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## Diversity and Complexity of Religion and Spirituality in Iran: Relationships With Self-Compassion and Self-Forgiveness

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined religious-spiritual types in Iran by comparing seminary and university students on self-compassion, self-forgiveness, and other measures of religious and psychological functioning. Islamic seminarians ( $N = 198$ ) more frequently self-identified as both religious and spiritual or as religious only. University students ( $N = 302$ ) more commonly described themselves as spiritual only or as neither spiritual nor religious. The both religious and spiritual type was highest in religious commitment, self-compassion, and psychological adjustment, with the neither religious nor spiritual type tending to score lowest. The religious-only type displayed the lowest self-forgiveness. Seminarians were also lower in self-forgiveness, but otherwise higher than university students in their mental health. In correlations, self-compassion was compatible, but self-forgiveness was incompatible with Muslim commitments. Muslim spirituality moderated Muslim attitude relationships. These data documented the diversity and complexity of religion, spirituality, and perspectives on the self in Iranian Muslims.

Research increasingly demonstrates that a comprehensive psychology of religion must include a psychology of spirituality (Pargament, 2013). One straightforward method for bringing the two together is through a fourfold typology (Zinnbauer et al., 1997) in which individuals identify themselves as belonging to a both religious and spiritual, religious but not spiritual (religious only), spiritual but not religious (spiritual only), or neither religious nor spiritual type. A comprehensive understanding of types presumably requires research across cultures and religious traditions. The present project pursued that goal by examining types in the Muslim cultural context of Iran.

Religion and spirituality are complex constructs that have been defined in all kinds of ways (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Spirituality, for example, can be described generally as a “search for the sacred” (Pargament, 2013, p. 257) and more specifically as “beliefs, practices, relationships, or experiences having to do with the sacred that are not necessarily linked to established institutionalized systems” (Loewenthal, 2013, p. 239). Social scientific research often rests upon an etic or “outside” perspective (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990) that conceptualizes spirituality in “not necessarily” religious terms. Etic perspectives might be especially useful in clarifying the spiritual only and the neither religious nor spiritual types in Iran. On the other hand, a full understanding of the religious and spiritual type would presumably require that an etic approach be supplemented by an emic or “inside” perspective that expressed spirituality in explicitly Muslim terms. Indeed, insight into all four types might be deepened by an effort to bring etic and emic perspectives into dialog. The potentials of such a dialogical social science have been demonstrated in a systematic program of research (seen e.g., Ghorbani, Watson, Tavakoli, & Chen, 2016; Watson, 2011).

In the present project, the Muslim Experiential Religiousness (MER) Scale expressed an emic Muslim perspective on spirituality (Ghorbani, Watson, Geranmayepour, & Chen, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). MER draws upon Quranic and Islamic theological perspectives to describe a Muslim search for the sacred in terms of a loving submission to God who is always close by (Ghorbani et al., 2014a). The Arabic word *Islam* literally means “submission,” and MER expresses this central feature of Muslim spirituality in such self-reports as, “Experiences of submitting to God cause me to feel more vital and motivated.” The *Qur’an* emphasizes that God is always as close to a Muslim as “his jugular vein” (50:16; Ali, 1993). The MER refers to the importance of this closeness by saying, for example, “For me, the core of religious practices and ceremonies is that they help me achieve a close relationship with God.” For Muslims, God is merciful and loving; so this close relationship with God should be loving. This idea appears in the MER with such claims as, “When I look deeply within myself, I understand that the experience of loving God is worth any effort in my life.” This instrument has been evaluated “a theoretically sound measure” that “captures a central feature of Islamic religiousness” (Abu-Raiya & Hill, 2014, p. 28).

## Types in Iran

Data previously obtained with the MER in Iran have demonstrated the importance of Muslim spirituality for understanding Muslim religiosity. Higher scores on this scale consistently predict stronger religious commitments and better psychological adjustment. MER can also moderate and mediate relationships of Muslim religiosity with other constructs (e.g., Ghorbani et al., 2014a; Ghorbani, Watson, Madani, & Chen, 2016). Such results already document the existence of noteworthy variations in the dynamics of Iranian Muslim religion and spirituality. The hypothesis of this study, therefore, was that Iranian Muslims would display a full diversity in their self-reported religious-spiritual types. The test of this possibility included a comparison of Islamic seminarians with university students. Seminarians have career aspirations that suggest stronger religious commitments. Seminarians should, therefore, more likely identify themselves as belonging to the both religious and spiritual and the religious-only types and less likely see themselves as spiritual only and as neither religious nor spiritual. Seminarians should also score higher on measures of Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality.

Analysis of types in Iran will, of course, need to be sensitive to their meaning within this cultural context. The idea of a spirituality that exists separate from religion is alien to Islam. Only in recent decades has the word *spiritual* entered Iran from the West. Initial attempts to translate *spiritual* into Persian focused in a literal way on *rohania* as relevant to the *rouh* or to the soul and spirit. A problem with this translation was that *rohania* in Persian culture also refers to the clergy. To identify a religious and *rohania* type would, therefore, point toward a religious and clergy type, which clearly is not what the religious and spiritual type means in the West.

Given these kinds of difficulties, “spirituality” in Iran now has a different, widely accepted translation as *manawiat*. *Manawiat* refers to a search for “meaning,” especially for a hidden meaning that exists within the ultimate implications of human intentions and actions. The root of *manawiat* is *mana*, and *mana* is the opposite of *sorat*, which refers to the face or to appearance. *Sorat* is obvious on the outside. *Mana* is on the inside and mostly hidden. An antonym for *manawiat* is *sorat parastior*, which means materialism. A person who is *manawi* or spiritual is a person who is not materialistic and who pays more attention to the hidden dimensions of life. This fact explains why *manawiat* can also suggest a specifically Sufi form of mysticism as a religious process of moving more deeply into the mysteries of existence.

These differentiations have important implications for the present project. Conservative elements within Iran sometimes reject Sufi perspectives as insufficiently orthodox and sometimes condemn the spirituality of *manawiat* as a New Age contamination from the West. Such individuals should more likely self-identify as religious but not spiritual (*motedaien ama na manawi*). The expectation, therefore, was that MER would be higher in the both religious and spiritual (*ham motedaien va ham*

*manawi*) type than in the religious-only type. Because they are “not religious,” the spiritual but not religious (*manawi ama na motedaien*) and the neither religious nor spiritual (*na motedaien va na manawi*) types should score lower than the other two types on all religiously relevant measures including the explicitly Muslim spirituality of MER.

Such differentiations, incidentally, may also help explain moderation effects. Interactions between MER and measures of religiosity suggest an energizing union of inward (*mana*) and outward (*sorat*) dimensions of Muslim faith. Moderation effects, for example, have revealed that MER can enhance relationships of both the Muslim Attitudes towards Religion (Wilde & Joseph, 1997) and the Attitude toward Islam (Sahin & Francis, 2002) scales with measures of religious commitment and psychological adjustment (e.g., Ghorbani et al., 2014b; Ghorbani, Watson, Madani, et al., 2016). A factor analysis, nevertheless, has found that almost one third of Attitude toward Islam items display secondary loadings on a Muslim spirituality factor defined by MER (Ghorbani et al., 2014b). Attitude toward Islam might, therefore, have psychometric liabilities for research that simultaneously analyzes Muslim spirituality. This study evaluated that possibility by directly comparing these two attitude measures.

### Self-compassion and self-forgiveness

This examination of types and moderation effects focused on associations with what might be described as the *mana* of self-compassion and self-forgiveness. With foundations in Buddhist traditions (Barnard & Curry, 2011), self-compassion essentially represents a form of spirituality (e.g., Wall, Warner, FitzMedrud, & Merritt, 2015). The Self-Compassion Scale expresses that spirituality in a nonreligious language that focuses on self-kindness, an understanding that imperfections are common to humanity, and a nonjudgmental awareness of ongoing experience (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Van Gucht, 2011). In contrast to the explicitly religious language of MER, the more nonreligious Self-Compassion Scale might, therefore, be higher in the spiritual-only type and in the less religious university students. Research already reveals that self-compassion predicts stronger religious commitments and better mental health in Iranian Muslims (Ghorbani, Watson, Chen, & Norballa, 2012).

Compassion for the self suggests forgiveness of the self. The two should, therefore, correlate positively. Self-forgiveness should also parallel self-compassion in positive relationships with religious commitments and mental health. However, a previous Iranian study used the Heartland Dispositional Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005) with a sample of 148 university students and found that its Self-Forgiveness subscale displayed nonsignificant *negative* linkages with religious commitment (Amini, Doodman, Edalati, Abbasi, & Redzuan, 2014). Muslim religiosity did, however, correlate positively with other-forgiveness and situation-forgiveness in conformity with claims that Muslim traditions encourage forgiveness of others (Zamanian et al., 2014). The present project used a larger sample of both university and seminary students, examined religious-spiritual types, and added MER to the analysis to test the hypothesis that self-forgiveness would predict at least some aspects of Muslim commitment. Given its expected correlation with the spirituality of self-compassion, self-forgiveness might be especially likely to correlate positively with the spirituality of MER. In addition, self-forgiveness like self-compassion uses nonreligious language. Hence, self-forgiveness might also be higher in the spiritual-only type and in university students.

### Additional measures

Administration of additional measures helped clarify the religious and psychological implications of the type, sample, self-compassion, and self-forgiveness variables. Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) scales recorded religious orientations. An intrinsic religious orientation reflects a desire to make religion the ultimate motivation in life. An extrinsic personal orientation involves the use of religion as a means for achieving a sense of personal well-being. The extrinsic social motivation reflects a use of religion as means to desired social ends. In Iran, intrinsic and extrinsic personal orientations

reliably predict stronger religious commitments and better psychological adjustment, but the extrinsic social scale yields ambiguous results (Ghorbani, Watson, & Khan, 2007).

With regards to psychological functioning, procedures included instruments with well-documented validity within the Iranian cultural context. Integrative self-knowledge (Ghorbani, Watson, & Hargis, 2008), self-control (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) scales assessed psychological adjustment. Anxiety and depression scales recorded maladjustment (Costello & Comrey, 1967).

Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality broadly predict more adaptive psychological functioning in Iran. The expectation, therefore, was that the both religious and spiritual type would most consistently display the best and the neither religious nor spiritual type the poorest psychological functioning. Religious-only and spiritual-only types might be more like one of the two other types in some ways, and sometimes intermediate between them.

In comparison to university students, Islamic seminarians should more strongly display intrinsic and extrinsic personal religious orientations, but no predictions were obvious for the ambiguous extrinsic social orientation. Previous studies have found no consistent mental health differences between seminary and university students (e.g., Ghorbani, Watson, Aghababaei, & Chen, 2014). Nevertheless, the assumption of this project was that Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality would both promote better mental health and that seminarians would be higher in both. Based on logic alone, therefore, the hypothesis was that seminarians would display better mental health.

## Hypotheses

In summary, this investigation examined religion and spirituality in Iran to test five broad sets of hypotheses.

First, and most important, all four religious-spiritual types would appear in Iran, with the both religious and spiritual and the religious-only types more frequent in seminarians and the spiritual-only and neither religious nor spiritual types more common in university students.

Second, the both religious and spiritual type would most consistently predict religious commitment and psychological adjustment, the neither religious nor spiritual type would be least religious and the most psychologically maladjusted, and the other two types would have intermediate implications. Unambiguous measures of Muslim religious commitment included MER, the two Muslim attitude scales, and the intrinsic and extrinsic personal religious orientations. Indicative of psychological adjustment were higher scores on self-compassion, self-forgiveness, the two other forgiveness measures, integrative self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-control and lower scores on anxiety and depression.

Third, self-compassion and self-forgiveness should correlate positively with each other and with MER, and given their nonreligious expression of constructs presumably relevant to spirituality, both should be higher in the spiritual-only type and in the less religious university students.

Fourth, the higher spirituality of MER should enhance the psychological adjustment associated with the religiosity of Muslim attitudes. In all analyses, however, the psychometric equivalence of the two attitude measures was an empirical concern.

Fifth, in comparison to university students, Islamic seminarians should exhibit stronger religious commitment and better mental health.

## Method

### Participants

Research participants included 302 university and 198 seminary students. Their average age was 24.8 years ( $SD = 5.3$ ). The university sample included 137 male and 165 female undergraduates enrolled at the University of Tehran. Seminarians attended institutions in Qom and Tehran and included 127 men and 71 women.

## Materials

All psychological scales appeared in a single booklet. Translation of the Heartland Dispositional Forgiveness Scale occurred in preparations for this project. Creation of Persian measures of integrative self-knowledge and MER took place during scale development procedures. All other instruments had been translated and used in previous Iranian investigations. In all translation procedures, one person translated a scale into Persian, and then another translated it back into English. Differences between original and back-translated measures were minor and easily resolved when necessary through revisions in the Persian translations. The Forgiveness Scale presented 1-to-7 Likert response options with 1-to-5 options used with all other measures. Statistical procedures quantified reactions to each instrument as the mean response per item. Scales appeared in the booklet in the order of their description that follows.

### Religious-spiritual types

An initial section of the questionnaire booklet obtained background information. One question asked research participants to identify themselves as religious and spiritual (*ham motedaien va ham manawi*), religious but not spiritual (*motedaien ama na manawi*), spiritual but not religious (*manawi ama na motedaien*), or neither religious nor spiritual (*na motedaien va na manawi*).

### Integrative Self-Knowledge Scale

The Integrative Self-Knowledge Scale (Ghorbani et al., 2008) used 12 items to record efforts of the individual to combine past, present, and desired future self-experience into a meaningful whole ( $\alpha = .80$ ,  $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ). One item said, for instance, “If I need to, I can reflect about myself and clearly understand the feelings and attitudes behind my past behaviors.”

### Muslim Experiential Religiousness

MER used 15 statements to express a specifically Muslim form of spirituality (Ghorbani, Watson, Geranmayepour, et al., 2013;  $\alpha = .97$ ,  $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). One representative item said, “Intimate closeness to God is at the core of my efforts to be religious.”

### Self-esteem

The widely used 10-item Rosenberg (1965) scale assessed self-esteem ( $\alpha = .82$ ,  $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). Higher levels of this construct appeared in such claims as “I take a positive attitude toward myself.”

### Anxiety and depression

Costello and Comrey (1967) scales operationalized dispositional depression (14 items:  $\alpha = .89$ ,  $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) and anxiety (nine items:  $\alpha = .82$ ,  $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ). Depression appeared in such statements as “I feel sad and depressed.” “I’m a restless and tense person” was representative of anxiety.

### Religious orientation

Adapted for use in Iran, the Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) Religious Orientations Scales assessed intrinsic (eight items:  $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), extrinsic personal (three items:  $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), and extrinsic social (three items:  $\alpha = .78$ ,  $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) religious motivations. Gorsuch and McPherson identified as most indicative of the intrinsic orientation the self-report, “My whole approach to life is based on my religion.” Exemplifying the extrinsic personal orientation was the statement, “What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow.” Illustrating the extrinsic social orientation in Iran was the assertion that “I go to activities associated with my religion because I enjoy seeing people I know there.”

### ***Attitude toward Islam***

Twenty-three statements made up the Sahin and Francis (2002) Attitude toward Islam Scale ( $\alpha = .97$ ,  $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). A representative attitude was, “I find it inspiring to listen to the Quran.”

### ***Muslim attitudes toward religion***

The Wilde and Joseph (1997) Muslim Attitudes towards Religion Scale included 14 statements ( $\alpha = .97$ ,  $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). One said, for instance, “I think the Quran is relevant and applicable to modern days.”

### ***Self-compassion***

Measurement of self-compassion involved use of the abbreviated 12-item version of this instrument (Raes et al., 2011;  $\alpha = .76$ ,  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). An example expression of self-compassion said, “I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don’t like.”

### ***Self-control***

Thirteen items made up the brief version of the Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004;  $\alpha = .79$ ,  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = .66$ ). Self-control appeared in such assertions as, “I am good at resisting temptation.”

### ***Dispositional forgiveness***

Three six-item measures made up the Thompson et al. (2005) Heartland Dispositional Forgiveness Scale that assessed self-forgiveness ( $\alpha = .75$ ,  $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ), other-forgiveness ( $\alpha = .77$ ,  $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ), and situation-forgiveness ( $\alpha = .66$ ,  $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Reflecting self-forgiveness was the reverse-scored statement, “It is really hard for me to accept myself once I’ve messed up.” Illustrating other-forgiveness was the reverse scored claim, “I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me.” Situation-forgiveness appeared in such self-reports as, “With time, I can be understanding of bad circumstances in my life.”

### ***Procedure***

All procedures conformed with ethical guidelines for conducting research at each institution involved in this study. Research participation was voluntary and completely confidential. University and seminary groups of varying sizes responded to the questionnaire booklet in a classroom setting. A researcher asked instructors to encourage their students to participate in the project. Students interested in doing so remained in their classroom after their class was over and received the research booklet. Classes ranged in size from 12 to 25 students, with 10 to 15 students agreeing to take part in the study. After responding to the research measures, students who wanted to better understand the project received debriefing procedures.

## **Results**

### ***Preliminary analyses***

The 64% male participants among seminarians was significantly higher than the 45% among university students,  $\chi^2(1) = 16.92$ ,  $p < .001$ . With men coded as 1 and women as 2, men scored higher on the intrinsic orientation ( $-.11$ ), extrinsic social orientation ( $-.13$ ), situation-forgiveness ( $-.09$ ), and self-compassion ( $-.15$ ) and lower on self-forgiveness ( $.12$ ) and anxiety ( $.11$ ,  $ps < .05$ ). All subsequent analyses, therefore, controlled for gender.

Table 1 summarizes partial correlations among all religious and psychological constructs used to clarify the self-compassion and forgiveness scales. All religious measures correlated positively. Especially robust associations appeared among MER and both Muslim attitude measures. Except for a nonsignificant extrinsic social linkage with integrative self-knowledge and for the absence of



**Table 1.** Partial correlations controlling for gender among religious and psychological measures.

Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. MER	—	.85***	.86***	.72***	.74***	.54***	.17**	.20***	-.03	-.17**	-.25***
2. MATR		—	.96***	.81***	.78***	.56***	.20***	.25***	-.01	-.24***	-.32***
3. ATIS			—	.79***	.78***	.54***	.20***	.23***	.00	-.19***	-.32***
4. Intrinsic Orientation				—	.65***	.51***	.26***	.26***	-.05	-.29***	-.20***
5. Extrinsic Personal Orientation					—	.55***	.18***	.21***	.04	-.21***	-.27***
6. Extrinsic Social Orientation						—	.04	.18***	.04	-.14**	-.19***
7. Integrative Self-Knowledge							—	.50***	.38***	-.44***	-.38***
8. Self-Control								—	.47***	-.46***	-.46***
9. Self-Esteem									—	-.34***	-.59***
10. Anxiety										—	.46*
11. Depression											—

Notes. Measures include Muslim Experiential Religiousness (MER), Muslim Attitudes towards Religion Scale (MATR), and Attitude toward Islam Scale (ATIS).

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

any relationships with self-esteem, all religious variables predicted better psychological functioning. Relationships among psychological variables conformed with their mental health implications.

### Self-compassion and forgiveness

Self-compassion and all three forgiveness scales correlated positively (see Table 2). Most surprising, however, self-forgiveness displayed weakly negative, though statistically significant relationships with MER, with the two Muslim attitude scales and with the intrinsic religious orientation. Self-compassion correlated positively with Muslim Attitudes towards Religion and with the intrinsic and extrinsic personal religious orientations. Other-forgiveness and situation-forgiveness exhibited direct associations with all but the extrinsic social index of religiousness. The overwhelmingly adaptive implications of self-compassion and all three forgiveness scales appeared in their significant relationships with each mental health variable.

### Multiple regression procedures

Multiple regression analyses examined whether the spirituality of MER and the religiosity of Muslim attitudes combined and then interacted to explain variance in religious and psychological functioning. Separate examination of the two attitude scales made it possible to evaluate their equivalence.

**Table 2.** Partial correlations controlling for gender of self-compassion and dispositional forgiveness scales with religious and psychological measures.

Measures	Self-Compassion	Self Forgiveness	Other Forgiveness	Situation Forgiveness
Self-Compassion	—	.52***	.38***	.62***
Self-Forgiveness		—	.23***	.52***
Other-Forgiveness			—	.48***
Situation-Forgiveness				—
Muslim Experiential Religiousness	.08	-.12*	.15**	.14**
Muslim Attitudes towards Religion	.12*	-.11*	.20***	.18***
Attitude toward Islam	.09	-.11*	.20***	.17***
Intrinsic Orientation	.16**	-.13*	.24***	.18***
Extrinsic Personal Orientation	.11*	-.07	.13**	.16**
Extrinsic Social Orientation	.09	-.07	.04	.04
Integrative Self-Knowledge	.43***	.30***	.26***	.36***
Self-Control	.52***	.32***	.29***	.40***
Self-Esteem	.50***	.51***	.20***	.42***
Anxiety	-.52***	-.31***	-.29***	-.43***
Depression	-.54***	-.33***	-.31***	-.51***

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



Standardization of MER and the attitude measures in these procedures addressed the problem of multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). Table 3 summarizes these results. For the sake of clarity, this table leaves out the analysis of gender on the first step and focuses on the influence of Muslim spirituality and religiosity on the second step, followed by their interaction on the third.

Most generally, multiple regression data demonstrated that the two attitude measures had similar implications. In each set of analyses, both attitude scales predicted higher levels of other- and situation-forgiveness, all three religious orientations, integrative self-knowledge, and self-control along with lower scores on anxiety and depression. MER explained additional increases in the extrinsic personal and social orientations in both sets of results, but its prediction of a stronger intrinsic orientation appeared only when combined with Muslim Attitudes towards Religion. For both attitude constructs, interactions with MER appeared in the prediction of the same eight variables: self-compassion, other- and situation-forgiveness, the intrinsic orientation, integrative self-knowledge, self-control, anxiety, and depression.

Multiple regression procedures also analyzed the prediction of each attitude measure using the other. Both MER ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ) and Muslim Attitudes towards Religion ( $\beta = .81, p < .001$ ), combined to explain variance in Attitude toward Islam, and their interaction was significant ( $\beta = -.06, p < .001$ ). In contrast, Attitude toward Islam ( $\beta = .92, p < .001$ ), but not MER ( $\beta = .04, p > .05$ ), predicted Muslim Attitudes towards Religion, and these two variables did not interact ( $\beta = .05, p > .05$ ).

For the sake of brevity, clarification of significant interactions focused on the Muslim Attitudes towards Religion Scale because the two attitude measures yielded similar results and because an interaction appeared in the prediction of Attitude toward Islam but not of Muslim Attitudes towards Religion. Figure 1 depicts these data. Significant interactions revealed that MER enhanced the positive mental health implications of Muslim attitudes. Specifically, Muslim attitudes at higher levels of MER more strongly predicted greater self-compassion, other-forgiveness, situation-forgiveness, integrative self-knowledge, and self-control and lower anxiety and depression. Muslim attitudes also displayed a stronger linkage with the intrinsic orientation when MER was higher. The Attitude toward Islam interaction effect reflected a steeper slope at lower levels of MER. Specifically, a simple slope test showed that at higher levels of MER, the prediction of Attitude toward Islam was  $b = .66, t = 26.00, p < .001$ . At lower levels of MER, it was  $b = .75, t = 38.43, p < .001$ .

### ***Institution and religious-spirituality type comparisons***

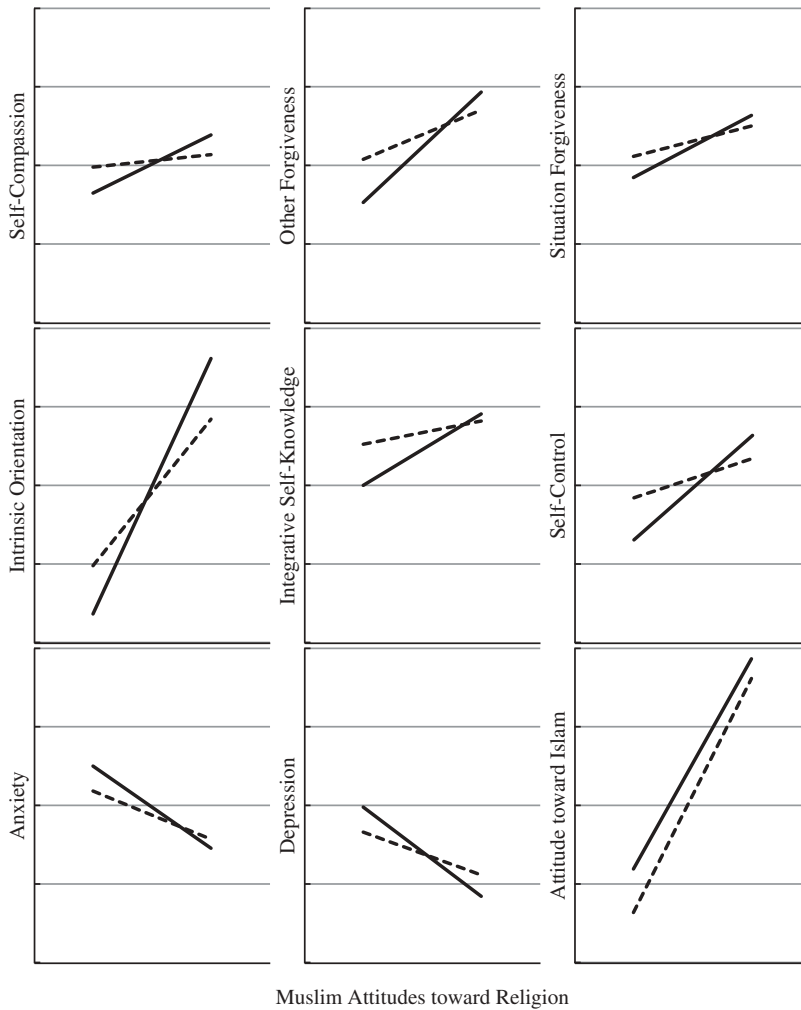
Substantial numbers of participants failed to indicate their religious-spiritual type. In the university sample, 253 self-reported their type, whereas 49 did not. Among seminarians, 128 responded and 70 did not. This nonresponse rate was higher in seminarians,  $\chi^2(1) = 23.09, p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Muslim Experiential Religiousness (MER) moderation of Muslim Attitudes towards Religion (MATR) and of Attitude toward Islam (ATI) relationships.

Variable	MATR Analyses					ATI Analyses				
	$\Delta R^2$	MER $\beta$	MARS $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	Interaction $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	MER $\beta$	ATIS $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	Interaction $\beta$
Self-Compassion	.02*	.00	.13	.03***	.21***	.01	.06	.05	.03***	.21***
Self-Forgiveness	.01	-.07	-.02	.00	.01	.01	-.05	-.04	.00	.02
Other-Forgiveness	.06***	-.07	.31***	.03***	.23***	.06***	-.09	.32***	.03***	.23***
Situation-Forgiveness	.04***	-.03	.23***	.01*	.14*	.04***	.00	.19*	.01**	.16**
Intrinsic Orientation	.65***	.11*	.72***	.07***	.34***	.63***	.10	.70***	.08***	.38***
Extrinsic Personal	.62***	.31***	.51***	.00	-.03	.62***	.27***	.54***	.00	.00
Extrinsic Social	.29***	.22***	.34***	.01	.09	.28***	.26**	.29***	.01	.10
Integrative Self-Knowledge	.05**	.03	.19***	.03***	.20***	.05***	.01	.21*	.03***	.24***
Self-Control	.06***	-.05	.29**	.05***	.30***	.05***	.00	.24***	.04**	.29***
Self-Esteem	.00	-.03	-.02	.00	.08	.00	-.08	.04	.01	.10
Anxiety	.06***	.05	-.29***	-.01*	-.14*	.05***	-.06	-.16***	.01*	-.12*
Depression	.09***	-.01	-.29***	.02**	-.19**	.10***	.05	-.35***	.03***	-.24***

Notes. ATIS = Attitude toward Islam Scale.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 1.** Interaction of Muslim Attitudes towards Religion on X-axis with Muslim Experiential Religiousness. *Note.* Solid lines define high and dashed lines define low Muslim Experiential Religiousness ( $\pm 1$  SD from the mean). Situation and Other Forgiveness are plotted on a 1–7 scale along the Y-axis, whereas a 1–5 scale applies to all other analyses.

Among those who did self-report their type, significant differences appeared across the two institutions,  $\chi^2(1) = 127.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . Frequencies for the Islamic seminarians were 61 (48%) for both religious and spiritual, 53 (41%) for religious only, 10 (8%) for spiritual only, and four (3%) for neither religious nor spiritual types. For university students, 43 (17%) were both religious and spiritual, 28 (11%) were religious only, 133 (53%) were spiritual only, and 49 (19%) were neither religious nor spiritual. The both religious and spiritual and the religious-only types, therefore, were more common in seminarians with the spiritual only and neither types being more frequent in university students. Among other things, these results suggested that multivariate analysis of covariance procedures needed to examine institution and religious-spiritual type differences separately. If both variables had been combined in a single procedure, too much institution data would have been lost given the high frequency of type nonresponders; in seminarians, the numbers of the spiritual-only and neither types were too small to support a meaningful analysis.

Multivariate analysis of covariance results appear in Table 4. University and seminary students displayed significant overall differences, Wilks's  $\lambda = .441$ ,  $F(15, 388) = 32.82$ ,  $p < .001$ . Seminarians

**Table 4.** MANCOVA contrasts of university and seminary students and of religious and spiritual (both), religious only (religious), spiritual only (spiritual), and neither religious nor spiritual (neither) types.

Variable	Institution		F	Religious-Spiritual Types			F
	University	Seminary		Both	Religious	Spiritual	
Self-Compassion	3.13 ± .04	3.23 ± .05	2.20	3.38 ± .06 <sub>a</sub>	3.07 ± .07 <sub>b</sub>	3.14 ± .05 <sub>b</sub>	3.15 ± .08 <sub>b</sub>
Self-Forgiveness	4.71 ± .07	4.27 ± .09	15.05***	4.61 ± .11 <sub>a</sub>	4.20 ± .13 <sub>b</sub>	4.78 ± .09 <sub>a</sub>	4.70 ± .15 <sub>a</sub>
Other-Forgiveness	4.63 ± .07	5.09 ± .09	16.10***	5.01 ± .11	4.92 ± .13	4.72 ± .10	4.66 ± .16
Situation-Forgiveness	4.52 ± .06	4.73 ± .08	4.90*	4.81 ± .09	4.55 ± .11	4.53 ± .08	4.54 ± .13
MER	3.13 ± .06	4.32 ± .08	134.85***	4.28 ± .09 <sub>a</sub>	3.96 ± .11 <sub>b</sub>	3.21 ± .08 <sub>c</sub>	2.35 ± .13 <sub>d</sub>
Muslim Attitudes	3.16 ± .06	4.49 ± .08	193.86***	4.45 ± .09 <sub>a</sub>	4.22 ± .10 <sub>a</sub>	3.14 ± .07 <sub>b</sub>	2.33 ± .12 <sub>b</sub>
Attitude toward Islam	3.32 ± .05	4.49 ± .07	171.88***	4.46 ± .08 <sub>a</sub>	4.22 ± .09 <sub>b</sub>	3.32 ± .07 <sub>c</sub>	2.51 ± .11 <sub>d</sub>
Intrinsic Orientation	2.92 ± .04	4.23 ± .05	374.93***	4.10 ± .07 <sub>a</sub>	3.83 ± .08 <sub>b</sub>	2.83 ± .06 <sub>c</sub>	2.69 ± .09 <sub>c</sub>
Extrinsic Personal	2.94 ± .07	3.84 ± .09	64.15**	3.92 ± .11 <sub>a</sub>	3.61 ± .12 <sub>b</sub>	2.90 ± .09 <sub>c</sub>	2.26 ± .14 <sub>c</sub>
Extrinsic Social	1.84 ± .05	2.72 ± .07	99.04***	2.61 ± .09 <sub>a</sub>	2.55 ± .10 <sub>a</sub>	1.70 ± .07 <sub>b</sub>	1.67 ± .12 <sub>b</sub>
Integrative Self-Knowledge	3.67 ± .04	3.82 ± .05	8.97**	3.97 ± .06 <sub>a</sub>	3.64 ± .07 <sub>b</sub>	3.59 ± .05 <sub>b</sub>	3.65 ± .09 <sub>b</sub>
Self-Control	3.19 ± .04	3.35 ± .05	6.47*	3.45 ± .07 <sub>a</sub>	3.33 ± .08 <sub>a,c</sub>	3.14 ± .06 <sub>b</sub>	3.12 ± .09 <sub>b,c</sub>
Self-Esteem	3.77 ± .05	3.49 ± .06	13.91***	3.79 ± .07 <sub>a</sub>	3.40 ± .08 <sub>b</sub>	3.75 ± .06 <sub>a</sub>	3.78 ± .10 <sub>a</sub>
Anxiety	2.87 ± .05	2.65 ± .06	8.91***	2.57 ± .07 <sub>c</sub>	2.72 ± .08 <sub>b,c</sub>	2.91 ± .06 <sub>a,b</sub>	2.98 ± .10 <sub>a</sub>
Depression	2.32 ± .04	2.04 ± .06	16.31***	1.97 ± .07 <sub>b</sub>	2.18 ± .08 <sub>a</sub>	2.33 ± .06 <sub>a</sub>	2.39 ± .09 <sub>a</sub>

Notes. Multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs) controlled for gender. Presented for each variable are the mean and standard error of the mean. For religious-spiritual types, means with different letter subscripts were significantly different ( $p < .05$ ). Letters used in describing significant comparisons range for a subscript “a” for highest mean up to a possible subscript of “d” for the lowest mean.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

scored higher on other- and situation-forgiveness, all religious measures, integrative self-knowledge, and self-control and lower on self-forgiveness, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Self-compassion was the only variable on which the two groups did not differ.

Overall differences appeared for the religious-spiritual types as well, Wilks's  $\lambda = .380$ ,  $F(45, 1019.75) = 8.71$ ,  $p < .001$ . Only other- and situation-forgiveness failed to exhibit significant effects. Least significant difference post hoc comparisons ( $p < .05$ ) most importantly revealed that the both religious and spiritual type alone but occasionally with the religious-only type consistently predicted the strongest religious functioning and the best mental health. The neither type alone or along with the religious-only or spiritual-only types had opposite implications. The one exception to this conclusion occurred when the religious-only type was significantly lower than the other three on self-forgiveness. Deserving emphasis were findings that all four types differed significantly from each other on MER, with the both religious and spiritual type highest, followed by the religious only, then by the spiritual only, and finally by the neither religious nor spiritual types.

## Discussion

Iranian seminary and university students displayed religious and spiritual diversity. The more religious Islamic seminarians identified themselves more frequently as belonging to the both religious and spiritual or the religious-only types, whereas the less religious university students more commonly described themselves as spiritual only or as neither religious nor spiritual. More generally, Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality tended to display a decline across the four religious-spiritual types. The Muslim spirituality of MER and the religiosity of Muslim attitudes also combined in multiple regression procedures to explain variance in religious and psychological functioning. In addition, MER interacted with Muslim attitudes to enhance the religious motivational and adaptive psychological implications of religious commitments. Such moderation effects were not specific to one attitude measure or the other and further documented the dynamic interactions between Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality.

Type and sample differences in psychological measures also pointed toward diversity in Muslim religious and Muslim spiritual functioning. The both religious and spiritual type displayed the best and the neither type displayed the poorest mental health. Religious-only and spiritual-only types tended to be intermediate between these two. Data for the both religious and spiritual type, therefore, conformed with the hypothesis that Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality would combine to predict better mental health. In addition, Islamic seminarians scored higher on the Muslim spirituality of MER and on the religiosity of all attitude and adaptive religious orientation measures. Logic suggests that the greater Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality of seminarians should eventuate in better psychological adjustment, and this outcome did generally occur.

## Complexities

Noteworthy complexities did, nevertheless, appear. First, a surprising percentage of research participants chose not to identify their religious-spiritual type. The religious context of a formally Muslim society perhaps made social desirability concerns especially influential in discouraging self-reports of especially the spiritual-only or the neither religious nor spiritual types. The higher nonresponse rate in the more religious seminarians perhaps supported this idea. This high nonresponse rate also meant that interpretative caution is essential in evaluating data for types. The low number of seminarian spiritual only and neither religious nor spiritual types, for instance, precluded the use of analyses that could have teased out variance attributable to Institution  $\times$  Type interactions.

Second, in opposition to hypotheses, self-compassion did not correlate positively with the Muslim spirituality of MER, nor did the spiritual-only type or university students display higher scores on this measure. Self-compassion did correlate positively with Muslim Attitudes towards Religion and with the intrinsic and extrinsic personal orientations. Moderation effects also revealed that MER

enhanced the direct association of self-compassion with both Muslim attitude measures. In addition, the both religious and spiritual type scored higher than the three other types on self-compassion. In short, self-compassion was compatible with Muslim religiosity, but at least in this sample, Muslim spirituality seemed important only in amplifying that compatibility.

Third, self-forgiveness correlated positively with self-compassion, confirming its expected relevance to spirituality. Against expectations, however, self-forgiveness correlated negatively not only with Muslim attitudes and the intrinsic religious orientation but also with the explicitly Muslim spirituality of MER. Seminarians also exhibited less self-forgiveness than university students, and the religious-only type scored lower than the three other types on self-forgiveness. Hence, self-forgiveness was at least somewhat incompatible with Muslim commitments. A previous failure in Iran of self-forgiveness to display significant negative correlations with religious variables presumably reflected the use of a smaller sample that did not include a subset of more religious seminarians (Amini et al., 2014). One verse from the Quran says, “It is He who accepts repentance from His servants, and pardons bad deeds, and knows all that you do” (42:25). Repentance is the duty of Muslims. Forgiveness of their self is the prerogative of God. At the same time, however, the small magnitude of these negative relationships perhaps pointed toward a confidence in the mercy of God that made self-forgiveness relatively less important within Muslim consciousness. Positive correlations with other-forgiveness and situation-forgiveness did confirm, however, that Muslim commitments were compatible with some forms of forgiveness.

Fourth, self-forgiveness consistently predicted better mental health. Evidence supporting that conclusion appeared in correlations that were positive with self-compassion, integrative self-knowledge, self-control, and self-esteem and negative with anxiety and depression. Self-forgiveness, therefore, displayed potentials to promote better psychological functioning in Iranians, but those potentials apparently had no groundings in Muslim commitments. Again, the direct relationship with self-compassion did identify self-forgiveness as relevant to a spirituality expressed in more generic terms, but the negative correlation with MER made it clear that this relevance did not extend to an explicitly Muslim spirituality.

Fifth, self-esteem failed to correlate with any index of Muslim commitment. The only significant outcomes relevant to Muslim religiosity and spirituality occurred when seminarians and the religious-only type scored lower on this construct. These group differences mirrored the self-forgiveness results, and similar results for these two measures perhaps revealed a Muslim cautiousness about affirming the self. Such a cautiousness may also have been influential in the failure of MER to correlate positively with self-compassion. In contrast, integrative self-knowledge and self-control recorded a less affirmational and more regulative self-dynamic. Knowing and controlling in contrast to affirming the self may, therefore, be more in conformity with Muslim belief systems (Ghorbani, Watson, Madani, et al., 2016), a possibility consistent with an implicit personality theory attributed to Islam (Smither & Khorsandi, 2009). Regarding the self-compassion and self-forgiveness data, an important additional conclusion may be the following: What is *mana* within Iranian Muslim religious traditions cannot be presupposed even implicitly based on Western research perspectives and instead requires careful empirical analysis.

Sixth, the Muslim Attitudes towards Religion and the Attitude toward Islam scales yielded similar results. In multiple regression procedures, MER supplemented Muslim attitudes to explain higher levels of the intrinsic religious orientation only when combined with Muslim Attitudes towards Religion. MER also interacted with Muslim Attitudes towards Religion to predict higher levels of Attitude toward Islam, but not vice versa. In the analysis of types, Attitude toward Islam was the only religiosity measure in which the spiritual-only type scored higher than the neither religious nor spiritual type. This contrast presumably reflected the spiritual content of some Attitude toward Islam items (Ghorbani et al., 2014b) with the other religious similarities between the spiritual-only and neither religious nor spiritual types confirming that they were “not religious.” In short, differences between the two attitude measures were subtle and apparent only when Muslim spirituality was an empirical concern. Future research into Muslim attitudes and Muslim spirituality might, therefore, avoid possible ambiguities by using the Muslim Attitudes towards Religion rather than the Attitude toward Islam scale.

Finally, with a few exceptions, seminarians were more psychologically adjusted than university students. The assumption of this project was that Muslim religiosity and Muslim spirituality would both predict better mental health and that seminarians would be higher in both. These outcomes did in fact occur; so, the higher other-forgiveness, situation-forgiveness, integrative self-knowledge, and self-control and the lower anxiety and depression of seminarians matched expectations based on logic. At the same time, however, Iranian seminarians do not always display better adjustment (e.g., Ghorbani, Watson, Aghababaei, et al., 2014; Ghorbani, Watson, Madani, et al., 2016). Future research will need to explain why seminarian mental health differences are inconsistent.

### Limitations

This study most importantly used types to document religious and spiritual diversity and complexity in the formally Muslim cultural context of Iran. Already mentioned in evaluating the findings of this project is a need for interpretative caution due to the high number of research participants who failed to report their type. Other cautions deserve emphasis as well.

University and seminary students were not typical of the wider population. Important differences might become evident with a more representative Iranian sample. Findings from Iran also might not generalize to other Muslims societies or to Muslims living as a minority community elsewhere. These other Muslim contexts require separate analysis.

The language used in two scales may have been especially influential. MER expressed spirituality in explicitly Muslim terms and displayed wide-ranging religious implications. A less religious expression of spirituality could have yielded different results (e.g., Hodge, 2003). The spiritual-only type, for example, might have scored higher on such measures. Conversely, Muslim spirituality and religiosity correlated negatively with a self-forgiveness scale that used more secular language. An index of self-forgiveness expressed in the explicitly God-mediated terms of Islam might yield opposite results. One such statement might be, for instance, “My faith in the mercy of God gives me strength to forgive myself for my own shortcomings.”

Finally, all the present data including type and student comparisons were essentially correlational. This means that no definitive conclusions can be made about causation. It cannot be said, for example, that Muslim spirituality and religiosity caused better mental health, or vice versa. Any establishment of causality will require use of different research designs.

### Conclusion

At the broadest level, this investigation confirmed that diversity in religious-spiritual types is not limited to the more secular, pluralistic West. Compared to most other societies, Iran is a more homogeneous society with institutional foundations more strongly grounded in religion. The observation of spiritual-only and neither religious nor spiritual types in such a society supplied especially compelling evidence of a possible diversity in types across cultures and religions. Such a conclusion points toward at least three important lines of future research.

First, religious-spiritual types clearly deserve additional analysis in Iran. This investigation focused on self-compassion and self-forgiveness and examined an array of additional measures in order to offer a usefully broad preliminary sketch of types in this cultural context. Future studies might evaluate Iranian types in relationship with other theoretically noteworthy concerns. Of interest, for example, might be an attempt to relate types to variations in religious openness as measured by fundamentalism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), religious schema (Streib, Hood, & Klein, 2010), and Islamic religious reflection (Ghorbani, Watson, Chen, & Dover, 2013) scales. Would the religious-only type, for example, most strongly display fundamentalist and less open intellectual perspectives?

Second, and most obvious, future studies need to broaden the analysis to completely new religious and cultural contexts. An examination of types in Indian Hindu and Asian Buddhist samples only begins to suggest the possibilities. Also of potential interest would be attempts to determine if types



in these and other religious communities living as minority groups in the more secular West differ in comparison to types in their home culture.

Finally, these data confirmed that research participants in Iran are like those in the West in using all four religious-spiritual types to describe themselves. This parallel did not mean, however, that types were necessarily equivalent in their semiotics. This possibility was already obvious in the attempt to translate the alien Western construct of “spirituality” as *manawiat* in Iran. More generally, the meaning of types will likely be influenced by prominent cultural exemplars. The both religious and spiritual type in Iran might mean, for example, “like the mullahs who assume such a prominent role in Iranian society,” whereas in the West, this type might instead point toward “those who are more and more on the periphery of an increasingly secular society.” Conversely, the neither religious nor spiritual type in the West might more likely mean “atheist,” whereas in Iran it might merely suggest “someone who goes through daily activities without making religion or spirituality the prominent concern that is common in Iranian society.” In short, additional studies will need to determine the degree to which types display semiotic equivalence across Iranian and other cultures. Such research would presumably benefit from the use of qualitative methodologies.

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