

Religion in the Home in the 1980s and 1990s: A Meta-Analytic Review and Conceptual Analysis of Links Between Religion, Marriage, and Parenting

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The authors reviewed 94 studies published in journals since 1980 on religion and marital or parental functioning. Meta-analytic techniques were used to quantify religion–family associations examined in at least 3 studies. Greater religiousness appeared to decrease the risk of divorce and facilitate marital functioning, but the effects were small. Greater Christian conservatism was modestly associated with greater endorsement and use of corporal punishment with preadolescents. Isolated findings suggested that greater parental religiousness relates to more positive parenting and better child adjustment. The scope, meaningfulness, and potential strength of findings were restricted because of reliance on global or single-item measures of religious and family domains. To facilitate more conceptually and methodologically sophisticated research, the authors delineated mechanisms by which the substantive and psychosocial elements of religion could benefit or harm family adjustment.

Ninety-five percent of married couples (Glenn, 1982) and parents (Mahoney, 2000) in the United States report having a religious affiliation. In addition, many married American women and men attend church at least once a month (60% and 53%, respectively) and believe the Bible is the answer to all important human problems (49% and 42%; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). Such data imply that religion is an important aspect of many families' lives. However, the way in which religion may shape marital or parent–child relationships has received only sporadic consideration by social scientists throughout this century (Jenkins, 1992). Psy-

chologists, in particular, appear to have devoted little attention to this topic. For instance, only 17 of the 94 studies we located for this review were published by psychologists.¹ Furthermore, psychologists report relatively low personal religiousness (e.g., 33% agree that religious faith is the most important influence in their life vs. 72% of the general population; Bergin & Jensen, 1990); as a result, they may overlook the impact of religion on marriage and parenting in research and clinical endeavors with families (Shafranske & Malony, 1990). Nevertheless, psychologists have much to offer and gain by becoming acquainted with the growing theory and research about religion and families (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999).

The two main purposes of this review are (a) to provide readers with up-to-date information on the empirical literature published since 1980 on links between religion and marital or paren-

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¹ On the basis of author information listed in publications, 17 studies were published by psychologists, 39 studies were published by sociologists, and 38 studies were published by educators, economists, or other social scientists who were not affiliated with a psychology, psychiatry, or sociology department.

tal functioning and (b) to encourage more psychological research in the area by delineating specific, but largely unexplored, theoretical mechanisms through which religion may influence family processes. The first major section of the review provides a comprehensive evaluation of recent investigations on ties between religion and the two broad domains of marriage and parenting. We use meta-analytic techniques to quantify key, replicated results, and we offer narrative reviews of more isolated but intriguing findings. Major criterion variables in the marital domain that have been related to religious variables include divorce rates, global marital satisfaction, commitment, verbal conflict, and domestic violence. In the parenting domain, major criterion variables include general childrearing attitudes, beliefs about corporal punishment, actual use of corporal punishment, nurturing parenting strategies, global family adjustment, and parental coping with children's developmental disorders or illness. Although the focus of the review is on marriage and parenting, we also cover studies suggesting that parental religiousness influences child mental health outcomes.²

The second major section of the article provides a conceptual framework to promote more sophisticated research on the intersections between religion, marriage, and parenting. Although available research implies that religion generally plays a desirable role in family life, the depth and scope of the knowledge base is quite limited. Consistent findings are based almost exclusively on single-item or global indexes to assess both the religious and family domains. Thus, many questions remain about specific adaptive and maladaptive roles of religion in the home. We hope to encourage more conceptually based research by highlighting two major issues to consider when developing fine-grained hypotheses about religious influences on family life: (a) the substantively religious elements versus generic psychosocial functions of religion and (b) the beneficial and harmful roles that religion may play.

Review of Empirical Findings

Background Information of Empirical Review

Literature search strategy. We limited our review to studies published in journal articles in

the 1980s and 1990s. A focus on recent findings is important because the increasing secularization of societies throughout the 20th century has raised questions about the relevance of religion for contemporary family life (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Unfortunately, the only empirical research we were able to locate involved English-speaking populations in Western societies (e.g., United States, Canada, New Zealand) and implicitly focused on religious variables rooted in Judeo-Christian institutions. The absence of social science research about religion and families from other major religions of the world represents a major gap in empirical knowledge. Social scientists should begin to investigate how non-Western religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam, influence family life.

We used three steps to locate studies for this review. First, we conducted computer searches using the electronic databases of PsycInfo, SocioInfo, and Social Science Citation Index for the period from January 1980 to September 1999. In separate searches, the key words *religion* and *religiosity* were each paired with the words *marriage*, *sexuality*, *parenting*, or *child adjustment*. Second, we searched for articles by hand in journals that had published more than one article in the area of religion and marital or family functioning. Third, we reviewed the ref-

² It should be recognized that sociologists have conducted quantitative research on religion and family-related topics that are less pertinent to marital and parental functioning. These topics include partner selection and interfaith marriage rates; nonmarital cohabitation; premarital sex and contraceptive practices; fertility rates and teenage pregnancy; general attitudes about gender roles; and parental influence on the religious identities and moral development of their children. We judged these issues to fall outside the scope of this review and refer readers elsewhere for recent reviews of this literature (Clark & Worthington, 1990; Goldscheider & Mosher, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999; Wittberg, 1999). In addition, we limited our review to evidence directly linking parental religiousness to child mental health outcomes, and we excluded studies on children's or adolescents' own reports of their own religiousness and their own psychological adjustment. We viewed the latter studies as falling outside the scope of this review because youths' reports of their own religiousness are influenced by factors outside the family system (e.g., peers, religious education; Clark & Worthington, 1990).

Table 1
Overview of Number of Studies in Two Domains and Subareas

Subarea	Qualitative or descriptive study	Quantitative study
All studies	16 ^a	78 ^b
Marital domain (total)	5 ^c	46 ^b
Divorce rates	0	13
Global satisfaction	2	24
Commitment	2	7
Verbal conflict and communication	3	10
Physical aggression	2	3
Parent and family domain (total)	13	35 ^c
Parental disciplinary attitudes or practices	3	14
Parental warmth and supportiveness	0	8
Family global satisfaction or cohesiveness	1	5
Parental coping with child problems	9	5
Child maladjustment	0	8

Note. To be listed as a subarea in the table, the topic had to be represented by three or more quantitative studies.

^a This figure is less than the sum of the total number of qualitative studies for two domains because two studies provided both marriage and parenting data. ^b This figure is less than the sum of the total number of quantitative studies for two domains because three studies provided both marriage and parenting data. ^c The figure for the total number of studies in the domain is less than the sum of subareas because some studies covered more than one subarea.

erence lists of the studies located in the first two steps. Our efforts yielded 97 potentially relevant studies, but we excluded 3 of these studies because the authors did not provide clear operational definitions of the religious variables. Thus, this review covers 94 studies, with 51 studies pertaining to the marital domain and 48 studies dealing with religion and the parenting domain.³ This body of literature includes qualitative or descriptive studies as well as quantitative studies with inferential statistics. All 94 studies are noted with an asterisk in the reference list.

Basic descriptive information about research literature. Table 1 depicts the number of studies in the marital and parenting domain that reflect qualitative or descriptive methods ($N = 16$) and quantitative methods ($N = 78$). Table 2 focuses on the 78 quantitative studies and depicts the samples, research designs, sources of data, types of measures, and key variables used. These 78 studies formed the pool of data for generating meta-analytic statistics. Several points about Table 2 are worth noting. First, the majority of quantitative studies involved national or community samples. This minimizes the concern that results may be systematically biased by the selection of strongly religious individuals from religious institutions. How-

ever, the preponderance of cross-sectional studies obscures whether religion has causal or longitudinal influences on family functioning. In addition, 80% of the marital studies and 66% of the parenting studies rely exclusively on single-item, global markers of religiousness (e.g., frequency of church attendance). The situation is a bit better for family variables, but single-item measures are still often the sole assessment method (57% of the marital and 37% of the parenting domain). Such measurement methods do not address the mechanisms that tie religion to family life. Moreover, many of the religious variables are dichotomous in nature (e.g., yes-no denominational affiliation), implying that religiousness is an "all or nothing" construct. To dispel this notion, it is helpful to realize that only 5 to 10% of Americans endorse the category of "no religious affiliation" (Hoge, 1996). In addition, most married individuals in the United States attend church at least once a

³ Five studies provided data about both the marital and parental domain: Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1996; Brody, Stoneman, Flor, & McCrary, 1994; Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984; Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1990; Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, Roberts, & Kaplan, 1998.

Table 2
*Samples, Basic Design, Assessment Methods, and Primary Variables Used
 in Quantitative Studies*

Variable	Number of quantitative studies			
	Marital domain (<i>n</i> = 46)		Parenting domain (<i>n</i> = 35)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Type of sample				
National: USA	20	43	11	31
National: non-USA	5	11	0	0
Community	15	33	15	43
Churchgoing	6	13	4	11
Distressed ^a	0	0	5	14
Type of design				
Cross-sectional	41	89	33	94
Longitudinal	5	11	2	6
Source of information used				
Self-reports based on surveys or interviews	46	100	35	100
Observational methods	2	4	3	9
Type of method				
All religious variables assessed with a one-item measure	37 ^b	80	23 ^{b,c}	66
All marital or family variables assessed with a one-item measure	26	57	13	37
Type of religious variable				
Denominational affiliation (single item)	12	26	13	37
Frequency of church attendance (single item)	26 ^b	57	9 ^b	26
Personal religiousness	16	35	17	47
Single item about prayer, salience of religion, etc.	6 ^b		12 ^b	
Global score from standard measures of devoutness	6		5	
Christian conservatism or fundamentalism	4	9	15	43
Based on denominational affiliation	3		9	
Single items about biblical literalism	0		5	
1-2 items endorsing conservative beliefs	0		3	
Global score from standard measures of devoutness	1		2	
Couples' religious homogeneity	16	35	0	0
Based on denomination affiliation	16			
Based on single items about religious beliefs	5			
Type of criterion variable in marital domain				
Divorce rate (single item)	13	28		
Global marital satisfaction	24	52		
Single item	10			
SMAT or DAS	12			
Other unstandardized measure	2			
Commitment	7	15		
Single item	2			
Multiple-item measure	5			
Verbal conflict and communication	10	22		
Single item	1			
Multiple-item measure	9			
Yes-no occurrence of physical aggression	3	7		
Type of criterion variable in parenting domain				
Attitudes valuing child obedience	4	11		
Single item	1			
Multiple-item measure	3			
Attitudes in favor of corporal punishment	5	14		
Single item	2			
Multiple-item measure	3			
Use of corporal punishment	7	20		
Single item	5			
Multiple-item measure	2			

Table 2 (continued)

Variable	Number of quantitative studies			
	Marital domain (<i>n</i> = 46)		Parenting domain (<i>n</i> = 35)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Nurturing parenting attitudes or practices	7	20		
Single item	3			
Multiple-item measure	4			
Family satisfaction or cohesiveness	4	11		
Single item	1			
Multiple-item measure	3			
Parent mental health or coping strategy in families with child developmental disability or cancer (all variables involved multiple-item measures)	5	16		
Child maladjustment (child behavior problems, depression, delinquency, alcohol, or marijuana use)	8	23		
Single item	3			
Multiple-item measure	5			

Note. For inclusion in the table, predictor or criterion variables had to be used in three or more studies in at least one domain. For a list of all other variables assessed across studies, contact Annette Mahoney. SMAT = Short Marital Adjustment Test, DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

^a Distressed samples comprise families with children with development disability (e.g., mental retardation, autism) or illness (e.g., cancer). ^b In three of these studies, authors combined one item about frequency of attendance and one item about self-rated religiousness for analyses. ^c In three studies, authors used mean score of ratings on two single items.

month (Heaton & Pratt, 1990), and most parents describe themselves as falling in the moderate range of religiousness (Mahoney, 2000). More detailed and multidimensional assessment tools that assess the various roles that religion may play in families clearly are needed.

Another measurement issue worth highlighting is that most studies focus on the religious practices or beliefs of one family member, rather than the religious compatibility within dyadic or family units. The primary example in the literature of the latter construct involves *religious homogamy*, which refers to the overlap between married partners' religiousness. Most typically, spouses who report the same religious affiliation are classified as having a homogamous marriage, whereas those with different affiliations have a heterogamous marriage. Unfortunately, this dichotomous variable merely compounds the insensitivity of a single item to capture one person's religiousness. For example, studies that classify couples as religiously homogamous usually include couples where both partners endorse the same denomination and couples where neither partner reports an affiliation. Furthermore, the heterogamous category often collapses couples where partners are affiliated with different religious groups and

couples where only one partner is affiliated with a religious group. Measured this way, religious homogamy may simply reflect shared philosophies and values rather than shared religiousness per se. More in-depth measures are needed to capture the extent to which family members share religious beliefs and practices.

Use of meta-analytic techniques to summarize key quantitative findings. To quantify consistent findings across the 78 quantitative studies, we first identified all of the bivariate associations between religious and marital or family variables that have been reported. We then used two criteria to identify associations that are sufficiently well-established to justify the use of meta-analytic techniques to calculate an average effect size. The criterion variable of the link had to be (a) examined in at least three studies and (b) represented by at least five separate effect sizes. Insofar as it was possible, we sorted correlations into different categories of hypotheses by different types of religious predictor variables. However, for some criterion variables (e.g., marital verbal conflict), we had to combine different indexes of religiousness for there to be at least five relevant correlations for that category (e.g., Table 11). Overall, our

strategy yielded 12 categories of key and replicated bivariate associations.

The following meta-analytic strategy was used to estimate the average magnitude of the linear relationship between the pairs of constructs. First, bivariate statistics were transformed into correlations, and then correlations were transformed into Z scores. Second, meta-analytic techniques were performed on the Z scores. Third, results were transformed back into correlations to facilitate interpretation. We created separate tables of the 12 key findings in which we display individual results from pertinent studies and the overall effect size. When needed, signs of correlations reported in the tables were reversed for the meta-analysis. When possible, we extracted straightforward bivariate correlations from each study. However, as explained below, the bivariate statistics we gathered from a few studies consisted of partial correlations. We excluded all findings in a particular study from consideration for the meta-analysis if authors provided statistics only for significant correlations and did not report data for insignificant correlations. In addition, we excluded correlations that involved canonical or latent variables from the meta-analysis because such statistics optimize linear relationships. Finally, we excluded findings from our meta-analytic tables if authors did not provide sufficient information to identify a correlation effect size or pertinent sample sizes.⁴

Many of the studies used a categorical data point based on a single-item measure for both the predictor variable (e.g., religious affiliated or not) and criterion variable (e.g., maritally happy or not). If associations between dichotomous data points were reported as a chi-square with one degree of freedom, the transformation to a correlation was simple. For some studies, we had to hand-calculate chi-square statistics from raw descriptive data because the predictor variable had more than two levels, and the chi-square confounded linear and nonlinear associations between the variables.⁵ In other studies, the bivariate results for categorical data points were embedded in logistical regression tables where multiple control variables were used in the model tested. When standard error terms were reported, we were able to calculate a chi-square statistic with one degree of freedom by dividing the coefficient term by the associated error term and squaring this result. In some

studies, insufficient information was available to do this derivation or to hand-calculate chi-squares. In these instances, we included the beta from the author's tables that involved the least number of control variables. This was necessary because the preponderance of evidence of a link between some pairs of variables rested on partial correlations (e.g., see Table 14). The heterogeneity of effect sizes are indicated in the tables. In all but three tables (5, 6, and 10), the correlations exhibited significant variability.

Empirical Links Between Religion and the Domain of Marriage

Divorce. The hypothesis that greater religiousness is tied to lower divorce rates has received considerable attention. As indicated in Table 3, several studies have found that individuals who report having an allegiance to a religious denomination (e.g., Catholic, Protestant) are less likely to have a history of divorce than those who state "none" when asked about their religious affiliation. The average effect size of this link is $r = -.082$. On the basis of Rosenthal's fail-safe index (Rosenthal, 1979; see also Mullen, 1989), approximately 1,020 opposite or null effect sizes would have to be produced to invalidate this finding. This effect size can be translated into concrete terms for a hypothetical sample of individuals by assuming that 50% of marriages end in divorce and 90% of adults report some type of religious affilia-

⁴ Consequently, we excluded the following studies from consideration for the meta-analysis: From the parent domain, Abbott, Berry, & Meredith, 1990; Alwin, 1986; Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998; Kelly, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; Ransom, Fisher, & Terry, 1992; Strawbridge et al., 1998; and from the marital domain, Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; Chi & Houseknecht, 1983; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Ortega, Whitt, & William, 1988; Pittman, Price-Bonham, & McKenry, 1983; Shehan, Bock, & Lee, 1990; Snow & Compton, 1996; Strawbridge et al., 1998.

⁵ We used Rosenthal and Rosnow's (1985) formula (p. 49) to calculate linear trends in the association between dichotomous criterion (e.g., divorce) and single-item predictor variables with up to four levels (e.g., church attendance of never, rarely, sometime, often); in studies where the predictor variables had more than four levels, we dichotomized the predictor variable and calculated a chi-square with one degree of freedom.

Table 3
Associations Between an Affiliation With Any Religious Denomination and Divorce Rates

Study	Sample type ^a	n ^b	Affiliated or not with a religious denomination	Divorce variable	r
Bahr & Chadwick, 1985	Community	1,044 individuals	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.062*
Bock & Radelet, 1988	National ^c	4,179 men	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.067****
Bock & Radelet, 1988	National ^c	5,510 women	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.020
Breault & Kposowa, 1987	National	3,111 countries	1 item	Divorce rate/1,000 people	-.242****
Call & Heaton, 1997	National	4,587 men	1 item	Divorce over 5-yr period	-.090****
Call & Heaton, 1997	National	4,587 women	1 item	Divorce over 5-yr period	-.052****
Glenn & Supancic, 1984	National	3,398 men	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.111****
Glenn & Supancic, 1984	National	4,512 women	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.049****
Heaton & Goodman, 1985	Mormon & national	3,801 men	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.106****
Heaton & Goodman, 1985	Mormon & national	4,863 women	1 item	1 item: Ever divorced	-.075****

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = -.082

95% CI = -.071 to -.093

Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 121.8****

Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 1,020 effect sizes

Note. yr = year; CI = confidence interval.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. ^c Excluded individuals not raised in religious households. * p < .05. *** p < .001. **** p < .0001.

tion. Using these assumptions, 62% of individuals with no religious affiliation would report a history of divorce compared to 49% of those with a religious affiliation. This illustrates that individuals with no religious affiliation are noticeably more likely to experience divorce than what typically occurs in the general population, whereas individuals with a religious affiliation have divorce rates on par with the average person. Interestingly, in some studies that have controlled for demographic factors related to divorce, the relatively small link between religious affiliation and divorce disappears (Breault & Kposowa, 1987; Call & Heaton, 1997; Glenn & Supancic, 1984). This raises the question of how strongly religious variables other than religious affiliation are related to divorce and whether such associations remain after controlling demographic factors.

The degree of religious participation has been examined extensively with regard to divorce. Table 4 supports the hypothesis that greater frequency of church attendance is associated with lower divorce rates. The average effect size for this link is $r = -.125$. On the basis of Rosenthal's fail-safe index, approximately 2,629 contrary effects would be needed to nullify this finding. Practically speaking, the likelihood of divorce as a function of church attendance can be roughly estimated by using the average effect size to calculate divorce probability rates from a 2 (yes-no divorce) \times 2 (high-low attendance) contingency table, where one assumes that about 55% of married individuals in the United States attend church at least monthly (Heaton & Pratt, 1990) and 50% of marriages end in divorce. Using these assumptions, approximately 60% of infrequent churchgoers have a history of divorce compared to 44% of frequent churchgoers. The link between church attendance and divorce history remains after controlling for a wide range of demographic factors as well as various marital or family factors associated with divorce (Breault & Kposowa, 1987; Call & Heaton, 1997; Clydesdale, 1997; Fergusson, Horwood, & Shannon, 1984; Glenn & Supancic, 1984).

Of course, greater church attendance and lower likelihood of a prior divorce may be related simply because people feel less welcome in religious organizations and reduce or cease their participation in church following a divorce. However, Clydesdale (1997) did not find

that church attendance rates dropped following a divorce. In addition, two longitudinal studies indicated that church attendance is a predictor, and not merely a consequence, of divorce. Fergusson et al. (1984) found that mothers' and fathers' church attendance at the time of their child's birth predicted separation rates over the subsequent 5 years, and this link held after controlling for six salient demographic factors. Clydesdale (1997) also found that men and women who frequently attended church in both 1965 and 1982 were less likely to get divorced than those who infrequently attended church at both time points or those who changed from being frequent to infrequent attenders. Although more longitudinal research is needed to extend these findings, greater church attendance appears to be a protective factor against divorce.

Denominational homogamy (e.g., both Catholic, Protestant, or Mormon) between couples is another religious variable that has been hypothesized to relate to lower divorce rates. Although several studies address this issue (Bahr, 1981; Call & Heaton, 1997; Chan & Heaton, 1989; Chi & Houseknecht, 1983; Lehrer & Chadwick, 1993), an insufficient number of comparable effect sizes were available for meta-analysis. Instead, we provide a narrative summary of salient findings. In a longitudinal study, Lehrer and Chadwick (1993) found that same-faith couples had lower future rates of divorce than couples where only one partner was affiliated with a denomination or partners had different religious affiliations. Similar results were found by Bahr (1981) in a cross-sectional study. Further insight about divorce and religious homogamy comes from Call and Heaton's (1997) study, which assessed the similarity-dissimilarity of partners' church attendance and the belief that the Bible is the answer to all important human problems as well as couples' denominational homogamy. Their results indicate that dissimilarity in church attendance, but not in denominational affiliation or orthodox belief, was related to greater marital dissolution. Moreover, this link remained after controlling for salient religious, marital, family, and demographic variables. Finally, spouses who both belong to religious institutions that strongly discourage divorce (e.g., Catholic, Mormon, conservative Christian groups) might be expected to split up less often than couples affiliated with religious groups with relatively lenient attitudes

Table 4
Associations Between an Individual's Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services and Divorce Rates

Study	Sample type ^a	n ^b	Attendance variable	Divorce variable	r or β
Bahr & Chadwick, 1985	Community ^c	871 individuals	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month	Prior divorce history	-.101**
Call & Heaton, 1997	National	4,587 men	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month	Divorce during 5-yr period	-.080****
Call & Heaton, 1997	National	4,587 women	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month	Divorce during 5-yr period	-.081****
Chan & Heaton, 1989	National ^d	3,254 women	1 item: weekly, monthly, never	Delayed divorce	-.044*
Clydesdale, 1997 ^e	National	433 individuals	1 item: Consistent vs. nonattender over time	Divorce from 1965 to 1982	-.143*** ^e
Clydesdale, 1997 ^e	National	606 individuals	1 item: Consistent over time vs. become nonattender over time	Divorce from 1965 to 1982	-.182**** ^e
Fergusson et al., 1984 ^e	NZ-national	1,002 couples; husband	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month, never by husband at childbirth	Divorce 5 yr after childbirth	-.130****
Fergusson et al., 1984 ^e	NZ-national	1,002 couples; wife	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month, never by wife at childbirth	Divorce 5 yr after childbirth	-.202****
Glenn & Supancic, 1984	National	3,446 men	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month	Prior divorce history	-.199****
Glenn & Supancic, 1984	National	4,548 women	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month	Prior divorce history	-.178****
Heaton & Goodman, 1985	Mormon & national	3,622 men	1 item: ≥ 2/month, < 2/month	Prior divorce history	-.201****
Heaton & Goodman, 1985	Mormon & national	4,616 women	1 item: ≥ 2/month, < 2/month	Prior divorce history	-.153****
Shrum, 1980	National ^f	4,485 individuals	1 item: ≥ 1/month, < 1/month, < 1/year	Prior divorce history	-.050****

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = -.125 95% CI = -.115 to -.137 Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 133.9**** Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 2,630 effect sizes

Note. yr = year; NZ = New Zealand; CI = confidence interval.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. ^c Excluded participants who had no religious affiliation. ^d Restricted to Caucasian women married at least 10 years. ^e Longitudinal design. ^f Restricted to Caucasian Catholics and Caucasian and African American Protestants. ^g Controlled for sex, race, years married, education, geography. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001. **** p < .0001.

Table 5
Associations Between an Affiliation With Any Religious Denomination and Global Marital Satisfaction

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Affiliated with religious institution or no affiliation	Marital satisfaction index	r
Bahr & Chadwick, 1985	Community	698 individuals	1 item	1 item: Very satisfied vs. not	.057
Boek & Radelet, 1988	National ^c	3,961 men	1 item	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.070****
Boek & Radelet, 1988	National ^c	4,440 women	1 item	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.027
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; husbands	1 item	No. of items not reported: Unstandardized tool	.090
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; wives	1 item	No. of items not reported: Unstandardized tool	.110

Meta-analysis results

Mean $r = .050$

95% CI = .022 to .079

Heterogeneity, $Q_{total} = 4.89$

Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 35 effect sizes

Note. CI = confidence interval.

^aNational refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^bn refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. ^cExcluded individuals not raised in religious households. **** $p < .0001$.

toward divorce. Only mixed evidence supports this idea. Mormons and Catholics do appear to have somewhat lower divorce rates than other denominations (Chan & Heaton, 1989; Chi & Houseknecht, 1983; Heaton & Goodman, 1985). However, individuals and homogamous couples from some conservative Protestant groups have been found to have relatively high divorce rates (Chi & Houseknecht, 1983; Glenn & Supancic, 1984; Thornton, 1978). This suggests that religious factors other than prohibitory messages about divorce from the pulpit or pews influence decisions about remaining married.

Global marital satisfaction. *Global marital satisfaction* refers to spouses' general subjective appraisal of their marriage. This construct has been measured with single items, such as "Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage: very happy, pretty happy, not too happy" (Glenn, 1982) and brief questionnaires that assess general happiness and a wide range of marital issues (e.g., Dyadic Adjustment Scale; Spanier, 1976). As indicated in Table 5, only a few studies have addressed the hypothesis that having a religious affiliation is linked to greater global marital satisfaction. These studies have yielded weak results ($r = .05$). More extensive evidence exists on ties between involvement in religion and global marital satisfaction. A subset of this work focuses on the frequency of church attendance. As summarized in Table 6, this single item significantly predicts greater marital satisfaction in several studies, but the average size of this link is fairly small ($r = .074$). A larger, more compelling body of evidence is found in studies that go beyond mere rates of church attendance and inquire about the personal relevance of religion. These variables include single-item ratings of the importance of religion and frequency of prayer or Bible reading as well as more detailed questionnaires about personal religiousness. As can be seen in Table 7, the hypothesis that greater personal religiousness is related to greater marital satisfaction is well supported⁶ (Average $r = .15$).

⁶ M. R. Wilson and E.E. Filsinger's (1986) results are not included in Table 7 because the database used in this study was identical to Filsinger and Wilson (1984). Craddock's (1991) results are not included because the religious variable used confounded each partner's personal religiousness and couples' shared religiousness.

Table 6
Associations Between Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services and Global Marital Satisfaction

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Attendance variable	Marital satisfaction	r
Bahr & Chadwick, 1985	Community ^c	639 individuals	1 item: $\geq 1/\text{mo.}, < 1/\text{mo.}$	1 item: Very satisfied vs. not	.061
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	15 items: Unstandardized tool	.050
Glenn, 1982	National ^d	762 men	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.119** ^e
Glenn, 1982	National ^d	790 women	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.043 ^c
Hatch et al., 1986	Community	53 couples; husbands	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	3 items: KMS	.210
Hatch et al., 1986	Community	38 couples; wives	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	3 items: KMS	.290
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; husbands	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	No. of items not reported, unstandardized tool	.090
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; wives	1 item: Freq. attendance not described	No. of items not reported, unstandardized tool	.160*

Meta-analysis results

Mean $r = .074$ 95% CI = .018 to .131 Heterogeneity, $Q_{total} = 4.81$ Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 29 effect sizes

Note. KMS = Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey; mo. = month; Freq. = frequency; CI = confidence interval.
^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. ^c Excluded participants who had no religious affiliation. ^d Restricted to Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish couples. ^e Controlled for homogamy, age, prior divorce, job status, education, and income.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 7
Associations Between a Spouse's Personal Religiosity and Global Marital Satisfaction

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religiosity variable	Marital satisfaction	r or β
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Global religiosity	15 items: Unstandardized tool	.11***
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Freq. prayer	15 items: Unstandardized tool	.08*
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Freq. reading Bible	15 items: Unstandardized tool	.08*
M. G. Dudley & Kosinski, 1990	7th Day Adventist church goers	228 individuals	No. of items unclear: Private rituals (e.g., prayer)	15 items: SMAT	.19**
M. G. Dudley & Kosinski, 1990	7th Day Adventist church goers	228 individuals	No. of items unclear: Importance of religion	15 items: SMAT	.15*
Filsinger & Wilson, 1984	Protestant church goers	208 couples; husbands	37 items: DFW Religiosity Scale	15 items: DAS	.26** ^c
Filsinger & Wilson, 1984	Protestant church goers	208 couples; wives	37 items: SMAT and DFW Religiosity Scale	15 items: DAS	.32** ^c
Gruner, 1985	Protestant church goers	416 individuals	1 item: Freq. prayer	Low, mod., high satisfaction based on couples' DAS	.33****
Gruner, 1985	Protestant church goers	416 individuals	1 item: Freq. reading Bible to solve personal problems	Low, mod., high satisfaction based on couples' DAS	.30****
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer, church attendance, self-rated religiosity, self-rated spirituality	15 items: SMAT	.12
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer, church attendance, self-rated religiosity, self-rated spirituality	15 items: SMAT	.14
Roth, 1988	Protestant church goers	90 women	20 items: Religious Well-Being scale	15 items: DAS	.37***
Roth, 1988	Protestant church goers	57 men	20 items: Religious Well-Being scale	15 items: DAS	.13
Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987	Community	225 couples; husbands	8 items: Religious devoutness; unstandardized tool	12 items: Unstandardized tool	.14*
Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987	Community	225 couples; wives	8 items: Religious devoutness; unstandardized tool	12 items: Unstandardized tool	.23***
Schumm et al., 1982	Rural community	74 couples; husbands	1 item: Importance of religion	3 items: KMS	.29*
Schumm et al., 1982	Rural community	79 couples; wives	1 item: Importance of religion	3 items: KMS	.22
Schumm et al., 1982	Urban community	70 couples; husbands	1 item: Importance of religion	3 items: KMS	.34**
Schumm et al., 1982	Urban community	92 couples; wives	1 item: Importance of religion	3 items: KMS	.25*
Young et al., 1998	National	797 individuals	13 items: From DFW Religiosity Scale	1 item: Global rating	.02

Meta-analysis results

Mean $r = .150$

95% CI = .126 to .178

Heterogeneity, $Q_{total} = 72.6****$

Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 1,263

Note. Freq. = frequency; DFW = DeJong-Faulkner-Warland Religiosity scale; SMAT = Short Marital Adjustment Test; DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale; KMS = Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey; mod. = moderate; CI = confidence interval.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. ^c Control socioeconomic status, family size, income, and years married.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. **** $p < .0001$.

More than 1,200 contrary effects would be needed to invalidate this finding.

Some researchers assume that significant links between personal religiousness and marital satisfaction may simply be the by-product of marital conventionalization (e.g., Glenn & Weaver, 1978). That is, conventional people may be more likely to participate frequently in a religious organization (or say they do) and to overreport marital happiness. To test this hypothesis, Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich (1982) controlled for marital conventionalization and still found significant associations between religiousness and marital satisfaction. M. R. Wilson and Filsinger (1986) also found that personal religiousness accounted for 3 to 7% of marital satisfaction reported by Protestants, after taking into account marital conventionalization and demographic factors. Nevertheless, careful inspection of Table 7 suggests that individuals drawn from religious institutions experience stronger ties between personal religiousness and marital satisfaction. To evaluate this question, we generated average effect sizes for studies focused exclusively on church members ($r = .27$) and studies that used community or national samples ($r = .11$). Thus, although the link between personal religiousness and marital satisfaction cannot be explained away by conventionalization, the degree of personal religiousness appears to be especially salient for the marital happiness of church members.

Couples' religious homogamy has also received considerable attention as a religious construct related to global marital satisfaction. The basic premise is that couples who differ in religious viewpoints may be more likely to experience heightened marital distress than couples who share the same religious orientation. As illustrated in Table 8, numerous studies have obtained statistically significant results that support this hypothesis, but the average effect size is weak ($r = .045$), and at least one investigator (Heaton, 1984) found that this association disappeared after taking frequency of religious attendance into account.

Marital commitment. Several researchers have pursued the hypothesis that more religious individuals are more committed to marriage than less religious individuals. Efforts to assess commitment have included direct inquiry about degree of investment in the marriage and inferring levels of commitment from the benefits

derived from marriage (e.g., would specific areas of one's life get worse upon separation?). As can be seen in Table 9, diverse indexes of greater individual religiousness have been consistently tied to greater commitment. The average effect size of $r = .191$ is remarkable, and the fail-safe index of 2,191 effect sizes substantiates its stability. Furthermore, two studies have found that greater church attendance relates to marital commitment even after taking into account demographic factors and global marital or family satisfaction (Larson & Goltz, 1989; J. Wilson & Musick, 1996). In an interesting twist of this idea, Scanzoni and Arnett (1987) found wives' (but not husbands') perceptions of the costs-benefits ratio of their marriage and global marital satisfaction varied as a function of personal religiousness. For less devout wives, a much higher correlation existed between lower costs-higher benefits and greater marital satisfaction. This implies that compared with less religious women, more religious women may be more willing to sacrifice personal benefits in a marriage and remain satisfied. Table 10 summarizes another group of studies about marital commitment that focus on couples' denominational homogamy rather than on individual religiousness. Couples' similarity in religious denomination is tied to greater commitment but the average effect size is relatively small ($r = .097$), perhaps because single-item indexes of religious homogamy do not capture the depth and range of couples' shared religiousness.

Marital verbal conflict. Although (or even because) greater religiousness seems to facilitate marital stability and commitment, some have speculated that more religious couples may tolerate greater marital conflict and hostile, maladaptive communication patterns (Schumm, Ja Jeong, & Silliman, 1990; Schumm, Obiorah, & Silliman, 1989). As can be seen in Table 11, four studies offer numerous bivariate associations based on various global measures of individual religiousness and marital verbal conflict. The overall effect size is zero. Whereas the above studies span all denominational groups, two studies have targeted whether aversive communication patterns are more likely to occur in the marriages of Fundamentalists than non-Fundamentalist Protestants. Such differences have not been detected (Schumm et al., 1990; Schumm et al., 1989). In addition, two recent studies suggest that greater religiousness

Table 8
Associations Between Couples' Religious Homogamy (Shared Affiliation, Church Attendance, or Beliefs) and Global Marital Satisfaction

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religious homogamy variable ^c	Marital satisfaction	r
M. G. Dudley & Kosinski, 1990	7th Day Adventist churchgoers	228 individuals	2 items: Couple's congruence on global religiousness & attendance	15 items: SMAT	.510****
Glenn, 1982	National	2,558 men	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.076***
Glenn, 1982	National	2,843 women	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.031
Heaton, 1984	National	7,509 individuals	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.052****
Heaton & Pratt, 1990	National	6,000 individuals	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.055****
Heaton & Pratt, 1990	National	6,000 individuals	1 item: Same vs. different attendance	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.030*
Heaton & Pratt, 1990	National	6,000 individuals	1 item: Same vs. different belief in Bible	1 item: Very happy vs. not	.019
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community-Canada	179 couples; husbands	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	No. of items not reported, unstandardized tool	.020
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community-Canada	179 couples; wives	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	No. of items not reported, unstandardized tool	.020
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	SMAT	.070
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	SMAT	.190
Shehan et al., 1990	National-Catholics only	1,105 men	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: High vs. low satisfaction	.053
Shehan et al., 1990	National-Catholics only	1,256 women	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: High vs. low satisfaction	.012

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = .045 95% CI = .033 to .057 Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 73.5**** Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 360

Note. CI = confidence interval; SMAT = Short Marital Adjustment Test.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. ^c Same affiliation category includes couples where both partners share the same denominational affiliation or no affiliation.

* p < .05. *** p < .001. **** p < .0001.

Table 9

Associations Between Individual Religiousness (Any Affiliation, Church Attendance, or Personal Religiousness) and Commitment to Marriage

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religiousness variable	Commitment index	r
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; husbands	1 item: Freq. church attendance	4 items: Structural commitment	.25***
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; wives	1 item: Freq. church attendance	4 items: Structural commitment	.28***
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; husbands	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	4 items: Structural commitment	.30***
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; wives	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	4 items: Structural commitment	.23**
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	5 items: Benefits-dependency	.24*
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	5 items: Benefits-dependency	.21*
Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987	Community	225 couples; husbands	8 items: Religious devoutness	1 item: Marital commitment	.14*
Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987	Community	225 couples; wives	8 items: Religious devoutness	1 item: Marital commitment	.19**
J. Wilson & Musick, 1995	National	5,284 couples; husbands	1 item: Freq. church attendance	1 item: Marital commitment	.22***
J. Wilson & Musick, 1995	National	5,359 couples; wives	1 item: Freq. church attendance	1 item: Marital commitment	.25***
J. Wilson & Musick, 1996	National	4,614 couples; wives	1 item: Freq. church attendance	6 items: Benefits-dependency	.12***
J. Wilson & Musick, 1996	National	4,618 couples; husbands	1 item: Freq. church attendance	6 items: Benefits-dependency	.15***

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = .191 95% CI = .179 to .209 Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 63.9**** Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 2,191

Note. CI = confidence interval; Freq. = frequency.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001. **** p < .0001.

Table 10
Associations Between Couples' Religious Homogamy and Commitment or Investment in Marriage

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religiosity variable	Commitment index	r
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; husbands	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	4 items: Structural commitment	.12
Larson & Goltz, 1989	Community	179 couples; wives	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	4 items: Structural commitment	.12
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	5 items: Benefits-dependency	.07
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	5 items: Benefits-dependency	.17
J. Wilson & Musick, 1995	National	5,284 couples; husbands	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: Marital commitment	.14****
J. Wilson & Musick, 1995	National	5,359 couples; wives	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	1 item: Marital commitment	.10****
J. Wilson & Musick, 1996	National	4,614 couples; wives	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	6 items: Benefits-dependency	.08****
J. Wilson & Musick, 1996	National	4,618 couples; husbands	1 item: Same vs. different affiliation	6 items: Benefits-dependency	.11****

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = .097

95% CI = .071 to .123

Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 2.9

Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 120

Note. CI = Confidence interval.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women. **** p < .0001.

may be linked with greater use of adaptive communication skills. Using structural equation models, Brody and colleagues (1994) found that greater self-rated religiousness was associated with higher quality of couples' communication in observed marital interactions in African American families. Mahoney et al. (1999) also found that the degree to which Caucasian couples engaged in joint religious activities and perceived their marriage as sacred was related to more collaboration in handling disagreements.

Domestic violence. Five studies have been published on religion and the occurrence of domestic violence (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Fergusson, Horwood, Kershaw, & Shannon, 1986; Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1990). Two studies offer descriptive statistics indicating that rates of physical aggression in Quaker (Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984) and Mormon households (Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1990) mirror national norms. Efforts to corroborate the hypothesis that greater religious involvement is related to higher rates of domestic violence, particularly among men from conservative Protestant churches, have also been unsuccessful (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992). In fact, two sophisticated studies on this topic yielded inverse results; frequent churchgoers were half as likely as infrequent attenders to experience physical aggression (longitudinal study with wives, Fergusson et al., 1986) or to use physical aggression against their partners (wives and husbands, Ellison et al., 1999). Dissimilarity between husbands' and wives' conservative theological beliefs, however, may be linked to more marital physical aggression. Ellison et al. (1999) found that theologically conservative men married to more religiously liberal wives were 2.5 times more likely to be physically aggressive than those married to women with similar views about the Bible.

Unique findings on religion and marriage functioning. The virtual absence of research on links between marital sexuality and religion is worthwhile to note. Although sexual fidelity in marriage is a hallmark value promoted by Judeo-Christian religious institutions, we located only two recent empirical studies dealing with sexual attitudes or behaviors within marriage. (Most studies focus on premarital sex.) Cochran and Beeghly (1991) found that the

Table 11
Associations Between a Spouse's Religiosity (Any Affiliation, Church Attendance, or Personal Religiousness) and Marital Verbal Conflict

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religiousness variable	Marital conflict	r
Bahr, 1982	Community	1,846 individuals	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	1 item: Any conflict about housekeeping	.072**
Bahr, 1982	Community	1,846 individuals	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	1 item: Any conflict about money	.013
Bahr, 1982	Community	1,846 individuals	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	1 item: Any conflict about relatives	.000
Bahr, 1982	Community	1,846 individuals	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	1 item: Any conflict about sexual needs	.016
Bahr, 1982	Community	1,846 individuals	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	1 item: Any conflict about recreation	.028
Bahr, 1982	Community	1,846 individuals	1 item: Any vs. no affiliation	1 item: Any conflict about sharing problems	.028
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Global religiousness	No. of items unclear: Freq. of marital conflict	.000
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Freq. of prayer	No. of items unclear: Freq. of marital conflict	.020
Booth et al., 1995	National	1,008 individuals	1 item: Freq. Bible read	No. of items unclear: Freq. of marital conflict	-.090**
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	2 items: Freq. of marital conflict from CPSS	.09
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	2 items: Freq. of marital conflict from CPSS	-.06
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	8 items: Use of collaboration from CPSS	.04
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	8 items: Use of collaboration from CPSS	.27**
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	8 items: Use of verbal aggression from CPSS	-.13
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	8 items: Use of verbal aggression from CPSS	.00
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	5 items: Use of stalemate strategies from CPSS	-.06
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	5 items: Use of stalemate strategies from CPSS	-.04
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; husbands	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	7 items: Use of avoidance strategies from CPSS	.11
Mahoney et al., 1999	Community	97 couples; wives	4 items: Freq. prayer & church attendance, self-rated religiousness & spirituality	7 items: Use of avoidance strategies from CPSS	-.08
Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987	Community	225 couples; husbands	8 items: Religious devoutness	15 items: Effective conflict resolution	.08
Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987	Community	225 couples; wives	8 items: Religious devoutness	15 items: Effective conflict resolution	.22***

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = .000 95% CI = -.041 to .040 Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 22.2** Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 0

Note. CI = confidence interval; Freq. = frequency; CPSS = Conflict and Problem-Solving Scale.
^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for men and women.
 ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

strength of adults' professed commitment to their church doctrines for affiliates of Catholic and Protestant denominations (except for the Episcopalian) was related to stronger disapproval of extramarital sex; null results emerged for Jewish or nonaffiliated individuals. Young, Denny, Luquis, and Young (1998) examined associations between married individuals' degree of religious commitment, perceptions of God having an encouraging view of sex (e.g., sexuality is a gift from God and as such should be enjoyed), and sexual functioning. Interestingly, greater belief that God approved of sex was correlated with greater enjoyment of and more frequent participation in uninhibited sexual behavior (e.g., oral-genital sex, anal sex, masturbation), but greater general religiousness was correlated with less of this type of behavior. More research is clearly needed that addresses religious beliefs about sexuality.

Despite consistent findings that greater religiousness is related to more satisfaction and commitment for currently married couples, more research is needed on the causal direction of effects. In a rare longitudinal study on the topic, Booth, Johnson, Branaman, and Sica (1995) examined links over 4 years between five indexes of marital functioning and five religious items: self-rated importance of religion, frequency of Bible reading, prayer, participation in religious social activities, and attendance at religious services. The only consistent pattern was for divorce proneness. All five religious items at Time 1 predicted fewer reports of "divorce prone" cognitions (e.g., considering idea of divorce) or behaviors (e.g., getting professional consultation about divorce) at Time 2 (4 years later). This finding dovetails with Wineberg's (1994) unique study on religious homogamy and other demographic factors associated with couples' successful reconciliation after a marital separation. Couples who belonged to the same denomination at the time of their wedding were twice as likely to reconcile as couples in religiously heterogamous marriages. Couples where either partner had converted to the partner's denomination prior to marriage were four times more likely to reconcile. These two studies highlight the possibility that religion offers some couples important resources to facilitate their recovery from significant marital distress and avoid divorce.

Taken as a whole, available research on marital and spiritual-religious spheres reveal little about the mechanisms that underlie the links between these domains of life. Global or single-item measures of individuals' personal religiousness and couples' religious homogamy provide little insight into the extent to which couples integrate religion into their dyadic activities or perceptions about marriage. To help fill this void, Mahoney et al. (1999) examined two religious constructs that are conceptually closely connected to couples' experience of marriage. One construct, *joint religious activities*, refers to the frequency with which partners engage in informal and formal religious activities as a couple. The second construct, *sanctification of marriage*, refers to perceptions of one's marriage as having spiritual character and significance. Mahoney et al. (1999) found that this set of "proximal" religious variables were much more consistently linked to diverse aspects of marital functioning than each partner's individual religiousness or the couples' denominational homogamy based on global, single-item measures ("distal" religious variables). The proximal religious variables also accounted for substantial levels (9 to 47% variance) of greater marital satisfaction, lower frequency of marital conflict, greater commitment to marriage, and greater collaboration in problem solving, after controlling for all distal religious variables and demographic variables. Overall, this fine-grained approach to evaluate couples' cognitive and behavioral integration of religion into their marriage yielded a richer and much more robust picture than that achieved by global religious measures.

Empirical Links Between Religion and the Domain of Parenting

In this section, we address how parental or family religiousness operates within three domains of parent-child relations: disciplinary attitudes and practices, parental or family warmth and positivity, and coping with stressful child-rearing situations. We also review links between parental or family religiousness and child mental health outcomes.

Disciplinary attitudes and behaviors. We located 14 studies covering how religion may be tied to attitudes and practices about gaining child compliance. The overwhelming emphasis in this literature is on how Christian conserva-

tism may promote stronger valuation of child obedience and physical discipline relative to other religious orientations. Only a few studies contrast the disciplinary attitudes or practices of members of Catholic, mainline Protestants, and Jewish religious groups. Consequently, well-established findings about religion and parent discipline, based on our criteria of at least five bivariate associations across three studies, are limited to various indexes of Christian conservatism. In some studies, affiliation with certain Protestant dominations is assumed to reflect this construct (e.g., Baptists, Church of Christ), whereas in other studies this construct is assessed more directly by asking about biblical literalism (e.g., "The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word") or fundamentalist theological views (e.g., "The Bible is the answer to all important human problems"). Beliefs about the importance of child obedience and use of physical discipline are often presumed to correspond to use of punitive parenting practices, particularly corporal punishment. However, empirical evidence indicates that the overlap between parenting attitudes and actual parental behavior is far from perfect (Holden & Edwards, 1989). Thus, we discuss findings about attitudes about child obedience, attitudes about physical discipline, and actual use of physical discipline separately.

Christian conservatism and attitudes about child conformity. As can be seen in Table 12, a limited amount of evidence supports the hypothesis that greater Christian conservatism modestly correlates with the general belief of placing a high priority on child conformity and obedience ($r = .176$). In one study, this link remained significant after controlling for demographic factors (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993b). However, three of the five effect sizes pertaining to this hypothesis involved individuals who were not necessarily parents (college students, all adults from the general population), thereby raising questions about the applicability of results to parents themselves. In addition, Danso, Hunsberger, and Pratt (1997) found that parents' endorsement of right-wing authoritarian beliefs was more strongly related to their general values about child obedience than their degree of religious fundamentalism and that this personality style mediated links between fundamentalism and restrictive childrearing attitudes. This suggests the need to take into account

Table 12
Associations Between Christian Conservatism and Attitudes About Child Obedience

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religious variable	Parenting variable	r
Danso et al., 1997	Community	204 univ. students	20 items: Degree of fundamentalism	6 items: Values child obedience	.300****
Danso et al., 1997	Community	71 fathers of univ. students	20 items: Degree of fundamentalism	6 items: Values child obedience	.250*
Danso et al., 1997	Community	83 mothers of univ. students	20 items: Degree of fundamentalism	6 items: Values child obedience	.340**
Ellison & Sherkat, 1993b	National	958 adults	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. all other denominations	5 items: Values child obedience	.059
Ellison & Sherkat, 1993b	National	958 adults	1 item: Biblical literalism	5 items: Values child obedience	.240****

Meta-analysis results

Mean $r = .176$ 95% CI = .118 to .235 Heterogeneity, $Q_{total} = 24.1****$ Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 129

Note. univ. = university; Prot. = Protestant.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for fathers and mothers.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. **** $p < .0001$.

parents' general degree of authoritarianism when investigating how conservative Christian beliefs relate to global parenting attitudes.

Christian conservatism and belief in corporal punishment. Various biblical passages have been used by leaders from conservative religious organizations to condone the use of corporal punishment with preadolescents; this parenting practice is an integral component of conservative theological views about the family system (see Ellison, 1996, and Ellison & Bartkowski, 1997, for excellent discussions). As is summarized in Table 13, considerable evidence has accumulated in favor of the hypothesis that Christian conservatism is related to more favorable attitudes toward corporal punishment. The average effect size is $r = .205$, and more than 600 contrary findings would have to be produced to nullify this association. Once again, most of this research has used views of adults from the general population instead of focusing on parents. Fortunately, a recent study by Gershoff, Miller, and Holden (1999) offers unique and detailed insights into conservative Protestant parents' beliefs about physical discipline. These researchers found conservative Protestant parents of 3-year-olds to be more likely than other parents to believe that spanking is a necessary, effective way to achieve important goals (e.g., gain immediate and long-term obedience) and less likely to believe that this strategy had negative consequences (e.g., none believed that corporal punishment would make their child resentful or afraid of authority figures). When asked to respond to vignettes that portrayed their child as engaging in escalating levels of noncompliance, conservative Protestant parents were also more likely to select spanking and less likely to select reasoning to handle defiance. Finally, they were less likely than other parents to report experiencing guilt about using corporal punishment as a disciplinary strategy.

Overall, adults who belong to conservative Protestant groups clearly believe more strongly in the use of corporal punishment than other adults (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993a, Grasmick, Bursik, & Kimpel, 1991; Wiehe, 1990), with one study finding this link even after controlling for demographic factors, literalism, general importance of religion, and image of God (Grasmick et al., 1991). However, direct measures of Christian conservatism (e.g., degree of biblical

literalism) contribute unique variance to parents' views on corporal punishment over and above having a conservative Protestant denominational affiliation (Grasmick et al., 1991), and direct measures of theological conservatism mediate the link between conservative Protestantism affiliation and beliefs about corporal punishment (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993a). Thus, membership per se in a conservative Protestant organization may be less critical than the extent to which parents personally integrate conservative Christian beliefs into their views of parenting.

Christian conservatism and use of physical discipline. Several studies have directly tested the hypothesis that Christian conservatism is associated with greater use of corporal punishment by parents.⁷ As can be seen in Table 14, the average magnitude of this association ($r = .09$) is half the size of the association based only on measures of attitudes toward corporal punishment using samples of adults drawn primarily from society in general (see Table 13). Thus, although a connection exists between a conservative Christian stance and use of corporal punishment (even after controlling for demographic factors), this link is less robust than might be expected for parents and appears to be more pronounced in families with younger children. In addition, Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal (1996a, 1996b) demonstrated that the link between belonging to a conservative Protestant group and use of corporal punishment disappeared after taking into account the degree to which parents agreed with two conservative statements about the Bible. Again, individual differences in degree of Christian conservatism may be a more critical religious factor in predicting parents' actual use of corporal punishment than their denominational preference. Greater conservative views have been tied to greater use of corporal punishment even after taking into account demographics, conservative denomination affiliation, the degree of child misbehavior, and general authoritarian attitudes about childrearing (Ellison et al., 1996a).

⁷ Alwin (1986) and Day et al. (1998) also assessed associations between conservatism and frequency of spanking, but Alwin did not provide sufficient information to include statistics in meta-analysis, and Day et al. only provided effect sizes for significant findings.

Table 13
Associations Between Christian Conservatism and Supportive Attitude Endorsing Corporal Punishment

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religious variable	Parenting variable	r or β
Danso et al., 1997	Community	204 univ. students	20 items: Degree of fundamentalism	6 items: Belief in corporal punishment	.200**
Danso et al., 1997	Community	71 fathers of univ. students	20 items: Degree of fundamentalism	5 items: Belief in corporal punishment	.060
Danso et al., 1997	Community	83 mothers of univ. students	20 items: Degree of fundamentalism	5 items: Belief in corporal punishment	.340**
Ellison & Sherkat, 1993b	National	978 adults	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. all other denominations	1 item: Belief in corporal punishment	.099**
Ellison & Sherkat, 1993b	National	978 adults	1 item: Biblical literalism	1 item: Belief in corporal punishment	.208****
Grasmick et al., 1991	Community	239 adults	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. Catholics	2 items: Belief in corporal punishment at home & school	.184***c
Grasmick et al., 1991	Community	294 adults	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. liberal Prot.	2 items: Belief in corporal punishment at home & school	.150***c
Grasmick et al., 1991	Community	225 adults	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. no affiliation	2 items: Belief in corporal punishment at home & school	.085 ^c
Grasmick et al., 1992	Community	302 adults	1 item: Fundamentalist Prot. vs. nonfundamentalist Prot.	5 items: Belief in corporal punishment in schools	.206***
Grasmick et al., 1991	Community	239 adults	4 items: Biblical literalism	2 items: Belief in corporal punishment at home & school	.311****
Wiehe, 1990	Church goers	881 adults	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. other Christian groups	8 items: Belief in corporal punishment from AAPI	.337****

Meta-analysis results

Mean r = .205 95% CI = .175 to .242 Heterogeneity, Qtotal = 40.1**** Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 637

Note. CI = confidence interval; univ. = university; Prot. = Protestant; AAPI = Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory.
^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for fathers and mothers. ^c Controlled for parent education, gender, age, and race.
 ** p < .01. *** p < .001. **** p < .0001.

Table 14
Associations Between Christian Conservatism and Actual Use of Corporal Punishment

Study	Sample ^a	n ^b	Religious variable	Parenting variable	r or β
Ellison et al., 1996a	National	1,393 parents of 1- to 4-year-olds	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. all other denominations	1 item: Freq. of spanking	.059**d
Ellison et al., 1996a	National	1,393 parents of 1- to 4-year-olds	2 items: Theological conservatism	1 item: Freq. of spanking	.148***e
Ellison et al., 1996a	National	1,829 parents of 5- to 11-year-olds	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. all other denominations	1 item: Yes-no incidence of spanking	.054***c,d
Ellison et al., 1996a	National	1,829 parents of 5- to 11-year-olds	2 items: Theological conservatism	1 item: Yes-no incidence of spanking	.039**c,e
Ellison et al., 1996b	National	4,076 parents of newborns to 11-year-olds	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. all other denominations	1 item: Freq. of spanking	.070***f
Ellison et al., 1996b	National	4,076 parents of newborns to 11-year-olds	1 item: Theological conservatism	1 item: Freq. of spanking	.138***g
Gershoff et al., 1999	Community	118 parents of 3-year-olds to 11-year-olds	1 item: Conservative Prot. vs. all other affiliations	1 item: Freq. of spanking	.330***

Meta-analysis results

Mean $r = .091$ 95% CI = .071 to .111 Heterogeneity, $Q_{total} = 32.9***$

Rosenthal's fail-safe index: 294

Note. CI = confidence interval; Prot. = Protestant; Freq. = frequency.

^a National refers to the United States unless otherwise noted. ^b n refers to the actual sample size used in computing statistics for the hypothesis, not necessarily the total sample for the study; when possible, separate effects sizes are reported for fathers and mothers. ^c Effect size was estimated from p value in logistic regression table. ^d Controlled for child age, income, education, marital status, race, parent age and gender, family size. ^e Controlled for Conservative Protestant affiliation, child age, income, education, marital status, race, parent age and gender, family size. ^f Controlled for family structure, child age and sex, race, income, marital status, parent age, education, and gender. ^g Controlled for Conservative Protestant affiliation, family structure, child age and sex, race, income, marital status, parent education, age, and sex.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. **** $p < .0001$.

Although parents who hold conservative Christian views are more likely to spank preadolescents than other parents, empirical research has not substantiated concerns that conservative Christian membership or beliefs (a) increase parents' use of nonphysical, aversive punishers (e.g., time-out, threats, yelling, ignoring, or withdraw privileges; Gershoff et al., 1999) or (b) heighten their use of severe physical discipline (e.g., hitting with a fist, striking parts of body other than bottom with a hard object). We located only two studies that broached the topic of child physical abuse; one focused on Mormon families (Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1990) and one dealt with Quaker families (Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984). Neither of these descriptive studies found a greater incidence of parental use of severe physical aggression in these religious groups than in the general population. Moreover, national surveys that include families with adolescents have not found correlations between more frequent corporal punishment and either conservative denominational affiliation (Alwin, 1986) or general importance of religion (Jackson et al., 1999). Overall, documented links between conservative Christian variables and physical discipline practices appear to be limited to families with preadolescents and to acts of corporal punishment commonly used in the United States with young children (e.g., spanking; Giles-Sims, Straus, & Sugarman, 1995).

General importance of religion and disciplinary attitudes or practices. Very little research has addressed how the general importance of religion to parents is tied to disciplinary attitudes or behaviors. Alwin (1986) found that greater church attendance by parents from the general population related to a stronger emphasis on child obedience but not less approval for child autonomy. Jackson et al. (1999) found that parents who viewed religion as more important in their lives were more likely than other parents to value child obedience and hold traditional, strict childrearing attitudes (e.g., children should be seen and not heard). In this same study, however, greater importance of religion was related to more disapproval of physical discipline, even after controlling for a wide range of relevant predictors. Grasmick and colleagues (1991; Grasmick, Morgan, & Kennedy, 1992) also did not find links between the salience of religion in American adults' lives and their sup-

port for corporal punishment, after controlling demographic and other religious variables. More research clearly is needed to better understand how parents with varying levels of commitment to different theological orientations (e.g., conservative, moderate and liberal views on Christianity) differentially integrate their religious beliefs with disciplinary beliefs and practices.

Warmth and positivity. Social scientists have paid relatively little attention to how religion may be tied to greater warmth or positivity in family relationships. We located 8 studies that emphasize parent-child relations (Alwin, 1986; Brody et al., 1994; Gershoff et al., 1999; Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Kelly et al., 1992; Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Strayhorn, Weidman, & Larson, 1990; Wilcox, 1998) and 5 studies that focus on global family functioning (Abbot et al., 1990; Brody et al., 1996; Cherlin & Celebuski, 1983; Ransom et al., 1992; Wilkinson & Tanner, 1980). Although these studies consistently suggest that greater religiousness is tied to greater positivity in family relationships, the diverse types of samples, measures, and data analyses used across these studies precluded the use of meta-analytic techniques to summarize key findings. Instead, we highlight promising findings from several methodologically rigorous studies on links between parental religiousness and parent-child relationships and co-parenting processes.

In a longitudinal study, Pearce and Axinn (1998) examined how mother and adult child reports of the global quality of the mother-child relationship varied as a function of the mother's religious affiliation, religious attendance, and self-rated importance of religion at three time points: prior to the child's birth and when the child was 15 and 18 years old. Mother-child congruence scores were also created for these three religious variables when the child was age 18. Higher self-ratings of importance of religion by mothers when children were 18 were tied to more positive mother-child relationship when the child was 23, as reported by both parties, and after controlling for demographic and all other religious variables. Congruence between mother-child religious attendance and self-ratings of importance of religion also prospectively predicted a more positive mother-child relationship. This study represents the only longitudinal study we located in the arena of

religion and parenting. These results offer compelling evidence that parents' personal religiousness and parent-child congruence on religious matters may facilitate positivity in parent-child relationships.

Two excellent studies have been conducted by Brody and his colleagues (1994; Brody et al., 1996) on how African American parents' religiousness may be linked to supportive marital and family interactions. The first study focused on links between each parents' self-reported religiousness (frequency of church attendance multiplied by importance of religion) and observations of family discussions with 9- to 12-year-olds (Brody et al., 1994). In this study, greater maternal religiousness was directly linked to less "nattering" and inconsistent parenting, less co-parenting conflict, and better marital quality. Greater paternal religiousness was also associated with less co-parenting conflict and better marital quality. In addition, associations of parental religiousness and the quality of parent-child relationship were mediated through marital quality and co-parenting skills. This study stands out as the only one that directly assessed the co-parenting dimension of the marital relationship and examined religious "carry-over" effects from the marital to parent-child level of the family system. Brody and associates extended their research in a second study by incorporating measures of child adjustment. In terms of direct associations, greater maternal religiousness was related to less self-reported marital conflict and fewer child externalizing behavior problems. Greater paternal religiousness was directly related to less self-reported marital conflict, greater observed family cohesion, fewer child externalizing behavior problems, and fewer child internalizing behavior problems. A structural equation model also indicated that parental religiousness indirectly influenced youth self-regulation by promoting family cohesiveness and lowering marital conflict.

Gunnoe et al. (1999) also provided compelling observational evidence that parents' religiousness facilitates effective parenting practices which, in turn, leads to better social adjustment of youth. Using a large national sample of families, these researchers found robust direct associations between mother and father self-reports of greater personal religiousness and observations of greater maternal and

paternal authoritative parenting during dyadic problem-solving discussions between each parent and the adolescent. These links emerged after controlling for demographic and family variables. Moreover, indirect pathways of influence were found for parental religiousness leading to greater social responsibility by adolescents through authoritative parenting.

Finally, using a behavioral index of parental warmth collected during a comprehensive national survey, Wilcox (1998) found that parents' level of endorsement of theologically conservative views about the Bible was related to parent reports of more frequent hugging and praising of preschool and school-aged children. This effect emerged in regression models that controlled for Conservative Protestant affiliation, frequency of church attendance, mothers' participation in the workforce, and other demographic factors. Frequency of church attendance was also uniquely associated with parents' use of physical affection with school-aged children, but not preschoolers. Notably, the presence or absence of an affiliation with a Conservative Protestant organization was not related to parental affection, suggesting that more specific religious variables are relevant to parental warmth and positivity.

Parental coping. The findings reviewed thus far suggest, but do not directly confirm, the idea that religion may play a prominent role in how some individuals respond to serious family difficulties. In particular, researchers have not directly assessed ways in which religion may facilitate or interfere with effective coping with marital dysfunction, chronic parent-child conflict, and child psychopathology. Moreover, studies on religion and parental functioning have relied on families drawn from the general community and have not focused on families referred to mental health professionals for child or family therapy. However, numerous studies have explored how parents use religion to cope with children diagnosed with pervasive developmental disabilities or cancer (Bailey, Skinner, Rodriguez, Gut, & Correa, 1999; Barbarin & Chesler, 1984, 1986; Bennett, Deluca, & Allen, 1995; Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999; Dollahite, Marks, & Olson, 1998; Friedrich, Cohen, & Wilturner, 1988; Gray, 1994; Haworth, Hill, & Glidden, 1996; Leyser, 1994; Rogers-Dulan, 1998; Skinner, Bailey, Correa, & Rodriguez, 1999; Spilka, Zwartjes, & Zwartjes, 1991;

Weisner, Beizer, & Stolze, 1991). This body of work offers some interesting findings that might apply to parents struggling with other types of family difficulties. Before proceeding, it should be noted that research on parents' use of religious coping has been largely descriptive (only five studies used inferential statistics), relying heavily on informal ratings of interviews or unstandardized self-report tools.

Notable percentages of parents spontaneously report during interviews that they use religion to help them cope with their children who have developmental disabilities. Although specific figures vary widely in the literature (10%, Gray, 1994; 30–40%, Haworth et al., 1996; 66–73%, Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999), parents often appear to use religion to help deal with stresses associated with child disabilities. One parental religious coping strategy consists of benevolent cognitive reappraisals of a child's problems and parent's role as a caregiver. For example, Skinner et al. (1999) found that 71% of Latino mothers viewed their disabled child as a gift from God who found them worthy of the responsibility of raising such a child or wanted them to grow from the experience. Similar results were reported in Haworth et al. (1996) and Weisner et al. (1991). Another form of religious coping consists of religious rituals and practices, such as praying, attending religious services, or making pilgrimages to holy places on behalf of oneself or one's child. Bailey et al. (1999) found that parents of disabled children said they derived personal benefits from such practices, including obtaining hope, strength, and a sense of peace.

Several studies have attempted to address the question of whether parents' religiousness or religious coping strategies relate to better or worse outcomes in the context of child disabilities. Isolated findings suggest that greater religious coping is associated with better parental health (Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999), less parental stress and depression (Friedrich et al., 1988; Rogers-Dulan, 1998), more family cohesion (Weisner et al., 1991), more support from outside the family (Barbarin & Chesler, 1984; Weisner et al., 1991), less parental depression (Rogers-Dulan, 1998), and less negative impact on parents or families (Rogers-Dulan, 1998). Three major cautions about this body of research are that (a) measures of personal religiousness have been assumed to reflect actual

use of religious coping methods, (b) global measures of religious coping do not adequately distinguish among different types of religious coping, and (c) children's developmental delays and illnesses are typically perceived to be random events outside parental control. Working with adults dealing with a wide range of life stressors, Pargament and his colleagues (Pargament, 1997; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998) have differentiated between methods of religious coping, which have diverse implications for mental health depending on "fit" between the type of stressor and religious coping style. Thus, although religion may facilitate parents' adjustment to children's developmental disabilities, opposite effects may occur for child or family problems that fall under the perceived responsibility of parents. Consistent with this notion, Strawbridge et al. (1998) found that greater involvement in religious activities exacerbated the negative impact of family dysfunction (e.g., marital or child problems) on the depressive symptoms of elderly adults, whereas religiousness buffered the negative effects of more "uncontrollable" types of problems (e.g., chronic health problems, poverty).

Child psychopathology. Some critics of Christianity, and of conservative Protestantism in particular, have expressed concern that greater parental religiousness produces excessively harsh parenting practices which, in turn, heightens the likelihood of children's mental health problems (e.g., rebelliousness, fearfulness, guilt; see Ellison, 1996, for review). Others have pointed out that parental religiousness may be a protective factor against child maladjustment by heightening parents' emotional supportiveness, which may foster children's compliance to societal norms (Brody et al., 1996; Gunnoe et al., 1999; Wilcox, 1998). We located eight studies published in journal articles since 1980 that have tied measures of parental or family religiousness to child mental health outcomes (Brody et al., 1996; Burkett, 1993; Dudley, Mutch, & Cruise, 1987; Elifson, Petersen, & Hadaway, 1983; Gunnoe et al., 1999; Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne, & Weissman, 1997; Perkins, 1987; Strayhorn et al. 1990). We provide narrative remarks on these studies because of diversity of samples and variables involved. Greater maternal, paternal, or family religiousness has been linked with youth exhibiting fewer externalizing and internalizing

behavior problems (Brody et al., 1996; Miller et al., 1997), greater prosocial traits (Gunnoe et al., 1999), less frequent or problematic levels of alcohol usage (Burkett, 1993; Dudley et al., 1987; Perkins, 1987), less marijuana usage (Dudley et al., 1987), and less serious antisocial behavior (Elifson et al., 1983). Miller et al.'s (1997) 10-year, longitudinal study offers noteworthy evidence that maternal religiosity operates as a protective factor against offspring depression. As mentioned earlier, two studies (Brody et al., 1994; Gunnoe et al., 1999) suggest that the influence of parents' religiousness on children's better behavioral adjustment operate by facilitating effective parenting skills. In contrast, greater parental religiousness has yet to be documented to lead to undesirable child outcomes through more strict or punitive parenting practices. However, religious variables in this body of research overwhelmingly consist of global indexes of parental or family religiousness. Thus, ample room remains for delineating different pathways of influence between religion, parenting practices, and child adjustment.

Summary and General Critique of Empirical Findings

The picture about the interplay of religion with marriage and parenting is incomplete, but some basic findings are beginning to emerge. In terms of marital functioning, greater individual religiousness and religious homogamy between partners have consistently been associated with lower divorce rates, greater marital satisfaction, and greater commitment to the marital relationship. Greater religiousness has not been tied to greater marital verbal conflict or increased risk of domestic violence; in fact, isolated findings indicate an inverse relation between religion and these variables. With regard to parenting practices, considerable attention has been paid to how Christian conservatism relates to disciplinary attitudes and practices. Parents who are affiliated with conservative Christian groups or who hold literalistic beliefs about the Bible are more likely than other parents to express autocratic parenting attitudes, believe in corporal punishment, and spank preadolescents. Virtually no research, however, has focused on child physical abuse per se or on nonconservative, religiously based beliefs about punitive parenting. In terms of adaptive parental or family functioning, initial evidence suggests that reli-

gion may facilitate positive family interactions. In at least one study, greater parental religiousness has been tied to greater satisfaction with parent-child relationships, higher rates of parental affection, more parental consistency, stronger co-parenting alliances, and more cohesive family relations. Finally, several studies indicate that greater parental religiousness lowers the risk of child maladjustment and adolescent alcohol or drug use, with two investigations suggesting that religion leads to these outcomes by promoting effective parenting skills.

The replicated findings we identified using meta-analytic techniques were largely rooted in surveys of large national or community samples, which used brief measures to assess religiousness. These methodological characteristics reflect two major strengths of the available research. First, it would be difficult to argue that the key, replicated results apply to only intensely religious individuals. Instead, religion appears to be relevant across families from varying backgrounds. Second, although the average effect sizes of well-supported hypotheses were small ($r_s = .07-.20$), such associations for global variables in large, highly heterogeneous samples are not trivial. In fact, the effect sizes we found for global markers of religiousness are as impressive as the predictive power of other global risk factors of child or family problems that are highlighted in sociological and epidemiological research. For example, the magnitude of links between parental divorce and measures of children's well-being are also generally small but have nevertheless garnered considerable attention (Amato & Keith, 1991). Overall, we would argue that the associations documented in this review between global indexes of religiousness and various aspects of family life deserve careful consideration from social scientists.

Serious limitations, however, stem from the fact that social scientists have evaluated the interface between religious and family spheres of life primarily "from a distance." For one thing, the influence of religion in family life may be much stronger than what currently appears to be the case. Because brief measures (especially single-item measures) yield a restricted range of scores and are more prone to be unreliable, statistical associations based on such indexes are likely to be attenuated. More impor-

tant, research with global religious variables does not reveal what it is about religion that affects marriage and parenting. To reiterate, most research has relied on a handful of global markers to capture the religious domain, such as denomination affiliation, frequency of church attendance, personal religiousness (e.g., frequency of prayer), and single items about Christian conservatism. More in-depth and conceptually based measurement tools are needed to develop a richer, deeper understanding of the mechanisms that tie religion to family life. The Mahoney et al. (1999) study demonstrates that more robust and theoretically meaningful results about religion and marriage emerge by closely assessing how couples incorporate religion into their married life. To advance more conceptually sophisticated research, we turn to the theoretical mechanisms by which the substantive and psychosocial elements of religion could benefit or harm family adjustment.

Theoretical Mechanisms Through Which Religion May Influence Family Relationships

A General Conceptual Framework Based on Two Overarching Themes

Since the inception of the field of the psychology of religion,⁸ scholars have tended to emphasize either the psychosocial functions or substantive elements of religion with regard to human behavior (Pargament, 1997). The *functional element* refers to the psychological or social purposes that religion may serve, largely independent of the content of religious myths, teachings, rituals, or practices. For instance, involvement in a church provides families with opportunities to become integrated into their local community, obtain social support from people with similar attitudes, and take part in social activities. Such benefits of church membership could occur regardless of particular religious beliefs about family life. In contrast, the *substantive element of religion* refers to the content of systems of beliefs and practices promoted by different religious institutions. Religion is unique because of its focus on the nature of the sacred (e.g., God, Higher Power) and transcendental phenomenon (e.g., miracles, afterlife). Theological beliefs shape many individuals' core assumptions about ultimate goals, suffering, and good and evil behavior. These

cognitions, in turn, could guide people's actions with regard to family interactions. For example, conservative Christian theology emphasizes the spiritual importance of teaching children to obey authority figures and encourages parents to use corporal punishment to obtain child compliance (Ellison & Bartkowski, 1997); these religious beliefs appear to have a distinct influence on parenting attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, various religious rituals and practices may represent unique forms of behavior that influence marital and family processes.

Another major theme emphasized in the field of the psychology of religion is that religion has the power both to facilitate and impede healthy psychological functioning in adults (cf. Pargament, 1997). We argue that it is likewise critically important to recognize religion's potential to function adaptively or maladaptively for couples and parents, depending on the nature of religious beliefs and practices. Philosophical and religious biases may make it tempting for scholars and laypeople to emphasize ways in which specific religious teachings may lead to either desirable or undesirable outcomes. A more balanced and accurate picture emerges by considering the potential pros and cons of religion in family life.

An integration of the above two themes offers a coherent conceptual approach to generate hypotheses about mechanisms that may underlie the interface between religion and family life. We propose a framework where one question to

⁸ A brief historical overview is provided for readers unfamiliar with this area. The inception of the Psychology of Religion field occurred in the early 20th century, with notable leaders such as William James, G. Stanley Hall, and Carl Jung. Psychologists' interest in the area, however, waned until the mid-1950s (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985). At that time, rigorous empirical research on the psychology of religion began to flourish and psychologists began to contribute to the large body of research conducted by sociologists on religion. Several major journals were established for social scientific work on religion in the mid-1950s (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Journal of Health and Religion*, *Review of Religious Research*, and *Journal of Psychology and Theology*). In the mid-1970s, the American Psychological Association formed Division 36, Psychologists Interested in Religious Issues, which had an approximate membership of 1,200 professionals in February 2000 (American Psychological Association, 2000).

consider is this: What are the substantive and psychosocial aspects of religion in family life? The other question to address is, What are the potentially helpful and harmful roles religion may play in family life? As we illustrate, these two central questions generate a rich set of mechanisms for how religion may affect families' lives. Moreover, a conceptual framework organized around these two overarching questions fosters a balanced and full picture of the potential roles of religion in family life: religion as a rich set of theologically grounded beliefs or practices that may help or harm family functioning in unique ways, and religion as a source of generic psychosocial functions that lead to positive or negative outcomes.

Theoretical Mechanisms Linking Religion to the Marital Domain

Substantive elements of religion and marriage.

One substantive aspect of Judeo-Christian theology that promotes marriage is the assertion that marriage should be a lifetime bond and, conversely, that dissolving a marriage is unjustified in most situations (e.g., Giblin, 1993; Lauer, 1985). A proscriptive religious corollary is that married persons should place an equal, if not higher, priority on maintaining their relationship than on fulfilling individual desires. These religiously based beliefs could inhibit divorce and reinforce commitment to marriage in at least two ways. First, more religious individuals may anticipate as well as experience added cognitions or feelings of guilt and failure if a divorce occurred (e.g., I am violating a vow I made to God), compared to less religious individuals who may be more likely to view divorce as an acceptable solution to deal with unrewarding marriages. Second, more religious individuals may risk greater external disapproval if they divorce because their friends and family members object to divorce on religious grounds (e.g., divorce represents a serious spiritual failure). Thus, religious beliefs could create unique barriers to divorce.

If religion represented only a prohibitive barrier to leaving unhappy marriages and did not also operate in a constructive fashion (at least for some couples), then more religious individuals would report greater marital distress than less religious people. This is not the case, however. People who choose to remain married clearly report greater global marital satisfaction

as their level of religiousness rises. Thus, it is important to consider the specific ways in which religion may enhance marital functioning.

Judeo-Christian institutions disseminate many teachings advocating cognitions and behaviors that are likely to facilitate marital functioning. These theological stances include the importance of acknowledging one's own weaknesses and limitations, accepting and forgiving others, being sexually monogamous, being unselfish and making personal sacrifices for the sake of the marriage, and viewing the marital relationship as a symbolic or literal means through which to experience God's love and grace (e.g., Giblin, 1993; Lauer, 1985). From this perspective, religious institutions not only send punitive messages designed to inhibit marital dissolution but also send supportive messages designed to enrich marital relationships. We now extrapolate four sets of mechanisms from these teachings.

One group of mechanisms involves sanctification, a construct that centers on couples' perceptions of the sanctity of their marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney, Pargament, Swank, & Murray, 2001). Many couples perceive their marriage as having spiritual character and significance, either by imbuing the relationship with divine, transcendental attributes (e.g., holy, blessed, sacred) or viewing their marriage as a manifestation of God (e.g., God is present in my marriage; I experience God through my marriage). As indicated earlier, couples who report higher levels of the sanctification of marriage report more positive marital functioning in a number of areas. More research is needed to replicate and account for such links. We speculate, however, that spouses who view their marriage as sacred may be more willing to forgive and accept their partners, more likely to minimize or dismiss minor conflicts, more likely to engage in attributions and behaviors that resolve marital conflict effectively, and make greater use of religious coping methods (e.g., prayer, spiritual support for marriage; Mahoney, 2001). Couples who believe that God is incarnate in their marriage may also be more motivated to act in ways that protect their marriage because they want to sustain this avenue of spiritual connection and please God (Mahoney, 2001).

Another salient set of potential mechanisms arises from the emphasis in Judeo-Christian religions on the importance of sexual fidelity in

marriage. Religious wedding rituals highlight sexual monogamy as a sacred vow, and one of the 10 commandments in the Old Testament explicitly prohibits adultery. On one hand, these religious messages may set up high barriers against extramarital sexual relations by triggering a heightened sense of prohibition and guilt. On the other hand, some individuals may interpret these religious proscriptions to mean that sexual fidelity within marriage is an especially precious demonstration of monogamous love that should be nurtured and protected. Perceptions that God sanctions and desires couples to engage in sexual behavior in marriage may also facilitate a greater willingness to explore or take pleasure in this dimension of married life. Conversely, when sexual activity diminishes, religious individuals who view this as an essential component of a well-functioning marriage may be gravely concerned. Such speculations illustrate a variety of unexplored processes through which religion may shape sexual attitudes and practices in marriage.

Couples' mutual engagement in religious activities presents a number of behavioral pathways by which religion may influence marital functioning. Joint religious activities include praying together; talking about how to live out God's will; discussing personal spiritual issues or God's role in the marriage; and engaging in more formal and traditional religious services, programs, and rituals as a couple. Religious rituals and conjoint prayer give couples concrete methods to acknowledge their mistakes and ask each other for forgiveness. Habitual use of such practices could help prevent resentment and hostility from building up. In addition, unlike secular activities, couples may believe that engaging in religious rituals together pulls God directly into their relationship to facilitate mutual disclosure and acceptance of shortcomings. Joint religious activities also involve opportunities for couples to develop shared values and provide each other with support, particularly about religious, spiritual, and moral issues. This may help build intimacy and reinforce each partner's deeply held personal beliefs, thereby heightening each spouse's commitment to the relationship.

Religion may also help marriage by offering individuals unique cognitive and behavioral resources to cope with marital difficulties and stressors. Potentially helpful forms of religious

coping include (a) spiritual support from God—Higher Power, (b) support from a religious community, (c) benevolent religious reappraisal, and (d) religious rituals (Pargament, 1997). Examples of these respective forms of religion coping in marriage are to seek comfort and reassurance from God about marital struggles; ask clergy and fellow believers to pray for one's marriage; try to perceive how God might be working to strengthen one's marriage; and ask God for forgiveness for marital sins. These religious forms of coping may help one or both partners in a distressed marriage to de-escalate conflict, gain useful perspective on their own contribution to marital problems, and reach out to others for assistance (Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998). We refer readers to Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan (1998) for insightful illustrations of how Christians might use religious scripture to motivate their use of strategies that improve marital functioning (e.g., read Bible verses, such as James 1:19, to encourage the use of "speaker-listener" techniques).

Our discussion has thus far highlighted ways that substantive religious beliefs or practices may benefit marriage. Empirical findings suggest that this type of positive influence is most typical. However, unusual or distorted expressions of religion could yield undesirable outcomes. One concern is that more religious individuals, especially conservative Protestant women, may inappropriately sacrifice their personal well-being for the sake of the marriage (Bartkowski, 1997; Hansen, 1987). Those who experience extreme religious barriers to divorce (e.g., risk excommunication from their family network) and intensely believe in commitment to marriage at any personal price may have more difficulty exiting marriages that pose a clear and chronic threat to their psychological or physical safety. This may occur especially in situations where the perpetrator uses religious beliefs to condone abusive behavior, or a minister counsels the victim to remain in an abusive relationship.

A more common risk for individuals who have strong religious views about marriage could be more difficulty adjusting to an unwanted or unexpected divorce. In addition, those who hold profound beliefs that marriage is a holy bond sanctified by God may feel more distressed when spouses violate traditional religious wedding vows (e.g., engage in adultery,

revoke a promise to have children, abandon partner when illness or financial problems strike). Alternatively, couples who believe that children represent a blessing from God that fulfills their sexual life may have more difficulty coping with infertility. Finally, some individuals might engage in forms of negative religious coping that exacerbate marital distress or sidetrack marital therapy (Pargament, Zinnbauer, et al., 1998). Examples include preoccupation about whether God really cares about marital problems, feeling judged by clergy or cut off from religious support system, and believing that marital distress is a punishment for premarital sex (or other "sins") or that infidelity is unforgivable in oneself or partner. We would encourage more research on these topics because marital therapists may often be faced with helping religious individuals deal with these types of situations and beliefs.

Psychosocial functions of religion and marriage. It is important to identify psychosocial elements of religion that have little to do with the content of religious beliefs or practices themselves, but which may influence marital functioning. For example, greater religiousness may inhibit divorce and increase commitment because of the social benefits individuals derive from involvement with religious groups. To the degree that people rely on religious networks to provide social support and a sense of belonging, they may be reluctant to divorce because this action could lead to social rejection and isolation. Similarly, displaying a low level of marital commitment may elicit peer rejection as well as compromise access to important interpersonal resources.

From a psychosocial perspective, religious activities offer couples socially sanctioned, structured avenues to engage in pleasurable activities and spend time together. Couples may benefit from more frequent religious participation just as couples profit from doing nonreligious activities together. Spending time talking about religious issues may also simply signal a high degree of compatibility on a wide range of potentially conflictual issues, such as friends, philosophy of life, the decision to have children, and child-rearing practices. Spouses who share strong nonreligiously based philosophies may be equally compatible.

A gray conceptual area emerges in considering the norms, values, and models for how

couples should treat each other on the basis of religious and secular worldviews. Some might argue that concepts such as love, compassion, fidelity, forgiveness, honesty, self-sacrifice, and commitment supercede religion. These concepts are widely promoted in nonreligious as well as religious literature and communities. Others could insist that these virtues are inherently spiritual constructs that cannot be removed from a religious context without diluting their psychological power. We highlight this ambiguous conceptual zone to underscore the inevitable blurring between religious and secular views of marriages. There may, in fact, exist a set of *psycho-religious* mechanisms that cannot be fully untangled when examining religion's impact on marital functioning.

Theoretical Mechanisms Linking Religion to the Parenting Domain

Substantive aspects of religion and parenting. As indicated earlier, conservative Christian belief systems emphasize the spiritual importance of exerting control over children. This specific line of theological reasoning has generated considerable social science research. No studies, however, have gone beyond a few global items to capture the degree to which parents strive to integrate conservative Christian beliefs into their own parenting. The assumption appears to be that if parents belong to a particular denomination or hold literalistic views of the Bible, then they uniformly adopt the same disciplinary attitudes and behaviors. However, considerable diversity exists within conservative Protestant circles about the circumstances under which parental control and corporal punishment is necessary, including the age of the child, the nature of the infraction, the child's understanding of his or her misbehavior (i.e., "willful" disobedience), and the clarity of parental expectations (Ellison & Bartkowski, 1997). In addition, most conservative Protestant leaders emphasize that, as models of God, parents should deliver punishment in a calm, deliberate manner uncontaminated by excessive emotionality and that extreme or arbitrary use of physical discipline can stymie a child's spiritual growth (Ellison & Bartkowski, 1997). We believe a more detailed assessment of parents' beliefs and behaviors about corporal punishment, couched in religious language systems, would provide a better picture of how parents

translate these ideas into their own behavior. Parents who hold more or less extreme views than the conservative "party line" may discipline their children differently.

A narrow preoccupation with conservative Christian views of corporal punishment obscures other religiously based beliefs that parents may hold about discipline practices. Because of their religious principles, Quakers, for example, strongly advocate nonviolent approaches to resolving interpersonal conflict (Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984). Parents from other religious traditions may likewise hold profound religious beliefs that physical punishment contradicts theological directives to love, nurture, and protect children from harm. We believe these views deserve attention in their own right. Furthermore, we suggest that an interactive effect may exist between the centrality of religion to parents' identities and their religious views on corporal punishment (Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2000). Parents who are more personally religious and consider corporal punishment antithetical to their religious values about parenting may be most likely to reject this discipline strategy, whereas deeply committed parents who view use of corporal punishment as a spiritual obligation may most often rely on this strategy.

At the current time, firm conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the negative or positive psychological outcomes of religiously based discipline practices for parents or children (Elison, 1996). We offer the following speculations. On one hand, parents who hold stronger religious imperatives about disciplinary practices may be more consistent and confident in using aversive consequences, such as corporal punishment, and provide clearer limits about unacceptable child behavior. In turn, as parents' consistency with discipline increase, children may be more compliant and better adjusted. Moreover, youth who understand parents' use of punishment within a larger religious system may be more likely to accept physical punishment as fair. On the other hand, parents who rely heavily on punitive practices because of religious beliefs may have more difficulty negotiating and listening to their children, especially during adolescence. In addition, parents who often invoke God to justify aversive punishments may have children who experience stronger feelings of shame, guilt, and fear and

be at greater risk of internalizing disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety). Furthermore, when faced with serious child psychopathology, parents with more conservative Christian views may respond with increasingly elevated use of physical discipline as compared with other parents. Although available studies have not linked religion to child physical maltreatment, religious views on parenting (conservative vs. liberal) may moderate links between higher levels of child behavior problems and more frequent or severe physical discipline.

Judeo-Christian institutions disseminate many religiously based teachings to promote positive parent-child and family interactions. Similar to marriage, these include the importance of acknowledging personal weaknesses and limitations, accepting and forgiving others, making personal sacrifices on behalf of other family members, and viewing the family as a symbolic or literal means through which to experience God's love and grace (Abbot et al., 1990; Mahoney et al., 2001; Wilcox, 1998). Various religious rituals (e.g., baptism) and scriptures also send the message that parents have a sacred duty to reveal God's love to children by their example of love and devotion to the family. In addition, couples are encouraged to view themselves as cocreators of children with God and to work together to raise their children in a nurturing family atmosphere that reflects the "Kingdom of God."

We suggest that the substantive content of religion may influence parents' appraisals of their children and thereby facilitate family functioning. Parents may sanctify their children (e.g., view child as a holy gift), parenting (e.g., My parenting reflects God's will), or the coparent alliance (e.g., my spouse and I have a spiritual obligation to raise our children as a team). In other words, parents may imbue their children and their parenting role(s) with spiritual significance and meaning (Mahoney et al., 2001). This may lead to benevolent appraisals of children's misbehavior and the demands of the parenting role. Such appraisals, in turn, may short-circuit hostile parent-child interactions and facilitate interparental cooperation. In addition, mothers and fathers who explicitly invest parenting with religious or spiritual meaning may place a high priority on being affectionate and involved with their children.

Family religious activities also represent a potentially unique pathway to facilitate family cohesiveness. For example, habitual engagement in family prayer and attendance at religious services offers parents routine opportunities to communicate apologies, hopes, and shared goals to their children within a context overseen by an authority whose power supercedes even that of parents. This could prevent reciprocal resentments between parents and offspring from building up over time. In addition, greater involvement in religious groups could reinforce parents' efforts to use religion to cope more effectively with child or family problems. For example, friends and family who are part of the parents' religious social networks may reinforce parents' benevolent religious reappraisals and intensify parents' efforts to seek help from God.

As indicated earlier, parents may rely on religion as a means of coping with behaviorally or emotionally disturbed children. Parents may use four specific forms of positive religious coping: (a) looking to God for strength, support, and guidance in parenting; (b) seeking input from other church members about childrearing decisions; (c) perceiving one's parenting role and the child's problems to be part of God's plan; and (d) praying or attending religious services on behalf of child. Extrapolating from research on adult's general styles of religious coping with life crises (Pargament, Zinnbauer, et al., 1998), parents may gain most when they experience God as being part of a nonjudgmental, collaborative partnership in parenting (e.g., I tried to make sense of the situation with God). Parents may also benefit from active religious surrender over control over their child after having expending reasonable efforts (e.g., I did my best and then turned the situation over to God). This balance between taking action and relinquishing control in the face of child maladjustment could paradoxically facilitate better parenting by combating parents' attributions of learned helplessness as well as unrealistically high expectations or guilt about their own role. Parents who view God as a collaborative partner may be better off than parents who passively wait for God to rescue their child or plead for direct divine intervention (e.g., I bargained with God to make my child change).

Careful attention to how religion operates across the life span of the family could help

illuminate potentially destructive aspects of religion, particularly with regard to family cohesiveness. Viewing parenting as a sacred mission to the exclusion of other goals and values could foster unhealthy enmeshment in the family system. Parents with this orientation may be more reluctant to relinquish this role as children prepare to leave the home. Alternatively, an excessive emphasis on religious family activities and parent-child agreement on religious beliefs could inhibit children's growth and individuation at critical points in development. Finally, families who emphasize familial unity as a sign of spiritual success may tend to avoid dealing directly with conflict or deny serious family dysfunction for fear of disrupting the family system (Mahoney, 2001).

Perhaps because parents of developmentally delayed children are far more likely to use positive rather than negative religious coping strategies, scarce attention has been paid to ways religion may heighten parents' distress in response to difficult child-rearing situations (Tarakeshwar & Pargament, in press). Nevertheless, parents' use of negative religious forms of coping could exacerbate parenting or child maladjustment. For example, when faced with conflictual parent-child relations or chronic mental health problems of children, parents may wonder if God has abandoned the child or themselves; may feel conflicted about what the church wants the parent to do or feel unwelcome at church because of the child's disruptive behavior; and may believe the Devil is responsible for the child's problems. Such processes may be relatively rare, but they are important to consider for clinical practice.

Psychosocial aspects of religion and parenting. Although the substance of religious beliefs about discipline may fully account for links between religion and punitive parenting, it is important to consider the "nonreligious" psychosocial functions embedded in exposure to any given set of teachings about parenting. Religious institutions and their leaders offer recommendations from a position of authority about what parents should and should not do when raising children. Belonging to any social group that provides coherent, well-delineated guidelines about parenting could powerfully shape parents' attitudes and behaviors, whatever the content of those messages are. It could be argued that less religious parents often turn

to the field of social science in a similar manner to obtain education and reinforce their child-rearing attitudes or practices.

Greater participation in religious activities in a religious community may provide parents with valuable psychological and practical resources independent of the content of religion. Friendships with like-minded parents can provide social support to deal with the challenges of child rearing, regardless of the nature of the shared parenting beliefs. Furthermore, parents may experience more confidence and have less conflict with their children when their social network is composed of families with similar value systems. In addition, religious institutions provide opportunities for families to engage in activities together as a unit. Simply doing more things together as a family may facilitate cohesion. Religious organizations often provide valuable instrumental aid to parents. This includes financial assistance, provision of child care, help with daily hassles and unexpected crises associated with parenting a difficult child, and consultation about major decisions. Finally, belonging to a community that reinforces one's existential beliefs and values, whatever they may be, may facilitate better personal psychological adjustment to challenging and often uncontrollable family circumstances.

Recommendations for Future Research on Religion, Marriage, and Parenting

Available empirical literature offers little insight about the plausibility or respective power of the various specific mechanisms that could tie religion to marital or parental functioning. Few studies have directly assessed how or to what degree people internalize religious messages about marriage and parenting and whether such religion-based beliefs or behaviors enhance or harm family life. Instead, most researchers have viewed religion from a distance and have relied on global measures of religiousness as proxies for such factors. Prior research has also not addressed whether specific religious beliefs or behaviors contribute to marital or parental functioning over and above "nonreligious" positive attributions about marriage and parenting, nonreligious shared family activities, or nonreligious coping methods. Without such data, arguments can be made that religion is a proxy for variables that fall outside the substantive content of religious beliefs or practices.

To untangle the potentially beneficial and harmful functions that religion may play in the home, we urge researchers to develop more fine-grained, conceptually based indexes of various aspects of religion. We recommend that assessment tools be developed that capture the substantive element of religious beliefs or practices. Couples and parents could be directly asked about the degree to which they integrate religious messages about marriage or child rearing into their lives. Greater specificity in assessing religious beliefs or practices about marriage and parenting would greatly clarify the various pathways of influence. Another advancement needed in the area is to obtain multiple family members' reports and to assess marital or family interactions with observational measures.

We would also encourage researchers to study families who are and who are not experiencing marital distress, parent-child conflict, or child maladjustment. As indicated earlier, available empirical research on links between marriage and parenting has focused primarily on general population or community (i.e., "nondistressed") samples. Although religion may promote adaptive marital or family functioning for most families, religion may primarily yield adverse effects on individuals in families marked by marital or family dysfunction (e.g., chronic verbal or physical aggression in marital or parent-child relationships; Mahoney, 2001).

A final caution to note is that we have focused this review on how religion may shape marital and family functioning. However, researchers should recognize reverse pathways of influence. Experiences people have in their married life or with their children can affect their own religious beliefs and practices. For example, Thornton, Axinn, and Hill (1992) have found that premarital cohabitation of couples decreases their general religiousness, whereas marriage leads to increased religious participation. In addition, changing trends in society countershape positions taken by religious institutions on family-related policies, which over time may alter the links between family members' views on religion and their own behavior (Thornton, 1985).

Implications for Applications and Public Policy

Psychologists and other mental health professionals have been criticized for ignoring the

religious dimension of clients' lives, oversimplifying religious issues by resorting to religious stereotypes, or reducing religious phenomena to seemingly more basic psychological and social functions (Pargament & Mahoney, in press; Pargament & Park, 1995; Shafranske, 1996). Our review, however, suggests that religion is too significant and complex a part of family life to be ignored, oversimplified, or reduced to purely psychosocial functions. Furthermore, religion appears to play adaptive functions in marriage and parenting. Thus, clinicians who ignore this arena may overlook helpful resources available to at-risk families in the community or those referred for clinical services. The virtual absence of research with distressed families, however, leaves open the possibility that religion may sometimes exacerbate maladaptive family processes. In either case, we recommend that therapists routinely and carefully explore how religion operates in the lives of clients referred for marital or family therapy.

From a public policy perspective, the limited number of studies in this area echoes previous concerns that religion is a taboo topic in the field of psychology (Weaver et al., 1998). However, the apparent importance of religion to family life would seem to oblige public policy decision makers and funding agencies to encourage more research in this arena. More extensive and detailed evidence of the power of religion would also help to support the development of joint programming between psychologists and religious communities. For example, Stanley and Trathen (1994) have implemented their Christian-oriented Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program designed to prevent divorce among engaged or newly married couples, in area churches. Psychologists and policymakers need to keep in mind, however, that churches and synagogues are not quasi-mental health centers, and clergy are not quasi-mental health professionals. These institutions and their leaders have unique identities founded on a unique religious mission—the desire to bring people closer to God. Thus, psychologists' interactions with religious communities should be founded on a respect for the fundamentally religious character of these systems (Pargament, 1997). Nevertheless, the goals of social scientists, policymakers, and religious leaders are likely to often overlap with respect

to family life. Thus, the scientific study of religion in the home and the application of this knowledge through direct clinical work and prevention programs in the community offer exciting new directions for psychology and religion.

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