

## IMRF GRANT REPORT

### **A New Approach for Measuring Spirituality: The Development of an Authenticity Scale**

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#### **Purpose and Context of the Study**

Many incoming college students start their undergraduate journey with high hopes that college experiences will enhance and transform their values, purpose, and self-understanding (Astin et al., 2011). Indeed, research suggests that students gain a deepened sense of spirituality over 3-4 years of college (Astin et al., 2011; Kuh & Gonyea, 2006), but research on spirituality is often framed within the larger narrative of religion, carrying with it implicit ideologies, rhetoric, and power structures that are divisive rather than unifying (Martin, 2015). This issue is even more problematic when over 30% of today's college students do not identify with any religion or faith (Stolzenberg et al., 2019). That said, attending to what Palmer (1999) calls "the deepest needs of the human soul" (p. 6) is a central tenet of social justice and anti-oppressive practice (hooks, 2003; Shahjahan, 2009). Fulfilling such needs is critical for psychological flourishing and personal development (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Therefore, the purpose of this study was the development of a scale measuring students' spirituality—positioning this concept separately from religiosity—using data from a large-scale, multi-institutional, longitudinal dataset.

We chose to use the term authenticity, suggested by Chickering and colleagues (2006), which is "a more straightforward and less loaded term" (p. 8) in an attempt to encompass integrity, identity, autonomy, interdependence, meaning, and purpose. Living authentically means that people's "word and deed, word and word, deed and deed are consistent with a personally owned value structure" and that people have the "capacity to identify with something larger than our own self-interest" (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 9). This comprehensive term includes not only personal integrity but also connectedness with others and society, which helps address critiques that spirituality only pertains to oneself. Since religious values and activities are not included in this description, it will be possible to determine the role of college in shaping students' authenticity growth outside of religious structures.

Dalton (2006) provided ten principles that encompass thirty-four educational strategies and practices that are broadly applicable across institutional differences for promoting moral and spiritual development in college. In this study, we developed an authenticity measure based on these ten principles by translating them to student-level outcomes.

#### **Analyses and Results of the Study**

We initially selected 114 items from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education. The items were drawn from the Importance of Social and Political Involvement scale (Center for Research on Undergraduate Education, 2008), the Openness to Diversity and Challenge scale (Pascarella et al., 1996), the revised version of the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (Dugan et al., 2008), the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cacioppo et al., 1996), the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Two researchers independently ranked items to identify those that were theoretically associated with each of the 10 principles; these rankings were compared to examine agreement among raters. A total of 53 items were identified based on the strength of their content validity. Because the principles overlap within their content, we combined two conceptually related

principles together and narrowed our sub-dimensions of authenticity to five constructs: authentic being, authentic behavior, authentic citizenship, authentic engagement, and authentic self-awareness. For parsimony, we selected six items in each of the five principles.

To assess the model fit, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) through the implementation of structural equation modeling in Stata. All five sub-dimensions of authenticity demonstrated acceptable model fit by root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; .01-.04), comparative fit index (CFI; .95-1.00), and standard root mean square residual (SRMR; .01-.02) as well as standardized factor loadings greater than .30. A second-order authenticity scale using these five sub-dimensions also resulted in a strong model fit in terms of RMSEA (.04), CFI (1.00), and SRMR (.01), with all loadings greater than .30.

To establish concurrent validity of the authenticity scale, correlations between the authenticity scale and existing WNS measures were examined. Given that this construct involves prosocial behaviors, attitudes, and values, we expected that the authenticity scale should be positively correlated with students' post-conventional moral reasoning, as measured by the N2 score on the Defining Issues Test 2 (12 items;  $\alpha = .80$ ; Rest et al., 1999) and the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (15 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ; Miville et al., 1999), which measures students' awareness and acceptance of similarities and differences among other people. On the other hand, we expected that the authenticity scale should not be correlated with the Professional Success Scale (5 items,  $\alpha = .76$ ; Center for Research on Undergraduate Education, 2008), which measures the personal importance of achieving professional or career success. The results of bivariate correlations between each of the authenticity measures and the three scales were consistent with our expectations, which confirmed convergent and divergent validity of the authenticity scale.

### **Dissemination of the Study Results**

The results of this study have been accepted for publication in a forthcoming manuscript in *Journal of College and Character*. A paper that explores experiential predictors of changes in this authenticity scale over time has also been submitted for publication.

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