



Adaptation of the Big Five as a hermeneutic instrument for religious constructs

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Abstract

This study investigated the personological significance of religious constructs through analysis with the five-factor model (FFM) of personality. For this purpose the Polish Adjective List (PAL [Szarota, P. (1995). Polish Adjective List: instrument to assess the five-factor model of personality. *Studia Psychologiczne*, 33, 229–256.]) was used to assess the personality factors, namely; neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness (O), agreeableness (A) and conscientiousness (C). The Polish version of the Swedish Religious Orientation Scale (SROS [Hovemyr, M. (1996). Assessment of the Swedish religious orientation scale in a Polish context. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 15, 248–257.]) was used to assess intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest religious orientation. These were administered to 104 middle school students. Results suggest that intrinsic and quest religious orientations linked to qualities of agreeableness and conscientiousness. Whereas extrinsic religiosity associated to extraversion. The overall findings of the hierarchical regression suggested that the five personality domains explained the 4% variance of relationship with God, whereas religious orientation accounted for the additional 35% variance of relationship with God. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Although the religious theme has been present in the realm of psychology since the time of Freud, the empirical psychology of religion has been in existence only since the mid fifties (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996), when psychologists began to acknowledge that religion plays a pivotal role in “historical, cultural, social and psychological realities that humans confront in their lives” (Hood et al., 1996, p. 2). Despite the abundance of empirical studies in religion, a systematic method of organizing these findings has not yet been developed (Gorsuch, 1988, 1994; Piedmont & Hendrick, under review). In view of this limitation, the efforts of present studies in religion seems to be twofold.

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First, it is necessary to develop a methodology for assessing religious constructs vis-à-vis personality traits. Hood et al. (1996) and Schaefer & Gorsuch (1991) have previously criticized the existing excess of terminology by which psychologists refer to similar constructs. At the same time, they call for a uniformity of language among researchers. To achieve this, it is important that model personality traits be employed that are both comprehensive and widely accepted in the field of psychology (Piedmont & Hendrick, under review). Secondly, they postulate the need for an adaptation of the paradigm of incremental validity approach. This is imperative in order that religious constructs be a meaningful enhancement to understanding “those individual difference qualities unique to religious constructs that are predictive of important outcomes (i.e. prosocial behavior, racism, sexual behavior) over and above the more traditional personality variables of the FFM” (p. 14). Hence, the uniqueness of this method consists in its attempt to create a more comprehensive approach which, in its methodology, attempts to appraise and explain both dimensions, personality and spirituality, without overlapping.

One assessment tool that meets this criterion is the five-factor model of personality (FFM) (McCrae & Costa, 1990). The FFM is a comprehensive taxonomy of traits that has the capacity to account for most of the variations in personality (Basic Behavior Science Task Force of the National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1996) and is proven to be universal (McCrae & Costa, 1997). The FFM has been demonstrated to be a comprehensive assessment of personality extensively validated by other personality instruments (McCrae & Costa, 1987, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1988, 1992; McCrae & John, 1992; Piedmont, McCrae & Costa, 1992) and is able to predict salient life events, e.g. prosocial behavior, burnout and job performance (Piedmont, 1993; Kosek, 1995; Furnham, Crump & Whelan, 1997).

The ‘Big Five’, as it is often referred to in the literature, is comprised of neuroticism (N), which reflects distinct ways of reacting emotionally to distressing situations; extraversion (E), which reflects traits associated with energy and enthusiasm, particularly when dealing with people; openness (O), which appraises responses to diverse kinds of experience; agreeableness (A), which measures attitudes in relation to interpersonal interaction and conscientiousness (C), which measures differences in motivation and persistence. Using this reliable and comprehensive personality model as the navigating compass will allow an assessment of the contributions of the religious constructs.

Undoubtedly the most enduring religious concepts used by the psychology of religion in the assessment of religious accountability are intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation (Hovemyr, 1996), as well as quest religious orientation. Intrinsic religiosity considers faith as the guiding principle of life (Allport, 1966). People representative of this religious orientation are described as pious, unselfish, altruistic and humanitarian with strong personal commitment (Hood et al., 1996). For its part, extrinsic religiosity regards faith as a means to attain other aims in life (Allport, 1966). People characterized by extrinsic religious orientation tend to be ethnocentric, utilitarian and tend to view others in terms of their economical and social status (Hood et al., 1996). Lastly, quest religiosity, as considered by Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis (1993), is an implementation construct of both intrinsic and extrinsic religion. Quest religiosity pertains to genuine ‘faithing’ throughout life’s occurrences (Batson & Ventis, 1982). A person marked by quest religiosity tends to be open to changes, challenges and traditional answers in the search for ‘truth’. Such a person also views religious doubt in a positive light (Hood et al., 1996).

The intention of the author is to apply previously outlined methodology in the following order.

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