

Reflecting the Gendered God:  
 Analyzing the Difference in Self-Esteem and Well-Being  
 Between Individuals in Churches that use Non-Inclusive Gender  
 Images for God  
 and Churches that use Gender Inclusive Images for God  
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### Introduction

The self is uniquely and intricately influenced by the individual's images of God. Religious institutions and practices, in turn, have immense impact on how people imagine God. Therefore, it is important to critically examine how God is talked about in the context of religious practice and how this may affect the self-esteem and well-being of its members. This study asks the following question: Do masculine images of God and male language in religious practice affect the self-concept of the women and men who take part in those religious practices? To better explore this question we must bring together the two disciplines of psychology and theology.

Anna-Maria Rizzuto's theory accents the inward development of self and images of God. She conducted many case studies to explore the development of the images of the Divine and how those images function in everyday life in her book *The Birth of the Living God* (1979). Utilizing Freud's theory of *imagoes*, or the representation of the parent-figure into the internal psyche of

a child, Rizzuto suggests that a child has internal representations of herself, her parents, and God. She theorizes that an individual's God-images are developed out of the person's relationship with significant others and the internal impression of the self. By learning more about the significant others in an individual's life and how they have been internally represented in an individual's mind, Rizzuto begins to understand more about the self and how the individual's psyche imagines God. She finds that the relationship between representation of God and self-concept is reciprocal. On the one hand, one's self-concept informs and creates the God-concept. On the other hand, one's concept of God shapes one's thinking about one's self.

Stanley Coopersmith and Carol Ryff provide us with the literature about self-esteem and well-being and suggest their importance in giving an individual the ability to act independently and creatively in the world. Coopersmith (1981) explores the correlates for self-esteem and the factors that may affect it. Through his research, he found high self-esteem to be correlated with independence, confidence, ability to cope with anxiety, communication, stability, and creativity. He argues that high or low self-esteem is created in childhood and that it is the result of the style parenting. His study concludes that children with parents who set clear boundaries, show total acceptance of their child, and respect their child's independent action develop the highest self-esteem. Similarly, Ryff suggests that those with relatively high well-being are self-driven, have a sense of competence, have goals and direction, are able to empathize, are able to accept the good and bad aspects of themselves, and are willing to try new experiences. She divides well-being into 6 aspects: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Life Purpose, Positive Relations with Others, Self-Acceptance, and Personal Growth. All 6 aspects together make up one's overall sense of well-being. Well-being is measured along with self-esteem in this study so that the relationship between self and images of God may be more clearly and distinctly explored in light of all the factors that may lead to one's mental wellness.

Mary Daly gives us a starting point for how to think of the interplay between self wellness and images of God. She writes

in her book *Beyond God the Father* (1985) that women cannot become their true selves if male images of God are still

employed in their church setting. According to Daly, patriarchy is to blame for the exclusively male-God of Christianity. Daly decides to completely reject the male-God because it is used to sustain patriarchy and is harmful to women's development. This "one sex symbol" (Daly, 1985, p. 19) is perpetuated by language and images that keep women isolated from the Divine. Because of this, women cannot become their true selves. Moreover, due to the connectedness of humankind, if women cannot truly become their true selves, then neither can males become their true selves. In order to claim and take part in becoming, women must throw off the patriarchal names and images of the Divine. Only if the exclusively male-god is discarded and the female voice reclaimed can women and, Mary Daly argues, all of humankind come into their true, whole selves (Beyond God the Father, 1985).

Elizabeth Johnson gives us a model for how to speak of the Divine in feminine ways in order to bring balance to images of God. In her book, *She Who Is*, Johnson reclaims the history of the Christian tradition in which God is imagined as ineffable and beyond gender. She continues to advocate for feminine images of God in an effort to reverse and correct the patriarchy of the God-Image in the church over the past years (1992). As the title suggests, she advocates the name *She Who Is* for the Divine. Not only does this name bring to imagination the feminine aspects of creation but it also encapsulates the oldest name for God, "I AM." According to Johnson, by using this name for God, we can reclaim women's participation with the Divine and also remember the ineffable God beyond all we can imagine who, as the name suggests is pure liveliness and being.

By using the theories of Daly, Johnson, Rizzuto, Coopersmith, and Ryff, we begin to see the relationship between images of God, the well-being of the self, and how the images of God may affect one's feelings toward the self. The purpose of this study is to empirically test the assertions made by Rizzuto and Daly. Are images of God and self-esteem related? Do masculine images of God negatively affect females and males? Does employing non-gendered or feminine images of God positively affect the self-esteem and well-being of males and females?

## God-Image in Psychology

Anna-Maria Rizzuto, a Freudian psychoanalyst, gives us the groundwork for exploring the relationship between God-Image and self. Through her work in psychoanalysis, she repeatedly observed how images of God affected her patients' sense of self and well-being. Unlike many of her Freudian colleagues, she wished to take this connection seriously and not dismiss God and religion as a mere delusion or pathology. In order to investigate the connection between the imagined God and self, she conducted case studies to explore the development of God representation in interaction with the development of the self. She interviewed individuals, and used information gained through psychoanalysis, to consider the factors that influenced the patient's God representation and learn further how the representation functioned in everyday life. She begins with Sigmund Freud's theory of *imagoes* of the parents. Freud (1914) theorizes that the infant creates images of the mother and father, or the primary objects, in the child's internal psyche. These object representations stay with the child into adulthood. As the representations are formed and reformed, they inform the individual's sense of self and relationship to others. Rizzuto proposes that the individual's image of God comes from the individual's representation of the parents.

Rizzuto works from an object-representations theory to suggest that the God representation is created by the child and is important in her development and sense of self. She argues that all people in Western society create a God representation (1979, p. 200). The God representation is initially created in infancy and early childhood from the representation of the primary objects (mother and father). As the child develops, the God representation changes to function within the developmental stage of the child. Once the child reaches the stage of development in which the self is differentiated from the primary objects, the God-representation may function as a transitional object in developing and maintaining a unified self. Regardless, the child's representation of God is unavoidably linked to the child's understanding of the self. This understanding of the self develops into adulthood and the God representation either evolves with the developing adult and is in constant use or is put

into storage to make its appearance in times of crisis or instability. The adult that chooses to maintain their God representation cannot break the ties between the representation of God and their sense of self.

Object representation and self representation are constantly in dynamic interaction with each other. Infants develop representations of their parents in order to form an idea of the self. Winnicott (as cited in Rizzuto, 1979, p.122) refers to the mother's face as a mirror for the infant. The infant sees herself mirrored in the mother's face and identifies a sense of self, "When I look I am seen, so I exist" (p. 122). Winnicott maintains that mirroring the mother functions to help the infant, and later adult, maintain a sense of self "into which to retreat for relaxation" (p. 122). Representations of objects can be conscious and preconscious, or outside our awareness. Most often, they are outside of consciousness until they are recalled in a specific situation to help one cope and restore psychic equilibrium. Rizzuto explains a process of the self that helps to integrate past object representations with the present self

One of the processes of the continuous ego or self-synthesis is the summoning up of memories of encounters with objects, whether supportive and loving or disruptive and frightening. These processes serve the individual in the present, helping him to adapt and master his situation. The constant movement from present object and self-representations to past object and self-representations is one of the critical processes which makes us "create a history of ourselves" and contributes to our "becoming a self". (Loewald as cited by Rizzuto, 1979, p. 57) The task of "becoming a self" cannot be accomplished without the complex processes and interactions of the self and the object representations created by the individual.

Among these object representations is the God representation. In the natural progression of development, according to Rizzuto, God arrives in a child's psyche at about the same time as monsters and superheroes. As the child is using fantasy to work out representations of his or her self through displacement of

feelings of badness, rage, and frustration onto monsters and the lack of a sense of power onto grandiose superheroes, the all-powerful enigmatic figure of God emerges. However, unlike the monsters and superheroes, which eventually disappear once their use to the child is fulfilled, the God representation endures

and develops with the child. Rizzuto attributes this to the important language and reverent actions that adults use in connection with God. The child realizes the ultra importance of the God figure and therefore the God representation stays in the psyche throughout the life cycle.

At this stage of the child's development, she has an aggrandized representation of the parents and, because the language of God points to God's all-powerful being, the child begins to form the God representation out of the representation of the primary objects, mother and father. The object of the parents—distant or overbearing, loving or resentful—inform the child's representation of God. A reason that Rizzuto gives for the compounding of the parental representations and the God representation is the child's concern with causality. Eventually the child will ask the parents the "why" of everything, never being satisfied with purely scientific explanations. The child will ask, why the wind blows, who makes the clouds move and so forth, and in attunement with the parent's belief or perhaps because they have run out of all answers, the parent will probably answer, "God" attributing to God all causality and an enormous sense of power (Rizzuto 1979). And, because at this age, in the eyes of the child the parents are also aggrandized beings that have the ability to secure food, protect, and even know the child's intentions, the child makes a connection between the parental representation and the one she is creating for God. Therefore, the God representation always has traces of, if it's not identical with, the representation of the parent figure. As Rizzuto develops her theory, she shows that the healthy individual adapts and maneuvers his or her God representation to better fit changing parental and self representations (p.206-207). So, the healthy adult would have a representation of God that is fully realized and, although it may have originated from the parental representation, it is now distinct from it.

Rizzuto (1979) states that in Western culture a child cannot go through childhood without developing a God representation, and she even affirms its importance as a transitional object (p. 200). A transitional object helps the child transition between the inner world of the child and the outer world. Well-known transitional objects would be a teddy bear, blanket, or a pacifier. These objects bring comfort to the child and help to keep the equilibrium between the inner representations and the outer

reality. A transitional object acts as a bridge between the self and others. It fosters in the child the ability to develop genuine relationships and act creatively in the space between the outer and inner world. The God representation acts, like the teddy bear, as a transitional object. It helps the child healthily maneuver between inner space and the outer world and also allows them the psychic space for creativity between the two “worlds”. This is God’s place in the psychic interiority of an individual. The God representation gives the individual the space to situate herself safely and creatively in the world.

God, unlike the teddy bear, is a special type of transitional object. The God representation, because of the significance it is given in language and culture, does not get discarded like the blanket or teddy bear. It remains an important part of the individual’s psychic life.

The psychic process of creating and finding God—this personalized representational transitional object—never ceases in the course of the human life. It is a developmental process that covers the entire life cycle from birth to death. (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 178)

God remains a special transitory object because the God-representation is created from the representations of the primary objects (Rizzuto, 1979). This fact sets the God representation apart from the transitional toy, as the toy is an object adopted for an immediate purpose of the child. Once the object has fulfilled its purpose, i.e., once the child feels adjusted and has made new friends in school, they no longer need the transitional object. God, on the other hand, is rooted in the child’s deepest experiences with her parents and therefore cannot be discarded so easily. In some cases, God may be like a teddy bear in the attic that comes out to comfort in times of crisis. The God “teddy bear” is only used when needed then is put back on the dusty shelf (Rizzuto, 1979). Nevertheless, others have developed the God representation and use it constantly, allowing psychic

equilibrium for the individual, “Used throughout life, God remains a transitional object at the service of gaining leverage with the self, others, and life itself” (Rizzuto, 1979, p.179).

Transitional space is the space where illusion, art, culture and religion belong and allows the individual space to play (Rizzuto, 1979). In play, the individual can act out fantasies and wishes that are not acceptable to display in the outer world. This space



gives freedom for the young human to tinker and maneuver objects of the inner world without this imagining having a profound effect on the outer world. According to Rizzuto if a child does not have the space to play and is not allowed transitional objects, it can stunt her development and cause pathological ways of coping with the fantasies and wishes the child did not get maneuver safely in play (Rizzuto, 1979).

If we could not kiss those we should not kiss, if we could not hate those we should not hate, if we could not laugh at those we should respect, if we could not cry with those who cannot take our tears, if we could not make love with those who should only remain friends, if we could not kill those who should remain alive, if we could not parade in front of those who have not acknowledged how great we are, then life would be miserable indeed. (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 82)

If one is able to keep the balance in play and fantasy, then she can act out, imaginatively, the unthinkable in the outer world. This gives the child the freedom to play with inner objects and not have to take them or one's self too seriously. It opens the door to laughing at the self and one's wishes and fantasies. This is the freedom and space that allows one to healthily adjust their inner self in the outer world.

Rizzuto suggests the reworking of the God representation with each stage of development when she says, "The central thesis is that God, as a transitional representation, needs to be recreated in each developmental crisis if it is to be found relevant for lasting belief" (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 208). She outlines ways that the God representation may lead to belief or unbelief and assembled a chart to display how the God representation develops. Her chart follows the form and development of Erik Erikson's life cycle (1959) and the sections that pertain to God representation are replicated below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Table of the development of the God-Image (Rizzuto,

1979, p. 208)

Erikson's Stages	Trust vs. Mistrust	Autonomy vs. Shame	Initiative vs. Guilt	Industry vs. Inferiority	Identity vs. Identity Diffusion	Intimacy and Generativity vs. Isolation and Self-Absorption	Integrity vs. Despair
Type of God	Experienced through senses	Self-object	Idealized and Aggrandized parental imago	Less Aggrandized parental imago	Multitude of representations. Inestimable shifting	Emotional distance from representation. Critical reassessment.	The representation is questioned.
	Mirroring						Doubts: Is God what I thought he was?
God representation that allows belief	I am held, fed, I feel you nurtured. I see me on your face	I are with me.	You are wonderful, the Almighty.	You are my God, my protector.	You are the maker of all things.	You are. You let me be me.	I accept you whatever you are. Basic trust.
God representation which leads to unbelief	I am not held, I am hungry, I feel uncared for. I do not see me.	I cannot feel you are there for me. I despair.	I thought you were omnipotent. You failed.	You are destructive. You won't spare me.	You are the beloved and the loving. You are unjust. You permit evil. You suffocate me.	You think I am a child. Let me be me.	You never gave me anything. You are not there.
			You do not love me. I do not count.	I do not need you. I have other protection.	I don't need you. I have myself. I found love. That is enough.	Life is all right.	Life makes sense. I was That is enough for me

As seen in Figure 1, the type of God representation is specific and changes to each developmental stage or crisis, as do thoughts about God. It is the representation and the thoughts toward God that lead to belief or disbelief in God. It stands to reason that the individual with more positive thoughts about the primary objects, "I'm held, fed, and nurtured. I see me on your face," is more likely to believe in God since the God representation is formed from the primary objects representation. Although Rizzuto states that "belief in God or absence of belief are no indicators of any type of pathology (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 202)," it can be inferred from the chart that the individuals who have a God representation that leads to belief are engaged in healthier, more positive thoughts about themselves and the world around them.

Rizzuto gives us a working theory of how the representation

of God, created by the child and continued into adult life, is deeply personal and is influenced by, as well as influences, the inner and outer life of the individual. Where Rizzuto falls short is in realizing and addressing the importance of cultural influences on the God representation. She does state in her conclusion:

The entire representational process occurs in a wider context of the family, social class, organized religion, and particular subcultures. All these experiences contribute a background to

the shape, significance, potential use, and meaning which the child or the adult may bestow on their God representations.

(1979, p. 209)

The attributes of the wider context, social class, and organized religion need to be investigated more deeply to discern the ways in which they influence the God representation and therefore self-representation of the individual. Patriarchy undoubtedly influences culture and the God that is available to parents and their children for the creation of their God representation. The question that follows from Rizzuto's research and analysis is, how would changing the culturally conceived God change the way in which God is presented to the child and therefore alter the God representation that the child creates? Rizzuto's question asks how the God representation functions for the individual and how the individual can or cannot change their God representation. My question pulls at the underlying currents that contribute to the God representation and if, by radically changing the current of patriarchy in which God is situated, an individual may be able to form a healthier God representation from childhood that will better assist in the development of the self.

## Self-Esteem and Well-Being

### 1 Self-Esteem and the Self

Stanley Coopersmith explores the causes and effects of self-esteem. His theory is important for this study in showing the invasive reach of high or low self-esteem. In his book, *The*

*Antecedents of Self-Esteem*, he provides his findings of his in-depth research with children, their parents, and their teachers. He begins his book by describing what self-esteem is and how it relates to the functioning of the individual. He defines self-esteem as follows:

The evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 5)

These “attitudes toward the self” can be conscious or unconscious (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 5). Therefore, the individual may never fully be aware of her attitude toward herself. However, bringing the attitude to the attention of the individual, for example, through the measure crafted by Coopersmith, may bring the disposition to mind. During this process, the individual could be surprised at her feelings toward herself. The measure created by Coopersmith, the *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory*, is self-evaluative, which means that the participant reports the feelings toward her self. This type of measure can leave out unconscious feelings about the self; however, the hope is that it will work like holding a mirror up to the individual. Being confronted with the particular issue may allow the individual to bring unconscious feelings into consciousness, maybe even leaving the participant surprised and startled. Although aspects of self-esteem could be conscious or unconscious and one has to be careful in how it is measured and evaluated, it is of utmost importance that research attempt to measure and analyze the properties of self esteem because it is undisputedly true that “self-esteem has pervasive and significant side effects (Coopersmith, 1989, p. 19).”

Along with defining and setting parameters around self esteem, Coopersmith’s study also outlines factors that lead to high or low self esteem. Interestingly, all factors pertain to childhood and the type of parenting the child received. Children with the highest self-esteem were found to have parents who 1) show total acceptance of the child 2) set clear limits and boundaries and 3) have respect for the individual action of their child within their set boundaries and limits (Coopersmith, 1981). Another attribute that led to high self-esteem was the high self-esteem of their parent. Here, Coopersmith found that children tended to identify with and mirror their parents. Therefore, children with high self-esteem were mirroring parents with high self-esteem. Coopersmith’s study shows the immense importance of early childhood experiences in developing and maintaining high self-esteem throughout adulthood. His findings lead one to wonder about the types of interventions that may help an adult with low self-esteem develop higher self-esteem. Would the introduction of a strong, authoritative, parent-like figure (God-image) that an individual can identify and connect with help raise the self-esteem of an individual?

Coopersmith found that self-esteem, high or low, has a profound effect on the individual and was a contributing factor in independence, confidence, coping with anxiety, conversation skills, nonconformity, creativity, outspokenness, sensitivity to criticism, level of self-consciousness, and concern with inner problems. He concludes, "There is every reason to conclude that persons with high, medium, and low self-esteem live in markedly different worlds" (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 48).

Coopersmith found in his study that those with high self-esteem had significantly different ways of acting in the world. Children who exhibited high self-esteem also generally spoke more in conversation than those who had low self-esteem, held a totally independent view and did not comply with pressure from authorities, tended to be more outspoken, were relatively insensitive to criticism, were rarely self-conscious in social situations, and showed little to no concern with inner problems leaving more time and energy to be concerned with more global issues. In contrast those with low self-esteem showed a great deal of concern with inner problems, were relatively self-conscious in social situations, were extremely sensitive to criticism, were generally the listeners in conversation, and exhibited occasional or total compliance with authorities. To assess creativity, the subjects were given 3 different creativity measures. Those with high self-esteem significantly outperformed those with low self-esteem, showing significantly greater creativity (Coopersmith, 1981 p. 61). Furthermore,

according to the Rorschach test and other findings in Coopersmith's research, he reports that individuals with high self-esteem

Respond to internal and external events in a consistent and characteristic style...[which] lead us to believe that self-esteem is significantly related to the individual's basic style of adapting to environmental demands. (Coopersmith, 1981 p. 46)

All of this data shows that the individuals with high and low self-esteem do in fact live in "markedly different worlds." Those who have high self-esteem showed more confidence, better ability at communicating, more creativity, more independence,

and a remarkable ability to direct concern and energy towards global instead of inner problems. In light of this data, Coopersmith concluded, “Self-Esteem thus appears to have ramifying consequences that vitally affect the manner in which an individual responds to himself and the outside world” (1981, p. 71).

Coopersmith’s study gives us insight into the importance and ramifications of self-esteem; by using his findings we can move forward to questions of God-Image and self-esteem. It is clear in his analysis that high self-esteem is essential for creativity, confidence, communication, and an overall grounded-ness in the self and the world. His study does leave us with some questions of how God-Image may relate to self-esteem. Since Rizzuto links God representation to parent representation and Coopersmith places the initial cause of high or low self-esteem in the household how might the attributes of the God-Image relate to the self-esteem of the individual? As we have seen from Rizzuto, God plays a completely distinct yet a powerful role in the early lives of children. How might the idea of a powerful, “parent-like” God who may or may not have rules, may or may not give acceptance, and may or may not dole out harsh punishments affect the self-esteem of a child? How will that, then, affect the child later in life, into adulthood? Unfortunately, Coopersmith does not address gender. There is no exploration of the differences between boys and girls self-esteem, yet the relationship with the parents is closely examined. Leaving open for discussion the effect of acceptance, limits, and freedom given from a same-sex or different sex parents on self-esteem.

Relating it to the above question, if God was male and God were the ultimate accepting, ruling, and freedom-giving being how would that affect the self-esteem of young girls?

## 2 Well-Being and the Self

Carol Ryff’s concept of well-being gives us yet another avenue for exploring the impact of images for God on the total wellness of the self. In her article *Happiness is Everything, Or Is It?*, she gives a brief overview of the history of positive psychology and how it has defined and measured well-being. In the end, she pulls out six aspects of well-being and creates a measure to assess the aspects in individuals. The theories from which Ryff draws on and builds upon are Maslow’s self-

actualization, Jung's theory of individuation, Carl Roger's idea of the fully functioning person, and Allport's theory of maturity. It is from this background and rich literature that Ryff develops her six aspects of well being: 1) Autonomy, 2) Environmental Mastery, 3) Life Purpose, 4) Positive Relations with Others, 5) Self-Acceptance and, 6) Personal Growth (1989, p. 1071). The existing measures that she uses and evaluates hers against are 1) Affective Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969) 2) Life Satisfaction (Neugarten et al, 1961) 3) Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) 4) Morale (Lawton, 1972) 5) Locus of Control (Levensons, 1974) 6) Depression (Zung, 1965). After a correlational analysis between her 6 aspects and the 6 existing measures, Ryff concludes

These data suggest that, although there is considerable overlap between certain theory-guided dimensions and former indexes of well-being, other criteria following from the theoretical descriptions are not strongly linked to existing assessment instruments. (1989, p. 1075)

Meaning that her six aspects overlap well with and measure some of the same characteristics of the self as the existing validated measures; however, they are unique and original enough that they were far from a perfect correlation, as in a 1:1 ratio. Ryff defines her six aspects as follows:

Autonomy: how one regulates behavior and reacts to social pressures

Environmental Mastery: how one manages their environment

Life Purpose: beliefs that give one the feeling there is purpose in and meaning to life

Positive Relations with Others: ability to love

Self-Acceptance: one's attitude toward the self

Personal Growth: perception of one's development and potential

Ryff outlines parameters on what it means to be a high scorer or low scorer on each aspect of well-being. An individual who scored high in Autonomy is independent and self driven, not pressured by social expectations, and evaluates oneself by personal standards. Quite the opposite, is the individual with low Autonomy. This individual makes decisions based on others' judgments, is overly concerned about others' opinions, and conforms to social pressure. An individual who scored high on the Environmental Mastery aspect has mastered their

environment, has a sense of competence, can control many external activities, and is “able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values” (Ryff, 1989, p. 1072). One who reports a low score on Environmental Mastery lacks a sense of control over the external world, does not believe that she can change her circumstances and surroundings, and has much difficulty managing everyday life. Those with high Life Purpose have goals and a sense of direction and believe there is meaning to their actions and life. In contrast, those who score low on Life Purpose lack a sense of meaning and directed goals. Strong Positive Relations with Others include ability for empathy and intimacy and an understanding of the give and take of relationships. However, those who have not been successful at forming healthy Personal Relationships are not willing to make concessions in order to maintain their relationships and are incapable of feeling warm affection and concern for others. An individual who has a strong sense of Self-Acceptance has positive attitudes towards their self, accepts their good and bad qualities, and generally has a positive feeling about their life. On the other hand, a person that does not totally accept their self wishes to be different than he or she is, is generally dissatisfied with their life, and is preoccupied with a certain aspect of their self that they do not like. Finally, one who scores high on Personal Growth views oneself as always growing, notices improvements and changes in the self, and is willing to try new experiences. In contrast, the individual who scores low on

Personal Growth is stagnant in life, feels bored with life and their situation, and has no sense of growth and improvement over time. These six aspects that Ryff uses to define well-being each give us a different sense of wellness and together get closer to accurately measuring the complete wholeness and wellness of a person. It has many of the same characteristics as Coopersmith’s self-esteem but includes and expands more of the distinctions within well-being. Ryff’s theory and measure gave us an expanded sense of the healthiness of a person and the questionnaire allowed us to capture more unique distinctions in an individual’s well being.

Through Ryff’s theory we realize the importance of developing and maintaining characteristics that will contribute to overall wellness and can now explore the connections between God-Image and each aspect of well-being. Her research



raises some important questions about how well-being pertains to our question of God-Image: Will God-language and types of God-image be correlated to any six aspects of well-being? If concepts of self can be affected by actions and perceptions of parents/authority figures, and can also affect so many other functions of well-being is there an empirical, significant relationship between God-Image and Autonomy, Self-Acceptance, Life Purpose, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with others, and Environmental Mastery? In order to explore the questions between God-Image, language, self-esteem, and well-being, we must delve into a different type of parallel literature and scholarship that will help us to clarify our questions and bring us closer to some answers, feminist theology.

#### Feminist Theology on God-Image and Self-Esteem

Theologians like Mary Daly, Elizabeth Johnson, and Nelle Morton help us fill the gap left by discipline of psychology between images of God and their affect on self-esteem and well-being. These feminist theologians draw a connection between the powerful male images for the Divine and the well-being of the women in its grip. All three theologians begin with the

realization of the limits of a patriarchal society. It is patriarchy that has created and perpetuates the male images for God. By using male language for God and allowing the dominant “God the Father” image to govern the imagination, women are stuck in the grips of the oppressive male figure.

Male images and language for God that are perpetuated by the system of patriarchy, feminist theologians claim, keep women from full participation with the whole cosmos. Women do not have the space to fully realize their potential and come to true self actualization without participation with the Divine. Breaking free from the oppressive all powerful male patriarchy is the first step for women to participate fully with God. This initial step can only be made by first being able to finally recognize the limitations of the patriarchal system. Once women see the bonds of patriarchy, they can begin to break free of it and come closer to full participation in all of existence. Furthermore,

according to Daly, humanity is so intimately connected that if women have not been given the space to truly become themselves, then men's becoming has also been stunted and not fully realized. Male images for God, created and sustained by patriarchy, have inhibited the realization of both women and men's full self. Therefore, in order to break the patriarchy and realize the human potential to truly become, the images for God now in use must be critically examined and balanced to include feminine images that go beyond "God the Father".

Exclusively male God images, not only keep women from fully participating in the Divine, but also, from realizing and claiming their power to name themselves, the world or God and become imaginative creators in the world. The male-god is maintained by language and symbols that perpetuate women's isolation from the Divine. Without the opportunity to participate in the whole of the cosmos and use language for their own naming, women cannot claim their own power of imagination and creation. To claim the power of imagination and the ability to name is to become fully human. The need for women to discover their own creativity and power to name and leave behind the male-god is not only essential for women, but for all humankind. Daly confesses, "women's liberation is essentially linked with full human liberation" (Daly, 1985, p. 25). For Daly, women's becoming is so deeply connected to the becoming of

the whole human race. The exclusively male God images have stunted the growth and self realization of all humankind. In order to become our true selves, women and men must throw off the patriarchal names and images of the Divine. Women must be allowed the space to discover their power to name and create themselves and their world.

Male images for God go beyond mere thought and conscious speech; images are powerful in affecting our psyche and coloring the lens through which we see the world and our selves. Even if one consciously asserts that God is beyond gender, the male images employed are still at work in the psyche. For this reason it is important to include the feminine experience in images for God. Mary Daly explains the difference between abstract thinking and the pervasive influence of images:

Sophisticated thinkers, of course, have never intellectually identified God with a Superfather in heaven. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that even when very abstract

conceptualizations of God are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine “him” as belonging to the male sex. Such primitive images can profoundly affect conceptualizations, which appear to be very refined and abstract. (p.17)

Nelle Morton also writes on the power of image. In *The Journey Home*, Morton emphasizes the unconscious character of male images for God, “Images...cannot be so controlled. They are not so easy to identify or to describe. They have a life of their own. Often they function when persons are most unaware of their functioning” (p.20). It is important to remember the power of images. Even if someone says, “I do not think of God as male,” the images have an effect that goes beyond intellect or rationalization. The male God images work hand in hand with patriarchy, working at an unconscious level to dictate what is acceptable speech and thought. The power of male images is so pervasive and complete in controlling the thoughts and psyches of those under its power that “women experience themselves at the mercy of structures that deny them their humanness” (Morton, p. 24). By the use of male language, women were

being denied participation. Their alienation drives them to feel disconnected from their husbands, fathers, brothers, sisters, mothers, friends and even themselves. Once this becomes conscious in women, they begin to feel anger towards the dehumanizing language and structure that has caused their alienation. The work of removing the male images from our imagination must reach deep into the psyche. One cannot simply talk abstractly of God beyond gender but must begin to employ counter feminine images of God. A bridge to this new way of talking is to leave the old language of patriarchy and God images behind in order to find new names for God that include the feminine experience.

We must focus on feminine images for God that work towards balancing the male God image and help women to find their place in existence. Elizabeth Johnson boldly names God, SHE WHO IS. Johnson stresses the ineffableness of God and carefully gives analogies and names only to point toward God. However, in the end, she focuses only on female images for God

in order for women to begin to find a place in participation with the Divine. While she ends with a feminine name for God, SHE WHO IS, it is interesting that she does not begin there. She begins with God as being, pure liveliness. This image is neither feminine nor masculine; it goes beyond gender. One may think that Johnson is performing her task backwards. Should it not be the goal to find images for God that are beyond male and female? Should Johnson stop with God as pure un-gendered being instead of going on to name God SHE WHO IS? Johnson makes clear that while she believes “theoretically” in “the ideal of language for God in male and female terms used equivalently, as well as the use of cosmic and metaphysical symbols (p.56)”, the “actual fact” is that male and female symbols for the Divine have never been equivalent. It simply will not suffice to skip immediately to equivalent or un-gendered images for God, but we must, in an effort to correct the past patriarchy, focus on female images for God. Johnson does not see this as the ideal end point, but simply an unavoidable and extremely important stepping stone on the way to equivalent and un-gendered language for God. In beginning with an un-gendered, cosmic symbol for God, Johnson reminds us that all our images and language about God must originate from the understanding that

God is beyond all human conceptions, including gender.

Knowing this, we can then translate this cosmic symbol into a relatable image. Johnson ends with SHE WHO IS. This name allows women an understanding and an access to the Divine, which they have never before been granted. Johnson shows us the importance of not only being critical of the male images, but also, creating feminine images to live in the imagination. These feminine images function to get rid of the “one sex symbol (Daly, p.19)” God and give women a place and language to fully become.

Mary Daly’s theory of women’s and humanity’s “becoming” being hindered by male God images poses questions for this study to explore. Daly asserts, “If God is male then male is God (p. 19).” If this is the case, then in an environment where male God images are pervasive, the men will have a higher sense of well-being and self-esteem than the women. On the other hand, in an environment where the images for God are not exclusively male, the well-being and self-esteem of the women and men should be relatively equal. Furthermore, if women’s becoming

can only happen when the exclusively male-god is rejected then it stands to reason that women who are surrounded by a male image of God will have lower well-being and self-esteem. Women, who do not recognize the system of patriarchy at work in naming God, will not be able to confront their alienation from God and from their “authentic self”. However, women who do see the patriarchy in the male-god have begun the process of becoming their authentic self and therefore will have a higher sense of well being and self-esteem. Yet, Daly also asserts that women’s becoming is tied to the becoming of all humankind. If this is true then the men in an environment purged of male imagery will have higher well-being and self-esteem than men in an environment full of male God images. These are the tenants that this study attempts to investigate. Mary Daly’s idea of the “becoming” of the self into a whole, full self is operationalized in this study as well-being and self esteem, which takes into account one’s feelings about their whole self. Does Mary Daly’s theory hold true? Does male God-image significantly affect the wholeness of humankind, as seen by their well-being and self-esteem?

## Research Method

### 1. Background

Religious institutions and practices have immense impact on how people conceptualize God. Unfortunately, not all Christian institutions have adopted the theories of Johnson and Daly. Many churches still use only masculine language and images for God. However, a few churches have found it important to accept and support women, and men, in creating and utilizing feminine ways for engaging with the Divine. For this study, four groups of women and men were given the God-Image Survey (Lawrence, 1997), the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967) and the Ryff’s Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1989). Two groups are from churches that primarily employ masculine imagery for God: 1) Elevate Christian Church and 2) Crossroads Christian Church. These churches will be referred to as non-inclusive churches. The second two groups are from churches that teach and practice feminine images and ways of talking about God and move away from masculine images of

God: 1) St. John's Lutheran Church and 2) The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany. These two churches will be referred to as inclusive churches.

The information gained from all measures in each group will be analyzed to discover if God-Image has a significant positive relationship with self-esteem and well-being and whether there is a significant difference in self-esteem and psychological well-being between the women and men who have explored feminine images for God and those who have not. Moreover, the results from the men will be compared to the women's results to assess the gender gap (or lack thereof) between the self-esteem and well-being.

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** The women and men from the inclusive churches will have significantly higher scores than the women and men from the non-inclusive churches on Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1989) and the Coopersmith Self-

Esteem Inventory (1967).

This hypothesis is derived from Daly's assertion that women and men cannot become their true selves without all of humanity being given a voice and participation with the Divine.

**Hypothesis 2:** The women and men from the inclusive churches will have a significantly more Benevolent, Accepting, and Challenging image of God as measured by the God-Image Inventory (Lawrence, 1997) than the women and men from the non-inclusive churches.

If God is seen in inclusive images and language, open to participation with all beings regardless of gender, then that would likely lead to a more loving, accepting God that challenges one to become better and work towards more inclusive participation with God in the church.

**Hypothesis 3:** The women and men from the non-inclusive settings will have significantly more Present, Providential and Influential image of God as measured by the God-Image Inventory (Lawrence, 1997) than the women and men from the inclusive settings.

If God is seen as a patriarchal Father then His attributes will follow in that manner—as dominate, present, and controlling.

**Hypothesis 4:** The men from the non-inclusive settings will have significantly higher scores than the women from the non-inclusive settings on the Ryff Psychological Scale of Well-Being (1989) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967). This hypothesis comes from Daly's assertion, "If God is male, then male is God (p. 19)." If men are allowed full participation with God then their esteem and well-being will be secure. However, if women are denied the same participation then their sense of self and well-being may suffer and will certainly be lower than the males in the same settings.

**Hypothesis 5:** The men and women from the inclusive churches will have no significant gender difference between the Ryff Psychological Scale of Well-Being (1989) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967). This hypothesis, again, comes from Daly's theory that we are all free to become our true selves when all of humanity has participation and we move beyond patriarchal images and language for God.

## 2. Design

### a. Sample

The population that was studied in this research included men and women from two distinct settings with ages ranging from mid-twenties to late sixties. The four groups were from two non-inclusive church settings, Elevate Christian Church and Crossroads Christian Church, and two churches that use inclusive language and images for God, St. John's Lutheran Church and The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany. All who are members of the four locations volunteered and are able to read and respond to the informed consent and questionnaire. The entire sample for this study is 62 participants.

The number of volunteers from each setting is as follows:

Elevate Christian Church, n=14, females=9

Crossroads Christian Church, n=17, females=12

St. John's Lutheran Church, n=15, females= 9

The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, n=15, females=12

### b. Setting

#### Elevate Christian Church

Elevate Christian Church is an independent evangelical church near Atlanta, GA. The average age of the congregation is 35. Its members are primarily white middle class. The sermon,

songs, and website of Elevate Christian Church are full of masculine images for God. God is consistently referred to as He, King, Lord, etc. Moreover, Jesus' role as the Son of God is also emphasized. Members of this church worship and relate to a male God and must find their salvation through His Son. Following with these images, Elevate Christian Church does not ordain women or allow them to preach. They cite the inerrant Word of God in 1 Timothy and other places that command the silence of women in church and instruct that they should not teach men.

### Crossroads Christian Church

Crossroads Christian Church, located in Steubenville, OH, is also an independent evangelical church. They have about 350 regular attenders, a little over half are female. The members of Crossroads Christian Church are primarily white middle class. The average age at Crossroads is 40. They explicitly state as their mission to “bring people of all backgrounds into a personal

relationship with Jesus Christ.” They believe in the one and only God, the trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit, that salvation is only found through the unique Son of God, Jesus Christ, and that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Like Elevate, they also use scriptures, such as 1 Timothy, to argue that women should not be ordained. However, their worship leader and their children's minister are female. The image of God for Crossroads Christian Church is exclusively male. As evidenced in their worship songs, sermons, church banners, and Sunday school, God is talked about only in male forms and is viewed as acting in patriarchal, masculine ways, i.e. dominating, powerful, etc.

### St. John's Lutheran Church

St. John's Lutheran Church is an urban church situated in the heart of the city of Atlanta. The members of St. Johns are primarily white middle class. The average age of those that attend St' John's is 40. Their mission is to “be a diverse and compassionate congregation that embodies God's love in Atlanta and around the world” (St. John's Lutheran Church). Their stated beliefs are that salvation is found through the grace of God alone, salvation is through faith alone, and the Bible is “the only norm of doctrine and life” (St. John's Lutheran Church). In worship, sermons, and practice, St. Johns Church



strays away from masculine images for God and employs un-gendered language for the Divine. Feminine images for God are explored during small groups and Sunday school classes. Also, there are several female leaders in the church including a reverend. St. John's encourages women to be leaders in the church, as they are called.

### Church of the Epiphany

The Church of the Epiphany is an Episcopal church located in Atlanta, GA. Their members are mostly white middle-class adults with an average age of 40. They define their mission as follows:

The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany is an inclusive community called to seek and follow Jesus Christ. We welcome all people in the Eucharistic Fellowship of Christ's body. We receive strength and encouragement at the common table to carry out Christ's work of reconciliation

in our broken world. Nourished by worship and witness, learning and teaching, fellowship and service, we strive to live out the Gospel's radical values with gladness of heart.

(The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany)

Similar to St. John's Lutheran Church, masculine images of God are not explicitly employed in worship, sermons, publications, or Sunday school. Moreover, feminine images of God are explored in small groups. The Church of the Epiphany strives toward speaking of God in un-gendered language. They also have a female reverend as well as several other females serving in leadership positions. They do not interpret scripture as forbidding women to speak or teach in the church.

#### c. Recruitment

First, contact was made with a leader or contact person for the four settings. The contact person gave information about the study and its purpose and asked if any of their members would like to participate. Those who wished to participate were given the consent form, questionnaires, and contact information of the researcher.

#### d. Consent

Informed consent was obtained from each participant. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, the confidentiality

of the participants, and their ability to withdraw their data at any time. They were also be given the contact information of the researcher if they had any questions or concerns.

#### e. Procedures

The interaction with the participants was a one time session that consisted of an explanation of the study, informed consent, and completion of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three different measures, the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1989), the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967), and the God-Image Survey (Lawrence, 1997). The questionnaires aimed to measure the participants' image of God, their self-esteem, and overall well-being. The total time for the participants to give informed consent and complete the questionnaire was 30 minutes.

#### f. Measures

##### Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (RSPWB)

The Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1989) measured six aspects: Autonomy (A), Personal Growth (PG), Positive Relations with Others (PR), Self-Acceptance (SA), Life Purpose (LP), and Environmental Mastery (EM). The original scale consisted of 20 items for each aspect. In the Adapted Ryff Scale each aspect has been cut to 14 items. The participants rate each item on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The lowest score possible is a 14 with the highest score possible being an 84.

Examples:

*A* My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.

*PG* In general, I feel that I continue to learn more about myself as time goes by.

*PR* I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family and friends.

*SA* In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.

*LP* I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them happen.

*EM* I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to be done.

Ryff reported reliability coefficients for these scales ranging from 0.87(personal growth) to 0.93 (positive relations with others). Test–retest reliability coefficients for the original measure ranged between 0.80 and 0.90 for a subsample of 117 adults over a six-week period (Ryff, 1989). The shorter scale with 14 items in each subscale correlated strongly with the parent 20-item scale. For the current study the shorter 14-item subscales were used.

### The God-Image Survey (GIS)

The God-Image Survey (Lawrence, 1997) also measured six aspects: Benevolence, Acceptance, Challenge, Influence, Presence, and Providence. Each aspect has 12 items that are rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, strongly disagree to strongly agree. The minimum score for each aspect is a 12 and the maximum is 48.

The God-Image Survey was adapted from the God-Image Inventory (GII), also created by Lawrence. The GII had the same 6 aspects; however each one had 22 items. Also added to the GII are two shorter subscales: *Faith*, which asks, “Do I believe that my God image corresponds to a being who actually exists?” and *Salience*, which asks, “How important to me is my relationship with God?” The reliability coefficients for the GII ranged from .86-.94. Lawrence reports validity coefficients that range from .85-.94. Independent reliability and validity tests were not run on the GIS; however they were correlated strongly with the parent GII with *r* values ranging from .95-.99.

### Examples

*B* I think of God as more compassionate than demanding.

*I* When I obey God’s rules, God makes good things happen for me.

*C* God takes pleasure in my achievements.

*A* I am confident in God’s love for me.

*Ps* God is always there for me.

*Pv* God is on control of my life.

## The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) (1967) is comprised of 58 items that the participants decide is “like me” or “unlike me”. There are eight lie-items on the inventory that control for participants trying to inflate their self-esteem. The highest score that indicates high self-esteem is 50. Obviously, the lower the score, the lower the self-esteem.

The original Self-Esteem Inventory by Coopersmith (1967) was designed for children. Muriel B Ryden from the University of Minnesota adapted the scale for adults. He reported test-retest reliability at .80 in a study with 32 women over 6-58 weeks. Also. The adult form SEI was correlated with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale to assess how strongly the desire to present oneself favorably affected the score of the SEI.

The initial correlation was .47; however, after the Lie Scale was added the correlation decreased by .32.

### Examples

Like me: I'm pretty sure of myself.

Unlike me: I often wish I were someone else.

Lie item: I never worry about anything.

### g. Benefits and Risks

There were minimal risks to the participant. The time commitment of 30 minutes and the minimal stress that may have been induced by the deep thought of God and self-image inspired by the questionnaire are the only risks known to the researcher. The benefit to the participants is the satisfaction of participating in a study that may further knowledge about God-Image, Psychological Well-Being, and Self-Esteem.

## Results and Discussion

### **Hypothesis 1**

The women and men from the inclusive churches will have significantly higher scores than the women and men from the non-inclusive churches on Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1989) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967).

Table 1: Women's and Men's Scores on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory

	Gender	Non-Inclusive Churches	Inclusive Churches	t-test
Autonomy	Women	65.3	58.5	2.681**
	Men	68.2	50.3	6.648**
Environmental Mastery	Women	61.7	64.9	-.911
	Men	67.0	51.0	6.581**
Personal Growth	Women	70.7	73.1	-1.144
	Men	68.1	63.6	1.353
Positive Relations	Women	66.4	67.1	-.193
	Men	62.4	50.0	3.460**
Purpose in Life	Women	64.5	70.9	-2.014*
	Men	66.8	48.0	8.896**
Self-Acceptance	Women	61.2	65.3	-1.005
	Men	67.6	39.7	10.639**
Self-Esteem	Women	36.6	39.3	-.989
	Men	38.0	23.7	6.291**

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

Hypothesis 1 was partially validated. There was a significant difference in only 2 of 6 aspects on the females' scores on the Ryff Scale. Surprisingly, there was a significant difference in the Autonomy scores with the non-inclusive churches scoring higher and exhibiting more autonomy than the women in the inclusive churches. The other significant difference between the women's scores was on the aspect, Purpose in Life. The inclusive churches scored higher on the Purpose in Life aspect than the women from the non-inclusive churches. This finding shows that women in the inclusive settings had more goals and direction than the women in the non-inclusive churches. There was no significant difference between the women's scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory.

The males had significantly different scores on 5 of the 6 aspects of the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being and on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. However, the difference was in the opposite direction than what was hypothesized. The men from the inclusive churches had significantly lower scores on all but one (Personal Growth) aspect of the Ryff scale and the Coopersmith Inventory. On the flip side, the males from the non-inclusive churches scored significantly higher on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory.

## **Hypothesis 2**

The men and women from the inclusive churches will have a

significantly more Benevolent, Accepting, and Challenging image of God as measured by the God-Image Inventory (Lawrence, 1997) than the men and women from the non-inclusive churches.

Table 2: Scores on Benevolent, Accepting, and Challenging aspects from the God-Image Scale in Non-Inclusive and Inclusive Churches

Aspect on God-Image Scale	Non-Inclusive Churches	Inclusive Churches	t-test
Benevolent	43.4	42.6	.867
Accepting	43.4	41.9	1.211
Challenging	40.9	39.3	1.156

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

There was no significant difference between the non-inclusive and inclusive churches' scores on Benevolence, Acceptance and Challenge leaving Hypothesis 2 unsupported.

### Hypothesis 3

The men and women from the non-inclusive settings will have significantly more Present, Providential and Influential image of God as measured by the God-Image Inventory (Lawrence, 1997) than the men and women from the inclusive settings.

Table 3: Scores on Present, Providential, and Influential aspects from the God-Image Scale in

Non-Inclusive and Inclusive Churches

Aspect on God-Image Scale	Non-Inclusive Churches	Inclusive Churches	t-test
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Present	42.8	34.4	6.031**
Providential	37.3	26.7	6.164**
Influential	39.8	28.9	6.457**

\*significance at the .05 level  
 \*\* significance at the .01 level

Hypothesis 3 was supported as the women and men from the non-inclusive and inclusive churches had significant differences in the scores on God’s Influence, Presence, and Providence. The non-inclusive churches see God as more influential, providential, and more active in the world than do the women and men from the inclusive churches.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

The men from the non-inclusive settings will have significantly higher scores than the women from the non-inclusive settings on the Ryff Psychological Scale of Well-Being (1989) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967).

Table 4: Scores on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being and the Coopersmith Self-

Esteem Inventory in the Women and Men from the Non-Inclusive Churches

	Women in Non-Inclusive Churches	Men in Non-Inclusive Churches	t-test
Autonomy	65.3	68.2	-.964
Environmental Mastery	61.7	67.0	-1.676
Personal Growth	70.7	68.1	.923
Positive Relations	66.4	62.4	1.067
Purpose in Life	64.5	66.8	-.713
Self-Acceptance	61.2	67.6	-1.405
Self-Esteem	36.4	38.0	-.494

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

Hypothesis 4 was not supported as there was no significance difference found between women and men's scores from the non-inclusive churches on any of the Ryff Scale's aspects or the Coopersmith Self-Esteem. It seems that the men and women from Crossroads and Epiphany have similar self-esteem and well-being as there was no significant difference.

## Hypothesis 5

The men and women from the inclusive churches will have no significant gender difference between the Ryff Psychological Scale of Well-Being (1989) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967).

Table 5: Scores on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being and the Coopersmith Self-

Esteem Inventory from Women and Men in the Inclusive Churches

	Women in the Inclusive Churches	Men in the Inclusive Churches	t-test
Autonomy	58.5	50.3	3.508**
Environmental Mastery	64.9	51.0	3.280**
Personal Growth	73.1	63.7	3.766**
Positive Relations	67.1	50.0	3.612**
Purpose in Life	70.9	48.0	11.817**
Self-Acceptance	65.3	39.7	8.682**
Self-Esteem	39.3	23.7	4.719**

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

Hypothesis 5 is not supported. Contrary to expected, there was a significant gender difference in all aspects of well-being as well as self-esteem. The women from the inclusive churches scored overall higher on Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, and Self-

Acceptance than did the men. Moreover they also scored significantly higher on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory than the men from St. John's and Epiphany.

### **Correlations**

The researcher conducted a series of correlations to learn more about the overall relationship between God-Image and Self-Esteem. The results follow

Table 6: Correlations between aspects of the God-Image Scale and Self-Esteem in the Non-Inclusive Churches

Aspect on the God-Image Scale	Correlation with Self-Esteem
Influence	.398*
Benevolence	.041
Acceptance	.240
Presence	.530**
Providence	.220
Challenge	.064
Lie Scale on Self-Esteem Inventory	.383*

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

In non-inclusive churches, there was a significant positive correlation between an image of God as Influential and Self-Esteem and an image of God as Present in the world and Self-Esteem. This means that the higher one's score on the aspects of Influence and Presence on the God-Image Scale the higher their self-esteem and vice versa. Moreover, as seen in Table 6 the higher an individual scored on the Lie Scale on the Coopersmith, the higher the self-esteem score. The Lie Scale was created to determine if one was presenting their self in a false light to try and make their self look better. There were 8 Lie Scale items and the higher one scored the more they were trying to present a false self. Interestingly, the more one was compelled to present their self better the higher the self-esteem score was.

Table 7: Correlations between aspects of the God-Image Scale and Self-Esteem in the

Inclusive Churches

Aspect on the God-Image Scale	Correlation with Self-Esteem
Influence	.496**
Benevolence	.106
Acceptance	.295
Presence	.221
Providence	-.030
Challenge	.014
Lie Scale on Self-Esteem Inventory	.030

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

The only significant correlation found between God-Image and Self-Esteem in inclusive churches is between Influence and Self-Esteem. There was a significant and moderately strong correlation of .496, showing that the higher the Influential aspect of the God-Image the higher the self-esteem and vice versa. There were no other significant correlations between the type of God-Image and Self-Esteem in the inclusive churches. There was also no correlation between the Lie Scale and Self-Esteem showing that one's tendency to present their self in a better light did not affect their self-esteem score.

Table 8: Correlation between type Church and Self-Esteem among Men

Church Men	Self-Esteem -.836**
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\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

There was a significant relationship between the type of

church attended and the self-esteem score in men. This negative correlation indicates that the men who attended the inclusive churches, St. John's and Epiphany, had lower self-esteem than those that attended the non-inclusive churches, Crossroads and Elevate.

Table 9: Correlation between type of Church and Self-Esteem among Women

Church Women	Self-Esteem
	.154

\*significance at the .05 level

\*\* significance at the .01 level

There was no significant relationship between the church attended and self-esteem in the women. The church and God-Image used in church do not indicate high or low self-esteem in women.

## Discussion

Before discussing the findings of this study, it is important to address some of the caveats. Of course, like any other empirical study, there are limitations of this research. The first caveat is the small sample size, especially of the men. The sample size of the men was less than half of the sample of women. Ideally, similar sample sizes are desired. The questionnaire for this study was made available to the same number of men as women. As seen by the sample size, far more women completed and turned in the questionnaire than men. Due to the significant results between the men's self-esteem and well-being scores in the different settings, it would be crucial to repeat this study with a larger sample of males to see if the significant results are replicated. Moreover, using four different locations for my study unavoidably brings other variables into the study. While the

researcher worked to find churches with similar demographics not all variable of race, age, class, and education level could be controlled. Perhaps in further studies of this kind the sample could be reduced to only two churches allowing for a little more control or questions of race, class, and education level could be included in the questionnaire to provide the researcher with more information about how these variables interact with God-Image, Self-Esteem, and Well-Being.

Another caveat of this research, as with any research, is the limitation of questionnaires that reduce an individual to a series of scores. The measures used in this study are meant to measure a specific aspect of an individual; but, of course, individuals prove to be more complex than a single questionnaire can measure. Several questionnaires were used together in this study to obtain as much data as possible, yet each one measures a narrow aspect in a specific way. Due to time limitations, interviews could not be used in this study. For further research in this area, it would be useful to conduct a more in depth analysis of the churches studied and conduct lengthy interviews to fully understand the individual's complex image of God. Interviews would allow the researcher to collect greater and more individualized data that may shed more light on the relationship between gendered images and language for the Divine and its affect on the self.

Rizzuto's theory and psychoanalysis of her patients brings to light the relationship between God-Image and self-image. The child develops their self as mirrored in the parents. Developmentally, the child soon experiences their self as separate from the parents. At this time the God-Image is used, like a teddy bear, as a transitional object. The child now understands their self in relation to the God-Image; their representation of God is now the mirror in which they see and understand their self. First, we began to understand the strong relation between the God-image and the self from the theory of Rizzuto, then we moved on to Mary Daly's theory of God-image and patriarchy's influence.

We learned from Mary Daly that God-image is not only constructed in the interiority of an individual's psyche but also by society. Due to the power of the system of patriarchy, the God-Image of society is dominantly male, anthropomorphic, and all-powerful. As the child develops, cues from society about the

patriarchal God-Image impact the psyche and subsequently inform the child's image of God. Daly begins by unmasking patriarchy, which is at its core, harmful to the development of self-esteem and well-being. What Mary Daly tells us is if the child, raised in a patriarchal system, develops a patriarchal male God through which they create their sense of self and see the

world, then the individual will have lower well-being and self-esteem than one who operates with an inclusive image of God.

From the theories of Rizzuto and Daly we were expecting self-esteem and well-being to be correlated with God-Image. However, what the results of the current study reveal is that the self-esteem and well-being of the women is not significantly different whether they attend an inclusive or a non-inclusive church. The dominant male language and images for God in the non-inclusive churches did not measurably affect the self-esteem and well-being of the women who attend those churches.

Nevertheless, there was a significant difference in the well-being and self-esteem of the men from the separate locations. The men involved in the non-inclusive churches had significantly higher well-being and self-esteem than the men from the inclusive churches. This finding was opposite of what we were expecting from Rizzuto and Daly. Regardless, it is clear that Rizzuto and Daly were right in suggesting that there is a relationship between God-Image and self. Our findings suggest that the God-Image presented in the church does affect the individuals who attend. Furthermore, there were significant correlations between two aspects of the God-Image Scale, Influence and Presence, and the self-esteem of the individual.

Contrary to what was expected from Daly's theory, this study found that there was no significant difference in self-esteem between women in non-inclusive churches and inclusive churches. This finding does not necessarily mean we have to simply dismiss theories like Daly's or Johnson's. One way of understanding these findings is to recognize the history of the patriarchal images that are in place. For many centuries, women have had to cope with being excluded from participation with the Divine. Women have become used to the idea that their God, and mirror through which they see themselves, is male. Because of the long history of patriarchy and patriarchal images in Christianity, women may have found other ways of validating themselves. They may, individually, choose other mirrors in

which to see the self reflected, mirrors beyond the God of the church. These mirrors might be their mothers, sisters, friends, bosses, co-workers, or female role-models. Likewise, their well-being may be situated outside of the church. They may see themselves as successful career women, caring mothers, loving

friends, and loyal sisters. Women have had hundreds of years to cope with a male God-Image and begin to create other, healthy ways of seeing themselves. Perhaps, this is a reason for why there was no significant difference in the self-esteem and well-being of the women in the inclusive and non-inclusive churches.

Unlike the females, there was a significant difference in the self-esteem and well-being between males in non-inclusive and inclusive settings. The men in the inclusive churches had significantly lower self-esteem and well-being than the men in the non-inclusive churches. This result can be interpreted similarly to the last one, however, in the opposite direction. Historically, men have often been given participation with God by gender and name. Because of the recent shift in moving away from patriarchal God images, men, unlike women, have not yet had time to find other ways of validating the self. We can interpret this finding in light of Rizzuto's developmental theory. Men are stuck in finding new ways of using God as they develop. Because they are no longer given direct participation with the Divine, by name and gender, in the inclusive churches, they do not have a clear mirror through which to see the self. The apparent loss of the mirror, in which they have seen their self reflected back to them, has resulted in a loss of self-esteem and well-being. Men, unlike women, have not had the time to recover from this loss. Unfortunately this results in a lower sense of self-esteem. The un-gendered, ambiguous, and even feminine God has caused the men in the inclusive churches to lose God as their transitional object. Perhaps, they have found God as disruptive since there is no direct avenue, for them, to God. The memories of this object become disconnected and God as transitional object can no longer bridge the gap between inner and outer; therefore the self/ego image is disrupted. I believe Rizzuto's theory of the role of God through development is useful in understanding how the loss of direct participation with God by name results in a disconnection of the ego and loss of self-esteem and well-being.

The results of another independent t-test showed that there



was no significant gender difference in self-esteem and well-being between males and females in the non-inclusive churches. The females from the non-inclusive churches and the males from the non-inclusive churches had relatively the same scores

on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and all aspects of the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being. The fact that there is not any significant difference between the self-esteem and well-being of the men and women in the non-inclusive settings may indicate that the women derive self-esteem and well-being from places outside of the church. Because the women in the non-inclusive churches may ground their sense of self worth from other factors aside from being able to participate with the Divine, that is, their scores were not any lower than the self-esteem and well-being scores of the men in the same setting.

Even though there was no significant difference between the women and men in the non-inclusive churches, a significant gender difference was found between males and females in inclusive churches. The women in these communities have high self-esteem either for reasons stated before (that women may have found other ways of validating their self due to the long history of not being able to participate with God) or because the language and images of their community do not exclude them from the Divine and they have reclaimed the images and language of God for themselves. By attributing to the most powerful being characteristics that they can relate to, women have been able to recover God as a mirror. However, our results show us that stripping God of all male language may have excluded men from participation and stolen their mirror through which they see themselves. Men in the inclusive settings have significantly lower self-esteem and well-being than the women in the same churches. A reason for this can be the same one noted above. Men have not yet had the time to regain their mirror. Without the God-mirror that has unquestionably been given to men over centuries, they struggle to find other ways in which to clearly see the self.

The participants were also given the God-Image Scale, along with the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being. The God-Image Scale measured six aspects of God: Influence, Benevolence, Challenge, Acceptance, Presence, and Providence. The higher the score, the more the participant saw God as fulfilling that aspect. This

research found that, on the one hand, the God-Image of the women and men in the non-inclusive settings was significantly more Influential, Providential, and Present than the God-Image

of the women and men in the inclusive settings. This result was hypothesized because, in the non-inclusive settings, God was expected to be seen as a patriarchal figure who is dominant, extremely influential, omnipresent, and has unlimited control over what happens to creation. On the other hand, the churches that have a more inclusive image of God, which may include feminine aspects, would imagine a more well-rounded God, and traits such as caring, affection, love, and compassion would be emphasized in the Divine. The parameters of this study did not allow the researcher to do an in-depth analysis of the God-Image of each individual church. However, this analysis does begin to uncover distinct attributes that belong to the non-inclusive God and how the God-Image differs as it becomes more feminine or un-gendered.

Quite the opposite of what was hypothesized, the males in the non-inclusive churches viewed God as significantly more Accepting. This finding suggests that the males in the non-inclusive settings, who are freely given participation with God through language and images and who have not lost the Divine as their mirror, would view this God, who is very much like them in gender and mannerisms, to be accepting of them. Moreover, God as more accepting would lead to or come from accepting the self. Because the males from inclusive settings have a disruption in the preservation of their self they do not accept themselves and therefore cannot conceive of a God who would. Or, it is possible to view this finding in another light—because the males from the inclusive settings are not given direct participation with God through language they do not feel as accepted by their God and therefore cannot fully accept themselves.

There were significant correlations between Influence and Self-Esteem as well as between Presence and Self-Esteem in the sample, as a whole. The individuals who found God to be more influential and present in the world tended to have higher self-esteem. Or, because we only know that there is a relationship but not the direction of the relationship, it may be that individuals with high self-esteem tended to have images of God that were more influential and present. This finding of the

relationship between a more present and influential God and self-esteem suggests that a more active God in the world or the

closeness of God may cause one to feel safer and therefore boost their self-esteem. According to Coopersmith, children who have parents who are present and provide clear boundaries are found to have higher self-esteem. Perhaps, if God is seen as an ultimate parent, the same might be true for adult members of churches. Our self-esteem rises when we are sure that our parent is present and we can be certain of the expectations that parent has of us, the child. When the samples were separated into inclusive and non-inclusive churches, the significant correlation between Presence and Self-Esteem disappeared in the inclusive churches, leaving only the correlation between Influence and Self-Esteem in the inclusive settings. Therefore, in the inclusive church only high self-esteem and an influential God were linked.

Our findings clearly show us that the relationship between self-esteem, well-being, and God-Image is complicated. Each individual has his or her own image of God. Likewise, each individual has their own ways of perceiving and validating their self. The limitations of this study did not allow for in depth analysis and interviews with each individual; however, this would have provided valuable information in the deeply personal and individual formation of the God-Image and the self. While there were some significant findings and trends between the groups, it is hard to broadly generalize and claim that any two people, let alone whole groups of people, have the same image of God.

Overall, the results from this study show that there are many connections between our images of God and our self-esteem and well-being. Seen by the low self-esteem of the men in the inclusive churches, participation with the Divine through language, images, and gender is important in building one's self-esteem and well-being. Also, seen by the correlations between the Presence and Influence aspects of the God-Images Scale, how one views God does affect how they view their self. In order to foster environments that encourage high self-esteem and well-being, we need to find a more balanced image of God. Perhaps, gender should not be excluded when talking about God. The language and images for God that create positive self-esteem and well-being in both genders is one that is balanced: a God that is both male and female. If we can imagine this God

and talk about this God, that is all things to all people, then we can foster and encourage the people around us to a more whole and healthy becoming.

### Conclusion

This study shows that there is a relationship between images of God and self-esteem and well-being. While there was not any significant difference between the self-esteem and well-being in women from the inclusive and non inclusive churches, there was a significant difference in self-esteem and well-being between the men from the inclusive and non inclusive churches. The loss of participation by name with the Divine negatively affected the men from the inclusive churches, resulting in lower self-esteem and well-being than men in the non inclusive churches who are repeatedly confronted with male images of God. Furthermore, two aspects of the God-Image Scale correlated positively with self-esteem, Influence and Presence. The findings from this study strongly suggest that there is a significant relationship between an individual's image of God and concept of self.

Despite its limitations, this study advanced our understanding of the relations of gendered images for God on the well-being of the self. It took seriously the arguments of Mary Daly and used the insights of Ana-Maria Rizzuto. What was found is that there is a relationship between God-Image and Self-Esteem and Well-Being and further, that being given participation with the Divine in speech and image does affect the Self-Esteem and Well-Being of the individual. The implications for this research point to the importance of critical and reflective language and images for God. While knowing intellectually that God is beyond gender, this study shows the importance of using both male and female images for God in order to give everyone full participation with the Divine. It is essential for self-esteem and well-being that men and women feel included in images for God so that they may see their self fully in the mirror of the Divine. When God can become an image of both female and male, fully and

balanced, then all gendered people can look into the mirror of the Divine and see their self fully and balanced and are capable of becoming a whole and healthy self.

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