PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF TRANSFORMING THE ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

Using Attachment-Informed Psychotherapy

GEOFF GOODMAN

ROUTLEDGE

Practical Applications of Transforming the Attachment Relationship to God

Practical Applications of Transforming the Attachment Relationship to God discusses four distinct attachment relationships to the God of personal spiritual experience and considers how each of these relationships has implications for working with clients in psychotherapy.

Geoff Goodman uses Attachment-Informed Psychotherapy (AIP) to explore the connection between a relationship to God and a relationship to caregivers during childhood. By analyzing the attachment relationships evident in the lives of four public figures—human rights activist Coretta Scott King, Jewish Holocaust victim Anne Frank, Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill W., and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud—this book demonstrates how their attachment relationships with their caregivers during childhood helped to determine the quality of their attachment relationship (or nonrelationship) to God in later life. Goodman demonstrates how to use AIP to work with these attachment relationships, formulating a psychotherapeutic treatment plan for each one with the goal of restoring wholeness and unity.

This book will be a valuable resource for psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, and marriage and family therapists in practice and in training.

Geoff Goodman is Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in the Emory University School of Medicine and Associate Professor of Psychology and Spiritual Care in the Emory University Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. He holds board certifications in clinical psychology and psychoanalysis from the American Board of Professional Psychology.

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To Carlyn Chantal Dent Goodman
Once riding on Daddy’s shoulders
Now climbing up the canyon boulders
Fly away, my butterfly
Fly to the tip-top of the sky

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Acknowledgments

I have often read the conventional wisdom, "Don't make your hobby your job." By writing this book, I openly defied this advice. I have always been passionate about the integration of psychology and spirituality. My first journal article, written in graduate school, explored the meaning of empathy for Carl Rogers, Heinz Kohut, and Jesus. As a graduate student, I took as many courses related to psychology and spirituality as I could fit into my schedule. Yet I never pursued this interdisciplinary area as one of my research interests, perhaps due to my own ambivalence about the existence of a Higher Power (see Chapter 1). Now, having written this book, I can now claim that making my hobby my job has only inspired me to write more about the integration of psychology and spirituality. It has helped that my relationship with my Higher Power is now on firmer ground.

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Note on the Text

I wrote this book, *Practical Applications of Transforming the Attachment Relationship to God: Using Attachment-Informed Psychotherapy*, while I was writing my other book, *Using Psychoanalytic Techniques to Transform the Attachment Relationship to God: Our Refuge and Strength*. Both books address humans' attachment relationships to God and their transformation by using Attachment-Informed Psychotherapy (AIP). While this book is more practically oriented, the first book is more theoretically oriented. I strongly recommend that the reader read both books to optimize their learning experience. Because theory and practice go hand in hand, these two books complement each other.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Attachment Relationships to God and to My Parents from the Perspective of a Middle-Aged White Man

In this autobiographical narrative, I will focus almost exclusively on my relationships with my mother, father, and God as well as inanimate substitutes for these relationships. I could focus on many other facets of my life, but the intricacies of these relationships, followed over time, will form the evidence in support of my thesis that: (1) these relationships are interconnected, and (2) transforming one relationship has the potential to transform the other.

I came into the world in a small town in rural northern central Pennsylvania as the first-born child into a white, evangelical Christian, lower-middle-class family that included my mother, father, and maternal grandmother. My mother was the first person in her family to graduate from college with a teaching certificate; my father attended college but never graduated (I was the first from his line to graduate from college). My earliest childhood memory is of sitting in a car outside a hospital with my maternal grandmother while my mother was giving birth to my younger sister. I was 2½ years old. I presume that my father was with my mother. Thus, my earliest memory has to do with separation from my parents.

Another early childhood memory, this time from when I was age 5, also had to do with separation. My parents took me to an airplane show at our local airport: all types of airplanes were on display. The event was crowded, and somehow I lost my grip on my mother's hand and got separated from her. I started crying, and a stranger took me to the flight control tower, where someone made a public announcement, and my father came to the tower. I hugged him for a long time. I remember feeling comforted by his presence. During these early years, I would describe both my parents as loving, devoted, and exciting to be around. I felt a secure attachment to my parents (for an explanation of "secure attachment," see Chapter 2).

By late childhood, I began to distinguish myself academically. Both my parents valorized achievement: my father extolled the virtues of academic excellence, while my mother displayed a strong interest in my success in Cub Scouts, Webelos, and later, Boy Scouts, helping me meet the requirements for earning various merit

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badges. Although not consciously aware of it at the time, upon reflection, I probably started making connections between achievement and love, especially in my relationship to my father. If I were academically successful, I would earn my father's love, I reasoned. During these years, I developed a few close friends at school and attended weekly Bible Club meetings held after school on Wednesdays in a nearby church. I became increasingly interested in God, and particularly, Jesus. I remember that at age 9, I asked Jesus into my heart at the invitation of my Bible Club teacher. I did not know exactly what that meant, but in my 9-year-old mind, I probably understood it as inviting Jesus to live inside me. If He lived inside me, I would never be separated from Him. At Bible Club, I also became skilled at memory verse contests and "sword drills"—looking up specific Bible verses more quickly than anyone else (the secret to winning this contest was memorizing the 66 books of the Bible in order).

Just before I hit puberty, the Bible Club teacher permitted me to give a "sermon" to the other children—my only experience with preaching. I was in sixth grade and would be graduating to junior high school, which was far away from Bible Club. At around this time, I also started having conflicts with my father. These conflicts often resulted in harsh corporal punishment as well as emotional abuse such as silent treatments that sometimes lasted months (which I would learn to use against each parent later in life). In retrospect, I suppose that he was struggling with my prepubertal need for autonomy. These conflicts coincided with the onset of an addiction that I would struggle with for the next 38 years (I will not identify the specific addiction here).

By middle adolescence, the conflicts with my father escalated. I ran away from home for five-and-a-half weeks after he had humiliated me in front of my brother. I lived with one of my best friends in his basement until his mother found out and forced me to go home. The frequency of my addictive behavior likewise increased. I was only nominally involved in my church, attending on Sunday mornings with my family and singing in the choir but otherwise showing little interest. By contrast, my sister was involved in the Baptist Youth Fellowship (BYF) and, I believe, held a leadership position in this group.

During the later years of adolescence, my father and I learned to tolerate each other. My mother seemed preoccupied with her own thoughts and rarely challenged my father's parenting decisions. My maternal grandmother was the only person who I felt actually *saw* me. She would comfort me after one of my father's draconian punishments. During my high school years, perhaps sensing that I would be going away to college soon, my father did try, in his own way, to re-establish a connection with me. He would come into my brother's and my bedroom early on Saturday mornings and announce that he was going to Elby's, the local diner. My brother, six years younger than I, would bound down the bunk bed ladder to join my father, while I would roll over with my face to the wall and continue sleeping. Thus, feeling rejected, I likewise rejected my father's breakfast invitations. I never did go to breakfast with my father and brother. Instead, I became obsessed with academic success, which pleased my father. Thus, in

spite of my animosity toward my father, I still strived to please him in ways that I knew mattered to him.

In the meantime, I began making unsuccessful attempts to curb my addictive behavior or stop it altogether. Even though this behavior was not interfering with my grades, I nevertheless became alarmed. I would be leaving for college soon; I did not want to bring this addiction with me. I kept this behavior a secret from my parents. I felt that they would punish me for it rather than help me to overcome it.

I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for college. Unexpectedly, now that I was out of the house and living on my own, my relationship to my father improved. We experienced a rapprochement, which felt good to both of us. My father had access to an 800 number at his job, and this access allowed us to connect without having to pay long-distance telephone bills. I also tried to get to know my mother better—someone who felt mysterious to me—but these attempts went nowhere. We maintained a weekly letter correspondence, which continued for 35 years, but her letters were disappointingly superficial. I always knew she loved me, but who was she? I did not know.

In the context of escalating addictive behavior, I became actively involved in a Christian group on campus. I prayed to God about my behavior, which would help for a while, but then I would resume old habits. For the first time, I spoke to someone about my addiction—the young adult minister of my church. Surprisingly, he responded with a variation on Nancy Reagan's slogan, "Just Say No." I did not feel judged by him, but neither did I feel supported.

After struggling to find a major, I settled on psychology and writing and was accepted into a Christian clinical psychology doctoral program near Los Angeles, California. Soon after moving to the West Coast, my maternal grandmother died. Around this time, I started questioning the Bible's infallibility, which prompted me to question my enrollment at a conservative evangelical Christian university. I decided to drop out of my doctoral program and work full-time in a psychiatric hospital inpatient unit in California. In southern California, one must rely on a car to get around, so I asked my father for money. He refused, however, informing me that I would have bought "a lemon"—and in so doing be wasting his money. Incensed by this response, I stopped communicating with my family for a year. I worked and lived completely on my own for the first time, which felt good. I decided that the Bible was indeed fallible and that evangelical Christianity, the tradition in which I was raised, treated the Bible like a "paper pope"—unable to acknowledge its obvious contradictions and scientific inaccuracies. Around this time, I entertained the possibility that God does not exist or no longer exists. I maintained my faith but felt the responsibility of figuring out what I believed rather than what I thought the Bible (or my childhood faith community) told me to believe. My addictive behavior continued to develop on its own trajectory, seemingly propelled by forces beyond me. Working full-time also afforded me the financial independence to pursue this passion, which only hastened its trajectory.

After that year of independence, I returned to the East Coast and enrolled in a master's degree program in developmental psychology in New York City.

Although we never processed what had happened between us, I again experienced a rapprochement in my relationship with my father and to the rest of my family. My father recommended a church in New York City that he knew about from a Christian magazine to which he subscribed. I started going to that church, which turned out to be much more liberal than my father would have liked, had he known. The pastor's sermons were filled with psychological as well as spiritual wisdom, which would obviously appeal to someone like me who was hungering for an integration of these two worlds. Just as I had done as an undergraduate, I became actively involved in a campus Christian group and enjoyed learning about and relating to God with my peers; however, I did not tell them that I did not believe in the Bible's infallibility. Perhaps I feared that the group would reject me, just as I feared that my father would reject me if I informed him that his son now believed that the Bible contains all sorts of errors. During my master's degree, I also took a graduate course at the liberal theological seminary affiliated with my university. While I did not agree with every theological point it brought to my attention, I was at least considering alternative points of view to my own. My addiction stabilized during this time, but on the day of my graduation, I went on an all-night bender that shocked me. No one knew. In retrospect, this extreme behavior might have reflected my worry about moving on to the next stage in my life: a clinical psychology doctoral program in Chicago, Illinois.

Within the first year of my doctoral program, my father and I had a relationship-ending fight over my use of his health insurance benefits (I was still on his plan) to help pay for psychotherapy, which, ironically, I wanted to access to work through my issues with him. He refused to allow me to access his benefits, explaining that he did not want his boss to find out that his son was in psychotherapy. He never explained how his boss would find out. I realized that we were both experiencing profound feelings of shame: whereas I was ashamed of my addiction, my father was ashamed of his own son's desire for psychotherapy, perhaps because it signified to him that he was a flawed father whose son needed such help. I thus stopped all communication with him for the rest of his life, which lasted only four more years. He died of a sudden heart attack, four months before I graduated with my doctorate.

Within the same few months of severing all ties to my father, I became an agnostic. Reading biblical passages that seemed to condone slavery and the treatment of women as men's property, I reasoned I could no longer trust the Bible to tell me anything truthful about anything, including Jesus. Renouncing my faith also enabled me to engage in my addiction more freely with less guilt over my behavior. I finally stopped listening to any still, small voice that signified a Power greater than myself abiding in me.

Despite this formal break from Christianity and theism, I cross-registered in four theology courses at a nearby university's liberal divinity school, which counted as electives toward my doctorate. I maintained an interest in learning more about God and the intersection of religion and psychology, even though I was no longer sure whether God existed. During these years in my doctoral

program, I continued to invest significant time in my addiction, although it never seemed to affect the quality of my work. I do believe, however, that the addiction made me emotionally distant from others and from myself. Notably, circumventing my father's health insurance and his disapproval by finding low-cost treatment, I did open up about my addictive behavior with my therapist, but surprisingly, it continued unabated.

After graduation, I moved back to New York City, where I completed an internship program and two two-year postdoctoral fellowships and later applied for academic positions. After completing the second of these fellowships, I joined the full-time clinical faculty at Cornell University Medical College, working on the children's psychiatric inpatient unit. Having become interested in psychoanalytic training during graduate school, I entered formal psychoanalysis four times per week at a psychoanalytic candidate's fee, which I could afford. I spent most of these sessions talking about my father, my mother, and my addiction. To my surprise, disappointment, and worry, this most intensive form of psychotherapy was not helping me overcome my addiction. Despite this lackluster outcome, I continued in psychoanalysis for the next 16 years. Although I found that this method of treatment helped me work through my feelings about my father's treatment of me, his death, and his lingering power over me, it did not help me with my addiction. In fact, I witnessed a steady increase in frequency and risk associated with this behavior during these 16 years.

During those years of psychoanalysis, I became a professor in a clinical psychology doctoral program and a certified psychoanalyst, but not even this most intensive treatment was working. Despite my outward success, I felt like a personal failure—weak, unworthy of love, secretive, ashamed. Over eight years into my personal psychoanalysis, I consulted with two world-renowned psychoanalysts in New York City about my addiction. The first analyst suggested that I had experienced an early trauma, which he said is difficult to treat. The second analyst suggested that I needed to switch analysts because the current one was not helping me. No one asked about my relationship to God. Neither my analyst, nor these two consultants, nor I mentioned anything about God. Like Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter*, God was He Who must not be named.

After moving back to New York City, I did return to the church my father had recommended to me six years earlier, attending perhaps several times a year. I always enjoyed the pastor's sermons. He was adept at weaving together spirituality and psychology in a way that always made me feel good when I left the sanctuary. Outside these occasional Sunday morning excursions, however, I had no discernible relationship to God. Returning to Pennsylvania to visit my mother and less often, my siblings, I would pretend I was still a believer, attending my mother's church and even singing in that church. As the church organist, my mother would always ask me to sing on the Sunday after Christmas, which I enjoyed doing. I still experienced a sense of awe in the emotional power of Christian hymns—sometimes becoming tearful even though I was an agnostic. If I did not know whether a Higher Power existed, then what was I crying about?

Fifteen years after my father died, a series of events changed the trajectory of my life. By this time, I had earned tenure at my university, opened a thriving part-time private practice in child, adolescent, and adult psychotherapy, and was busily working on completing my psychoanalytic training. I was still attending on-the-couch classical psychoanalysis four times per week (a training requirement at my psychoanalytic institute). Gradually, I began to feel more emotionally available, especially in romantic relationships. I began dating a wonderful person who became my wife two years later. Simultaneously and despite (or perhaps because of) the positive changes going on in my life, my addictive behaviors continued an ever-upward trajectory. Early on in my relationship with Valeda, I told her about my addiction. Not only did I not want to keep secrets from her, but I also needed to know whether she was going to accept me for who I was at that time—all of me. By the time we got married, I secretly hoped that our marriage would be the catalyst to stop the addiction in its tracks. That did not happen, and by the time I realized that not even marriage to the woman of my dreams could stop me, I scrambled to find another source of help other than my psychoanalyst.

During this first year of marriage, I also learned some shocking information about my mother. Here is how it happened: Valeda, my mother, and I were visiting my maternal great-aunt, who lived in a town close to that of my mother. This aunt mentioned that my grandparents "loved my mother just the same," which seemed to imply that my mother had been adopted by them. At the time, my great-aunt was in her nineties, so I initially attributed her comment to misremembering. Nevertheless, when we got into my car to leave, I asked my mother about this curious statement. What did Aunt Rhoda mean? Then my mother dropped the bomb: my grandparents had adopted her at birth. Immediately, I realized that my maternal grandmother—a member of my nuclear family and the woman who helped raise me—was not biologically related to me. The obvious question was, "Why didn't you tell me?" I received the supremely disappointing reply: "I didn't think it was that big a deal." Not a big deal? It took a long time to metabolize that information into my mind and my life. It also prompted a long search for my biological maternal grandparents, which ended just two years ago, when I finally learned who my biological grandfather was. During this search, my mother provided only very modest assistance, informing my sister and me that whatever this search yielded did not interest her.

Around this time, I began to realize that my mother was suffering from her own addictive behavior (different from my own). Several years earlier, my sister had read in one of my mother's diaries about this addiction and told me about it. When we asked our mother about some of these diary entries, she readily acknowledged her addictive behavior but declared that she had stopped cold turkey when we were young children. Now aware of this history, I became more observant and soon realized that her addictive behavior was in fact still active. I do not doubt that my mother had stopped cold turkey, but upon reflection, I pieced together a narrative for myself in which my mother had reactivated her addiction sometime shortly after my father died. Living alone for the first time in her life and grieving the loss

of her life partner were stresses that overwhelmed her. Interestingly, she never disclosed to us children that she was struggling. She did not cry at my father's funeral or at any time before or after. I remember standing in the kitchen around the time of the funeral, watching her unceremoniously scooping up my father's insulin bottles from the refrigerator shelf and dumping them in the trash without a word. I thought, "She's not a normal person." Everyone processes grief in their own way, but something about my mother's emotions seemed off.

In retrospect, learning about my mother's adoption and addiction clarified a lot of issues for me. She was a master at keeping secrets—something to which I could relate—and she must have experienced shame as a constant companion throughout her life—something to which I could likewise relate. At the same time, however, I felt angry that she had kept me in the dark all those years about her adoption, and her addiction, both of which she vehemently denied. I wanted my mother to be a whole person—even if I could not be.

All these events—my wedding, my knowledge of my mother's adoption and current addictive behavior, my self-realization that marriage was not going to stop my own addictive behavior—provided the context for the next step in my life: I turned to a 12-step program as a last resort. That meant having to return to God and leaving my agnosticism behind, which caused an intellectual and emotional conflict for me. I enjoyed the ambiguity of not knowing whether a Higher Power exists. I certainly did not owe a Supreme Being anything if this Supreme Being did not exist. I could live my own life in any way I pleased. But this stubborn addiction would not go away, no matter how much attention I paid to it in my psychoanalysis or at all the other times in my life when I reflected on the potential damage to my marriage, my career, and my friendships. My addiction did not care about these things. It had a mind of its own.

I had dabbled in 12-step recovery eight years earlier, having attended four meetings. At the time, I felt that "the rooms" just were just not for me. I rationalized that most of the participants were older, married, and suffering from multiple addictions. I could not locate myself among them in the rooms. In addition, my psychoanalyst thought that I was diluting our work together by seeking outside help through a 12-step program. I could understand that reasoning, but psychoanalysis was not working. After all, it had been 14 years since I began this long, strange trip with him. Certainly, a lot of good things had come out of my relationship with him—except that the addiction had only escalated. I was ready to try something else.

I turned to 12-step literature, meetings, a sponsor, prayer, meditation, and fellowship members for help. I also prioritized self-care. In my reading, I encountered a quotation from the French philosopher Voltaire that helped me to surrender to a Higher Power: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him" (Voltaire, 1919, p. 231). I interpreted this aphorism to mean that it does not matter whether a Higher Power exists or does not exist; the fact remains that I need a Benevolent Being stronger and wiser than I am to break free of this prison of addiction—a Higher Power Who cares about me and wants to protect me from

destroying myself. In short, I needed a Higher Power in my life to begin and to continue the process of recovery.

I then asked myself what this Higher Power would consist of. The 12-step literature emphasizes the "decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2012, p. 5; italics added). How did I understand God now, after almost 23 years of agnosticism? I considered exploring Unitarianism/Universalism—a broad, accepting, progressive view of God. Ultimately, however, I returned to Christianity because its primary message of hope—the promise of forgiveness of my rebellion against God and subsequent reconciliation with God through a radical act of grace, not through my own effort—still resonated with me powerfully. Christianity was also familiar to me, and I craved familiarity amid all the frightening changes I was making in my life. This Christianity would be progressive, however, not conservative evangelical Christianity. Over the next five years, my church was my weekly 12-step meeting—a group of men and women sharing from the depths of their vulnerability their struggles with addiction and with their Higher Power as well as their progress over our common disease and their growing trust in a Higher Power of their own understanding. After having tried everything else (including many so-called "solutions" not mentioned in this narrative), I gradually began to trust in the care of my Higher Power. Then a strange thing happened. I started to experience relief from my addiction. It was still there (and is still there), but by taking steps along this path of recovery, I learned that I could live without my addiction and even thrive without it. I had replaced a "false god" (Pargament, 2011, p. 137) with a "living God" (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 87) Who was concerned about me and actively involved in my life. Some persons can live secure, well-adjusted lives without trust in a Higher Power. That has not been my personal experience. I need God in my life to live a secure, well-adjusted life. I wrote this book for spiritually curious psychotherapists like me who want to help spiritually curious patients like me to live secure, well-adjusted lives.

There is an addendum to this story. I want to share how I responded to my mother's addiction in the ensuing years and how it affected me. Two or three years after I began my recovery process, I began to talk to my mother about her addiction—without mentioning anything to her or to my family about my own. Unfortunately, she had developed a troubling delusion of microscopic worms traveling underneath the skin on her arm, which made her scratch them until they bled. Inexplicably, when she went to the doctor with her complaint, they diagnosed her with scabies. They observed a rash—caused by her scratching—and just assumed that is what it was. When the doctor prescribed a cream for her, and her symptoms did not subside, the doctor finally examined her more carefully and determined that she did not, in fact, have scabies. My mother had also developed a severe paranoia that the pastor of her church was talking badly about her behind her back and trying to get rid of her as the church organist. Of course, none of this was true. In fact, the church had just held a celebration of her 25 years of service to this church. Finally, she was having dizzy spells, which, one year later, resulted in a fall in which she

hit the side of her head on her coffee table and landed in the intensive care unit for a couple of days. She turned out to be fine, but the prospect of a stroke or brain damage occupied my mind.

Talking to my mother about her addiction did not go anywhere. She claimed that she suffered from abdominal pain, and that her addictive behavior was the only method that alleviated this pain. Of course, many doctors over the years had examined her abdomen, but no one ever found anything to account for her pain. I felt betrayed, frustrated, sad, and helpless. I decided to file a complaint with the state medical board against her primary care physician, which alienated my siblings as well as my mother, who stopped talking to me. Months later, my mother reversed course, but it was too late. She (as well as my siblings) refused to cooperate with the state medical examiner, and so my complaint was discarded in the circular file. At that point, I had had enough. I completely withdrew from her. Within months of my decision to withdraw from her, I began to attend church on a weekly basis, becoming actively involved in the children's ministry. Years later, I became a Stephen Minister in my church and still later, a Stephen Leader. I remain committed to my new 12-step fellowship group and new church here in Atlanta, where my family moved last year. I am continuing my Stephen Ministry work as well as my private practice and professorship with a dual appointment at the Emory University School of Medicine and the Candler School of Theology.

My preparation for writing this book drew me closer to my Higher Power, and as a possible by-product, I repaired the insecure and broken relationship with my mother, who is in an assisted-living community overseen by a nursing staff. Unfortunately, she never did confront her addiction, but she is receiving ongoing medical monitoring. I am taking a gentler stance toward my mother after years of feeling guilty for the role I played in our lack of communication. I did not want to relive the anguish of my relationship to my father, who died before I had a chance to reconcile with him. My life is not perfect, but it is better knowing that a Higher Power is watching over me, protecting me, and loving me. I can now declare that God is my refuge (see Psalm 46:1; NIV, 1978).

Reflections on My Autobiographical Narrative

I want to reflect on certain aspects of this autobiographical narrative that illustrate my thesis, namely, that: (1) relationships to parents and relationship to God are interconnected, and (2) transforming one relationship has the potential to transform the other. At this point, I want to introduce two hypotheses that will feature prominently in this book: the correspondence hypothesis and the compensation hypothesis. These twin hypotheses will help us to make sense of my autobiographical narrative as well as the analysis of the autobiographical narratives I present in Chapters 2–5 and the case illustration in Chapter 6. As originally formulated by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) and elaborated by others (e.g., Granqvist, 2020; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2018; for an in-depth exploration, see also Goodman, 2025, Chapter 3), the correspondence hypothesis refers to the strong positive

correlation found between the quality of the attachment relationship between a person's parents and the quality of the attachment relationship to their Higher Power (I use the terms "Higher Power" and "God" interchangeably in this book). This observed correspondence seems to be most evident among those persons who are securely attached to their parents (see Chapter 2 for an overview of attachment theory). With roots in the writings of James (1902), the compensation hypothesis, on the other hand, refers to the strong negative correlation found between the quality of attachment relationship to a person's parents and the quality of attachment relationship to their Higher Power, which is most evident among those persons who are insecurely attached to their parents. In other words, the correspondence hypothesis applies mostly to securely attached persons, while the compensation hypothesis applies mostly to insecurely attached persons. The compensation hypothesis, however, has received only mixed support in the research literature (see also Goodman, 2025, Chapter 3).

Both hypotheses—the correspondence hypothesis and the compensation hypothesis—propose that relationships to parents and relationship to God are interconnected, only in opposite directions. British philosopher Popper (1959) argued that a hypothesis is scientific if it is falsifiable (or refutable), that is to say, if an empirical test can logically contradict it. These twin hypotheses of correspondence and compensation, however, seem to be unfalsifiable: every person's relationships to parents and to God would seem to fall under one of these two hypotheses. I explore this issue more extensively in Chapter 3. Adding nuance (and falsifiability) to the compensation hypothesis, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2018) suggested that persons insecurely attached to their parents from childhood *compensate* for these insecure relationships when they "cannot bear the high levels of suffering experienced sufficiently well by employing his or her usual [insecure] strategy for managing stress" (p. 934). In bearable situations of stress, however, insecurely attached persons' relationship (or nonrelationship) to God *corresponds* to these insecure parental relationships. In other words, compensation is activated *only when* an insecure attachment relationship to parents from childhood *and* high levels of stress co-occur.

This qualification provided by Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2018) circumvents the falsifiability problem inherent in the compensation hypothesis. Unfortunately, however, it does not solve the problem of determining the stress threshold when compensation is hypothesized to be activated, which no doubt depends on many factors (e.g., stress intensity, frequency, and duration; developmental phase; personality organization; defensive structure; type of insecure attachment subcategory; nature of the relationship to the significant other with whom the stress is occurring; and genetic predisposition).

We can use these two hypotheses descriptively to characterize a process that seems to be going on between attachment relationships to parents and to God. In addition to high stress levels moderating the relationship between insecure attachment relationships to caregivers from childhood and a secure attachment