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CHAPTER 31

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HEAVEN ON EARTH:
BENEFICIAL EFFECTS
OF SANCTIFICATION
FOR INDIVIDUAL AND
INTERPERSONAL
WELL-BEING

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SCIENTIFIC evidence that religion and spirituality facilitates well-being is proliferating and becoming more sophisticated (Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Pargament, Exline, & Jones, in press; Pargament, Mahoney, & Shafranske, in press). Researchers have gone beyond predicting well-being with a few general questions about religiousness, such as type of religious affiliation or attendance at services. Of particular interest to positive psychology, scientists have begun to tie constructs that have been rooted historically in theological systems of meaning and promoted by diverse faith communities, such as virtues, to personal and relational happiness. This handbook, for example, highlights recent scientific evidence on the benefits of forgiveness, compassionate love, and gratitude. Yet laudable virtues may be tied only loosely, or not at all, to religion or spirituality. For example, virtuous conduct may be readily evident in the lives of individuals who consider themselves "neither religious nor spiritual." This raises the question as to whether we can identify constructs that are fundamentally spiritual in substance and that function to promote individual and interpersonal well-being. In this chapter, we identify and discuss one such construct, sanctification, which refers to perceiving an aspect of life as having divine significance and character.

We start with our approach to defining spirituality and sanctification. We then discuss ways people may come to view an aspect of life as sanctified. Next we highlight evidence that sanctification enhances and is, in turn, enhanced by positive psychosocial functioning. This evidence comes from studies on the sanctification of strivings, marriage, marital and

non-marital sexuality, parenting, work, the body, and nature. We close by discussing the paradoxical darker side of sanctification, which can be seen when people are challenged to radically alter their perceptions about a sacred aspect of life.

SANCTIFICATION: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION

The construct of sanctification grows out of our definition of spirituality as "the search for the sacred" (Pargament, 2007; Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). "The search" component refers to three dynamic and recursive stages of discovering, maintaining, and transforming one's experience of the sacred across the life span. Discovery refers to a proactive process of developing an understanding of what the sacred is and how the sacred operates. Maintenance involves seeking ways to conserve one's understanding and experience of the sacred during the ups and downs of daily life. Transformation refers to fundamentally altering one's experience of the sacred, typically prompted by life events that deeply challenge one's basic assumptions about the sacred. In our view, "the sacred" centrally involves perceptions of the divine, God or transcendent reality, but may extend to any aspect of life that takes on divine character and significance by virtue of its association with divinity (Mahoney, Pargament, & DeMaris, 2009; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Thus, as seen in Fig. 31.1, "the sacred" consists of a core that involves individuals' perceptions of the divine, God or transcendent reality and a ring that holds different constellations of sacred objects across different individuals.

Defining sanctification

Considerable research has addressed how people construe and relate to the core of the sacred (Pargmant, 2007). For example, some people speak of having a personal relationship with an external deity who has well-delineated features. Other people speak of experiencing profound connections to a spark of divinity within the self or to depersonalized supernatural forces that permeate life. People also travel along diverse cognitive and behavioral pathways—from the solitary exploration to engagement in religious social networks—to foster their felt connections to the divine, within and outside the self. Further, people often turn to the divine to cope in times of trouble (Pargament, 1997).

In our view, however, the sacred can extend beyond an understanding of the divine to virtually any aspect of seemingly mundane life. As Durkheim (1915) wrote: "By sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called gods or spirits; a rock, a tree, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything can be sacred" (p. 52). We use the term "sanctification" to refer to the process by which people appraise an aspect of life as having divine[1] character and significance (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). It is important

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[1] In our initial study on sanctification of marriage, we defined sanctification as perceiving as aspect of life as having *spiritual* character and significance, but we subsequently replaced the word "spiritual" with "divine." We have initiated a distinct line of research on perceiving as aspect of life as possessing overtly negative spiritual qualities (e.g., unholy, demonic, or cursed).
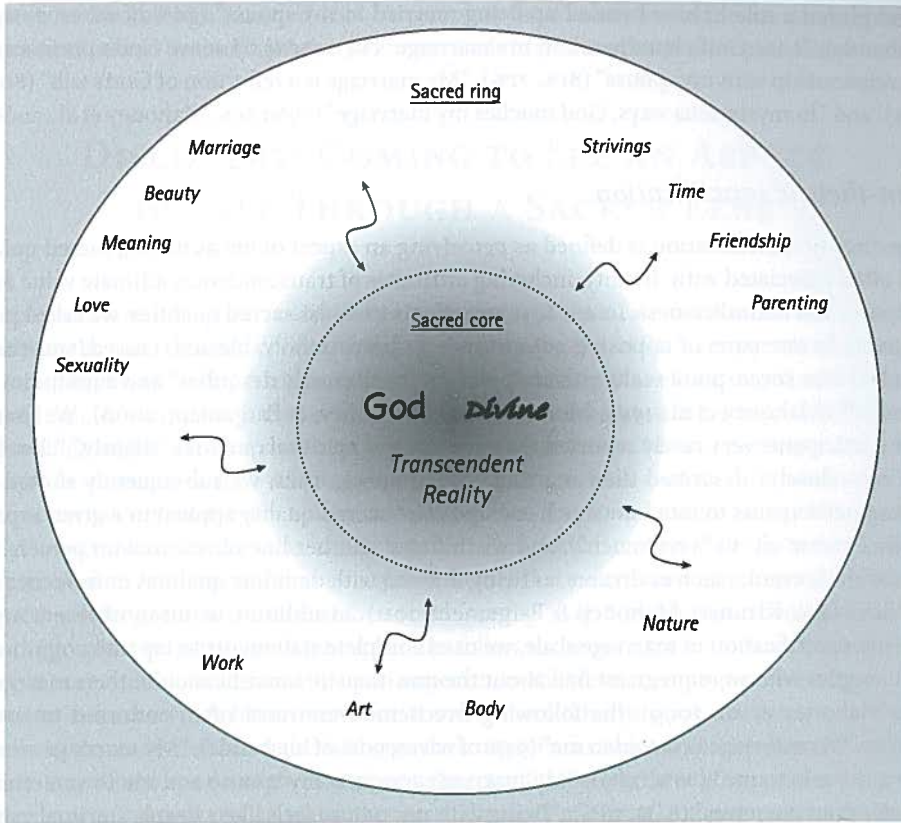
FIG. 31.1 The sacred encompasses a core and a ring.

to note that our concept of "sanctification" differs from theological meanings that vary across religious traditions. For example, from a Christian vantage point, sanctification is an inherently mysterious process through which God transforms profane objects into sacred entities. In contrast, our definition of sanctification is "psychospiritual," not theological, in nature. It is spiritual because of its point of reference, the sacred. It is psychological because it: (1) focuses on human perceptions of the sacred, and (2) is studied with social scientific methods.

Theistic sanctification

To operationalize sanctification for scientific research, we differentiate between theistic and non-theistic forms of sanctification. Theistic sanctification is defined as appraising an aspect of life as a manifestation of one's images, beliefs, or experiences of God. This is illustrated by the five items that 178 couples drawn from mid-sized community in the Midwest who were pregnant with their first child most often said applied to their marriage to some degree[2]:

[2] Lichter and Carmalt (2009) slightly modified five items from a 14-item Manifestation of God in Marriage subscale from Mahoney et al. (1999) to assess the sanctification of marriage (personal communication,

"God played a role in how I ended up being married to my spouse" (86% of wives; 79% of husbands); "I see God's handiwork in my marriage" (84%, 74%); "I sense God's presence in my relationship with my spouse" (81%, 71%), "My marriage is a reflection of God's will" (80%; 72%), and "In mysterious ways, God touches my marriage" (79%; 74%; Mahoney et al., 2009).

Non-theistic sanctification

Non-theistic sanctification is defined as perceiving an aspect of life as having sacred qualities often associated with divinity, including attributes of transcendence, ultimate value and purpose, and boundlessness. In our first two efforts to assess sacred qualities, we asked participants to rate pairs of opposing adjectives (e.g., holy–unholy, blessed–cursed, spiritual–secular) on a seven-point scale with endpoints of "very closely describes" and a midpoint of "neutral" (Mahoney et al., 1999; Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006). We found that participants very rarely reported that the negative spiritual qualities "slightly," "closely," or "very closely" described their marriage or parenting. Thus, we subsequently shifted to asking participants to rate how much each positive sacred quality applied to a given aspect of life ("not at all" to "very much"), and we initiated another line of research on perceiving stressful life events, such as divorce, as being imbued with demonic qualities or influence by the devil (e.g., Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). In addition, in our most recent non-theistic sanctification of marriage scale, we used complete statements to tap into cognitions that couples who were pregnant had about the non-theistic sanctification of their marriage (see Mahoney et al., 2009); the following five items were most often endorsed to some degree: "My marriage is sacred to me" (93% of wives; 90% of husbands); "My marriage seems like a miracle to me" (88%, 73%), "My marriage connects my spouse and me to something greater than ourselves" (84%, 78%), "Being with my spouse feels like a deeply spiritual experience" (74%; 63%), and "This marriage is part of a larger spiritual plan" (75%; 70%).

While sanctification can occur theistically and/or non-theistically, neither perception appears to be unusual or outdated, at least in the USA. The prevalence rates just cited involved couples drawn from a Midwestern community who in 2005 were, on average, 28 years old, and the wives' frequency of religious attendance was similar to a nationally representative sample of married, first-time pregnant couples (Mahoney et al., 2009). Further, in a 2006 survey of married Americans, the average rating of five sanctification of marriage items fell at 2.8 on a scale with "4" equal to "strongly agree" and "1" equal to "strongly disagree" (Litcher & Carmalt, 2009). Such perceptions also apply to non-martial relationships as seen in 2006 national survey where 55% of US adults involved in a steady dating relationship and cohabiting "strongly agreed" that "God is at the center of my relationship" (Henderson, Ellison, & Glenn, 2010). In another national survey, most Americans said they often or very often saw God's presence in life (75%), saw evidence of God in nature in creation (78%), sensed that their spirit was part of God's spirit (68%), and sensed God's presence moving in their relationships with others (56%; Pargament, 2007, p. 38). Other community-based studies on sanctification likewise indicate that people often view various

July 18, 2009). Although these authors refer to the construct as "religious centrality, i.e., the importance of religion to the marital relationship" (p. 174), we use "sanctification of marriage" to refer their findings with Lichter's agreement. A chart of various theistic sanctification items used across studies can be found at http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/psych/page31068.html, along with additional suggestions for how to assess sanctification in different domains.

aspects of life through a sacred lens. A complete list of samples and items used to assess sanctification can be found at http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/psych/spirituality/

DISCOVERY: COMING TO SEE AN ASPECT OF LIFE THROUGH A SACRED LENS

People vary in which aspects of life they view as having a divine dimension. For instance, in a study on the sanctification of life strivings, diverse endeavors in life were perceived as sacred to some degree, including family relationships (e.g., working at one's marriage), self-development (e.g., learning), work and money (e.g., being successful at work), physical health (e.g., exercising), and existential concerns (e.g., seeking inner peace; Mahoney, Pargament, et al., 2005). This sample wasn't religiously atypical for the US; it consisted of adults from a Midwestern community who, as a group, showed the same range and frequency of attending religious services as Americans as a group. What might account for differences in spiritual acuity? To date, little research has focused on factors that contribute to coming to see various objects as falling within the ring of the sacred (see Fig. 31.1). Nevertheless, theological literature highlights two pathways that people often follow to discover the sacred in daily life. First, people may stumble unexpectedly upon experiences that lead them to perceive sacred phenomena as forces which have, in essence, come to them (Hardy, 1979). They may experience the invisible made visible, a light shed on a dark mystery, a revelation of the divine. Similarly, Eliade (1957/1959) speaks of the sacred revealing itself to people through a particular kind of experience, a "hierophany," in which the sacred dimension "erupts" into the world. Such spiritual awakenings could happen outside the context of organized religion and be triggered by significant or unexpected life events that could be attributed to divine forces. Likely examples include falling in love unexpectedly, giving birth or adopting a child, or stumbling upon a new career path. Second, people may perceive sacred matters as something they themselves and their social networks, especially religious communities, have had a hand in finding and nurturing. In this vein, Eliade (1957/1959) goes on to note that "by reactualizing sacred history, by imitating divine behavior, man puts and keeps himself close to the gods – that is, in the real and the significant" (p. 202). Some may wonder if the origin of what is sacred lies in God or the human mind, individually or collectively. This ultimate theological question falls beyond the grasp of science. We cannot determine whether God "makes sacred" or people do. We can, however, draw on scientific theories and methods to identify measurable factors that facilitate people's discovery of what is sacred, both "encountered" and "constructed" (Paden, 1992).

Presumably, a variety of behavioral, emotional, and social experiences help to impart divine meaning and significance to particular aspects of life. For example, in Christian and Jewish wedding rituals, the couple's union is sanctified by verbal (e.g., vows, prayers) and non-verbal behaviors (e.g., exchange blessed rings) in a social context (e.g., clergy, family, friends) that can elicit strong emotions (e.g., joy, trepidation). Thus, while viewing an aspect of life through a sacred lens may be a cognitive process, certain religious or spiritual experiences may elicit and strengthen such beliefs. In one qualitative study, religious couples reported that the wedding ceremony itself, particularly the vows, intensified the spouses' sense that God was an active third party in their marriage (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008).

In addition, an experimental study found that the assigned behavioral task to pray for a romantic partner's well-being caused increases over time in the perception that the relationship was sanctified (Fincham, Lambert, & Beach, 2010). We have also identified spiritual emotions and behaviors centered on marriage as two factors that reciprocally shape the cognitive appraisal of marriage as sacred, beyond the influence of religious attendance, prayer, or Biblical conservatism (Mahoney et al., 2009). Of course, the overall salience of religion or spirituality in one's life may feed into sanctification. In this vein, spouses who generally rate themselves as more "religious" or "spiritual," and engage in more private (e.g., prayer) and public (e.g., religious attendance) religious activities are more likely to view their marriage as sanctified (DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010; Litcher & Carmalt, 2008; Mahoney et al., 1999, 2009). Studies of other domains likewise show that higher general religiousness and spirituality are modestly correlated with higher sanctification ratings (e.g., Mahoney, Carels, et al., 2005, Mahoney, Pargament, et al., 2005; Walker, Jones, Wuensch, Aziz, & Cope, 2008).

MAINTENANCE: SUSTAINING RECIPROCITY BETWEEN A SACRED ASPECT OF LIFE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL BENEFITS

Once individuals develop the belief that an aspect of life is connected to God or imbued with sacred qualities, they are likely to strive to maintain its sacred status. Such efforts may include investing disproportional time and energy in the domain, and acting to preserve and protect the domain in coping with the ups and downs of daily life. In turn, people are likely to report better functioning in that domain and view this area of life as a source of personal strength and self-efficacy. Positive psychosocial functioning in a domain may, in turn, reinforce the belief that a given aspect of life is part of the sacred realm. We now summarize evidence that sanctification is associated with psychosocial benefits. Due to space constraints, we highlight selective findings from the 26 studies on sanctification we located.

Sanctification of strivings

Within a sample of Midwestern adults whose general religiousness was similar to other Americans, greater sanctification of personal strivings was linked to greater investment of psychological and pragmatic resources that could sustain the pursuit of strivings (Mahoney, Pargament, et al., 2005). This included greater perceived importance of, commitment to, longevity of, social support for, confidence about, and internal locus of control attached to strivings. People also devoted more time and energy to their most versus least sanctified strivings based on two phone calls assessing their behaviors in the past 24 hours. Higher sanctification was also tied to greater joy and meaning derived from pursuit of sacred strivings. Yet sanctification was not linked to greater life satisfaction, lower depression, and better physical health. The overall pattern of findings was consistent with a core message found in many world religions, namely that people should move beyond goals that are personally gratifying to pursue goals that may involve sacrifice and effort. Therefore, individuals may

persist in and find fulfillment in strivings they believe have transcendent purposes, even if this sometimes exposes them to stress that triggers sadness, compromises physical health, and fosters difficult life circumstances. At other times, such costs may be offset by the self-enhancing benefits tied to strivings that are believed to be sacred. Paradoxically, then, religion's answer to the question of what makes life goals meaningful, valuable, and purposeful may not necessarily guarantee personal satisfaction and well-being.

Sanctification of marriage and couples' relationships

Three qualitative studies suggest that perceptions of a romantic union as sacred can enhance the quality of that relationship. For example, most highly religious couples in long-term marriages reported that God played an influential and constructive role in their marriage, either directly or indirectly via other people's actions (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Further, most couples from a southern US state who obtained a covenant marriage license indicated their non-egalitarian gender roles in marriage reflected God's intentions, and the sacred structure of their traditional roles facilitated communication and follow-through on their respective marital responsibilities (Baker, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2009). Similarly, nearly all same-sex couples from the mid-South region of the US saw their union as being imbued with divine significance and indicated this enhanced their communication dynamics and long-term commitment (Rostosky, Riggle, Brodnicki, & Olson 2008).

Four rigorous quantitative studies also help substantiate that sanctification is tied to relational benefits for couples. In a national survey, higher sanctification of marriage by both spouses, and especially husband–wife similarity in sanctification, predicted greater marital satisfaction and commitment, after controlling for demographic variables, general religiousness of spouses, and unmeasured characteristics of the couples' relationship (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Similar findings emerged using a community sample of Midwestern couples where higher sanctification by one or both spouses were associated with less marital conflict and dysfunctional communication strategies in (Mahoney et al., 1999). In addition, in a community sample of married Midwestern couples pregnant with their first child, sanctification of marriage neutralized the tendency for perceived unfairness between spouses to elicit marital dissatisfaction, marital conflict or personal anxiety (DeMaris et al., 2010). This buffering of the negative effects of perceived inequity on relational and personal adjustment was especially strong for wives who felt they were receiving more benefits from husbands than they were giving to husbands. Fourth, in a national sample of adults in a cohabiting or steady dating relationship, greater belief that God was at the center of the relationship was tied to greater relationship satisfaction (Henderson et al., 2010); this link persisted after controlling for acts of kindness, consideration, and criticism between partners and demographic characteristics. Overall, sanctification of marriage has been tied to greater relational happiness and positive relationship processes for couples involved, on average, in organized religion about as much as other American couples.

Sanctification of marital and non-marital sexuality

Consistent with long-standing religious prohibitions against adultery, two qualitative studies with highly religious couples suggest that greater sanctification of marriage may strengthen commitment to sexual fidelity. For instance, couples reported that certain religious beliefs

and practices facilitated viewing their marriage as sacred and connected to God's purposes which improved marital quality; higher marital quality, in turn, promoted sexual fidelity (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007). A related study with this sample found that couples believed they were more committed to each other because they had engaged in past (e.g., exchanging vows in religious wedding ceremony) and ongoing spiritual experiences (e.g., worship services) that reminded them of the sanctity of their union (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). These observations from qualitative interviews dovetail with several national surveys where higher religious attendance predicted lower levels of infidelity (Mahoney, 2010). Further, using a rigorous experimental design with undergraduates, Fincham et al. (2010) found that praying for romantic partner's well-being increased perceptions of their intimate relationship as sacred. Further, these increases in the sanctification of the relationship accounted for the causal links that were found between praying for their partner and decreased sexual infidelity, in thought or action, over time. These initial studies suggest that perceiving marriage or an intimate relationship is sacred can discourage sexual infidelity.

Remarkably, almost no controlled research exists on whether spirituality may enhance marital sexuality, not merely suppress extramarital affairs (Hernandez, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2011). Three recent studies on the sanctification of marital sexuality are beginning to fill gaps in understanding the intersection of spirituality, sex, and marriage. In a Midwestern community sample of newlyweds, greater sanctification of marital sexuality related strongly to greater sexual satisfaction, sexual intimacy, marital satisfaction, and spiritual intimacy after controlling for demographic variables, frequency of religious attendance and prayer, and Biblical conservatism (Hernandez et al., 2011). Even more striking, greater sanctification of sexuality predicted more frequent sexual intercourse, and greater sexual and marital satisfaction 1 year later after accounting for initial levels of marital satisfaction (Hernandez & Mahoney, 2009). In an additional study, greater sanctification of marital sexuality has been tied to greater sexual satisfaction for married individuals, over and above the role of personality traits and feelings of shame, guilt or pride about sex (Murray-Swank & Brelsford, 2009). Further, manifestation of God in marital sexuality is tied to lower sexual dysfunction, especially for spouses who endorse conservative views of the Bible.

The salutary outcomes associated with sacred sex for married couples may also extend to undergraduates involved in premarital relationships that they perceive as loving (Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney 2005). Specifically, undergraduates at a state university in the Midwest who more often ascribed sacred qualities to sex with their partner reported they had more satisfying and positive feelings about their sexual relationship. Unexpectedly, undergraduates (with or without a current romantic partner) who imbued the act of sexual intercourse in a loving relationship with greater sacred qualities reported a greater likelihood of ever having sexual intercourse, more lifetime partners, more frequent intercourse in the past month, and a varied history of sexual experiences. These results stand in contrast to national surveys linking higher religious attendance to lower levels of premarital sexual activities (Murray-Swank et al., 2005). The findings indicate that while some markers of spirituality, such as religious attendance, may inhibit sexual activity, imbuing sexuality with sacred meaning may enhance a sense of sexual desire and fulfillment.

Sanctification of parenting

Descriptive accounts indicate that many new parents imbue parenthood with spiritual significance and purpose (Mahoney et al., 2009). Yet, controversy exists within and across

religious subcultures about the emphasis parents should place on fostering children's obedience versus autonomy (for review, see Mahoney, 2010). Likewise, debate exists within religious circles about the blend of parenting techniques that should be used to socialize children, with some subcultures advocating spanking. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that in one initial small scale study of mothers from a Midwestern community, higher sanctification of parenting translated into different patterns of parenting practices toward young children by mothers, depending on their degree of Biblical conservatism (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006). For mothers who endorsed more literal interpretations of the Bible, higher sanctification was tied to more spanking and positive interactions with their children. Such findings are consistent with national surveys that indicate parents with a conservative Christian orientation tended both to spank more and be more affectionate with young children (Mahoney, 2010). For mothers with more liberal views of the Bible, higher sanctification was tied to less spanking and did not alter relatively high levels of positive interactions with their children. For all mothers, higher sanctification of parenting related to less verbal hostility and more self-reported consistency in parenting. In another small-scale study of married Midwestern couples (Volling, Mahoney, & Rauer, 2009), higher sanctification of parenting related to greater use of positive parenting strategies by mothers and fathers (e.g., praise, induction) to elicit young children's moral conduct. Also, positive parenting techniques were especially likely to predict children's conscience development when fathers viewed parenting as connected to God. This implies that parents who view parenting as a sacred mission may be more motivated to use positive parenting strategies to instill in their children a sense of personal responsibility for their actions. Finally, in a sample of parents from a low-income, urban setting, sanctification of parenting related to greater investment in parenting, but not parenting satisfaction or efficacy, after controlling for demographics and child problems (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006). Parents who believed parenting was a sacred task were also more likely to report spiritual struggles, such as feeling punished or abandoned by God when faced with parenting problems, and such spiritual struggles predicted more parental disengagement. These interesting results hint at the possible risks of sanctification when situations arise that conflict with expectations that people should not experience failure in a more sacred aspect of life (see more later in this chapter).

Sanctification of work

For centuries, the word "calling" has been understood in Western religious contexts as being "'called' by God to do morally and socially significant work (Steger, Pickering, Shin & Dik, 2010). Increasingly, however, the term "calling' is losing its spiritual connotation in scientific circles and is used simply to refer to deriving a sense of personal fulfillment and meaning from work (Steger et al., 2010). Yet studies that have directly assessed whether people view work as a spiritual endeavor highlight the possible benefits of such perceptions. For example, Walker et al. (2008) found that greater sanctification of work by full-time employees holding a variety of jobs correlated with greater job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment, and lower intention to leave the job after controlling for demographics and global religiousness. Carroll (in press) replicated these findings using a large sample of male and female educators working in religiously affiliated middle and secondary schools. Further, in a sample of 200 working mothers with a post-college degree who were recruited from Christian organizations, greater sanctification of work related to greater satisfaction with

work, subjective well-being and positive mood, and less internal conflict about balancing work and parenting roles, net of demographic factors and general levels of religiousness. Such findings echo those from a qualitative study on the sanctification of one's career among evangelical Christian, female professors and mothers; those who saw their career as a spiritual enterprise and part of a greater plan reported less guilt and less tension about juggling the multiple roles of wife, mother, and professional because both their paid and unpaid work roles were imbued with sacred purposes (Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005). Hopefully, more research will be done to reveal the benefits and drawbacks of having work that men and women perform in and out of the home infused with spiritual significance (Hernandez & Mahoney, in press).

Sanctification of the material world: the body and nature

Broadly speaking, conflicting theological views exist as to whether the realm of the body and earth has equal spiritual status with the realm of spirit and heaven. For instance, Christians have hotly debated whether people's physical bodies should be eschewed as a source of sin or celebrated as a conduit of the Holy Spirit (Mahoney, Carels, et al., 2005). Theological debates have also persisted about the intersection of spirituality and nature (Tarakeshwar, Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2001). Three published studies shed initial light on the psychosocial implications of imbuing the material world with divine significance.

Regarding the physical body, greater sanctification of one's body by college students at a Midwestern state university related to more health-protective behaviors (eat sensibly, get enough sleep, wear a seat belt, greater satisfaction with one's body) and disapproval of illicit drug use, even after controlling for demographics and general religiousness (Mahoney, Carels, et al., 2005). In elderly individuals from the Midwest, greater sanctification of the body related to greater body satisfaction for men, but not women, after taking into account the centrality of religion in one's life (Boyatzis & Homan, 2009). Yet, in both studies, significant ties between many other health-related factors and sanctification disappeared after controlling for overall general religiousness (e.g., religious attendance). This suggests that certain religious beliefs centered on the body may attenuate or intensify the impact of sanctification of the body on health outcomes due to differing perceptions of God's mandates about the care of one's physical body. With regard to nature, a national survey of members, elders, and clergy affiliated with the Presbyterian Church found that a stronger belief in the sanctification of nature was associated with greater pro-environmental beliefs and willingness to invest personal funds in the environment (Tarakeshwar et al., 2001). These results are consistent with theological teachings that nature itself is a transcendent and holy object, and merits reverence and care because it is a creation of God. Conversely, greater Biblical conservatism was associated with lower care for the environment, a finding consistent with the theological stance that humans have dominion over the earth and securing a place in heaven takes precedence over caring for the environment. These contrasting findings again suggest that viewing the material world as sacred may have different psychosocial implications based on varying spiritual ideals that people hold about how humans should relate to nature, including various beliefs about God's will.

TRANSFORMATION: DEALING WITH FUNDAMENTAL
THREATS TO A SACRED ASPECT OF LIFE

It is important to recognize that perceiving an aspect of life as sacred can carry potential psychosocial risks, not merely benefits. This paradoxical side of sanctification emerges when negative life events challenge people to relinquish a sacred object. In an initial study on this topic, adults from a Midwestern region indicated the extent to which a traumatic event within the past 2 years (e.g., serious illness, accident, natural disaster, divorce) led to a perceived loss (i.e., sacred loss) or violation (i.e., desecration) of a sanctified aspect of life (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2007). Higher sacred loss and desecration both related to more intrusive, distressing thoughts about the event. In addition, sacred loss was related to greater depression whereas desecration tied to greater anger. Thus, people seem to experience more unhappiness when a sacred object is harmed. Yet, the more that a traumatic event was experienced as a sacred loss, the more people also reported personal and spiritual growth due to the trauma. This implies that letting go of a sacred object may paradoxically spur the discovery of new sacred objects as people rework their constellation of sanctified objects and redefine the strivings that they hold sacred. On the other hand, if someone or something is perceived as intentionally injuring a sacred object, these perceptions seem to elicit added anger toward the source of the threat. Along these lines, when Christians view Jews (Pargament, McConnell, Mahoney, & Silberman, 2007) or Muslims (Raiya, Pargament, Mahoney & Trevino, 2008) as desecrating their faith tradition, they are more likely to report anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim attitudes, respectively. Further, recent research indicates that perceptions of sacred loss and desecration almost always unfold concurrently for some life events, such as one's own divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009) or parental divorce (Warner, Mahoney, & Krumrei, 2009). Moreover, these negative spiritual interpretations of divorce added both to the psychological distress and spiritual growth that family members experienced in trying to come to terms with the event. Taken together, these findings suggest that when objects fall from their sacred pedestals, people are challenged to transform their understanding of what aspects of life are imbued with divine significance.

SUMMARY

Emerging research on sanctification reveals that people often find the sacred within the inner workings of their day-to-day lives. Indeed, virtually any aspect of life could be perceived as a manifestation of God's presence (theistic sanctification) or imbued with sacred qualities independent of a belief in a deity (non-theistic sanctification). For instance, researchers have discovered that people commonly view major life strivings, marriages, sexuality, parenting, careers, bodies, and nature through a sacred lens. Such perceptions fit well with teachings found in most religious traditions that God is concerned with earthly as well as heavenly matters, and that seemingly profane matters can take on a sacred aura.

Hopefully, empirical work will be extended on viewing other domains through a sacred lens, such as the sanctification of art, beauty, science, love, or friendship (see Cohen, Gruber, & Keltner, 2010).

Interpreting an aspect of life as possessing a sacred dimension is reciprocally tied to several benefits, including: (1) greater commitment to and investment in that aspect of life; (2) stronger efforts to preserve and protect what has been sanctified; (3) greater access to resources for strength, support, and sustenance; and (4) greater satisfaction and happiness derived from that realm (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Examining possible links between sanctification and virtues, such as hope, gratitude, and forgiveness is another promising avenue for psychologists interested in well-being and spirituality. Not surprisingly, the benefits associated with sanctification seem to raise the costs when a sanctified object is lost or violated. Paradoxically, however, situations that challenge people to let go of broken sacred vessels may also spur personal and spiritual growth as they seek alternative sacred objects. In sum, emerging research suggests that the study of sanctification offers one fruitful, direct approach to understanding the benefits and risks of integrating spirituality into daily life.

Acknowledgments

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