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### Adversity, Grace, and Distress Among College Students

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# Adversity, Grace, and Distress Among College Students

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Norfolk, VA

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# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

- Positive psychology has been with us for about 20 years (Peterson, 2008; Seligman, 1998; 2002; 2009; Seligman & Csikszmentihaly, 2000)
- Positive psychology emphasizes authentic happiness, wellness, flourishing, eudaimonia, or shalom
  - Grace falls within this domain
  - Grace remains a relatively neglected topic

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

- Grace is
  - A widely known concept
    - Gracious
    - Graceful
    - Grace-note
  - An emphasis of Christianity
  - Largely neglected by positive psychology
- Grace is “getting better than I deserve”
- Grace is “unmerited favor”

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

- Grace investigation began in the 1980s but remained obscure
  - Watson (Watson et al, 1988a; 1988b)
  - Spradlin (Payton, Spradlin, & Bufford, 2000; Spradlin, 2002)
- Recently grace has received more attention
  - Several measurement efforts
    - Bassett (Bassett et al, 2012; 2013)
    - Bufford (Bufford et al, 2015; 2017; 2018)
    - Sisemore (Blackburn et al, 2012; Sisemore et al, 2006; 2011; Watson et al, 2011)
    - Sells (Beckenbach et al, 2010; Patrick et al, 2013; Sells, et al, 2009)

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

- Dimensions of Grace scale (Bufford, Blackburn, Sisemore, & Bassett, 2015; Bufford, Sisemore & Blackburn, 2017)
  - God's Grace
  - Costly Grace
  - Grace to Self
  - Grace from Others
  - Grace to Others
- Measurement sets the stage for empirical study
  - Empirical correlates (Bufford et al, 2017)
  - Grace outcomes (Bufford, McMinn, Moody, & Geczy-Haskins, 2017)

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

- Adversity is
  - Common
  - Varied in kind, degree
  - May be helpful or harmful
    - Trauma and PTSD
    - Resilience, hardiness, grit, post-traumatic growth in psychological literature
    - Perseverance, endurance, proven character, hope (Ro 5:3-5; Ja 1:2-4) are Christian notions

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

- This study explored the relationships among adversity, distress, and grace
  - Participants
  - Methods
    - Instruments
    - Procedures
  - Results
  - Discussion



# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

## ► Participants

### ► 93 traditional undergraduates

► Male = 42 (45.2%)

► Female = 51 (54.8%)

### ► Age: $M = 19.37$ $SD = 1.30$ (18-21 years)

### ► Ethnicity

► American Indian = 2 (2.2%)

► Asian American = 9 (9.7%)

► European American = 75 (81.8%)

► Latina/o = 9 (9.7%)

► Multi-ethnic = 2 (2.2%)

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

## ► Participants

### ► Physical health

- Good to Excellent – 83.9%
- Medication (not psychotropic) – 33.3%

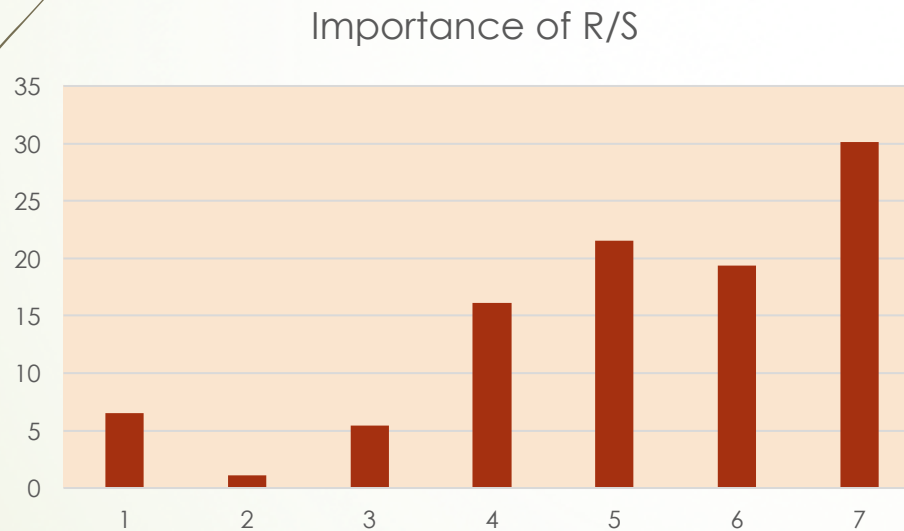
### ► Mental Health

- Ever therapy – 39.6%
- Current therapy – 16.1%
- Psychotropic medications – 15.4% (about 1:6)

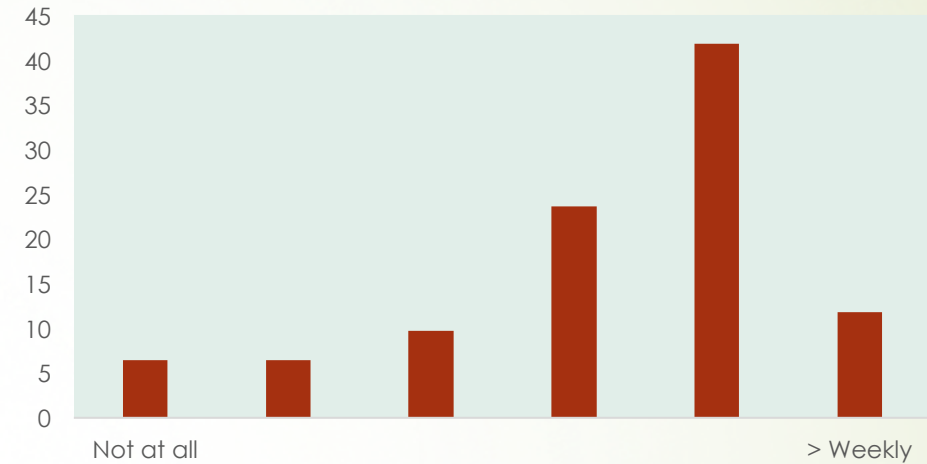
# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

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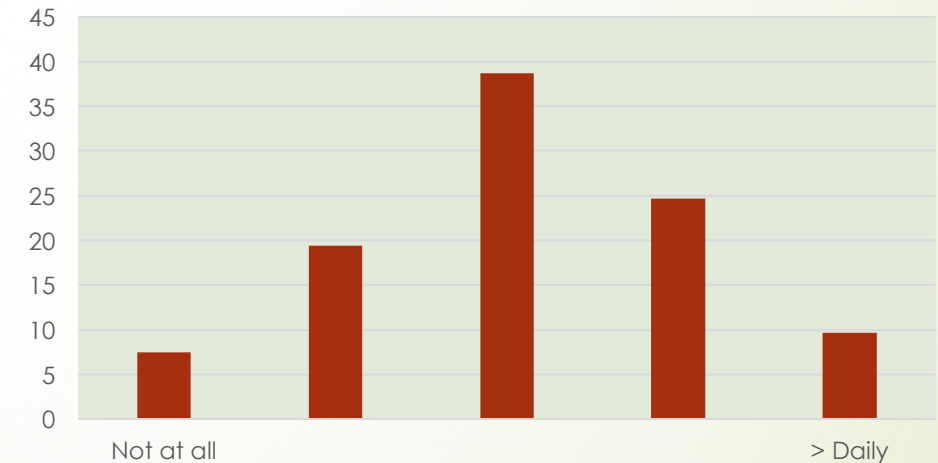
Participants R/S



Frequency of Attendance



Frequency of Personal R/S Practices



# Adversity, Grace, and Distress: Instruments

- Adversity: Adverse Childhood Experiences (Felitti et al, 1998)
  - 10-item checklist
  - Yes/No
  - Alpha = .78
- GAD-7
  - 7 items
  - Responses from *Not at All* = 1 to *Nearly Every Day* = 4
  - Alpha = .92
- PHQ-9
  - 9 items
  - Responses from
  - Alpha = .90
- Distress: Somatic Symptom Scale (SSS-8; Gierk et al, 2014); derived from PHQ-15
  - Eight items
  - 5 point continuum from *Not at All* = 0 to *Very Much* = 4
  - Alpha = 0.80
- Grace: Dimensions of Grace (Bufford et al, 2017)
  - 5 subscales: God's Grace, Costly Grace, Grace to Self, Grace from Others, Grace to Others
  - 36 items
  - 7 point continuum from *Strongly Disagree* = 1 to *Strongly Agree* = 7
  - Alpha = .89, .89, .53, .71, .74 respectively (negative items?)

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress

## ➤ Procedure

- Traditional undergraduates completed materials for course credit
- The study was approved by the GFU IRB
- Data were gathered in the spring of 2017

## Adversity, Grace, and Distress: Descriptive Data

Scale	Alpha	Mean	SD
ACE-Total	0.78	1.08	1.79
GAD-7	0.92	12.62	5.05
PHQ-9	0.90	14.46	5.58
SSS-8	0.80	14.99	5.6
God's Grace	0.89	4.54	1.04
Costly Grace	0.89	5.39	1.21
Grace to Self	0.53	3.42	0.74
Grace from Others	0.71	4.71	1.05
Grace to Others	0.74	4.53	0.94



## Descriptive Data: Adversity, Grace, and Distress

Scale	Skew	SE-Skew	Skew/SE-S	Kurtosis	SE-Kurtosis	K/SE-K
ACE-Total	2.110	0.244	8.648	1.923	0.483	3.981
GAD-7	1.103	0.243	4.539	0.319	0.481	0.663
PHQ-9	1.366	0.240	5.692	0.815	0.476	1.712
SSS-8	0.731	0.241	3.033	4.925	0.478	10.303
God's Grace	0.070	0.243	0.288	2.237	0.481	4.651
Costly Grace	0.692	0.243	2.848	2.051	0.481	4.264
Grace to Self	0.105	0.243	0.432	-0.478	0.481	-0.994
Grace from Others	0.234	0.243	0.963	0.203	0.481	0.422
Grace to Others	0.490	0.241	2.033	1.314	0.478	2.749

## Correlations: Grace and Adversity on GAD-7

Scale	ACE	GAD-7	PHQ-9	SSS-8
GAD-7	.442**			
PHQ-9	.480**	.791**		
SSS-8	.351**	.502**	.616**	
God's Grace	.019	-.069	.097	-.024
Costly Grace	-.035	.011	.053	.065
Grace to Self	-.154	-.318**	-.269**	-.224*
Grace from Others	-.451**	-.320**	-.318**	-.288**
Grace to Others	-.182	-.109	-.208	-.238*



## Regressions: Grace and Adversity on GAD-7

Variable	R	R-Square	Adj R-Square	df	MS	F	Sig.	Beta
Race, Sex, Age	0.262	0.069		3, 85	52.070	2.020	0.117	
ACE	0.500	0.250	0.213	4, 81	141.850	6.750	< .001	0.431

## Regressions: Grace and Adversity on GAD-7

Variable	R	R-Square	Adj R-Square	df	MS	F	Sig.	Beta
Race, Sex, Age	0.262	0.069		3, 85	52.070	2.020	0.117	
ACE	0.500	0.250	0.213	4, 81	141.850	6.750	< .001	0.431
Race, Sex, Age	0.262	0.069		3, 85	52.070	2.020	0.117	
Grace from Others	0.388	0.150	0.108	4, 81	85.242	3.580	0.010	-0.081
Grace to Self	0.452	0.204	0.154	5, 80	92.695	4.110	< .001	-0.229
ACE	0.552	0.305	0.252	6, 79	115.212	5.766	< .001	0.369

## Regressions: Grace and Adversity on PHQ-9

Variable	R	R-Square	Adj R-Square	df	MS	F	Sig.	Beta
Race, Sex, Age	0.130	0.039	0.004	3, 84	36.724	1.123	0.344	
ACE	0.510	0.260	0.224	4, 83	185.477	7.282	< .001	0.476

## Regressions: Grace and Adversity on PHQ-9

Variable	R	R-Square	Adj R-Square	df	MS	F	Sig.	Beta
Race, Sex, Age	0.130	0.039	0.004	3, 84	36.724	1.123	0.344	
ACE	0.510	0.260	0.224	4, 83	185.477	7.282	< .001	0.476
Race, Sex, Age	0.130	0.039	0.004	3, 84	36.724	1.123	0.344	
Grace from Others	0.353	0.125	0.082	4, 83	88.964	2.953	0.025	-0.304
ACE	0.515	0.265	0.220	5, 82	151.231	5.906	< .001	0.436

## Regressions: Grace and Adversity on SSS-8

Variable	R	R-Square	Adj R-Square	df	MS	F	Sig.	Beta
Race, Sex, Age	0.182	0.033	-0.002	3, 83	30.823	0.947	0.422	
ACE	0.400	0.160	0.119	4, 82	111.831	3.909	0.006	0.361

## Regressions: Grace and Adversity on SSS-8

Variable	R	R-Square	Adj R-Square	df	MS	F	Sig.	Beta
Race, Sex, Age	0.182	0.033	-0.002	3, 83	30.823	0.947	0.422	
ACE	0.400	0.160	0.119	4, 82	111.831	3.909	0.006	0.361
Race, Sex, Age	0.182	0.033	-0.002	3, 83	30.823	0.947	0.422	
Grace from Others	0.317	0.101	0.057	4, 82	70.203	2.291	0.067	-0.271
ACE	0.408	0.167	0.115	5, 81	93.131	3.241	0.010	0.309

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress: Summary of Results

- Anxiety, depression and somatization are related to ACEs and to each other
- ACEs predict
  - GAD-7      Delta R-Square = .178
  - PHQ-9      Delta R-Square = .221
  - SSS-8      Delta R-Square = .127
- Grace moderates this relationship
  - GAD-7      Delta R-Square = .101
  - PHQ-9      Delta R-Square = .140
  - SSS-8      Delta R-Square = .066

## Adversity, Grace, and Distress: Discussion

- These findings show that grace is inversely related to distress as reported on measures of anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms.
- About 1/3 to 1/2 of the variance on anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms related to adverse childhood experiences is ameliorated by grace from others, and for anxiety, grace to self.
- Although anxiety and depression are strongly related, grace to self seems to selectively benefit anxiety, possibly by reducing self-critical thoughts.
- Here we see benefits of grace from others and grace to self; we wonder how God's grace, costly grace, and grace to others might be manifested in us?



# Adversity, Grace, and Distress: Discussion

## ➤ Limitations

- Sample is racially/ethnically homogeneous
- Sample is made-up of Christian university students between the ages of 18 and 21.
- Sample is also relatively homogenous in terms of education and SES related to their status as university students
- Sample is geographically localized

# Adversity, Grace, and Distress: Discussion

## ➤ Directions for Future Research

- Path analysis of the relationships among adversity, grace, and psychological functioning
- Similar investigation that utilizes a larger sample, more diverse sample of individuals outside of a university setting
- Include spiritual and religious practices as predictors in regression?
- Include participants from a variety of religious traditions (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, Atheist, etc.)
- Use of other positive psychology constructs such as \_\_\_\_\_ as criterion variables
- Although anxiety and depression are strongly related, grace to self seems to selectively benefit anxiety, possibly by reducing self-critical thoughts. This could be a focus of further study

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