

Assessing spirituality on two dimensions

Sharp, Carissa; Johnson, Kathryn

DOI:

[10.1080/10508619.2019.1633853](https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2019.1633853)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Sharp, C & Johnson, K 2020, 'Assessing spirituality on two dimensions: closeness to God and focal orientation', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 48-67.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2019.1633853>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* on 10/07/2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/figure/10.1080/10508619.2019.1633853>

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Assessing Spirituality on Two Dimensions: Closeness to God and Focal Orientation

Carissa A. Sharp

University of Birmingham

Kathryn A. Johnson

Arizona State University

Acknowledgements. The idea of a simple, multi-dimensional measure of relational spirituality originated during an informal meeting of the authors and Nicholas Gibson during Taco Night at the 2009 annual convention of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. A different version of the measure was previously published as part of Carissa A. Sharp's doctoral dissertation. Data collection and revisions of both the diagram and instructions continued through multiple iterations, made possible through the support of the John Templeton Foundation. We did not pre-register these studies collected over a five year period. The ThEOS measure and correlates were typically included as part of larger, unrelated as yet unpublished studies; therefore, we will not be making the data, analytic methods, and study materials available to other researchers at this time. Carissa A. Sharp and Kathryn A. Johnson share first authorship and can be contacted at c.sharp@bham.ac.uk or kathryn.a.johnson@asu.edu.

Abstract

Assessing the nature of people's relationships with God or the Divine is a central concern in the psychology of religion. We developed an intuitive, single-item diagrammatic scale which measures spirituality along two dimensions: (1) closeness to God or the Divine, and (2) the focus of that relationship as aimed at understanding either God (theo-focused) or the Self (ego-focused). In predominantly Christian and SBNR US samples, we found that the closeness dimension (from distant to close) was highly correlated with awareness of God's presence and also with various measures of religiosity and belief in a personal God. Additionally, focal orientation discriminated between different aspects of religiosity/spirituality. Theo-focused spirituality was associated with religious beliefs and practices such as religious commitment, belief in a personal God, and religious service attendance. Moreover, it was a positive predictor of social responsibility, belief in a dangerous world, and support for government spending on the military. In contrast, ego-focused spirituality was associated with an eclectic combination of unorthodox religious beliefs, an individualistic approach to spirituality, as well as an interest in science, support for government spending on scientific research, and environmentalism. Finally, we found similar between-group differences in closeness and focal orientation across the US, UK, and India. We expect that this short, intuitive measure will be useful for better understanding a wide range of relationships with the Divine.

Assessing Spirituality on Two Dimensions: Closeness to God and Focal Orientation

A common theme in the psychology of religion, generally, and cognitive science of religion, specifically, is the argument that “God,” “gods,” “supernatural agents,” or other related terms, are conceptualized as *persons*, albeit with some extra abilities (Tremelin, 2006). These personal beings are often described as “minimally-counterintuitive,” given that they are *mostly* person-like (Boyer, 2001). Research shows that people tend to anthropomorphize these supernatural others (Barrett & Keil, 1996) and relate to them in ways that are similar to how people relate to human beings (Barrett, 2004; Orsi, 2004). Belief in the Divine as a personal being can even extend to a belief that one can physically see and hear God (Luhrmann, 2012). Mystics report having experienced union with the Absolute (James, 1902/2002). Yet, at other times, people may feel very distant from the Divine (Exline, Grubbs, & Homolka, 2015). Consequently, various researchers have sought to measure the perceived closeness to, or distance from, God (Hodges, Sharp, Gibson, & Tipsord, 2012; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992).

A second aspect of one’s relationship with God is the perceived directionality of, or motivation for, that relationship. For example, the focus of the relationship may be either primarily on understanding God (what we shall refer to as “theo-focused” spirituality) or, in contrast, on gaining a better understanding of the self (what we shall refer to as “ego-focused” spirituality). To a certain extent, Allport’s measure of intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation alludes to this difference (Allport & Ross, 1967) and the terms theo-focused and ego-focused have many other close cousins in the philosophical, psychological, and theological literatures. We provide definitions, examples, and hypothesized correlates of these terms ahead.

We suggest that the closeness and the motivational dimensions are each critical in assessing individual differences in relational spirituality. In the current research, we present a

novel, intuitive, and easy-to-administer scale that gives a measure of both closeness to God and theo-focused versus ego-focused motivations for a person's relationship with the Divine.

Closeness to God

Belief in God, the Divine, a Higher Power, or Ultimate Reality is a central characteristic of religion (Boyer, 2001). Yet people all over the world, from all of the world's religions, have a myriad of ways in which they represent the nature, character, attributes, and/or manifestations of the Divine (Babb, 1975; Benson & Spilka, 1973; Froese & Bader, 2010; Gorsuch, 1968; Johnson, Okun, Cohen, Sharp, & Hook, 2018; Ward, 1998). These diverse representations may include the unimaginable God of Maimonides (1138-1204), Jesus the Messiah, Krishna the charioteer, Durga the warrior goddess, or Allah the Absolute. However, henceforth and in this research, we will refer to these many different representations quite simply as "God" or as "God or the Divine" when we wish to emphasize both personal and impersonal representations of God.

Just as interpersonal relationships are often characterized by a merging of representations of the self and a close or important other (Mashek, Aron, & Boncimino, 2003), people may feel more or less in union or interconnected with God (James, 1902/2002). Several existing measures have assessed perceived closeness to God, including Gorsuch and Smith's (1983) 6-item scale emphasizing God's presence and approachability. One frequently used measure to assess this perceived Self/Other overlap in human relationships is the Inclusion of Self in Other diagram with pairs of overlapping circles of varying distances (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Using a similar measure, Hodges et al. (2012) showed that people often think of God in a manner similar to other humans, such that perceived Self/God overlap was related to several different factors – notably, religiousness and awareness of God's presence. We use this existing self/other overlap scale as the basis for our measure of theo-focused vs. ego-focused self/other overlap.

Theo-focused vs. Ego-focused Self/Other Overlap

Critically, in considering the relationship between the self and God, just as in any relationship, one may focus on either individual in the relationship (in this case, on God as the referent or on the self as the referent), suggesting that the relationship with God can be measured along two dimensions (i.e., closeness and focus). Specifically, the relationship between self and God may have a theo-focused or ego-focused orientation — theo-focused as primarily focused on God and ego-focused as primarily focused on the Self.

Theo-focused Spirituality. Theo-focused spirituality is perhaps the more straightforward of the two proposed religious orientations. It stems from the term “theocentric,” which means “having God as the central interest and ultimate concern” (Theocentric, n.d.). This may refer to large groups of people (e.g., “a theocentric religious group”). However, we refer to “theo-focused spirituality” to indicate that the focus of, and motivation for, an individual’s spirituality is their relationship with God. This relationship with God is typically thought of as existing with a person-like being—a predominant conceptualization of God in existing psychological research. A theo-focused orientation emphasizes a desire to understand the nature, attributes, and purposes of God as well as improving one’s relationship with the Divine. Philosophers, religious specialists, and laypersons alike, from many religious traditions, have dedicated their lives to understanding God. For instance, devotees have created lists of attributes or names in order to help understand the character of God and to provide believers with different ways of interacting with God (e.g., St. John of Damascus’ 18 attributes, the 99 names of Allah). Others have focused on writing songs and poems in devotion to God (e.g., the Bhakti movement of Hinduism).

A primary feature of theo-focused spirituality may be engaging in the practices of worship, scripture reading, rituals, festivals, and prayer directed toward God. Thus, we would

expect a theo-focused orientation to be associated with religiousness. However, there are certainly individual differences in closeness to God even among those who seek to understand God (Exline, Grubbs, & Homolka, 2015; James, 1902/2002). For example, the puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, who famously described humans as “sinners in the hands of an angry God” (Edwards, 1797), was theo-focused in his theology and yet saw a great chasm between humans and God.

Ego-focused Spirituality. Whereas theo-focused spirituality is probably a common spiritual orientation in monotheistic religions, there are also many who view their relationship with God or the Divine as primarily illuminating something about their selves. For example, individuals in Abrahamic religious traditions may take an ego-focused, relatively individualistic approach to spirituality (Johnson, Sharp, Okun, Shariff, & Cohen, 2018) with a focus on self-improvement; unity with nature (e.g., Gaia) or other humans (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988); and/or conceptualizing a “higher self” (Heelas, 1996) or impersonal force rather than God as a personal being.

Although monotheists certainly engage in practices and hold religious and spiritual beliefs that align with the ego-focused dimension, we can imagine that a higher percentage of people from *non*-Abrahamic faith traditions would be ego-focused. For example, individuals in Asian or South Asian religious traditions may focus more on their duties as a householder (Flood, 1996), practicing asceticism (self-discipline), or concerns about karmic forces (White, Baimel, & Norenzayan, 2017). Notably, we have chosen the term “ego-focused” rather than ego-centric to signal that self-focused *spirituality* may entail self-denial and/or union with God or an Ultimate Reality rather than mere self-interest. Indeed, among Hindus, Buddhists, and those in related traditions, there may be an emphasis on self-denial, emotional and worldly

detachment, and understanding the self as an illusion or part of a greater cosmic whole—where the goal is to attain escape from the mundane.

In terms of closeness to God or the Divine, Jaworski (2015) has conceptualized spirituality which focuses on the self as *anthropocentric* spirituality, “placing oneself in the centre of life” (p. 143), and “meeting the needs for self-fulfillment and spiritual development...without reference to God” (p. 144). Someone with this Jaworskian anthropocentric spirituality would likely show little or no overlap (i.e., closeness) with God or the Divine. However, we maintain that ego-focused spirituality is not necessarily a-theistic and, therefore, not strictly anthropocentric. For example, one could argue that Saint Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle* is an ego-focused mystical account of a soul’s journey, through the metaphor of a castle. While the ultimate purpose of this journey is union with God, the emphasis is placed on the self – one must develop self-knowledge, moving through the seven “mansions” of the interior castle before one is ready to become a “Bride of Christ.” In a similar vein, the warrior Arjuna wrestles with his own emotions and duties to his countrymen in the Bhagavad Gita before coming to realize the majesty and divinity of his Lord Krishna. Thus, we argue that “union” or “connection” with the Divine can be an aspect of ego-focused spirituality as well.

The Theo-focused vs. Ego-focused Overlap Scale (“ThEOS”)

Our goal in the present research was to design a simple, easy-to-administer measure that could capture both dimensions of spirituality discussed above: assessing perceived closeness to whatever one might think of as God and distinguishing between a theo-focused vs. ego-focused orientation. Many of the existing measures of religion and spirituality repurpose scales designed originally to measure human-to-human, interpersonal relationships (e.g., attachment to God [Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992]; controlling vs. loving nature of God [Benson & Spilka, 1973]).

Indeed, researchers find many parallels between human relationships and relationships people have with God. However, while these existing measures form the theoretical basis for understanding different aspects of people's relationships with God, the measures often need to be adapted to adequately assess religion and spirituality. For example, the Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004) includes items such as "I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life," to imply that God is an omnipotent deity capable of controlling everything in a person's life.

As previously discussed, the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) has been modified to assess inclusion of *God* in the self (Hodges et al., 2012). The original measure has been invaluable in assessing interpersonal relationships. In the present research, we modified and extended the IOS overlapping circles measure to include both a theo-focused and ego-focused orientation as shown in Figure 1. We refer to this modification of the IOS scale as the Theo-focused vs. Ego-focused Overlap Scale (ThEOS).

****Figure 1 about here****

Similar to the original IOS Scale, the ThEOS uses two circles to represent the Self (presented as green) and God (presented as blue). The IOS uses the same size circles for both self and other. However, in order to adapt the scale to emphasize differences in motives and spiritual focus, we varied the size of the circles so that the God circle is larger than the Self circle where God is the focus of one's spirituality and the Self circle is larger than the God circle where understanding the Self is the focus of one's spirituality. Thus, participants have the option of choosing either a "Big God" version of the overlap measure (indicating Theo-focused spirituality), or a "Big Self" version (indicating Ego-focused spirituality). In this way, the ThEOS provides measures along two dimensions of relationship with God: closeness/connection

with God (the overlap dimension), and focal orientation (the size dimension).

In the current research, we present four studies demonstrating the correlates and predictive ability of each dimension, as well as an initial examination of the cross cultural validity of the measure. All studies were approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the researchers. We used the Turk Prime interface (Litman, Robinson, & Abberbock, 2016) to be sure there were no duplicate participants across the four studies. In Studies 1-3 and the U.S. and Indian samples in Study 4, participants were excluded if they (a) failed any of the multiple attention checks, (b) completed the survey in a number of minutes less than two standard deviations from the average time to complete, or (c) reported less than English fluency on a three-item multiple choice question. All exclusions were made prior to any data analyses.

Study 1: TheOS and Related Beliefs and Practices

In Study 1, we sought to validate the measure by investigating the correlates of each of the two dimensions of the Theo-focused and Ego-focused Overlap Scale (TheOS).

Participants

There were 341 Mechanical Turk workers ($M_{age} = 36.50$, $SD = 11.37$) who participated in the online survey for \$1.75. The average time to complete the study was 23.28 minutes. Participants were pre-screened for belief in God. There were 150 males and 270 Euro-Americans, 30 Black/African-Americans, 13 Hispanics, 12 Asians, and 16 other/multiple ethnicities. There were 92 Agnostics, 64 Catholics, 144 Non-Catholic Christians, and 41 Spiritual but not Religious (SBNR).

Measures

Participants completed the TheOS measure (Figure 1) which was presented as a color diagram using the Qualtrics survey platform. Participants chose one of 10 circle pairs, yielding

scores from 1 to 10. Participants also completed the following measures assessing beliefs about God, religious and spiritual practices, and religious orientation.

We limited participation to individuals residing in the U.S., the majority of whom identify (or previously identified) with the Christian tradition (Pew Research Center, 2015). Therefore, due to the likely religious demographics of our U.S. sample, we included existing measures of religiosity that are currently available. Several of these measures (notably Fundamentalism and Biblical Literalism) are based on the Christian religious tradition. All measures were presented as Likert scale ratings from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Religious commitment. We assessed religiousness with the 10-item Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington et al., 2003). Sample items are “My religious and spiritual beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life” and “I enjoy working in the activities of my religious organization” ($\alpha = .96$).

Fundamentalism. We assessed religious fundamentalism using the 12-item Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). Sample items are “God has given humankind a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed” and “To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion” ($\alpha = .95$).

Biblical literalism. We assessed Biblical literalism as agreement with six statements from the Literalism, Anti-literalism, Metaphor scale (LAM; (Hunt, 1972): “I believe in God as creator of heaven and earth” (Agree), “All miracles in the book of Genesis are true” (Agree), “The chief purpose of this life is to glorify God” (Agree), “The biblical story of creation is probably based on one of the early Babylonian myths” (Disagree), “I believe that humanity working and thinking together can build a just society without divine help” (Disagree), and “The

writings of such commentators on human life as Plato, Aristotle, Dante, and Shakespeare are as much inspired as were the writers of the scriptures” (Disagree) ($\alpha = .91$).

Practices. We are unaware of a measure of religious/spiritual practices. Therefore, we assessed types of practices with a 16-item novel measure asking how often participants engaged in three types of practices: *Traditional*—“attend a religious service (outside of weddings, funerals, or the like)”; “pray (outside of religious services)”; “listen to radio programs or podcasts related to your religious or spirituality”; “watch television programs about religion or spirituality”; “read scriptures or sacred texts”; “communicate with religious beings other than God (e.g., angels, saints in heaven)” (Eigenvalue = 5.07; $\alpha = .87$); *Guidance and Magical Thinking*—“consult a religious leader (e.g., guru, priest, pastor, imam)”; “consult a psychic or fortune teller”; “consult your horoscope”; “communicate with dead relatives”; “avoid unlucky situations (e.g., walking under ladders)”; “practice magic” (Eigenvalue = 2.43; $\alpha = .77$); and *Self-help*—“meditate”; “practice yoga”; “practice mindfulness”; and “read self-help books or articles” (Eigenvalue = 1.63; $\alpha = .71$). The frequency was measured as *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *less than once a month* = 3, *once a month* = 4, *several times a month* = 5, *several times per week* = 6, and *daily or almost daily* = 7.

Quest. We assessed acceptance of religious doubts and changes in beliefs with the 12-item Quest religious orientation scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) ($\alpha = .85$).

Individualistic spirituality. We assessed a tendency to piece together various spiritual and metaphysical beliefs using the 5-item Individualistic Spirituality scale (Johnson, Sharp, Okun, Shariff, & Cohen, 2018). The items are: “My spirituality often leads me to develop novel, inspired, creative beliefs of my own,” “My religious and spiritual beliefs are based upon my own understanding gleaned from multiple faith traditions,” “I have my own religious or spiritual

beliefs that are not quite like anyone else's," "Every individual must seek out and find his or her own spiritual truth," and "Spirituality is unique to every individual" ($\alpha = .81$).

Awareness of God. We assessed awareness of the presence of God in daily life with the 19-item Awareness of God subscale from the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall & Edwards, 1996). Sample items are: "I am aware of God telling me to do something" and "From day to day, I sense God being with me" ($\alpha = .99$).

God's Engagement in the World. We assessed the extent to which participants believed that God is actively engaged in human affairs using seven items from the Belief in Divine Intervention scale (Degelman & Lynn, 1995). Sample items are "God does not intervene directly in our daily lives" (reverse scored) and "God sometimes directly intervenes to change the course of damaging weather conditions" ($\alpha = .94$).

God view. We assessed views of God using two items adapted from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (Smith & Denton, 2003). The two items are: "What sort of image comes to mind when someone asks you to think about God?" . . . "God is a person-like being" and "God is something like a cosmic or transcendent life force."

Results and discussion

We coded scores on the Theo-focused (Big God) row as '1' and the Ego-focused (Big Self) row as '0' on the focus dimension. As indicated by the diagram, scores on each row of the Closeness dimension ranged from 1 = *distant* to 5 = *close connection*. As can be seen in Table 1, frequencies for the ten possible choices ranged from $n = 12$ to 46, $\chi^2(4) = 8.30$, $p = .081$.

****Tables 1 & 2 about here****

Table 2 provides the correlates of the variables of interest with (1) choosing Big God, (2) Closeness to God for those who chose Big God ("Closeness/Big God"), and (3) Closeness to

God for those who chose Big Self (“Closeness/Big Self”). As expected, religious commitment, fundamentalism, Biblical literalism, belief in a personal God, belief in God’s engagement in the world, and participation in traditional religious practices were all positively correlated with Big God, Closeness/Big God, and Closeness/Big Self. Notably, Awareness of God was positively associated with Closeness/Big God and Closeness/Big Self but uncorrelated with Big God. In contrast, but as expected, practices such as seeking guidance from psychics and using self-help materials were negatively correlated with choosing Big God (and, as its reverse, positively correlated with choosing Big Self). However, surprisingly, Quest, Individualistic Spirituality, and belief in God as an impersonal force were not significantly correlated with Big God or Closeness. We suggest that it is possible to collapse the Closeness scores across the Focus dimension in order to create a continuous variable, so that each participant has two scores: a Big God score (0 or 1) and a Closeness score (1 to 5).

Although we view TheOS as a measure of individual differences, we were interested in any differences across religious groups. A Chi Square test of independence showed that SBNRs (61%) were significantly more likely than Agnostics (46.7%), Catholics (40.6%), or Protestants (36.8%) to select a Big Self circle pair on the orientation dimension, $\chi^2(3) = 8.32, p = .040$. We also conducted an exploratory, post hoc analysis of between group differences in terms of Closeness to God. A one-way ANOVA using a Bonferroni corrected alpha of .0125 revealed that there were significant differences across the four groups in terms of Closeness to God, $F(3, 316) = 18.31, p < .001$, with Agnostics ($M = 2.07, SD = 1.33$) having significantly lower scores relative to Protestants ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.34$), Catholics ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.44$), and SBNRs ($M = 3.37, SD = 1.44$), all p ’s $< .001$.

The results of Study 1 suggest that selecting the Theo-focused (i.e., the Big God) orientation of the ThEOS measure is an indication of spirituality focused on a desire to understand God which is often characteristic of monotheists. However, for many people, spirituality may be less about understanding God and more about understanding or improving the Self. Indeed, selecting the Big Self orientation appears to be an indication of spiritual practices aimed at understanding the self and is typically selected by people identifying as Spiritual but not Religious in a U.S. sample.

Study 2: ThEOS, Atheism, and Spiritual Beliefs

The purpose of Study 2 was threefold. First, we wished to replicate the null results of Study 1, especially in regard to Quest, individualistic spirituality, and impersonal God representations, as the results in Study 1 were contra to our hypotheses. Second, we wanted to investigate the extent to which ego-focused spirituality was positively associated with the perceived sacredness of other non-religious entities (e.g., nature). Third, we wanted to investigate how atheists might respond to the ThEOS. We predicted that atheists would choose the Ego-focused (i.e. Big Self) dimension and would have low scores on the Closeness dimension, thus being consistent with Jaworski's definition of anthropocentric spirituality. (We caution, however, that the measure is not intended to assess unbelief. For example, it is meaningless to ask an unmarried person to rate their relationship with their spouse.)

Participants

Participants were 250 MTurk workers ($M_{age} = 36.36$, $SD = 11.97$) who participated in the online survey for \$1.80. The average time to complete the study was 18.04 minutes. There were 126 males and 180 Euro-Americans, 29 Blacks/African-Americans, 15 Hispanics, 10 Asians, and 16 other/multiple ethnicities. We used quotas to limit the number of atheists and to obtain

approximately equal sample sizes across religious groups. There were 23 Atheists, 35 Agnostics, 50 Catholics, 52 Evangelical Christians, 61 Mainline Protestants, and 29 SBNRs.

Measures

Participants completed a larger survey which included the following measures from Study 1: ThEOS, Awareness of God's presence (Hall & Edwards, 1996; $\alpha = .98$), God as a personal being vs. impersonal force (Smith & Denton, 2003), Quest (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991; $\alpha = .85$), and Individualistic Spirituality (Johnson et al., 2018; $\alpha = .85$).

We also included a novel measure designed to assess the importance of other kinds of entities for one's spirituality. We asked participants to rate 14 entities, on a 1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *extremely important* Likert scale, asking "To what extent are the following important for your own spirituality?" The entities were: God, Jesus, angels, deceased saints, ancestors, space, oceans, mountains, animals, alien beings, fairies, fire, science, and higher self.

Results & discussion

As shown in Table 3, Big God and Closeness to God were uncorrelated. Quest religious orientation, individualistic spirituality, and views of God as an impersonal force were negatively correlated with Big God (and, its reverse, positively correlated with Big Self). These results were similar to, but more robust than, Study 1 and were in accord with our original predictions with the exception of Quest. We expected that people with doubts about God would feel further from God. In line with our expectations, in Study 1, Quest was negatively (although non-significantly) associated with Closeness to God for those who chose Big God. However, in Study 2, Quest was positively (and significantly) associated with Closeness to God in the Big God category. Notably, and consistent with Study 1, awareness of God's presence was positively correlated

with Closeness to God but uncorrelated with Big God, supporting our assumption that ego-focused spirituality can involve feelings of union with the Divine.

Next, we found that ego-focused spirituality (i.e., Big Self) was positively correlated (and, its reverse, Big God was negatively correlated) with ratings of many other types of entities as important for one's spirituality including sentient beings (e.g., ancestors, angels, aliens), natural features (e.g., space, oceans), abstract concepts (e.g., science, Higher Self), and animals. Yet Closeness to God was uncorrelated with ratings for these entities lending further support for the need to evaluate religion and spirituality on two dimensions and suggesting that spirituality may be more complex and subject to individual experiences than has previously been studied.

****Table 3 about here****

Atheist responses. Finally, we conducted a Chi Square test of independence to better understand atheists' responses in terms of theo-focused vs. ego-focused spirituality. Contrary to our prediction that atheists would respond using the Big Self circle pairs, we found that Atheists (69.6%)—and Evangelical Christians (67.3%)—were significantly more likely than Agnostics (48.6%), Catholics (36.0%), Mainline Protestants (44.3%), or SBNRs (31.0%) to choose a circle pair from Big God orientation, overall $\chi^2(5) = 18.54, p = .002$. This may indicate that Atheists reject a specific concept of God, and consistent with previous research, this concept is similar to that endorsed by Evangelical Christians (Gibson, 2006). Conversely, and consistent with Study 1, SBNRs were significantly more likely to select one of the Big Self circle pairs.

As expected, a one-way ANOVA using a Bonferroni corrected alpha of .008 revealed there were also significant differences across six groups in terms of Closeness to God, $F(5, 244) = 29.04, p < .001$, with Atheists ($M = 1.35, SD = 1.03$) having significantly lower scores relative to Evangelical Christians ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.12$), Protestants ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.25$), Catholics (M

= 3.54, $SD = 1.23$), and SBNRs ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.53$), all p 's < .001. Atheists did not differ from Agnostics ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.19$) in closeness to God. As in Study 1, Agnostics also had significantly lower Closeness to God scores relative to the other groups, all p 's < .001.

A final analysis showed that 60.9% of the Atheists (compared with 31.4% of Agnostics, 3.8% of Evangelical Christians, 4.9% of Mainline Protestants, 2.0% of Catholics, and none of the SBNRs) selected the Big God circle pair with the furthest distance between the two circles. One interpretation is that Atheists are more prone to reject both belief in God and ego-focused spirituality. However, we caution that the ThEOS is not intended to be a forced response item; nor is it designed to assess spiritual focus or closeness to the Divine among non-believers or the non-religious. Instead, we recommend either pre-screening participants for belief in God, a Higher Power, or Divine Life Force (as in Study 1) or providing an opportunity to opt out of the question on large surveys (as in Study 3).

Study 3: ThEOS, Self-centeredness, and Social Attitudes

Beliefs about the nature and attributes of the Divine often reflect a person's self-construal (Benson & Spilka, 1973), well-being (Wood, et al., 2010), values (Johnson, Okun, & Cohen, 2015), and social attitudes (Froese & Bader, 2010). In Study 3, we investigated the ability of each dimension (closeness to God and theo-focused vs. ego-focused orientation) to uniquely predict the willingness to increase government spending for the military, welfare programs, scientific research, and the environment over and above the social attitudes that might contribute to supporting these causes. Specifically, we hypothesized that in US contexts, (1) focus on God (i.e., selecting Big God circle pairs on the focus dimension) would be positively aligned with belief in a dangerous world and the endorsement of military spending (Altemeyer, 1988); (2) focus on God would also be negatively correlated with social responsibility and the endorsement

of welfare spending (Froese & Bader, 2010); (3) closeness to God would be negatively correlated with an interest in science and the endorsement of government spending on scientific research (given the relationship between closeness to God and Fundamentalism in Study 1); and (4) closeness to God would be negatively correlated with closeness to nature and the endorsement of government spending on the environment (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2016).

A second goal of Study 3 was to further investigate the correlates of ego-focused spirituality in terms of self-construal. Our hypothesis was that ego-focused spirituality is not necessarily egocentric or self-centered but, rather, reflects a desire for self-improvement or self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

Participants

Participants were 657 MTurk workers ($M_{age} = 36.496$, $SD = 11.87$) who participated in the online survey for \$2.00. The average time to complete the study was 25 minutes. Participants were pre-screened for belief in God. There were 258 males and 500 Euro-Americans, 66 Black/African-Americans, 33 Hispanics, 31 Asians, 27 other/multiple ethnicities. There were 150 Agnostics, 121 Catholics, 320 Non-Catholic Christians, and 66 SBNRs.

Measures

Participants completed a larger survey including the ThEOS and the following measures.

Religion and spirituality. We assessed religiosity using a 6-item measure (Cohen, Shariff, & Hill, 2008) ($\alpha = .94$). Sample items are “I am a religious person” and “I often and regularly practice the requirements of my faith tradition.” As in Studies 1 and 2, we assessed individualistic spirituality ($\alpha = .83$) and Quest orientation (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) ($\alpha = .85$). We used 15 items to assess representations of God as Authoritarian (e.g., *punishing, strict*;

$\alpha = .88$), Benevolent (e.g., *merciful, compassionate*; $\alpha = .93$), and Mystical (e.g., *nature, energy, consciousness*; $\alpha = .78$) adapted from Silverman, Johnson, & Cohen (2016).

Government spending. Participants were instructed, “We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. For each of the problems below, please indicate whether you think the government is spending the right amount of money.” Participants answered on a 1 = *far too much* to 5 = *far too little* Likert scale. The four problems were: Military, armaments, and defense; Scientific research and development; Social services and welfare programs; and Improving and protecting the environment.

Social Attitudes. We included other predictors of attitudes toward government spending.

Belief in a dangerous world. We assessed Belief in a Dangerous World with 6 items (Altemeyer B. , 1988) ($\alpha = .87$) as a predictor of support for military spending.

Social responsibility. We assessed participants’ felt personal responsibility to help others using the 8-item social responsibility subscale of the Prosocial Personality Scale (Penner, 2002) ($\alpha = .80$) as a predictor of support for spending on social services and welfare.

Interest in science. We assessed an interest in science using a novel 5-item measure ($\alpha = .89$) as a predictor of support for government spending on scientific research. The five items were: “I enjoy reading about science,” “It is important to me to spend time thinking about scientific topics,” “I have a strong desire to be part of the scientific community,” “I often talk to my friends and family about scientific topics,” and “Compared with other people my age, I know quite a bit about science.”

Environmentalism. We assessed positive attitudes toward the environment using the 6-item Green Scale (Haws, Winterich, & Naylor, 2014) ($\alpha = .93$) as a predictor of support for spending on the environment.

Egocentrism. To further investigate the nature of ego-focused spirituality, we used a planned missing data design in which participants completed one, but not all of three measures of egocentrism.

Self-actualization. We assessed self-actualization ($n = 215$) using the 14-item Self-actualization scale (Jones & Crandall, 1986) ($\alpha = .75$). Sample items are “I am not ashamed of my emotions,” “I can like people without having to approve of them” and “I am bothered by fears of being inadequate” (reverse scored).

Egotism. We assessed egotism ($n = 239$) using the 15-item Egotism subscale of the Supernumerary Personality Inventory (Paunonen, 2002) ($\alpha = .91$). Sample items are “I expect to be treated with a great deal of respect and admiration,” “I am good at almost everything I do,” and “I like to tell others about my accomplishments.”

Self-consciousness. We assessed self-consciousness ($n = 203$) using the 10-item private self-consciousness scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) ($\alpha = .75$). Sample items are “I am always trying to figure myself out,” “I reflect about myself a lot,” and “I’m often the subject of my own fantasies.”

Results & discussion

The bivariate correlations between each of the variables of interest and Big God (and, its reverse, Big Self) and Closeness to God are provided in Table 4.

Tables 4 & 5 about here

Religion and spirituality. Religiosity was positively correlated with Big God whereas individualistic spirituality was negatively correlated with Big God (and positively correlated with its reverse, Big Self). However, in support of our claim that ego-focused spirituality is not necessarily a-theistic, religiosity and individualistic spirituality were both positively correlated

with closeness to God or the Divine. Quest was weakly and negatively associated with Big God and, as expected and as in Study 1, selecting Big God was negatively correlated with Closeness to God. Selecting the Big God orientation was positively correlated with representations of God as authoritarian and benevolent, but not mystical. In contrast, closeness to God was positively correlated with representations of God as benevolent and mystical, but not authoritarian.

Egocentrism. Importantly, Big Self was uncorrelated with egotism and self-consciousness. Instead, seeing one's relationship with the Divine as centered on understanding the self seems more likely to be characterized by self-actualization. Additionally, for those who selected Big God (rather than Big Self), feeling close to God was associated with self-actualization.

Social attitudes. To investigate the ability of each dimension to predict government spending, uniquely, and over and above relevant social attitudes, we conducted four multiple regression models, regressing government spending on (1) the military, (2) welfare, (3) science, and (3) the environment on Belief in a Dangerous World, Social Responsibility, Interest in Science, and Environmentalism, respectively. We also regressed the four areas of government spending on Big God (coded '1'), Closeness to God (centered), and the interaction of Big God x Closeness to God. In Step 2, we added two control variables, sex (female coded '1', male coded '0') and age. The results are presented in Table 5.

Closeness to God had been positively correlated with support for the military and negatively correlated with government spending on social services and welfare (see also Froese & Bader, 2010; Johnson, et al., 2016). However, as predicted, the focus dimension seems to play a more important role such that when both focus and closeness are included in a regression model, a focus on understanding God (i.e., Big God) was the only (positive) predictor of support

for the military and the only (negative) predictor of support for welfare programs. The interactions were not significant.

In contrast, when Big God and Closeness to God were entered in a regression model, Closeness to God was the only (negative) predictor of support for government spending on science. The interaction was not significant.

One striking difference between Big God, Big Self, and Closeness to God on the two dimensions involved attitudes toward the environment and government spending on the environment. As shown in Table 4, for the group selecting Big Self, Closeness to God was a positive predictor of environmentalism but uncorrelated with spending. In contrast, for the group selecting Big God, Closeness to God was a negative predictor of spending but uncorrelated with environmentalism. In the regression model, Closeness to God was negative predictor of spending on the environment (although the effect was non-significant after controlling for age). We had collapsed the scores for Closeness to God across the two dimensions because the pattern of correlations was very similar for most related variables, across three studies. However, we note that the negative effect of Closeness to God on environmental spending here was most likely driven by the group selecting Big God.

Religious group differences. A Chi Square test of independence showed that SBNRs (72.2%) were more likely than Agnostics (62.0%), Catholics (48.8%), or Protestants (37.2%) to select a Big Self circle pair on the orientation dimension, overall $\chi^2(3) = 54.77, p < .001$.

Study 4: The ThEOS across Cultures

In three studies we have shown that each dimension of the Theo-focused vs. Ego-focused Overlap Scale (ThEOS) provides unique information regarding individual differences in religion and spirituality, beliefs about the nature of God, and social attitudes. In Study 4, we turned our

attention to group differences. We expected to find that the Big God orientation is generally more characteristic of monotheistic religious groups and that the Big Self dimension, while still applicable to monotheism, is more relevant to holistic traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and for non-religious spirituality (i.e., SBNRs).

Participants

U.S. participants were the 657 MTurk workers from Study 3 who were pre-screened for belief in God. There were 121 Catholics, 320 non-Catholics, 150 agnostics, and 66 SBNRs.

Participants in the United Kingdom were members of Qualtrics panels who were pre-screened for belief in God. A “soft launch” of 10% of the data was conducted, after which participants who completed the survey in less than one-third of the median response time were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, participants were excluded from the analysis if they did not sufficiently answer a free response question unrelated to the current analysis. In the final sample of 297 ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.95$, $SD = 13.67$), there were 109 males. There were 60 Christian (both Catholic and non-Catholic), 54 Muslim, 41 Hindu, 40 Buddhist, 42 Jewish, and 60 SBNR participants. There were 172 White British, 19 Non-UK European, 5 Black British, 38 Asian British, 3 Black/Caribbean, 3 Black/African, 9 Chinese, 18 Indian, 5 Middle Eastern, 9 Pakistani, 4 Bangladeshi, and 12 “Other” participants. 3 participants reported not being fluent in English.

Participants in India were 317 MTurk workers ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.75$, $SD = 8.97$) who were pre-screened for belief in God. There were 224 males. There were 48 Catholics, 36 Non-Catholic Christians, 46 Muslims, and 187 Hindus. There were 283 South or Southeast Asians, 25 East Asians, 7 Pacific Islanders, and 2 “Other” participants.

Results & discussion

The descriptive statistics for each dimension of the ThEOS, by religious group, by country, are provided in Table 6.

U.S. A one-way ANOVA using a Bonferroni corrected alpha of .0125 revealed that there were significant differences in Closeness to God between the four religious groups, $F(3, 654) = 38.13, p < .001$, with Agnostics feeling significantly further from God relative to Catholics, Non-Catholic Christians, or SBNRs, all $ps < .001$. The three religious groups did not differ from one another in Closeness to God.

****Table 6 about here****

A Chi Square test of independence revealed that the groups were also significantly different on the focal dimension, $X^2(3) = 42.85, p < .001$. Subsequent t -tests showed that Non-Catholic Christians (62.8%) were significantly more likely than Catholics (51.2%), $t(439) = 2.22, p = .027$, SBNRs (27.3%), $t(384) = 5.50, p < .001$ and Agnostics (38.0%), $t(468) = 5.17, p < .001$ to choose a Big God orientation. Catholics were significantly more likely than SBNRs, $t(185) = 3.24, p = .001$, and Agnostics, $t(269) = 2.19, p = .029$, to choose a Big God orientation. Agnostics and SBNRs did not differ in orientation, $p = .128$.

U.K. A one-way ANOVA using a Bonferroni corrected alpha of .008 revealed that there were significant differences in Closeness to God between the six religious groups, $F(5, 291) = 2.53, p = .029$, with Christians feeling significantly further from God ($p = .044$) and SBNRs feeling further from God relative to Hindus ($p = .065$). The other religious groups did not differ significantly in Closeness to God.

A Chi Square test of independence revealed that the groups were also significantly different on the focal dimension, $X^2(5) = 19.77, p = .001$. Subsequent t -tests showed that Buddhist participants (75.00%) were significantly more likely than Christian (55.00%), $t(98) =$

2.05, $p = .043$, Jewish (38.10%), $t(80) = 3.58$, $p = .001$, and Muslim participants (42.6%), $t(92) = 3.28$, $p = .001$ to choose a Big Self orientation. Christian participants were marginally more likely than Jewish participants, $t(100) = 1.69$, $p = .094$ to choose a Big Self orientation. Hindu participants (68.30%) were significantly more likely than Jewish, $t(81) = 2.86$, $p = .005$, and Muslim participants, $t(93) = 2.55$, $p = .013$ to choose a Big Self orientation. And finally, SBNR participants (65.00%) were significantly more likely than Jewish, $t(100) = 2.76$, $p = .007$, and Muslim participants, $t(112) = 2.44$, $p = .016$ to choose a Big Self orientation. The other religious groups did not differ significantly on this dimension. Overall, we found that participants from non-Abrahamic faith traditions tended to be more likely to choose an ego-focused orientation.

India. A one-way ANOVA using a Bonferroni corrected alpha of .0125 revealed that there were significant differences in Closeness to God between the four religious groups, $F(3, 313) = 4.31$, $p = .005$, with Non-Catholic Christians feeling significantly closer to God relative to Catholics ($p = .021$), Muslims ($p = .008$), or Hindus ($p = .009$). Catholics, Muslims, and Hindus did not differ from one another in Closeness to God.

A Chi Square test of independence revealed that the groups were also significantly different on the focal dimension, $X^2(3) = 13.31$, $p = .004$. Subsequent t -tests showed that Non-Catholic Christians (66.7%) were significantly more likely than Hindus (39.6%), $t(221) = 3.05$, $p = .003$, somewhat more likely than Catholics (45.8%), $p = .059$, but no different from Muslims (60.9%), $p = .594$, to choose a Big God orientation. Catholics were not significantly different from Hindus, $p = .433$, or Muslims, $p = .147$, in choosing a Big God orientation. However, Muslims were significantly more likely than Hindus to choose a Big God orientation, $t(231) = 2.64$, $p = .009$. Agnostics and SBNRs did not differ in orientation

General Discussion

Individual differences in religious orientation have been central in the study of religion. For example, the predictors and outcomes of intrinsic vs. extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967) were the gold standard in theorizing about religion for more than a quarter century. However, the religious landscape and its theoretically relevant categories are always changing (Pew Research Center, August 29, 2018). We believe that recognizing and assessing differences in a theo-focused versus ego-focused spiritual orientation will be increasingly important for researchers interested in understanding religion and spirituality going forward. To that end, we built upon previous research and a measure assessing closeness to God in order to develop and validate the Theo-focused vs. Ego-focused Overlap Scale (ThEOS) which assesses individual differences in spirituality on two dimensions: (1) spirituality focused on understanding God vs. understanding the Self, and (2) the psychological closeness of the Self and the Divine.

We found that, in the U.S., theo-focused spirituality is associated with religious commitment, Biblical literalism, belief in a personal God, and religious practices such as service attendance, prayer, and seeking out religious media presentations. Moreover, theo-focused spirituality is a positive predictor of social responsibility (but not support for welfare programs), belief in a dangerous world, and support for government spending on the military.

In contrast, and consistent with previous research and theorizing (Farias & Lalljee, 2008; Goodenough, 2001; Heelas, 1996; Helminiak, 2008; Jaworski, 2017; Johnson et al., 2018; Worthington, 2012), we found that ego-focused spirituality is associated with a wide range of religious beliefs and practices. For example, in the U.S., ego-focused spirituality was positively correlated with practicing magic, consulting psychics and horoscopes, and seeking self-help through reading, mindfulness, and meditation. Whereas ego-focused spirituality may be associated with monotheism (e.g., 55% of Christians in the U.K. chose the “Big Self” option),

we found that ego-focused spirituality was focused on a “higher self” and God as an impersonal force, but also on nature, ancestors, aliens, fire, and even science as important for participants’ spirituality. This eclectic combination of spiritual foci corresponds with an individualistic approach to spirituality. Ego-focused spirituality is also correlated with an interest in science, support for government spending on scientific research, and environmentalism. Importantly, ego-focused spirituality was not associated with egotism or self-consciousness. Differentiating between theo-focused and ego-focused spirituality may be especially useful in identifying individuals whose spiritual focus is on nature or one’s ancestors, or whose spiritual practices include self-improvement or seeking new ways of thinking about the divine (e.g., Quest).

As expected, the Closeness to God dimension was highly correlated with awareness of God’s presence, various measures of religiosity, and belief in a personal God. Although the correlations were generally weaker, we found that individuals reporting ego-focused spirituality may also feel close to the Divine. Indeed, individualistic spirituality, belief in God as an impersonal or mystical force, focusing on the “higher self”, and self-actualization were all positively correlated with closeness to God.

Limitations

Whereas the ThEOS measure specifies a binary choice between ego-focused and theo-focused orientation, we acknowledge that people may have different foci in different situations, or at different times of life. Moreover, ontological beliefs certainly impact self-perception (Johnson et al., 2016) and one’s identity no doubt informs representations of God (Roberts, 1989). In other words, people may have difficulty choosing whether their religion and spirituality focus on God versus the Self. However, like the distinction between God-concepts and God-images (Davis, Granqvist, & Sharp, 2018) or intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity (Allport &

Ross, 1967), there is a meaningful distinction between the two ways of understanding the relationship between self and God. Thus, while we ask participants to choose whether their relationship with God is focused mainly on understanding God or the self, future research should investigate fluctuations in the focus of people's spirituality as well as the bi-directionality of understanding God and self.

Additionally, we reiterate that an ego-focused orientation is not an indication of a-theism. Moreover, the ThEOS may not provide meaningful information about those who are a-theistic or a-spiritual. All the participants in Studies 1, 3, and 4 professed some degree of belief in God, a Higher Power, or Divine Life Force. Indeed, participants in the small sample of atheists in Study 2 were more likely to choose a *theo-focused* orientation circle pair (albeit the furthest distance of the circle pair) when asked about the focus of their religion and spirituality. We highly recommend providing an "opt out" option when the measure is used in large scale surveys.

We expect that the ThEOS will be useful as a measure of individual differences across various religious and cultural groups. However, we have only provided preliminary evidence for the relevance of this measure across cultures (US, UK, and India) and religious traditions (Buddhism, Catholic and Non-Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Spiritual but not Religious, Agnosticism). We acknowledge the need for further cross-cultural and cross-religious validation. For instance, we did not attempt to ensure that the validating questionnaires were localized to reflect the beliefs and practices of people living in India or the UK. Also, the English-speaking, computer savvy respondents in India are not representative of the Indian population. Additionally, much of the research conducted was in a U.S. context, and the relationships found between the outcome variables and theo-focused versus ego-focused spirituality may be culturally specific. Future research might be conducted to compare the

dimensions of the ThEOS using multilevel modeling across cultures and religious groups.

Although we generally found results in the expected directions for both dimensions of the ThEOS, there were some surprising findings. For example, we found a significant association between belief in God as an impersonal force and Big Self in Study 2, but the correlation was non-significant in Study 1. Similarly, we found that Quest and individualistic spirituality were associated with Big Self in Studies 2 and 3, but the correlations were non-significant in Study 1. One possible explanation is that the Study 1 survey consisted entirely of items assessing beliefs about the nature and attributes of God whereas Studies 2 and 3 included other questionnaires (e.g., government spending, environmental attitudes). Future research with more diverse and larger samples will increase our confidence in the direction and magnitude of these effects.

Finally, we caution that we investigated multiple versions of the diagram (e.g., 1 x 5, 2 x 4, 2 x 7, 5 x 5, 3 x 7) and multiple sets of instructions (e.g., focusing on God's omni-ness; focusing on God's engagement in the world; asking about the importance of God) in developing the ThEOS, before arriving at the final version. (More information can be obtained from the authors upon request.) Consequently, we highly recommend using the diagram and instructions which are presented here without modification.

Conclusion

The Theo-focused vs. Ego-focused Self/Other Overlap Scale is an intuitive, easy-to-administer diagrammatic measure that provides useful and important information regarding a person's relationship with the Divine, a Higher Power, or whatever one thinks of as "God." We expect that this measure will be useful in helping researchers, clergy, and clinicians to better understand the varieties of religious experience.

Notes

1. We highlight expectations for US Christian contexts at various points throughout the paper, as this is where the majority of the research in psychology of religion to date has focused, and where we are able to make the most accurate predictions. We acknowledge that there is a general need in the psychology of religion to engage in more cross-religious and cross-cultural research so that we can make more accurate predictions in non-U.S. and non-Christian contexts.
2. It is notable that the ThEOS closely resembles an adaptation of the IOS used to measure identity fusion with groups (Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009); however, rather than using the size of circles to indicate the relative size of the entity in question (i.e., the individual self vs. the collective group), we use the size dimension to indicate focal orientation.

References

- Allport, G. W., & Ross, J. M. (1967). Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 432-443.
- Altemeyer, B. (1988). *Enemies of freedom: Understanding right-wing authoritarianism*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (2004). A revised religious fundamentalism scale: The short and sweet of it. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 14, 47-54.
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 596-612.
- Babb, L. A. (1975). *The divine hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Barrett, J. L. (2004). *Why would anyone believe in God?* Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Barrett, J. L., & Keil, F. C. (1996). Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts. *Cognitive Psychology*, 31, 219-247.
- Batson, C. D., & Schoenrade, P. (1991). Measuring religion as quest: Reliability concerns. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, 430-447.
- Beck, R., & McDonald, A. (2004). Attachment to God: the attachment to God inventory, tests of working model correspondence, and an exploration of faith group differences. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 32, 92-103.
- Benson, P., & Spilka, B. (1973). God image as a function of self-esteem and locus of control. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 12, 297-310.
- Boyer, P. (2001). *Religion explained: The evolutionary origins of religious thought*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Cohen, A. B., Shariff, A. F., & Hill, P. C. (2008). The accessibility of religious beliefs. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42, 1408-1417.
- Davis, E. B., Granqvist, P., & Sharp, C. (2018). Theistic relational spirituality: Development, dynamics, health, and transformation. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/rel0000219.
- Degelman, D., & Lynn, D. (1995). The development and preliminary validation of the Belief in Divine Intervention Scale. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 23, 37-44.
- Edwards, J. (1797/1997). *Sinners in the hands of an angry God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House.
- Elkins, D. N., Hedstrom, L. J., Hughes, L. L., Leaf, J. A., & Saunders, C. (1988). Toward a humanistic-phenomenological spirituality: Definition, description, and measurement. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 28, 5-18.
- Exline, J. J., Grubbs, J. B., & Homolka, S. J. (2015). Seeing God as cruel or distant: Links with divine struggles involving anger, doubt, and fear of God's disapproval. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 25, 29-41.
- Farias, M., & Lalljee, M. (2008). Holistic individualism in the Age of Aquarius: Measuring individualism/collectivism in New Age, Catholice, and Atheist/Agnostic groups. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47, 277-289.
- Farias, M., Claridge, G., & Lalljee, M. (2005). Personality and cognitive predictors of New Age practices and beliefs. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 979-989.
- Fenigstein, A., Scheier, M. F., & Buss, A. H. (1975). Public and private self-consciousness: Assessment and Theory. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 43, 522-527.
- Flood, G. (1996). *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Froese, P., & Bader, C. (2010). *America's four Gods: What we say about God - & what that says about us*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goodenough, U. (2001). Vertical and horizontal transcendence. *Zygon*, 36, 21-31.
- Gorsuch, R. L. (1968). The conceptualization of God as seen in adjective ratings. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 7, 56-64.
- Gorsuch, R. L., & Smith, C. S. (1983). Attributions of responsibility to God: an interaction of religious beliefs and outcomes. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22, 340-352.
- Hall, T., & Edwards, K. (1996). The initial development and factor analysis of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 24, 233-246.
- Haws, K. L., Winterich, K. P., & Naylor, R. W. (2014). Seeing the world through GREEN-tinted glasses: Green consumption values and responses to environmentally friendly products. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24, 336-354.
- Heelas, P. (1996). *The New Age movement: The celebration of the self and the sacralization of modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Helminiak, D. A. (2008). Confounding the divine and the spiritual: Challenges to a psychology of spirituality. *Pastoral Psychology*, 57, 161-182.
- Hodges, S. D., Sharp, C. A., Gibson, N. J., & Tipsord, J. M. (2012). Nearer by God to Thee: Self-God overlap and believers' relationships with God. *Self and Identity*, 1-20.
- Hoffarth, M. R., & Hodson, G. (2016). Green on the outside, red on the inside: Perceived environmentalist threat as a factor explaining political polarization of climate change. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 45, 40-49.
- Hunt, R. A. (1972). Mythological-symbolic religious commitment: The LAM scales. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 11, 42-52.

- Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values. *American Sociological Review*, 65, 19-51.
- James, W. (1902/2002). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Jaworski, R. (2017). Anthropocentric and theocentric spirituality as an object of psychological research. *Journal for Perspectives of Economic Political and Social Integration*, 21, 135-154. doi.org/10.2478/pepsi-2015-0006 .
- Johnson, K. A., Cohen, A. B., & Okun, M. A. (2016, July 27). God is watching . . . but also watching over you: The influence of benevolent God representations on secular volunteerism among Christians. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 8, 363–374.
- Johnson, K. A., Okun, M. A., & Cohen, A. B. (2015). The mind of the Lord: Measuring authoritarian and benevolent God representations. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 7, 227–238.
- Johnson, K. A., Okun, M. A., Cohen, A. B., Sharp, C. A., & Hook, J. N. (2018). Development and validation of the five-factor LAMBI measure of God representations. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rel0000207>.
- Johnson, K. A., Sharp, C. A., Okun, M. A., Shariff, A. F., & Cohen, A. B. (2018). SBNR identity: the role of impersonal God representations, individualistic spirituality, and dissimilarity with religious groups. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 28, 121-140.
- Jones, A., & Crandall, R. (1986). Validation of a short index of self-actualization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 12, 63-73.

- Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Shaver, P. R. (1992). An attachment-theoretical approach to romantic love and religious belief. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 266-275.
- Litman, L., Robinson, J., & Abberbock, T. (2016). TurkPrime.com: A versatile crowdsourcing data acquisition platform for the behavioral sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 1-10.
- Luhrmann, T. M. (2012). *When God talks back: Understanding the American Evangelical relationship with God*. New York: Knopf.
- Mashek, D., Stuewig, J., Furukawa, E., & Tangney, J. (2006). Psychological and behavioral implications of connectedness to communities with opposing values and beliefs. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25, 404-428.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 5, 370-396.
- Orsi, R. (2004). *Between heaven and earth: The religious worlds people make and the scholars who study them*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Paunonen, S. V. (2002). *Design and construction of the Supernumerary Personality Inventory*. (Research Bulletin 763). London: Ontario: University of Western Ontario.
- Penner, L. A. (2002). Dispositional and organizational influences on sustained volunteerism: An interactionist perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 447-467.
- Pew Research Center. (2015, May 12). *America's Changing Religious Landscape*.
- Pew Research Center. (August 29, 2018). *Religious Typology*.
<http://www.pewforum.org/2018/08/29/the-religious-typology>.
- Preston, J., & Epley, N. (2009). Science and God: An automatic opposition between ultimate explanations. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 238-241.
- Roberts, C. W. (1989). Imagining God: Who is created in whose image? *Review of Religious Research*, 30, 375-386.

- Silverman, G., Johnson, K., & Cohen, A. (2016). To believe or not to believe, that is not the question: the complexity of Jewish beliefs about God. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 8, 119-130.
- Smith, C., & Denton, M. L. (2003). *Methodological design and procedures for the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR)*. Chapel Hill, NC: The National Study of Youth and Religion.
- Swann, W. B. ,Jr., Gomez, A., Seyle, D. C., Morales, J. F., & Huici, C. (2009). Identity fusion: The interplay of personal and social identities in extreme group behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(5), 995-1011.
- Theocentric. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theocentric>
- Tremlin, T. (2006). *Minds and gods: the cognitive foundations of religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ward, K. (1998). *Concepts of God: Images of the Divine in Five Religious Traditions*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- White, C., Baimel, A., & Norenzayan, A. (2017). What are the causes and consequences of belief in karma? *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 7, 339-342.
- Wood, B. T., Worthington, E. L., Exline, J. J., Yali, A. M., Aten, J. D., & McMinn, M. R. (2010). Development, refinement, and psychometric properties of the attitudes toward God scale (ATGS-9). *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 2, 148-167.
- Worthington, Jr., E. L. (2012). Progress in physics and psychological science affects the psychology of religion and spirituality. In L. J. Miller (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality* (pp. 47-62). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Worthington, Jr., E. L., Wade, N. G., Hight, T. L., Ripley, J. S., McCullough, M. E., Berry, J.

W., . . . O'Connor, L. (2003). The Religious Commitment Inventory-10: Development, refinement, and validation of a brief scale for research and counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50, 84-96.

Table 1. *Frequency distribution of ThEOS scores in Study 1*

	Distant				Close	Total
Big God = 1	35	44	35	34	46	194
Big Self = 0	35	33	23	12	44	147
Total	70	77	58	46	90	341

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Big God, Closeness to God, Beliefs, and Religiousness in Study 1*

Variable	Big God <i>n</i> = 194		Big Self <i>n</i> = 147		<i>r</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Big God	Close - Big God	Close - Big Self
Close to God	3.06	1.44	2.98	1.57	.03		
Religiousness	3.99	1.56	3.64	1.60	.11*	.47***	.46***
Fundamentalism	3.64	1.65	3.04	1.43	.19***	.48***	.35***
Biblical Literalist	2.80	1.19	2.41	1.14	.16**	.47***	.39***
Engaged God	4.42	1.58	3.97	1.64	.14*	.46***	.47***
Practices							
Traditional	2.93	1.32	2.47	1.27	.17***	.40***	.37***
Magical Thinking	1.63	0.79	1.91	0.99	-.16***	-.04	.06
Self Help	2.85	1.28	3.20	1.27	-.14**	.12	.09
Quest Orientation	4.09	1.05	4.14	1.05	-.03	-.12	.00
Individual Spirituality	4.88	1.20	5.14	1.17	-.11	-.02	.11
Awareness of God	2.68	1.36	2.50	1.32	.07	.55***	.54***
Godview							
Personified Being	4.02	1.94	3.53	1.97	.12*	.32***	.28***
Impersonal Force	4.58	1.72	4.81	1.72	-.07	-.01	.14

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Big God, Closeness to God, Beliefs, and the Importance of other Entities as Spiritual Foci in Study 2*

Variable	Big God <i>n</i> = 128		Big Self <i>n</i> = 122		<i>r</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Big God	Close – Big God	Close – Big Self
Close to God	3.22	1.62	3.35	1.46	-.04		
Quest	3.62	1.19	4.14	1.04	-.23***	.18*	-.02
Individual spirituality	4.22	1.52	5.10	1.19	-.31***	.14	.23**
Awareness of God	2.92	1.47	3.05	1.44	-.04	.64***	.59***
Godview							
Personified Being	4.46	2.21	3.92	2.10	.12*	.53***	.37***
Impersonal Force	3.64	1.98	4.65	1.91	-.25***	.05	.19*
Other Sacred Entities							
God	3.74	1.62	3.55	1.52	.06	.67***	.46***
Jesus	3.48	1.73	3.26	1.56	.07	.64***	.50***
Angels	2.43	1.48	2.89	1.51	-.15**	.46***	.39***
Saints	1.77	1.21	2.02	1.31	.10	.24**	.16
Ancestors	2.07	1.22	2.80	1.41	-.27***	.18*	.09
Space	2.05	1.26	2.70	1.47	-.23***	-.08	.14
Oceans	2.10	1.29	2.54	1.44	-.16**	.08	.17
Mountains	2.03	1.27	2.49	1.41	-.17**	.10	.09
Animals	2.25	1.37	2.84	1.43	-.21***	.11	.10
Aliens	1.34	0.88	1.89	1.30	-.24***	-.07	.03
Fairies	1.30	0.86	1.54	1.09	-.12	-.01	.04
Fire	1.63	1.08	2.16	1.39	-.21***	.06	.06
Science	2.28	1.36	2.96	1.39	-.24***	-.11	.08
Higher Self	2.39	1.43	3.18	1.36	-.27***	.21**	.28***

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Religiosity, Social Attitudes, Egocentrism and Big God and Closeness to God in Study 3*

Variable	Big God <i>n</i> = 338		Big Self <i>n</i> = 319		<i>r</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Big God	Close - Big God	Close - Big Self
Close to God	3.40	1.43	2.93	1.52	.15***		
Religiosity	4.71	1.64	3.78	1.63	.27***	.57***	.48***
Individual Spirituality	4.52	1.33	5.05	1.17	-.21***	.06	.30***
Quest	3.93	1.06	4.25	1.04	-.15*	-.11	-.06
God Representation							
Authoritarian	3.69	1.47	3.34	1.57	.11**	-.05	-.06
Benevolent	5.63	1.39	5.19	1.52	.15***	.49***	.40***
Mystical	5.14	1.31	5.21	1.28	-.03	.09*	.35***
Self-actualization ¹	4.82	.65	5.00	.79	-.13*	.23**	.09
Egotism ²	4.08	1.02	4.22	.98	-.07	-.00	.09
Self-consciousness ³	4.59	.89	4.67	.86	-.05	-.00	.08
Dangerous World	4.57	1.30	4.24	1.24	.13***	.13**	.18***
Govt Spend - Military	4.62	1.24	4.29	1.13	.14***	.12**	.07
Social Responsibility	5.18	.93	4.94	.99	.12***	.13**	.12**
Govt Spend - Welfare	5.03	1.20	5.26	1.24	-.09**	-.05	.04
Environmentalism	4.69	1.26	4.91	1.14	-.09**	-.05	.15**
Govt Spend - Environ	5.57	1.08	5.81	.98	-.11**	-.16***	-.00
Interest in Science	4.22	1.40	4.50	1.30	-.10**	-.10*	-.07
Govt Spend - Science	5.55	.98	5.72	.91	-.09*	-.21***	-.20***
Age	37.21	12.41	35.72	11.24	.06*	.09*	.02
Sex (female = 1)					.01	.16**	.14**

Notes: ¹ *n* = 215; ² *n* = 239; ³ *n* = 203; *** *p* < .001, ** *p* ≤ .01, * *p* ≤ .05.

Table 5. *Multiple Regression Analyses Regressing Government Spending on Social Attitudes, Big God dimension, and Closeness to God, Controlling for Age and Sex, in Study 3*

Predictor	Government Spending			
	Military	Welfare	Science	Environment
	β	β	β	β
Step 1				
Dangerous World	.32***			
Social Responsibility		.14***		
Interest in Science			.36***	
Environmentalism				.49***
Big God	.09**	-.10*	-.02	-.05
Close to God	.01	.03	-.17***	-.11**
Big God x Close to God	.05	-.07	-.01	-.05
Step 2				
Dangerous World	.31***			
Social Responsibility		.15***		
Interest in Science			.35***	
Environmentalism				.50***
Big God	.07*	-.10**	-.02	-.05
Close to God	-.00	.02	-.16***	-.06
Big God x Close to God	.04	-.06	-.01	-.05
Age	.27***	-.07	-.01	-.09**
Sex (Female = 1)	.06	.05	-.03	-.02
Total R^2	.21***	.04**	.18***	.28***
$F(6, 650)$	28.82***	4.16***	23.20***	41.23***

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$.

Table 6. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages for Big God and Big Self, by Religious Group, by Country in Study 4*

Group	U.S.					U.K.				
	N	Close to God		Big God	Big Self	N	Close to God		Big God	Big Self
		M	SD	%	%		M	SD	%	%
Non-Catholic										
Christian	320	3.50	1.37	62.81	37.19					
Catholic	121	3.36	1.29	51.24	48.76					
All										
Christian						60	3.22	1.39	45.00	55.00
Agnostic	150	2.12	1.47	38.00	62.00					
SBNR	66	3.64	1.40	27.27	72.73	60	3.25	1.55	35.00	65.00
Jewish						42	3.67	1.26	61.90	38.10
Muslim						54	3.65	1.32	57.40	42.60
Buddhist						40	3.60	1.24	25.00	75.00
Hindu						41	4.02	1.01	31.70	68.30
Total	657					357				

Table 6. *continued*

Group	<i>N</i>	India			
		Close to God		Big God	Big Self
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	%
Non-Catholic					
Christian	36	4.64	0.87	66.70	33.30
Catholic	48	3.79	1.38	45.80	54.20
Agnostic					
SBNR					
Jewish					
Muslim	46	3.70	1.52	60.90	39.10
Buddhist					
Hindu	187	3.88	1.30	39.60	60.40
Total	317				

Figure 1. *Two dimensional measure assessing (1) Inclusion of God with Self (i.e., Closeness to God) and (2) Theo-focused (Big God) vs. Ego-focused (Big Self) spirituality*

Consider the images below in which the GREEN circle represents YOU and the BLUE circle represents GOD, the Divine, a Higher Power, or whatever you think of as God.

Which of the diagrams best represents your relationship with God or the Divine? Please use the row with the BIGGER BLUE GOD circle if your relationship with God is focused mainly on understanding God. Use the row with the BIGGER GREEN SELF circle if your relationship with God is focused mainly on understanding your Self.

