

Chapter 7

Measurement at the Intersection of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality



Peter C. Hill, Nicholas DiFonzo, C. Eric Jones, and Justin S. Bell

In this chapter, we review measures at the intersection of positive psychology and the psychology of religion/spirituality (R/S). We do this by viewing measures from the psychology of R/S through the lens of virtues and character strengths (VCS), as formulated in the seminal work of Peterson and Seligman (2004). That taxonomy had 24 character strengths that were organized into six virtues: wisdom/knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. In this chapter, we identify VCS that are assessed by extant religious/spiritual measures and make the case that the religious/spiritual context should be taken into account when applying the VCS taxonomy to assessing religiously/spiritually committed individuals. For example, the Attachment to God Scale, which ostensibly assesses *God attachment* (i.e., God as safe haven and secure base, seeking proximity to God, and responding to separation from God), also assesses courage (specifically, the character strength of bravery, e.g., “My relationship with God gives me the courage to face new challenges”) and temperance (specifically, the character strength of self-regulation, e.g., “When I face difficulties, I turn to God”; Sim & Loh, 2003).

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P. C. Hill (✉)

Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University, La Mirada, CA, USA
e-mail: peter.hill@biola.edu

N. DiFonzo

Department of Psychology, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, NY, USA
e-mail: difonzo_nicholas@roberts.edu

C. E. Jones

Psychology Department, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, USA
e-mail: ejones@regent.edu

J. S. Bell

Department of Psychology, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, USA
e-mail: Jbell35@depaul.edu

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To identify VCS assessed in religious/spiritual scales, we examined a conceptually diverse sample of 200 psychology of R/S measures by rating each scale on its assessment of the 24 VCS. Ratings were made independently, and disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus. Consensus ratings are presented in an online table that is organized by the six virtues and related character strengths. See Appendix 7.S1 for the complete *Table of VCS Ratings of R/S Scales*. A detailed description of its methods and the list of scales associated with each character strength is in Appendix 7.S2. In the current chapter, we review a selection of these scales and explore how each virtue's character strengths are conceptualized in religious/spiritual contexts.

One thesis of this chapter is that for people who are religiously or spiritually committed, a thorough understanding of virtue must take their religious/spiritual worldview into account. This does not mean a religious/spiritual lens is always necessary in conceptualizing virtue. Secular philosophy, particularly grounded in the Aristotelian tradition, has provided much clarity to the study of virtue. However, there is an undeniable linkage between R/S and virtue (see Ratchford et al., Chap. 4, this volume). For example, in a study of eight religious and moral philosophies (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Athenian philosophy, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity), Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) found that all the core virtues were expressed in the major writings of multiple religious and philosophical traditions. In fact, the authors pointed out that even though the core virtues are not meant to reflect any single tradition, all six core virtues were identified eight centuries earlier (dubbed the Seven Heavenly Virtues) by the Catholic theologian Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*: four by name (Wisdom, Courage, Justice, and Temperance) and two implicitly as the theological virtues of Faith/Hope (Transcendence) and Love (Humanity; see Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that contemporary R/S measures assess each core virtue and its related character strengths.

A catalogue and exploration of measures at the intersection of VCS and R/S can inform theoretically interesting questions, many with significant practical import. For example, what is “the extent to which religion and spirituality help foster [or impede] those human strengths and virtues that lie at the heart of what makes a life well lived” (Hood et al., 2018, p. 452)? More broadly, by identifying, highlighting, and clarifying points of VCS–R/S intersection, this chapter can inform interdisciplinary cross-pollination and dialogue (see Cowden et al., Chap. 16 this volume).

For many reasons, a “VCS-colored-lenses” approach to identifying and understanding measures at this intersection is justified. First, the VCS–R/S intersection is already on the positive psychology map. Because most existing theories of VCS emerged from the writings of religious thinkers and moral philosophers (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005), the scientific study of VCS originated, at least in part, in intersection with R/S. Second, VCS have been given a place of honor in the positive psychology map. That is, because VCS are intrinsically linked to questions about the good life (a life worth living), VCS have become foundational and ubiquitous concepts in positive psychology, the science of human flourishing. Third, using VCS-colored lenses is productive; it enables the perception of key VCS ingredients in a culturally

rich and complex religious/spiritual stew. This is so because constructs of R/S (e.g., religious beliefs, experiences, and practices) naturally involve, reflect, or produce a number of virtues, such as when a comprehensive set of religious beliefs affords a sense of perspective (e.g., “perspective” is a character strength in the Peterson and Seligman [2004] virtue category of “wisdom/knowledge”).

The downside of such productivity is the danger of reductionism—reducing religious/spiritual phenomena to the additive combinations of the VCS that comprise them. Religious/spiritual phenomena are not merely collations of VCS ingredients. For example, with VCS-colored lenses, the abstracted character strength of love can be perceived as part of what is being measured by religious/spiritual scales of spiritual experience (e.g., “I feel *loved* by God”). However, the phenomenological spiritual experience of being loved by God (*the whole*) is more than simply love plus spirituality (*the sum of its parts*). Indeed, we contend that, for religiously/spiritually committed people, their religious/spiritual worldview helps define and nurture VCS; in our culinary metaphor, VCS ingredients are often cultivated in the soil of R/S.

VCS in Religious/Spiritual Concepts and Measures

We organize the rest of this chapter according to the six core virtues, as conceived by Peterson and Seligman (2004): wisdom/knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. For each virtue, we point to connections between character strengths and constructs in the psychology of R/S. Next, we focus on a subset of these VCS–R/S connections by exploring how particular character strengths are conceptualized and measured in religious/spiritual contexts and then review a selection of religious/spiritual scales that assess those strengths. We draw on insights gained from our VCS-focused ratings of 200 conceptually and religiously diverse scales from the psychology of R/S. Some character strengths are frequently represented in the reviewed measures, whereas others are hardly considered. Scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of R/S and VCS can access the complete *Table of VCS Ratings of R/S Scales* and *Lists of R/S Scales by VCS* in Appendixes 7.S1 and 7.S2.

Wisdom and Knowledge

Peterson and Seligman (2004) conceptualize the virtue of *wisdom/knowledge* as “cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge” (p. 29), especially the use of such strengths for the common good. Wisdom/knowledge is comprised of the character strengths of *creativity*, *curiosity*, *open-mindedness*, *love of learning*, and seeing things in a *perspective* that makes sense to oneself and others, and it can be both fostered and inhibited by R/S. The character strength of creativity is evident in religious problem solving or as a collective strength (such as in

religious communities that emphasize creative expressions of worship). Curiosity is manifested in research on indigenous, new age, and transpersonal religious/spiritual orientations. Open-mindedness is reflected in research examining quest religious orientation and religious/spiritual struggles and doubts. Love of learning includes people's efforts to gain knowledge and understanding of their own and others' R/S. Perspective is germane to religious/spiritual ideologies, worldviews, and beliefs. We discuss VCS connections with quest orientation, religious/spiritual struggle and doubt, and religious/spiritual beliefs more closely.

Quest religious orientation, the willingness to face complex existential issues (Batson et al., 1993), requires open-mindedness. In this orientation, tentativeness reflects religious/spiritual maturity. If flexibility is viewed as a hallmark of mental health, then quest reflects an open-minded toleration of ambiguity that marks wisdom and religious/spiritual maturity. An example item from the Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) is "As I grow and change, I expect my religion to also grow and change," and one from the Religious Maturity Scale (Dudley & Cruise, 1990) is "Important questions about the meaning of life do not have simple or easy answers; therefore, faith is a developmental process."

Quest orientation is also emblematic of *religious/spiritual struggles and doubts*. Indeed, religious/spiritual questing, struggles, and doubts often increase following exposure to tragedy, as profound existential questions might press for a spiritual transformation that involves a new system of meaning (Krauss & Flaherty, 2001). Example measures include the Religious Doubts Scale (Altemeyer, 1988) that assesses the extent one has religious doubts (e.g., "Doubts about the existence of a benevolent, good God, caused by the suffering or death of someone I knew.") and the Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991; e.g., "I have been driven to ask religious questions out of growing awareness of the tensions in my world and in my relationship to my world.").

Religious/spiritual beliefs are the propositions that help one make sacred sense of people, events, and the cosmos; they afford perspective. Example items from the Buddhist Beliefs and Practices Scale (Emavardhana & Tori, 1997) are "I believe in the theory of karma and rebirth" and "I think the cessation of suffering occurs when the Noble Eightfold Path is followed."

Courage

Peterson and Seligman (2004) define the virtue of *courage* as "emotional strengths that involve the exercise of the will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal" (p. 29). This virtue consists of the character strengths of *bravery (valor)*, *persistence*, *integrity*, and *vitality (enthusiasm)*. Strengths of persistence and bravery are involved in moral behavior and religious coping; integrity, in intrinsic religious orientation; and vitality, in religious/spiritual well-being. We will discuss VCS connections with intrinsic orientation and religious coping.

As an internalized, paramount desire to serve the object of one's sacred devotion, a key element of *intrinsic religious orientation* is integrity—moral behavior and expressed R/S that are consistent with internalized sacred devotion (Allport, 1950). The intrinsically oriented religious person maintains their integrity and authenticity, even in the face of derision or disappointment. Example items from the Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967) are “I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life” and “The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotion as those said by me during services.”

Several measures of *religious coping*, such as Pargament et al.'s (1998) positive religious coping subscale, involve the character strengths of bravery and persistence. Example items include: “Tried to put my plans into action together with God” and “Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.” An example from the Pakistani Religious Coping Practices Scale (Khan & Watson, 2006) is “Gave Sadaqah—charity—in the name of Allah.”

Humanity

Peterson and Seligman (2004) define *humanity* as a core virtue of “interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others” (p. 29). Its character strengths are *love*, *kindness*, and *social intelligence*. This virtue “relies on doing more than what is only fair—showing generosity even when an equitable exchange would suffice, kindness even if it cannot (or will not) be returned, and understanding even when punishment is due” (p. 37). Love is germane to God representations and attachment to God, whereas kindness is implicated in religious attitudes, moral behavior, and religious/spiritual social support. Social intelligence is involved in religious caregiving. We examine VCS connections with God representations, attachment to God, and religious/spiritual support.

God representations, one's mental representations of God, involve people's perceptions of the character of God, especially with respect to the character strength of love. God-representation scales include Johnson et al.'s (2015) 18-item list of adjectives of a benevolent God (e.g., *caring*, *generous*, *gracious*) and an authoritarian God (e.g., *commanding*, *stern*, *controlling*). Another example is Benson and Spilka's (1973) Loving God items (e.g., *accepting*, *loving*, *approving*).

Attachment to God, the extent to which a person perceives God as a safe haven from distress and a source of relational and emotional security, is grounded in the character strength of love. Attachment to God theory is rooted in the assumption that people have an attachment system that impels them to develop internal working models of relational–emotional patterns that are formed primarily during early childhood interactions with caregivers. Researchers have found that God often serves as an attachment figure (Granqvist, 2020). Most measures of attachment (including attachment to God) emphasize assessing insecure attachment patterns of avoidance and anxiety. Two attachment to God measures are Rowatt and Kirkpatrick's (2002) Attachment to God Scale (e.g., “God seems to have little or no

interest in my personal affairs” [avoidance]; “God’s reactions to me seem to be inconsistent” [anxiety]) and Beck and McDonald’s (2004) Attachment to God Inventory (e.g., “I prefer not to depend too much on God” [avoidance]; “I often worry about whether God is pleased with me” [anxiety]).

Of course, some religious traditions do not emphasize a theistic notion of a personal God, but for such traditions, the humanity virtue is still relevant. For example, Buddhism suggests that attachment (to anything or anyone) is unhealthy. Indeed, one of the four Noble Truths of Buddhism is that suffering arises from attachment to desires. In this faith tradition, attachment is “a mental affliction that distorts the cognition of its object by exaggerating its admirable qualities and screening out its disagreeable qualities” (Sahdra et al., 2010, p. 116). In other words, perceptions of an attachment object—which are viewed as inherently distorted and illusory—interfere with authentic relationship with that object. In this religious/spiritual worldview, the character strength of love requires *nonattachment* (“release from mental fixations,” Sahdra et al., 2010, p. 116): release from fixating on a relationship (i.e., desiring it) brings about a sense of security that actually facilitates the relationship. Therefore, nonattachment should “enhance relatedness, compassion, and well-being because... the need to influence relationship partners or life events to fit some static mold is no longer present” (Sahdra et al., 2010, p. 117). Sahdra et al. developed the Nonattachment Scale and found that nonattachment was indeed negatively associated with both anxious and avoidant attachment (considerably stronger with anxious), and it was positively related to empathy, generosity, self-compassion, and well-being. Example items include “I have a hard time appreciating others’ successes when they outperform me” (reverse-scored) and “I do not have to hang on to the people I love at all costs; I can let them go if they wish to go.”

Religious/spiritual support is an aspect of kindness and love in religious/spiritual relationships and communities. Bjorck and Maslim’s (2011) Multi-Faith Religious Support Scale assesses perceived support from one’s religious community, from religious leaders, and from God (with an adolescent version subsequently published). Originally developed among Muslim women, the scale’s validity has been supported with other groups (e.g., Korean-speaking Protestants). Example items are “Other participants in my religious group care about my life and situation” and “I can turn to my religious leaders for advice when I have problems.”

Justice

Peterson and Seligman (2004) define the virtue of *justice* as “civic strengths that underlie healthy community life” (p. 30). This virtue includes the character strengths of citizenship, fairness, and leadership. Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that this virtue is unique in that its character strengths can be considered as strengths *among* people (they pertain to community living), whereas the strengths of humanity are strengths *between* people (they pertain to interpersonal relationships). The character strength of fairness is relevant to extrinsic religious orientation, religious/

spiritual attitudes about prejudice, and religious/spiritual attitudes about social justice. Citizenship and leadership are implicated in religious/spiritual community identity and religious/spiritual organizational attributes. We discuss VCS connections with religious/spiritual prejudice, extrinsic religious orientation, social justice attitudes, and organizational attributes.

Prejudice, of course, is fundamentally related to fairness. Prejudice among religious people is what prompted Allport (1950) to distinguish between those who *use* their religion instrumentally as a means to another end—*extrinsic religious orientation*—and those who *live* their religion as an end in itself—*intrinsic religious orientation*. Extrinsically oriented religious persons were more racially prejudiced than intrinsically oriented persons. Example items from the Religious Orientation Scale's extrinsic subscale are (Allport & Ross, 1967) "Occasionally I find it necessary to compromise my religious beliefs in order to protect my social and economic well-being" and "The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection."

Many religious traditions emphasize themes of social justice. *Attitudes about social justice* pertain to issues involving fairness regarding the welfare of less powerful groups and persons; social justice includes concerns about poverty, immigration, discrimination, and hunger. A brief measure developed for use with Christians is the Sanctification of Social Justice Scale (Todd et al., 2014), which has items such as "God wants Christians to work for social justice" and "God wants Christians to confront discrimination so that everyone can be successful."

Religious/spiritual organizational attributes, such as the climate, cohesion, leadership, and communication in a faith community or institution, are germane to citizenship and leadership. In this area, faith communities and institutions are assessed in terms of group and organizational dynamics. For example, the Congregation Climate Scales (Pargament et al., 1983) include subscales assessing sense of community (e.g., "Members treat each other as family, for example, visiting the sick, celebrating anniversaries, etc."), organizational clarity (good leadership; "Our church has clearly stated goals for the future"), stability ("It is usually not a problem finding teachers for religious education classes"), and openness to change ("Members are willing to share and listen to different points of view"). The role of good religious/spiritual leadership is also assessed in the Congregation Satisfaction Questionnaire (Silverman et al., 1983), with items asking whether the leader is well-informed, creative, dedicated, and receptive to new ideas.

Temperance

Peterson and Seligman (2004) define the virtue of *temperance* as "strengths that protect against excess" (p. 30). This virtue includes the character strengths of *forgiveness/mercy*, *humility/modesty*, *prudence*, and *self-regulation*, most of which are central concepts across many faith traditions. Humility and forgiveness are respectively involved in R/S-grounded humility and forgiveness, religious practices and moral behavior are involved in prudence, and self-control and religious/spiritual

coping are germane to self-regulation. Here we will examine VCS connections with R/S-grounded humility, forgiveness, and moral behavior.

Naturally, *R/S-grounded humility* refers to when the character strength of humility is rooted in a religious/spiritual worldview. Broadly, *humility* is defined as a nondefensive willingness to view oneself accurately (including owning one's limitations), an other-oriented (rather than self-focused) interpersonal stance, a low concern for personal status, and a nondefensive teachability (see McElroy et al., 2019, for a review of humility measures). R/S-grounded humility bases these components in one's religious/spiritual beliefs, practices, and relationships, especially people's perceived relationship to God. For example, the Theistic Intellectual Humility Scale (Hill et al., 2021) assesses intellectual humility on a vertical plane (e.g., "My understanding of the world depends on God revealing things to me"; "I don't need to know everything because God is in control") and a horizontal plane ("I'm not always sure my interpretations of the Bible are right"). The similarly grounded Spiritual Humility Scale (Davis et al., 2010a) uses informant-ratings (e.g., "He/she accepts his/her place in relation to the Sacred.").

R/S-grounded forgiveness likewise refers to when the character strength of forgiveness is rooted in a religious/spiritual worldview. Forgiveness is often based in R/S, whether as a central component in seeking the path of righteousness for Hindus (Klostermaier, 1994), as part of forbearance and compassion for Buddhists (Higgins, 2001), as a response to divine forgiveness for Jews and Christians (Rye et al., 2000), or as a command from Allah for Muslims. For instance, the State Sanctification of Forgiveness Scale (Davis et al., 2012) takes religious/spiritual motives into account; example items are "God wants me to forgive the person who hurt me" and "If I don't forgive the person who hurt me, my spiritual life will suffer." The Relational Engagement of the Sacred for Transgressions scale (Davis et al., 2010b) assesses "the extent to which victims actively engage a relationship with the Sacred to deal with a specific transgression" (p. 288; "I tried to view him/her as a child of God"; "I tried to pray for him/her.").

Moral behavior involves the character strength of self-regulation. Religious texts and traditions speak a lot about self-regulation, broadly defined as exerting control over one's responses in order to pursue goals and maintain standards such as moral injunctions, norms, and ideals. Baumeister and Exline (1999) claim that self-control is personality's "moral muscle" (p. 1170) and state that "virtues seem based on the positive exercise of self-control, whereas sin and vice often revolve around failures of self-control" (p. 1175). In fact, the frequently documented connection of R/S with physical and mental health may be due largely to R/S's emphasis on self-regulation (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Many religious/spiritual measures involve the character strength of self-regulation, such as "When I face a problem in life, I believe that I am being punished by Allah for bad actions I did" (Psychological Measure of Islamic Religiousness scale; Abu-Raiya et al., 2008) and "God helps me to keep from drinking when I have a lot of problems" (Alcohol-Related God Locus of Control Scale for Adolescents; Goggin et al., 2007).

Transcendence

Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined the virtue of *transcendence* as “strengths that forge connections to the large universe and provide meaning” (p. 30), and it includes the character strengths of *appreciation of beauty and excellence*, *gratitude*, *hope*, *humor*, and *spirituality*. The appreciation of beauty and excellence is relevant to mysticism and transcendent experiences; gratitude is germane to grace; hope is implicated in religious/spiritual coping and death transcendence; and spirituality is relevant to religious/spiritual insight, transcendent experiences, and God representations. We will examine VCS connections with religious/spiritual insight, transcendent experiences, and God representations.

Of note to positive psychologists, it is first worthwhile to dwell momentarily on the potentially transformative power of strong transcendence. *Strong transcendence* is “an aspect of human life or experience that involves encounters with things that defy human comprehension, understanding, and control” (Nelson, 2009, p. 548). Life is sometimes filled with enigmas; loved ones die and babies are born, the innocent suffer while the guilty prosper, freak accidents happen whereas serendipitous discoveries are made. Such woeful—and wonderful—slices of life often invite larger existential questions. Religious/spiritual thinkers contend that close encounters of the strong-transcendence kind (e.g., with transcendent reality, sacred beings or forces, or God) have the power to respond to life’s enigmas and transform people in powerful and positive ways. Thus, transcendence—as abstractly conceived in the VCS frame, relates to *aspects of personal transformative encounters with strong transcendence*—as holistically conceived by psychologists of R/S. These aspects include *religious/spiritual insight* (e.g., meaning, religious coping, belief, faith maturity, God concepts, and God attributions), *transcendent experiences* (e.g., awe, wonder, prayer, meditation, and mysticism), *changed future expectations* (e.g., hope, optimism, and death transcendence), and *transformed relational emotions and postures* (e.g., submission, acceptance, gratitude, trust, joy, contentment, comfort, and peace).

Religious/spiritual insight, which involves the character strength of perspective, deserves special attention here because of positive psychology’s increasingly meaning-oriented focus, including its emphasis on the dialectic between the positives and negatives of life (a shift that has been referred to as “Positive Psychology 2.0,” Wong, 2011, p. 69). R/S is, of course, a well-known source of meaning, and meaning-making is a central facet of R/S (Park & Van Tongeren, this volume; Davis et al., Chaps. 1 and 18, this volume). Furthermore, a sense of meaning in life significantly mediates the positive relationship between R/S and subjective well-being (Steger & Frazier, 2005). In short, R/S and positive psychology already intersect at meaning.

One multidimensional measure that taps into insight inherent in transcendent encounters is the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (Elkins et al., 1988; see also Lazar, 2021). This measure originates within a framework of *spirituality*, which is defined as “a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a

transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (Elkins et al., 1988, p. 10). Its items on the Meaning and Purpose in Life subscale assess spiritually based meaningful insights (e.g., “Whether or not it is always clear to us, the universe is unfolding in a meaningful, purposeful manner” and “My belief that there is a transcendent, spiritual dimension gives meaning to my life”). Items on its Sacredness of Life subscale assess insights into spiritually derived meaning from even mundane activities (e.g., “Even such activities as eating, work, and sex have a sacred dimension to them” and “I do not divide life into sacred and secular; I believe all of life is infused with sacredness”). Its items on the Awareness of the Tragic subscale assess meaning accruing from adverse life experiences (e.g., “I have grown spiritually as a result of pain and suffering”).

Within a religious/spiritual framework, *transcendent experiences*—which are germane to the appreciation of beauty and excellence—also deserve notice, particularly because of positive psychology’s long-standing engagement with mindfulness, a practice originally intended to promote awareness of transcendent reality. *Mindfulness* is typically defined as nonjudgmental awareness of present experience (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000), but this conception often is stripped of its religious/spiritual moorings, which originated in Buddhism and Christianity (Sharf, 2014). However, mindfulness researchers and therapies are increasingly reintegrating mindfulness within a holistic religious/spiritual framework (Purser & Milillo, 2014). Thus, R/S and positive psychology also intersect at transcendent experiences. The Spiritual Orientation Inventory (Elkins et al., 1988) assesses experiences with strong transcendence by asking about awareness of a Transcendent Dimension (e.g., “I have had transcendent, spiritual experiences in which...”: “...I felt deeply and intimately loved by something greater than I” and “...deeper aspects of truth seem to have been revealed”).

God representations (i.e., one’s mental representations of a deity) are related to the character strengths of spirituality and perspective, and they are directly relevant to encounters with strong transcendence. Dual-process conceptualizations of God representations are particularly interesting, because they highlight the difference between cognitive–doctrinal representations of God (“head knowledge”)—one facet of transcendent understanding/insight—and affective–experiential representations of God (“heart knowledge”)—which is one facet of transcendent relational emotion (see the theoretical framework and review of 73 measures by Sharp et al., 2021). For example, Zahl and Gibson (2012) asked Christian adults to consider positive (e.g., *kind, responsive, approachable*) and critical (e.g., *critical, judgmental, controlling*) adjectives of God in two different ways. Respondents were asked to indicate “whether it was descriptive of what they ‘should believe that God is like’ (intended to capture doctrinal representations), or what they ‘personally feel that God is like’ (intended to capture experiential representations)” (p. 220). This resulted in two subscales assessing doctrinal representations (of God as positive and critical) and two assessing experiential representations (God as positive and critical). Only experiential representations of God as positive were predictive of life satisfaction.

Conclusion: The Religious/Spiritual Varieties of Positive Psychology

In this chapter, we examined scales at the intersection of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Our intent was to aid scholars and practitioners by identifying VCS assessed with religious/spiritual measures and by making VCS–R/S connections explicit. We accomplished this goal by viewing measures from the psychology of R/S through the lens of VCS—a foundational and ubiquitous construct in positive psychology. By exploring the scales featured in this chapter, we also demonstrated how—at the level of measurement—constructs in the psychology of R/S can enhance our understanding of VCS. More broadly, we have shown how VCS measurement may be shaped within religious/spiritual contexts. We drew on insights gained from our VCS-focused ratings of 200 diverse scales from the psychology of R/S, the complete set of which is available in the *Table of VCS Ratings of R/S Scales* and *Lists of R/S Scales by VCS* in Appendixes 7.S1 and 7.S2.

We conclude with a note of caution. There is a sense that the metaphor of “intersection”—around which this chapter and volume are centered—is a misnomer. Different conceptualizations of VCS are grounded in different religious/spiritual worldviews, and because measurement follows conceptualization, measurement ought to reflect these religious/spiritual worldview differences (Hill & Hall, 2017). Had William James been a *positive* psychologist of R/S who was writing for this volume, perhaps he would have entitled his chapter *The Religious/Spiritual Varieties of Positive Psychology*.

Consider, for example, the concept of well-being, which is perhaps the overriding VCS concept to which all virtues and character strengths are indicators. Well-being is conceived—and therefore should be measured—differently among the different religions. Well-being in Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Sufism, and Taoism, for example, is flavored with the virtues of social harmony over personal expressiveness (Joshano, 2014; Uchida et al., 2004). Likewise, Muslim concepts of happiness are grounded in Islam, which emphasizes virtues of piety, fear of God, and submission to God’s will, as expressed in the *Shari’ah* (i.e., “the divine law”; Joshano, 2013). Within Islam, ultimate happiness comes in part from liberation from the flesh, suggesting that hedonic well-being scales measuring the frequency and intensity of positive emotion might be invalid when used with Muslims. In this vein, Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2011) noted that empirical research with Muslims needs to attend to Islam; otherwise it will risk distortion. Their note applies to research assessing any religious/spiritual population.

Similarly, because of the abstracted nature of positive psychology’s formulation of VCS, the risk of reductive distortion is inherent in negotiating the “intersection” of VCS and the psychology of R/S. Thus, when dealing with specific populations, such as people who adhere to religious/spiritual traditions, it is important that researchers and practitioners use positive psychology measures that validly assess such populations—not on positive psychology’s assumed cross-culturally universal terms but in the idiographically defined terms of the people they are assessing. A consideration of psychology of R/S measures will aid this endeavor.

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