

# Implicit Religiosity and Personality

## A Clarification of the Relation Between Personality Dimensions and Subjective Forms of Religiosity

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'Implicit Religiosity' approaches contemporary religiosity by viewing traditional elements of religion as possible, though not necessary elements of personal religiosity (cf. Bailey, 2001). The construct was developed by comparing various kinds of religions—primal and contemporary, world religions and new religious movements—in order to find common elements. The synopsis resulted in the identification of *myth*, *ritual* and *experience of transcendence* as present in every religion (Schnell, 1999, 2002). All three elements can be associated with the three basic dimensions of psychological research: cognition, behaviour and experience. The concept thus falls into line with the demand of several psychologists of religion, to differentiate between cognitive, behavioural and experiential dimensions of religiosity (cf. Glock, 1962; Wulff, 1997).

Myth, ritual and experience of transcendence are, first of all, *structural terms*. These structures are typically present in religions, but can be represented by varying *contents* and associated with personal *meaning*. A combination of relevant content and personal meaning turns them into *Personal Myths*, *Personal Rituals* and *Experience of Transcendence*—implicit forms of religiosity.

70 persons of *different religious and social backgrounds*, age ranging from 17 to 70, were questioned about their personal myths, personal rituals and experiences of transcendence. Afterwards, interviewees were requested to fill in a personality questionnaire. 56 people complied with that.

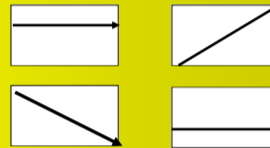
The three elements of Implicit Religiosity: Personal Myth, Personal Rituals, and Transcendent Experiences were analysed in relation to each other, the Big 5 (NEO-FFI) and the TCI character scales.

The sample size of N = 56 is rather low. On the other hand, depth and validity of qualitative data as well as the heterogeneity of participants are advantages of the sample at hand. Furthermore, a questionnaire on Implicit Religiosity (FIRE) is presently being developed and will allow for assessing bigger samples in the future.

### Personal Myth, Personal Rituals, and Experiences of Transcendence

1. A **Personal Myth** is based on a person's *story*. A story can be called a **Personal Myth** if it is perceived as developing in a certain direction, if it contains several recurring themes, has a life-task and stages one or more archetypal characters. The term was coined by McAdams (1993) who did pioneering work on the topic. The construct has been slightly moderated and integrated into the theory of Implicit Religiosity. For the study at hand, **Personal Myth** was analysed by means of three relevant elements:

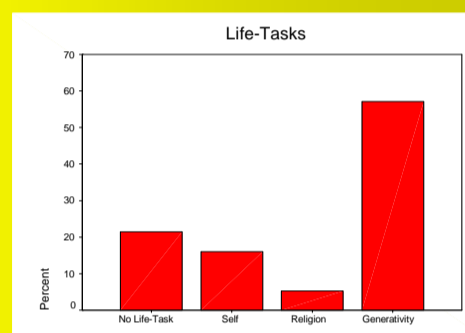
A **Direction of development**: Personal Myths can be either positive or pessimistic. The direction of development was assessed by asking people to divide their lives into chapters and then rate their affects respectively by means of a PANAS short version (Mackinnon et al., 1999). Personal Myths were classified as being positive if life is perceived as continuously good or changing to the better.



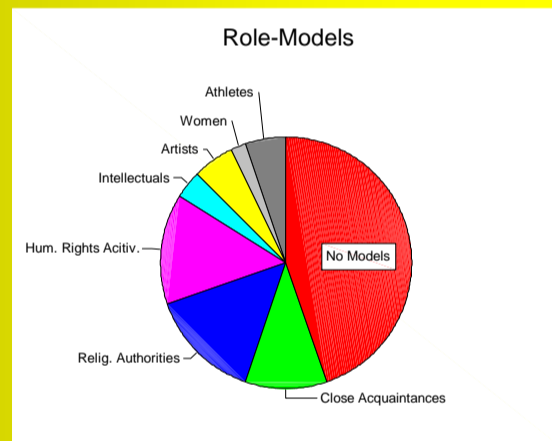
A negative Personal Myth assumes a change to the worse or continuous negativity.

B **The Life-task**: A Personal Myth only is complete if one's doings are embedded into a bigger, or universal framework. This was assessed by asking for a 'personal mission or life-task'. Life-tasks that were stated can be classified as follows:

1. *No Life-task* (21%)
2. *Generativity* (57%) – A life-task that contains the passing on of experiences and knowledge, the aim to contribute positively to society and to do good.
3. *Self* (17%) – A life-task that aims at happiness and self-actualisation.
4. *Religion* (5%) – A life-task oriented by accomplishing God's will and/or a religious mission.



3. **Archetypes**: A Personal Myth stages several protagonists; they can be called archetypes. Archetypes—not to be interpreted in a Jungian way—can be understood as prototypes for certain qualities or features. Archetypes in a Personal Myth reveal which qualities a person either identifies with, or idealises, or is in conflict with. One possibility to find out about a person's archetypes is to ask about role models and attachment figures. The following groups of people were mentioned:



1. *No models* (45%)
2. *Religious Authorities* (14%)
3. *Human Rights Activists* (14%)
4. *Persons from a circle of close acquaintances* (11%) – relatives, friends, colleagues
5. *Artists* (5%) – Writers, musicians, painters
6. *Athletes* (5%)
7. *Intellectuals* (4%) – Scientists, psychologists
8. *Women* (2%)

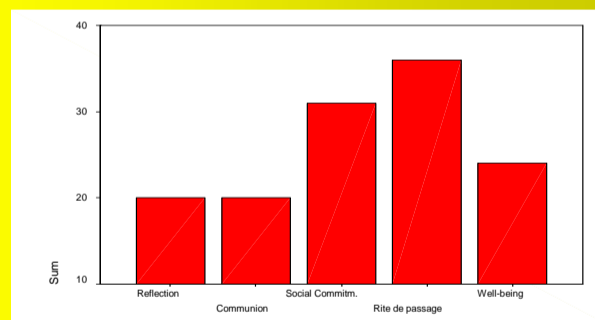
2. A **Personal Ritual** is a *regularly performed behaviour that is perceived as being extraordinarily meaningful*. A comparison of several definitions of rituals yielded contradictory results. Two criteria appeared necessary to turn an action into a ritual: 1. its regularity in either a chronological order, or 'always, if...'; 2. its pointing beyond itself; the obvious meaning of an action is superseded by another, broader meaning.

Personal Rituals were assessed by asking about

- regular actions that are performed in a celebratory or special way,
- regular actions performed with others that are rather meaningful, and
- regular commitments.

Personal Rituals can be grouped as follows (non-exclusive categories):

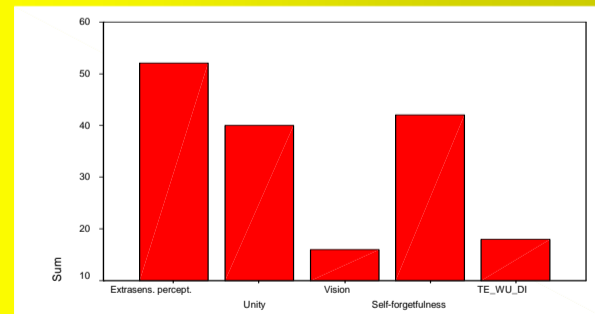
1. 'Rite de passage' (63%) – activities to celebrate or facilitate transitions
2. Social commitment (55%)
3. Well-being (41%) – personal hygiene, sauna, massage...
4. Reflection (36%) – meditation, prayer
5. Communion (36%) – cooking, going out, etc. for the sake of companionship



3. **The understanding of Transcendent Experiences** is a broad one. Referring to the Latin etymology of *transcendo-I go beyond*—Transcendent Experiences are those during which we experience something beyond our every-day experience.

These are (non-exclusive categories)

1. Extra-sensory experiences (96%)
2. Experiences of self-forgetfulness (75%) – experience of forgetting one-self and one's sorrows
3. Experiences of unity (71%) – feeling of being a part of a bigger whole
4. Experience of a miracle (32%)
5. Enlightenment or vision (29%)



Previous research on the relationship of religiosity and personality has gone through several phases. Personality models as well as definitions of religiosity have been criticised as being inadequate (cf. Eysenck's PEN-model and the inappropriateness of one-dimensional or arbitrarily specific constructs).

Within the last years, the Big 5 have been established as a framework to assess personality in a comprehensive and comparable way. Several relations of the Big 5 and religiosity have been hypothesised. A fruitful meta-analysis by Saroglou (2002) organised relevant studies available up to May 2000 according to their definition of religion and compared them with respect to the FFM.

A general association of religion and *Agreeableness* and *Conscientiousness* that had been stated before was replicated. Furthermore, the meta-analysis allowed for a classification of several types of religion. The necessity to do this is made obvious by the differential results obtained. Four types of religiosity were named:

- 1) *Religiosity (intrinsic and general)*,
- 2) *Open, mature religiosity and spirituality*,
- 3) *Religious fundamentalism* and
- 4) *Extrinsic religiosity*.

The following correlations were found:

- *Religiosity* is positively associated with E, A and C.
- *Open, mature religion* shows a positive relationship with E, A, C and O as well as a negative one with N.
- *Religious fundamentalism* correlates negatively with both N and O, as well as positively with A.
- Finally, *extrinsic religiosity* goes along with an increased value of N.

Implicit Religiosity is by definition integrated into a person's life; in this respect, it is close to religiosity intrinsic and spiritualistic. Since it is not linked to a historical tradition, it can not be fundamentalist. Correlations with personality should thus tend to be similar to those found for *Religiosity* and *Open, mature religiosity and spirituality*. Further clarification is expected due to the differentiation of a cognitive, behavioural and experiential dimension.

### Correlation of Personal Myth, Personal Rituals and Transcendent Experiences with NEO-FFI and TCI-Character-Scales

	N	E	O	A	C
<b>Personal Myth:</b>					
<i>Dir. of Developm.</i>	-.313**	.226*	.105	.130	.107
<b>Personal Myth:</b>					
<i>Life-Task</i>	-.056	-.061	.189	.167	-.020
<b>Personal Myth:</b>					
<i>Role-Models</i>	.118	-.127	.235*	-.026	.075
<b>Personal Rituals</b>	.021	.179	.345**	.270*	.049
<b>Transcendent Experiences</b>	.027	.138	.326**	.440**	-.096

Point-biserial correlation  $r_{pb}$ , N = 56. \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ .

The adequacy of the Big 5 is not universally agreed upon (Becker, 2002; Cloninger et al., 1994). While not all five factors are replicable, other aspects are ignored. Cloninger et al.—in their Temperament-Character-Inventory (TCI)—developed three *character* scales that are meant to cover individual differences in goals and values. They assess intellectual as well as emotional perspectives on limits of the self and transcendence of these limits. *Self-directedness* is based on the concept of an autonomous self, resulting in experiences of integrity, dignity, self-efficiency, hope etc. *Cooperativeness* sees the self as an integral part of humanity or society, associated with community, charity, conscientiousness etc. *Self-transcendence* assumes that the self is perceived as an integral part of the universe, going along with feelings of mystic union, religious faith, or stoicism and unquestioning patience.

All three scales are correlated with Personal Myth, Personal Rituals and Transcendent Experiences. Though *self-directedness* and *cooperativeness* do not tie in with more traditional concepts of religiosity, their cognitive and behavioural dimensions might yield interesting correlations with Personal Myth and Rituals. *Self-transcendence* is of special interest as regards its association with all of the elements of IR, especially Transcendent Experiences.

The TCI character scales show a remarkable pattern of association with IR: *Self-directedness*, intending to measure integrity and self-efficiency, correlates with a positive direction of development as well as with the performance of Personal Rituals, while cooperativeness, the communal and charitable self, is associated with Transcendent Experiences. *Self-transcendence*, similar to the subjective theory of Personal Religiosity, is linked to Personal Myth, Rituals and Transcendent Experiences—apart from the existence of role-models.

A dimensional differentiation of Implicit Religiosity yields interesting results. The cognitive dimension—Personal Myth—is related with neuroticism, but only by means of the direction of development: people who perceive their life as turning to the negative or remaining negative, show higher values in neuroticism. This result might be partly tautological, though, since N contains facets underlying a negative attitude towards life. The significant relation of direction of development and extraversion might be due to the familiar correlation between N and E. The Life-Task is—surprisingly—not associated with any of the five factors, though a relationship with openness might become clearer when using a bigger sample. **The existence of role-models does correlate positively with openness.**

The Personal Myth is thus neither related to agreeableness, nor to conscientiousness.

However, the frequently replicated correlation of religiosity and agreeableness can be found in both the behavioural and the experiential dimension of Implicit Religiosity. Personal Rituals and Transcendent Experiences show convincing associations with agreeableness—as well as with openness.

### Implicit Religiosity and the TCI-Character-Scales

	TCI-Self-Dir.	TCI-Coop	TCI-Self-Tr.
<b>Personal Myth: Direction of Development</b>	.325**	.153	.293*
<b>Personal Myth: Life-Task</b>	.092	.202	.324**
<b>Personal Myth: Role-Models</b>	-.114	-.132	.163
<b>Personal Rituals</b>	.254*	.134	.281*
<b>Transcendent Experiences</b>	.080	.434**	.488**

Point-biserial correlation  $r_{pb}$ , N = 56. \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ .

## Results

All elements of Implicit Religiosity display strong correlations with TCI-Self-transcendence. The religious character of non-religious contents is thus proven: religiosity is not necessarily linked to an institutional religion, certain beliefs or traditions.

Personal Rituals and Transcendent Experiences are associated with agreeableness. The often replicated correlation of A and religion can be traced back to the behavioural and experiential dimension: putting religiosity to action and experiencing moments of transcendence.

In contrast to explicit religion which is bound to a certain catalogue of beliefs and rules, the underlying **Implicit Religiosity** is not associated with conscientiousness. Hence, the relation between religion and C seems to be the result of certain explicitly religious contents.

The existence of role-models, Personal Rituals and Transcendent Experiences is closely linked to openness. This indicates a mature and spiritualistic character of Implicit Religiosity. In contrast to a fundamentalist way of obeying authorities and performing rituals as a duty—which correlates negatively with O—implicitly religious orientation by role-models and performance of Personal Rituals is positively associated with openness.

The correlation of TCI-Self-directedness with Personal Rituals points towards the rituals' self-improving character. The autonomous self-directed individual is able to supply herself with *soul-food*, as necessary. TCI-Cooperativeness and Transcendent Experiences also enhance each other. The ability to transcend one's limits apparently facilitates pro-social behaviour and conscientiousness.

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