



Short Communication

Fundamental dimensions of personality underlying spirituality: Further evidence for the construct validity of the RiTE measure of spirituality

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the construct validity of the RiTE as a multidimensional measure of spirituality in relation to the five-factor model of personality in a sample of 325 college students. Results of correlational and regression analyses provided support for the notion that the dimensions of ritualistic, theistic, and existential spirituality tapped by the RiTE, are empirically distinguishable. Overall, our findings provide further evidence for the construct validity of the RiTE and for the potential value of measuring spirituality as a multidimensional phenomenon in the study of religious processes.

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1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, researchers have become increasingly interested in the scientific study of religious processes (see Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Hall, Meador, & Koenig, 2008, for reviews). However, studies on religious processes have tended to largely focus on *religiosity*, the extent to which individuals endorse a belief system involving distinct practices, rituals, and symbols (e.g., going to temple, praying in church, and reciting holy texts) that are associated with a reverence for the sacred or transcendent (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). In contrast, less work has been conducted on *spirituality*, the extent to which individuals seek and experience a personal connection with the transcendent (Del Rio & White, 2012). Indeed, according to Emmons and Paloutzian (2003), one of the major challenges faced by researchers interested in the study of spirituality is the lack of consensus on how spirituality has been defined and measured in the extant empirical literature. For example, some researchers have contended that spirituality is not necessarily predicated on a reverence to a transcendent being/s (e.g., Elkins, 2005; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; Wong, 2012; Wong, Reker, & Peacock, 2006). Other researchers have pointed to spirituality as a core aspect of personality. For example, within Cloninger's (2004, 2006) tripartite model of personality character, spiritual acceptance vs. rational materialism

represents a distinct facet of self-transcendence, which also involves facets of self-forgetful vs. self-conscious experience and transpersonal identification vs. self-differentiation. Alternatively, other researchers have noted points of commonality in defining spirituality and religiosity, such as the shared emphasis on the sacred (e.g., Zinnbauer et al., 1999). To address these concerns, Webb (2003) proposed a multidimensional model of spirituality, distinct from broader personality dimensions (cf. Cloninger, 1986; Costa & McCrae, 1992), that incorporates both secular and transcendental dimensions.

According to Webb, Toussaint, and Dula (2014), spirituality represents a multidimensional phenomenon composed of three distinguishable dimensions, namely, ritualistic spirituality, theistic spirituality, and existential spirituality. *Ritualistic spirituality* reflects engagement in structured, conventional, ritual-dependent connections with one's deity. *Theistic spirituality* reflects non-structured connections with one's deity, even in the absence of one being affiliated with any specific religion. Finally, *existential spirituality* reflects one's non-theistic search for meaning and purpose. To assess for these dimensions of spirituality, these researchers developed the Ritualistic, Theistic, and Existential (RiTE) measure of spirituality. The RiTE is a 30-item measure of multidimensional spirituality with 10 items that measure for ritualistic spirituality (e.g., "I observe or follow the rules of a formal belief system"), 10 items that measure for theistic spirituality (e.g., "I feel connected to a deity or deities"), and 10 items that measure for existential spirituality (e.g., "I see life as a journey toward fulfillment"). Unfortunately, evidence for the construct validity of

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the RiTE has been limited. For example, although Webb, Phillips, Bumgarner, and Conway-Williams (2013) found that the three spirituality dimensions from the RiTE held differential associations with a variety of health outcomes (e.g., physical health status, mental health status, somatic symptoms, & distress), it is not clear if these three spirituality dimensions might be redundant with broad dimensions of personality. As noted earlier, Webb (2003) conceptualized these dimensions of spirituality as separate from normal personality. However, no study has yet examined the associations of the RiTE with existing measures of normal personality.

One of the most researched and popular measures of normal personality is the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992), which has generated hundreds of studies based on the five-factor model of personality (see Digman, 1990, for a review). Indeed, some researchers have used the NEO-FFI to help examine the validity of new constructs, such as performance perfectionism (Chang, 2006) and social problem solving (D’Zurilla, Maydeu-Olivares, & Gallardo-Pujol, 2011). The NEO-FFI provides both higher-order domain scores, reflecting the five fundamental dimensions of personality, namely, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, as well as lower-level cluster scores for each of the fundamental dimensions (e.g., anxiety, depression, and self-reproach; Chapman, 2007). Therefore, in evaluating the construct validity of the RiTE, it would be useful to determine if scores on the RiTE hold differential associations across domain and cluster scores from a popular personality measure like the NEO-FFI.

2. Purpose

Given the concerns and limitations mentioned above, the present study was conducted to: (1) examine the associations between scores on the RiTE and the NEO-FFI; and (2) determine the extent to which NEO-FFI cluster scores predict scores on the three RiTE scales.

In general, consistent with the notion that the three RiTE scales are tapping into distinct spiritual processes (viz., ritualistic, theistic, & existential spirituality), we expected to find evidence for differential associations between scores on the three RiTE scales and scores on the NEO-FFI. Although findings from Saroglou’s (2002) meta-analytic study of the five-factor model indicated that domain scores on Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness should be associated with all three dimensions of spirituality tapped by the RiTE, we expected greater evidence of differential associations to emerge when examining scores on the RiTE against clusters scores.

Furthermore, we examined NEO-FFI cluster scores to predict scores on the three dimensions of spirituality tapped by the RiTE. Although we did not have any specific predictions, we did expect the final prediction models to vary in terms of the amount of variance accounted for by the clusters in each spirituality dimension, and the specific clusters found to be uniquely predictive of each spirituality dimension.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This study recruited 325 college students from a university in the Southeast United States. The sample included 212 females and 113 males, ages ranging from 18 to 58 years, with a mean age of 21.82 ($SD = 4.72$). The breakdown of the undergraduate participants’ year in school was as follows: 34.4% freshmen, 22.6% sophomores, 22.3% juniors, and 17.6% seniors. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the participants was 86.8% White, 5.5% Black, 2.8% Asian, and 1.8% Hispanic (3.1% did not report race).

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Multidimensional spirituality

To assess for multidimensional spirituality, we used the Ritualistic, Theistic, and Existential (RiTE) measure of spirituality developed by Webb et al. (2014). The RiTE is a 30-item measure of multidimensional spirituality with 10 items that measure for ritualistic spirituality (e.g., “I observe or follow the rules of a formal belief system”), 10 items for theistic spirituality (e.g., “I feel connected to a deity or deities”), and 10 items for existential spirituality (e.g., “I see life as a journey toward fulfillment”). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Preliminary evidence for the construct validity of the RiTE measure has been reported by Webb and colleagues (Webb et al., 2013, 2014). Higher scores on the three RiTE scales indicate greater spirituality in each dimension.

3.2.2. Five-factor model of personality

To assess for fundamental dimensions of personality, we used the 60-item NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) developed by Costa and McCrae (1992). The NEO-FFI assesses for five core personality domains, namely, neuroticism (e.g., “I am not a worrier”), extraversion (e.g., “I laugh easily”), openness (e.g., “I have a lot of intellectual curiosity”), agreeableness (e.g., “Most people I know like me”), and conscientiousness (e.g., “I work hard to accomplish my goals”). According to Chapman (2007), scores on the NEO-FFI can be broken down to lower-level cluster scores within each domain. For example, scores on Anxiety, Depression, and Self Reproach make up the neuroticism domain. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Evidence for the construct validity of the NEO-FFI has been reported in Costa and McCrae (1992). In general, high scores indicate a greater presence of the specific personality domain or cluster being assessed.

3.3. Procedure

Approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Participants were recruited at a regional university in the Southeast United States and received either course-required credit or extra credit upon completion of the survey. All participants were provided with written informed consent, which indicated that all data would be kept strictly confidential.

4. Results

Correlations between RiTE scores and NEO-FFI domain and cluster scores are presented in Table 1. Consistent with expectations at the domain level, all three dimensions of spirituality were positively related to extraversion ($r_s = .15-.23$), agreeableness ($r_s = .14-.22$), and conscientiousness ($r_s = .18-.27$). In contrast, only existential spirituality was negatively associated with neuroticism ($r = -.16$) and positively associated with openness ($r = .14$). At the cluster level, all three dimensions of spirituality were positively associated with depression, positive affect, sociability, activity, unconventionality, nonantagonistic orientation, prosocial orientation, orderliness, goal-striving, and dependability. Interestingly, these three spirituality dimensions were also associated with aesthetic interests and intellectual interests. However, the associations were negative for ritualistic and theistic spirituality, and positive for existential spirituality. Overall, the correlations obtained between scores on the RiTE and the NEO-FFI were never so high as to indicate redundancy. For example, the positive correlation between existential spirituality and prosocial orientation ($r = .63$) indicated that they shared less than 40% of common variance.

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