Comparing Attachment Theory and Buddhist Psychology

Baljinder K. Sahdra
School of Social Sciences and Psychology
University of Western Sydney

Phillip R. Shaver
Department of Psychology
University of California, Davis

We focus on some similarities and differences between attachment theory and Buddhist psychology. Both systems highlight the importance of giving and receiving love and of minimizing anxious clinging or avoidant aloofness and suppression of unwanted mental experiences. However, the two differ in their conception of security in adulthood. Attachment theory suggests that security is rooted in mental representations of a self that has been reliably loved and cared for in close relationships. In Buddhist psychology, security is conceptualized as freedom from static or rigid views of self and others, and is cultivated by countering, often through formal meditation practices, our habitual tendencies of reifying or solidifying aspects of our ever-changing phenomenal experience. "Nonattachment" or release from mental fixations is a key construct in this process. It is empirically distinct from its Western counterpart of felt security. We discuss implications of the two systems for a unified model of optimal adult development and beneficial interventions involving social and introspective routes to reduced defensiveness, greater self- and other-oriented compassion, greater mental clarity, and more prosocial behavior.

In this article, we focus on some similarities and differences between attachment theory and Buddhist psychology. We begin with a discussion of some similarities between the two systems, including the common emphases on supportive relationships and relaxation. We then discuss important divergences, especially related to the concept of security. We also include a brief report of preliminary empirical evidence suggesting that the Buddhist notion of "nonattachment" is distinct from its Western counterpart of felt security. Finally, we discuss some directions for future research.

Back in the days when one of us (Shaver) worked on psychology of religion papers with Bernie Spilka and our shared graduate student Lee Kirkpatrick (e.g., Kirkpatrick & Shaver,

Correspondence should be sent to Baljinder K. Sahdra, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia. E-mail: b.sahdra@uws.edu.au

1990; Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985), the "religion" in the psychology of religion was usually Christianity. This was natural in what is often considered a Christian country, and in a field that often enlists American undergraduates as research participants.

An interesting development in psychological science in recent years has been the gradual importation of issues, constructs, and practices from Buddhism and Buddhist psychology (e.g., Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, & Wallace, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). This interest in Buddhism, which in its original form was viewed as a religion, seems to be partly due to the interest of many agnostic scientists in a "spiritual" practice that may be beneficial for non-religious people, but it is also due to the usefulness of Buddhist practices in clinical psychology and to the recent movement toward a more "positive" psychology (e.g., Snyder & Lopez, 2009).

The constructs from Buddhist psychology that are being considered by contemporary researchers include compassion (e.g., Lutz, Greischar, Perlman, & Davidson, 2009), self-compassion (e.g., Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts Allen, & Hancock, 2007; Neff, 2003), mindfulness (e.g., Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006), loving-kindness (e.g., Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffen, Pek, & Finkel, 2008), acceptance (e.g., Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006), and "nonattachment" or release from mental fixations (Sahdra, Shaver, & Brown, 2010). The construct of mindfulness and the use of special practices that enhance it have become popular in the treatment of depression (Kuyken et al., 2008), eating disorders (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999), substance abuse (Bowen et al., 2006), and stress-related physical diseases (e.g., psoriasis; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998). More recent evidence from basic research, including our own, demonstrates the effectiveness of meditation in enhancing sustained attention (MacLean et al., 2010), adaptive psychological functioning (Sahdra et al., 2011), and levels of stress-related biomarkers (Jacobs et al., 2011).

This importation of Buddhist psychological concepts into Western psychology raises questions about how the two different traditions compare, whether they can be productively integrated, and if so what the integration might look like. Of particular interest to us in this article are the similarities and differences between one currently influential Western framework, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), and key concepts in Buddhist psychology. Earlier work, summarized by Kirkpatrick (2005) and influenced by his early work with Spilka, made good use of attachment theory in the study of mostly Christian beliefs and practices, partly because Christians consider themselves to have a "personal" relationship with a god who is conceptualized somewhat like a large, very powerful parental figure. More recently, researchers have examined similar attachment-related processes in samples from other traditions, such as Judaism (e.g., Granqvist, Mikulincer, Gewirtz, & Shaver, 2012; Pirutinsky, 2009) and New Age spirituality (reviewed by, e.g., Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008).

Buddhism is different from other religions involving faith in god (e.g., Brahman in Hinduism and God in Abrahamic traditions). Although Tibetan Buddhism includes prayers addressing deities such as Tara and Amitabha, existence of god is explicitly denied in all forms of Buddhism including its Tibetan forms. For instance, Tenzen Gyatzo, the 14th Dalai Lama, the current spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, wrote,

> Buddhism does not accept a theory of God, or a creator. According to Buddhism, one's own actions are the creator, ultimately. Some people say that, from a certain angle, Buddhism is not a religion but rather a science of mind. Religion has much involvement with faith. Sometimes it

seems that there is quite a distance between a way of thinking based on faith and one entirely based on experiment, remaining skeptical. Unless you find something through investigation, you do not want to accept it as fact. From one viewpoint, Buddhism is a religion, from another viewpoint Buddhism is a science of mind and not a religion. Buddhism can be a bridge between these two sides. (Tenzen Gyatzo, as cited in Piburn, 1990, p. 101)

The present article adds to the growing literature on the intersection of Buddhism and science. It begins to integrate key elements from Western attachment theory and Buddhist psychology to arrive at a more complete understanding of optimal adult development than either system alone can provide.

COMMONALITIES: EMPHASES ON SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND RELAXATION

Attachment theory and the large body of empirical research it has inspired suggest that experiences in the family and in other close social relationships shape the development of a person's mind toward either "security" or "insecurity" and that there are different major forms of insecurity, which attachment researchers call anxious and avoidant attachment (or attachment-related anxiety and avoidance). Research has linked attachment security with emotional well-being or mental health, a general lack of defensiveness, lower death anxiety, more accurate social perception, more constructive close relationships (including with God; Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010), compassion and prosocial behavior, and greater tolerance for ethnic diversity (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, and Shaver & Mikulincer, 2011, for comprehensive literature reviews).

Buddhist psychology also describes ways of fostering positive emotional states and harmonious social relationships while avoiding "destructive" or "afflictive" emotional states (Goleman, 2003). At first glance, however, the paths to attaining security (according to attachment theory) or genuine happiness (according to Buddhist psychology) seem very different. Attachment theory seems to be mainly about close relationships, whereas Buddhism seems to be mostly about practices that take place within an individual's solitary mind (at the extreme, while the person is alone in a hut for months at a time). In fact, however, the theoretical outcome of supportive attachment relationships is a fairly open, objective mind and an autonomous self, which sounds individualistic, whereas Buddhism emphasizes love, compassion, a community of practitioners (the Sangha), and relationships with key teachers. As Batchelor (1997) puts it, "A culture of . . . [Buddhism] simply cannot occur without being rooted in a coherent and vital sense of community, for a matrix of friendships is the very soil in which [Buddhist] practice is cultivated" (p. 114). In other words, compassionate relationships are as important in Buddhism, if not more so, as solitary practice. Hence, both systems share an emphasis on loving, supportive social relationships.

Another similarity is the importance of minimizing clinginess and aloofness. Buddhist meditation involves maintaining a sustained, relaxed, alert attention with few lapses into drowsiness, mental laxity, or excessive excitation, and remaining open to whatever arises, without mentally grasping or suppressing it (Wallace, 2006). This is similar to attachment theory's notion of optimal functioning as a consequence of attachment security, operationalized

as low scores on measures of both attachment anxiety (concerning rejection or abandonment), a condition that involves a great deal of grasping and clinging, and attachment-related avoidance of intimacy, which has been empirically associated with suppression of unwanted thoughts and feelings (Mikulincer, Dolev, & Shaver, 2004). In short, attachment theory and Buddhist psychology have common ideas about the development of a healthy mind, and both systems highlight the importance of giving and receiving love and of minimizing anxious clinging or avoidant aloofness and suppression of unwanted mental experiences.

DIFFERENCES: DIVERGENT MEANINGS OF SECURITY

A productive blending of aspects of attachment theory and Buddhist psychology requires clarifying the meaning of adult security in the respective traditions. Ainsworth and Bowlby (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982) conceptualized the secure attachment of a child to a caregiver in terms of the child's confidence that the caregiver would be available and responsive and able to provide what attachment theory calls a "safe haven" (in times of threat or discouragement) and a "secure base" (from which to explore the world and acquire new skills). Later, Main and colleagues (e.g., Hesse, 2008; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), which is a method for classifying adults as secure or insecure with respect to attachment. Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) developed questionnaire measures of the two major forms of adult attachment insecurity: anxiety and avoidance. Research using these measures has shown that more secure adults are more effective as parents, have more satisfying romantic and marital relationships, and have better relationships with colleagues in work settings (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2011).

In other words, attachment theory and research emphasize the quality of a person's relationships across the lifespan and the mental states associated with a capacity for good relationships. Attachment theory was intended to be a lifespan theory of personality development, but because Bowlby and Ainsworth focused most of their attention on parent–child relationships, they did not provide a model of optimal adult outcomes. Research using either the AAI (reviewed by Hesse, 2008) or Brennan et al.'s (1998) Experiences in Close Relationships Scales (reviewed by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) have illuminated some of the psychological features of adults who are relatively secure with respect to attachment: Secure adults are, for example, more coherent, objective but sympathetic, and forgiving when discussing their parents' behavior toward them during childhood; they are less defensive and self-protective; they are more compassionate toward others who are suffering and more willing to take personal risks to help them. From all of these qualities one could begin to fashion a prototype of the secure mind, but this has not been attempted in detail so far. (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, did end their book with a discussion of the relation between attachment theory's portrait of the secure adult and Rogers's, 1961, classic description of what he called "the fully functioning personality," a landmark within the field of humanistic psychology, a precursor of today's positive psychology movement.)

Buddhist psychology offers a different conception of security. In this tradition, people's efforts to find security in relationships, careers, possessions, wealth, or reputation are seen as errors in thinking and mistaken decisions in one's pursuit of happiness. When people hope that valued objects and relationships will never change or fail, such "zones of safety" and "illusion

of security" lead to suffering (Chödrön, 2003, pp. 23–24), because human beings naturally change, age, get sick, and die; in fact, everything changes, and nothing is completely stable, certain, or immutable. Buddhist psychology rejects the idea of a stable, permanent source of security either within a person (e.g., a soul) or outside of a person (e.g., an omnipresent god). In Johansson's (1979) words,

> Bereft of these two stabilizing factors, the gods and the soul, he [the Buddha] chose a very different way to security.... [He] chose to accept the perceptual world in all its richness just as it appeared to be: endless sequences of conscious processes. (p. 24)

A systematic investigation of the moment-to-moment phenomenal experience, through careful observation in meditation and logical analysis, is thought to be important for developing a more accurate understanding of the ever-changing nature of reality. In Buddhist psychology, then, a more reliable source of security is theorized to be "wisdom" defined as understanding the ever-changing, dependently arising phenomenal experience in the present moment (e.g., see the dialogue between Paul Ekman and Tenzen Gyatzo, the 14th Dalai Lama, in their 2008 book, *Emotional Awareness*).

The Buddhist notion of dependent arising and continual flux is very compatible with the assumption shared by modern empirical psychologists that any given psychological phenomenon exists in the context of a complex nexus of causes and conditions. For empirical psychologists, tightly controlled experiments can help to identify some of the causes of a psychological phenomenon, although they do so by controlling or ignoring many other possible influences. For Buddhist practitioners, first-person "experiments" are based on increasing familiarity with various mental processes observed in the "laboratory" of solitary meditation (Wallace, 2011). In theory, meditators can gain insight into the connections among the myriad aspects of their present experience. In practice, it is not possible to identify every possible cause of an observed phenomenon or even know with certainty that personal observations represent solid truths. However, with sufficiently relaxed, focused attention, meditators do learn to observe carefully how one experience leads to another, thereby gaining insight into the dependently arising nature of their experience. They learn, for example, that anxiety exists in dependence on repeated troubling thoughts, say, about a painful childhood memory. Although anxiety or any given mental phenomenon may feel like a solid, immutable state, careful study of phenomenal experience reveals that the mental state does not have a uniform character and does not exist in isolation. In that sense, anxiety or any mental phenomenon is "empty" insofar as it has no inherent, isolated existence (Aronson, 2004).

The Dalai Lama, in a commentary on a Buddhist text on emptiness, *The Heart Sutra*, describes how emptiness and dependent origination are synonymous:

> Emptiness does not imply non-existence; emptiness implies the emptiness of intrinsic existence, which necessarily implies dependent origination. Dependence and interdependence is the nature of all things; things and events come into being only as a result of causes and conditions. (Tenzen Gyatzo, the 14th Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 117)

As one's Buddhist practice matures, self-identity is called into question. No matter how hard and long meditators try, they are unable to find, within their experience, a core, solid, static, permanent entity they might call "the self." This is consistent with the modern scientific

understanding of the self as a diffuse construct lacking a central location in the brain (Metzinger, 2003). In meditation, it is certainly possible to identify mental representations of the self, but the important point is that meditators realize that their mental representations are not static or stable. Theoretically, this kind of analysis allows meditators to identify and overcome causes and conditions of their suffering. Hence, "wisdom" or understanding of dependent arising of observed phenomena is theoretically tied to "compassion" defined as a desire to alleviate one's own and others' suffering. In Buddhist psychology, wisdom and compassion are conceptualized as complementary "skills" that become proceduralized through practice. The Dalai Lama describes this process as follows:

> First, you have to have some knowledge, whether on the basis of reading or hearing. In Buddhism, it is considering the interdependent nature of one's interest and others' interests, the shared humanity, the fundamental equality of desiring happiness and overcoming suffering. So the first stage is the knowledge. You have to either hear it or read it, or someone has to tell you. Then, you need to constantly reflect and internalize this knowledge through reflection, constant reflection or meditation, to a point where it [becomes] a conviction. It becomes integrated into your state of mind, and you are deeply convinced of it. Once you have that conviction, you cannot leave it at that: You need to constantly remind yourself and reflect upon it, familiarize yourself with it, cultivate the habit, make it part of your mental habit. Then you will get to a point where it becomes spontaneous. The moment you think about others, compassion becomes effortless. (Tenzen Gyatzo & Ekman, 2008, p. 156–157)

Wisdom and compassion are seen as reliable sources of security. This Buddhist version of security is often described as "sukha," a term that has no direct translation in English. The Dalai Lama and Ekman described it as follows:

> In Buddhist literature, sukha is defined as a state of flourishing that arises from mental balance and insight into the nature of reality. Rather than a fleeting emotion or mood aroused by sensory and conceptual stimuli, sukha is an enduring trait that arises from a mind in a state of equilibrium and entails a conceptually unstructured and unfiltered awareness of the true nature of reality. We do not have anything like that concept in English. That does not mean it does not exist, but we do not have a name for it. (Tenzen Gyatzo & Ekman, 2008, p. 33–34)

In short, Buddhist psychology offers a very different view of security, one that emphasizes introspective routes to removing the hindrances to genuine security (in the Buddhist sense) by minimizing our tendencies to look for security in something permanent, to solidify our concepts of self, others, life in general.

The desire to find relief from one's own suffering is thought to be a universal human desire. In Buddhist terminology, "attachment" to unhealthy fixations on mental representations causes suffering because the reification of mental representations (thinking of them as solid, static, and permanent) is at odds with the ever-changing, interdependent phenomenal world. The theorized remedy is "nonattachment" or release from mental fixations (Sahdra et al., 2010). Thus, we encounter the paradox that "attachment security" or "secure attachment" is considered ideal or optimal in a major stream of Western psychology, attachment theory, whereas the ideal or optimal state in Buddhist psychology is called "nonattachment."

Phenomenologically, nonattachment has the subjective quality of ease and balance, not feeling "trapped" or dissatisfied, not being stuck or fixated on mental representations. It is

important to note that lack of fixation on mental representations does not imply lack of connectedness to others or avoidance of intimacy in relationships. Nonattachment therefore differs importantly from *avoidant attachment*, which includes aversion to intimacy and interdependence in close relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Nonattachment is also distinct from *anxious attachment*, which involves intense concern with rejection and abandonment in close relationships.

To empirically examine the relation between the Buddhist concept of nonattachment and attachment theory's concepts of anxious and avoidant attachment, we recently designed a Nonattachment Scale (NAS) and showed that it has good psychometric properties in various American student and community samples (Sahdra et al., 2010). Consistent with our theorizing, we found statistically significant and moderately sized negative correlations (around −.50) between nonattachment and anxious attachment, and smaller but still significant negative correlations (around −.20) between nonattachment and avoidant attachment. Although these variables from two different psychological traditions are related, they are conceptually distinct. From a theoretical standpoint, nonattachment to rigid personal views is a more general construct than the absence of anxious or avoidant attachment, and it applies to mental representations both within and beyond the close relationship context.

BRIEF EMPIRICAL REPORT

Recently, we conducted a more direct test of whether the Buddhist construct of nonattachment can predict a theoretically relevant variable, closed-mindedness, above and beyond avoidant and anxious attachment. Because nonattachment is a relatively new construct in social psychology and the NAS is a new scale, it is important to test its predictive validity in the context of previously well-validated measures of anxious and avoidant attachment, to see if it adds anything to our understanding of closed-mindedness beyond what we might be able to predict using measures of anxious and avoidant attachment (and their opposite, attachment security). Closed-mindedness is an important variable for this purpose because it is a well-established construct in social psychology (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), and, as Buddhist psychology suggests, it theoretically is inversely related to nonattachment.

Closed-mindedness is defined as "an unwillingness to have one's knowledge confronted, hence, rendered insecure, by alternative opinions or inconsistent evidence" (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994, p. 1050). It is an important component of what social psychologists call "cognitive seizing and freezing" (Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Information that fits existing cognitive-emotional structures tends to be "seized" in that it is well encoded and deemed valid. In other words, people usually believe what they want to believe, as long as it is situated within certain reality constraints (Kunda, 1990). Under conditions of cognitive "freezing," any new information that is inconsistent with preexisting beliefs or motives tends to be closed off—that is, unattended, rejected, or forgotten. If it is absorbed at all, it is distorted in accordance with current motives (Bar-Tal, 2007; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1997).

Buddhist psychology suggests that one way to "unfreeze" cognitive rigidity is to loosen the tight mental grip on one's beliefs. This should be easier for nonattached individuals to do because they have a lower tendency to reify mental representations (Sahdra et al., 2010). Nonattachment, in the Buddhist sense, should minimize "cognitive seizing and freezing"

because it should lessen the need to fit one's views about oneself and others into a static mold and the need to avoid or resist information that conflicts with preexisting beliefs. In other words, nonattached individuals should generally be less closed-minded.

We recently tested this hypothesis in a small study, which we describe briefly here. Fifty-seven college students completed an online survey for which they received research credit in a psychology course. The measures included our NAS (Sahdra et al., 2010), containing 30 items designed to assess the Buddhist construct of nonattachment, conceptualized as release from mental fixations. Illustrative items include "I can enjoy the pleasures of life without feeling sad or frustrated when they end"; "Instead of avoiding or denying life's difficulties, I face up to them"; and "I can accept the flow of events in my life without hanging onto them or pushing them away." We also included the 36-item Experiences in Close Relationships Scales (Brennan et al., 1998) to measure attachment anxiety (e.g., "I worry about being rejected or abandoned") and avoidance (e.g., "I don't feel comfortable opening up to others"). Finally we included an eight-item measure of Closed-Mindedness (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), with items such as "I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view."

Replicating our previous studies (Sahdra et al., 2010), nonattachment was negatively correlated with anxious attachment, $r(57) = -.32$, $p = .02$, indicating that Buddhist nonattachment is, to an extent, similar to the opposite of attachment anxiety. As hypothesized, nonattachment was strongly related to closed-mindedness, $r(57) = -.56$, $p < .001$, and anxious attachment was positively correlated with closed-mindedness, $r(57) = .31$, $p = .02$. Avoidant attachment was not significantly related to nonattachment, $r(57) = -.15$, $p = .27$, or closed-mindedness, $r(57) = .10$, $p = .48$.

We also conducted a hierarchical regression analysis in which the two dimensions of insecure attachment were entered in the first step and nonattachment was entered in the second step. The R^2 for the first step was .11, $F(2, 54) = 3.38$, $p = .04$. In that step, anxious attachment was significantly related to closed-mindedness, $\beta = .32$, $t(56) = 2.50$, $p = .02$, whereas avoidant attachment was not, $\beta = .13$, $t(56) = 1.02$, $p = .31$. When nonattachment was entered into the regression equation, the R^2 for the full model increased to .34, which was a significant increase, R^2 change $= .22$, $F(3, 53) = 8.91$, $p < .001$. The standardized regression coefficient for nonattachment was negative and highly significant, $\beta = -.51$, $t(56) = -4.22$, $p < .001$, indicating its ability to uniquely predict lower levels of closed-mindedness. Furthermore, anxious attachment no longer significantly predicted closed-mindedness, $\beta = .15$, $t(56) = 1.26$, $p = .21$, and there was still no relationship between avoidant attachment and closed-mindedness, $\beta = .04$, $t(56) = 0.32$, $p = .75$.

The findings suggest that Buddhist nonattachment predicts closed-mindedness, as theorized, even after controlling for anxious and avoidant attachment. The results provide initial support for our hypothesis that nonattachment to (or lack of an unhealthy fixation on) mental representations discourages closed-mindedness. This is an encouraging finding because the NAS and the measure of closed-mindedness are not at all semantically redundant; the relation between them therefore appears to be substantive. Closed-mindedness is rooted in a desire to maintain a sense of permanence of cherished personal beliefs, presumably to attain epistemic security (Kruglanski, 2004). In contrast, nonattachment is based on a sense of impermanence of all mental representations, *regardless* of whether they are security enhancing or insecurity inducing (Sahdra et al., 2010).

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In Buddhist psychology, security is conceptualized as freedom from static or rigid views of self and others (McLeod, 2007). Perhaps counterintuitive to some Western psychologists, the most reliable source of security, according to Buddhist psychology, is the impermanent and interdependent nature of our phenomenal experiences in all their complexity (Johansson, 1979). Cultivation of security, in the Buddhist framework, involves countering, often through formal meditation practices, our habitual tendencies of reifying or solidifying aspects of our ever-changing phenomenal experience. This emphasis on ever-changing phenomena with complex sets of causes and conditions implies that there cannot be a stable, permanent source of security within a person (e.g., a soul) or even outside a person (e.g., an omnipresent god). It is theoretically impossible to find lasting security in mental representations. Here, Buddhist psychology differs from attachment theory, which does not focus on reification of mental representations.

There is no indication in attachment theory that optimal security depends on challenging all of one's social-cognitive representations, although some of the markers of security in the AAI (see review by Hesse, 2008) come close. The AAI predicts the security of an interviewee's infant child in the Strange Situation assessment procedure (Ainsworth et al., 1978), and a parent is coded "secure and autonomous with respect to attachment" if he or she answers an interviewer's questions about childhood relationships with parents in ways that indicate openness to memories and emotions combined with a lack of rigidity in talking about them. That is, the secure parent seems not to defend against even painful emotional memories and is open to questioning their correctness or completeness. The secure parent discusses childhood experiences reasonably, showing what the AAI scoring manual (Main, Goldwyn, & Hesse, 2003) calls "metacognitive monitoring," "coherence of discourse," and coherence of mind. In contrast, interviewees assigned a dismissing (i.e., avoidant) AAI classification often have a static, highly generalized (sometimes idealized) representation of self and parents, and speakers assigned a preoccupied (i.e., anxious) classification often offer an overly simplified or "canned" description of parents (e.g., "My mother is borderline"). These issues have not been explored very fully by social/personality psychologists who use self-report attachment measures, and it would be interesting and worthwhile to study AAI classifications in relation to our measure of nonattachment.

Buddhist psychology emphasizes introspective awareness and relinquishing the tendency to reify concepts of self and others, because such reified mental representations are seen as hindrances to a secure and genuinely happy life. Practitioners learn that the self is not a solid, static entity that needs to be defended but rather multiple streams of phenomenal experience emerging in dependence on complex causes and conditions, some of which foster "grasping" and dissatisfaction while others involve "nonattachment" and satisfaction. Driven by compassion (to alleviate suffering), insights into dependent arising allow meditators to abandon mental habits that lead to suffering and choose those that lead to satisfaction. Nonattachment or release from mental fixations seems to be a key theoretical outcome in this larger Buddhist framework of cultivation of lasting security and genuine happiness. Preliminary evidence indicates that this Buddhist construct of optimal functioning is empirically distinct from its Western counterpart of felt security. We conducted our (brief) study using an American sample, but future studies should employ the NAS in Buddhist cultures as well, where it might produce even stronger results. Future research should clarify these different approaches to security

and perhaps move us toward a better conception of optimal adult development. The two different theories have different implications for beneficial interventions. Attachment theory implies that security can be obtained through improvements in relationships, and for this reason it is one foundation of contemporary marital therapy (e.g., Johnson, 2003). Buddhist psychology, including the concept of nonattachment, implies that security can be obtained through a meditative study of one's own mind. If these two approaches are combined, they might have a joint effect larger and more comprehensive than either one alone.

One way to think of the Buddhist framework is that human beings, through introspection and a long history of trial and error, have identified the kinds of mental habits that lead to suffering and the kinds that lead to relief from suffering. The Western framework of attachment theory has instead taken a third-person, or outsiders', perspective on social processes that lead to an open and relatively fear-free mind. It is ironic that Buddhism arose in a generally collectivistic south Asian culture and yet emphasizes individual exploration of the mind, whereas attachment theory arose in an individualistic culture that had failed to understand the importance of social relations. (Bowlby was originally interested in improving hospital practices that separated children and adults when one member of a family was hospitalized for medical reasons, leaving children in states of intense anxiety and grief.) It may now be possible to construct a more complete model of optimal adult development that acknowledges social and introspective routes to reduced defensiveness, greater self- and other-oriented compassion, greater mental clarity, and more prosocial behavior. This more complete model might allow secular individuals, who are less inclined to follow religiously prescribed forms of behavior, to attain some of the goals of religion, such as peace of mind and prosocial behavior, without relying on a reified god or soul.

This might be a valuable step in the journey from religion per se to a psychology of prosocial ideals associated with religion at its best, a journey that Bernie Spilka helped to promote by making religion a legitimate focus of psychological study. We are grateful to him for opening and holding open a door for everyone interested in the psychology of religion and religion-related concepts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: Assessed in the Strange Situation and at home.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Aronson, H. B. (2004). *Buddhist practice on Western ground: Reconciling Eastern ideals and Western psychology.* Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Hopkins, J., Krietemeyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self-report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment, 13,* 27–45.

Bar-Tal, D. (2007). Sociopsychological foundations of intractable conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 50,* 1430–1453.

Batchelor, S. (1997). *Buddhist without beliefs: A contemporary guide to awakening.* New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Bowen, S., Witkiewitz, K., Dillworth, T. M., Chawla, N., Simpson, T. L., Ostafin, B. D., . . . Marlatt, G. A. (2006). Mindfulness meditation and substance abuse in an incarcerated popultion. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 20*, 343–347.

Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss: Vol. I. Attachment.* New York, NY: Basic Books. (Original work published 1969)

Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview. In J. A. Simpson, & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 46–76). New York, NY: Guilford.

Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. R. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford.

Chödrön, P. (2003). *Comfortable with uncertainty.* Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Ekman, P., Davidson, R. J., Ricard, M., & Wallace, B. A. (2005). Buddhist and psychological perspectives on emotions and well-being. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*, 59–63.

Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*, 1045–1062.

Giner-Sorolla, R. & Chaiken, S. (1997). Selective use of heuristic and systematic processing under defense motivation. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*, 84–97.

Goleman, D. (2003). *Destructive emotions.* New York, NY: Bantam.

Granqvist, P., & Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2008). Attachment and religious representations and behavior. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed., pp. 906–933). New York, NY: Guilford.

Granqvist, P., Mikulincer, M., Gewirtz, V., & Shaver, P. R. (2012). Experimental findings on God as an attachment figure: Normative processes and moderating effects of internal working models. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 103*, 804–818.

Granqvist, P., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2010). Religion as attachment: Normative processes and individual differences. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14*, 49–59.

Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J., Bond, F., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Model, processes, and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 44*, 1–25.

Hesse, E. (2008). The Adult Attachment Interview: Protocol, method of analysis, and empirical studies. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (2nd ed., pp. 552–598). New York, NY: Guilford.

Jacobs, T. L., Epel, E. S., Jue, L., Blackburn, E. H., Wolkowitz, O. M., Bridwell, D. A., . . . Saron, C. D. (2011). Intensive meditation training, immune cell telomerase activity, and psychological mediators. *Psychoneuroendocrinology, 36*, 664–681.

Johansson, R. E. A. (1979). *The dynamic psychology of early Buddhism.* London, UK: Curzon Press.

Johnson, S. M. (2003). Attachment theory: A guide for couple therapy. In S. M. Johnson & V. E. Wiffen (Eds.), *Attachment processes in couple and family therapy* (pp. 103–123). New York, NY: Guilford.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses.* New York, NY: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J., Wheeler, E., Light, T., Skillings, A., Scharf, M. J., Cropley, T. G., . . . Bernhard, J. D. (1998). Influence of a mindfulness meditation-based stress reduction intervention on rates of skin clearing in patients with moderate to severe psoriasis undergoing photo therapy (UVB) and photochemotherapy (PUVA). *Psychosomatic Medicine, 60*, 625–632.

Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2005). *Attachment, evolution, and the psychology of religion.* New York, NY: Guilford.

Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Shaver, P. R. (1990). Attachment theory and religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 29*, 315–334.

Kristeller, J. L., & Hallett, C. B. (1999). An exploratory study of a meditation-based intervention for binge eating disorder. *Journal of Health Psychology, 4*, 357–363.

Kruglanski, A. W. (2004). *The psychology of closed-mindedness.* New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Kruglanski, A. W., & Webster, D. M. (1996). Motivated closing of the mind: "Seizing" and "freezing." *Psychological Review, 103*, 263–283.

Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin, 108*, 480–498.

Kuyken, W., Byford, S., Taylor, R. S., Watkins, E., Holde, E., White, K., . . . Teasdale, J. D. (2008). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy to prevent relapse in recurrent depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 76*, 966–978.

Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Batts Allen, A., & Hancock, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 887–904.

Lutz, A., Greischar, L. L., Perlman, D., & Davidson, R. J. (2009). BOLD signal in insula is differentially related to cardiac function during compassion meditation in experts vs. novices. *NeuroImage, 47*, 1038–1046.

MacLean, K. A., Ferrer, E., Aichele, S. R., Bridwell, D. A., Zanesco, A. P., Jacobs, T. L., ... Saron, C. D. (2010). Intensive meditation training leads to improvements in perceptual discrimination and sustained attention. *Psychological Science, 21*, 829–839.

Main, M., Goldwyn, R., & Hesse, E. (2003). *Adult Attachment Classification System version 7.2*. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.

Main, M., Kaplan, N., & Cassidy, J. (1985). Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to the level of representation. *Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development, 50*, 66–104.

McLeod, K. (2007). *An arrow to the heart: A commentary on the Heart Sutra.* Victoria, British Columbia, Canada: Trafford.

Metzinger, T. (2003). *The ego tunnel: The science of the mind and the myth of the self.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Mikulincer, M., Dolev, T., & Shaver, P. R. (2004). Attachment-related strategies during thought-suppression: Ironic rebounds and vulnerable self-representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*, 940–956.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity, 2*, 85–102.

Piburn, S. (1990). *The Dalia Lama: Policy of kindness* (an anthology of writings by and about the Dalai Lama). Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion.

Pirutinsky, S. (2009). Conversion and attachment insecurity among Orthodox Jews. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 19*, 200–206.

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Sahdra, B. K., MacLean, K. A., Shaver, P. R., Ferrer, E., Jacobs, T. L., Rosenberg, E., ... Wallace, B. A. (2011). Response inhibition enhancedăby intensive meditation training predicts improved adaptive socio-emotional functioning. *Emotion, 11*, 299–312.

Sahdra, B. K., Shaver, P. R., & Brown, K. W. (2010). A scale to measure nonattachment: A Buddhist complement to Western research on attachment and adaptive functioning. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 92*, 1–12.

Shaver, P. R., & Mikulincer, M. (2011). Attachment theory: The mind viewed in its social-relational context. In P. Van Lange, A. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 160–179). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (Eds.). (2009). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Spilka, B., Shaver, P. R., & Kirkpatrick, L. (1985). A general attribution theory for the psychology of religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 24*, 1–20.

Tenzen Gyatzo (Dalai Lama XIV). (2005). *Essence of the Heart Sutra: The Dalai Lama's Heart of Wisdom teachings* (Thupten Jinpa, Trans.). Boston, MA: Wisdom.

Tenzen Gyatzo (Dalai Lama XIV), & Ekman, P. (2008). *Emotional awareness: Overcoming the obstacles to psychological balance and compassion.* New York, NY: Times Books.

Wallace, B. A. (2006). *The attention revolution.* Somerville, MA: Wisdom.

Wallace, B. A. (2011). *Meditations of a Buddhist skeptic: A Manifesto for the mind sciences and contemplative practice.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Wallace, B. A., & Shapiro, S. L. (2006). Mental balance and well-being: Building bridges between Buddhism and Western psychology. *American Psychologist, 61*, 690–701.

Webster, D. M., & Kruglanski, A. W. (1994). Individual differences in need for cognitive closure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 1049–1062.