relationship between self-critical perfectionism and depression and self-critical perfectionism and burnout, which indicated that higher levels of self-compassion might attenuate the risk of distress and burnout.

Linnett and Kibowski (2020) investigated the relationship between perfectionism and self-compassion directly. The results concluded that perfectionism was associated with significantly lower levels of overall self-compassion and lower scores on each of the positive self-compassion dimensions (e.g., self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity). Perfectionism was also associated with sig-

nificantly higher levels of each of the negative self-compassion dimensions (self-judgement, isolation, and over-identification). By considering perfectionism as a multidimensional construct, these findings made a novel contribution to the literature and underscored the complexity of this personality trait.

Role of Self-Compassion in Clergy Perfectionism and Burnout

As with other helping professions, burnout is a common experience among religious leaders, clergy, and pastors in Christian ministry, who often face unique emotional, spiritual, and professional pressures (Barnard & Curry, 2012). The demands of ministry—such as providing spiritual guidance, offering pastoral care, giving comfort in times of grief, managing church operations, and responding to crises—can lead to chronic stress, isolation, and spiritual fatigue. Many clergy members and pastors feel the weight of constantly meeting the needs of their congregations while also struggling to maintain their own emotional and spiritual health. The emotional demands of ministry, combined with high expectations, and often limited resources for self-care, mirror the stresses experienced in other caregiving roles (Frederick et al., 2018). The impact of burnout not only affects the well-being of the leaders, but also the vitality and spiritual health of the congregations and communities they serve. Therefore, as rates of clergy burnout are on the rise, research has investigated various occupational and personality factors that correlate with psychological distress and burnout in this domain.

The personality trait of perfectionism has been linked with religious behaviour and beliefs and the experience of burnout in Christian ministers (Abdollahi et al., 2021). Most notably, perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP)—a feature of socially prescribed perfectionism—has received considerable attention. PSP is defined as "an attempt to construct a socially desirable identity and to regulate an often-precarious sense of self" (Sherry et al., 2007, p. 487). This characteristic of perfectionism is significant because of the emphasis many religious communities place on striving toward moral perfection (e.g., "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect"; *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Matthew 5:48). Indeed, Christianity contains a rich history of striving for moral perfection (Brodar et al., 2015). While this may be culturally normative in many Christian communities, it can become maladaptive in some circumstances and, thus, interfere with spiritual growth and development. Brodar et al. (2015) suggested that high levels of PSP might be an important predictor of psychological distress among Christians in general and a substantial risk factor for burnout in clergy more specifically.

Given the Christian propensity toward moral perfectionism and PSP, combined with the likelihood for emotional exhaustion and burnout in pastoral ministry, it seems plausible that self-compassion might play an important role in re-orienting individuals toward self-kindness and grace. Indeed, a study by Barnard and Curry (2012) found that clergy who were higher in self-compassion experienced lower levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout in ministry. Brodar et al. (2015) suggested that self-compassion may allow individuals to constructively process their faults and pursue spiritual growth without experiencing the negative effects of self-judgement. Specifically, the self-kindness aspect of self-compassion may be related to greater tolerance of imperfections, while a sense of common humanity may be associated with reduced fears of failure and vulnerability. The capacity to hold one's imperfections in mindful awareness may also help to buffer against the potential negative effects of PSP in Christian pastors and clergy and, in turn, lessen the likelihood of burnout. Therefore, the same benefits and practical implications of self-compassion for those in secular helping professions are also applicable in Christian ministry.

Research into Practice

It is notable that self-compassion is not only a trait, but also a skill that can be developed (Neff & Germer, 2024). Research has demonstrated that the three interrelated dimensions of self-compassion—self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity—are learnable with practice and training and can lessen the impact of burnout on helping professionals (Eriksson et al., 2018; Felton et al., 2015; Finlay-Jones et al., 2017). A study by Felton et al. (2015) yielded the outcome of self-compassion using the mindful-

ness-based stress reduction program (MBSR) with master's level graduate students in counselling. At the end of the 15-week program consisting of two-hour mindfulness training sessions per week, students reported (a) increased acceptance and non-judgmental attitude toward their own clinical limits, (b) less pressure to perform, and (c) enhanced awareness and regulation of their emotional responses.

Several key practices have been developed to cultivate self-compassion for helping professionals, which can enhance both their personal and professional effectiveness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a component of self-compassion, but it can also be used independently as a regular part of self-care (Coaston, 2017). It is the practice of paying focused, non-judgemental attention to the present moment (Neff, 2003). It involves a centered awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment, without trying to change or judge anything that arises (Germer & Neff, 2013). In this way, mindfulness serves as an approach-based strategy that allows individuals to be present with difficult emotions and internal experiences without reacting impulsively or becoming overwhelmed (Lyon & Wright, 2024). Over time and with continued practice, mindfulness fosters self-compassion and an increased capacity to regulate emotions and cope with life's challenges.

In general, individuals can learn to cultivate a more mindful and intentional approach to life through everyday exercises such as mindful eating, walking, and breathing, in which the goal is to slow down and reconnect with the present moment (Coaston, 2017). More specifically, mindfulness techniques can be tailored to the demands of helping professions through structured meditation exercises implemented both at home and at work. For instance, professional therapists and counselors can practice breathing and taking mindful self-reflection breaks before and after client sessions to check in with their own emotions and thoughts without judgement. This can be especially beneficial when they feel ineffective, tired, or overextended. In addition, therapists can practice mindfulness during sessions. This entails staying centered in the present moment, noticing and remaining attentive to their clients' emotions, while also managing their own internal states (Coaston, 2017).

In the case of religious leaders, Garzon and Ford (2016) suggested that mindfulness exercises could be appropriated and adapted for clergy and Christian pastors to align with Christian theology and values. The practice of Christian mindfulness and meditation could be integrated into a regular routine of one's spiritual disciplines and devotional time to create an inner refuge from distressing thoughts and emotions. The goal is to facilitate spiritual connection with God through present-moment awareness using techniques like focusing on the breath while repeating Scripture phrases like "Be still and know that I am God" (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Psalm 46:10). Similarly, listening prayer is a form of contemplative prayer and mindfulness in which the person becomes still and quiets their mind, tuning into any impressions, words, images, or feelings that may arise. In addition to cultivating a posture of present mindedness, this practice also fosters inner reflection, relaxation, and acceptance of divine guidance (Brodar et al., 2015). Frederick et al. (2018) suggested that learning to maintain a compassionate awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and impulses could be accomplished using spiritual practices that also draw on contemplative traditions within Christianity, such as the Jesus Prayer, the daily examen, and lectio divina scriptural reading.

Overall, by incorporating mindfulness into both their work and personal self-care routines, helping professionals can enhance their ability to manage stress and burnout. The stress reducing effects of mindfulness may also allow them to lessen self-criticism and maintain their effectiveness and passion for their work over the long-term.

Mindfulness-Based Psychological Interventions

Mindfulness-based psychological interventions, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and compassion-focused therapy (CFT), have demonstrated effectiveness for cultivating self-compassion to attenuate the impact of perfectionism on burnout in helping professionals (Ong et al., 2020). CFT is designed to develop self-compassion by encouraging feelings of warmth, kindness, and safety in re-

sponse to shame and self-criticism. CFT uses psychoeducation and therapist modelling to help individuals become more aware of their self-critical thoughts and negative self-talk and encourages them to be more self-compassionate (Ong et al., 2020).

In ACT, the goal is to embrace psychological flexibility, which fosters the acceptance of difficult emotions and thoughts without avoiding or being overwhelmed by them, while also acting in accordance with one's values. Specifically, individuals are asked to confront distressing thoughts in a mindful way and to withhold their inclination to be defensive or self-critical (Brodar et al., 2015). The therapeutic process leads individuals to align their actions with their core values, despite the presence of emotional pain, shame, or self-criticism (Ong et al., 2020). Both therapeutic modalities are especially relevant to perfectionism and burnout, wherein individuals learn to respond to distress and self-criticism flexibly in ACT and compassionately in CFT. Ong et al. (2020) suggested that practicing self-compassion and psychological flexibility may temper the relationship between perfectionism and burnout. Moreover, these skills appear to be especially beneficial for psychological well-being when perfectionism is average or high among helping professionals.

In addition, both ACT and CFT may be useful for Christian pastors and leaders. ACT can be integrated into a Christian framework by emphasizing faith-based values and acceptance of difficult emotions as part of spiritual growth, without becoming overly self-critical (Knabb, 2023). Likewise, CFT can be adapted for Christian use by aligning its focus on self-compassion with the biblical concepts of grace, forgiveness, and the importance of loving oneself as part of loving others. Using CFT, self-criticism, shame, and imperfection can be addressed in the context of God's unconditional love and acceptance (Brodar et al., 2015).

Cognitive-Behavioral Models

Cognitive-behavioral models suggest that unhealthy perfectionism is perpetuated by negatively skewed thinking patterns, including self-criticism, fear of failure, black-and-white thinking, unrealistic expectations, worry, and rumination (Di Schiena et al., 2012; Egan et al., 2007; James et al., 2015). Similarly, research indicates that individuals prone to shame and self-criticism are often more resistant to developing a compassionate mindset, fearing its effects. This resistance can lead to avoidance, hindering the cultivation of self-compassion (Steindl et al., 2023). In response, various cognitive-behavioral therapies have emerged in recent years, specifically targeting perfectionism and self-compassion, such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), mindful compassion for perfectionism (MCP), and compassionate mind training (CMT). Studies have demonstrated that these approaches effectively reduce perfectionism by alleviating unhelpful beliefs about emotions and rumination and enhancing mindfulness and self-compassion (Cheli et al., 2024; James & Rimes, 2018; Petrocchi et al., 2024; Steindl et al., 2023). These interventions involve psychoeducation about self-compassion and its application while addressing common misconceptions. They also include exercises like mindfulness meditation, journaling, and skill-building to reduce self-criticism and cope with difficult emotions and failure (Neff & Germer, 2024). Additionally, imagery exercises allow individuals to explore the concept of the "perfect self," offering insights into the role of perfectionism and self-criticism, as well as the fears associated with not achieving perfection. Imagery of the "compassionate self" helps individuals connect with their inner wisdom, strength, and courage (Matos & Steindl, 2020).

Gratitude and Self-Kindness Practices

Gratitude and self-kindness practices also build self-compassion by shifting the focus from what is lacking or flawed in oneself to an appreciation for personal strengths, growth, and the positive aspects of life. Lyon and Wright (2024) suggested that those who struggle with practicing mindfulness alone may benefit from increasing gratitude and self-kindness to foster a more balanced and realistic perspective toward themselves. For instance, the "Three Good Things" (Passmore & Oades, 2016) gratitude exercise encourages individuals to focus on the positive aspects of their day by writing down three good things that happened, along with a brief explanation of why each event was meaningful or positive. Over time, this five-minute daily reflection can soften self-critical tendencies and reduce perfectionism that often leads to burnout (Lyon & Wright, 2024).

Neff's (2003) three-part "Self-Compassion Break" is another practical exercise that helps individuals respond to moments of difficulty, failure, or stress with gratitude and self-compassion rather than self-criticism. Using the three interconnected components of self-compassion, it involves pausing during a moment of suffering to consciously practice self-kindness (e.g., "May I be kind to myself"), mindfulness (e.g., "I am struggling right now"), and common humanity (e.g., "Suffering is a part of life") (Neff & Dahm, 2015). This brief exercise takes only a few minutes and is an effective way to nurture kindness and self-compassion in stressful situations.

In addition to these two secular interventions, Thomas et al. (2011) suggested a method for cultivating self-kindness among religious leaders and Christians known as "allegorical bibliotherapy," in which individuals identify their experience with biblical characters or stories. This practice draws on Neff's (2003) self-kindness, mindful awareness, and common humanity by focusing on God's restorative action, kindness, and gentleness in the lives of flawed biblical characters (e.g., Peter denying Jesus; *New International Version*, 2011, Matthew 26:69-75). This, in turn, facilitates a more compassionate and kind self-perception, as well as a gracious inner dialogue.

Through the regular practice of gratitude and self-kindness, individuals are more likely to cultivate the skill of self-compassion as they learn to acknowledge that imperfections, mistakes, and challenges are part of the human experience. These concrete interventions help to build a more compassionate mindset, reducing perfectionism and the harsh self-criticism that can lead to burnout.

Self-Compassion Journaling and Writing

Self-compassion journaling and writing is another key practice that promotes self-reflection, increased self-awareness, and personal growth (Coaston, 2017). Research has found that traditional journaling provides a safe space to express and process emotions and thoughts without judgement. Helping professionals can use the medium of journaling in a multitude of ways. For instance, "The Writing Workout" (Warren at al., 2010) is a way to express, validate, and externalize difficult emotions in journal form. It involves structured writing exercises that help the writer to organize their thoughts and feelings and derive meaning from their experiences. A therapist could use this technique to write and reflect upon a clinical situation that was emotionally intense, or did not have the intended outcome, to process the experience and creatively explore some lessons learned from it. Over time, writing in this way can provide an outlet to release stress, frustration, fear, and failure, which might otherwise lead to emotional overload and burnout.

Beyond the traditional journaling practice, helping professionals might find alternative ways to use journaling to build self-compassion. Incorporating gratitude journaling into a regular routine can encourage individuals with perfectionistic tendencies to shift their focus to strengths and achievements rather than shortcomings (Coaston, 2017). Writing can also be used to track patterns of stress, perfectionism, and burnout, which empowers individuals to adjust, let go of unrealistic standards, and set appropriate boundaries. Likewise, journaling can be used to track progress in self-compassion and the reduction in self-critical thinking as a tangible indicator of growth. This reinforces the value of cultivating self-compassion as an ongoing practice. Individuals with perfectionistic tendencies might also benefit from using journaling for goal setting and prioritization, which values small successes to build self-compassion and more positive self-perceptions (Linder et al., 2000).

Finally, a simple "Self-Compassion Permission Slip" can be an effective intervention that fosters self-compassion. It is a written note that grants oneself permission to embrace and accept self-kindness, care, and imperfection. For instance, "I give myself permission to ask for help when I need it," "I allow myself to make mistakes and learn from them," and "It's okay to say no and prioritize my well-being" (Coaston, 2017).

Conclusion

Given the increasing rates of burnout and the positive effects of self-compassion, it is recommended that professionals in helping fields integrate self-compassion and mindfulness into their personalized self-care routines. These practices not only enhance coping mechanisms and emotional regulation but also help in developing resilience (Leary et al., 2007). Research consistently highlights the value of cultivat-

ing self-compassion as a protective measure against occupational hazards like burnout.

Although it might initially feel uncomfortable or undeserved—particularly for those with perfectionistic tendencies—self-compassion ultimately contributes to greater mental well-being. It serves as a buffer against the emotional fatigue that arises from self-critical perfectionism, promoting not just external self-care but also a gentler, more understanding relationship with one's own thoughts and emotions (Neff & Germer, 2024).

Among helping professionals, practicing self-compassion benefits both the individual and the people they serve. Higher self-compassion has been linked to greater empathy toward clients and improved therapeutic outcomes in clinical settings (Latorre et al., 2021). This is important because burnout can impair professional performance, reducing the effectiveness of care provided to clients. Consequently, self-compassion training should be implemented on both individual and organizational levels. Studies support brief mindfulness and self-compassion sessions (e.g., five-minute exercises over two weeks) for professionals in helping fields (Lyon & Wright, 2024). Those who recognize perfectionist tendencies in themselves may particularly benefit from personal therapies like CBT or mindfulness, alongside training to help them support others more effectively (Moate et al., 2016). By embracing mindfulness and self-compassion, helping professionals not only improve their own well-being but also better assist those they work with. In this way, self-compassion emerges as a powerful tool for fostering a kinder relationship with oneself and others, ultimately reducing the negative effects of perfectionism and burnout.

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Assessment in Research and Practice

Introducing the Four Sides Measure for Christian Views of Same-Sex Marriage

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Climate of Christian Views on Same-Sex Marriage

Historically, Christian communities have viewed same-sex sexual activity as sinful, and it could often be punishable by social outcast or death (Williams, 1982). Modern Christian traditions have been shaped by this orthodoxy, as the vast majority of Protestant and Catholic denominations maintain statements of faith that include a heteronormative view of sexuality (Hamilton, 2018). In the Christian diaspora, intersectional factors, including race, ethnicity, and nationality significantly influence views of same-sex relationships (Parra & Hastings, 2018). For global Christian denominations, making cohesive institutional changes can be difficult, due to differences in political climates and contextual factors across nations.

In the United States, sociopolitical changes, such as the depathologizing of homosexuality in the American Psychological Association (APA, 2009), and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, have contributed to increasingly diverse views. Notably, the North American Anglican and Episcopal Churches have adopted affirming positions on queer people, including the ability for these members to hold any leadership position in the congregation and for same-sex unions to be conducted within the church by its leaders. Other congregations and denominations maintain perspectives ranging from acceptance of queer identity but not same-sex sexual activity, to a conviction that same-sex attraction should be healed from, to the belief that people attracted to the same sex are inherently evil (Yarhouse, 2018). Across various Christian traditions worldwide, the urgency to address sexuality and sexual diversity has long been a source of contention and division. Many Christian organizations and denominations grapple with uncertainty regarding their belief systems and organizational approaches to these complex issues.

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Existing Measures & Studies

Much of the research exploring Christian attitudes toward same-sex relationships has been limited to large, nationally representative surveys on Americans' political, social, and religious preferences. As these surveys are not specifically intended to study the unique interplay between religiousness and attitudes toward same-sex relationships, they often exclude items assessing the intricate factors contributing to individuals' beliefs. Moreover, many of these studies examine Christian perspectives secondary to religious perspectives as a whole, providing limited insight into the theological underpinnings of an individual's views.

Historically, survey questions have gathered broad perspectives on the legalization of same-sex marriage across different religious groups, where participants are prompted to rate their level of agreement to statements such as "The only legal marriage should be between one man and one woman" and "Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?" (Gay et al., 2015). One cross-sectional study, however, examined participants' biblical beliefs pertaining to same-sex unions, exploring the domains of biblical literalism, evangelical affiliation, and religious attendance (Baker & Brauner-Otto, 2015).

In contrast, relatively few studies have analyzed the direct relationship between Christianity and views on same-sex marriage. Two notable studies investigated levels of religiosity, explicit sexual prejudice, and support for civil same-sex marriages—one study surveyed students from the University of Toronto (van der Toorn et al., 2017), while the other included students from private Catholic, Mennonite, and Baptist schools, alongside a Midwest public school (Walls et al., 2014). Similarly, another survey examined perspectives held by first-year seminary students, where they were asked to

share about their "religious upbringing, decision to attend divinity school, career plans, theological views, academic experiences, and physical health practices" (Johnston et al., 2024). The responses were transcribed into a thematic codebook highlighting six authorities that motivate students' perspectives on same-sex relationships: biblical, Godly, experiential, scientific, academic, and denominational.

The Four Sides Framework

The Four Sides Framework grew out of "Bridges Across the Divide," an internet discussion group in the 1990s that presented a two-sided framework (Side A and Side B) for exploring Christian perspectives on same-sex marriage (Lee, n.d.). This framework was then popularized by the former Gay Christian Network (now known as the Q Christian Fellowship), and as conversations continued, Side X and Side Y developed out of the need for more nuance. More recently, the *Life on Side B Podcast*, which discusses the intersection of queer and Christian identities, produced a summary of the Four Sides Framework for communities to easily access (Proctor, 2024). Other early works had been exploring, defining, and critiquing the intersection of homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and Christian theology for decades prior to the Four Sides Framework (Holben, 1999). Other authors like Preston Sprinkle (2015) and Matthew Vines (2015) have also been influential voices in shaping the conversation that led to the existence of the four sides.

Definition of Sides

The *Life on Side B Podcast* describes how the Four-Sided Framework categorizes the intersections of queer identity, sexual orientation, Christian faith, relationships, and marriage. In the Four Sides Framework article published by the *Life on Side B Podcast*, Proctor (2024) notes the use of the word "sides" rather than perspectives or beliefs. He explains that the word "sides" is not meant to "pit people against each other," but rather to improve communication and offer language for the nuance of the beliefs that already exist within Christian communities.

Side A

Side A is the affirming view, and Side A Christians support marriage for same-sex couples (Lee, n.d.). Proctor (2024) added that Side A Christians endorse that "God intentionally created queer people as they are and therefore God blesses sex between members of the same sex within certain boundaries." Side A affirms that monogamous same-sex relationships are just as valid as heterosexual ones and can be fully accepted within the Christian community and emphasizes equality, inclusion, and celebration of queer identities within the church.

Side B

Side B maintains that while same-sex attraction itself is not sinful, marriage should be reserved for one man and one woman. A Christian with Side B perspectives might say, "God calls all believers (queer and straight alike) to the vocation of celibacy within community or to a monogamous marriage with a member of the opposite sex" (Proctor, 2024). Side B embraces the queer identity but defines the options for queer Christians' relational choices solely to celibacy, non-sexual deep friendship, and/or monogamous marriage with someone of the opposite sex (Proctor, 2024). The Side B perspective says that queer identity can be a healthy way of communicating one's experiences, desires, and personality, but the institution of marriage is reserved for heterosexual relationships only.

Side Y

Side Y Christians believe that same-sex relationships and the Christian faith are incompatible (Proctor, 2024). Therefore, they would hold that same-sex attracted Christians should repent of any desires that conflict with specific interpretations of biblical teachings, including same-sex attraction, seeing it as a part of humanity's sinful nature. It rejects sexual orientation labels entirely, focusing instead on living a holy sexuality, which means celibacy until heterosexual marriage. Side Y calls Christians to renounce their queer identity and explain their same-sex attractions through non-identity language. However, opinions about whether a person should try to change their sexual attractions vary for Side Y Christians.

Side X

Side X Christians firmly believe that attraction to others of the same sex is due to humans' sinful nature and developmental wounding (Proctor, 2024). They believe that heterosexuality is God's original intent for all human beings.

Therefore, Side X promotes the possibility of changing or diminishing same-sex attraction by pursuing "healing and heterosexuality" (Proctor, 2024), including through options like conversion therapy, or similar efforts to alter same-sex attraction. Side X views heterosexuality as the ultimate goal and sees same-sex attraction as inherently disordered, emphasizing transformation over the acceptance of a queer identity.

Measure Development and Classification Method

The Four Sides Measure includes six questions to classify individuals based on their Christian views towards same-sex marriage. These questions were designed to identify key points that differentiate the four sides. For example, only the Side A position believes that God approves of same-sex marriage, whereas only Side X completely encourages using interventions to change one's sexual attraction.

The first question asks whether participants think that God approves of marriage between people of the same sex. The second question asks participants which options are acceptable for unmarried Christians with primarily same-sex attractions. The third question asks about acceptable options for same-sex attracted Christians in a heterosexual marriage. The fourth question asks whether same-sex attraction in and of itself is sinful. The fifth question asks participants about their view on interventions that target changing one's same-sex attraction. The last question asks whether people with same-sex attraction can identify as LGBTQ+ while being Christian. The measure was developed by a research team consisting of a psychology professor and four psychology doctoral students with theological training.

Classification involves a 10-step automated process based on the participant's answers. To illustrate, the first step categorizes participants into Side A if they answer that God approves of same-sex marriage. The second step categorizes participants into Side X if they answer that they encourage interventions changing same-sex attraction. As it is an option to answer *Uncertain* or *Other* for most these questions, some individuals may be classified in between sides, i.e., A/B or B/Y. Lastly, the consistency of participants' responses to these questions is assessed. For example, if they answer that God approves of same-sex marriage and also that same-sex attraction in and of itself is a sin, they would receive a message indicating that their responses are inconsistent and "invalid" for classification purposes.

Future Directions

This Four Sides Measure was developed as a tool to help Christians systematically understand their religious perspective on same-sex marriage, which can be used for both individual and organizational purposes. On an individual level, one can better understand which of the four sides they are classified into based on how they answer the six questions. On an organizational (e.g., church, university, seminary) level, this could be used to anonymously gauge how the community's views distribute across the four sides. The goal is to offer a structured approach that encourages open dialogue on this critical yet often sensitive topic.

Accessing the Four Sides Measure

The Four Sides Measure is available through https://www.kennethwang.com/4sides. Users are directed to an online survey, where they can complete the questions and receive their classification results upon completion.

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Theology in Research and Practice

To Feel Better: Neuroaesthetics, *Blk Halos*, and the Power of Art for Psychological Well-Being

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In 1 Samuel 16, the biblical narrative describes a scene in which the Spirit of God has departed from Saul, leaving him tormented by an "evil spirit." In an effort to alleviate the King's suffering, his servants call upon the talents of a young shepherd named David, who takes a lyre and plays it for the King. The result is that Saul is immediately relieved of the distress caused by the evil spirit. One version says that, whenever David would play his music, Saul would "feel better" (1 Sam. 16:16, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989). Yet, another version says that Saul would "relax" (1 Sam 16:16, *Common English Version Bible*, 2011). A surface reading of the text would suggest that a supernatural event occurred during which God used David's ability to play an instrument in order to miraculously rid Saul of an oppressive spirit. What if, however, we approached this passage from a psychological perspective? While there very well may have been an actual "evil spirit" at work, a number of underlying, psycho-physiological dynamics would have also been involved as Saul experienced the presence of the supernatural entities described by Scripture. In other words, whatever we make of the metaphysics, somehow, and in some way, the music David played on his instrument seems to have regulated Saul's emotional state, which involved not only his spirit, but also his body.

Fast forward to the plantations of the antebellum south, where enslaved Africans created and performed music as a means of enduring the dehumanizing experience of forced labor from sun-up to sundown. Reflecting on the barbaric treatment their bodies suffered on a daily basis, John W. Blassingame, in *The Slave Community*, wrote that it was through music that the enslaved "expressed their feelings and desires, gave them solace, lightened their daily burdens…[and] relieved themselves of sorrow" (Blassingame, 1979, p. 126). The art of music and dance functioned not only as entertainment and much needed play, but also as practices of psychological well-being. Gospel music, a descendant of the music and spirituals of the slavery era, has also proven to serve a similar function among African Americans for almost a century. A study conducted by the Yamaha Institute and published in *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine* demonstrates how gospel music can reduce cardiovascular health risks among African American seniors (Bittman et al., 2020, pp. 8-16). While the study at Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, took 18 months to conduct, six months after completing the program there was a significant decrease in systolic blood pressure among the participants. Robert M. Marovich described gospel music's function this way: "It is…used to articulate messages of hope, encouragement, praise, and worship—a cathartic experience for the singer/musician as well as the listener" (Marovich , 2015, p. 3).

How might we understand art's capacity to foster psychological well-being, even in the midst of the most horrific conditions? Furthermore, from a theological perspective, what does it mean for God to be present and active in and through art and artmaking? And to what degree does participating in this art (as an artist or an audience member) mean that one is participating with the divine? This article seeks to address these questions by focusing on the arts as a concrete site where spirituality and psychological science meet. In doing so, it attempts to demonstrate that artmaking can and does foster psychological well-being and even healing, which includes both physiological and psycho-social components. Whether in the context of a religious liturgy or an artist's studio or exhibit, receptivity to the creative energy of all forms of artmaking can affect both the artist and the audience in restorative ways.

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Neuroaesthetics

Magsamen and Ross (2023), in *Your Brain on Art*, outlined neuroscientific research that provides evidence that artmaking has physiological effects on the human body, referred to as *neuroaesthetics* or *neuroarts* (p. 514). Considering the daily stressors in most people's lives, not to mention those engaged in social activism, art provides a restorative outlet. Here I want to focus on art-making's capacity to heal the artist while it inspires the audience. This is not to minimize the positive impact on the psychological well-being of those who gaze at, listen to, or touch the art. The one who creates, however, is uniquely changed as they contribute to the aesthetics of the space.

The human body seems to be particularly attuned to aesthetics. Magsamen and Ross claimed, "The aesthetics that surround you and the physiological sensations they elicit are core building blocks of your experience" (Magsamen & Ross, 2023, pp. 346-360). Artworks communicate to the body through colors, sound, movement, textures, etc., and the body's physiology responds accordingly. Indeed, it is now scientifically well documented that art—"making"—affects people physiologically. Neuroaesthetics is the field of study that aims to "understand and translate the power of the arts" and how it has the capacity to change us (Magsamen & Ross, 2023, p. 55). For example, Daisy Fancourt's study in the U.K. in 2020 on the effects of art on mental health provides evidence that "people who [regularly] engaged in the arts were found to have lower mental distress, better mental functioning, and improved quality of life," regardless of socioeconomic level (Magsamen & Ross, 2023, p. 528).

According to neuroaesthetics, engaging in art as either an audience or an artist has the capacity to change the individual and, in fact, has the capacity to "transform…lives" (Magsamen & Ross, 2023, p. 55). Art communicates truth and beauty. It leads to self-reflection and offers an alternative worldview, one that tends to be subversive to dominant power structures while simultaneously energizing those with less power on the margins of society. Society's progress, or rather, healing, would never have been possible without the inclusion and influence of art, its alternative language, its symbols, or its rhythms. In fact, no social movement has proven to be attractive or sustainable without some connection to art.

Art, Social Movement, and *Blk Halos*

Historically speaking, Black social movements rarely occur without the involvement of Black art and Black artists. For instance, the Civil Rights Movement was far more than marches and demonstrations. It was also the singing of freedom songs that infused hope in the movement's participants. The presence of artists and their creative works served a dual purpose: to inspire and to heal. From an individual perspective, Black artists would inspire inward motivations within participants. That is, through song, poetry, dance, or film, to name a few, they breathed life into those who were marching for freedom and, quite literally, risking their life for the cause of social change. They also breathed life into the youth who may not have seen themselves as ready to lead demonstrations, but could nevertheless bring a piece of themselves to these spaces in ways that were unique to who they were. From a communal/community perspective, these artists breathed life into all by simply showing up and offering their gifts in a show of solidarity. In doing so, Black artists spoke truth to power in ways that augmented the activists' voices who were already on the front lines.

The second, but equally important, purpose of art and the artist is to offer healing. Healing is available both to the artmaker and the audience. For the artist, it is more than expressions of his or her creativity. It is also an expression of feelings—lament or joy—from their interpretation of people, events, or ideas they witness in the world. For the audience, they are invited into a space where art has the potential to give them language for what they too may feel internally from their own experiences in the world.

The space that sits at the intersection of art and activism confronts societal ills with creative justice- and equity-oriented fervor. It can, and indeed does, invite bodies that have absorbed and stored society's traumatizing structures with an alternative series of events and practices. The invitation is to experience a healing that depends upon the processing of such trauma.

The recent artwork known as *Blk Halos* provides a particularly helpful example of how

art can create exactly this kind of space. It is first and foremost a performance arts piece consisting of an amalgamation of artforms: textile art, poetry, music, and improvisational dialogue. Its founder, Dea Jenkins, desires to honor the legacy of Black art, thought, and prophetic voices (Jenkins, 2024). That said, what Jenkins may or may not have anticipated as an artist is the positive psycho-social outcomes of her work. *Blk Halos* offers the artists themselves, as well as the audience, an opportunity to metabolize the reality of the injustices that have plagued African Americans throughout history. With creative honesty, Jenkins, as the lead vocalist, along with fellow musicians, poets, and dancers, name and dramatize the interrogation of racialized systems and structures that have been a source of trauma for the Black community. Jenkins' lyrics bluntly name the insults narrated against Black skin, hair, and overall aesthetics. Dancer Mietta McLaurin interprets both song and poems with movements and rhythms that add bodily dimensions and visual textures to the feelings of pain, shame, and even resilience embodied in blackness as responses to bigotry and structural injustices. The audience does not just hear the emotions, but they see and feel them through the artists' enactments.

As a consequence, the audience is invited to participate in this artmaking by adding their creativity and perspective to one of the textile art pieces in the installation, which allows not only for shared inspiration, but also for sharing in the healing and empowering potential of artmaking. Each person that views the installation is permitted to take pieces of yarn and weave whatever colors from any point on the piece to make the artistic statement they feel led to make. The final product is an intense conversation of colors that stretch from one part of the piece to another and from one wall to the other creating a web-like design in one corner of the room. The yarn strung from wall to wall, still connected to the original piece, is not just an art display. It is also a metaphor for the integration of experiences, ideas, perspectives, and the collective value that all humans ideally share.

As *Blk Halos* demonstrates, both music and poetry have the capacity to produce positive physiological impacts on listeners. Resmaa Menakem, in *My Grandmother's Hands*, recommended listening to music as a practice that regulates one's body (Menakem, 2017, p. 161). For some, music evokes memories of a sound from an earlier time in their life. Their bodies sway and move to the music's rhythm as if to relive the joy they once felt. The evidence of regulated nervous systems during the *Blk Halos* performance can be observed from the smiles across faces and the relaxed disposition in their bodies as they absorb the lyrics. While the truth of the lyrics may be the cause of lament, the music, along with the event's soundtrack, serve as a soothing counterbalance that promotes joy and peace of mind, body, and spirit.

Poetry, as the oldest form of literature in human history, serves as script and narration for *Blk Halos*. The poets verbally, creatively, and rhythmically steer the audience through a survey of Black reality, all the while articulating the collective emotions that are born out of the Black experience. Just as significant is the fact that *Blk Halos* fosters psychological well-being for the artist themselves. The poets, vocalist, and dancers are able to name their emotions, to metabolize them, and then to express them in constructive ways deviating from the more stereotypical and even destructive manifestations of trauma. Martin Luther King, Jr., once stated that "a riot is the language of the unheard" (Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, 2015). The same is true for art. Art, or art-making, is the voice of the unheard that communicates and interprets social reality, confronts power structures, grieves, and is the practice of restoration and wellness. *Blk Halos* curates this voice and invites an audience eager, or at the least, interested, to engage.

Conclusion

I recently passed a young vocalist on a street corner in Pasadena, CA, who was performing a series of original songs for anyone who would listen. Some people gave him money for the performance, while others followed him on social media. I went to his Instagram page and read the caption of a post he made that explained why he sings and plays music. He wrote, "[M]usic healed me of chronic anxiety, countless hospital visits, medication—

prescribed more meds to stop side effects of others, losing friends and family due to lack of understanding, drawing closer to God…finally remnants of peace in life though not perfect" (Jarrell, 2021). In his transparency, this artist revealed how, at least from his perspective, engaging in the art of music had been equally if not more effective than the prescriptions of Western medicine. While it is certainly not the case for every individual, it would seem that, for many, art and artmaking have the potential to serve as potent resources for addressing mental health. As I have argued above, it can and does contribute to the psychological well-being of both the artist and the audience whose collective gaze it captures.

But the effects of art are not only or merely psychological. They are theological, too. It is within the practice and imagination of artmaking that the human being finds themselves most in sync with the divine Artmaker. The lifegiving and sacred practice of making art, in whatever form, has the capacity to calm the body's nervous system, restore peace amid an anxious society, and infuse joy into one's being—one's soul. And if this is truly the case, then art and artmaking can rightly be included in the Christian list of "good deeds" for which Ephesians 2:10 claims God's masterpiece (humans) were created. Like David playing before the psychologically and spiritually distressed Saul, the artist participates in practices of wellness that may benefit anyone who is receptive to the artist's work. In doing so, the artist is capable of pointing us toward the ongoing work of the Artist—the one whose greatest masterpiece will be nothing less than the restoration of all works of art (including us).

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Case Studies in Integrative Practice

From More Than Human to Simply Human: A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Working with Clergy

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> We are all more simply human than otherwise.
> –Henry Stack Sullivan (1947, p. 7)

In this new column of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* (*JPC*), "Case Studies in Integrative Practice," we invite submissions of clinical cases highlighting the therapeutic practice of integration. Authors are encouraged to submit cases illustrating various ways of thinking and practicing integratively with different populations and from different theoretical orientations. Clinical practice is often described as "art and science." Therefore, the individual case study still has much to teach us. While one must resist overgeneralization from a single case, cases offer unique perspectives and may spark clinical imagination in the readers.

This short article is an example of what we hope authors will submit. The topic here is clergy in therapy. In this paper, we will outline some of the stressors of modern-day clergy, explore what is known about clergy in therapy, and examine the literature regarding clergy in psychoanalytic therapy. While we recognize that space allows only a preliminary glimpse into the complexity of this topic, we note, again, that the goal is to ignite the imagination of the reader.

The Challenges of Clergy

As religious leaders, clergy bear significant responsibilities, occupy multiple roles, and oversee as well as navigate a wide array of issues within their congregations. The unique demands of pastoral work (e.g., serving at times as crisis counselor, first responder, and confidant for people in their most difficult life transitions) may make it challenging for clergy to distinguish firm boundaries between work and personal life, which has been associated with higher levels of burnout due to the lack of restorative forms of self-care (McMinn et al. 2005; Randall, 2007). Clergy roles often include high demands on their time, lack of privacy, and criticism from church members, stressors also linked to psychological distress (Edwards et al., 2022; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). If gone unchecked, these accumulated stressors can cause clergy to be at a higher risk for burnout, stress, and emotional exhaustion (Duke Clergy Health Initiative, 2014; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). In addition, congregations may idealize clergy, perceiving them to be holy people without weakness, placing undue pressure and further isolating them while neglecting their need for support (Rayburn et al., 1986).

With a nod to the epigram above (Sullivan, 1947), many clergy feel both the internal and external pressure to be *more than human* as opposed to *simply human*. In a related vein, some research has observed higher levels of narcissism in clergy than the general population (Lee, 2004), and congregations may share responsibility for some of this. Ruffing et al. (2018) noted that components of the clergy role, which can either emanate from or be encouraged by congregations—including idealization by the congregation, isolation of the self, stress, overfunctioning, overestimation of influence, and unrealistic expectations—may all contribute to narcissism in the clergy. Therefore, certain congregations may unknowingly either desire a narcissistic leader and/or place pressure on clergy to be *more than human*, activating latent narcissistic tendencies.

Clergy Needs

In a seminal study on clergy needs assessment, McMinn et al. (2005) noted that clergy depend heavily on interpersonal resources, like fellow spiritual leaders for coping while underutilizing external resources, such as psychotherapy (Knox et al., 2005). Studies have indicated that there is a gap between clergy who could benefit from therapy compared to those who have received it (Proeschold-Bell & Byas-

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see, 2018). Additionally, McMinn et al. (2005) noted that self-care for clergy primarily involved maintaining a relationship with God through prayer and Scripture. While these personal spiritual forms of coping are important aspects of any believer's ongoing faith development, they tend to be the foundational sources of clergy support while ignoring other external resources which could offer clergy more holistic support.

In summary, studies have shown that clergy still face barriers that prevent them from seeking help outside of their religious community (Wamser et al., 2008). The spiritual norms and expectations for clergy to rely primarily on personal practices and their faith community may make it difficult for them to seek psychotherapy despite its benefit. Social stigma towards mental health impacts one's ability to seek treatment even when it is available (Corrigan, 2004). This highlights a broader issue for the need of de-stigmatization of mental health services to be utilized along with forms of spiritual coping within clergy populations.

Clergy in Therapy

Clergy burnout may be exacerbated due to religious beliefs and religious/spiritual pressures and norms, which further contribute to the stigmatization of therapy. Expectations placed on clergy to be models of faithfulness and spiritual guides above reproach can create complicated dynamics between the place of faith formation and psychological maturity. Clergy may feel conflicted when choosing either spiritual or psychological resources, or both, when attempting to move toward health and healing.

In addition, many religious traditions still consider mental distress and the concurrent emotions as an indication or failure, of one's spiritual health rather than biopsychosocial factors (Lloyd & Waller, 2020). Therefore, seeking help from external sources rather than relying solely on God can be perceived as lacking faith (Weaver, 2015). If the narrative persists that mental well-being is attributed to spiritual health, clergy may further hesitate to seek professional mental health support in order to protect the image of their own spirituality. Research confirms that these stigmas have powerful effects on one's willingness to seek mental-health treatment even when it is accessible (Webb et al., 2008).

These challenges exist while clergy depression rates have been found to be higher than the national average of the U.S. adult population (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). Clergy vocational focus is primarily care for others, but research suggests that therapy can mitigate symptoms of burnout, such as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, by allowing clergy to have devoted time to care for themselves (Muse et al., 2015). Religious coping has also been found to partially mediate the negative effects of clergy's emotionally taxing roles (Edwards et al., 2022). This research points to the reality that if clergy are to find their way to therapy, proper spiritual adaptation of therapy should be considered when working with clergy (Lloyd & Waller, 2020).

Psychoanalytic Therapy with Clergy

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy may offer a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the unique psychological and emotional struggles of clergy. This therapeutic approach (Safran & Hunter, 2020) works with unconscious processes, defenses, and deep-seated emotional conflicts that often remain unspoken, even for clergy who may be adept at guiding others through their own emotional challenges. By focusing on these unconscious dynamics, psychoanalytic therapy can help clergy with their mental health concerns and explore the complexities of their personal identity and pastoral role, often revealing how these aspects intersect and influence their overall well-being (Souza, 2020).

Few authors have written extensively on clergy in psychoanalytic therapy, and much of the existing literature tends to be older. So, while psychoanalytic therapy with clergy is not as commonly discussed as other therapeutic modalities, psychoanalytic therapy itself has demonstrated efficacy in addressing long-standing emotional conflicts (Cornelius, 2018; Shedler, 2010; Woldemichael et al., 2013). The focus on transference and countertransference—the unconscious redirection of feelings from one person to another—plays a key role in this process (Meissner, 2009; Robison, 2004). In the therapeutic setting, clergy may unconsciously transfer feelings/thoughts from their historical past onto the therapist and others, but also feelings they hold towards authority

figures, congregants, or even feelings/thoughts related to spiritual beliefs. Celenza (2015) highlighted how these transference dynamics manifest themselves through relational entanglements, such as priests engaging in exploitative behaviors due to unresolved internal conflicts, such as unmet emotional needs or displaced love. By addressing these unconscious conflicts and dissociated experiences in the transference dynamics, psychoanalytic therapy can help clergy unearth the way in which these unconscious conflicts are acted out in their pastoral roles and personal life (Madonna, 2018; Shafranske, 2009). This may assist them to become conscious of their motivations and subsequently make healthier decisions regarding personal/professional boundaries, role responsibilities, congregational expectations, and handling other stresses of the ministry.

Psychoanalytic therapy may offer a space for clergy not only to reflect on these issues but also to confront the psychological defenses they have utilized to avoid them. These defenses such as spiritual bypassing (Cashwell et al., 2007), repression, denial, and projection are common as clergy may unconsciously avoid acknowledging personal vulnerabilities due to the expectations of their role (Meloy, 1986). By acknowledging and working through these defenses, which have unconsciously been used to manage their fears and anxieties, psychoanalytic therapists can help clergy gain a deeper understanding of how these anxieties have shaped their emotional responses, perceptions, and behaviors, ultimately allowing for personal and spiritual growth (Jang, 2021).

Again, the clergy pressures, stressors, and unconscious ways by which many clergy cope can lead to clergy attempting to be *more than human* rather than *simply human*. As noted above, a major impact on this need to be *more than human* may be related to spiritual pressures and expectations. Therefore, incorporating spiritual matters in psychotherapy is particularly important for those working in a spiritual career. Research has shown that addressing religious and existential issues in therapy can have significant benefits, particularly when clients struggle with conflicts related to their faith or their role in spiritual leadership (Abu-Raiya et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2010). The inclusion of these concerns allow clergy to explore and process the emotional conflicts that may arise from their relationship with the Divine or their religious duties (Stålsett & Vikersund, 2008). This intersection of existential and spiritual struggles with psychological challenges plays a critical role in clergy's emotional well-being, making it essential for therapists to meaningfully engage with these themes (Shafranske, 2009).

The therapy vignette below is a small window into working psychoanalytically with a pastor for whom the clergy challenges noted above as well as his own personal history led him to have expectations of himself to be *more than human*.

Therapy Vignette

Carlos was a 40-year-old Latino American, married, cisgendered pastor of a small, theologically moderate congregation in therapy with a White cisgendered theologically progressive therapist. A first-generation immigrant, Carlos obtained his theology degree in the United States from a multi-denominational theologically moderate seminary. His seminary training included the importance of the health and well-being of the pastor and personal therapy was encouraged. His lack of stigma related to psychotherapy allowed him to seek help.

Carlos entered therapy with vague descriptions of his presenting problem, describing general malaise, frustration with his dwindling congregation, and a conflictual relationship with another congregation that shared their facilities. It soon became apparent that Carlos suffered from fairly unrealistic expectations of himself, which seemed to be rooted in his cultural upbringing, a conflictual relationship with his father, and his spiritual beliefs. Carlos carried an unconscious internalized object representation of self and others that caused him to believe that he was valuable if perfect (or at least above reproach or criticism). This was exacerbated by an internalized theological perfectionism and a pastoral expectation that he should "always be available." These experiences formed an unconscious amalgamation of messages he had internalized in his religious upbringing, graduate education, and his own story as a first-generation immigrant. All these messages were acted out intrapsychically and interpersonally, via certain pathogenic beliefs of how pastors should act and feel. If there was

any deviation from these internalized messages/beliefs of self and others (i.e., he as a pastor should be above reproach, perfect, above most human needs, and always available), which were often unconscious, he would become anxious. He interpreted this anxiety as a sign that something was wrong with him, with his interpersonal relationships and/or even his relationship with God.

This was explicitly illustrated when Carlos shared in therapy that he was having intermittent and seemingly innocent text conversations with a young woman he had met on a mission trip. It appeared that nothing inappropriate had taken place nor was anything being said in the text chain that seemed ostensibly problematic. In fact, Carlos was upfront with his wife about these texts, letting her know who this young woman was, when they texted and the content of the messages. Nevertheless, Carlos felt highly anxious and guilty. His automatic response was caused by an unconscious organizing principle (Stolorow et al., 2002) that there was something wrong with these very human feelings. As a pastor, he believed that he shouldn't be troubled by these kinds of *simply human* feelings.

Below is a short example of a pivotal conversation had in the course of therapy.

Carlos: I'm spending too much time thinking about this. (The texting with the young woman.)

Therapist: You feel uncomfortable because you are enjoying the interaction with this young woman.

Carlos: Yes. I wonder if this means that something is missing in my marriage or something is wrong in my walk with God?

Therapist: The texting with this young woman feels good, and that leads you to feel something is wrong. You feel guilty, even though your wife knows all about the content.

Carlos: Yes, but it's more than that. I feel like I shouldn't even enjoy the exchange. Why would I be enjoying this? I feel like I shouldn't feel this.

Therapist: Why wouldn't you be enjoying it?

Carlos: I mean, I don't know. It's nice to feel useful, and it reminds me that I am impactful with younger people in spite of what is happening in our church. I feel as if this young woman is basically treating me like a mentor, but I enjoy her flattery. She doesn't know me well but says things like, "I bet you are a good pastor and have positively impacted a lot of people." That makes me feel good and I find myself wanting more.

Therapist: I'm wondering if what makes this feel so good is that the exchange is like an antidote to the pain you have been feeling regarding your dwindling congregation and the lack of young people in the church. The church situation makes you feel the old story "I'm a failure," born out of your relationship with your father, being a young immigrant, and even a kind of spiritual perfectionism. The texting feels like the opposite of that. So of course it feels good.

Carlos: Thinking about it that way makes me feel less guilty. I do really struggle with feelings of failure, like I'm doing something wrong or shouldn't be enjoying positive feedback, and subsequently something is wrong in my marriage or even with God.

Therapist: It's been uncomfortable for you at times to allow yourself to desire, to enjoy positive feelings, as if you, especially a pastor, should be above all this. A part of you has come to believe that certain feelings are too human, too debased, and spiritual leaders should be above them. But in this case, you are enjoying the interaction even while you keep good boundaries, are upfront with your wife, and are talking with me. The positive interactions and feedback you are receiving feels good, you like it and desire it. These feelings have been in short supply over the last six months.

Carlos: I think that's right. I've been afraid of my desires. It's like I should be above or beyond or not even have any desires.

This short vignette cannot capture all the complexity of an ongoing psychoanalytically oriented case with its transference/countertransference enactments, ruptures and repairs, etc., but what we do know is that as a pastor, Carlos had to deal not only with the typical stressors and strains of pastoring, but also with an internalized unconscious organizing principle (Stolorow et al., 2002) that he was to be *more than human*. Spiritually, he believed that good feelings about himself, his ministry, and impact were a form of dangerous pride. He feared that desiring these things must certainly be connected to lust, covetousness, and

envy. For Carlos, these all too human feelings of desire at best were immature and needed to be eradicated or at worst were dangerously sinful. And yet, Carlos desperately needed signs that he was not a failure as he had internalized. Naturally Carlos attempted to be *more than human*, denying his desire for desire. While this kind of text exchange could signal that something was wrong and lead to harmful acting out, the real danger would be that Carlos would be tempted to hide these conflictual feelings. Hiding, rather than working through them, could lead to acting out, an all too familiar pastoral scenario. By risking being vulnerable in therapy, Carlos' unconscious organizing principles and harsh self-representation could be softened. In therapy, we could examine its origin and impact and explore how to live into a more or *simply human* position, trusting God, himself, and his marriage.

Conclusion

Clergy deal with multiple stressors, role strains, and expectations; yet, they infrequently use coping resources outside their personal spiritual practices. Pastors especially may be socialized to live lives that are *more than human*, possibly leading to depression, burnout, physical illness, and potential acting out behavior. Psychoanalytic therapy affords a unique way to explore unconscious or unacknowledged fears, prohibitions, affects, conflicts, etc., that drive behavior. This short vignette demonstrated one simple way to work with a particular form of unconscious organizing principle, which led to a harsh self-representation. Rather than ignoring or suppressing his feelings and potentially acting them out, this pastor's desires become normalized and less frightening, allowing him to work with them in a conscious and productive manner.

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