Chapter 28
Positive Psychology and Religiousness/ Spirituality in the Context of Couples and Families

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The positive psychology (PP) movement offers uplifting insights on how social science can be leveraged to promote human well-being for individuals, couples, families, communities, and societies. As Chap. 4 of this handbook illustrates, many synergistic overlaps exist between religiousness/spirituality (R/S) and the virtues that PP has found to promote personal thriving. Similar intersections may exist between R/S and PP across diverse types of close relationships and families. In this chapter, we use Mahoney's (2010) relational spirituality framework and focus on the maintenance stage of healthy relationships, highlighting helpful roles that R/S can play for partners and parents. Specifically, we summarize extensive evidence linking global markers of higher R/S (especially higher religious service attendance) to relational well-being. Next, we delve into four specific religious/spiritual strengths associated with better relational well-being: sanctification, spiritual intimacy, prayer for partner, and positive religious/spiritual coping. We close by offering guidelines for helping professionals and recommendations for scientists to consider when they engage in efforts to enhance couple and family well-being.

The Relational Spirituality Framework

Mahoney's (2010) relational spirituality framework synthesizes empirical findings of global religious/spiritual markers and delineates specific religious/spiritual processes that can facilitate or undermine close relationship functioning. Analogous to Pargament and Mahoney's (2017) conception of spirituality as the discovery, conservation, and transformation of people perceive as sacred, Mahoney's (2010, 2013) relational spirituality framework heuristically sorted the R/S and couple/family

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research literature into three recursive, overlapping stages: (a) formation (i.e., creating and structuring a relationship), (b) maintenance (i.e., protecting an established relationship), and (c) transformation (i.e., reforming or exiting a distressed relationship). In addition, Mahoney differentiated specific religious/spiritual strengths or struggles that could emerge in individuals' relationships with (a) perceived supernatural figures (e.g., deity, immortal ancestor), (b) other individuals (e.g., romantic partner, spouse, child), and (c) religious communities (e.g., religious leaders and coreligionists). Each type of strength or struggle has the potential to shape close dyadic relationships (e.g., adult unions, parent–child relationships). Consistent with the emphasis of PP, this chapter elaborates the portion of the relational spirituality framework that addresses positive roles R/S can play in maintaining close relationships. Readers are referred elsewhere for scholarship on conflicts within and across families and religious communities (e.g., over the formation of adult unions and family units viewed as morally acceptable versus unacceptable; Mahoney & Krumrei, in press) and for scholarship on ways R/S can exacerbate individual and family distress when people reform or exit distressed relationships (Ellison & Xu, 2014; Mahoney, 2013; Mahoney & Boyatzis, 2019).

Most scientific studies on faith and family life focus on families that adhere to a Western "traditional" family structure (i.e., married heterosexual couples with children), perhaps because such families tend to attend religious services more often than other types of family units. For example, according to 2011–2013 U.S. surveys, 49% of married mothers, 39% of single mothers, and 32% of cohabiting mothers attended religious services at least two to three times per month (Mahoney et al., 2015). Such group differences can be misinterpreted to mean that R/S is primarily or exclusively helpful to traditional families. However, in these same surveys, 79% of married mothers, 77% of single mothers, and 68% of cohabiting mothers reported R/S was *somewhat* or *very important* to their daily lives (Mahoney et al., 2015). More importantly, growing evidence indicates that higher R/S is tied to relational thriving for unmarried couples, same-sex couples, and families headed by single mothers (Mahoney & Krumrei, in press). Thus, in this chapter, we highlight that greater R/S can be a valuable resource for many types of couple and family relationships, even though people in traditional family units may participate in organized religious groups more often than other people.

Basic Research on Global Markers of Personal Religious/ Spiritual and Relational Well-Being

Since 1980, several hundred peer-reviewed studies have been published on associations between global markers of individuals' R/S (e.g., religious attendance or importance) and (a) forming and maintaining well-functioning adult unions, (b) becoming and being a better parent, and (c) sustaining close parent–adolescent relationships. Overall, this large body of work has found that higher involvement with

organized religious groups is beneficial for couples and families. We refer readers to Ellison and Xu (2014), Mahoney (2010, 2013, 2021), Mahoney and Boyatzis (2019), Mahoney and Krumrei (in press), and Marks and Dollahite (2016) for extensive reviews of and specific citations from this rapidly expanding literature that we summarize below.

For couples, greater religious attendance and importance have been repeatedly correlated with less extra-relational infidelity, lower domestic violence, higher marital satisfaction, better relationship processes (e.g., relational commitment), and lower risk of divorce. For parenting, higher religious attendance and importance have been tied to less maternal substance use during pregnancy, higher parental satisfaction, and lower parental stress. For child-rearing attitudes and practices, higher religious attendance has been consistently linked to lower use of corporal punishment. Higher global R/S has also been tied to more positive childrearing methods, greater positive parental time spent with children, and lower risk of child physical abuse. Conservative Christian beliefs and affiliation have been tied to more frequent use of corporal punishment but not to higher rates of child physical abuse.

Taken together, higher R/S—especially religious attendance—has been consistently linked to desirable relational outcomes. Most of this research has been with married and unmarried opposite-sex couples or with single mothers. In addition, most findings are based on one or two global religious/spiritual items. Moreover, existing studies typical use cross-sectional designs which leaves open speculation about why and how greater involvement in religious groups is associated with better relational functioning. Perhaps greater involvement in a supportive religious community signals greater internalization of that religious community's valued family goals (e.g., getting and remaining married, having children) and virtues (e.g., altruism, generosity, commitment), which in turn protects and strengthens relational and family bonds. More longitudinal research is needed to explore these and other untested possibilities.

Unfortunately, global religious/spiritual indices do not help identify what specific aspects of people's religious/spiritual thoughts, feelings, and relationships (with other people or deities) might be helpful versus harmful. Multi-item religious/spiritual measures that simply involve general questions about religious/spiritual activities (e.g., frequency of prayer or Scripture reading) also fail to disentangle adaptive versus maladaptive religious/spiritual processes. This confounding creates four major problems in understanding why faith matters for couples and families. First, skeptics can easily argue that any apparent associations between virtues and higher global R/S are merely due to basic psychosocial strengths, such as prosocial morality, meaning-making, or social support, each of which humans can develop and access within or outside of organized religious participation. From this conceptual vantage point, greater religious/spiritual engagement (such as attending religious services) is interchangeable with involvement in other cultural subgroups; it is not necessarily beneficial because of unique, substantive religious/spiritual beliefs, practices, or processes. Second, and conversely, critics can easily attribute associations between global religious/spiritual indices and relational vices to unique religious/spiritual beliefs that are taught by some religious groups, such the idea that

scriptural passages or a deity condone spousal or child maltreatment. Third, global religious/spiritual indices allow scholars with an indiscriminately proreligious worldview to accentuate only the virtues tied to R/S (because global religious/spiritual indices can conceal rare but toxic forms of faith, especially in large national or community samples of mostly nondistressed individuals). Fourth, correlations between global indices of R/S and better relationship functioning are often small and/or insignificant, perhaps because the opposing effects of underlying positive and negative religious/spiritual processes often cancel each other out.

Basic Research on Specific Relational Religious/Spiritual Strengths and PP Outcomes

One solution to problems embedded within global religious/spiritual measures is for researchers to assess and disentangle religious/spiritual strengths from less common religious/spiritual processes that are toxic. Illuminating both positive and negative religious/spiritual processes could also help integrate the aforementioned findings about the salutary links between R/S and PP, without losing sight of the potential dark sides of R/S.

We now highlight four specific relational religious/spiritual processes that mesh well with PP: sanctification, spiritual disclosure and intimacy, prayer for one's partner, and positive religious/spiritual coping. Unless otherwise noted, studies of these religious/spiritual strengths have thus far been conducted with U.S. samples of predominantly middle-class, White Christians. Such sampling is similar to overall U.S. demographics, but it obscures the roles these processes may (or not) play within various demographic subgroups or religious traditions.

Sanctification of Couple and Family Relationships

Sanctification refers to the degree to which a relationship is perceived (a) as a manifestation of God or Higher Powers (i.e., theistic sanctification) and/or (b) as imbued with sacred qualities (i.e., nontheistic sanctification). In a meta-analysis of correlational findings through mid-2019, Mahoney et al. (2021) found that greater sanctification of various types of close relationships is associated with more positive relational adjustment (i.e., average $r = .24$, CI = .20 to .29) and lower rates of relational problems (average $r = -.12$, CI = $-.06$ to $-.18$). Below we highlight a few findings from the around 55 qualitative and quantitative studies on sanctification and relational well-being in couples and family relationships that have been conducted as of mid-2021.

Married heterosexuals (Mahoney et al., 1999), same-sex couples, (Phillips et al., 2017), and dating and cohabiting couples (Henderson et al., 2018) often view their relationship as having sacred qualities and/or as being a manifestation of a deity's presence. For all three types of couples, greater perceived sanctification of the couple relationship has been tied to greater relationship satisfaction and commitment (Henderson et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2017), even after controlling for positive relationship behaviors (e.g., forgiveness and sacrifice; Sabey et al., 2014) and stable traits of partners (Kusner et al., 2014). Greater sanctification has also been found to be linked to less partner-focused revenge (Davis et al., 2012), to buffer against the adverse impact of life stress on relationship quality (Ellison et al., 2011), and to predict more supportive partner behaviors and in turn greater relationship happiness (Rusu et al., 2015). Furthermore, cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence indicates that greater sanctification of marriage predicts better-observed communication skills (by both spouses) and intimacy during conflictual marital interactions (Kusner et al., 2014; Rauer & Volling, 2015) and emotionally vulnerable conversations (Padgett et al., 2019).

At least four studies have extended findings on sanctification of marriage beyond predominantly Christian U.S. couples. Consistent with findings on unmarried college students (Fincham et al., 2010), greater sanctification has been tied to lower infidelity thoughts and behaviors among married Iranians seeking counseling (Reich & Kalantar, 2018). Also among married Iranians, greater sanctification of marriage uniquely predicted both greater marital satisfaction even after controlling for religious/spiritual coping (Fallahchai et al., 2021), and more frequent prayer for one's partner (Reich & Kalantar, 2018). Furthermore, among Christian Orthodox couples from Romania, higher sanctification has been associated with better marital satisfaction and with more supportive marital interactions (Rusu et al., 2015).

The value of delving into specific religious/spiritual processes like sanctification is vividly illustrated by studies focused on sexuality within intimate unions. For decades, higher global R/S has been linked to greater sex guilt and more inhibition of sexual activity outside of marriage (Hernandez et al., 2013), implying that R/S mainly functions to suppress sexual well-being. However, greater sanctification of sexuality predicts greater sexual satisfaction cross-sectionally among married and unmarried partners (Leonhardt et al., 2021) and longitudinally among newlyweds (Hernandez-Kane & Mahoney, 2018). It also is tied to lower sex guilt among opposite-sex, same-sex, and cohabiting partners (Leonhardt et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2017) and to lower odds of physical and emotional cheating, even after controlling for plausible alternate explanations (general R/S, problematic alcohol use, trait self-control; McAllister et al., 2020).

Like with marriage, viewing parenting as sacred is commonplace, at least in the United States (Nelson & Uecker, 2018). Moreover, both among married couples and single mothers, sanctification of parenting is tied to greater satisfaction with being a parent of school-aged children, even after controlling for global religious involvement and other demographics (Nelson & Uecker, 2018). Among college students

and their parents, sanctification has also been tied to more satisfaction within the parent-child relationship (Brelsford, 2013). Beyond satisfaction, viewing parenting as a sacred endeavor may intensify parental involvement and convictions about their preferred childrearing methods. Focusing on disciplinary situations, for example, sanctification by married parents has been linked to positive parenting techniques (e.g., to greater use of contingent praise and to teaching reparation) but not to punitive parenting techniques (e.g., to shaming or spanking; Volling et al., 2009). Furthermore, when a stronger belief in the sanctity of parenting is combined with greater use of nonpunitive strategies, evidence suggests it enhances children's conscience development (Volling et al., 2009). Focusing on fathers, viewing parenting as a sanctified role has been tied to fathers' greater involvement in their children's lives, even after accounting for personality and marital characteristics (yet children did not report feeling closer or more attached to their fathers; Lynn et al., 2016). More broadly, studies have found that greater sanctification of parenting also buffers parents against feeling stressed by their children's behavior problems, suggesting sanctification of parenting may help parents maintain confidence in the face of child noncompliance (Weyand et al., 2013).

Spiritual Disclosure and Intimacy

Whereas sanctification captures an individual's private view of a relationship, two or more people can engage in overt religious/spiritual behaviors that are tied to relational well-being as well, such as engaging in intimate dialogues about R/S. In an initial study on this topic, Brelsford and Mahoney (2008) assessed how much college students and parents openly shared their religious/spiritual views, resources, and struggles. Labeled *spiritual disclosure*, this process was associated with higher relationship satisfaction and lower verbal hostility, both in mother–child and father–child pairs. However, many people may avoid revealing information about their religious/spiritual thoughts or feelings to others, due to fear of being dismissed, ridiculed, or misunderstood (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). Kusner et al. (2014) therefore created a measure to assess both dyadic spiritual disclosures and spiritual support (i.e., responding to a partner's spiritual disclosures in an empathic, nonjudgmental way), labeling this combined process *spiritual intimacy*. Greater spiritual intimacy predicted both partners displaying less negativity and more positivity during observations of couples discussing major conflicts, and associations persisted after accounting for couples' stable characteristics (e.g., education level, personality traits, and family backgrounds; Kusner et al. 2014). Moreover, in a longitudinal study, Padgett et al. (2019) found that spiritual intimacy predicted observations of new parents being more emotionally supportive of one another during emotionally vulnerable conversations.

Prayer for Partner

Individuals can privately turn to a perceived relationship with God to help them enact virtues that can help sustain their adult union (Fincham & Beach, 2014). For example, several studies have found that, in generally well-functioning relationships, benevolent prayer for one's partner reliably facilitates that relationship's quality (Fincham et al., 2010; Fincham & Beach, 2013, 2014). Indeed, in longitudinal studies of U.S. college students in a dating relationship, those who privately prayed for their romantic partner's well-being have reported increased relationship satisfaction and decreased risk of infidelity over time (for review, see Fincham & Beach, 2013). Similarly, among Iranians seeking marital counseling, partner-focused prayer was tied to lower infidelity, even after controlling for sanctification (Reich & Kalantar, 2018). Experimental studies have also found that praying for someone with whom one has a romantic or close relationship increases the praying person's levels of selfless concern, gratitude, and forgiveness of the person for whom they are praying (Fincham & Beach, 2013). In addition, in a randomized experiment with a community sample of married African Americans, Beach et al. (2011) randomly assigned couples to one of three conditions: (a) an evidence-supported marital education program, (b) the same program supplemented with a module focused on partner-focused prayer, and (c) self-help reading materials only. In the experimental condition, partner-focused prayer enhanced marital outcomes for wives (but not husbands) over time, beyond the beneficial effects of the other two conditions. However, for both spouses, partner-focused prayer predicted each partner's higher marital satisfaction, which also mediated (explained) the effect of partner-focused prayer on increased marital commitment (Fincham & Beach, 2014).

Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping and Relationship Well-Being

Rooted in Pargament's (1997) seminal book, extensive research exists on the role of positive religious/spiritual coping for individual well-being (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). Measures of positive religious/spiritual coping largely assess how much people cope with stressful life events by drawing on a benevolent and secure relationship with God (divine coping) and on support from coreligionists (fellow religious believers). Such resources are often tied to better psychological adjustment, especially stress-related growth (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015; Pargament, 1997).

Likewise, positive religious/spiritual coping with personal and interpersonal stressors could potentially enhance relational well-being (Mahoney, 2010, 2013). Two studies of married couples offer preliminary support of this possibility. Specifically, for married Iranians, higher positive religious/spiritual coping predicted higher marital satisfaction (after controlling for prayer for partner;

Reich & Kalantar, 2018), sanctification of marriage, and global indices of R/S (frequency of prayer, religious pilgrimages, fasting, reciting the Quran; Fallahchai et al., 2021).

With regard to parenting, positive religious/spiritual coping has been related to parents' higher self-appraisals of parental competence, particularly among parents whose children have significant behavior problems (Weyand et al., 2013). However, such salutary links did not emerge for parents of at-risk preschoolers (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006) or children with autism (Tarakeshwar & Pargament, 2001). Such null findings may reflect stress-mobilization coping processes where parents may call on God more often when they feel overwhelmed.

Summary Observations

To recap, greater sanctification of close relationships and benevolent prayer for a partner have been robustly tied to better marital, sexual, and parental satisfaction and commitment. These findings have emerged mostly in studies comprised of largely nondistressed couples and parents, as well as both inside and outside of marriage. Initial studies on spiritual disclosure, spiritual intimacy, and positive religious/spiritual coping suggest these specific religious/spiritual processes may also help enhance and sustain healthy relationships with loved ones. All these specific religious/spiritual processes are likely to be reciprocally linked to greater participation in a supportive religious community. Furthermore, being active in a religious group that affirms the type of family to which one belongs could be helpful in many ways, such as offering norms, role models, and classes that help build and reinforce positive couple, marital, and family dynamics.

Applications of Relational Religious/Spiritual Strengths in Community and Clinical Contexts

Next, we discuss possible applications of the research findings we have reviewed, particularly for religious leaders, chaplains, and couple and family educators or psychotherapists.

Awareness of Religious/Spiritual Strengths To date, nearly all studies on relational religious/spiritual strengths have involved national or community samples of generally well-functioning couples (opposite-sex or married-heterosexual) and single parents. One implication of this research is that helping professionals could consider integrating research findings about religious/spiritual relational strengths into psychoeducational prevention programs (e.g., couple or parenting enrichment programs) and facilitate participants' reflection and dialogue about the potential benefits of drawing on these religious/spiritual resources. Similarly, psychothera-

pists could help clients identify specific religious/spiritual beliefs about close relationships that could help motivate their use of interpersonal strategies for enhancing their relational and personal well-being. Next, we offer a few guidelines for such efforts, based on available research findings.

Avoid Religious/Spiritual Stereotypes One guideline is for practitioners and researchers to avoid stereotypes when anticipating who might benefit from relational religious/spiritual strengths. For instance, do not assume that religious/spiritual assets are only relevant to individuals embedded in "traditional" couples or families. Instead, when working across diverse types of couples and families, directly assess whether and how relational religious/spiritual strengths may facilitate personal and relational well-being. In addition, do not merely focus on simplistic religious/spiritual constructs such as religious affiliation or attendance. Moreover, assess constructs that are relevant for theists and nontheists alike, such as the nontheistic sanctification of couple and family relationships. Indeed, increasing numbers of people are involved in nontraditional intimate or family relationships. To illustrate, based on 2010 data, about 65% of U.S. women cohabited with a partner prior to their first marriage, about 40% of children were born to unmarried women, and 50% of children are expected to spend part of their childhood living with an unmarried couple (Mahoney & Krumrei, in press).

Take Religious/Spiritual Dialogue Seriously Another guideline is to take seriously the potential bonding power of two individuals vulnerably sharing their religious/spiritual thoughts, questions, or struggles with each other and then providing one another with empathic, nonjudgmental support about such disclosures. These spiritually intimate dialogues can lead to better relational satisfaction and emotion-focused communication skills. Leaders of relationship education programs can consider intentionally encouraging and facilitating spiritually disclosing intimate dialogues between partners (and parents and children) about their respective religious/spiritual journeys and how these journeys inform their personal and relational aspirations. For example, individuals could be asked to share with loved ones whether, why, how, and to what degree they pray for each other and view their relationship as a sacred bond. Similarly, psychotherapists could consider exploring whether and with whom their clients experience spiritual intimacy, taking care to model genuine and nonjudgmental curiosity about the roles R/S plays in shaping their clients' desires and strategies to sustain healthy close relationships. The emergence of problematic conflicts during religious/spiritual dialogues could signal a need for relationship partners to approach—not avoid—unresolved tensions.

Unpack Religious/Spiritual Content A third guideline is to unpack the content of individuals' religious/spiritual thoughts and ways of dialoguing with other people and with God/Higher power(s). Use religious language that matches the target audience (see Beach et al., 2008, for sample prayer script adapted for a particular religious tradition). As an exemplary illustration, Beach et al. (2011) examined the causal impact of adding partner-focused prayer to a well-established evidence-based

marital education program (PREP). The researchers carefully tailored the language of sample partner-focused prayers to fit well with the worldview of their theologically moderate to conservative, African-American, Christian participants. Namely, the prayers emphasized God's love and were supplemented with *agape*-related biblical verses that resonated with the theme of selfless love. These partner-focused prayers improved relational outcomes, at least for wives (Beach et al., 2011). In contrast, Cobb and Sullivan (2015) found that over 2 years, wives who participated in uncontrolled premarital or relationship educational programs (71% delivered in religious settings) showed declines in marital satisfaction that were 3.5 times steeper compared with wives who did not participate in any such programs, with no effects found for husbands. These results contrast what Beach et al. (2011) found and raise questions about how to address participants' religious/spiritual beliefs when disseminating relationship educational programs in religious settings. In psychotherapy, we suggest psychotherapists sensitively assess whether the content of clients' religious/spiritual beliefs or prayers facilitates or undermines partners' relational and personal well-being.

Possible Clashes Between R/S and PP   Although we highlight possible benefits of relational religious/spiritual resources, these processes can translate into relational processes that conflict with positive relationship dynamics that are often promoted by PP. For example, in a study of married heterosexual couples, greater perceived sanctity of the parent–infant bond led to decreased (not increased) egalitarianism in providing essential infant care (DeMaris et al., 2011). Also, in a small-scale study of mothers, greater sanctification of parenting was tied to more use of corporal punishment when mothers interpreted the Bible literally but less use of corporal punishment for mothers with more liberal biblical views (Murray-Swank et al., 2006). More studies are needed to clarify for whom and when specific religious/spiritual resources translate into virtuous attitudes and actions toward loved ones. In the meantime, couple and family educators and psychotherapists need to be prepared to address conflicts between their own and clients' views of the optimal means to build and maintain couple and family relationships.

Dark Sides of R/S   As elaborated elsewhere (e.g., Johnson, 2015; Mahoney, 2013), dark sides of relational R/S exist that need to keep that in mind. To illustrate, we highlight four religious/spiritual risk factors that are counter examples to the four religious/spiritual strengths we emphasize in this chapter. First, individuals can perceive couple or family problems, such as a divorce or romantic breakup, as a desecration or sacred loss, which can intensify their subsequent personal and interpersonal distress. Second, in conflicts with loved ones, partners and parents can engage in religious/spiritual dialogues in which they "align" with divine beings or religious/spiritual teachings to justify a harmful position (i.e., spiritual one-upmanship), such as objecting to a sexual and/or gender minority family member (Etengoff & Diaute, 2014). Third, instead of confronting problems productively, individuals can pray to God as an ineffectual means to tolerate or try to change another's dysfunctional behavior. Fourth, individuals can become embroiled in negative religious/spiritual

coping, including distressing thoughts and feelings about supernatural figures (e.g., anger toward God, feeling punished by the devil), religious groups (e.g., conflicts with co-believers), or the self (e.g., feeling morally conflicted or confused about ultimate meaning). Studies suggest these four processes are relatively rare, but they each are tied to more relational and/or personal distress. Thus, although clinicians may be more likely to witness pathological manifestations of R/S than religious leaders in community settings, professionals working in either context need to be willing to address the dark sides of R/S.

Collaborate with Religious/Spiritual Groups Although some people pursue their religious/spiritual journeys outside of a religious community, religious groups presumably represent salient social networks that can help individuals access religious/spiritual resources and work through religious/spiritual struggles. Mental health professionals and couple and family educators can collaborate with religious organizations to identify specific religious/spiritual factors that may enhance evidence-supported psychoeducational programs. Additionally, mental health professionals could offer religious groups insights from emerging research on personal and relational distress that some religious/spiritual teachings may create, and they can help religious organizations consider how to address such distress. Taken together, mutually beneficial collaborations could be built between practitioners and religious organizations, to help people cultivate healthy relationships (Mahoney et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Science and Practice

We close by articulating some key priorities for scientific research on R/S, close relationships, and PP. First, more research is needed that differentiates specific religious/spiritual factors from PP's virtues (e.g., forgiveness) that do not necessarily involve substantive religious/spiritual beliefs, practices, or elements. Second, studies need to disentangle specific religious/spiritual resource and risk factors that are confounded in global indicators of R/S. Third, diverse couples and families—beyond married heterosexuals with children—need to be included in studies of R/S and close relationships (e.g., couples without children, single or repartnered/remarried parents, multigenerational families, and same-sex couples); such efforts will broaden the sociocultural generalizability of scientific findings on how R/S can help relationships thrive. On a related note, kinship relationships across the lifespan need empirical attention (e.g., adult siblings, aunts/uncles, and friendships) to encompass the family networks of single adults without children. Fourth, researchers need to be clear that despite mean differences between subgroups (e.g., married vs. unmarried individuals) on religious/spiritual engagment, similar significant associations may exist between religious/spiritual strengths and relational well-being within subgroups. Fifth, research needs to establish pathways from relational religious/spiritual strengths to positive relational dynamics and then to individual and relational

well-being. Taken together, progress on these recommendations could offer practitioners and policymakers deeper depth insights about why and how R/S matters for close relationships which could then be incorporated into evidence-based prevention and intervention programs for couples and families.

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