I Deserve Better and God Knows It! Psychological Entitlement as a Robust Predictor of Anger at God

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Anger at God has begun to receive empirical attention as a psychological construct. Studies have shown that anger at God is common, and is often associated with various indicators of psychological distress. Past research has demonstrated that multiple aspects of personality, including psychological entitlement, are related to anger at God. The goal of the present study was to evaluate whether psychological entitlement is robustly associated with anger at God, even when diverse aspects of personality are statistically controlled. We tested this hypothesis in two groups: an undergraduate sample ($n = 413$) and an adult web sample ($n = 148$). Results provided strong, consistent support for our hypothesis: psychological entitlement consistently emerged as a unique predictor of anger at God, even when controlling for the Big Five factors of personality and narcissistic entitlement. These findings strongly demonstrate that psychological entitlement is a robust predictor of anger toward God, beyond previously established predictors.

Keywords: anger at God, religion, spirituality, spiritual struggle, entitlement, narcissism, personality

Recent research has suggested that certain personality traits predict struggles in spiritual life (e.g., Ano & Pargament, 2012; Wood et al., 2010). Many studies have shown associations between personality, religiousness, and spirituality (e.g., Piedmont, 1999; Piedmont, Ciarcrochi, Dy-Liacco, & Williams, 1999; for reviews, see Piedmont & Wilkins, 2013; Rose & Exline, 2012; Saroglou, 2002), However, to date, little research has examined individual differences in the experience of spiritual struggle. Our aim was to examine the role of psychological entitlement, a trait characterized by a pervasive sense that one deserves more than other people (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004) in predicting a specific type of spiritual struggle: anger at God. Building on a prior study that showed a positive association between psychological entitlement and anger at God (Wood et al., 2010), we sought to test the robustness of this relationship. Our aim was to determine whether psychological entitlement, with its elements of antagonism and perceptions of deserving special treatment, would emerge as a robust predictor of anger toward God even when other personality factors were controlled.

Spiritual Struggle and Anger at God

Within recent decades, the psychology of religion and spirituality has blossomed into a burgeoning field. Volumes of literature now document the positive effects of religious belief and practice, as well as private forms of spirituality, on the individual (Myers, 2012). Religious involvement is often associated with better health outcomes, longer life, greater levels of happiness, and fewer interpersonal conflicts (Myers, 2012).

Despite their many benefits, religion and spirituality also include the potential for struggle (e.g., Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000; Grubbs, Sessoms, Wheeler, & Volk, 2010; Wortmann, Park, & Edmondson, 2011; for reviews, see Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Exline, 2013; Exline & Rose, 2005; Pargament, Murray-Swank, Magyar, & Ano, 2005; Pargament, 2007). These struggles can be highly varied. For example, some struggles center on issues with organized religion, such as doubts about religious teachings (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997) or feeling offended by members of a religious group (e.g., Ellison, Krause, Shepherd, & Chaves, 2009). Other struggles, though sometimes shaped by religious teachings, center on more private spiritual issues. For example, some people experience excessive guilt about personal moral transgressions (e.g., Abramowitz, Huppert, Cohen, Tolin, & Cahill, 2002; Grubbs et al., 2010), and others experience divine struggles (e.g., Exline, 2013; Pargament, 2007), which involve conflicts or distress centered on thoughts about God.

Recent studies of anger at God (e.g., Exline, Park, Smyth, & Carey, 2011) have demonstrated that this form of divine struggle is very common, and is often experienced in response to a wide variety of life circumstances. Severe stressors, such as natural disasters, disease, or the death of loved ones, can trigger anger at God (Exline et al., 2011; Exline & Grubbs, 2011). However, less severe events, such as the death of a pet, may also lead to anger at God (Exline & Grubbs, 2011). Despite this variety in the types of situations giving rise to anger at God, certain triggering themes consistently emerge. Perceptions of divine injustice are often associated with anger at God, as are perceptions of being wronged or
unfairly victimized by a deity (Exline et al., 2011). Both of these themes find parallels in interpersonal anger, in that perceived injustice and perceived victimization are both strongly associated with interpersonal anger (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Notions of victimization, whether interpersonal or divine, often trigger volatile responses that can ultimately develop into anger at the perceived aggressor. When individuals experience injustices or slights that can be attributed to a divine figure, anger at God is a plausible response.

Anger at God has shown consistent links with indicators of emotional distress, including depression (e.g., Edmondson, Park, Chaudoir, & Wortmann, 2008; Strelan, Acton, & Patrick, 2009; Wood et al., 2010), anxiety (e.g., Exline, Yali, & Lobel, 1999; Exline et al., 2011), lower spiritual well-being (Hall & Edwards, 2002), and poorer physical health (e.g., Fitchett, Rybarczyk, DeMarco, & Nicholas, 1999; Wood et al., 2010). Anger focused on God may also be a significant source of internal conflict, because people often see such anger as morally wrong (Exline, Kaplan, & Grubbs, 2012) and may be reluctant to admit these feelings to themselves, God, or others (Exline & Grubbs, 2011). Anger toward God is closely associated with other forms of spiritual struggle and negative religious coping (e.g., Hall & Edwards, 1996, 2002; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998; Wood et al., 2010), which in turn are associated with greater emotional distress (for reviews, see Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Exline, 2013; Pargament et al., 2005) and even with higher mortality rates (Pargament, Koenig, Taraleshwar, & Hahn, 2004). As such, anger at God seems to have relevance in both research and clinical settings. Even so, research in this area is still in its early stages, and many aspects of anger at God (including the predictive role of personality factors) have yet to be thoroughly studied.

Individual Differences, Entitlement, and Anger at God

Given the role that personality variables can play in individual emotional experience (Tobin, Graziano, Vanman, & Tassinary, 2000) and the influences they have on religious experiences (e.g., Rose & Exline, 2012; Saroglou, 2002), it stands to reason that they would contribute to the experience of anger at God as well. This notion was supported, in part, by two earlier studies: Wood et al. (2010) demonstrated that anger at God is positively correlated with neuroticism, trait anger, and psychological entitlement and is negatively correlated with conscientiousness. Also, Ano and Pargament (2012) found that neuroticism and trait anger both predicted higher levels of spiritual struggle (broadly defined). In conducting the present study, we built on these prior studies by examining the relations between several personality variables and anger at God. Our primary interest was in psychological entitlement, with the aim of evaluating whether its association with anger at God would remain significant when controlling for other personality variables.

Entitlement

The main aim of the present study was to evaluate the robustness of the association between entitlement and anger at God. At the core of entitlement is the belief that one deserves or is entitled to more than other people (Campbell et al., 2004). This pervasive belief extends across situations, representing a general approach to life and interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, it is not necessarily related to any performance or behavior that would naturally lead to the special goods, treatment, or circumstances that the individual expects. Coinciding with this attitude of deservingness is the distinct possibility for the violation of that expectation. In other words, despite their ideas of deservingness, entitled individuals are likely to experience circumstances in which they are not given what they perceive as rightfully theirs. When such violations occur, negative (and perhaps volatile) reactions are possible. Indeed, highly entitled individuals tend to be angry, aggressive, and demanding of those individuals around them, and they have difficulty forgiving others for perceived slights (Campbell et al., 2004; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004).

When these prototypical characteristics of the entitled person are applied to an individual’s religious and spiritual experiences, conflict is likely to result. More specifically, entitled individuals are likely to experience circumstances in which they feel that life itself is unfair or that grand circumstances are not providing them with the things they believe they deserve. Because religious individuals often attribute ultimate causality for a wide range of positive and negative events to God (Beck & Taylor, 2008; Exline et al., 2011; Gray & Wegner, 2010; Turell & Thomas, 2001), they could easily attribute difficult life events to God. Should such attributions be made, a wide variety of reactions would be possible. However, should an entitled individual make such attributions, anger at God would be a logical consequence. This supposition maps onto the previously mentioned associations between perceived divine injustice and anger at God. Entitled individuals should be more likely to construe events as evidence of divine injustice than nonentitled individuals. As such, one would expect a positive association between entitlement and anger at God.

In evaluating the relation between entitlement and anger at God, some attention must be given to the type of entitlement being emphasized. A distinction has been made between psychological entitlement and narcissistic entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004; Pryor, Miller, & Gaughan, 2008). Narcissistic entitlement has been studied for several decades as a distinct component of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988). It is linked with heightened anger and aggression (Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008), antisocial traits (Pryor et al., 2008), and low levels of forgiveness (Exline et al., 2004; Strelan, 2007). However, despite these robust links with various constructs, the measurement of narcissistic entitlement has been criticized on various grounds (e.g., Brown, Budzek, & Tambsorki, 2009; Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008; Miller, Price, & Campbell, 2012; Miller & Campbell, 2011).

Although narcissism, as measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory—40 (NPI-40), is a relevant clinical concept (Miller et al., 2012), the specific measurement of its components, such as entitlement, has been fraught with difficulty and plagued by empirical concerns such as poor reliability (Brown et al., 2009; Brown & Tambsorki, 2011). Concerns about the NPI’s factor structure and reliability have reduced its use in recent entitlement research (e.g., Kuharych, Deary, & Austin, 2004). In contrast, the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) has been established as a valid and reliable single-factor entitlement measure (Campbell et al., 2004). In keeping with this reasoning, we focused our main predictions on psychological entitlement; however, we examined narcissistic entitlement as well to maintain a link to past research.
The exact relation between psychological entitlement and spirituality/religiosity has not received much attention to date. However, there is some research documenting a link between narcissism and spirituality (see Sandage & Moe, 2011, for a review). Much of this research has focused on narcissism as it contrasts with humility, which is a prized virtue in many faith systems (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Rowatt et al., 2006; Sandage & Moe, 2011). There is also a body of research on the construct of spiritual grandiosity, which is analogous to a form of spiritual narcissism (Hall & Edwards, 1996, 2002). Other studies have documented a negative association between religiosity and narcissism (Sandage, Worthington, Hight, & Berry, 2000; Wink, Dillon, & Fay, 2005). Specifically, narcissism consistently demonstrates a negative relation with intrinsic religiosity (Watson, Hood, Foster, & Morris, 1988; Watson, Jones, & Morris, 2004). Taken together, these studies support the idea of a connection between a narcissistic personality (which often includes a sense of entitlement) and difficulties around religion and spirituality.

When these findings on narcissism, religiosity, and spirituality are considered alongside the findings on psychological entitlement and anger (Campbell et al., 2004), it seems reasonable to predict that entitlement would predict greater anger at God. To date, one article (Wood et al., 2010) has documented an association between anger toward God and psychological entitlement. Our primary aim was to see whether the predictive role of psychological entitlement would predict greater anger at God. To date, one article (Wood et al., 2010) has documented an association between anger toward God and psychological entitlement. Our primary aim was to see whether the predictive role of psychological entitlement would remain robust when controlling for several other personality predictors of anger toward God, as described next.

Other Personality Predictors of Anger Toward God

Following prior work (Ano & Pargament, 2012; Wood et al., 2010), we predicted that anger at God would be associated with heightened neuroticism, because neuroticism is often associated with anger in various forms (Martin et al., 1999; Martin, Watson, & Wan, 2000). We also expected to find a positive relation between anger at God and trait anger, a finding that has been documented previously (Exline et al., 1999; Wood et al., 2010; see also Ano & Pargament, 2012). Finally, we expected to find negative associations between anger at God and agreeableness. This association was not documented by Wood et al. (2010), perhaps because their study used an abbreviated measure of the Big Five that used 2-item subscales. We expected a link between agreeableness and anger at God because agreeableness is generally inversely associated with anger, aggression, and grudge holding (Brown, 2003; Exline et al., 2004). Although we expected all of these personality factors to correlate with anger toward God, our primary prediction was that the link between psychological entitlement and anger toward God would remain significant when these other factors were controlled.

The Present Study: Overview

We predicted that anger at God both as a general concept (e.g., Wood et al., 2010) and as a reaction to specific life events (e.g., Exline et al., 2011), would be positively associated with psychological entitlement. We expected to replicate Wood et al.’s (2010) findings about general anger at God, and we also extended our focus to situational anger at God, which had not previously been examined. Furthermore, we predicted that psychological entitle-

Sample 1: Participants and Procedure

Participants in the first sample were undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a mid-sized private university in the Midwest. All were granted partial course credit for their participation. Other means of obtaining such credit were provided to all students, and participation in the study was completely voluntary. An initial sample of 532 individuals completed the online survey Personality, Beliefs, and Behavior. Because this study focused on emotions toward God, only participants who endorsed some belief in God (at least 1 on a 0–10 scale indicating belief) were included in the final analyses. This resulted in a final sample size of 414 (221 men, 193 women; M_age = 19.1 years, SD = 2.2).

Participants were primarily White (62%), followed by Asian or Pacific Islander (25%), African American (7%), Latino or Hispanic (3%), and Middle Eastern (3%). Religious affiliations of participants were varied, with the majority being Protestant or Evangelical Christian (31%), followed by Catholic (22%), nonaffiliated (18%), agnostic (15%), Jewish (5%), Hindu (4%), Muslim (3%), and Buddhist (2%).

Sample 2: Participants and Procedure

Participants in the second sample were adults who volunteered to participate in an online study entitled God’s Role in Suffering. Participants received no compensation. Links to the survey were provided through various news websites featuring articles and weblogs (i.e., blogs) about anger at God. Links to the survey were also published on a departmental website to allow general access to the survey. The initial sample consisted of 370 adults ranging in age from 18–73 years. As in Sample 1, only participants indicating some belief in God (at least 1 on a 0–10 scale of belief) were included in analyses.1 This resulted in a final sample of 146 (60 men, 86 women; M_age = 41.4 years, SD = 15.1).

Participants were primarily White (81%), followed by Latino or Hispanic (6%), African American (5%), Asian or Pacific Islander (5%), Middle Eastern (1%), and Native American (1%). Primary religious affiliations reported were Protestant or Evangelical Christian (49%), Catholic (23%), nonaffiliated (13%), agnostic (7%), other (4%), and Jewish (3%).

1 Due to the publication of the survey on news websites featuring stories about atheism and anger at God, there were many participants who identified as atheists (n = 294). Because this article focuses on anger toward God (rather than anger focused on a purely hypothetical God image), we did not include these participants in our main analyses. Furthermore, participants endorsing no belief in God received different prompts and survey items than those endorsing belief in God. As such, direct comparisons between the two groups would not be appropriate.
Measures

Most measures in both samples were scored by taking the average of the individual items comprising each scale. Scales using other scoring methods are noted.

Belief in God. To assess belief in God, two measures were used in each sample. The primary measure of belief in God was a 0–10 rating scale in which participants responded from 0 (not at all) to 10 (totally) to the question: “To what extent do you believe that God exists?” A secondary measure of belief in God was adapted from the National Opinion Research Center’s General Social Survey (http://www.gss.norc.org). This forced-choice measure required participants to indicate agreement with one of the following five options: “I don’t believe in God” (Sample 1 = 100; Sample 2 = 213), “I don’t know whether there is a God, and I don’t believe that there is any way to find out” (Sample 1 = 120; Sample 2 = 81), “I find myself believing in God at some of the time, but not at others” (Sample 1 = 57; Sample 2 = 17), “While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God” (Sample 1 = 132; Sample 2 = 47), and “I know that God really exists, and I have no doubts about it” (Sample 1 = 123; Sample 2 = 86). As indicated previously, only participants who indicated some belief in God on the continuous measure (response > 0) and also possible belief in God (Options 2–5) on the forced-choice measure were included in final analyses.

Anger at God. Anger at God was measured in two domains: current, general anger toward God, and anger toward God in response to a specific situation. General anger toward God was measured using the Anger/Disappointment subscale of the well-validated Attitudes Toward God Scale—9 (ATGS-9; Wood et al., 2010). To measure situation-specific anger toward God, participants were asked to reflect on a recent stressful event and to type a brief description of the event. This method has been employed successfully in the past (Exline et al., 2011; Exline et al., 2012; Exline & Grubbs, 2011). After reflection, participants then responded to the prompt, “At this moment, when I think about the incident involving suffering that I described earlier, it makes me feel _____ toward God.” by rating their agreement from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely) with 17 single-word items, both positive and negative. Five of these items (anger, disappointment, mistrust, frustration, and resentment) were averaged to assess situation-specific anger at God.

Big Five factors of personality. The Big Five Inventory—54 (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) was used. This inventory measures Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism on a 1–5 scale.

Trait anger. A brief version of Spielberger and Sydeman’s (1994) State—Trait Anger Inventory was used in both samples. This measure includes 12 items designed to assess trait-level anger characteristics on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always).

Narcissistic entitlement. Raskin and Terry’s (1988) Entitlement subscale of the NPI—40 was included in both samples. This measure includes six forced-choice items in which the narcissistic choice (e.g., “I find it easy to manipulate people”) is assigned a score of 1 and the nonnarcissistic item (e.g., “I don’t like it when I find myself manipulating people”) is assigned a score of 0. Items are summed.

Psychological entitlement. Campbell et al.’s (2004) PES was used. This scale has 9 items rated from 1 (strong disagreement) to 7 (strong agreement). Example items include “If I were on the Titanic, I would deserve to be on the first lifeboat!” and “People like me deserve an extra break every now and then.”

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for all continuous variables in both samples.

Exploratory Analyses

We first conducted exploratory analyses to determine if there were differences in relevant outcome variables based on age, sex, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. There were no differences in general or situation-specific anger toward God based on age, sex, or ethnicity in either sample. Analysis of variance with Bonferroni-corrected post hoc comparisons revealed no significant differences in either form of anger toward God based on religious affiliation in Sample 1. In the second sample, however, significant differences between Protestant/Evangelical Christian participants and religiously nonaffiliated participants emerged for both forms of anger at God. Regarding general anger at God, Protestant/Evangelical Christian respondents reported less ($M = 3.1, SD = 2.8$) than those individuals without religious affiliation ($M = 5.3, SD = 3.6$, $F(3, 136) = 3.5, p = .027$). Regarding situation-specific anger at God, Protestant/Evangelical Christian respondents again reported less ($M = 4.0, SD = 3.0$) than those without religious affiliation reported ($M = 7.1, SD = 4.0$, $F(3, 136) = 5.4, p = .002$.

Correlational Analyses

Initial correlational analyses were performed to identify any associations between the various measures of individual differences. All interim correlations for individual-difference measures are listed in Table 2.

To test the primary hypothesis that psychological entitlement would be associated with anger at God in both forms, Pearson correlations were calculated for both measures of anger at God and all relevant measures of individual differences. The results of these correlations are illustrated in Table 3. In both samples, general anger toward God correlated positively with psychological entitlement, and the strength of this correlation was moderate. These findings were analogous to the findings related to situation-specific anger at God. Across both samples, psychological entitlement was found to correlate significantly and positively with situation-specific anger at God.

In addition to the associations with psychological entitlement, narcissistic entitlement and neuroticism were positively associated with general anger at God, as predicted. In both samples, general anger toward God correlated negatively with conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Situation-specific anger at God demonstrated positive correlations with trait anger in both samples and negative correlations with agreeableness in both samples.

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2 Only groups for which there were at least 10 respondents were included in these analyses. This same rule was also used for comparisons based on religious affiliations.
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sample 1 (n = 413)</th>
<th>Sample 2 (n = 148)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General anger at God</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation-specific anger at God</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological entitlement</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcissistic entitlement</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait anger</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regressions: Does Psychological Entitlement Predict Unique Variance in Anger Toward God?

To further test the our hypothesis that psychological entitlement would account for unique variance in anger toward God above and beyond various personality constructs, including narcissistic entitlement, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses predicting general anger at God (ATGS Anger/Disappointment subscale) and situation-specific anger at God. For both samples, Model 1 included the Big Five; Model 2 added trait anger; Model 3 added narcissistic entitlement; and, finally, Model 4 added psychological entitlement. The results of the regression predicting generalized anger at God can be seen in Table 4. The results of the regression predicting situation-specific anger at God can be seen in Table 5.

As predicted, for both general anger at God and situation-specific anger at God, psychological entitlement accounted for unique variance in both samples, even when the five factors of personality, trait anger, and narcissistic entitlement were all held constant. These findings strongly underscore the notion that psychological entitlement is a robust, consistent, and unique predictor of anger at God.

Discussion

At the outset of this study, we sought to examine and test the relationship between psychological entitlement and anger at God, in various forms, with a specific goal of demonstrating that psychological entitlement is a unique and robust predictor of anger at God. The following paragraphs offer an integration and interpretation of our findings, as well as ideas for future research within this domain. We will begin with a brief description of other personality predictors of anger toward God before describing the entitlement findings.

Personality Factors and Anger at God

In keeping with past work (Ano & Pargament, 2012; Wood et al., 2010), our results found positive correlations between traits such as neuroticism, trait anger, and anger at God. Similarly, Wood et al.’s (2010) finding of an inverse relationship between conscientiousness and anger at God was replicated in our findings. We also demonstrated, in both samples, that general anger at God correlated negatively with agreeableness, which was not documented in previous work but expected, because agreeableness is associated with diminished expression of anger. Collectively, these findings reinforce the assertion that intense anger at God is associated with indicators of poor mental health (Exline et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2010). However, in hierarchical regression analyses controlling for these personality traits, psychological entitlement consistently contributed unique variance in predicting anger at God, above all other predictors.

Table 2
Interitem Correlations for Included Personality Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample 2: Undergraduate sample (n = 413)</th>
<th>PES</th>
<th>NE</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>TA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PES</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.171*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
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<td>.29**</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  PES = Psychological Entitlement Scale; NE = narcissistic entitlement; O = Openness; C = Conscientiousness; E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; N = Neuroticism; TA = trait anger.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Psychological Entitlement and Anger at God

Supporting our primary hypothesis, psychological entitlement was shown to be a unique predictor of anger at God, even when various other measures of personality were controlled for statistically. Psychological entitlement, in final analyses, emerged as the only reliable predictor of both general and situation-specific anger at God across both samples. Although narcissistic entitlement demonstrated a fairly consistent relation with anger at God, even when other personality constructs were statistically controlled, psychological entitlement consistently contributed unique variance. Similarly, the predictive roles of the five factors of personality and trait anger were consistently inferior in contrast to psychological entitlement. This contribution was found, even when other predictors maintained significance. These results strongly support our hypothesis that psychological entitlement represents a distinct and robust predictor of anger toward God.

Our findings collectively support the idea that entitlement presents individuals with the distinct possibility of spiritual struggle. Entitlement, as a character trait, is diametrically opposed to the values of numerous spiritual and religious belief systems. Furthermore, entitled individuals carry with them an attitude of “deservingness” (Campbell et al., 2004). This predisposes them to greater perceptions of being wronged when they are denied those things they think that they deserve (Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009).

When such findings are applied to an individual’s relationship with the divine, similar patterns should emerge. When entitled individuals are unable to receive something that they believe is their right, blaming God for that denial could be a natural response. Given that perceived divine injustice contributes to anger at God (Exline et al., 2011), one would expect entitled individuals to experience more anger at God than less entitled individuals. Our findings strongly underscore this interpretation, and they point to at least one domain in which psychological entitlement can be associated with spiritual struggle.

Notably, the significant predictive role of psychological entitlement was found even when controlling for narcissistic entitlement, trait anger, and the Big Five. This finding suggests that the sense of deservingness associated with psychological entitlement, rather than related tendencies to be aggressive, socially dominant, disagreeable, or exploitative, seems to be a key predictor of anger at God. In other words, an individual who has a pervasive sense that he or she deserves “special treatment” or “more things” is going to

Table 4
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Variables Predicting General Anger at God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1 Sample 1 (n = 413)</th>
<th>Model 1 Sample 2 (n = 148)</th>
<th>Model 2 Sample 1 (n = 413)</th>
<th>Model 2 Sample 2 (n = 148)</th>
<th>Model 3 Sample 1 (n = 413)</th>
<th>Model 3 Sample 2 (n = 148)</th>
<th>Model 4 Sample 1 (n = 413)</th>
<th>Model 4 Sample 2 (n = 148)</th>
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<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>-.11</td>
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<tr>
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* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Table 5
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Variables Predicting Situation-Specific Anger at God

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
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</table>

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  ** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

risk being displeased with his or her perception of God’s plan, which then makes anger at God much more likely. In practical terms, it is valuable to be able to identify psychological entitlement as a robust risk factor for anger toward God, particularly given the consistent links between anger at God and poor mental health.

Narcissistic Entitlement

In designing this study, it was noted that narcissistic entitlement and psychological entitlement are related but distinct constructs (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004). As such, we expected these two constructs to follow similar patterns in our analyses, but we also expected psychological entitlement to emerge as a distinct predictor of anger at God, above and beyond narcissistic entitlement. Our results supported these predictions fully. Although narcissistic entitlement and psychological entitlement were both associated with more anger at God on both measures, psychological entitlement consistently explained unique variance over and above narcissistic entitlement, even when narcissistic entitlement contributed unique variance of its own. These findings strongly support the notion that psychological entitlement be viewed as a better predictor of anger at God than narcissistic entitlement alone.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Although our study presents persuasive evidence for an association between psychological entitlement and anger at God, it is not without its limitations. Consistent with many other studies of anger at God, this study was conducted in a Western sample and consisted primarily of monotheistic individuals. This finding is also compounded by the fact that narcissism and entitlement are, in many ways, especially observable in Western societies (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Collectivist societies demonstrate much lower levels of entitlement and narcissism. As such, there is a need for future research of this relationship in other cultural settings to determine whether our findings may be generalized.

This study also used a self-report design. Although self-report methods have typically been used to assess both personality factors and spiritual struggle, self-reports can be easily manipulated by individuals who want to control the impressions that they give when completing a survey. Granted, the predictive role of psychological entitlement remained consistent in both samples when several relevant personality factors were controlled for statistically. However, there is a need for studies of anger at God that do not rely entirely on self-report measures, instead incorporating implicit measures of anger at God or even physiological measures. Also, along with this limitation, the self-selected nature of the studies presents the potential for bias. This bias is particularly relevant for the adult web sample. In that sample, individuals chose to participate in the study with the knowledge that anger at God was a primary focus, which could have affected responses.

Finally, these findings do not allow inferences about causation. Although the emotional construct of anger at God is likely less stable than personality constructs such as entitlement and narcissism, the fact remains that the samples presented here are cross-sectional and correlational in nature. To allow causal inferences, experimental studies would be required that allowed for priming of entitlement-related constructs. Longitudinal studies documenting changes in general anger at God over time would be useful in allowing researchers to assess how baseline personality predicts subsequent spiritual struggle. Although stable facets of personality, such as entitlement and the Big Five, are unlikely to change drastically over time, more rigorous testing of this relationship is necessary before causal links can be specified.

Conclusion

Anger at God is gaining increasing attention as a form of spiritual struggle that impacts many individuals’ lives. However, certain people may be especially susceptible to experiences of anger toward God. Using two samples of adults, we demonstrated that psychological entitlement is a consistent, unique, and robust predictor of anger at God, accounting for unique variance even when controlling for other individual-difference measures that have previously been linked to the experience of anger at God. Entitlement is characterized by a pervasive attitude of deservingness and a demanding quality that begs for preferential treatment. When this attitude is applied to one’s relationship with God, anger is a logical consequence. These findings suggest that psychological entitlement serves as a robust personality-level predictor of anger toward God, which bears both practical and theo-
References


Dahlsgaard, K., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Shared virtue: Retorical implications for researchers and clinicians working with spiritual struggle. They also raise questions about the possibility of a relation between psychological entitlement and spiritual struggle more broadly.

French and anger at God


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