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# ON MAKING HUMANS HUMAN: SPIRITUALITY AND THE PROMOTION OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

RICHARD M. LERNER

AMY E. ALBERTS

PAMELA M. ANDERSON

ELIZABETH M. DOWLING

**A**rguably, spirituality and religiosity are the only mental and behavioral characteristics that are distinctly associated with human beings. For instance, characteristics of functioning, such as love, hate, language, caring, cognition, temperament, personality, and purpose, can be found or operationalized in other species. However, the commitment to ideas or institutions that transcend the self in time and place is the essence of spirituality. Reich, Oser, and Scarlett (1999), for instance, operationalize spirituality as viewing life in new and better ways, adopting some conception as transcendent or of great value, and defining oneself and one's relation to others in a manner that goes beyond provincialism or materialism to express authentic concerns about others. In turn,

the subordination of self to institutions that are believed to have relations to the divine is the essence of religiosity. Reich et al. (1999) operationalize religiosity as involving a relationship with a particular institutionalized doctrine about a supernatural power, a relationship that occurs through affiliation with an organized faith and participation in its prescribed rituals.

We believe that spirituality and religiosity may be singularly human characteristics. Nevertheless, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics that operationalize spirituality and religiosity are not present in the newborn. These characteristics *develop* across the life span. In other words, these two facets of human functioning, which together mark what is uniquely human about humans, emerge over the course of life.

Although theoretically and empirically identifiable as important influences on human development across much of the life span (e.g., Koenig & Lawson, 2004), both spirituality and religiosity, as developmental phenomena, are transformed in personal and adaptive salience and cognitive conceptualization across the course of life. This transformation is a key feature of the adolescent period.

In adolescence, spirituality is significant for the healthy, positive development of a person's sense of self—his or her identity—and for enabling identity to frame the individual's pursuit of a life path eventuating in idealized adulthood, that is, an adulthood involving mutually beneficial relations between the individual and his or her social world. We argue that such an adulthood maintains and advances humanity.

Accordingly, in this chapter we argue that spirituality may play a key role in creating in people the defining characteristics of their humanity *and* in energizing the positive development of the person at a key portion of the life span—adolescence—that is critical for ensuring both healthy individual development across the life span and the perpetuation of the species. We believe that spirituality may foster an integrated moral and civic identity within a young person and lead the individual along a path to becoming an adult contributing integratively to self, family, community, and civil society. The argument we present will be linked to data that suggest that the process of exemplary positive development among youth—a process we label as “thriving”—involves both the direct effects of spirituality on positive development and the mediation of religiosity between spirituality and thriving. We believe, and will conclude our presentation by suggesting, that the spirituality–thriving relation has significant implications for policies and programs aimed at promoting positive youth development among diverse youth.

#### THEORETICAL BASES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RELATION BETWEEN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND THRIVING AMONG YOUTH

Across the past quarter century, human developmental scientists have increasingly eschewed

both mechanistic and organismic models of individual development (Lerner, 2002), in that the splits (Overton, 1998) between nature- and nurture-based variables associated with such conceptions have proved to be theoretically limited, logically problematic, and empirically counterfactual. These models have been replaced by integrative, fused, or relational theories, conceptions that stress the mutually influential connections among all levels of the development system, ranging from genes through society, culture, the designed and natural ecology, and ultimately history (e.g., see Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Elder, 1998; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, 2002; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998; Thelen & Smith, 1998). Accordingly, in developmental systems theories, the mutual influence between the developing person and his or her complex and changing context may be represented as individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context relations.

The ideas of developmental systems theory (Lerner, 2002) are a useful frame for formulating a model of exemplary positive youth development, of thriving, and of the role of spiritual development in enhancing the adolescents' contributions to the society within which they develop. Two features of developmental systems theories are important to stress in order to understand their use for conceptualizing positive youth development: relative plasticity and developmental regulation.

The relation described within developmental systems theory of individual development to history means that change is a necessary feature of human life. However, change in individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context relations is, of course, not limitless. Interlevel relations within the human developmental system both facilitate and constrain opportunities for change. For example, change (e.g., learning a new language with native-speaker fluency in adolescence or young adulthood) is constrained both by past developments (knowledge of one's native language) and by contemporary contextual conditions (the absence or presence of opportunities to immerse oneself in a new language and culture). As a consequence, contemporary developmental systems theories stress that only relative plasticity exists across life and that the magnitude of this

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plasticity may vary across ontogeny (Baltes et al., 1998; Lerner, 1984, 2002).

Nevertheless, relative plasticity legitimates an optimistic and proactive search for characteristics of individuals and of their ecologies that, together, can be arrayed to promote positive developmental change (Birkel, Lerner, & Smyer, 1989; Fisher & Lerner, 1994; Lerner, 2002; Lerner & Hood, 1986). Accordingly, the emphasis in developmental systems theory on relative plasticity provides a foundation for an applied developmental science aimed at enhancing human development through strengthening the linkages between developing individuals and their changing family and community settings. The mutual influence between individual and context regulates the course of development; when these bidirectional influences maintain or advance the health or well-being of both components of individual  $\leftarrow \rightarrow$  context relations, they are termed adaptive developmental regulations. From an applied developmental science perspective, healthy development involves positive changes in the relation between a developing person—who is both able to contribute positively to self, family, and community and committed to doing so—and a community supporting the development of such citizens.

By our definition, a young person involved across time in such healthy, positive relations with his or her community, and on the path to an ideal adulthood, may be said to be *thriving*.

### Developmental Regulation and Moral and Civic Identity

Mutually supportive individual  $\leftarrow \rightarrow$  context relations in ontogeny reflect the phylogenetic requisites for the survival of humans and their contexts (Gould, 1977). Such relations involve the breadth of the developmental system, including brain, behavior, social relations, and the institutions of society (cf. Lerner, 2004). In other words, in human development, successful (adaptive, health-promoting) regulations at the level of individual functioning involve changing the self to support the context and altering the context to support the self. Such efforts require the individual to remain committed to contributing to the context and to possess, or to strive to develop, the skills for making such contributions.

Such a relation is the essence of adaptive developmental regulation. There are universal, structural, and cultural components of such regulations, as well as society-specific components. The universal components of the thriving process involve the *structure* of the regulatory connection between person and context. This context is composed of other people (e.g., peer groups, families) and of the institutions of society and culture. These institutions involve at least two components. There are cultural institutions, such as schools and religious institutions, and there are conceptual or ideological institutions, such as the values that exist in a society with regard to the desired features of human functioning.

A relation that subserves the maintenance and perpetuation of the developmental system is one in which the individual acts to support the institutions of society and, simultaneously, these institutions support the healthy and productive functioning and development of the individual (Elder, 1998; Ford & Lerner, 1992). In such a relation the actions of the individual on the context and the actions of the context on the individual are fused in the production of healthy outcomes for both the individual and the institutions (Elder, 1998).

As such, the key feature of the thriving process is one in which the regulation of individual  $\leftarrow \rightarrow$  context relations eventuates in positive outcomes at multiple levels of the developmental system, for example, the person, the family, and the community (Lerner, 2004). In fact, a key structural value of all societies is that individuals' regulation of their individual  $\leftarrow \rightarrow$  context relations should make positive contributions to self, family, community, and society (Elder, 1998). In all societies, then, healthy and valued (or "idealized") personhood is seen as a period, or "stage," in which such generative developmental regulation is produced (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1998; Erikson, 1959).

Ideally, then, a thriving youth will become an adult generating productive and culturally valued contributions to self, family, community, and civil society. These contributions will have an intergenerational impact. Idealized personhood maintains civil society by contributing to the current components of community, business, and civic life. It also perpetuates civil society by

imbuing these components with assets for future adaptation to historical change. *Children are these assets*. Most important, then, a key facet of idealized personhood is socialization of the members of the next generation to become active agents of civil society—as parents, teachers, mentors, and so on.

Of course, in different societies there is variation in what a person must do to manifest the structural values of productive and healthy personhood. How a person must function to manifest structurally valued regulation will vary from social and cultural setting to setting and across historical (and ecological) conditions (Elder, Modell, & Parke, 1993; Erikson, 1959). For example, in the United States regulations that support individual freedom, equity, and democracy are highly valued. In other societies it may be that regulations that support interindividually invariant belief in and obedience to religious dictums may be of superordinate value.

In all cases, however, each society will show variation within a given historical moment in what behaviors are judged as valuable in (consistent with) supporting the universal structural value of maintaining and perpetuating individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context regulations that subserve mutually beneficial individual and institutional relations (Meyer, 1988). As a consequence, then, the indicators of what an individual must manifest as he or she develops from infancy to adult personhood may vary across place and time (Elder et al., 1993). There may be variation across different societies, and across points in time within the same society, in definitions of individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context relations that comprise exemplary development, or thriving, and thus in the specific behaviors that move a young person along a life path wherein he or she will possess the functional values of society and attain structurally valued personhood.

### Thriving, Liberty, and Moral Duty

Developmentally emergent and contextually mediated successful regulations of positive individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context relations ensure that individuals will have the nurturance and support needed for healthy development. Simultaneously, such regulation provides society with people having the mental capacities and the behavioral skills—the inner and outer lives—requisite to maintain,

perpetuate, and enhance what a society defines as just, equitable, and democratic institutions (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Freund, De Stefanis, & Habermas, 2001; Lerner & Spanier, 1980).

This mutual interdependency between person and context can foster thriving.

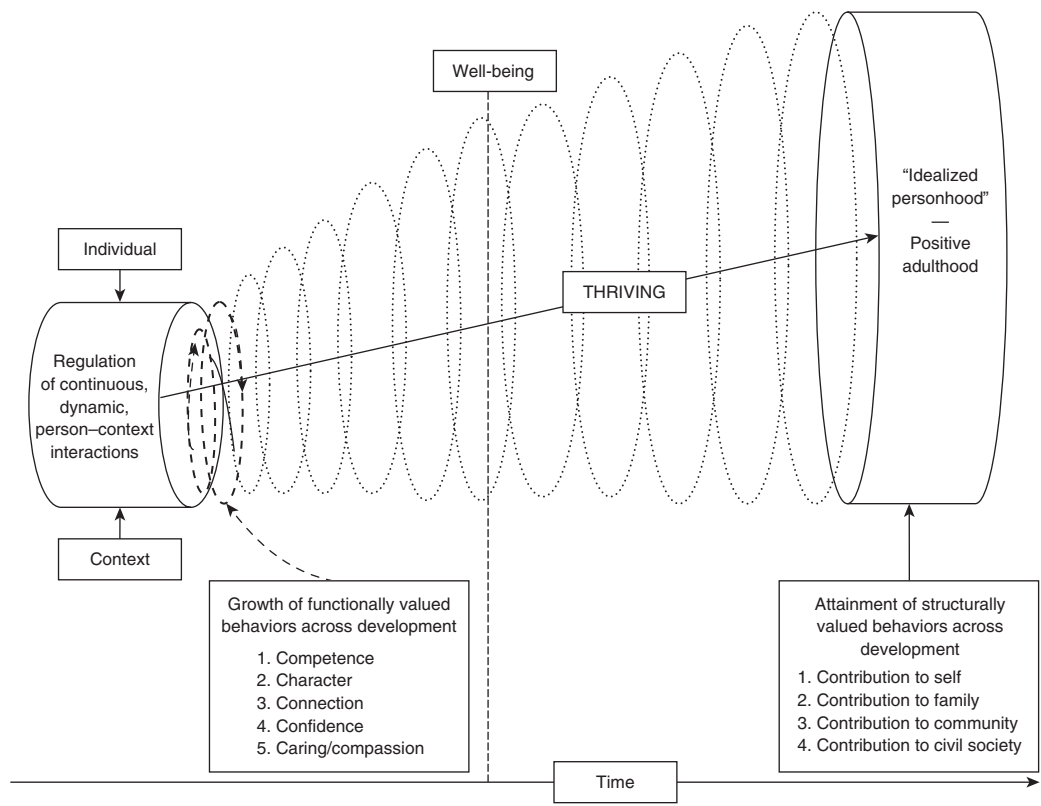
Such individuals are committed to contributing to social justice and equity for all individuals in society because society is committed to ensuring justice and equality of opportunity and treatment (equity) for them. Through civic engagement they enter a life path marked by the “five Cs” of positive youth development: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (or compassion). Such youth will pursue the noble purpose of becoming productive adult members of their community (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003), developing the “sixth C” of contribution to self, family, others, and, ultimately, civil society. This type of developmental regulation—between thriving individuals and their civil society—is the essence of a system marked by liberty (Lerner, 2004). Figure 5.1 provides an illustration of the model of thriving that we have developed (e.g., Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2003).

In short, adaptive developmental regulation results in the emergence among young people of an orientation to transcend self-interest and place value on, and commitments to, actions supportive of a social system promoting equity, democracy, social justice, and personal freedoms. This regulatory system is one that enables the individual and individual initiative to prosper. As such, it is this relation—between an individual engaged in support of a democratic system that, in turn, supports the individual—that is the essence of healthy developmental regulation. Moreover, a commitment to contribution rests on defining behavior in support of mutually beneficial individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context exchanges as morally necessary. Individuals’ moral duty to contribute exists because, as citizens receiving benefits from a social system supporting their individual functioning, it is necessary to be actively engaged in, at least, maintaining and, ideally, enhancing that social system (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999).

### Thriving and Spiritual Development

The sense of transcendence of self and of zero-sum-game self-interest that accrues as

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**Figure 5.1** A Developmental Systems Model of the Thriving Process

integrated moral and civic self-definitions (identities) develop may be interpreted as a growing spiritual sense (Benson, 2003; Dowling, Gestsdottir, Anderson, von Eye, & Lerner, 2003; Dowling et al., 2004; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Erikson (1959) discussed the emotional “virtues” that were coupled with successful resolution of each of the eight psychosocial crises he included in his theory of ego development. He specified that fidelity, defined as unflinching commitment to abstract ideas (e.g., ideologies) beyond the self, was the virtue associated with adaptive resolution of the identity crisis of adolescence, and thus with the attainment of a socially prescribed, positive role (cf. Youniss et al., 1999). Commitment to a role was regarded by Erikson (1959) as a means for the behaviors of youth to serve the maintenance and perpetuation of society; fidelity to an ideology coupled with a role meant that the young

person would gain emotional satisfaction—which to Erikson (1959) meant enhanced self-esteem—through contributing to society by the enactment of role behaviors (Lerner, 2002).

One need not focus only on crisis resolution to suggest that behaviors attained during adolescence in the service of identity development may be coupled with an ideological “virtue,” that is, with a sensibility about the meaningfulness of abstract ideas that transcend the self (Youniss et al., 1999). From a perspective that focuses on adaptive developmental regulation within the developmental system, it is possible to suggest that spirituality is the transcendent virtue that is coupled with the behaviors (roles) reflecting an integrated moral and civic identity.

Contemporary researchers (e.g., Youniss et al., 1999) increasingly frame questions about the impact of community contributions and service activities on healthy identity development.

Erikson (1959) proposed that when young people identify with ideologies and histories of faith-based institutions, identities can be placed within a social-historical framework that connect youth to traditions and communities that transcend the immediate moment, thereby providing young people with a sense of continuity and coherence with the past, present, and future.

Consistent with Erikson's prescription, youth-service programs sponsored by faith-based institutions such as the Catholic Church are embedded in interpretive values and historical meaning. For example, a parish that sponsors a highway cleanup activity for its youth will likely rely on a moral and value-laden framework to explain its involvement, describing that involvement in religious traditions and stories (Youniss et al., 1999). Youth who take part in service activities are likely to "reflect on these justifications as potential meanings for their (own) actions. These established meanings, with their historical richness and picturing of an ideal future may readily be seen as nourishment for youths' identity development" (Youniss et al., 1999, p. 244).

As such, youth whose exchanges with their contexts (whose developmental regulations) are marked by functionally valued behaviors should develop integrated moral and civic identities and a transcendent, or spiritual, sensibility (Benson, 2003; Youniss et al., 1999). There is, in fact, evidence that adolescents' sense of spirituality is linked to thriving.

### **Thriving and Religiosity Among Adolescents**

There are moderate to weak associations between youth religious practices and beliefs and both lower probabilities of problem behaviors (e.g., delinquency, drug and alcohol use and abuse, and sexual activity) and higher probabilities of positive behaviors (e.g., prosocial behaviors such as altruism, moral values, and mental health) (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003). There are also weak to moderate associations between positive youth behaviors and parental involvement in religion (Bridges & Moore, 2002). For instance, Metz and Youniss (2003) found that high school students who identified themselves as religious

were more likely to volunteer, participate in school organizations, and have higher grade point averages. In addition, religious students were more likely to have parents who had volunteered; these religious, volunteering students were also more likely to be female (Metz & Youniss, 2003).

Bridges and Moore (2002) note that these associations between religiosity and positive youth development are weakened owing to the low quality of measures of youth religiosity. In addition, they indicate that there is a lack of sufficient longitudinal data to chart the potentially changing role of religiosity in positive youth development (Bridges & Moore, 2002). Moreover, Kerestes and Youniss (2003) note that charting this role is complicated by the fact that "religion is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot easily be segregated from the social context in which it is practiced" (p. 170).

In this regard, a promising advance in the measurement of religiosity and its link to positive youth development has been reported by King (in press). King indexed religiosity through the use of multiple indicators that had sound measurement characteristics; she also assessed the social capital supporting religious development that was present in the social context of youth. In a cross-sectional sample of several hundred diverse urban youth, she found that religiously active adolescents who had high levels of social capital (measured by indicators of social interaction, trust, and shared vision) had higher levels of moral functioning.

To Reich et al. (1999) and others (e.g., Youniss et al., 1999), a young person's sense of religiosity may be an important source of positive development; however, religiosity may or may not be dependent on a young person's experiencing a sense of transcendence or spirituality when involved in the formal rites and institutions of an established faith tradition. In fact, according to Benson (1997), religion and spirituality may be regarded as orthogonal and important sources of thriving among youth.

In sum, then, contemporary scholars of adolescent development are pointing to the implications of religiosity and spirituality on positive youth development (see, e.g., Lerner, 2004; Youniss et al., 1999), but they conceptually differentiate the role of these constructs in such

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development. However, there have been few attempts to date psychometrically to operationalize and obtain support for these constructs within one data set pertinent to adolescence. For this reason, it is useful to discuss briefly some research in our laboratory that has been aimed at providing empirical tests of the purported links in adolescence among spirituality, religiosity, and thriving.

RESEARCH WITHIN  
THE INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED  
RESEARCH IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

One study we have conducted used one of the few data sets with an item pool potentially appropriate for rich psychometric analyses. Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has several large data sets in its research archives that contain information pertinent to the constructs of religiosity, spirituality, and thriving during the adolescent period. Dowling et al. (2003) reported initial analyses of the *Young Adolescents and Their Parents* (YAP) data set (Search Institute, 1984). The YAP involves the responses of a cross-sectional sample that includes 8,165 youth, ranging from fifth through ninth grades (9 to 15 years of age), and 10,467 parents.

The YAP sample, which was gathered in 1982 and 1983, was drawn randomly from 13 national youth-serving organizations and religious organizations. The survey was administered in group settings in 953 locations. Focusing only on the youth data in the YAP, Dowling et al. (2003) drew a random sample of 1,000 youth from the overall sample. This smaller sample was composed of 472 boys (mean age = 12.2 years,  $SD = 1.5$ ) and 528 girls (mean age = 12.1 years,  $SD = 1.4$ ) and was representative of the demographic characteristics present in the larger YAP sample.

Of the 319 items in the youth survey, the participants responded to 91 questionnaire items that pertained to religiosity, spirituality, and positive youth development or thriving (e.g., social competence, self-esteem, and respect for diversity). Orthogonal, principal axes factor analyses were conducted for each of the three constructs

of interest, that is, religiosity, spirituality, and thriving. Varimax rotational procedures were used. A Root 1 criterion was followed for the extraction of factors. The resulting factor solution was confirmed through the use of structural equation modeling (SEM), using the LISREL 8.53 program (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2002).

As shown in Table 5.1, four factors potentially associated with the construct of religiosity emerged, three factors potentially associated with the construct of spirituality emerged, and nine factors potentially associated with the construct of thriving emerged. Using LISREL 8.53, an attempt was made to confirm a model of the constructs (or latent variables) of religiosity, spirituality, and thriving, and, in turn, the factors and items associated with these constructs. As reported in Dowling et al. (2003), the hypothesized model involves three levels: (1) the three second order factors of religiosity, spirituality, and thriving; (2) the four first order factors associated with religiosity, the three first order factors associated with spirituality, and the nine first order factors associated with thriving; and (3) the manifest variables—the items—associated with each of the latent variables defined as the sets of first order factors.

Dowling et al. (2003) report that the results of the LISREL analysis, which employed maximum likelihood methods for estimation, indicated that the model fit the data well. Accordingly, the findings of this test of the overall model confirm the presence of three relatively independent constructs (religiosity, spirituality, and thriving). Figure 5.2 presents the first and second order factors confirmed by Dowling et al. (2003).

In short, the results of both the factor analysis and the SEM procedures converged in indicating that, within the YAP data set, the constructs of religiosity, spirituality, and thriving can be independently identified and confirmed, with each construct multivariate in its latent structure. The confirmation of the independent presence of these three constructs afforded a necessary condition to begin to explore theoretical ideas about the role of spirituality in exemplary positive youth behavior and development.

Accordingly, in a second study using the 1,000 adolescents from the YAP data set

**Table 5.1** Hypothesized Religiosity, Spirituality, and Thriving Factors and a Representative (High Loading) Item for Each Factor

<i>Religiosity Factors</i>	<i>Representative Item</i>
1. Impact religious beliefs on self	Does your religion make you feel better when things don't go well?
2. Religious views	What is your view of God?
3. Religious restrictions of God on people	God has a lot of rules about how people should live their lives.
4. Role of a faith institution in one's life	How many years have you attended classes which teach about God and other religious things?
<i>Spirituality Factors</i>	
1. Orientation to do good work	Imagine you saw a little kid fall and get hurt on the playground. Would you run over and try to help?
2. Participation in self-interest activities	In the past 12 months, how many times have you been out on a date?
3. Orientation to help others	How many hours did you give help to people outside your family that have special needs during the last month without pay?
<i>Thriving Factors</i>	
1. Rules for youth presented by mother	Mom tries to help me see why rules are necessary and important.
2. Rules for youth presented by father	When I do something wrong, my father takes the time to help me see why it was wrong.
3. Presence of a moral compass	How wrong is it to lie to your parents?
4. Future orientation/path to a hopeful future	What do you want most in life (e.g., to have world without war)?
5. Search for positive identity	How much interest do you have in finding out what is special about you?
6. Personal values	What do you most want in life? To do whatever I want to do when I want to do it.
7. Engagement with school	How do you feel about going to school?
8. View of gender equity	I think women should have the same rights as men.
9. View of diversity	How right or wrong is racial discrimination?

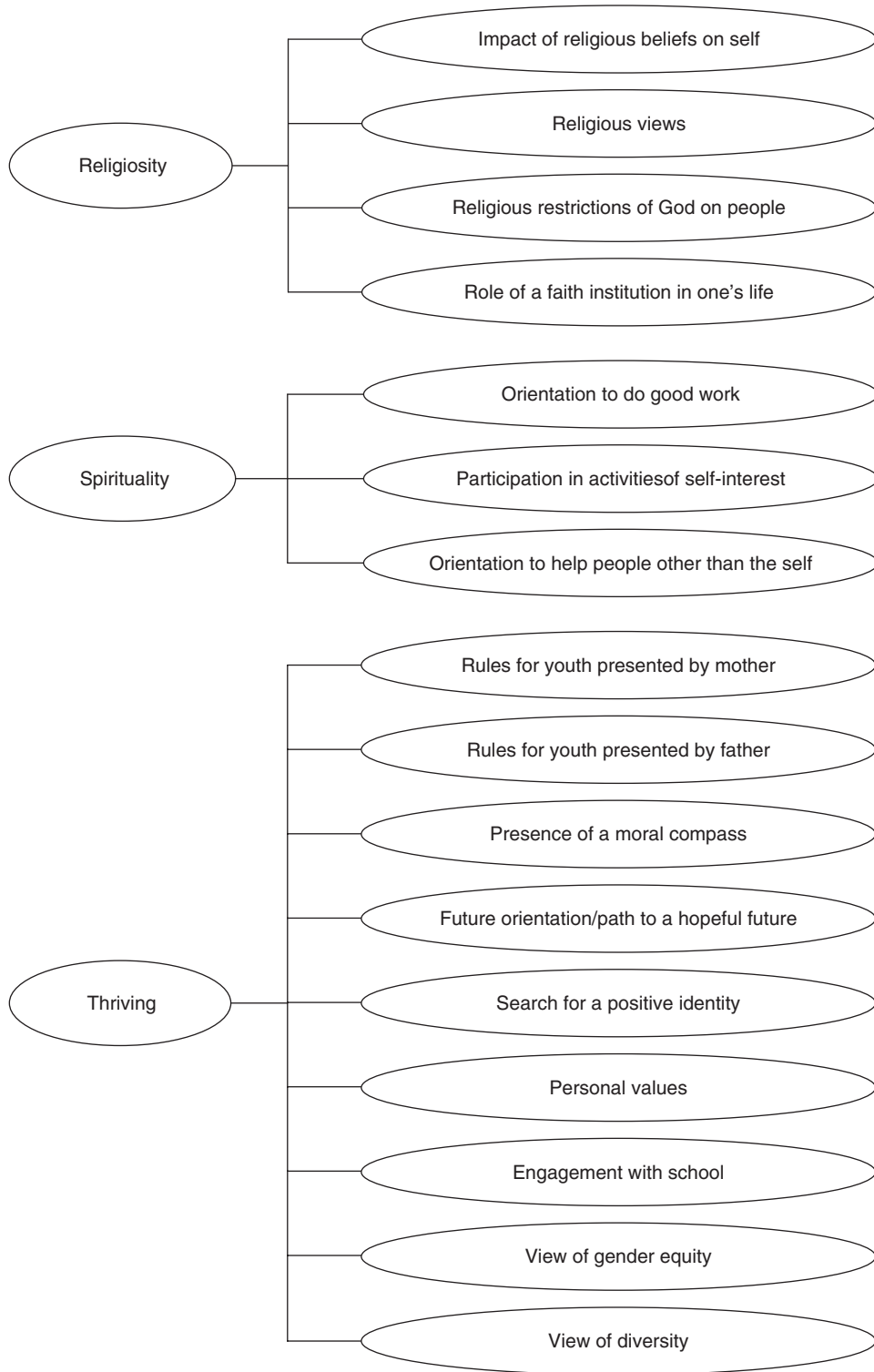
Dowling et al. (2004) posed the following question: Does religiosity mediate the influence of spirituality on thriving? In other words, is the only pathway of spirituality to thriving through religiosity? While the literature would not support the complete absence of combined influences of spirituality and religiosity on thriving

(e.g., Benson, 1997), we expected that there would nevertheless be some influence of the former construct on thriving that existed over and above any combined or mediated influence involving the latter construct.

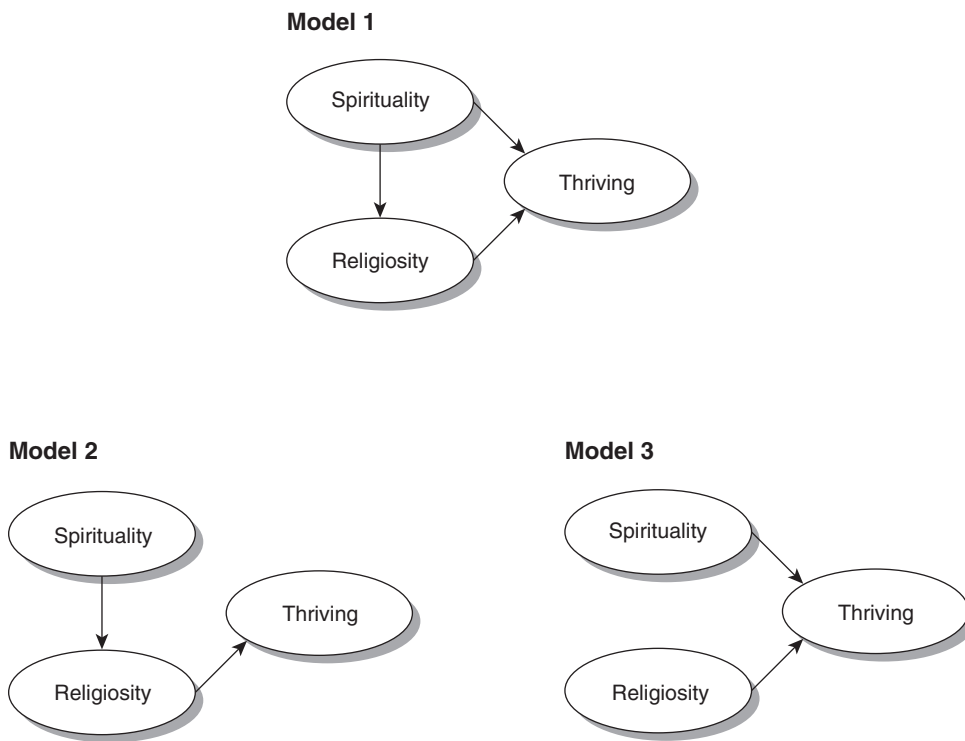
To address this question, the second order factors of spirituality, religiosity, and thriving



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**Figure 5.2** First- and Second-Order Factors Found by Dowling et al. (2003)



**Figure 5.3** Three Models of Possible Structural Relations Among Spirituality, Religiosity, and Thriving

were operationalized without going through the respective sets of first order factors shown in Figure 5.2, but with the use of the same indicators. LISREL 8.53 was again employed to ascertain the structural relations that were hypothesized to exist among these three latent constructs. We anticipated that both spirituality and religiosity would be related to thriving. We also expected, however, that there would be an influence of spirituality on thriving that existed over and above any combined or mediated influence of religiosity on thriving. In other words, in the terms of Baron and Kenny (1986), we expected to find support for a fully mediated structural model.

To test this hypothesis, three models were estimated through the use of LISREL 8.53, employing maximum likelihood estimation methods. As shown in Figure 5.3, the first model

is that of complete mediation. This model includes the paths from spirituality to religiosity, from religiosity to thriving, and from spirituality to thriving. This fully mediated model reflects our key expectation that there would be an influence of spirituality on thriving that existed over and above any combined or mediated influence of religiosity on thriving. The second model is the mediation-only model. It includes only the paths from spirituality to religiosity and from religiosity to thriving. This second model is hierarchically subordinate to Model 1. The third model includes only the paths from religiosity to thriving and from spirituality to thriving, thus depriving religiosity of the role of a mediating entity. Model 3 is also hierarchically subordinate to Model 1.

Dowling et al. (2003) present data indicating that the first, complete mediation model

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depicted in Figure 5.2 corresponds well to the data. As such, we conclude that the fit of the comparison models was significantly worse than the fit of the complete mediation model. In other words, each of the comparison models performs significantly below the complete mediation model. As such, the model that includes a path from spirituality to thriving, as well as the path of spirituality through religiosity to thriving, best fits the data from the YAP subsample tested in this research.

### CONCLUSIONS

The developmental systems view of human development (Lerner, 2002) posits that, as a consequence of the influence of plasticity and adaptive developmental regulation, there exists the potential in every young person for healthy and successful development. In this view, youth who are dynamically engaged in mutually beneficial ways with their contexts will contribute positively to the healthy development of both self and society (Lerner 2004; Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002). Although multiple relations between person and context have been the focus of study in positive youth development, we believe that the role of spirituality in thriving among young people merits further attention, especially because spirituality may fuel the adaptive individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context relations that enable humans to contribute in productive ways to the healthy development of self, family, community, and civil society (Dowling et al., 2003, 2004; Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2002; Youniss et al., 1999).

Interest in these ideas led to our use of the Search Institute (1984) data set *Young Adolescents and Their Parents* (YAP), and to our finding that, in adolescence, it appears that paths from spirituality to religiosity, from religiosity to thriving, and from spirituality to thriving are a better fit to the data set than are hierarchically related, reduced models that lack either the direct effect of spirituality on thriving or the mediating effect of spirituality on thriving through religiosity. Accordingly, our results to date, albeit limited by the ethnic, racial, and religious composition of the YAP sample, as well as by the historical era within which the YAP data were collected (and of course by the

measurement model and data analytic approaches used in our research), are nevertheless consistent with the idea that within the developmental system associated with exemplary positive development—that is, with thriving—among youth, spirituality constitutes an important component of such functioning and one that is not fully commensurate with other key dimensions of an adolescent's inner life, such as religiosity.

Indeed, in demonstrating that both spirituality and religiosity must be considered—and independently indexed—as important parts of the developmental system linked to thriving among adolescents, the present findings provide a basis for the design of measurement and structural models in future, longitudinal analyses aimed at understanding whether, when, and under what ecological conditions, and for what youth, spirituality and religiosity provide independent or combined sources of exemplary positive youth development.

The nature of the links among thriving, civic engagement, and moral development that mark adaptive developmental regulation make it clear that a society interested in the maintenance and enhancement of liberty should develop policies to strengthen, in communities, the capacities of families to provide the individual and ecological assets—the personal and social “developmental nutrients” needed for thriving (Benson, 2003)—that are suggested by Search Institute (Benson, 2003; Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). These assets are associated with positive youth development—and to an increased probability of thriving among young people (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Within such a policy context, asset-rich communities would enact activities (e.g., programs) that would provide young people with the resources needed to build and to pursue healthy lives that make productive contributions to self, family, and community.

Thriving will more likely emerge when youth develop in such a policy and community action/program context (Benson, 2003; Lerner et al., 2000; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Competent, confident, connected, caring youth who also possess character will have the moral orientation and the civic allegiance to use their skills to enact in themselves and, when parents, promote in their children, behaviors that “level

the playing field” for everyone. Committed—behaviorally, morally, and spiritually—to a better world beyond themselves, such individuals will act to sustain for future generations a society marked by social justice, equity, and democracy and a world in which all young people may thrive.

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