Religiosity Scales: What Are We Measuring in Whom?*

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Summary

At least 177 scales are available to researchers who want to measure religiosity, but questions exist as to exactly what these scales are measuring and in whom they are measuring it. A review of these scales found a lack of items designed to measure ethical action in society or the prophetic response to the experience of the divine. Instead, the vast majority of scales focus on internal experiences and beliefs or institutional relationships. A review of scale norm groups found that norm groups often are not fully described, particularly in the area of race/ethnicity, and when they are described, they reveal an over-reliance on convenience samples of college students and an under-representation of racial/ethnic minority groups. Examples of scales with more fully described and more representative norm groups are given, and recommendations are offered for researchers using and developing religiosity scales.

Keywords

Religiosity, spirituality, scale development, religiosity measures

... (M)en have no eyes but for those aspects of things which they have already been taught to discern. (William James, *The Principles of Psychology*)

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Hill and Pargament (2003) argued that despite the existence of a substantial body of literature relating physical and mental health to religion and spirituality, religion and spirituality continue to be neglected in psychology research. They also suggested that the use of single, broad measures of religiosity such as church attendance or denominational affiliation may obscure as much as they reveal and supported the use of more nuanced and more reliable measures. Despite the development of a plethora of measures related to religion and spirituality, we believe that there are significant questions about what we are measuring with the existing scales of religiosity, and in whom we are measuring it.

**Surveying Existing Scales for Constructs of Religiosity**

While at least 177 scales intended to measure religiosity have been published in the last 50 years (Hill & Hood, 1999; also see Appendices A and B) there have been few integrated efforts at defining or debating the constructs of religion or religiosity being measured. Instead there has been a proliferation of scales, often overlapping or measuring isolated aspects, but no consistent effort at a phenomenological description and definition of all the dimensions that a religion or religiosity might take. The publication of Hill and Hood’s (1999) *Measures of Religiosity*, which compiled and reviewed existing scales, was a major step forward and a significant service to the field. We believe that it is time to step back and consider what it is that we are actually measuring when we measure “religiosity.” A review of the scales in Hill and Hood, as well as 51 scales not included (44 published since 1999 and 7 published prior to that date but not included), suggests that at least one major dimension of religion—the prophetic public expression of faith and implementation of religious values in the world—is consistently neglected in measures of religiosity used in psychology.

We recognize that debates on the essence, origin, description, and function of “religion” are wide-ranging (Capps, 1995; Wulff, 1997) and that the definition of “religion” has changed over time (Smith, 1998). However, we believe that the philosophical categories developed by Alston (1967), a past president of the Society of Christian Philosophers and of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology (Battaly & Lynch, 2005), may offer one useful way to consider the validity of our measures of religiosity. Alston used the argument of William James (1902) that an awareness of divinity and a way or ways of responding to that divinity are common to all religions. (Recognizing the