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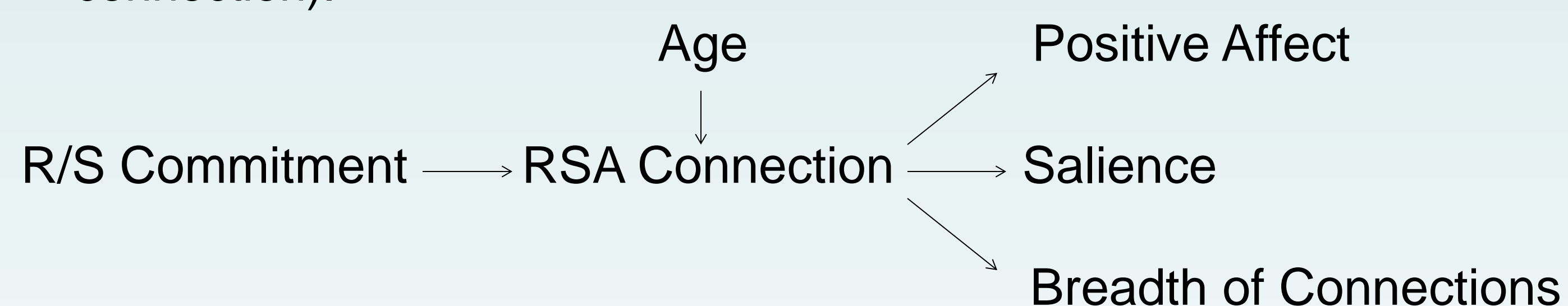
# “Adoption Confirms that God is in my Life”: Links between Religious/Spiritual Commitment and Feelings about Adoption in Adolescents

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## Purpose

- Some adolescents in confidential adoptions have incomplete adoption stories because they have little or no information about their birth parents and the reasons why they were placed for adoption. Despite these limitations however, it is possible that religion/spirituality can help them find meaning in their adoption, and provide them with motivation to integrate their adoption into their overall identity.
- Religion/spirituality has been shown to help many people find meaning and purpose in their lives (Kashdan & Nezlek, 2012), as well as offer support in the face of adversity, and provide a way to positively reframe distressing life events (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Pollner, 1989).
- It is hypothesized that adoptees with higher levels of religious/spiritual (R/S) commitment will be more inclined to create an adoption story that is influenced by their religious/spiritual beliefs (such as viewing adoption as a part of God's plan). In having an adoption story filled with religious/spiritual meaning, adoptees likely come to view their adoption as an important part of who they are (“salience”), feel more positive about being adopted (“positive affect”), and feel more comfortable talking about their adoption with others (“breadth of connections”); all of which will help to promote the integration of adoption into one’s overall identity.
- In this study, the influence that adoptees’ R/S commitment has upon their adoption story will be described by the connection adoptees perceive between their religion/spirituality and their adoption (RSA connection).



## Methods

- The Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP) is a longitudinal study, which began in the mid-1980’s, that examines post-adoption contact arrangements in adoptive families (Grotevant et al., 2007). This study will be using a sample of 41 adoptees from confidential adoptions, from the second wave of MTARP. The sample consists of 19 males and 22 females, ranging in age from 13 to 20.
- Thirty-five of the 41 adoptees self-identified as belonging to a particular religion, including Christianity (n=30), Judaism (n=3), Islam (n=1), and Wicca (n=1).
- Coding data will be used from the adoptee interviews (MTARP Wave 2) that measure variables of positive affect about adoption, salience of adoptive identity, and breadth of relationship connections. Data from the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (Benson, Sharma & Roehlkepartian, 1994) will also be used to measure positive affect about adoption.

## Rating Scales

### Religious/Spiritual Commitment Rating Scale

- The R/S commitment rating scale was constructed as a scoring system, in which any items mentioned by the adoptee in the interview that were related to their R/S commitment were given a score of 1. Items with a frequency (e.g. church attendance) were scored from 0 (no attendance) to 1.5 (once or more a week).
- In addition, each item was identified with a domain number that described a particular aspect of R/S commitment.

**Q: How would you describe your personal views about spirituality and religion now?**

R: Right now, I feel it’s a very important part of my life (3). I always try and remember to pray or thank God for what he’s given me (5).

Score: 2

### Religion/Spirituality and Adoption Connection Rating Scale

- The authors developed a rating scale that measures the connection adoptees perceive between their religion/spirituality and their adoption, based on whether or not the adoptee states a connection between the two variables. The responses were scored 0 (no connection), 0.5 (implicit or unclear connection), and 1 (explicit and clear connection).

**Q: I would like to find out how your being an adopted person relates to your religion or spirituality?**

R: Basically, I think being adopted has strengthened my dependence on God, and how I feel towards Him, and the fact that without His divine intervention, I guess you could call it, I wouldn’t be in the family I am in today.

Score: 1

## Results

- Correlational Analyses were performed to test the hypotheses. R/S commitment was positively correlated with RSA Connection,  $r = .345$ ,  $n = 41$ ,  $p = .027$ ; positive affect of one’s adoption (coded from the adoptive identity interview),  $r = .353$ ,  $n = 39$ ,  $p = .027$ , and (measured by the Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire),  $r = .436$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p = .006$ ; salience of adoptive identity,  $r = .395$ ,  $n = 39$ ,  $p = .013$ ; and breadth of relationship connections,  $r = .352$ ,  $n = 39$ ,  $p = .028$ .
- RSA connection was not significantly correlated with any of the variables for adoptive identity, but all correlations were in the predicted direction. It was found that 21 of the 41 adoptees in the sample perceived no connection between their religion/spirituality and their adoption.
- The age of the adolescent adoptee was thought to be positively correlated with RSA connection, but there was no correlation found between these two variables,  $r = -.028$ ,  $n = 41$ ,  $p = .861$

### Religious/Spiritual Commitment and Adoptive Identity

	Religious / Spiritual (R/S) Commitment	R/S and Adoption Connection Interview Rating
R/S and Adoption Interview Rating	.345*	1.0
Positive Affect (interview rating)	.353*	.261
Positive Affect (self-report ADQ)	.436**	.314
Salience of Adoptive Identity	.395*	.307
Breadth of Connections	.352*	.175
Age	-.148	-.028

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  N’s range from 36 to 41

### R/S Commitment Domains in Adoptee Interview

Domains	Number of Items (Out of 300)	% of Total Items
1. Daily Spiritual Experience	7	2.3%
2. R/S Coping	4	1.3%
3. Meaning	5	1.6%
4. Beliefs	137	45.6%
5. Private R/S Practice	15	5%
6. Organizational Religiousness	124	41.3%
7. R/S Direction	2	0.6%
8. Other	6	2%

## Discussion

- The findings from the correlational analyses are noteworthy in that they show that adoptees’ R/S commitment is associated with A) RSA connection, B) positive affect about adoption, C) salience of adoptive identity, and D) breadth of relationship connections.
- The accuracy of the RSA connection scale as well as the sample size used in this study are two factors which might have affected the results for determining the possible mediating effects of RSA connection.
- Although the RSA connection interview questions asked about the relationship between adoptees’ religion/spirituality and their adoption, they did not prompt the adoptee to consider how their R/S commitment might influence their adoption story.
- Future studies might want to consider developing rating scales and measures that better assess how adoptees’ R/S commitment lead to the positive outcomes found in this study.
- Additionally, a next step in future research would be to discover whether R/S commitment provides similar results for adoptees in open adoptions.