SPIRITUALITY AND GOD-ATTACHMENT AS PREDICTORS OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING FOR SEMINARIANS AND NUNS IN INDIA

Dudley Mendonca, K. Elizabeth Oakes, Joseph W. Ciarrocchi, William J. Sneck, and Kevin Gillespie*

ABSTRACT

The present study was a cross-sectional study of spirituality and views of God as predictors of subjective well-being (SWB) over and above a comprehensive measure of personality. The total sample of 321 participants consisted of 121 Catholic religious women and 200 Jesuit seminarians in India whose overall mean age was 34 years. Family of origin backgrounds of the participants were severely impoverished economically. Hierarchical multiple regression found that personality explained a significant amount of variance for all three facets of SWB including positive affect, negative affect, and cognitive well-being. Faith maturity and positive God image each contributed significant independent variance in predicting increased positive affect and cognitive well-being. Negative God-image, in contrast, predicted reduced positive affect and cognitive well-being, and increased negative affect. Analysis by gender indicated that spirituality and God image predict differentially to subjective well-being components for men and women. The findings replicate cross-culturally the utility of viewing spiritual transcendence as related to human flourishing.

Religiosity, personality, and subjective well-being are three characteristics that have independently generated considerable cross-cultural research. They are topics well-suited to teasing out emic (what is unique to a culture) and etic (what is generalizable across cultures) dimensions of the human person. Progress in understanding the cross-cultural features of personality and subjective well-being are currently more advanced than is either religion or spirituality. A wide body of empirical work has found the five-factor model to represent an adequate taxonomy that holds up well across many cultures (McCrae & Allik, 2002). Similarly, the cross-cultural study of subjective well-being has established common

* Author Note: Dudley Mendonca is now at Sadhana Institute, Old Khandala Road, Pune DT Maharashtra Lonavla 410401, India. The authors thank Monique Daniels and Agnes Jo Tepe for manuscript preparation. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Joseph W. Ciarrocchi, Pastoral Counseling Department, Loyola College in Maryland, 8890 McGaw Road, Suite 380, Columbia, Maryland, 21045. Dr. Ciarrocchi’s email is jwc@loyola.edu.

measures of its components and has reliably determined which variables and conditions consistently predict happiness (Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener & Suh, 1999).

Not as much progress has occurred for religious and spiritual variables. The preponderance of research has been conducted in Western societies where Christianity is the majority religion thus leaving unknown to what degree the findings pertain either to Christianity specifically or Western culture generally.

The present study is a cross-cultural examination of a minority religion—Catholicism—in India, an Asian country. To what degree do empirical constructs such as spirituality, religion, personality, and their relationship to subjective well-being resemble patterns established in Western society where Christianity is the majority religion? Since Western findings are largely based on middle socioeconomic class participants, will these findings replicate in a group of seminarians and nuns from mostly rural and extremely poor family backgrounds?

Early research on the connection between religiosity and subjective well-being was open to the criticism of not adequately controlling for plausible alternative explanations. Some have criticized religious research as discovering little more than “mundane mediators,” or represent the “religification” or “parasitization” of already established psychological constructs (Buss, 2002; Joiner, Perez, & Walker, 2002; VanWicklin, 1990).

In response to these objections recent research has examined the relationship between spirituality and subjective well-being that controlled for one psychological construct that has consistently been shown to carry the largest variance for subjective well-being, namely, personality (DeNeve, 1999; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). The studies, using different measures for the individual constructs, including participants from general adult samples in the United States, England, and Malta, as well as trauma victims, Protestant clergy, sex offenders, and problem gamblers have established that spirituality adds moderate and significant additional variance over and above personality (Ciarrocchi & Deneke, 2004; Francis & Katz, 2002; Galea, 2003; Geary, Ciarrocchi, & Sheers, 2004; Golden, Piedmont, Ciarrocchi, & Rodgerson, 2004; Walsh, 2001).

Furthermore, this research has extended the earlier well-established finding that different forms of religious experience predict uniquely to subjective well-being components. Seeing God as a close friend or collaborator predicts to positive aspects of subjective well-being while viewing God as punishing or abandoning is related to negative aspects