SPIRITUALITY’S UNIQUE ROLE IN POSITIVE AFFECT, SATISFACTION WITH LIFE, AND FORGIVENESS OVER AND ABOVE PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM

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ABSTRACT

Although spirituality is increasingly acknowledged to play a significant role in human psychological functioning, it is often seen as part of personality or cultural values and thus relegated to the domain of an add-on variable in research designs. The present study went further than just acknowledging the general role of spirituality (spiritual transcendence and intrinsic religious motivation) by testing the hypothesis that spirituality has a unique role in impacting the positive psychological constructs of positive affect, satisfaction with life, and forgiveness (transgression related interpersonal motivation) over and above personality and cultural orientation of individualism-collectivism. Data from 637 participants were analyzed for intercorrelations and incremental validity. Results indicated that spirituality had a unique significant contribution to positive affect, satisfaction with life, and forgiveness after controlling for the effects of personality and individualism-collectivism. Based on these significant results, the reasons for the integration of spirituality in both research design and clinical practice are discussed.

Keywords: spirituality, personality, individualism-collectivism, positive affect, satisfaction with life, forgiveness, incremental validity

The field of positive psychology stresses that the discipline is concerned not just with pathology or human weaknesses but also with human strengths and virtues (see Lopez & Gallagher, 2009; Peterson & Park, 2003; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Wright & Lopez, 2009). The underlying assumption of positive psychology is that persons who carry even the weightiest psychological burdens care about much more in their lives than just the relief of their pain and suffering (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). Based on this assumption, this study took a positive psychology approach with positive affect (PA), satisfaction with life (SWL), forgiveness, and spirituality as the core variables, which have been generally considered a part of broader taxonomy of positive psychology.

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(e.g. Diener & Diener, 1996; Duckworth et al., 2005; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Seligman, 2002). This study specifically looked at the extent to which spirituality influences PA, SWL, and forgiveness beyond that of personality and cultural orientation of individualism (IND) and collectivism (COL).

**Personality and Spirituality**

Research investigating the relationship of personality traits to spiritual constructs has been expanding (Saroglou, 2002; Wink, Ciciolla, Dillon, & Tracy, 2007). Saroglou’s (2002) research review of studies on the relation between the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality and measures of religiosity indicated that religiosity was related to the FFM factor of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, extrinsic religion was related to high Neuroticism, religious fundamentalism was associated with all dimensions except Conscientiousness, and spiritual maturity was related to all of the five personality factors. Piedmont (2005) summarized the results of various studies that investigated correlations between a number of different measures of religiosity and spirituality with the FFM personality domains and reported that a religiosity item of frequency of reading the Bible moderately correlated with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, reading religious literature correlated negatively with Neuroticism and positively with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, and the Universality facet of the Spiritual Transcendence Scale correlated positively with Openness and Agreeableness.

The review studies by both Saroglou (2002) and Piedmont (2005) demonstrated that only some factors of the FFM, such as Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, are most related to religiosity, whereas some factors are either unrelated to religion, or their effect sizes are very small. Moreover, the significance and size of the relationship depended clearly on the religious dimension measured. For instance, in Saroglou’s (2002) meta-analysis, religiosity was weakly correlated with Extraversion, and there was only a small effect size regarding Openness. On the other hand, Extraversion had a greater effect on mature religiosity and spirituality than it did on overall religiosity.

From the above mentioned research studies, it appears that the five factors of the FFM may relate differently to different aspects of religiosity and spirituality (Saroglou, 2002). Thus, Piedmont (1999a; 2001; 2005) pointed out that although numinous constructs share something common with the FFM domains, they also play a unique role in human psychological functioning, which needs to be proven empirically.