THE ROLES OF SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY IN RESPONSE TO ROMANTIC BREAKUP

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This study examined a model of religious/spiritual (R/S) coping with nonmarital breakup in a sample of college students. More specifically, the impact of college students’ R/S appraisals and coping on their psychological and spiritual adjustment was investigated, with special attention given to ways that sexuality and other pre-breakup relationship variables may be involved in these dynamics. Two-hundred and seventy-six undergraduate university students completed measures about the dissolution of a romantic relationship within the past 48 months (M = 14, SD =12.23) that they reported left them “heartbroken.” Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that participants’ R/S appraisals of the breakup predicted post-breakup anger, subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, and spiritual growth; R/S coping methods predicted post-breakup subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, and spiritual growth. Regression analyses revealed that positive and negative R/S coping methods offered unique contributions to individuals’ post-breakup adjustment above secular coping methods. Mediational analyses highlighted that R/S coping mediated links between religious appraisals and positive post-breakup adjustment. Additionally, greater certainty of belief that participants would marry their ex-partner was found to predict greater sacred loss and desecration appraisals. This study was the first of its kind to systematically assess a model of R/S coping with nonmarital breakup, accompanied by a preliminary exploration of relationship variables that may impact the R/S coping model.
This manuscript is dedicated to all who struggle. May you find peace.
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INTRODUCTION

“That morning I had to go to work and I balled my eyes out and I had to leave. I cried for a few hours and I had never felt so much emotional pain in my life ever before. I can not describe it but I can honestly say that was the worst day of my entire life. The pain was definitely the worst part.”

“The worst part of the break-up was that I am still in love with him, I just knew that neither of us were truly happy in the relationship. I wish that we could still be friends, however, he is unwilling.”

“The breakup basically came out of no where. I was completely thrown and heartbroken to be very honest. It was very hard for me to still love someone who not only did not love me anymore, but then ignored me completely for 3 weeks after the breakup.”

“[The worst parts of the breakup were] feeling betrayed, knowing that one of the best things in my life at the time was ruined, losing my best friend.”

“So many things still remind me of him and our relationship together. I feel a huge weight that is constantly on my back that I just can never shake off.”

“It was helpful to have God to turn to when I was emotionally destroyed from the breakup, and knowing that God is there for me gives me hope in the future.”

“I've grown more spiritually since the breakup because I feel that every time I am down, sad, hurt, angry, or whatever my feelings may be, God is there to listen. I can tell Him anything because he already knows what I am doing. I feel released and I feel better once I talk to him. Eventually God gets me through my situation and I become satisfied. This lets me know that praying does work and everything that happens is for a reason and is in God's plan.”

“The breakup totally changed my spirituality. I feel as though I no longer have a connection with God. I used to feel somewhat of a connection. I have stopped attending church almost entirely. Mostly my spiritual side of life has disappeared, or become focused on different things entirely.”

Dissolution of Romantic Relationships

Romantic Breakup and Distress

Romantic breakups are regarded as emotionally and psychologically painful events. From a list of 83 stressful life events nominated by undergraduate students, nonmarital romantic breakups were identified by students as one of the top seven sources of severe stress (Crandall,
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Preisler, & Aussprung, 1992). The high level of stress experienced by young adults after a breakup may be expressed through a variety of negative psychological symptoms. For example, romantic breakup has been identified as a prospective risk factor for the onset of Major Depressive Disorder in adolescents (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999). Furthermore, Mearns (1991) found that across three studies of college students coping with a romantic breakup (cross-sectional, longitudinal, and prospective), 40% of the sample experienced clinical depression, and 12% experienced moderate to severe depression after the breakup. Field et al. (2009) conceptualize the distress accompanying a romantic breakup as “complicated grief,” which is described as an intense and prolonged period of grief following a loss (Horowitz, Siegel, Holen, Bonanno, Milbrath, & Stinson, 1997). The symptoms of complicated grief include pangs of severe emotion, intense intrusive thoughts, distressing yearnings, feeling excessively alone and empty, sleep disturbances, and loss of interest in activities (Hardison, Neimeyer, & Lichstein, 2005; Najib, Lorberbaum, Kose, Bohning, & George, 2004). Consistent with this conceptualization, college students who reported higher levels of breakup distress experienced more intrusive thoughts, more difficulty controlling their intrusive thoughts, more sleep disturbances, and higher levels of depression and anxiety (Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, 2009). Given prior research indicating that college students experience a variety of negative psychological symptoms following a nonmarital breakup, the current study aims to investigate post-breakup functioning across multiple psychological variables.

Previous research highlights some factors that may intensify the level of distress experienced after a romantic breakup. Higher breakup distress has been found among college students who did not initiate their breakup, reported that the breakup was sudden and unexpected, and felt rejected and betrayed by the breakup (Field et al., 2009). In both a
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prospective study of college students who experienced a real-life romantic breakup and an experimental study in which students imagined participating in a relationship breakup, participants exhibited greater distress after being rejected by a romantic partner than after initiating a breakup (Waller & MacDonald, 2010). Kaczmarek, Backlund, and Biemer (1990) found that college students whose relationship ended suddenly and unexpectedly were more likely to experience depression than those who anticipated the dissolution of the relationship. Furthermore, Perilloux and Buss (2008) found that among college students who had experienced a romantic breakup, both males and females who were rejected experienced more depression, loss of self-esteem, and rumination over their breakups, compared to those who did the rejecting.

Given findings that non-initiators generally experience a breakup as unwanted and psychologically distressing, previous studies of romantic breakup among college students have given special emphasis to initiator status in analyses. However, dividing participants by initiator status may overlook an important issue that may be at work in the lives of college students post-breakup: the extent to which the breakup was desired, regardless of initiator status. It is reasonable to presume that some breakup initiators experience their breakup as a significant negative life event. For example, an individual might end a romantic relationship due to a partner’s infidelity, a major life transition that dramatically diminishes the quality of the relationship (e.g., a long-distance move), or irreconcilable differences between the partners despite enduring love (e.g., incompatible goals for career or family). Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by presenting a sophisticated analysis of data including both non-initiators and initiators who experienced subjective heartbreak at the time of their breakup. The construct of self-reported “heartbreak” at the time of breakup was chosen as an inclusion criterion because I assumed participants would find this an easily understandable and ubiquitous
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term to capture the stressful experience an unwanted breakup without making assumptions about whether initiator status is essential to the definition of a breakup being undesired. The next section will shed light on the various ways in which college students cope with breakup and the impact of coping on their subsequent psychosocial adjustment.

Coping with Romantic Breakup

Empirical evidence indicates that individuals attempt to cope with a romantic breakup in a number of ways. For instance, Perilloux and Buss (2008) found that college students use a variety of positive (e.g., discussing the breakup with friends) and negative (e.g., avoiding or threatening the ex-partner) strategies to cope with their breakups. Mearns (1991) found that the more college students expected they could do something to alleviate the negative moods they experienced as a result of a breakup the less likely they were to feel depressed in the first week after the breakup and to exhibit avoidant coping (e.g., “refused to believe that it happened”). Individuals with higher confidence in their ability to reduce their distress also exhibited more active attempts to cope with their romantic breakup, either through problem-solving cognitions and/or behavioral responses (e.g., “made a plan of action and followed it”). In different study focused on graduate students, those who had already been employing preventative positive coping resources prior to their breakup (i.e., self-directedness, confidence, acceptance, financial freedom, and physical health) appraised the breakup to be significantly more desirable and reported less negative emotions immediately after the event. Positive coping strategies that were enacted to help participants cope with the event (i.e., self-disclosure, tension control strategies, problem-solving, social support, and physical fitness) reduced the subsequent negative emotional response to the breakup over time (median time elapsed since breakup was 35.5 weeks; McCarthy, Lambert, & Brack, 1997).
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In sum, these studies highlight that young adults employ a variety of positive and negative coping strategies after a breakup and that positive and negative coping strategies can impact post-breakup psychological functioning in conflicting ways. Interestingly, however, researchers have yet to closely examine coping strategies that tap into religious or spiritual approaches to manage the stress experienced following a nonmarital romantic breakup. Religious and spiritual coping methods may influence post-breakup adjustment in ways that extend beyond the impact of typically assessed non-religious/spiritual coping resources, especially for young adults who identify strongly with a faith tradition and/or perceive religion/spirituality as central to their lives. Next, I will offer a model with which to conceptualize the impact of religion and spirituality on nonmarital breakups, accompanied by a review of related empirical literature to set the stage for this study.

Dissolution of Romantic Relationships and Religion/Spirituality

Religion & Spirituality

The spiritually-oriented conceptualization of romantic breakup used in this study is grounded in Pargament’s (2007) integrative model of spirituality. In this model, spirituality is defined as “the search for the sacred” (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002). An individual’s search for the sacred is facilitated by a complex spiritual orienting system that is made up of pathways and destinations that come together in a personal and dynamic way and provide a framework of spiritual beliefs, practices, experiences, relationships, and values that constantly guide and direct the individual. An individual’s spiritual orienting system may or may not include religion as a core component. Building upon the previous work of Hill et al. (2001) and Pargament (1997), researchers have recently defined religion as “the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality” (Pargament,
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Mahoney, Exline, Jones, & Shafranske, in press). Thus, religion and spirituality both deal with the *sacred*, which has been defined as any aspect of life that is perceived to have divine-like qualities, such as transcendence, boundlessness, and ultimate meaning; the sacred may or may not reference a deity or higher power (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). However, while spirituality focuses exclusively on the destination of the sacred, religion can be directed toward a variety of other goals, including psychological and social functions (Pargament et al., in press). Because religion and spirituality constitute often overlapping yet distinct processes, both terms will be used in this paper (often signified by R/S) to denote aspects of life that involve the sacred as a valued destination.

**Religious/Spiritual Trauma**

A *spiritual trauma* has been defined as a stressful event that is interpreted not only as unpredictable and devastating but additionally as a negative spiritual experience (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). A spiritual trauma, then, is a traumatic event that disrupts the individual’s spiritual orienting system. The strength of the spiritual trauma is shaped by one’s primary and secondary coping appraisals. An individual’s primary coping appraisals include the degree to which the event is perceived as threatening or damaging to one’s central spiritual values and goals, while one’s secondary coping appraisals are comprised of an assessment of the spiritual resources available to cope with the stressor (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). For individuals who are engaged in a search for the sacred, a romantic breakup may not only involve the perception of heartbreak but also the perception of devastating spiritual loss. Thus, for some, nonmarital breakup may be conceptualized as a spiritual trauma. For individuals who employ religion as a process to facilitate spirituality, the event may be perceived as both a negative spiritual and religious experience. The next section will discuss the process through
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which individuals come to assign sacred significance to certain aspects of life. This process has important implications for young adults who face the dissolution of a relationship they once viewed as sacred.

**Sanctification and Personal Investment**

Sanctification refers to the endowment of an aspect of life with divine character and significance (Mahoney et al., 1999). An individual may perceive an aspect of life to be a manifestation of God (i.e., theistic sanctification) or to have divine qualities (e.g., transcendence, boundlessness, perfection) that do not reference a specific deity (i.e., nontheistic sanctification). Prior research has indicated that events that threaten and damage sacred objects and relationships of life are interpreted as particularly traumatic (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005).

Individuals are likely to invest more of themselves in the pursuit and maintenance of aspects of their lives that are sanctified compared to non-sanctified aspects (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). For example, individuals in a variety of professional occupations who sanctified their work reported a higher level of commitment to the organization and a lower intention to leave the job (Carroll, 2010; Walker, Jones, Wuensch, Aziz, & Cope, 2008). Similarly, those who defined their work as a “calling” reportedly missed fewer days than those who did not endow their work with sacred qualities (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). In a community sample, more highly sanctified personal strivings were associated with higher levels of perceived importance and commitment. People invested more time, energy, and personal resources into their most highly sanctified strivings compared to their less sanctified strivings (Mahoney, Pargament, Cole, Jewell, Magyar, Tarakeshwar, et al., 2005).
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Empirical research also sheds light on the greater personal investment associated with imbuing aspects of the material world with divine significance. For example, college students who sanctified their bodies to a greater extent placed a higher priority on maintaining their health and physical well-being (e.g., engaged in more health-protective behaviors, exercised more vigorously, and ate more sensibly; Mahoney, Carels, Pargament, Wachholtz, Leeper, Kaplar, et al., 2005). Likewise, a national survey of individuals affiliated with the Presbyterian Church found that a stronger belief in the sanctification of nature was associated with greater pro-environmental convictions and willingness to invest personal funds in environmental causes (Tarakeshwar, Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2001).

Recent evidence suggests that parents who imbue their parental roles with spiritual significance make greater personal investments in their relationships with their children. For instance, higher levels of sanctification of parenting in a Midwestern community sample were associated with reports of more consistent parenting behavior and less reported verbal aggression toward children (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006). In a sample of parents from a low-income, urban setting, sanctification of parenting was related to greater investment in parenting, after controlling for demographics and child variables (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006). In another sample of married Midwestern couples (Volling, Mahoney, & Rauer, 2009), higher sanctification of parenting was related to greater use of positive parenting strategies (e.g., praise, induction) to elicit young children’s moral conduct. Moreover, when fathers perceived parenting as connected to God, fathers’ positive parenting techniques were more strongly linked to children’s conscience development. Together, these data suggest that parents who sanctify their parental roles are more motivated to personally invest in their children’s growth and well-being.
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The sanctification of marriage has been previously established as a highly relevant and important topic of research. For example, in a sample of married, first-time pregnant couples from a Midwestern community (Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2009), the majority of respondents endorsed the following statements: “My marriage is sacred to me” (93% of wives, 91% of husbands), “My marriage connects my spouse and me to something greater than ourselves” (84%, 78%), and “I see God’s handiwork in my marriage” (83%, 74%). Importantly, prior research has shown that individuals who sanctify their romantic relationships exhibit an increased level of personal investment into the relationship. For example, in a national survey, higher sanctification of marriage by both spouses predicted greater marital investment (i.e., greater commitment to partner and children, more communication, greater emotional support and intimacy, effective conflict resolution strategies, and positive conflict behavior), especially when the spouses sanctified their relationship similarly (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Likewise, in a community sample of Midwestern couples, perceptions of marriage as having spiritual character and significance were associated with more positive marital functioning and investment in the relationship. (i.e., more protective of the relationship, better use of problem-solving strategies to resolve conflict, greater use of collaboration, and less reliance on verbal aggression and stalemate strategies to handle conflict; Mahoney et al., 1999). Furthermore, in a community sample of married Midwestern couples pregnant with their first child, sanctification of marriage attenuated the tendency for perceived unfairness between spouses to elicit anxiety, marital dissatisfaction, or marital conflict (DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010). In a qualitative study, nearly all same-sex couples indicated that their relationships were endowed with divine significance, which facilitated their commitment to one another and enhanced their communication dynamics (Rostosky, Riggle, Brodnicki, & Olson 2008).
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Findings from multiple studies also suggest that greater sanctification of marriage strengthens marital quality and commitment to sexual fidelity (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007; Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010; Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). These observations are consistent with national surveys indicating that higher religious attendance predicted lower levels of sexual infidelity (Mahoney, 2010). Furthermore, in a Midwestern community sample of newlyweds, greater sanctification of marital sexuality was strongly linked to greater sexual and spiritual intimacy, after controlling for demographic variables and initial indicators of global religiousness (Hernandez, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). Furthermore, greater sanctification of sexuality predicted more frequent sexual intercourse one year later after additionally accounting for initial levels of marital satisfaction (Hernandez & Mahoney, 2009).

The increased personal investment associated with the sanctification of sexuality appears to hold true for unmarried individuals as well. Among college students at a state university in the Midwest, greater sanctification of sexual intercourse was associated with increased sexual behavior, including a history of greater range and frequency of sexual activity, greater frequency of sexual activity in the past month, and higher number of lifetime sexual partners (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2005). Individuals who hold sanctified views of sexuality may therefore be more likely to invest themselves sexually in romantic relationships than those who do not sanctify sexual activity.

Overall, results from the above studies are consistent with sanctification theory, which asserts that individuals are willing to make greater investments and sacrifices to preserve and protect sacred relationships (DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010). These empirical observations also support the conclusion that “sanctification appears to raise the psychological and spiritual stakes tied to an aspect of life” (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). This
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conclusion is especially relevant to this study because theistic sanctification has been reported among individuals in nonmarital romantic relationships. In a 2006 national survey, 55% of U.S. adults involved in steady dating and cohabiting relationships “strongly agreed” that “God is at the center of my relationship” (Henderson, Ellison, & Glenn, 2010). Thus, the stage is set for a study which focuses, in part, on the aftermath of appraising a breakup as the loss or violation of a once-upon-a-time sacred relationship.

Negative Religious/Spiritual Appraisals

When an aspect of life that has been sanctified is threatened or harmed, the individual may appraise the event negatively through a sacred lens. Two types of negative primary spiritual appraisals have been identified, namely, sacred loss and desecration (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). A sacred loss appraisal involves the perception of something once viewed as a manifestation of God or endowed with sacred qualities as lost. In contrast, a desecration appraisal occurs when the individual perceives the sanctified aspect of life as violated. Therefore, while both appraisals incorporate a feeling of dissolution or loss of something once held sacred, desecration appraisals also involve an attribution of blame to the one perceived as responsible for the violation. Negative spiritual appraisals have been previously observed as a response in the context of romantic relationships. In a sample of college students who had been recently hurt in a romantic relationship, over 88% of the participants appraised the hurt or betrayal they had experienced by a romantic partner as a desecration of a sacred relationship to a moderate or severe degree (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000). More research is needed, however, to examine negative spiritual appraisals specifically in response to nonmarital breakups.
Psychological Impact of Negative Religious/Spiritual Appraisals

Prior research has revealed a link between negative R/S appraisals and negative psychological outcomes. College students in the Midwest and New York City who had reported higher levels of desecration related to the September 11th terrorist attacks reported higher levels of anxiety and depression (Mahoney et al., 2002). Desecration appraisals were also associated with stronger approval of extreme forms of revenge against the terrorists. In a community sample of adults who reflected on the most negative event in their lives in the last two years, sacred loss and desecration were associated with greater trauma impact and emotional distress (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). Specifically, desecration appraisals were predictive of more anger and lower levels of posttraumatic growth. Sacred loss appraisals were predictive of greater depression and more intrusive thoughts about the event. In a study of individuals’ adjustment to divorce, appraisals of the divorce as a sacred loss and/or desecration were associated with higher levels of depression (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009). In another study, young adults who recalled perceiving their parents’ divorce as a sacred loss and/or desecration reported higher levels of current parental blame, self-blame, feelings of loss and abandonment, intrusive thoughts, depressed mood, and seeing life through a filter of divorce (Warner, Mahoney, & Krumrei, 2009).

Field et al. (2009) found that one of the greatest contributors to overall breakup distress among college students was feeling betrayed by the breakup, although the study did not take religious or spiritual factors into account. Given previous research on desecration, it is reasonable to believe that feelings of betrayal that are tied to R/S beliefs may affect post-breakup adjustment in especially potent ways for some individuals. There is some evidence of the significant impact of negative R/S appraisals on psychological and spiritual adjustment in the
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context of romantic relationships. In one study, stronger perceptions of sacred loss and
desecration among college students recently hurt in a romantic relationship were associated with
greater psychological and spiritual distress (e.g., more negative affect, more physical health
symptoms, and poorer mental health; Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000). These effects
were observed after taking into account the negativity of the event and the global religiousness of
the individual.

On the flip side, there is some evidence that negative R/S appraisals of an event may also
be linked to positive outcomes. Among adults adjusting to divorce, those who reported stronger
appraisals of the divorce as a sacred loss and/or desecration reported higher levels of
posttraumatic growth (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009). Likewise, college students who
reported greater desecration appraisals in reference to a recent transgression by a romantic
partner reported greater posttraumatic and spiritual growth (e.g., feeling a stronger sense of
closeness to God and others, placing a greater priority of spirituality, and gaining new spiritual
insights; Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000). Thus, it seems that negative R/S appraisals
may trigger processes that not only promote negative psychological adjustment but also positive
psychological and spiritual development.

In order to gain a more thorough understanding of post-breakup adjustment across a
variety of psychological and spiritual variables, and to create more effective interventions for
young adults experiencing post-breakup distress, it is necessary to take into account the ways in
which one’s way of being religious and/or spiritual may impact perceptions of the event. R/S
appraisals of one’s breakup may have important implications for both negative and positive
domains of post-breakup adjustment. Specifically, building on prior research, it is expected that
appraisals of a nonmarital breakup as a sacred loss or desecration would be associated with
greater negative psychological adjustment across a variety of domains, including depressive symptoms, anger, subjective distress (i.e., intrusive thoughts and avoidant behaviors). It is also likely that negative R/S appraisals of the breakup would be linked to greater personal and spiritual growth. Moreover, as will be discussed shortly, religious and spiritual factors may profoundly shape the ways in which one copes with a nonmarital breakup.

Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping

Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress and coping theory emphasizes the importance of primary and secondary cognitive appraisals of a stressor, the cognitive and behavioral coping strategies employed to deal with the stressful event, and the outcomes of coping. Pargament’s (1997) theory of religious/spiritual (R/S) coping highlights the positive roles spirituality can play in the appraisal of major life stressors and the subsequent coping strategies employed. R/S coping has been defined as “a search for significance in times of stress in ways related to the sacred” (Pargament, 1997). It has similarly been defined as “the use of religious beliefs or behaviors to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances” (Koenig, Pargament, & Nielsen, 1998). Much like R/S struggles, positive R/S coping methods may center on one’s relationship with the divine, internal spiritual orienting system, or relationship with others.

Psychological Impact of Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping

Empirical evidence indicates that positive R/S coping strategies are associated with adaptive psychological and spiritual functioning. Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) found that, across 49 studies of R/S coping, positive R/S coping strategies were associated with positive psychological and spiritual outcomes to stressful events (e.g., stress-related growth, spiritual growth, positive affect, higher self-esteem, less depression and anxiety). Pargament, Smith,
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Koenig, and Perez (1998) found greater positive R/S coping to be linked with greater adaptive psychological, spiritual, and physical health functioning (e.g., stress-related growth, positive spiritual outcomes, greater cooperativeness, and lower levels of psychosomatic symptomatology). Furthermore, positive R/S coping strategies have been longitudinally linked to improvements in physical and psychological health (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004). In a study of R/S coping with divorce, higher levels of positive R/S coping were associated with greater posttraumatic growth, beyond the effect of secular coping (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009).

It is likely that this pattern of findings would be observed among college students undergoing nonmarital romantic breakups as well. Within the context of the loss of a significant and intimate relationship, it is reasonable to believe that college students may seek interpersonal and/or divine R/S resources to cope. For instance, a heartbroken individual may pursue greater intimacy and closeness with a God who they perceive to be personal and loving; similarly, social relationships with clergy or with other members of a faith community may offer much-appreciated social support in the midst of feelings of rejection, abandonment, loneliness, betrayal, and/or guilt. Given findings that positive R/S coping strategies are related to post-divorce psychological and spiritual functioning, after controlling for positive secular coping strategies, it is reasonable to empirically test the model with nonmarital breakups. Perhaps positive R/S coping strategies, which tap into support from God and/or one’s faith community, may influence nonmarital post-breakup functioning above and beyond positive secular coping methods. Specifically, it is expected that greater positive R/S coping would be linked to greater posttraumatic and spiritual growth following a nonmarital breakup.
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Negative Religious/Spiritual Coping (Spiritual Struggles)

While many studies have highlighted the positive influence of R/S coping resources on psychological adjustment, research findings do indicate that a “dark side” of R/S coping does exist, which may amplify the distress experienced after an undesirable event. Negative R/S coping methods (also called spiritual struggles in the literature) have been defined as efforts to conserve or transform one’s spirituality when it has been threatened or harmed and are therefore signs of a spiritual orienting system that is under stress (Pargament, Desai, & McConnell, 2006; Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). Three categories of spiritual struggles have been identified through prior research: divine spiritual struggles, intrapersonal spiritual struggles, and interpersonal spiritual struggles (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998; Mahoney et al., 2008). Divine spiritual struggles involve a threat to one’s thoughts, feelings, and general relationship toward God. Intrapersonal spiritual struggles center on internal questions, doubts, and uncertainties about the spiritual aspects of one’s life. Interpersonal spiritual struggles refer to relational tensions and conflicts between individuals over spiritual matters. A negative interpersonal event, such as a nonmarital breakup, may conceivably trigger all three types: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and divine spiritual struggles.

Psychological Impact of Negative Religious/Spiritual Coping

Empirical evidence suggests that negative R/S coping methods are associated with indicators of psychological distress. Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 49 studies of R/S coping and reported that negative R/S coping strategies are positively associated with negative psychological adjustment to stress (e.g., more depression, anxiety, distress). Divine spiritual struggles have been longitudinally linked to poorer medical health and psychological functioning (Pargament, Desai, & McConnell, 2006; Pargament, Koenig,
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Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004). Furthermore, interpersonal and intrapersonal spiritual struggles have been correlated with negative psychological and physical health outcomes (e.g., emotional distress and depression, more PTSD symptoms, higher levels of callousness, poorer physical health, lower quality of life, and higher levels of psychosomatic symptomatology; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998).

Prior research indicates that interpersonal relationships gone awry often trigger negative R/S coping strategies that result in negative psychosocial outcomes. In a sample of parents from a low-income, urban setting, those who perceived parenting as a sacred task were more likely to report divine spiritual struggles, such as feeling abandoned or punished by God when faced with parenting problems (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006). These spiritual struggles predicted greater parental disengagement and dissatisfaction. In a study of R/S coping with divorce, 71% of the participants reported experiencing some type of spiritual struggle over their divorce, and higher levels of spiritual struggles were strongly related to greater depression, anger, and posttraumatic anxiety symptoms. These effects were present even after controlling for demographics and access to positive spiritual and secular coping resources (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009).

As with positive R/S coping, it is reasonable to expect that this pattern of findings would extend to nonmarital romantic breakups. Due to the strong influence of romantic relationships in young adults’ lives, it is important to directly investigate factors that may exert powerful effects on post-breakup adjustment. While negative secular coping strategies have been studied in college samples experiencing breakup, religious and spiritual strategies have been thus far overlooked. Given findings that negative R/S coping strategies are related to post-divorce psychological functioning, after controlling for negative secular coping strategies, it is
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reasonable to extend the model to investigate whether negative R/S coping strategies impact adjustment after nonmarital breakups above and beyond negative secular coping methods. Specifically, it is expected that greater negative R/S coping would be associated with greater depressive symptomatology, anger, and subjective distress following a nonmarital breakup. In the upcoming section, I will also discuss mediational pathways in the R/S coping model which help to integrate the various constructs already reviewed into an overarching picture.

**Mediation Model of Negative and Positive Religious/Spiritual Coping in Shaping Impact of Negative Spiritual Appraisals**

Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament (2008) have articulated a mediation model of R/S coping with divorce in which the negative spiritual appraisal of a life event as a sacred loss and/or desecration may trigger spiritual struggles as well as adaptive spiritual efforts to cope with the event. The experience of these negative R/S coping strategies (spiritual struggles) and positive R/S coping strategies to cope with the breakdown of a marriage is hypothesized to mediate the link between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and psychosocial outcomes. There has been recent empirical support for this model. In a community sample of adults who reflected on the most negative event in their lives in the last two years, support was found for the hypothesis that R/S coping mediates the link between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and outcomes (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). Specifically, negative R/S coping linked sacred loss and desecration with depressive symptoms, subjective distress (i.e., intrusive thoughts and avoidant behaviors), and anxiety; additionally, negative R/S coping linked desecration with state anger. Positive R/S coping appeared to mediate the relationship between sacred loss and greater positive spiritual change and posttraumatic growth. In another study, young adults recalled their spiritual responses to their parents’ divorce (Warner, Mahoney, &
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Krumrei, 2009). The negative spiritual appraisal of parental divorce as a sacred loss/desecration was strongly linked to the experience of spiritual struggles. Spiritual struggles over parental divorce mediated the link between negative spiritual appraisals and greater psychological maladjustment (e.g., depression, anxious avoidance, intrusive worries, and painful feelings about the divorce). On the other hand, the use of adaptive R/S coping strategies mediated the impact of negative spiritual appraisals of parental divorce on greater perceived personal and spiritual growth. Similarly, in a sample of adults adjusting to divorce, R/S coping and struggles mediated the link between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and depression (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009). Evidence consistent with the mediation model of R/S coping has also been observed in a sample of college students who had been recently hurt in a romantic relationship (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000). Higher levels of perceived desecration were associated with greater use of positive and negative R/S coping. In turn, positive R/S coping mediated the impact of desecration appraisals on spiritual growth, posttraumatic growth, and positive affect. Similarly, negative R/S coping mediated the impact of desecration appraisals on adverse physical health symptoms and negative affect.

Thus, we come to the first major purpose of this study: to extend the previously articulated mediation model of R/S coping from adults undergoing divorce to college students undergoing nonmarital romantic breakup. Young adulthood is a critical time in life for seeking companionship and love, including the development of mutually satisfying relationships with a romantic partner. As articulated by Erik Erikson (1950), feelings of isolation and rejection from a love interest during this time can result in a crisis of one’s identity and can have negative implications for personal adjustment and development. For young adults who perceive a relationship to be spiritually significant, the loss or violation of the relationship may have
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especially potent repercussions. Therefore, a conceptualization of nonmarital breakup that includes R/S domains is desirable. This study aims to test an existing model of R/S coping with relationship dissolution that has previously illuminated the experience of divorcing adults. The extension of this model to young adults’ nonmarital breakups may contribute to our understanding of their experience and aid in creating and implementing effective interventions for post-breakup distress.

**Implications of Relationship Factors for Post-Breakup Adjustment**

The second major purpose of this study is to take some initial steps to expand the current mediation model of R/S coping to incorporate factors that may play a critical role in shaping post-breakup sacred loss and desecration appraisals, coping, and adjustment.

**Infidelity and Subjective Hurt**

Previous research indicates that college students who have been hurt in a romantic relationship interpret the experience through a negative R/S lens (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000). In this study, greater appraisals of a partner’s transgression as a desecration of the relationship were tied to greater use of positive and negative R/S coping. In turn, positive and negative R/S coping mediated the impact of desecration appraisals on positive and negative psychological and spiritual adjustment. Taking these results into account, it is expected that a partner’s physical and/or emotional infidelity prior to breakup would trigger negative R/S appraisals among young adults who had endowed the relationship with R/S significance. Furthermore, greater subjective hurt over the infidelity would likely result in stronger negative R/S appraisals; these appraisals would, in turn, have important implications for post-breakup coping and adjustment.

**Perceived Commitment & Long-Term Expectations**
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Negative spiritual appraisals of divorce have been previously observed in a sample of adults (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009). These appraisals involved the loss and/or violation of a relationship that had been perceived as having divine-like qualities, such as transcendence, boundlessness, and ultimate meaning. It is reasonable to assert that individuals in exclusive nonmarital relationships may similarly imbue their romantic relationships with divine-like qualities. For example, an individual may perceive a nonmarital relationship as being the most meaningful aspect of life, or as potentially never-ending. The term “commitment” is often used in the context of romantic relationships to denote such qualities as enduring love and monogamy. Commitment alludes to a sense of personal investment, a pledge that the needs and desires of the partner will be considered. Thus, the construct of commitment may be linked to perceptions of the relationship as having sacred qualities, such as ultimate meaning. Thus, one’s perceived level of commitment to a nonmarital relationship prior to breakup may predict post-breakup appraisals of sacred loss and/or desecration. Likewise, perceptions of a nonmarital relationship as transcendent and boundless may be associated with expectations that a nonmarital relationship will endure and lead to marriage. Therefore, one’s certainty of belief that a nonmarital relationship will result in marriage may also predict post-breakup appraisals of sacred loss and/or desecration.

**Sexuality & Cohabitation**

The initiation of greater sexual intimacy and cohabitation within the context of an exclusive dating relationship often co-occur with increased emotional investment and intimacy. Thus, increased sexual intimacy and cohabitation bond two people together and often make a nonmarital romantic relationship more reminiscent of a marriage relationship, without a formal long-term contractual commitment. Previous research has demonstrated that a large proportion of
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college students perceive sexuality as sacred among married partners, with a smaller yet still significant proportion perceiving sexuality as sacred in loving nonmarital relationships (Murray, 2000; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005). Yet Christian and Jewish denominational policies are generally prohibitive regarding premarital sexual relations (Bullis & Harrigan, 1992). Consistent with these conventional religious views, indicators of greater involvement in organized religious groups, such as religious attendance, are tied to delayed premarital sexual activity (Murray, 2000; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005). Nevertheless, sexuality seems to be on the minds of nonreligious and religious college students alike. Through quantitative data collected from more than 2,500 American college students and subsequent interviews with 111 students at seven American colleges, Freitas (2008) observed that the majority of students who are highly invested in their religious and/or spiritual identities also experience sexual desire, long to act on that desire, and regard romance and experiencing fulfilling romantic relationships as priorities. Furthermore, Freitas found that these students often have difficulty reconciling their faith with their sexual and romantic desires and behavior.

Findings from nationally representative samples offer some additional helpful insights regarding the sexual experiences of religious youth and young adults (Regnerus, 2007). Data from the 1995 wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health suggest that 18-year-olds who reported more frequent church attendance and higher importance of religion were more likely to have preserved their virginity than peers. Despite this difference relative to their peers, however, over half (55.7%) of 18-year-olds who regarded religion as “very important” had experienced intercourse by age 18. Moreover, evangelical Protestant youth, who belonged to the American religious tradition often regarded as the most conservative with respect to sexual attitudes were, in fact, only slightly different than their less religious and nonreligious peers in
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the base rates of actual sexual behaviors. However, evangelical youth were considerably more likely to have negative attitudes about sex (e.g., it will breed guilt, it will cause their partner to disrespect them), and evangelical recent non-virgins were the most likely to feel bad about their sexual activity. This mismatch between sexual attitudes and behaviors constitutes a considerable dilemma in the lives of religious youth and young adults.

Over the past few decades, emerging adults have become increasingly accepting of premarital sexual activity within “committed” relationships perceived to be monogamous and loving (Martin et al., 2001; Treas, 2002; Wells & Twenge, 2005). Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney (2005) demonstrated that college students do, in fact, often perceive sexuality as sacred within loving, nonmarital relationships. Further, in this study, college students who sanctified sexual intercourse with their romantic partners to a greater extent reported increased sexual satisfaction. Moreover, increased belief in the sanctification of sexual intercourse was related to increased sexual behavior, including a greater range and frequency of sexual activity, greater current frequency of sexual activity, and greater number of lifetime sexual partners. These effects were significant beyond the effects of attitudes toward premarital sex, dating status, and general religiousness.

Sexual intimacy and cohabitation are often, although certainly not always, co-occurring. Research indicates that increased sexual activity is linked to more favorable attitudes toward cohabitation (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005; Manning et al., 2007; Willoughby & Carroll, 2010). Willoughby and Carroll (2010) found that religiosity moderated the relationship between sexual experience and attitudes about cohabitation among emerging adults. Specifically, among individuals who reported that their religious faith was extremely important to them, who pray daily, who attend religious services often, and who perceive faith as important to their personal
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identity, sexual activity was associated with more favorable general attitudes toward cohabitation. This finding has two important implications for the current study. First, the results indicate that sexual intimacy and cohabitation are indeed relevant to the lives of young adults who are deeply committed to religion/spirituality and are therefore valid topics of empirical study within this population. Second, sexual intimacy and cohabitation may exist in tandem for some highly religious/spiritual individuals, increasing their level of personal investment and potentially raising the risk of negative post-breakup R/S appraisals and adjustment.

In general, emerging adults have become increasingly accepting of cohabitation (Martin et al., 2001), with results of the 2006 national Monitoring the Future survey (reported by Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008) indicating that positive attitudes toward cohabitation before marriage among high school seniors has risen dramatically from 37% in 1980 to 64% in 2006. This growing acceptance of cohabitation has coincided with changes in attitudes regarding the timing of marriage over the past 30 years. In 1976, for example, 25% of high school seniors reported that they wanted to wait more than five years before getting married; this statistic had increased to 47% in 2006. These altered attitudes mirror the behaviors of young adults; over two-thirds (67%) of first marriages since 2000 were preceded by cohabitation (Manning, 2010). A large proportion of young adults perceive cohabitation as a good way to test the relationship prior to marriage (Larson, 1988; Martin et al., 2003) or as part of the developmental progression toward marriage (Manning et al., 2007). For others, cohabitation appears to be seen as an acceptable alternative to marriage (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Thornton et al., 1995).

Risman et al. (1981) found that college couples who cohabited were more intimate than other dating couples not only in terms of frequency of sex but in other ways as well. Cohabiting couples reported a higher frequency of interactions, saw their relationships as closer, indicated
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greater love for one another, and reported more self-disclosure given to and received from their partners. The enhanced emotional and physical investment associated with cohabitation are likely to make relationship dissolution all the more painful. For religious and/or spiritual individuals, this increased intimacy and investment may extend to R/S domains, increasing the likelihood that a breakup would be interpreted through a negative R/S lens.

In summary, given data discussed previously indicating that increased relational investment raises the stakes associated with an aspect of life, it is expected that greater sexual intimacy and cohabitation would predict negative R/S appraisals of a nonmarital breakup and negative psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the impact of sacred loss and desecration appraisals on negative psychological adjustment may be magnified by the loss of a sexually intimate and cohabiting relationship. That is, for individuals in sexually intimate and cohabiting relationships, nonmarital breakup may threaten the sacred realm in multiple ways: not only through the loss of a psychological investment but also through loss of a significant physical investment. This conceptualization is consistent with the theological perspective of embodiment, which frames sexuality as theologically desirable and as intimately connected with religion/spirituality (Townsend, 2001). It is expected that levels of sexual intimacy and cohabitation would interact with negative R/S appraisals of a breakup to produce more intense post-breakup psychological distress.

The Present Study

It is important that social science research remains relevant to the lifestyle trends of emerging adults. Given the increase in cohabiting relationships and delays in the timing of marriage, it is important to better understand the psychosocial and spiritual implications of romantic breakups outside the context of marriage. This study represents an investigation of the
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impact of R/S appraisals and coping on psychological and spiritual adjustment, in a sample of young adults who have experienced a nonmarital romantic breakup. Additional attention was given to pre-breakup relationship factors that may impact these dynamics. The five goals of the current study fit within the two major purposes articulated previously: 1) to extend an existing model of R/S coping with relationship dissolution to a college student population dealing with nonmarital breakups, and 2) to expand the reach of the model to include pre-breakup relationship factors that may influence the coping model.

**Purpose 1: Extending a Model of Religious/Spiritual Coping to Nonmarital Breakups**

**Goal 1.** Drawing on evidence that a large proportion of individuals perceive nonmarital romantic relationships as having sacred significance (Henderson, Ellison, & Glenn, 2010), the first goal of this study was to examine the association between appraisals of romantic breakup as a sacred loss and desecration and post-breakup adjustment. Consistent with prior findings on divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), parental divorce (Warner, Mahoney, & Krumrei, 2009), and feeling betrayed by a romantic partner (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000), I expected appraisals of a breakup as a sacred loss and desecration to predict greater negative psychological outcomes (i.e., depression, anger, intrusive thoughts and avoidant behaviors) as well as positive psychological outcomes (i.e., posttraumatic growth, spiritual growth).

**Goal 2.** Although prior studies have investigated various strategies employed to cope with breakups, there is a need for additional research regarding both secular and R/S coping resources within this context. The second goal of this study was to examine the relationship between the participants’ spiritual responses to a breakup and their post-breakup adjustment, while taking into account secular coping methods. Again, consistent with prior studies on
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divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009) and feeling betrayed by a romantic partner (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000), I expected negative R/S coping due to the romantic breakup to predict greater depression, anger, and subjective distress, beyond negative secular coping strategies utilized by the participant. Conversely, I anticipated positive R/S coping to predict greater posttraumatic growth and spiritual growth, even after taking into account secular coping methods employed by the participant.

Goal 3. Previous research has supported a mediation model of R/S coping with divorce (Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008), in which a negative spiritual appraisal of the divorce may trigger both negative and positive R/S coping strategies that impact psychological and spiritual functioning. Much like divorce, romantic breakup can be conceptualized as a spiritual trauma, given the high level of personal investment involved between exclusive dating and cohabiting couples. The emotional and psychological distress accompanying romantic breakups has been well documented. College students experiencing nonmarital breakup constitute a key population for interventions centering on enhancing coping, promoting positive growth, and reducing distress. However, the interplay between R/S appraisals, R/S coping, and post-breakup adjustment must be understood more clearly before developing effective interventions.

Therefore, the third goal of the study was to extend prior research on divorce by gathering and testing whether non-experimental data are consistent with a mediation model, in which individuals who interpret their breakup as a sacred loss and desecration are more likely to become engaged in a) negative R/S coping strategies that predict negative psychological outcomes and/or b) positive R/S coping strategies that predict posttraumatic and spiritual growth.
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Purpose 2: Expanding the Model to Include Factors that May Shape Negative Religious/Spiritual Appraisals of the Breakup

**Goal 4.** The fourth goal was to extend prior research to examine variables that predict the appraisal of a romantic breakup as a sacred loss and desecration. Given increasing acceptance of sexual intimacy and cohabitation within nonmarital relationships, these are important factors to consider in young adult populations. Specifically, I expected cohabitation and greater sexual intimacy to be linked to higher appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration. Moreover, I anticipated cohabitation to contribute to these appraisals above and beyond the effect of sexual intimacy.

Based on previous research concerning perceptions of betrayal by college students (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000), I also expected the individual’s perception of infidelity and higher levels of perceived hurt to be linked to higher appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration (i.e., the ex-partner is responsible for violating what has been deemed sacred). Furthermore, I anticipated higher levels of perceived commitment to the relationship prior to the break-up, as well as higher certainty that the respondent would marry the ex-partner, to predict appraisal of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration.

**Goal 5.** The fifth goal was to examine whether sexual intimacy and cohabitation moderate the association between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and psychological outcomes. I expected individuals who appraised their breakup as a sacred loss/desecration and who were more sexually intimate with their ex-partners to report greater negative psychological outcomes (i.e., depression, anger, and distress) beyond the main effects of each of the predictors. Likewise, I expected individuals who appraised their breakup as a sacred loss/desecration and who
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cohabited with their ex-partners to report greater negative psychological outcomes beyond the main effects of each of these predictors.
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MEASURES

Religious/Spiritual Appraisal and Coping Variables

Sacred loss and desecration. The 28-item Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale was used to assess to what degree, if at all, participants viewed their breakup as a loss or violation of something sacred. This scale assesses both theistic and non-theistic religious appraisals of the breakup. The original scale demonstrated high internal consistency (sacred loss $\alpha = .93$, and desecration $\alpha = .92$) and discriminant validity (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all,” to “very much,” and summed to create a total score for perceptions of sacred loss and desecration. This measure is included in Appendix A.

Positive religious/spiritual coping. Thirty-three items from a R/S coping scale (RCOPE) were used to assess the degree to which participants have engaged in positive R/S coping methods in response to their breakups. The items selected from the RCOPE have been identified across multiple samples, including a sample of college students, as positive R/S coping strategies. The selected items were taken from multiple positive RCOPE subscales that have good internal consistency ($\alpha = .81-.94$) and predictive validity to various criterion measures (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Each item is rated on a four-point scale from (1), “not at all” to (4), “a great deal,” and the items are summed into a positive R/S coping score. These items are included in Appendix B.

Negative religious/spiritual coping. Seventeen items from a R/S coping scale (RCOPE) were used to assess the degree to which participants have engaged in negative R/S coping methods in response to their breakups. The items selected from the RCOPE have been identified across multiple samples, including a sample of college students, as negative R/S coping
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strategies. The selected items were taken from multiple negative RCOPE subscales that have reasonable internal consistency (α = .78-.92) and predictive validity to various criterion measures (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Each item is rated on a four-point scale from (1), “not at all” to (4), “a great deal,” and items are summed into a negative R/S coping score. These items are included in Appendix B.

Secular Coping

The Brief-COPE scale was used to assess a broad range of functional coping methods and struggles following the romantic breakup (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The inventory includes the following two-item subscales: self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, and self-blame. The R/S coping subscale was deleted because R/S coping was assessed with a more comprehensive measure. The COPE scales have displayed acceptable internal and test-retest reliability (Carver et al., 1989). Items are rated on a 4-point scale from “not at all” to “a great deal,” and summed into a positive coping score and a negative coping score. As recommended by the authors of the measure, the items were analyzed via principal component factor analysis to determine which two-item subscales best capture positive and negative secular coping strategies. This analysis is explained in more detail in the results section. This measure, including both positive and negative subscales, is included in Appendix C.

Psychological & Spiritual Adjustment Variables

Depression. Participants’ depressive symptoms were assessed with the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). Extensive research has established the validity and reliability of the CES-D in the general population (α = .85). Items
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are rated on a 4-point scale from “rarely or none of the time” to “most or all of the time,” and summed to create a total depression score. This measure is included in Appendix D.

**Anger.** Five items were adapted from the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (Spielberger, 1991) to assess participants’ experience of state anger about their breakup, including feeling angry, irritated, annoyed, mad, and furious about the event. Previous research has established high internal consistency for these items (e.g., \(\alpha = .94\); Kroner & Reddon, 1992). Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much,” and summed to create a total score of breakup-related anger. This measure is included in Appendix E.

**Subjective distress.** The 15-item Impact of Events Scale (IES) was used to assess subjective distress participants experienced with regard to their breakup (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979). The IES includes two subscales of symptoms associated with anxiety disorders and stress response syndromes: intrusive thoughts, such as, “pictures about it popped into my mind” (7 items) and avoidant behaviors, such as, “I tried not to talk about it” (8 items). Prior research has established adequate internal reliability and construct validity (intrusion subscale \(\alpha = .78\), avoidance subscale \(\alpha = .82\); Horowitz et al., 1979). Items are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “often,” and summed to create a total post-traumatic distress score. This measure is included in Appendix F.

**Posttraumatic growth.** The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) was developed to assess positive outcomes of traumatic experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). It was used in this study to assess personal growth as a result of the breakup across four domains: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, and appreciation for life. The spiritual change domain of the original scale was omitted, resulting in 19 items. Internal consistency of the PTGI is high and has been linked to psychosocial adjustment (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Items are
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rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “I did not experience this change as a result of my breakup” to “I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my breakup” and summed to create a total post-traumatic growth score. This measure is included in Appendix G.

**Spiritual growth.** Spiritual growth as a result of the breakup was assessed with 8 items, including the Short Spiritual Growth Scale, which has shown good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$; Pargament et al., 1990). Items are rated on a 6-point scale ranging from “As a result of my breakup, I have experienced a change in this area not at all,” to “As a result of my breakup, I have experienced a change in this area to a very great degree,” and summed to create a total score for breakup-related spiritual growth. This measure is included in Appendix H.

**Key Relationship Variables**

**Sexual intimacy.** The degree and frequency of sexual intimacy participants shared with their ex-partner prior to their break-up were assessed using an index of sexual behaviors. This index originally included ten items, which were adapted from a previous study on the sanctification of sex by college students (Murray Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005). The first three items (i.e., light kissing, heavy kissing, and breast stimulation) were excluded from the final index of sexual intimacy because they are conceptually mild physical activities and have high base rates in the sample. The last item (i.e., anal intercourse) was also excluded from the index of sexual intimacy due to having a low base rate. Therefore, the final index of sexual intimacy used in the analyses was made up of six items. Sexual intimacy was also measured using one item assessing frequency of intercourse and a second item measuring frequency of participant-defined physical intimacy. This second item measuring subjective intimacy was included because an individual’s perceptions of shared intimacy may influence subsequent appraisals of the breakup. That is, an individual who has offered a high level of perceived sexual
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investment and has interpreted the sexual bond as having sacred qualities may be more likely to appraise a subsequent breakup through a negative spiritual lens (as discussed in Murray-Swank et al., 2005). Sexual intimacy items are included in Appendix I.

**Cohabitation.** The extent to which participants cohabitated with their ex-partner prior to their breakup was assessed using one subjective measure and one behavioral measure, both adapted from a national sociological study (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Specifically, participants responded to the following statements: (a) “Prior to your breakup, how often, on average, did you live with your romantic partner?” and (b) “Prior to your breakup, how many times per week did you and your partner stay together overnight?” Prior research indicates that the format in which cohabitation is assessed significantly influences results and that part-time cohabitation is fairly common among unmarried couples (Knab, 2005). With these important considerations in mind, both items were included in the present study. These items are included in Appendix I.

**Infidelity.** Participants answered one item assessing their perceptions of the level of their partner’s fidelity prior to breakup. Additionally, participants who rated their ex-partner as “somewhat faithful” to “very unfaithful” were asked to rate the level of subjective hurt they felt in response to the infidelity, on a 7-point scale. These two items are included in Appendix J.

**Commitment.** Participants answered two items assessing their perceived commitment to the relationship prior to breakup. Specifically, participants responded to the following statements: (a) “Prior to your breakup, how certain were you that you would eventually marry this person?” and (b) “How much do you agree with the following statement: ‘Prior to the breakup, I was completely committed to the relationship.’” These two items are included in Appendix J.
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Additional Descriptive & Control Variables

**Basic demographic information.** Participants answered items concerning their age, gender, race/ethnicity, education level, and GPA. These items are included in Appendix K.

**Global religiousness.** To gain descriptive information regarding the religious characteristics of the sample, participants responded to one item inquiring whether they believe in God and one item addressing their religious affiliation. In addition, two items widely used in religion research (i.e., frequency of church attendance, frequency of prayer) were used to create an index of global religiousness to use in analyses (Mahoney et al., 1999). Greater scores across these two items indicate greater general religiousness/spirituality. These items are included in Appendix L.

**Biblical conservatism.** As in previous research on this topic (Ellison et al., 1996a, 1996b), biblical conservatism was assessed using a two-item index. Participants indicated their agreement with the following statements on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”: (a) “The Bible is God’s word and everything will happen exactly as it says” and (b) “The Bible is the answer to all important human problems.” The sum of these two items creates a total score for biblical conservatism. This index is included in Appendix L.

**Romantic breakup variables.** Participants answered questions regarding their most recent romantic breakup. They were asked who initiated the breakup, whether the breakup was sudden and unexpected, and whether they felt rejected and/or betrayed by the breakup. Additionally, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they were heartbroken over the breakup when it occurred and the extent to which they were still heartbroken over the breakup at the time of the survey. They reported the length of the relationship prior to breakup, the length of
time since the breakup, and the gender of their ex-partner. These items are included in Appendix M.

**Causes of breakup.** The factors that contributed to breakup were assessed using a checklist. The items on this list were adapted from the Breakup Reasons Scale (BRS; Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, 2010) and the Breakup Behaviors Scale (BBS; Pelaez, Field, Diego, Deeds, & Delgado, 2011). The BRS was developed through coding qualitative data from a study on high school students’ explanations for their romantic breakups and was subsequently used in research with college students. Similarly, the BBS was derived from college students’ qualitative responses about the behaviors they believed led to their breakups. This checklist, which was used for descriptive purposes in the current study, is included in Appendix N.

**Qualitative information.** An additional section provided participants the opportunity to respond to five open-ended questions about their experience of romantic breakup. These items, which are presented in Appendix O, have been adapted from items included in a longitudinal study of religious appraisals and coping in adjustment to divorce (Krumrei, 2009).
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METHOD

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the human subjects review board, recruitment emails were sent to students enrolled in psychology courses at a state university in the Midwest during February, 2012. The emails included links to an online survey, which took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Participants were given the option to earn experimental research credit for their psychology course and/or to enter into a drawing for one of twenty $20 Amazon.com gift certificates.

Participants

Table 1 provides descriptive information about the sample, including means, standard deviations, and percentages for a variety of characteristics. The sample consisted of 276 undergraduate students (78.3% female) from Bowling Green State University who had experienced self-reported heartbreak over at least one romantic breakup. Their last relationship must have lasted at least two months prior to dissolution ($M= 15.86, SD= 13.82, \text{range}= 2 \text{ to } 72 \text{ months}$). Participants were 80.8% Euro-American/Caucasian, 10.1% African American/Black, 4.0% Multi-racial/ethnic, 2.9% Hispanic/Latino, 1.8% Asian/Asian-American, and 0.4% Middle Eastern. Their ages ranged from 18 to 33 ($M= 19.44, SD= 1.70$). Current year in college was reported as: 52.7% first year, 25.8% second year, 10.9% third year, 7.6% fourth year, and 2.9% fifth year. Their overall college GPA ranged from 0.2 to 4.0 ($M= 2.91, SD= 0.68$).

The majority of participants believed in God (78.6%), 13% were unsure, and 8.3% did not believe in God. The sample was predominately Christian (42.7% Protestant and 39.4% Catholic); additionally, 4% identified with a different religion and 13.9% did not identify with a particular religion or denomination. Consistent with prior research (Mahoney et al., 1999), a
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global religiousness score was computed on the basis of self-reported frequency of religious
service attendance and frequency of prayer. Scores ranged from 2 to 17 with a mean of 8.80 (SD
= 4.16); frequencies are presented in Table 1. Overall, the participants’ frequency of religious
service attendance was lower than a national sample of 18-23-year-olds, based on data collected
in 2008; for example, 10.2% of the current sample reported attending services once a week or
more, compared to 20.3% of the national sample (Smith, 2009). Participants in the current
sample reported a slightly lower frequency of prayer, on average, than the national sample of
similarly-aged peers; for instance, 26.5% of the current sample reported praying once a day or
more, compared to 30% in the national sample. Finally, biblical conservatism was assessed with
a two-item index used in prior research (Ellison et al., 1996a, 1996b). Scores ranged from 2 to
10, with a mean of 5.52 (SD = 2.29); frequencies are presented in Table 1.

Regarding initiator status, 36.6% of the participants reported initiating the breakup,
47.1% reported that their ex-partner had initiated the breakup, and 16.3% reported that the
breakup had been mutual. The most commonly endorsed reasons for breakup were: unequal
effort put into the relationship (69.1%), stubbornness (66.8%), poor communication (62.6%),
jealousy/insecurity about the relationship (62.0%), frequent disagreements/arguments (61.5%),
and lack of time together (61.1%). Fifty-four percent of the sample reported feeling betrayed by
the breakup, 51.6% endorsed feeling rejected, and 38.8% indicated that the breakup was sudden
and unexpected. While all participants reported feeling heartbroken at the time of the breakup,
only 26.5% said they were still heartbroken at the time of the survey. The mean length of time
since breakup was 14 months (SD = 12.23, range = 0-48 months). The majority of the sample had
been in a heterosexual relationship (98.91%); two males and one female endorsed having a
same-sex ex-partner.
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With regard to sexual intimacy, the mean number of items endorsed out of ten sexual behaviors was 7.20 (range 0-10, $SD=2.65$). Table 1 includes percentages for all ten sexual behaviors. Nearly all participants (96.7%) reported engaging in light kissing, while 65.6% of the participants reported engaging in vaginal intercourse with their ex-partner. The mean number of times per month participants reported engaging in intercourse (including vaginal, oral, and anal) with their ex-partner prior to breakup was 7.78 (range= 0-80, $SD=9.56$). Participants reported sharing physical intimacy, as self-defined, with their ex-partner a mean of 15.43 times per month prior to breakup (range 0-100, $SD=15.93$). When asked about their cohabitation status, 80.8% of the participants reported that they rarely or never lived with their ex-partner, 15.6% reported that they cohabited some of the time, and 3.6% reported that they cohabited most or all of the time. The breakdown for average number of nights per week spent together overnight with their ex-partner was as follows: 47.1% never spent nights together, 36.6% spent 1-2 nights together, 11.6% spent 3-5 nights together, and 4.7% spent 6-7 nights together per week.

Approximately half of the sample (46.4%) perceived their ex-partner to be very faithful prior to their breakup, while 41.7% described their ex-partner as somewhat faithful/unfaithful and 12% described their ex-partner as very unfaithful. Among participants who reported any degree of perceived infidelity, the mean level of subjective hurt was 5.54 out of 7 (range= 1-7, $SD=1.34$). The majority of participants (82.6%) agreed that they were completely committed to the relationship prior to the breakup; 40.5% reported that they were somewhat to very certain that they would marry their ex-partner before their relationship ended.
RESULTS

The following sections provide an explanation of the statistical analyses conducted for this study. Some preliminary analyses are described first, including a factor analysis of secular coping items, descriptive statistics on key constructs, correlations between religious and non-religious variables, and correlations between key constructs and demographic variables. Then, the proposed analyses are presented in an order consistent with the study’s five goals, stated previously. The five proposed analyses sections are structured so that correlational findings are presented prior to the results of hierarchical regressions. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted only when the relevant predictor and outcome variables were significantly correlated. For the regression analyses, each model was assessed for the assumptions of linearity, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, and normality of the error distribution. It was determined that the results of these tests did not justify performing data transformations.

Preliminary Factor Analysis of Secular Coping Items

The 26 Brief-COPE items used in this study were analyzed to determine which two-item subscales best capture positive and negative secular coping strategies, as suggested by the authors of the measure. Specifically, principle component factor analysis was conducted to extract two factors using the varimax rotation method, developed by Kaiser (1958). This method is the most commonly used rotation method, which searches for a rotation that maximizes the variance of the loadings, thus simplifying interpretation. The following two-item subscales loaded onto the first factor, labeled positive secular coping: self-distraction, active coping, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, positive reframing, planning, humor, and acceptance. The following two-item subscales loaded onto the second factor, labeled negative
secular coping: denial, substance use, behavioral disengagement, and self-blame. The venting subscale was deleted due to cross-loading onto both factors. See Table 2 for more detailed information regarding this factor analysis. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliability for the positive and negative secular coping scales are included in Table 3.

**Descriptive Information on Key Study Variables**

This study provides descriptive information on a variety of students’ psychological and spiritual experiences. For each key religious and non-religious construct, Table 3 displays the number of items, the possible range of scores, and the internal consistency reliability. In addition, the sample’s minimum and maximum values, mean scores, and standard deviations are reported. The following sections provide a summary of the nature of the participants’ experiences across the various psychological and spiritual domains assessed in this study. These include the religious/spiritual constructs of sacred loss and desecration, R/S coping, and spiritual growth, as well as the non-religious constructs of depression, state anger, subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, and secular coping.

**Sacred loss and desecration.** The 28-item Sacred Loss and Desecration Scale (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005) was used to assess the extent to which participants viewed their romantic breakup as a loss and/or violation of something sacred. The scale was originally designed to assess two separate domains, with items identified as either falling into the sacred loss subscale or desecration subscale. As anticipated, the correlation between the two subscales in the current sample was extremely high ($r = .87$, $p < .001$). Therefore, sacred loss and desecration were treated as one construct for the purposes of this study and were combined for all statistical analyses. At the time of the survey, 56% of participants indicated that they had experienced some form of sacred loss or desecration with
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regard to their breakup. This included 5.2% of the sample who reported experiencing moderate to high appraisals of their breakup as a sacred loss or desecration, meaning that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 3 (“somewhat”) and 5 (“very much”).

**Positive religious/spiritual coping.** Thirty-three items from a R/S coping scale (RCOPE) were used to assess the degree to which participants have engaged in positive R/S coping methods in response to their breakups. At the time of the survey, 76.8% of participants indicated that they had engaged in some form of positive R/S coping in response to their breakup, including 26.1% of the sample who engaged in positive R/S coping to a moderate to high degree. This means that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 2 (“somewhat”) and 4 (“very much”).

**Negative religious/spiritual coping.** Seventeen items from a R/S coping scale (RCOPE) were used to assess the degree to which participants have engaged in negative R/S coping methods in response to their breakups. At the time of the survey, 65.2% of participants indicated that they had engaged in some form of negative R/S coping, including 8.2% of the sample who engaged in negative R/S coping to a moderate to high degree. This means that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 2 (“somewhat”) and 4 (“very much”).

**Positive secular coping.** After conducting principal components factor analysis, 16 items from the Brief-COPE scale were used to assess a variety of functional coping methods following the romantic breakup (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). At the time of the survey, 98.1% of participants indicated that they had engaged in some form of positive secular coping in response to their breakup. This included 81.5% of the sample who engaged in positive secular coping to a moderate to high degree. This means that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 2 (“somewhat”) and 4 (“a great deal”).
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Negative secular coping. After conducting principal components factor analysis, eight items from the Brief-COPE scale were used to assess a variety of struggles following the romantic breakup (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). At the time of the survey, 89.1% of participants indicated that they had engaged in some form of negative secular coping. This included 31.8% of the sample who engaged in negative secular coping to a moderate to high degree. This means that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 2 (“somewhat”) and 4 (“a great deal”).

Depression. Participants’ depressive symptoms were assessed with the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). At the time of the survey, 99.6% of participants endorsed experiencing some depressive symptoms during the past month. This included 2.7% of the sample who reported experiencing moderate to high levels of depressive symptomatology in during the past month, meaning that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 3 (“occasionally”) and 4 (“most of the time”).

Anger. Five items were adapted from the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (Spielberger, 1991) to assess participants’ experience of state anger about their breakup. At the time of the survey, 56.1% of participants endorsed experiencing some anger in response to the breakup during the past month. This included 18.1% of the sample who reported experiencing moderate to high levels of anger, meaning that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 3 (“sometimes”) and 4 (“often”).

Subjective distress. The 15-item Impact of Events Scale (IES) was used to assess subjective distress participants experienced with regard to their breakup, including intrusive thoughts and avoidant behaviors (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979). At the time of the survey, 76.2% of participants indicated that they had experienced some form of intrusive thoughts and/or
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avoidant behaviors related to their breakup within the past week. This included 15.7% of the sample who experienced intrusive thoughts and/or avoidant behaviors related to their breakup to a moderate to high degree, meaning that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 3 (“sometimes”) and 4 (“often”).

Posttraumatic growth. Participants were asked to what extent they had changed personally as a result of their breakup, across four domains: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, and appreciation for life. At the time of the survey, 98.8% of participants indicated that they had grown personally as a result of their breakup. This included 48.5% of participants who endorsed moderate to high levels of personal growth, meaning that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 4 (“to a moderate degree”) and 6 (“to a very great degree”).

Spiritual growth. Participants were asked to what extent they had changed spiritually as a result of their breakup. At the time of the survey, 68.2% of participants indicated that they had grown spiritually as a result of their breakup. This included 19.1% of participants who endorsed moderate to high levels of spiritual growth, meaning that their scores were equivalent to endorsing all items with a response between 4 (“to a moderate degree”) and 6 (“to a very great degree”).

Qualitative responses. An optional section provided participants the opportunity to respond to five open-ended questions about their experience of romantic breakup. Appendix P presents their qualitative comments, organized by theme. The responses regarding participants’ various forms of positive and negative R/S coping have been organized in accordance with Pargament’s (1999) RCOPE framework. Tables 16 and 17 provide representative quotations for
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the various categories of positive and negative R/S coping methods utilized by the participants, according to their self-report.

Preliminary Analyses of Links between Predictor and Outcome Variables

Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the interrelationships between various predictor and outcome variables. Specifically, this included assessing the intercorrelations among all religious constructs, the intercorrelations between all non-religious constructs, the correlations between the religious and non-religious constructs, and the correlations between demographic variables and all key constructs.

Bivariate correlations among religious constructs. To explore the psychometric properties of the religious constructs used in this study, correlational analyses were conducted between each of the key religious variables. The results are displayed in Table 4. The correlational analyses indicated that there is a range of significant positive correlations between all of the key religious constructs. The magnitude of these correlations would be expected and provides convergent validity. Yet, there is sufficient independence across the religious variables to justify analyzing each separately as a meaningful construct.

Bivariate correlations among non-religious constructs. To explore the psychometric properties of the various non-religious constructs used in this study, correlational analyses were conducted between each of the key non-religious variables. The results are displayed in Table 5. In general, a range of significant correlations exist between several of the non-religious variables. Noteworthy positive correlations were found between depression, anger, and subjective distress. The magnitude of these correlations ($r = .20-.62, p < .001$) would be expected and provides convergent validity, while supporting the independent analysis of these variables as three separate constructs. Likewise, the three sexual intimacy variables were moderately
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positively correlated \( (r = .37-.67, p < .001) \), as were the two cohabitation variables \( (r = .54, p < .001) \), suggesting that they measure related yet distinct facets of their respective constructs. As would be expected, there was a weak positive relationship between perceived commitment to the relationship and certainty of belief that the relationship would result in marriage \( (r = .22, p < .001) \).

It should also be highlighted that some relationship variables were positively correlated with post-breakup psychological adjustment \( (r = .14-.26) \). Specifically, greater sexual intimacy was associated with greater anger, distress, and posttraumatic growth \( (r = .18-.20, p < .01) \). Higher levels of cohabitation and overnights spent with the partner prior to breakup were related to greater depression, anger, and distress \( (r = .14-.26) \). Greater certainty of belief that the participant would marry the ex-partner was correlated with greater anger, distress, and posttraumatic growth \( (r = .18-.19, p < .01) \). Stronger perceptions of partner infidelity and subjective hurt were associated with greater posttraumatic growth \( (r = .25, .17) \).

**Bivariate correlations between key religious and non-religious constructs.**

Correlational analyses were conducted between each of the key religious and non-religious variables. The results are presented in Table 6. Generally, there was a range of significant associations between several religious and non-religious variables. It should be noted that multiple sexual intimacy and cohabitation variables were negatively correlated with global religiousness, biblical conservatism, and spiritual growth (significant correlation coefficients ranging from -.14 to -.23). Greater perceived infidelity by the ex-partner was tied to higher levels of spiritual growth \( (r = .20, p < .001) \).

It should also be highlighted that a few romantic relationship variables were significantly associated with positive and negative R/S coping. Specifically, greater positive R/S coping was
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related to lower levels of cohabitation ($r = -.21, p < .001$) and higher levels of perceived infidelity ($r = .14, p < .05$); greater negative R/S coping significantly correlated with lower frequency of intercourse ($r = -.13, p < .05$) and cohabitation ($r = -.16, p < .05$). In upcoming sections, additional correlations between key religious and non-religious constructs will be highlighted, as they relate to the study’s hypotheses.

**Bivariate correlations between demographic variables and key constructs.** To assess whether demographic characteristics should be controlled in the proposed analyses of this study, correlational analyses were conducted between the demographic variables and all key religious and non-religious variables. These analyses revealed that gender was significantly correlated with positive R/S coping ($r = -.13, p < .05$), and current year in college was significantly associated with spiritual growth ($r = -.14, p < .05$). Length of time since breakup (in months) was significantly associated with anger ($r = -.34, p < .001$) and subjective distress ($r = -.40, p < .001$).

Race was significantly correlated with sacred loss and desecration, positive and negative R/S coping, and spiritual growth. More specifically, Caucasian/Euro-American was negatively correlated with these R/S variables, African-American/Black was positively correlated, and Other was not significantly associated. Race was dummy coded into two dichotomous variables, with Euro-American/Caucasian as the reference group in regressions (comparison with African-American/Black presented as Race 1, comparison with Other presented as Race 2 in tables). All demographic variables discussed in this section were controlled in regression analyses involving sacred loss and desecration, positive and negative R/S coping, anger, subjective distress, and spiritual growth as relevant dependent variables.
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Proposed Analyses (I): Examination of Links between Sacred Loss/Desecration Appraisals and Post-Breakup Adjustment

Correlations between negative spiritual appraisals of breakup and psychological/spiritual adjustment. Pearson correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between participants’ negative spiritual appraisals of their breakup (i.e., sacred loss and desecration) and participants’ psychological and spiritual adjustment to their breakup. I expected a significant association between appraisals of a romantic breakup as a sacred loss and/or desecration and greater negative psychological outcomes (i.e., depression, anger, subjective distress) as well as positive psychological outcomes (i.e., posttraumatic growth, spiritual growth). Consistent with this hypothesis, a greater degree of appraising one’s breakup as a sacred loss and desecration was associated with higher levels of anger ($r = .22, p < .001$) and subjective distress ($r = .27, p < .001$). Furthermore, higher levels of perceived sacred loss and desecration were associated with higher levels of positive outcomes, including posttraumatic growth ($r = .19, p < .01$) and spiritual growth ($r = .54, p < .001$). Contrary to this hypothesis, sacred loss and desecration appraisals of the breakup were not significantly related to the experience of depressive symptoms within the last month. These correlations are included in Tables 4 and 6.

Negative spiritual appraisals of breakup predicting post-breakup adjustment. Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether sacred loss and desecration appraisals of the breakup were predictive of negative adjustment (i.e., anger and subjective distress) and positive adjustment (i.e., posttraumatic growth and spiritual growth) post-breakup. In step 1 of each analysis, global religiousness and the appropriate demographic
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variables were entered as controls. In step 2 of each analysis, the sacred loss/desecration appraisal was entered.

As anticipated, sacred loss and desecration appraisals significantly predicted anger ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .06$) and subjective distress ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .08$) after controlling for length of time since breakup and global religiousness. These results are displayed in Table 7. Sacred loss and desecration appraisals also significantly predicted posttraumatic growth ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .03$) after controlling for global religiousness. Furthermore, sacred loss and desecration appraisals significantly predicted spiritual growth ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .11$), after controlling for global religiousness, year in college, and race. These results are displayed in Table 8.

Proposed Analyses (II): Examination of Links between Coping Responses and Post-Breakup Adjustment

Correlations between positive R/S coping and positive psychological outcomes. I anticipated a positive association between positive R/S coping and posttraumatic growth. This hypothesis was supported ($r = .34, p < .001$). This correlation is presented in Table 6. Likewise, as expected, greater positive R/S coping was related to greater spiritual growth ($r = .77, p < .001$). This correlation is reported in Table 4.

Correlations between negative R/S coping and negative psychological outcomes. I anticipated negative R/S coping (spiritual struggles) to correlate significantly with depression, anger, and subjective distress. This hypothesis was only partially supported. Greater negative R/S coping was associated with greater subjective distress ($r = .21, p < .01$). Negative R/S coping was not significantly related to depression or anger. These data are presented in Table 6.

Religious/Spiritual coping predicting post-breakup adjustment. Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether engaging in R/S coping
methods was predictive of post-breakup psychological and spiritual adjustment (i.e., subjective
distress, posttraumatic growth, and spiritual growth). In step 1 of each analysis, global
religiousness and relevant demographic characteristics were entered as controls. In step 2 of each
analysis, positive or negative R/S coping were entered.

As expected, positive R/S coping significantly predicted posttraumatic growth ($R^2$ change
$= .14$) after controlling for global religiousness. Positive R/S coping also significantly predicted
spiritual growth ($R^2$ change $= .23$), after controlling for global religiousness, year in college, and
race. In addition, positive R/S coping significantly predicted post-breakup subjective distress ($R^2$
change $= .03$) after controlling for length of time since breakup and global religiousness. Table 9
presents these findings.

Similarly, negative R/S coping significantly predicted post-breakup subjective distress
($R^2$ change $= .04$) after controlling for length of time since breakup and global religiousness.
Negative R/S coping also significantly predicted posttraumatic growth ($R^2$ change $= .04$), after
controlling for global religiousness. Additionally, negative R/S coping significantly predicted
spiritual growth ($R^2$ change $= .06$), after controlling for global religiousness, year in college, and
race. Table 10 presents these findings.

**Unique contributions of R/S coping in predicting post-breakup adjustment above secular coping.** Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate
whether engaging in R/S coping methods predicted change in post-breakup adjustment better
than engaging in parallel forms of secular coping methods. In step 1 of each analysis, global
religiousness and relevant demographic variables were entered as controls. In step 2 of each
analysis, positive or negative forms of secular coping were entered. Finally, in step 3 of each
analysis, positive or negative R/S coping were entered.
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As anticipated, positive R/S coping significantly predicted posttraumatic growth ($R^2$ change = .02), above positive secular coping, after controlling for global religiousness. Positive R/S coping also significantly predicted spiritual growth ($R^2$ change = .15), above positive secular coping, after controlling for global religiousness, year in college, and race. Additionally, positive R/S coping significantly predicted post-breakup subjective distress ($R^2$ change = .02) above positive secular coping, after controlling for length of time since breakup and global religiousness. Table 11 displays these findings.

Similarly, negative R/S coping significantly predicted post-breakup spiritual growth ($R^2$ change = .05), above negative secular coping, after controlling for global religiousness, year in college, and race. Table 12 presents this finding. Negative R/S coping did not significantly predict subjective distress above negative secular coping, after controlling for length of time since breakup and global religiousness, nor did it significantly predict posttraumatic growth above negative secular coping, after controlling for global religiousness.

Proposed Analyses (III): Mediation of Links between Sacred Loss/Desecration Appraisals and Post-Breakup Adjustment

Preliminary correlations between spiritual appraisals of breakup and R/S coping. As explained previously, significant links were found between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and post-breakup adjustment; likewise, there were significant associations between R/S coping and post-breakup adjustment. As a first step to test a model in which R/S coping mediates the relationship between sacred loss/desecration and post-breakup adjustment, I conducted correlations to examine links between sacred loss/desecration and positive and negative R/S coping. As expected, stronger appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration were
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linked with greater positive and negative R/S coping ($r = .48, p < .001$ and $r = .55, p < .001$, respectively). These correlations are included in Table 4.

**Spiritual appraisals of breakup predicting positive and negative R/S coping.** Prior to testing the full mediation model, separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether sacred loss/desecration appraisals of the breakup were predictive of post-breakup positive and negative R/S coping. In step 1 of each analysis, global religiousness and the appropriate demographic variables were entered as controls. In step 2 of each analysis, the sacred loss/desecration appraisal was entered.

The findings indicated that sacred loss and desecration appraisals significantly predicted positive R/S coping ($R^2$ change = .07), after controlling for global religiousness, gender, and race. Scared loss and desecration appraisals also significantly predicted negative R/S coping ($R^2$ change = .16), after controlling for global religiousness and race. Table 13 displays these results.

**Mediational analyses.** It was hypothesized that the links between sacred loss and desecration appraisals and post-breakup adjustment would be partially mediated through positive and negative R/S coping methods. Figure 1 provides a pictorial representation of the mediational analyses. Paths $a1$ and $a2$ represent the effect of sacred loss/desecration appraisals on positive and negative R/S coping, respectively. Paths $b1$ and $b2$ represent the effect of positive and negative R/S coping on post-breakup adjustment (specifically subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, and spiritual growth). Path $c'$ represents the direct effect of sacred loss/desecration on the post-breakup adjustment variables, whereas the indirect effect of sacred loss/desecration on the adjustment variables through R/S coping is quantified by $a1b1 + a2b2$. The total effect ($c$) is equal to the direct effect of sacred loss/desecration on post-breakup adjustment plus the sum of
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the indirect effect through positive R/S coping and the indirect effect through negative R/S coping. That is, \( c = c' + a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 \).

All mediational analyses were performed with a bootstrapping technique because this method tends to have higher power and superior Type I error control compared to older techniques (e.g., Baron & Kenny causal steps approach, Sobel test). Additionally, bootstrapping analyses are not dependent on a normal sampling distribution of the indirect effect (Hayes 2009). All analyses were conducted with 1000 bootstrap samples and controlled participants’ global religiousness and relevant demographics. Positive and negative R/S coping were entered simultaneously in each analysis, which served two functions: 1) results revealed the relative size of each mediator’s contribution to the relationship independent of the other, and 2) this approach eliminated the problem of estimation bias that may result when mediators that are intercorrelated are tested individually in simple mediation models (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

It should be noted that a specific indirect effect of positive or negative R/S coping (i.e., \( b_1 \) or \( b_2 \)) on an outcome variable does not represent the ability of the single mediator to mediate the effect of sacred loss/desecration on the outcome; rather, the specific indirect effect represents the ability of the mediator to mediate the effect after controlling for the other mediator and all other controls in the model. Therefore, since positive and negative R/S coping are highly correlated, it is expected that their specific indirect effects may be weakened (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Pairwise contrasts of the specific indirect effects of the two mediators were conducted, which reveal the unique ability of each to mediate above and beyond the other mediator and all other controls in the model.

Table 14 provides the findings from the meditational analyses. The results indicate that R/S coping did not significantly mediate links between appraising one’s breakup as a sacred loss
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and desecration and level of subjective distress. The indirect effects through R/S coping (ab path) were not significant, and the direct effects of sacred loss and desecration on subjective distress (c’ path) remained significant after factoring out these indirect effects.

The findings reveal that R/S coping fully mediated links between sacred loss and desecration appraisals and posttraumatic growth. That is, the direct effects of sacred loss and desecration on posttraumatic growth were no longer significant after factoring out the indirect effects through R/S coping. More specifically, there was a specific indirect effect for positive R/S coping mediating the relationship between sacred loss and desecration and posttraumatic growth (β = .20). Positive R/S coping was significantly more powerful in mediating the effect than negative R/S coping, when the mediators were entered into the model together (pairwise comparison β = .19).

R/S coping partially mediated links between sacred loss and desecration appraisals and spiritual growth. That is, the direct effects of sacred loss and desecration on spiritual growth were still significant after factoring out the indirect effects through R/S coping, although the indirect effects through R/S coping accounted for some of the relationship. More specifically, there was a specific indirect effect for positive R/S coping mediating the relationship between sacred loss and desecration and posttraumatic growth (β = .16). Positive R/S coping was significantly more powerful in mediating the effect than negative R/S coping, when the mediators were entered into the model together (pairwise comparison β = .20).

Proposed Analyses (IV): Examination of Potential Predictors of Sacred Loss/Desecration Appraisals
Correlations between key relationship variables and sacred loss/desecration appraisals. This study extended prior research by examining key relationship variables that may potentially predict the appraisal of a romantic breakup as a sacred loss and desecration.

Bivariate correlations between sexual intimacy & cohabitation variables and sacred loss/desecration appraisals. I expected greater sexual intimacy (assessed using an index of six sexually intimate behaviors, frequency of intercourse, and frequency of participant-defined sexual intimacy) and cohabitation (assessed using subjective report of cohabitation frequency and number of overnights spent with partner per week) to be linked to higher appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration. These hypotheses were not supported. See Table 6.

Bivariate correlations between infidelity and commitment variables and sacred loss/desecration appraisals. I expected stronger perceptions of partner infidelity and higher levels of perceived hurt over the infidelity to be linked to higher appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration (i.e., the ex-partner is responsible for violating what has been deemed sacred). These hypotheses were not supported. Furthermore, I anticipated higher levels of perceived commitment to the relationship prior to the break-up, as well as the certainty of belief that the participant would marry the ex-partner, to correlate with stronger appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration. Consistent with my hypothesis, a greater degree of certainty that the participant would marry the ex-partner prior to breakup was associated with more intense appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration ($r = .17$, $p < .01$). However, contrary to my hypothesis, higher levels of perceived commitment were not significantly associated with sacred loss and desecration appraisals. See Table 6 for a correlation matrix.
Certainty of belief that participant would marry ex-partner predicting sacred loss/desecration appraisals. Because bivariate correlations revealed a positive association between certainty of belief that participants would marry their ex-partners prior to breakup and sacred loss/desecration appraisals, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether the expectation of marriage predicted appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration. In step 1 of the analysis, global religiousness and race were entered as controls. In step 2 of the analysis, the certainty of impending marriage was entered.

As expected, the degree of certainty with which participants believed they would marry their ex-partner significantly predicted sacred loss and desecration appraisals ($R^2$ change = .04), after controlling for global religiousness and race. These findings are presented in Table 15.

Proposed Analyses (V): Investigation of Potential Moderators of the Relationship between Sacred Loss/Desecration Appraisals and Negative Post-Breakup Adjustment

It was hypothesized that sexual intimacy would moderate the relationship between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and negative psychological adjustment (i.e., depression, anger, and subjective distress). To test this hypothesis, nine separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to investigate whether level of sexual intimacy (assessed using an index of six sexually intimate behaviors), frequency of intercourse, and frequency of participant-defined sexual intimacy would moderate the association between sacred loss/desecration and the three negative psychological adjustment variables. These analyses revealed no interaction effects for sacred loss/desecration and sexual intimacy.

Likewise, it was hypothesized that cohabitation would moderate the relationship between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and negative psychological adjustment (i.e., depression, anger, and subjective distress). To test this hypothesis, six separate hierarchical regression analyses
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were conducted to investigate whether cohabitation (i.e., one item assessing subjective report of cohabitation frequency and one item assessing number of overnights spent with partner per week) would moderate the association between sacred loss/desecration and the three negative psychological adjustment variables. These analyses revealed no interaction effects for sacred loss/desecration and cohabitation.
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DISCUSSION

Previous research on post-breakup adjustment has focused largely on situational factors that impact the level of post-breakup recovery, including initiator status, length of relationship prior to breakup, contact with ex-partner, level of social support, and time elapsed before dating commences after the breakup (as discussed in Locker, McIntosh, Hackney, Wilson, & Wiegand, 2010). While these factors are no doubt important to the post-breakup recovery process, it is also important to consider intrapsychic factors that create important individual differences in post-breakup adjustment. In addition, it is important to broaden the range of psychological and situational factors investigated as having a possible role in post-breakup adjustment. This study aimed to address both tasks, by investigating the role of religion/spirituality in the context of nonmarital romantic breakups, with additional attention given to the potential role of pre-breakup sexuality and other relationship factors. Although recent studies have begun to establish that a large portion of adults in nonmarital relationships perceive their romantic relationships to be spiritually significant (Henderson, Ellison, & Glenn, 2010), we were unable to locate published quantitative research that has systematically or thoroughly assessed the role of spirituality in adjustment to nonmarital breakups. Furthermore, because previous research has demonstrated that many college students perceive sexuality as spiritually significant within loving, nonmarital relationships (Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005), this study sought to investigate the role of retrospective perceptions of pre-breakup sexuality in post-breakup appraisals, coping, and psychological functioning. Another contribution of this study was to investigate post-breakup adjustment among both initiators and noninitiators who had experienced subjective heartbreak at the time of the breakup, which acknowledges the pain that may be associated with
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ending a relationship under undesirable circumstances. Thus, this study offers a unique lens through which to look at post-breakup adjustment.

Two-hundred and seventy-six undergraduate university students (78% female) completed measures after experiencing “heartbreak” over the dissolution of a romantic relationship (length of relationship: $M=15.86$ months, $SD=13.82$; length of time since breakup: $M=14.0$ months, $SD=12.23$). It is noteworthy that 36.6% of the sample described themselves as initiators of the breakup and 16.3% as co-initiators. This suggests that romantic breakups may be unwanted and distressing events even among those who come to the conclusion that they must end a relationship.

The results indicate that the participants’ appraisals of the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration were predictive of post-breakup adjustment. In addition, R/S coping predicted some aspects of adjustment above and beyond secular coping methods. While many of the relationship variables (i.e., sexual intimacy, cohabitation, infidelity, subjective hurt over infidelity, commitment) did not predict sacred loss or desecration appraisals or serve as moderators of the relationship between religious appraisals of the breakup and post-breakup adjustment, as was expected, certainty of belief that one would marry the ex-partner was found to predict sacred loss and desecration appraisals. Finally, the study highlighted R/S coping as a mediator of the relationship between individuals’ religious appraisals of the breakup and positive post-breakup adjustment. A discussion of these findings follows.

Relevance of Religion and Spirituality to the Breakup Experience

It is of primary importance to note that the majority of the sample reported religion and spirituality as relevant to their experience of romantic breakup. Specifically, 56% of the sample endorsed item(s) describing the experience of sacred loss and desecration to some degree in
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response to their most recent breakup. A smaller proportion of participants (5.2%) formed moderate to high levels of sacred loss and desecration appraisals.

With respect to R/S coping, a majority of participants endorsed some item(s) describing positive R/S coping (76.8%) and negative R/S coping (65.2%). Smaller yet still noteworthy proportions of the sample endorsed moderate to high levels of positive (26.1%) and negative (8.2%) R/S coping in response to their breakup. Participants shared personal examples in the optional qualitative comment section of ways in which they had experienced positive and negative R/S coping (see Tables 16 and 17 for a representative summary of quotations pertaining to R/S coping and Appendix P for all qualitative responses). Their examples represented positive methods such as benevolent religious reappraisals, collaborative R/S coping, active religious surrender, seeking spiritual support, religious focus, religious purification, spiritual connection, marking religious boundaries, seeking support from clergy or fellow believers, religious helping, seeking religious direction, religious conversion, and religious forgiving; their examples also represented negative methods such as punishing God reappraisals, reappraisals of God’s powers, pleading for direct intercession, self-directing R/S coping, spiritual discontent, and interpersonal religious discontent.

These findings regarding the relevance of religion and spirituality to nonmarital romantic breakups are noteworthy for several reasons. Participants consisted of an undergraduate student sample at a state university and were not recruited on religious bases. That is, the participants came from a diverse student population with regard to religious/spiritual background, and students’ religious/spiritual background was not assessed as a selection criterion for the study. Furthermore, participants’ global religiousness, as measured by their self-reported frequency of religious attendance and prayer, was somewhat lower than a national sample of 18- to 23-year-
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olds (Smith, 2009), suggesting that the levels of religious appraisals and coping reported by this sample may be an underestimate for individuals in their age group in the general population. Thus, it seems that religious appraisals and R/S coping are important aspects of the romantic breakup experience for a significant portion of college students and emerging adults in general. This finding is significant in light of the paucity of previous research taking into account the role of religion and spirituality in young adults’ responses to nonmarital romantic breakup. Furthermore, the prevalence of post-breakup religious appraisals and R/S coping is particularly important because they have specific implications for post-breakup adjustment.

Religious/Spiritual Appraisals and Religious/Spiritual Coping Predict Post-Breakup Adjustment

The present study revealed that forming negative religious appraisals (i.e., sacred loss and desecration) of one’s romantic breakup and engaging in R/S coping in response to the breakup were predictive of certain aspects of post-breakup adjustment. Appraising the breakup as a sacred loss and desecration was predictive of higher levels of anger and subjective distress. On the flip side, sacred loss and desecration appraisals were also predictive of higher levels of posttraumatic growth and spiritual growth.

Engaging in negative R/S coping was predictive of higher levels of subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, and spiritual growth. After controlling for negative secular coping strategies, negative R/S coping was still predictive of greater spiritual growth. Engaging in positive R/S coping was predictive of higher levels of subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, and spiritual growth; these findings held after controlling positive secular coping methods reported by the participants.
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One implication of these findings is that individuals who appraise a romantic breakup through a negative spiritual lens and engage in negative R/S coping methods may be more likely to experience the breakup as a more traumatic life event. The measure of subjective distress used in this study assessed intrusive thoughts and images and avoidant behaviors experienced by the participants over the past week in response to the breakup. Similar intrusive and avoidant symptoms are reported by individuals who suffer posttraumatic stress reactions to other types of traumatic life events (e.g., experiencing or witnessing real or threatened physical injury, enduring sexual or emotional abuse, experiencing a devastating event such as divorce). The cognitive and emotional turmoil experienced by these individuals may impede them from maximizing the resources necessary to effectively adapt to the life changes brought about by the breakup.

On the other hand, individuals who appraise their breakup through a negative spiritual lens and who respond by employing positive R/S coping methods may be more likely to experience growth as a result of the breakup. The measure of posttraumatic growth used in this study assessed the individual’s post-breakup development in personal strength, openness to new possibilities, appreciation for life, and positive ways of relating to others. It is likely that such qualities would enable individuals to more effectively deal with the stress and challenges that come with a breakup and to move on with their lives with renewed strength and vigor.

It seems that romantic breakup can also stimulate positive spiritual change, when the individual appraises the breakup as a sacred loss or desecration and employs positive R/S coping methods. The measure of spiritual growth used in this study assessed areas such as feeling a stronger sense of closeness to God and others, placing a greater priority of spirituality, and gaining new spiritual insights. Many participants reported in their qualitative responses that they sought spiritual support after the breakup and experienced a stronger connection with God and
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others as a result. These findings mirror prior theory and research on divorce. Quantitative and qualitative research has suggested that adults who appraise their divorce as more traumatic report greater spiritual growth (Blomquist, 1985; Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009). Viktor Frankl (1959) wrote of the human tendency to find transcendent meaning in the midst of unavoidable suffering. Extending Frankl’s theory, Ferch and Ramsey (2003) have suggested that individuals may find new meaning and purpose in undesirable circumstances through seeking more intimate connections with God, others, and the self. It seems that, similar to individuals experiencing divorce, some individuals experiencing nonmarital breakup tend to find themselves confronted with spiritual questions and concerns that trigger renewed or newfound reliance on religion and/or spirituality as a source of personal growth.

While the above findings were consistent with predictions, some additional unanticipated links were observed. Specifically, negative R/S coping was predictive of posttraumatic growth and spiritual growth. For some participants, self-reported negative R/S coping may have been employed as an initial response to the breakup, before more adaptive ways to coping were initiated. Because participants were asked to report on all coping methods used to cope with the breakup, both past and present, it is unclear whether the negative R/S coping methods reported were relatively recent or were primarily initial responses that were later revised. Numerous qualitative responses by the participants revealed a pattern of initial negative R/S coping followed by more positive R/S coping methods (see Appendix P). Negative R/S coping may be experienced as one step in a multistep process for some individuals, through which one subsequently employs positive R/S coping methods that foster posttraumatic and spiritual growth.
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Additionally, positive R/S coping was predictive of subjective distress. This finding was not hypothesized yet is consistent with other cross-sectional research that has revealed a link between greater use of positive R/S coping and greater psychological distress, an effect which has been previously coined a stress mobilization effect (as discussed in Mahoney, Krumrei, & Pargament, 2008). Thus, it is not uncommon to observe both greater distress and greater personal growth during a time of crisis. It seems as though some individuals in this study may have been motivated to turn to their faith as a resource to help them grow through their painful breakup experience. Longitudinal data would be useful to verify whether greater positive R/S coping as an effort to deal with ongoing and current subjective distress later predicts better adjustment.

There were some anticipated links that were not observed. Specifically, sacred loss and desecration appraisals and negative R/S coping were not predictive of depression. It is important to note that while most of the sample reported experiencing low levels of depressive symptomatology, very few participants (2.7%) reported experiencing moderate to high levels of depression. One plausible explanation for this is that participants were asked to report their depressive symptoms over the past month, without reference to their breakup. The predictor variables (e.g., sacred loss and desecration, R/S coping) and other outcome measures (i.e., anger, subjective distress, posttraumatic growth, spiritual growth) were presented after participants reported on their most recent breakup experience and assessed participants’ thoughts and behaviors with specific reference to their breakup. If participants had been prompted to think about their most recent breakup and to report on the depressive symptoms specifically associated with their breakup, depression scores may have been higher overall and may have been linked more closely with these other variables.
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Additionally, although there was an association between sacred loss and desecration appraisals and state anger, the anticipated link between negative R/S coping and anger was not observed. One possible explanation is that while individuals who experienced anger in response to a breakup may have endorsed items indicating loss of a spiritually significant relationship, they may have been less inclined to endorse the heavily theistic negative coping items used in this study. This potential explanation is supported by the marginally negative correlation between anger and measures of global religiousness and biblical conservatism, which are generally indicative of active participation in a particular religious tradition. It should also be noted that only a small percentage (8.2%) of participants endorsed experiencing negative R/S coping to a moderate or high degree. Perhaps a larger sample would have had the power necessary to observe significant relationships between negative R/S coping and measures of depression and anger.

Nature of Religion/Spirituality’s Impact on Post-Breakup Adjustment

It should be highlighted that this study reveals several important points about the nature of religion and spirituality’s role in one’s response to romantic breakup. The finding that R/S coping methods predicted some aspects of post-breakup adjustment above and beyond parallel, secular forms of coping indicates that religion has something unique to offer to individuals coping with nonmarital romantic breakups that would be lost if the religious element were eliminated.

Moreover, this study highlights the subtleties of one’s religious/spiritual faith as significant contributors to each individual’s experience. Research in the social sciences has largely relied on general indicators of religious involvement as a measure of one’s level of religiousness/spirituality. However, this study, along with other recent studies (e.g., Krumrei,
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Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), underscores the importance of gaining a more nuanced picture of one’s way of being religious and/or spiritual. The index of global religiousness used in this study included frequency of church attendance and frequency of prayer, which are generally considered to offer a snapshot of one’s level of religiousness/spirituality. However, the specific R/S appraisals and R/S coping methods reported by participants were more powerful predictors of post-breakup adjustment, above and beyond levels of global religiousness. It seems that the specific ways in which religion and spirituality operate in one’s life (e.g., one’s image of God, spiritual understandings of life events and transitions, beliefs about the origin of suffering, ways of engaging God and one’s religious community in times of distress) matter more than the general terms used to describe one’s adherence to a religious faith (e.g., Fundamentalist Baptist, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox Jew, frequent church attendee).

Lastly, this study highlights the importance of considering religious variables as outcomes in studies of nonmarital breakup, in addition to measures of psychological and social adjustment. Previous investigations have underscored the importance of assessing personal post-breakup growth in addition to maladjustment (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003); this study builds upon that premise by demonstrating the importance of assessing not only basic intra- and interpersonal growth but also growth across spiritual dimensions. After all, major life events do not only impact one’s psychological and social functioning but also one’s spiritual functioning (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). Just as divorce has been identified as a significant event that can trigger important spiritual changes in one’s life (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), for some individuals, a nonmarital breakup may serve as an impetus for spiritual transformation. The potential spiritual impact of nonmarital relationship dissolution should not be overlooked by researchers and clinicians.
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Relevance of Relationship Characteristics to Post-Breakup Adjustment

A unique contribution of this study was to investigate the potential impact of sexuality and other pre-breakup relationship factors on a model of R/S coping with nonmarital relationship dissolution. Given increasing acceptance of sexual intimacy and cohabitation in committed nonmarital relationships (Martin et al., 2001; Treas, 2002; Wells & Twenge, 2005, Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008), even among religious individuals (Willoughby and Carroll, 2010), it is important that research stay current with these trends among young adults. Conceptually, greater sexual intimacy and cohabitation make a romantic relationship look and feel more like a marital relationship. Given previous findings that divorce is often accompanied by negative religious appraisals (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), it was predicted that higher levels of sexual intimacy and cohabitation would predict higher sacred loss and desecration appraisals in a sample of young adults who had experienced a “heartbreaking” breakup. Contrary to hypotheses, levels of sexual intimacy and cohabitation, as measured in this study, were not significantly related to sacred loss and desecration appraisals, nor did they moderate the relationship between sacred loss and desecration appraisals and post-breakup adjustment. It is noteworthy that there were significant negative correlations between a measure of global religiousness and all measures of sexual intimacy and cohabitation used in this study. It seems that individuals who engaged in greater sexual intimacy and cohabitation were less likely to be religious, in general. Therefore, it is plausible that one’s general religiousness may moderate the relationships between sexual intimacy/cohabitation and sacred loss and desecration appraisals. More specifically, an important consideration is the extent to which religion and spirituality play a role in an individual’s decisions about whether to engage, and how heavily to engage, in sexual intimacy and cohabitation with a partner prior to breakup. Because many religious young adults
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do, in fact, engage in sexual intimacy and cohabitation (Regnerus, 2007; Willoughby and Carroll, 2010), despite denominational prohibitions (Bullis & Harrigan, 1992), the intersection of spirituality and sexuality is an interesting line of research that should be pursued despite these null preliminary findings.

It was also expected that perceptions of a partner’s infidelity and subjective hurt associated with this perception of infidelity would be associated with higher sacred loss and desecration appraisals. These hypotheses were not supported; in fact, perceptions of infidelity and subjective hurt were significantly related to only a few other variables. Specifically, individuals who rated their ex-partners as more unfaithful were more likely to report greater sexual intimacy with their ex-partner, were more likely to engage in positive secular and R/S coping methods post-breakup, and were more likely to experience posttraumatic and spiritual growth. These findings suggest that individuals who experienced a partner’s infidelity drew upon constructive resources (e.g., intrapersonal, interpersonal, spiritual) that resulted in enhanced strength and growth. A small proportion of the sample indicated that their partner had been very unfaithful (12%); perhaps a larger sample would provide the power needed for a statistically significant association between partner infidelity and sacred loss/desecration appraisals. A previous study indicated that the vast majority of college students who experienced hurt and betrayal by a partner perceived the betrayal as a desecration of a sacred relationship (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000).

Additionally, it was anticipated that greater subjective commitment and greater certainty of belief that one would marry an ex-partner prior to breakup would predict sacred loss and desecration appraisals. Subjective commitment to the relationship prior to breakup was not significantly associated with any other variable of interest in the study. This variable may have
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relied too strongly on the faulty memory and retrospective report of participants to offer any valuable information. Conceivably, in a longitudinal study, an assessment of subjective commitment to a current relationship would predict subsequent post-breakup appraisals. Moreover, it seems that this variable was too vague and subjective, restricting the variance necessary for analyses (82.6% of participants reported that they had been “completely committed” to their relationship). The construct of “commitment” within the context of nonmarital relationships is rather ambiguous compared to the clear mutual and long-term agreement made by married couples to remain together indefinitely in a monogamous relationship. For couples who are not married, the terms of the “commitment” are less clear; young adults may use the “commitment” distinction to indicate that they are willing to maintain romantic and/or sexual exclusivity, they invest time and other resources into the relationship, they are willing to provide emotional support to their partner, they love their partner, they anticipate a long-term relationship, they desire marriage, and/or a variety of other possible meanings. Therefore, obtaining a clear definition of the meaning of “commitment” for each individual is crucial.

Consistent with hypotheses, certainty of belief that one would marry an ex-partner was predictive of sacred loss and desecration appraisals. This item is perhaps a better representation of one’s commitment (at least cognitively) to the relationship prior to breakup. Given prior data regarding the high prevalence of sacred loss and desecration appraisals among divorcees (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), it is not surprising that individuals who perceived their relationship to be heading toward a lifetime of commitment would be more likely to appraise the breakup as the loss or violation of a sacred relationship.
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The finding that sacred loss and desecration appraisals are predicted by one’s certainty of belief that a dating relationship will result in marriage has some practical implications. An important consideration is that one’s belief that a relationship is headed toward marriage seems to raise the stakes of the relationship and increase the risk of pain, should the relationship go awry. This increased risk is especially problematic given young adults’ propensity for dreaming of marital bliss. Results of the 2006 national Monitoring the Future survey (reported by Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008) indicate that 81% of high school seniors expect to get married, and 90% of those individuals expect to stay married to the same person for life. The latter percentage is astoundingly high, given evidence that an estimated 41-50% of first marriages end in divorce. Furthermore, high school seniors tend to overestimate their readiness for marriage, with 72% rating themselves as “well” or “very well” prepared for marriage. Adding to this recipe for potential heartache are results from the 2005 wave of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, indicating that young adults ages 21-24 tend to rate their current nonmarital romantic relationships very positively (i.e., 8.1 for daters and 8.8 for cohabiters on a 10-point scale of relationship quality; computed by Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008) in terms of closeness, commitment, caring, and conflict. Taken together, these findings suggest that young adults may overrate their preparedness for lifetime commitment and may have unrealistic expectations regarding the future of their romantic relationships when they find themselves happy and in love.

Given the longstanding religious and cultural belief in the U.S. that marriage is a spiritual process by which two people become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:8), paired with data indicating that people invest more of themselves to preserve and protect aspects of life (e.g., relationships) that are regarded as sacred (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005), one can imagine that
believing a relationship is progressing toward “holy matrimony” may contribute to appraisals of the end of the relationship as a sacred loss and desecration. Young adults may therefore benefit from education about various possible relationship trajectories and how to maintain realistic expectations for their current relationships. For instance, young adults should create expectations for their romantic relationships that accurately reflect the current developmental level of the relationship, as well as that of each partner. For religious and spiritual individuals, this appraisal of current developmental level should include an analysis of the growth and development of the relationship and of each partner across R/S domains that are consistent with the individual’s faith tradition. For example, a couple may need to take into account their current level of disclosure about R/S matters, as well as their level of consensus and compromise regarding issues that are central to each individual’s religious and/or spiritual journey, in order to determine whether plans to marry are appropriate and realistic. The level of disclosure, consensus, and compromise necessary to promote a healthy spiritual bond will likely differ from couple to couple, as will the content of the religious/spiritual discussions. Fostering more realistic relationship expectations may reduce the potency of negative breakup appraisals and maladjustment when breakups do occur.

**Religious/Spiritual Stress and Coping Mediation Model**

The meditational analyses in this study generally supported a framework proposed by Mahoney, Krumrei, and Pargament (2008), which is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress and coping model as well as Pargament’s (1997) R/S stress and coping model. These models suggest that stressful events elicit cognitive appraisals, which mediate the impact of the stressful event on the individual’s psychological responses and also shape one’s coping responses. The ultimate outcome of an event on the individual is contingent upon one’s
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appraisals and coping responses. Previous research confirmed that R/S appraisals and R/S coping in response to divorce function in a way consistent with this model (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009). In the current study, both R/S appraisals of a nonmarital breakup and R/S coping significantly predicted post-breakup functioning. Furthermore, R/S coping was found to be a mediator of links between R/S appraisals of the breakup and positive outcomes (i.e., posttraumatic growth, spiritual growth).

Mahoney et al.’s (2008) mediation model has important implications. First, the meditational findings highlight the complex way religion/spirituality functions for some individuals who experience romantic breakup. It seems that religion/spirituality can serve as a catalyst for positive growth but may also present an added stressor during a difficult life transition. For example, with respect to spiritual growth, positive and negative coping were simultaneously mediating the same outcome variable in opposite directions (although the indirect effect for negative coping was not statistically significant). Additionally, there was a high level of overlap between positive and negative R/S coping within the sample (i.e., they were highly correlated and were endorsed to some degree by the majority of participants), indicating that R/S coping should be addressed clinically as a complex phenomenon as well as a potentially powerful point of intervention.

Second, Mahoney et al.’s (2008) mediation model also helps to shed light on some of the paradoxical links that have been found in the research literature between nonmarital breakups and positive personal growth (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). This meditation model highlights R/S coping as one mechanism through which negative appraisals of breakups can elicit positive changes; specifically, sacred loss and desecration appraisals elicit R/S coping methods that foster personal development and growth.
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While the above findings were consistent with Mahoney et al.’s (2008) mediation model, R/S coping did not significantly mediate the link between appraisals of a breakup as a sacred loss and desecration and subjective distress, after controlling length of time since breakup and global religiousness. That is, although scared loss and desecration appraisals predicted subjective distress, this relationship did not change significantly after adding the indirect effects through positive and negative R/S coping. This null finding may reflect a lack of power in the present study.

Clinical Implications

College students who present for treatment at university counseling centers nationwide frequently report experiencing post-breakup maladjustment and seek help navigating breakup issues. The findings of this study may help clinicians gain a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the religious dimension of nonmarital romantic breakups. Past research has given much more attention to the implications of divorce than to the implications of nonmarital breakups. However, clinicians must not assume nonmarital breakups to be a trivial matter; for some clients, a breakup may represent the loss or violation of the most sacred aspect of their lives. The results of this study suggest that clinicians who do not assess the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of clients experiencing a breakup may overlook a significant aspect of the client’s experience and may lose significant insights into potential determinants of post-breakup adjustment. Moreover, these clinicians miss the opportunity to tap into religious and spiritual resources that may help minimize post-breakup maladjustment and maximize post-breakup growth.

The reasonably high prevalence of R/S appraisals and R/S coping in the context of nonmarital breakups and their association with post-breakup adjustment provide support for
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addressing topics related to religion and spirituality in treatment. Clinicians can help their clients work through potential spiritual wounds that resulted from their breakup (e.g., a client perceives a recent breakup to be a loss or violation of a sacred bond and/or the work of an evil force). Clinicians can also explore with clients positive ways to spiritually appraise the breakup (e.g., a breakup as God’s provision of a way out of an unhealthy relationship and a chance for a fresh start spiritually and interpersonally).

This study also provides a foundation for incorporating R/S coping into clinical interventions for individuals after a breakup. R/S coping methods were predictive of post-breakup positive growth above and beyond secular coping methods. Thus, clinicians can reinforce the use of positive R/S coping methods and can help clients explore helpful R/S coping methods that may be underutilized. Clinicians should also recognize that negative R/S coping may become a source of additional stress for individuals who have encountered a troubling breakup. For individuals who encounter spiritual struggles as a result of their breakup, clinicians may help explore how their religious/spiritual worldviews and assumptions guide their coping methods. For example, an individual who perceives God to be angry may perceive a breakup as punishment, while an individual who perceives God to be distant and disengaged may interpret a breakup as proof of God’s lack of love and care. One possible point of intervention for such individuals would be to explore new ways of imaging and relating to God and new adaptive R/S methods of coping (e.g., seeing God as actually demonstrating love through the allowance of free will, which necessarily results in some mistakes and negative consequences; reinterpreting a breakup as part of a mysterious yet superior life plan).
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Limitations & Directions for Future Research

The current study expands previous research by contributing a rich perspective on the role of religion and spirituality within the context of nonmarital romantic relationship dissolution. However, several limitations of this study should be noted. First, the results of this study are based on a cross-sectional, correlational research design. Consequently, directionality and causality cannot be inferred from the findings. Furthermore, the study’s design does not rule out possible unmeasured “third variables” that may cause the religious and spiritual variables to statistically predict the outcomes. Such limitations could be reduced with a longitudinal design but could only be overcome completely by an experiment with random assignment of participants; such a study is impossible for research on romantic breakups.

There are some limitations related to the sample used in this study. While the sample is relatively large for psychological research, it contains students from one Midwestern university and is not representative in terms of demographic variables such as age, gender, year in college, sexual orientation, and race. Furthermore, students were recruited through psychology classes and self-selected into the study on the basis of receiving research participation credit and/or a chance to win a monetary incentive. These students may differ from the general population of university students in meaningful and relevant ways. It would therefore be worthwhile for future researchers to assess similar constructs in larger, more nationally representative samples of college students and any other populations of interest.

Additionally, some difficulties inherent to research on stressful life events were encountered in this study. For example, it was impossible to obtain a sample of individuals who were at identical phases in the post-breakup process. Individuals varied greatly with respect to the amount of time elapsed since their breakup and the level of current heartbreak and distress
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over the breakup. Moreover, participants had experienced relationships of varying qualities prior to their breakups, and their breakups had been associated with a variety of causes and contexts. It is unknown how these qualitative differences in pre- and post-breakup experiences may have impacted the outcomes of this study. Perhaps in a sample of individuals who have experienced a very recent breakup (e.g., all within the last month), stronger links would be observed between R/S breakup appraisals and R/S coping methods and negative psychological outcomes of interest (e.g., anger, depression, subjective distress). Furthermore, in such a sample, R/S coping may significantly mediate the link between sacred loss/desecration appraisals and negative psychological outcomes.

Another limitation of this study is its reliance on retrospective self-report data. Most items required participants to reflect on their experiences since their last breakup. Like in other studies that use self-report measures and retrospective data, it is impossible to ascertain the quality of the responses or the reliability of the participants’ memories. Additionally, the majority of the questionnaires were not counterbalanced; that is, participants were first asked to report on their breakup experience before answering questions about their post-breakup psychological adjustment, followed by questionnaires assessing religious variables. This may have introduced experimenter bias by creating a “response set” for participants, unintentionally cuing them to report psychological and spiritual changes that took place as a result of the breakup.

Finally, the current study highlights potential areas for future inquiry. This project sheds light on post-breakup adjustment cross-sectionally, with individuals at various stages in the post-breakup process. Future investigations should assess at specific time points over time in order to gain a better understanding of how R/S appraisals and R/S coping change over time and how
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they impact longer-term adjustment to breakups. Additionally, a longitudinal analysis may assess the ways in which R/S appraisals and R/S coping may impact future relationship decisions (e.g., when and who to date after a breakup, whether to return to an ex-partner, changes in expectations for future partners).

A more fine-tuned investigation of the intersection of religion/spirituality and sexuality in the context of romantic breakups should be pursued. Specifically, future research investigations should consider global religiousness and, more specifically, the role of religion and spirituality in the formation of decisions about sexuality and cohabitation, as moderators of the relationship between pre-breakup sexual intimacy/cohabitation and post-breakup sacred loss and desecration appraisals. Furthermore, given the low base rate of cohabitation in the current study (i.e., only 3.6% endorsed cohabiting most or all of the time), additional research with a sample of cohabiting individuals is needed. Finally, future research endeavors should gather data from a broader range of samples, including individuals of a more diverse range of sexual orientations, faith traditions, and student subcultures (e.g., from a private religious university). Given the increasing acceptance of premarital sexual activity and recent data suggesting that college students do perceive sexuality as sacred within committed nonmarital relationships, the intersection of spirituality and sexuality among young adults is a relevant and essential field of study.

Future assessment of the ways in which individuals’ images of God relate to their R/S breakup appraisals would offer additional insight into the links that were found in this study between R/S appraisals and post-breakup adjustment. For example, an individual who perceives a loving and benevolent God as causing a breakup may react differently than an individual who
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perceives an angry and punishing God as causing a breakup. These varying images of God may have specific implications for post-breakup coping and adjustment.

In the future, data gathered from couples rather than individuals may shed additional light on the breakup process by offering a comparison of R/S appraisals of the breakup across ex-partners as well as a comparison of perspectives on dyadic variables such as post-breakup communication and conflict. This type of investigation would be best suited for couples who had been in relatively long-term, committed dating relationships, especially those who had cohabited.

Although nonmarital breakups have been a topic of interest in the social sciences for decades, the focus has been on how breakups impact individuals’ psychological, especially emotional, adjustment. This study highlights that nonmarital breakups have an important spiritual dimension for a substantial segment of young adults. Romantic breakups take on new depth and meaning when they are interpreted through a negative spiritual lens, and this process has significant implications for post-breakup coping and well-being. The addition of religious and spiritual components to assessment and treatment appears to be a promising strategy for improving the quality of clinical care for individuals who have experienced a troubling breakup.
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Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
APPENDIX B

RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL COPING

Please contact the author of this manuscript for more information.
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APPENDIX C

SECULAR COPING

Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
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APPENDIX D

DEPRESSION

Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
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APPENDIX E

STATE ANGER

Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
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APPENDIX F

SUBJECTIVE DISTRESS

Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
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APPENDIX G

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
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APPENDIX H

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Please contact the author of the original questionnaire for more information.
## Sexual Intimacy

1. Did you have the following types of experiences with your partner prior to your breakup?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light kissing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy kissing/ “making out”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast touching/ stimulation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying/standing together without clothes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You touching your partner’s genitals with fingers/hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your partner touching your genitals with fingers/hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You stimulating your partner’s genitals with mouth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your partner stimulating your genitals with mouth</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaginal intercourse (penis in vagina)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal intercourse (penis in rectum)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How many times per month, on average, did you engage in intercourse (including vaginal, oral, and/or anal intercourse) with your partner prior to your breakup? _____

3. How many times per month, on average, were you physically intimate (with or without intercourse) with your partner prior to your breakup? Answer according to what you consider to be “physically intimate.” _____

## Cohabitation

4. Prior to your breakup, how often, on average, did you live with your romantic partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All/most of the time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely/never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Prior to your breakup, how many times per week did you and your partner stay together overnight?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nights</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 nights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 nights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6-7 nights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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APPENDIX J

INFIDELITY & COMMITMENT

Infidelity

1. Prior to your breakup, how faithful do you think your romantic partner was to you?
   ___ Very faithful     ___ Somewhat faithful     ___ Somewhat unfaithful     ___ Very unfaithful

2. If your romantic partner was unfaithful to you, indicate the level of hurt you have felt due to
   the infidelity on a scale of 1 (not hurt at all) to 7 (unbearably hurt):
   ___ 1 (Not hurt at all)  ___2  ___3  ___4 (Moderately hurt)  ___5  ___6  ___ 7 (Unbearably hurt)

Commitment

3. Prior to your breakup, how certain were you that you would eventually marry this person?
   ___ Very uncertain  ___Somewhat uncertain  ___Neutral  ___Somewhat certain  ___Very certain

4. How much do you agree with the following statement: “Prior to the breakup, I was completely
   committed to the relationship.”
   ___ Strongly disagree   ___ Disagree   ___ Neutral   ___ Agree   ___ Strongly agree
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APPENDIX K

DEMOGRAPHICS

Please answer the following questions.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your gender? ___M  ___F

3. What best describes your race/ethnicity?
   ___ Euro-American/Caucasian  ___ African American/Black
   ___ Hispanic/Latino           ___ Asian/Asian-American
   ___ Native American/Alaskan Native  ___ Middle Eastern
   ___ Pacific Islander         ___ Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
   ___ Other (describe): _____________________

4. What is your current year in college?
   ___ 1st  ___ 2nd  ___ 3rd  ___ 4th  ___ 5th  ___ Other (describe): ______

5. What was your GPA last semester? _____ (on a 4-point scale)

6. What is your overall college GPA right now? _____ (on a 4-point scale)
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APPENDIX L

GLOBAL RELIGIOUSNESS & BIBLICAL CONSERVATISM

Please answer the following questions.

Global Religiousness

1. Do you believe in God?
   _____ Yes    _____ Not sure    _____ No

2. What best describes your current religious affiliation?
   _____ Protestant or Non-denominational (Christian)    _____ Catholic (Christian)
   _____ Jewish                                          _____ Muslim
   _____ Hindu                                           _____ Buddhist
   _____ None                                            _____ Other _____________

3. How often do you attend religious services?
   _____ Several times a week    _____ 2-3 times a month    _____ Once or twice a year
   _____ Every week               _____ About once a month   _____ Less than once a year
   _____ Nearly every week        _____ Several times a year _____ Never

4. How often do you pray?
   _____ More than once a day     _____ Once a week        _____ Less than once a month
   _____ Once a day               _____ A few times a month _____ Never
   _____ A few times a week       _____ Once a month

Biblical Conservatism

5. How much do you agree with the following statement: “The Bible is God’s word and everything happened or will happen exactly as it says.”
   ____ Strongly disagree   ____ Disagree   ____ Neutral   ____ Agree   ____ Strongly agree

6. How much do you agree with the following statement: “The Bible is the answer to all important human problems.”
   ____ Strongly disagree   ____ Disagree   ____ Neutral   ____ Agree   ____ Strongly agree
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APPENDIX M

ROMANTIC BREAKUP VARIABLES

Now think about your MOST RECENT BREAKUP of an exclusive romantic relationship to answer the following questions.

1. Most breakups are initiated by only one of the two partners. Who initiated your most recent breakup?
   ___ I did ___ My partner did ___ We both did (It was a completely mutual decision.)

2. How much do you agree with the following statement: “The breakup was sudden and unexpected.”
   ___ Strongly disagree ___ Disagree ___ Neutral ___ Agree ___ Strongly agree

3. How much do you agree with the following statement: “I felt rejected by the breakup.”
   ___ Strongly disagree ___ Disagree ___ Neutral ___ Agree ___ Strongly agree

4. How much do you agree with the following statement: “I felt betrayed by the breakup.”
   ___ Strongly disagree ___ Disagree ___ Neutral ___ Agree ___ Strongly agree

5. How much do you agree with the following statement: “At the time of the breakup, I was heartbroken over the breakup.”
   ___ Strongly disagree ___ Disagree ___ Neutral ___ Agree ___ Strongly agree

6. How much do you agree with the following statement: “I am still (currently) heartbroken over the breakup.”
   ___ Strongly disagree ___ Disagree ___ Neutral ___ Agree ___ Strongly agree

7. How long has it been, months, since your most recent breakup? _____ month(s)

8. What was the length of your relationship, months, prior to your breakup? _____ month(s)

9. What was the gender of your partner? ___ Male ___ Female
### Appendix N

#### Causes of Breakup

Please read the following list and identify all issues that contributed to your breakup. These may have been issues that you, your partner, or both of you contributed to the relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased time doing separate activities</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time together</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems maintaining independent self</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too stubborn</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishing empathy or caring behavior</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly controlling</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilarity of interests</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor communication</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilarity of personality traits</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of respect</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent disagreements/arguments</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishing fun or excitement</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger problems</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishing physical affection</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual dissatisfaction</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money issues</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishing physical attraction</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty or manipulation</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypersensitivity</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy/insecurity about the relationship</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal effort put into the relationship</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocated love</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure/conflict from outside sources</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally abusive</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical aggression</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual aggression</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you selected **Yes** for **Other**, please list any other issues that contributed to your breakup.

_________________________________________________________________
I would like to hear more about your breakup experience in your own words. The following questions give you the opportunity to describe your experience further.

1. What has been the worst part of your breakup?

2. What has been the best part of your breakup?

3. How, if at all, has your breakup changed your spirituality or way of being religious?
   - If you have not already done so in your response above, please describe if and how you have grown spiritually as a result of your breakup.
   - If you have not already done so in your response above, please describe any spiritual struggles that your breakup may have triggered.

4. How, if at all, has your spirituality or way of being religious affected your breakup experience?
   - If you have not already done so in your response above, please describe how your spirituality or religion has been helpful in your breakup experience.
   - If you have not already done so in your response above, please describe how your spirituality or religion has made it more difficult to deal with your breakup.

5. In the space below, you can comment on any of the questions in this survey, or give additional information that you think would be helpful for the researcher.
Please contact the author of this manuscript for more information regarding qualitative responses.
DATE: March 5, 2012

TO: Anna Hawley, B.A.
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [282534-4] The Roles of Spirituality and Sexuality in Response to Romantic Breakup
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: March 5, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE: November 6, 2012
REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll a total of 596 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on November 6, 2012. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Table 1

Describe characteristics of sample.

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*Descriptive characteristics of sample.*

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<td>Co-initiated</td>
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<td>Some of the time</td>
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<td>Most or all the time</td>
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Table 1 (continued)

*Descriptive characteristics of sample.*

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<td>Very unfaithful</td>
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<td>Subjective hurt due to infidelity (range 1-7)</td>
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<td>1.34</td>
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</table>

| Complete commitment                                  |     |     |     |
| Yes                                                 | 82.6|     |     |
| No/neutral                                          | 17.4|     |     |

| Belief would marry                                   |     |     |     |
| Somewhat to very certain                             | 40.5|     |     |
| Neutral to very uncertain                            | 59.5|     |     |

*This item was excluded from the final index of sexual intimacy.*
Table 2

Factor analysis of secular coping items.

Please contact the author of this manuscript for more information.
THE ROLES OF SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

Table 3

*Descriptive data on key constructs.*

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<tr>
<th>Key Construct (# of items, possible range)</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
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THE ROLES OF SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

Table 4

*Preliminary Analyses: Bivariate correlations of religious constructs.*

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<th>- R/S COPE</th>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001*
### Table 5

**Preliminary Analyses: Bivariate correlations of non-religious constructs.**

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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
## Table 6

*Bivariate correlations: Non-religious constructs by religious constructs.*

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<th>Biblical Conservatism</th>
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<th>Positive R/S Coping</th>
<th>Negative R/S Coping</th>
<th>Spiritual Growth</th>
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<td>.43***</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
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<td>-.23***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.19**</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
THE ROLES OF SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

Table 7

*Contributions of sacred loss & desecration appraisals predicting negative post-breakup adjustment, controlling for number of months since breakup and global religiousness.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>Global Religiousness</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
Table 8

**Contributions of sacred loss & desecration appraisals predicting positive post-breakup adjustment, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th>Spiritual Growth</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year- college</td>
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<td>3.09</td>
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<td>.38</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>6.76**</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
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* p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 9

*Contributions of positive R/S coping predicting post-breakup adjustment, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.*

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<th>Subjective Distress</th>
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<th>Spiritual Growth</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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* p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
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Table 10

Contributions of negative R/S coping predicting post-breakup adjustment, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.

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<td>Global Religiousness</td>
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* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
Table 11

Unique contributions of positive R/S coping predicting post-breakup adjustment above positive secular coping, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.

<table>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001*
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Table 12

*Unique contributions of negative R/S coping predicting post-breakup adjustment above negative secular coping, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.*

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<th>Spiritual Growth</th>
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* p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
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Table 13

Contributions of sacred loss & desecration appraisals predicting positive and negative R/S coping, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.

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<td>.02</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>58.68***</td>
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<td>.44***</td>
<td>58.68***</td>
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</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
### Table 14

*Religious coping methods as mediators of links between sacred loss & desecration and post-breakup adjustment, controlling for relevant demographics and global religiousness.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path (see figure 1)</th>
<th>Subjective Distress (Controlled for Global Religiousness and Number of months since breakup)</th>
<th>Posttraumatic Growth (Controlled for Global Religiousness)</th>
<th>Spiritual Growth (Controlled for Global Religiousness, Year in college, and Race)</th>
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<td>Path a: 2 Negative R/S Coping</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>7.43***</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path b: 2 Negative R/S Coping</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Path c:</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>5.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path c':</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>5.25***</td>
</tr>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>(-.05, .08)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Path axb Total: 2 Negative R/S Coping</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>(-.06, .06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path axb Total Pairwise Comparisons of Mediators:</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>(-.09, .09)</td>
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* p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001
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Table 15

*Contributions of certainty of belief that participant would marry their ex-partner predicting sacred loss/desecration appraisals, controlling for race and global religiousness.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Sacred Loss &amp; Desecration</th>
<th>Unstand. B</th>
<th>Std. Error B</th>
<th>Stand. B</th>
<th>R² Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
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<td>11.75***</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 16

Representative quotations for positive R/S coping methods reported by participants.

Please contact the author of this manuscript for more information regarding qualitative responses.
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Table 17

*Representative quotations for negative R/S coping methods reported by participants.*

Please contact the author of this manuscript for more information regarding qualitative responses.
Figure 1

Model of R/S coping as a mediator of links between sacred loss & desecration appraisals and post-breakup adjustment.

Legend:

- $a$ = path from independent variable to mediators
- $b$ = path from mediators to dependent variable
- $c'$ = direct path from independent to dependent variable (excluding what is accounted for by the mediators)
- $c$ = total effect of independent variable on dependent variable (including what is accounted for by the mediators)