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The Relationship Between God Representations and Psychological Well-Being

BY

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The Relationship Between God Representations and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between people's affective and cognitive representations of God (positive feelings about God, anxious feelings toward God, anger toward God, the perception that God is supportive, ruling or punishing, or passive) and their psychological well-being. Eighty-six college students who identified as Christian responded to the Questionnaire of God Representations (Schaap-Jonker, 2018) and a set of scales measuring hedonic well-being (life satisfaction, positive/negative affect), eudaimonic well-being (personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and autonomy), and psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress). Results indicated that perceiving God's actions as supportive was associated with higher levels life satisfaction, positive affect, and environmental mastery. Viewing God as angry was associated with higher levels of negative affect and lower levels of autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life. The perception of God as ruling or punishing was negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Additionally, feeling anxious about God was negatively correlated with self-acceptance. None of the six cognitive and affective representations of God was predictive of depression, anxiety, and stress.

The Relationship Between God Representations and Psychological Well-Being

Religion has always been a significant element of people's lives and of cultures across time. It has been experienced as both a source of comfort and of pain. In the domain of psychology, much research has been dedicated to the relationship between religion and mental health. Moreira-Almeida, Neto, and Koenig (2006) discuss the results of numerous studies devoted to this topic. They found a positive relationship between religiousness and psychological well-being in 80% of the studies they reviewed, even when age, gender, and socioeconomic status were controlled. Furthermore, religiousness was consistently found to be predictive of lower levels of depression across the 147 studies that were analyzed. The authors also concluded that intrinsically oriented religious behavior, or living according to religious principles, is more predictive of positive well-being than extrinsically oriented religious behavior or using religion to fulfill needs like socialization or emotional support (Moreira-Almeida et al., 2006).

Much research exploring the relationship between religion and well-being has investigated the impact of religious attendance or religious identity on well-being (Van Cappellen, Toth-Gauthier, Saroglou, & Fredrickson, 2014; Ibrahim & Gillen-O'Neel, 2018). In 1991, Ellison conducted a study that examined the relationship between religious involvement (how often the participants participated in religious activities in a group or alone) and subjective well-being (the participant's evaluation of satisfaction with their own life). He found that there was not a direct relationship between religious behaviors, such as church attendance and private prayer, and well-being, but that a direct relationship was present between religious belief, such as faith that God will do what is best, and well-being. In other words, the study points out that it may be intrinsic religious

beliefs or thoughts rather than extrinsic religious practices or behaviors that play a bigger role in influencing psychological well-being. The current study follows this line of inquiry by focusing on intrinsic religious beliefs and thoughts. How do religious beliefs and cognitions enhance or undermine our psychological well-being? Specifically, what role does the nature of our relationship with God play in our sense of well-being? By understanding an individual's cognitive or affective representation of God, we can better understand the effect that their relationship with God has on their psychological well-being.

Representations of God, as defined by Schaap-Jonker (2018), are the mental ideas people possess of God or the divine, such as thinking of God as a father figure or as an ambivalent creator. It reflects the personal meaning that God or the divine has for the individual and reflects the relationship that an individual has with God. In her attempt to develop a reliable and valid measure of God Representations, Schaap-Jonker (2018) tapped into the cognitive as well as affective dimensions of these Representations. The cognitive aspect reflects what people believe about God and God's actions, and typically stems from what people have learned about God through doctrine, traditions, and culture. On the other hand, the affective aspect, which is what people feel towards God, reflects emotional understandings of God. The affective aspect of God Representation is developed by experiences. It has been shown that cognition and affect influence each other (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Solomon, 1976; Zeelenberg & Aarts, 1999). Individuals' beliefs about God influence how they emotionally experience their relationship to God, and their emotions toward God, in turn, influence their beliefs about God (Hoffman, 2005). It is

important, therefore, to measure both cognitive and affective perceptions of God in the present study.

Based on Petersen's study (1993) which shows that people's feelings about God cluster along three lines (security/closeness, rejection, and anxiety/guilt), the Questionnaire of God Representations (QGR) developed by Schaap-Jonker (2018) measures both affective and cognitive dimensions of God Representations. The affective dimension is measured in three sub-scales: *positive feelings* of God, *anxious feelings* toward God, and *anger* towards God. The cognitive aspect of God Representation, which focuses on perceptions and beliefs of God and God's actions, is measured with the following three QGR sub-scales: God's actions are *supportive*, *ruling/punishing*, or *passive* or do nothing. The QGR was developed to have both cognitive and affective dimensions to better measure the relational aspect of God Representation. Thus, the God Representation of the QGR is multi-dimensional, and is shaped by emotional-experiential influences as well as conceptual influences.

The first goal of the proposed study is to examine the relationships between the cognitive and affective aspects of God Representation and various manifestations of psychological well-being. In psychological research, well-being is studied in its hedonic and eudaimonic forms. Hedonic well-being refers to experiencing feelings of pleasure and satisfaction more frequently than feelings of suffering or dissatisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Individuals who attain happiness by pursuing pleasure while simultaneously avoiding pain typically have high hedonic well-being. Hedonic well-being is typically measured in terms of *life satisfaction*, *positive affect*, and the absence of *negative affect*. *Life satisfaction* is a subjective global assessment of the quality of an individual's life. A

judgment of life satisfaction is made by an individual according to their own criterion for a good life, or a comparison of their own life to what they perceive to be an ideal life (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). *Positive affect* refers to the presence of good feelings and emotions, and *negative affect* refers to experiencing bad feelings and emotions (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Positive and negative affect are not opposites. High positive affect is characterized by the presence of satisfactory emotions, such as enthusiasm, high activity, and alertness, and high negative affect involves feelings of guilt, fear, and sorrow. Low positive affect is the absence of satisfactory emotions and is marked by lethargy and sadness. Meanwhile, those with low negative affect experience serenity (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Unlike hedonic well-being which primarily taps into global assessments of one's life and daily affect, eudaimonic well-being is attained by achieving the maximum potential in life by doing what is worth doing and striving to achieve true potential in specific domains of one's life (Ryff & Singer, 2006). This includes *self-acceptance* (holding positive attitudes about current and past self), *positive relations* with others (empathizing with others and maintaining warm trusting relationships), *autonomy* (independence and acting according to personal standards), *environmental mastery* (ability to create or choose a satisfactory environment), *purpose in life* (knowledge of meaning, directionality and intentionality of life), and *personal growth* (continued development of potential; Ryff, 1989).

In a previous study conducted by Wong-McDonald and Gorsuch (2004), individuals who had more positive concepts of God and intimacy with God were found to be more likely to have high spiritual well-being. The current study expected that the same

findings could be established for hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. It was anticipated that the results Wong-McDonald and Gorsuch found in cognitive concepts of God could be extrapolated to affective reactions to God. Thus, the current study predicted that positive affective perceptions of God (scoring high in *positive feelings*, low in *anxious feelings*, low in *anger*) and positive cognitive perceptions of God (scoring high in *supportive*, low in *ruling/punishing*, low in *passive*) would be correlated with higher levels of *life satisfaction*, *positive affect*, and lower levels of *negative affect*. Similarly, it was predicted that positive affective perceptions of God (scoring high in *positive feelings*, low in *anxious feelings*, low in *anger*) and positive cognitive perceptions of God (scoring high in *supportive*, low in *ruling/punishing*, low in *passive*) would correlate with higher levels of each of the six elements of eudaimonic well-being.

In psychological research, well-being is also assessed in terms of the presence or absence of psychological stressors, such as depression, anxiety, and stress. According to the Psychology Foundation of Australia (2018), *depression* involves feelings of pessimism towards the future, inability to feel satisfaction, and self-disparagement. *Anxiety* involves physiological symptoms of panic, such as trembling, sweaty palms, or pounding heartbeat. *Stress* entails an inability to relax, feelings of tension, and inability to tolerate interruptions or delays. It was predicted that negative affective perceptions of God (scoring low in *positive feelings*, high in *anxious feelings*, high in *anger*) and negative cognitive perceptions of God (scoring low in *supportive*, high in *ruling/punishing*, high in *passive*) would correlate with high scores in depression, anxiety, and stress.

The second goal of the study is to attempt to find out which of the three cognitive and three affective perceptions of God are most predictive of the specific forms of psychological well-being outlined above. For example, which of the six cognitive and affective perceptions are most correlated with depression? In general, it was hypothesized that positive cognitive and affective perceptions of God would be more predictive of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being elements, while negative cognitive and affective perceptions of God would be more correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Previous studies have shown that those who attribute fewer positive traits and more negative traits to God experience more anxiety and anger toward God (Schaap-Jonker, 2018). We hypothesized that this anxiety and anger toward God could be correlated with more mental health problems in life outside of a religious context, as well. Following the same line of thought, it was hypothesized that those who attributed more positive traits and less negative traits to God would experience considerably less anxiety or anger toward God and in general and would instead experience hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. To control for differences in religious affiliation, only individuals who claimed to be Christian were studied.

Method

Participants

One hundred twenty-two students participated in the study. The participants were obtained through convenience sampling. They were recruited through Eastern Illinois University Psychology Department classes that offered extra credit to students who participated. Of the 122 participants, 2% ($n = 3$) were excluded because of unusually long or unusually short response durations (less than 4 minutes or longer than 2 hours). An

additional 27% ($n = 33$) participants were excluded from the analyses because they indicated non-Christian religious affiliation (agnostic, atheist, Buddhist, Hindu, Islam, Jewish, or other). The final total of participants was $n = 86$.

The sample consisted of 17 males (20%) and 69 females (80%). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 53 ($M = 22.34$, $Mdn = 21$). The sample consisted of 71% White/Caucasian ($n = 61$), 16 % Black/African American ($n = 14$), 7% Hispanic ($n = 6$), 2% Asian American ($n = 2$), and 4% Multiethnic participants ($n = 3$). The religious affiliation of the participants was 6% Baptist ($n = 5$), 56% Christian-other ($n = 48$), 6% Lutheran ($n = 5$), 5% Methodist ($n = 4$), 14% Non-denominational ($n = 12$), and 14% Roman Catholic ($n = 12$).

Materials

The first section of the Qualtrics study presented an informed consent agreement that briefly detailed the content of the survey as well as the voluntary nature of the study and the confidentiality policy. Participants were informed that by proceeding to the next section, they gave their consent to take part in the survey. The following section of the survey obtained demographic information about the participants, including age, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. The following five scales were presented to the participants in random order.

Questionnaire of God Representations (QGR). The QGR is a 33-item scale that measures the participants' affective and cognitive perceptions of God (Schaap-Jonker, 2018). The affective component of God Representation is divided into three sub-scales: *positive feelings* towards God (nine items), *anxious feelings* towards God (five items), and *anger* towards God (three items). The cognitive component of God Representation is

also divided into three sub-scales: thinking of God as *supportive* (ten items), *ruling/punishing* (four items), and *passive* (two items). Participants were prompted to indicate the extent to which they agreed that a word described their feelings or thoughts towards God using a 5-point scale from 1 (completely applicable) to 5 (absolutely not applicable). Words like “punishes (*ruling/punishing*),” “lets everything take its course (*passive*)” and “comforts me (*supportive*)” were used to measure the participants’ cognitive perception of God, and words like “security (*positive feelings*),” “anger (*anger*),” and “guilt (*anxious feelings*)” were used to measure affective perceptions of God. Ratings from each sub-scale were summed for each of the six God Representations. Higher scores indicated the presence of a God Representation. Internal consistency was adequate for each of the six sub-scales: *positive* alpha = .93, *anxious* alpha = .94, *anger* alpha = .75, *supportive* alpha = .94, *ruling/punishing* alpha = .79, and *passive* alpha = .71 (Schaap-Jonker, 2018).

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). To measure the participants’ hedonic well-being, participants completed the 5-item SWLS (Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS measured the participants’ own assessments of how close their lives were to their ideal. Participants read statements such as, “in most ways my life is close to my ideal,” and indicated their agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The *life satisfaction* score was obtained by adding the scores across the items. Higher scores represented greater *life satisfaction*. The SWLS has a test-retest correlation of .82 and a correlation alpha of .87. Additionally, the SWLS has shown significant correlations with scales measuring self-esteem, neuroticism, emotionality, and other aspects of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1985).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). The 20-item PANAS scale measured the participants' feelings and emotions at the time of the survey to further understand their hedonic well-being (Watson et al., 1988). Participants were presented with ten positive affective words, such as "attentive" and "enthusiastic," and ten negative affective words, including "guilty" and "scared." They were asked to indicate how strongly they currently related to the word on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). To obtain scores, ratings were separated into two categories, *positive affect* and *negative affect*, and the ratings for each were added. The scores in each category could range in scores from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating the presence of *positive* or *negative affect*. This scale had sufficient internal consistency, with *positive affect* obtaining a Cronbach's alpha of .86 to .90 and *negative affect* obtaining a Cronbach's alpha of .84 to .87 (Watson et al., 1988).

Psychological Well-being Scale (PWB Scale). Eudaimonic well-being was assessed using the 42-item PWB Scale (Ryff, 1989). This scale measured the six dimensions of eudaimonic well-being: *autonomy*, *environmental mastery*, *personal growth*, *purpose in life*, *positive relationships*, and *self-acceptance*. Participants indicate their level of agreement to several statements on a six-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Examples of statements include "I sometimes feel I've done all there is to do in life," which measures *purpose in life*, and "I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me," which measures *environmental mastery*. Negatively worded statements were reverse-coded prior to analysis. Ratings were summed up for each dimension. Higher scores indicated higher levels of the

relevant dimension. The PWB Scale had adequate internal consistency, with alpha coefficients ranging from .71 to .78 (Shryock & Meeks, 2018).

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS). The DASS is a 21-item scale that measures the extent to which participants experience psychological and physiological symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (The Psychology Foundation of Australia, 2018). After being presented with a scenario, such as, “I felt that I wasn’t worth much as a person,” participants indicated the extent to which the statements applied to them on a four-point scale from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much, or most of the time). Ratings from the items were separated into *depression*, *anxiety*, and *stress* score, then averaged to determine a separate score for each of the three components of psychological suffering. Possible scores ranged from 0 to 21, with higher scores indicating higher levels of *depression*, *anxiety*, and *stress*. Internal consistency for the DASS was acceptable, with *depression* obtaining an alpha of .91, *anxiety* obtaining an alpha of .80, and *stress* obtaining an alpha of .84 (Sinclair, Siefert, Slavin-Mulford, Stein, Renna, & Blais, 2012).

The final section of the survey provided a debriefing statement which thanked participants for their time, presented a full explanation of the purpose of the study, and included predictions for the results of the study.

Procedure

College students were invited to participate in the study by their professor or by an email. The participants accessed the study through the SONA system or via a link that was included in the invitation email, and answered the survey through Qualtrics, a survey data collection website. An informed consent document was presented to the participants,

who consented to participate by proceeding to the next screen. Participants then answered demographic questions about their age, gender, and religious affiliation. Then the five questionnaires (PWB Scale, SWLS, PANAS, DASS, and QGR) were presented to the participants in a randomly assigned order. After completing the five scales, participants were given the option to enter into a drawing for a twenty-five-dollar Amazon gift card by typing their name and email address. If they had been recruited by a professor, they were then presented with the opportunity to receive extra credit for that professor's class by entering their name and selecting the class section and name of the instructor. A debriefing statement was then presented to the participants. The survey took approximately twenty minutes to complete.

Results

Internal Consistency Analysis of Scales

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of each scale and subscale. These values are reported in Table 1. Except for one of the subscales, the various God Representation sub-scales had acceptable ($\alpha > .70$; George & Mallery, 2003) to excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > .90$). *Passivity* had close to poor internal consistency ($\alpha = .45$). These results are similar to those found by Schaap-Jonker (2018), who found acceptable to excellent internal consistency in all six sub-scales. Interestingly, *passivity* was also found to have the lowest internal consistency in Schaap-Jonker's (2016) findings, although it was still acceptable ($\alpha = .71$).

All of the hedonic well-being measures exhibited good to excellent internal consistency (.88 to .91). These results were slightly higher than those established in previous studies (.84 to .90; Diener et al., 1985; Watson et al., 1988). On the other hand,

the Cronbach's alpha values varied between the eudaimonic well-being sub-scales. *Autonomy, purpose in life, and self-acceptance* were acceptable to good (.74 to .81), but *environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relations* were poor to questionable (.55 to .67). Previous studies found much less varied results among the six sub-scales, with internal consistencies ranging from .71 to .78 (Shryock & Meeks, 2018). With regards to the *depression, anxiety* and *stress* sub-scales, internal consistency estimates were acceptable to good (.74 to .89). These findings were slightly lower than those found in previous studies: .80 to .91 (Sinclair et. al, 2012).

Characteristics of the Sample Study

The mean scores and standard deviations for eudaimonic well-being, hedonic well-being, depression, anxiety, and stress, and God Representations can be found in Table 2. While results varied for each of the six dimensions of eudaimonic well-being, all mean scores were above the midpoint, indicating that the participants lean toward experiencing positive eudaimonic well-being, especially in *personal growth, positive relations, and purpose in life* where mean scores were the highest.

With regards to hedonic well-being, the above-midpoint means *for life satisfaction* and *positive affect* indicate that the participants experienced positive hedonic well-being levels. On the other hand, the close to the lower end of the scale mean in *negative affect* suggests that the presence of negative affect among participants was low. For the *depression, anxiety, and stress* scales, the mean values were just slightly above the midpoints indicating moderate levels of depression, anxiety and stress.

There was variation in the scale ranges for the six sub-scales of God Representation. Sub-scales that had means above the midpoints were *positive feelings,*

supportive actions, *ruling and punishing* actions, and *passivity*. Participants had positive feelings toward God and perceived God to be supportive, but also perceived God as slightly ruling and punishing as well as slightly passive. Sub-scales with means below the midpoints were *anxiety* and *anger*, suggesting that participants tended not to feel anxious about their relationship with God and did feel anger in their relationship with God.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas (N = 86)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI	Scale Range	Scale Midpoint	Cronbach's α
God Representations						
Positive Feelings	34.77	7.80	[33.10, 36.44]	9 – 45	27	.94
Anxious Feelings	12.45	4.01	[11.59, 13.31]	5 – 25	15	.72
Anger	5.81	2.20	[5.34, 6.29]	3 – 15	9	.83
Supportive	40.20	9.51	[38.16, 42.24]	10 – 50	30	.97
Ruling/Punishing	12.73	3.35	[12.02, 13.45]	4 – 20	12	.71
Passive	6.92	1.87	[6.52, 7.32]	2 - 10	6	.45
Eudaimonic Well-Being						
Autonomy	29.09	6.08	[27.79, 30.40]	6 - 42	24	.74
Environmental	28.05	4.87	[27.00, 29.09]	6 - 42	24	.55
Mastery						

Personal Growth	34.02	4.70	[33.02, 35.03]	6 - 42	24	.64
Positive Relations	32.72	5.30	[31.58, 33.86]	6 - 42	24	.67
Purpose in Life	32.16	6.18	[30.84, 33.49]	6 - 42	24	.77
Self-Acceptance	29.07	6.49	[27.68, 30.46]	6 - 42	24	.81
Hedonic Well-Being						
Positive Affect	31.37	8.67	[29.51, 33.23]	10 - 50	30	.91
Negative Affect	18.92	7.57	[17.29, 20.54]	10 - 50	30	.89
Life Satisfaction	23.10	6.82	[21.64, 24.57]	5 - 35	20	.88
DASS						
Depression	11.85	4.57	[10.87, 12.83]	0 - 21	10.5	.89
Anxiety	12.23	4.04	[11.37, 13.10]	0 - 21	10.5	.79
Stress	14.24	3.66	[13.46, 15.03]	0 - 21	10.5	.74

Bivariate Correlations Among the God Representations

In the correlational analysis conducted for the six God Representations, two were strongly correlated. These results can be seen in Table 2. A *supportive* perception of God's actions was highly correlated with *positive feelings* toward God ($r = .93$), sharing 86% of their variances. A closer examination of the two sub-scales showed that several of the *positive feelings* items were very similar to the *supportive* actions ones. In the subsequent multiple regression analyses, *positive feelings* was excluded and *supportive* actions was kept to avoid multicollinearity issues. Unexpectedly, *positive feelings* toward God and *supportive* perceptions of God's actions had moderate positive correlations with *ruling or punishing* perceptions of God's actions ($r = .67$ and $r = .69$, respectively).

Anxious feelings toward God had a moderate positive correlation with *anger* toward God ($r = .51$).

Table 2

Zero-Order Correlations Amongst the God Representations (N = 86)

QGR	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Positive Feelings	--	-.06	-.25*	.93***	.67***	.31**
2 Anxious Feelings		--	.51***	-.09	.07	.24*
3 Anger			--	-.21	-.06	.15
4 Supportive				--	.69***	.29**
5 Ruling/Punishing					--	.21
6 Passive						--

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

Research Question 1: God Representations and Hedonic Well-Being

The first research question inquired about the relationship between the six components of God Representation and *positive affect*, *negative affect*, and *life satisfaction*, which are markers of hedonic well-being. A multiple regression analysis was conducted for each of these markers to determine which of the God Representations were predictive of hedonic well-being.

In the first multiple regression predicting *positive affect*, *supportive* perceptions of God's actions was the only significant predictor. Perceiving God as supportive was associated with experiencing positive affect. The only significant predictor for *negative affect* was *anger* (second multiple regression). Anger towards God was associated with experiencing negative affect in life. With regards to *life satisfaction* (third multiple

regression), *supportive* actions and *ruling/punishing* actions were both significant predictors. Thinking of God as supportive but not as ruling or punishing was associated with being satisfied with one's life.

In sum, being able to perceive God as *supportive* was positively associated with experiencing *positive affect* and *life satisfaction*. Perceiving God as *ruling or punishing* was also predictive of *life satisfaction* but in an inverse manner. *Anger* towards God was related with experiencing *negative affect*.

Table 3

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses Between God Representations and Hedonic Well-Being (N = 86)

God Representation	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Positive Affect			
Anxious Feelings	-.33	.25	-.15
Anger	-.11	.46	-.03
Supportive	.33	.13	.36*
Ruling/Punishing	.03	.36	-.01
Passive	.82	.50	.18
Negative Affect			
Anxious Feelings	.26	.23	.14
Anger	.85	.43	.25*
Supportive	-.13	.12	-.16
Ruling/Punishing	.32	.33	.14
Passive	-.24	.49	-.06

Life Satisfaction

Anxious Feelings	-.14	.20	-.08
Anger	-.39	.37	-.13
Supportive	.38	.11	.53**
Ruling/Punishing	-.62	.28	-.30*
Passive	.00	.40	.00

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

Note: Positive Affect $R^2 = .24$; adjusted $R^2 = .19$; Negative Affect $R^2 = .15$; adjusted $R^2 = .09$; Life Satisfaction $R^2 = .22$; adjusted $R^2 = .17$

Research Question 2: God Representations and Eudaimonic Well-Being

The second research question asked about the relationship between God Representation and each of the six elements of eudaimonic well-being. A multiple regression analysis was conducted for each of the six to determine the extent to which the God Representations were related to the elements of eudaimonic well-being: *autonomy*, *environmental mastery*, *personal growth*, *positive relations*, *purpose in life*, and *self-acceptance*. Results of each of these multiple regression analyses are found in Table 4.

When predicting *autonomy* (first multiple regression), *anger* was the only significant predictor. Anger towards God was negatively correlated with experiencing a sense of autonomy in life. For *environmental mastery* (second multiple regression), *supportive* actions was the only significant predictor. Perceiving God as supportive was associated with being able to adapt to the surrounding world. The only significant predictor for *personal growth* was *anger* (third multiple regression). There was a negative correlation between anger toward God and establishing personal growth. There were no significant predictors of *positive relations* (fourth multiple regression). *Purpose in life*

had one significant predictor: *anger* (fifth multiple regression). Anger was negatively correlated with understanding one's purpose in life. *Anxiety* was the only significant predictor of *self-acceptance* (sixth multiple regression). Feeling less anxiety towards God was associated with higher levels of self-acceptance.

In summary, anger towards God was negatively correlated with autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life. Likewise, having anxious feelings toward God was negatively correlated with self-acceptance. Thinking of God as supportive was positively correlated with environmental mastery. The God Representations were not predictive of positive relations.

Table 4

Summary of Multiple Regression Between God Representations and Eudaimonic Well-Being (N = 86)

God Representation	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Autonomy			
Anxious Feelings	-.20	.19	-.13
Anger	-.80	.34	-.29*
Supportive	.05	.10	.08
Ruling/Punishing	.04	.26	.02
Passive	.22	.37	.07
Environmental Mastery			
Anxious Feelings	-.07	.18	-.06
Anger	-.27	.27	-.12
Supportive	.24	.08	.47**

Ruling/Punishing	-.36	.21	-.24
Passive	.02	.29	.01
Personal Growth			
Anxious Feeling	.02	.14	.01
Anger	-.89	.26	-.42**
Supportive	.03	.07	.07
Ruling/Punishing	-.03	.20	-.02
Passive	.05	.28	.02
Positive Relations			
Anxious Feelings	-.19	.17	-.14
Anger	-.27	.30	-.12
Supportive	.16	.09	.28
Ruling/Punishing	-.13	.23	-.08
Passive	.22	.32	.07
Purpose in Life			
Anxious Feelings	.04	.19	.02
Anger	-1.00	.33	-.36**
Supportive	.18	.10	.27
Ruling/Punishing	-.19	.26	-.11
Passive	-.34	.36	-.10
Self-Acceptance			
Anxious Feelings	-.43	.20	-.27*
Anger	-.21	.36	-.07

Supportive	.15	.10	.22
Ruling/Punishing	-.01	.28	-.01
Passive	.10	.39	.03

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

Note: Autonomy $R^2 = .16$; adjusted $R^2 = .11$; Environmental Mastery $R^2 = .18$; adjusted $R^2 = .12$; Personal Growth $R^2 = .18$; adjusted $R^2 = .13$; Positive Relations $R^2 = .13$; adjusted $R^2 = .08$; Purpose in Life $R^2 = .21$; adjusted $R^2 = .16$; Self-Acceptance $R^2 = .16$; adjusted $R^2 = .10$

Research Question 3: God Representation and Depression, Stress, and Anxiety

The final research question investigated the relationship between God Representation and *depression*, *stress*, and *anxiety*. A multiple regression analysis was conducted for each outcome variable. Table 5 summarizes the results. None of the five God Representations were statistically significant predictors of *depression*, *anxiety*, or *stress*.

Table 5

Summary of Multiple Regression Between God Representations and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (N = 86)

God Representation	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Depression			
Anxious Feelings	.24	.14	.21
Anger	.33	.26	.16
Supportive	-.06	.07	-.13
Ruling/Punishing	-.07	.20	-.05
Passive	.01	.28	.01

Anxiety

Anxiety	.09	.13	.68
Anger	.21	.24	.88
Supportive	-.08	.07	-.21
Ruling/Punishing	.19	.18	.16
Passive	.19	.26	.09
Stress			
Anxious Feelings	.21	.12	.23
Anger	.07	.22	.05
Supportive	-.01	.06	-.17
Ruling/Punishing	-.04	.17	-.26
Passive	-.05	.23	-.22

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

Note: Depression $R^2 = .15$; adjusted $R^2 = .09$; Anxiety $R^2 = .08$; adjusted $R^2 = .02$; Stress $R^2 = .07$; adjusted $R^2 = .01$

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between people's cognitive and affective representations of God and their psychological well-being, particularly among those whose religious affiliation is Christian. There were some interesting correlations among the six God representations. While perceiving God as *supportive* was positively associated with *positive feelings* about God, these were also positively correlated with perceiving God's actions as *ruling or punishing*. In many Christian denominations, God is described as a parental figure who disciplines his children so that they can learn and become better people. Many of the participants in this study likely had subscribed to this

view of God and therefore related *ruling/punishing actions* to character-building discipline, a positive concept.

The results of the current study have several psychological implications. There were significant relationships between many aspects of God Representation and psychological well-being. *Anger* toward God was the most predictive of well-being. Those who experienced less anger in their relationship with God experienced higher level of three aspects of eudemonic well-being (*purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy*), and also experienced less *negative affect*. Previous studies have found a similar relationship between anger expression and psychological well-being, where those who express anger more often have lower well-being (Diong & Bishop, 1999). It makes sense, then, that many aspects of well-being are closely related to feeling minimal anger toward God. Thinking of God's actions as *supportive* seems to be indicative of well-being as well, having positive correlations with *environmental mastery, positive affect, and life satisfaction*. Again, previous studies have found a relationship between social support and well-being, so it makes sense that these findings also apply to relationships with God (Turner, 1981).

No significant relationships were found between the God Representations and *depression, anxiety, or stress*, which was surprising. It was anticipated that negative markers of God Representation, especially *anxious feelings* and *anger* toward God, would be correlated with psychological symptomology. However, it is possible that the participants' scores on the DASS did not accurately represent their typical experiences of *depression, anxiety, and stress*. The survey was distributed shortly before mid-term examinations were scheduled. This is a period of time when the student participants

likely experienced elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress due to academic pressure. In fact, the 95% confidence intervals of these variables were above the midpoint of the scales. It is possible, then, that the variance of scores on the DASS among participants was limited in range, which could have impacted the results of the multiple regression analyses between God Representation and *depression*, *anxiety*, and *stress*. Future studies should be conducted to see if there is a relationship between God Representations and psychological symptomology during less atypical events.

The weak Cronbach's alphas among some of the eudaimonic well-being subscales are also notable. *Environmental mastery*, *personal growth*, and *positive relations* all had Cronbach's alphas below .70, with *personal growth* and *positive relations* obtaining questionable internal consistency and *environmental mastery* obtaining poor internal consistency. Due to the weak internal consistencies of these items, it is unclear as to whether these measures truly capture the essence of these variables. *Passive God Representation* also had the poorest internal consistency. It was not predictive of any of the psychological well-being measures.

The results of the current study indicate that there is a relationship between some God Representations and some components of psychological well-being. Given the correlational nature of the study, it is important to note that the directionality of the relationship cannot be established from the results obtained. It is possible that ascribing to more positive God Representation results in elevated levels of psychological well-being. It is also likely that people who are experiencing psychological distress would be angry and anxious in their relationship with God. A simple conclusion that can be drawn about

the current study is that individuals who are satisfied with their lives are more likely to also have positive concepts of God.

The participants were recruited from a pool of Eastern Illinois University college students with backgrounds in psychology. They were predominantly female and White. Thus, the study results may not necessarily reflect those that could emerge from a broader population. Future studies should also examine how individuals with non-Christian affiliations perceive God and how their God representations play a role in their psychological well-being.

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