

Appendix 22.S1: Religion and Spirituality: Conceptual Definitions

Religion and spirituality are complex, interrelated phenomena. Historically, within psychology of R/S studies, *religion* referred to an individual's feelings, acts, and experiences concerning the divine (James, 1902/1982); however, the term later became associated with organized and established traditions of beliefs and practices (Smith, 1962; Wulff, 1996). *Religion* served as a broadband, overarching construct involving both individual and institutional forms of religiousness (Pargament, 1997; Pargament et al., 2013). However, a cultural shift began in the mid-20th century that bifurcated religious experience and introduced notions of spirituality as distinct from formal religion. Individual, personal experiences and practices were seen to embody spirituality, and organized, institutional expressions were assigned to religion (Hill et al., 2000). Sheldrake (2016) suggested spirituality to be “a concept that defines our era” (p. 16), and, rather than being established by objective observation, this construct was characterized as an approach to the sacred that was “personalized, democratized, and eclectic” (p. 17). This development led to breach, in which *spirituality* was viewed as dynamic and privileged and segregated from static and delimited *religion*.

The fissure between religion and spirituality is not only of academic concern or construction but reflects perspectives held by an increasing number of the U.S. population. For example, in a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017), a growing number of adult Americans self-identify as *spiritual but not religious* (27%), which represented an increase of 8% from 5 years before. Of note, Lipka and Gecewicz (2017) found that 6% of Americans reported being *religious but not spiritual*; 18%, *neither religious nor spiritual*; and 48%, *both religious and spiritual*. However, some research evidence suggests the

distinction conveyed by the *spiritual-but-not-religious* category may be “more of a moral or political category than an empirical one” (Ammerman, 2013, p. 275).

Pargament (1997, 1999, 2013), concerned in part about the emerging polarization between the terms *religion* and *spirituality*, has proposed definitions that explicitly link the shared objectives and functions of each construct. He has defined *spirituality* as “a search for the sacred” and *religion* as “a search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality” (Pargament, 2013, pp. 257-258).

Pargament and colleagues (2013) have further described the multiple dimensions and levels of spirituality and religion, proposing that spirituality and religion are interrelated rather than isolated phenomena. They asserted:

People do not follow their religious and spiritual paths in isolation. They undertake their journeys within a larger field of social and cultural forces, including religious group, age, ethnicity, family, community, and culture. These forces shape the nature of the individual’s religious and spiritual trek over the life span. (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 6)

Individual experiences of spirituality emerge within familial, cultural, and explicitly religious contexts. The seeds of spirituality may be found in the person’s institutional religious background (no matter their present affiliation with that tradition) or in the religions infused in the cultural surround. In a reciprocal manner, faith communities and religious institutions are animated by their members’ individual and shared personal experiences. Self-transcendence, humility, and positive emotions reflect experiences that intersect religion and spirituality. A wide-angle conceptual lens is required to capture both the unique and shared experiences of religiousness and spirituality (R/S).

These definitional issues are not only relevant to the academic study of R/S, but they also have practical consequences for how psychological science investigates R/S, especially when it comes to how these constructs are operationalized and measured when studying their impacts on mental health. Generally, the behavioral features of beliefs, practices, and salience that are identified within religions serve as available measures of religiousness or religiosity. In addition, measures of religious coping (e.g., the RCOPE) provide valid tools to study the roles of religion in navigating life's challenges. The measurement of spirituality, however, poses challenges because "there are no commonly agreed on characteristics of spirituality" (Koenig et al., 2012, p. 37). *Spirituality* may be seen as "a broad term that technically refers to any aspect of life that is perceived to have a divine or metaphysical quality" (Rosmarin & Koenig, 2020, pp. ix-x).

Although the constructs of religiousness and spirituality appear to describe different concepts, Zinnbauer and colleagues (1997), concluded decades ago that these constructs are not entirely independent. Likewise, Koenig (2018), citing additional research (e.g., Ammermen, 2013; Klein et al., 2013), concluded "there is considerable overlap between how people understand spirituality and religion, even among those who are less religious and more religiously diverse than in the United States" (p. 3). The distinctions between these constructs have been characterized as fuzzy (Krauss & Hood, 2013; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), thereby posing challenges for measuring spirituality independent of religion (see also Wixwat & Saucier, 2021). On this point, Koenig and colleagues (2012) reiterated, "Given the difficulty of defining what being spiritual but not religious means, researchers have been hard pressed to identify characteristics to include in the definition of spirituality if religion is left out" (p. 40). Although considering an individual's spirituality has clinical value, Koenig (2018) has asserted, "spirituality has become a nebulous and poorly defined term that is of little use when conducting

research (because of overlapping definitions with mental health)” (p. 311; see also MacDonald, Chapter 5, this volume).

Miller and colleagues (2021) offer a different perspective. They advocate for “clinical science [to focus] on the human capacity for lived spirituality, experienced as perceptions, motivations and practices around transcendence and ultimate concerns” (p. 1; see also Miller, 2010). For psychology to understand R/S more fully, it will need methods that not only unfuzzy the fuzzy but provide the means to apprehend the depth of human experience—which is rarely (if ever) captured by nomothetic scales. Do single-item measures of religiousness really tell the story of the role of R/S in a person’s life? Finke and Bader (2017) have opined: “No single measure can hope to capture the totality of an individual’s belief or provide a single ‘number’ that represents religion” (p. 2). Similarly, self-reports of church attendance of other features of religious identity are confounded by measurement bias (Brenner, 2017; Speed & Fowler, 2021; see Hill et al., Chapter 7, this volume). Such measurements tell us something about the associations between R/S and mental health, but they are insufficient to capture fully the dynamic processes involved when R/S is well-integrated in a person’s life. Hill and Pargament (2017) have proposed an integrative paradigm that, in part, would integrate the multiple dimensions, levels, and valences of R/S (see also Pargament et al., 2013).

In sum, this “definition conundrum” complicates efforts to investigate scientifically the impacts of religion and spirituality on mental health. The meta-analyses and narrative reviews that are examined in this chapter (see Appendix 22.S2) have investigated R/S primarily through measuring religious involvement, salience, and coping. The examination of the associations between R/S and mental health is delimited by the nature of the measures and procedures that are employed, and therefore a full accounting of the impact of R/S on mental health is not currently

available. This point is relevant when reviewing the findings of the extant empirical literature, particularly when it comes to incorporating positive psychology into efforts to understand the pathways through which R/S uniquely contributes to well-being (see also MacDonald, Chapter 5, this volume; Davis et al., Chapter 18, this volume).

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