

Religious fundamentalism in Iran: Religious and psychological adjustment within a Muslim cultural context

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Abstract

This first analysis of the Religious Fundamentalism Scale in Iran further examined findings that conservative religious commitments have positive adjustment implications outside the West. Religious Fundamentalism in a sample of 385 Iranian university students displayed direct relationships with Muslim religiosity and spirituality and correlated positively with the Transcendence and negatively with the Symbolism Post-Critical Beliefs (PCB) factors. Religious Fundamentalism, and conservative religiosity more generally, predicted better mental health in relationship with variables related to self-regulation, narcissism, and splitting. PCB factors defined a fundamentalist attitude of Literal Affirmation that also displayed some linkages with more adaptive psychological functioning. Iranians who self-identified as “both religious and spiritual” were more conservative religiously and more adjusted psychologically than three other religious-spiritual types. Conservative religiosity did predict the maladjustment of Exploitable Dependency. These data further suggested that conservative religiosity can have largely, though not wholly, positive mental health implications outside the West.

Keywords

Iran, Islam, Muslim attitudes, Muslim Experiential Religiosity, Post-Critical Beliefs, religious fundamentalism, science and religion, self-functioning

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Research in the West frequently identifies conservative and fundamentalist religious commitments as socially and psychologically problematic (e.g. Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Hunsberger, 1996). However, almost all of these research efforts impose a Western, naturalistic perspective, which holds empirical observations of nature as the ultimate source of truth. This naturalistic perspective is fundamentally incommensurate with the theistic perspective by which God is the arbiter of truth. More than often in the study of psychology of religion, the naturalistic perspective dominates the theistic perspective, and the preference for “objectivity” could have impeded the expression of truths in many religious communities that operate outside of the naturalistic ideological surround.

As one theoretical advancement to solve this problem, the Ideological Surround Model (ISM) has pursued theoretical and methodological innovations designed to enhance the “truth” and “objectivity” of research into psychology and religion (Watson, 1993, 2011). The foundational argument of the ISM is that psychology as well as religion unavoidably operates within the limits of an ideological surround. Methodological theism, therefore, needs to supplement methodological atheism. Methodological theism should operationalize the meaningfulness of religious traditions and demonstrate empirically that the influences of ideology cannot be ignored.

Psychology and religion intersect in a cultural space that illustrates a central challenge within contemporary social life. The ISM describes this central challenge as the problematic relationship that invariably exists among social rationalities within pluralistic cultures. Social rationalities refer to what Taylor (2007) calls “social imaginaries” and defines as the manner in which people “imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” (p. 71). Pluralistic cultures, therefore, necessarily struggle with how to accommodate the sometimes strikingly different deeper normative notions and images that appear within their diverse social rationalities.

The ISM more generally suggests that contemporary social scientific rationalities need to be supplemented by more complex dialogical rationalities. Beliefs in secularization should also be supplemented by beliefs in trans-rationality. In particular, thought processes that are deemed as maladaptive in the secular scientific ideological surround—for instance, religious fundamentalism—might be adaptive in a theistic ideological surround. Similarly, the meaning of adaptation and psychological adjustment could also be subjected to dialogues between rationalities. Motivated by this theoretical impetus, this study examines the potential psychological adjustment of fundamentalist religious commitment in a non-Western Muslim culture of Iran. Three measurement approaches operationalized fundamentalist religious commitment in Iran.

Three fundamentalist religious commitments in Iran

The first approach analyzed conservative religious commitments outside the West by administering a measure not previously examined in Iran, the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RFS; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). Although exhibiting poor internal reliability in a recent study in India, Religious Fundamentalism nevertheless predicted greater Hindu openness, especially after accounting for psychometric complexities associated with reverse-scored items (Kamble, Watson, Duggi, & Chen, 2018). In line with this Indian and other previous non-Western studies, the expectation was that Religious Fundamentalism in Iran would display linkages with conservative religiosity and better psychological adjustment. Administering RFS would test this hypothesis based on correlations with psychological adjustment variables. Data collected on RFS from Iran would also facilitate comparisons with RFS data from an Indian sample (Kamble et al., 2019), adding to the understanding of Religious Fundamentalism in non-Western, non-Christian contexts. Therefore,

RFS was assessed as a first approach operationalizing fundamentalist religious commitment in Iran.

The second approach utilized the two-factor Post-Critical Beliefs (PCB; Duriez, Soenens, & Hutsebaut, 2005) in which the Transcendence factor recorded a commitment to traditional religion and the Symbolism factor assessed a rejection of literal and thus an embrace of more open interpretations of religious texts. In Iranian Muslims, the two PCB factors correlated negatively; Transcendence predicted higher and Symbolism predicted lower levels of Muslim religiousness (Ghorbani, Watson, Shamohammadi, & Cunningham, 2009). These data, therefore, suggested that in Iran as in the West, traditional faith was incompatible with the presumably greater openness of Symbolism.

On the contrary, Transcendence correlated positively and Symbolism correlated negatively with psychological openness and adjustment. This positive association of fundamentalist religious commitment and psychological openness, seemingly paradoxical, was partially explained in a mediation analysis involving the Quranic concept *Ilm*, or pursuit of knowledge as means to attain closeness to God (Tekke, Watson, İsmail, & Chen, 2015). In that study with a Malaysian Muslim sample, Islamic religious commitment led to higher motivation for pursuing and applying knowledge perceived as a requirement from God, which in turn increased one's openness to wisdom and knowledge outside their own Islamic tradition.

Further complexities appeared when interactions between Transcendence and Symbolism assessed the four religious attitudes of Wulff (1997). High Transcendence combined with low Symbolism defined the fundamentalist attitude of Literal Affirmation. Literal Disaffirmation appeared with low scores on both beliefs and pointed toward a skeptical rejection of so-called "revelation." Reductive Interpretation combined high Symbolism with low Transcendence to reveal a search for the true secular meaning behind religious texts. High scores on both factors identified efforts to reinvigorate religion through Restorative Interpretation. Most important in the initial Iranian PCB data were findings that Literal Affirmation defined better rather than worse psychological functioning (Ghorbani et al., 2009). Data from a recent Iranian study offered additional support in that Literal Affirmationist, people high in Transcendence and Low in Symbolism, showed the highest potential for intellectual openness (Ghorbani, Watson, Sarmast, & Chen, 2018). In comparison with the bivariate correlation approach associated with RFS, analysis of the PCB scale will involve test of moderation effect with two continuous variables in a regression analysis context. This study, therefore, focuses on the interaction of Transcendence and Symbolism, as a second approach to examine the psychological adjustment of fundamentalist religious commitment in Iran.

The third approach utilized comparison of means across four types defined by a nominal variable indicating religious and spiritual affiliations. Participants identified themselves as belonging to a "both religious and spiritual" (Both), "religious but not spiritual" (Religious-Only), "spiritual but not religious" (Spiritual-Only), or "neither religious nor spiritual" (Neither) type (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). A recent Iranian study found the Both type to be highest in Muslim religiosity and spirituality and to be the best adjusted psychologically, and in this article, the culture-specific meaning of religiosity and spirituality has been extensively examined (Ghorbani, Watson, Kashanaki, & Chen, 2017).

Whereas "being religious" has specific meaning related to Islamic faith and practice, the idea of a spirituality that exists separate from religion is only recently introduced to Islam. "Spirituality" in Iran now is translated as *manawiat*, referring to a search for a hidden meaning that exists within the ultimate implications of human intentions and actions. A *manawi* or spiritual person is therefore not materialistic and pays more attention to the hidden dimensions of life. Conservative elements within Iran 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. The expectation, therefore, was that religious adjustment would be higher in the both religious and spiritual type than in the religious-only type or nonreligious types. Therefore, the third approach of operationalizing fundamentalist religious commitment in Iran used the typological comparisons, with the Both type being most fundamentalist. In short, this project empirically defined conservative Muslim religiosity in terms of high scores on Religious Fundamentalism, the display of a Literal Affirmation attitude in the interaction of Transcendence and Symbolism, and self-identification as the Both type.

Psychological adjustments in Iran

Under the ISM, psychological functioning is operationalized with variables of two broad categories. The first category of variables captures tension that arises in dialogues between ideological communities, which often manifests as a defense mechanism within individuals, and a tendency to reject outgroup values (e.g. narcissism and splitting). The second category should include variables of critical interest to the specific theistic ideological surround being studied (e.g. in Iran, self-control and self-knowledge). These types of outcomes have been shown to effectively capture the complex dynamics between conflicting ideological communities in the ISM (e.g. Watson, 2011).

Specifically, Grandiose Narcissism (Foster, McCain, Hibberts, Brunell, & Johnson, 2015), Splitting (Gould, Prentice, & Aisnlie, 1996), and Interpersonal Dependency (Pincus & Gurtman, 1995) assessed maladjustment. Narcissism scales can include factors that reflect better and not just worse self-functioning (e.g. Watson, Varnell, & Morris, 1999–2000), so procedures first documented the need to subdivide the Foster et al. instrument into separate indices of Maladaptive and Adaptive Narcissism. Splitting reflects unstable and polarized evaluations of the self and others. With this defense mechanism, individuals fail to integrate representations of self and others as complex mixtures of both good and bad, so representations of self and others shift radically back and forth between all good and all bad as life circumstances change. The result is chaotic personal and interpersonal functioning. Interpersonal Dependency operationalizes immature forms of submissiveness. According to psychodynamic theory, narcissistic personalities frequently display splitting (Kernberg, 1985) and have a self-esteem that is dependent upon the approval of others (Kohut, 1977). These interrelated variables manifest a broadly rigid cognitive style and tendency to exclusively favor one's own religious tradition over all the others that, in being consistent with previous findings (e.g. Ghorbani, Watson, Chen, & Dover, 2013; Watson, Ghorbani, Vartanian, & Chen, 2015), would show positive correlation with fundamentalist religious commitments in the West, but negative correlation in Iran.

In addition to Adaptive Narcissism, Integrative Self-Knowledge (Ghorbani, Watson, & Hargis, 2008), Self-Control (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), and Mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) assessed healthier self-functioning. These three constructs have been shown in previous studies to indicate psychological adjustment particularly relevant to the Iranian context. Specifically, Integrative Self-Knowledge and Self-Control have been used to define an Iranian Muslim spiritual ideal, the Perfect Man (e.g. Ghorbani, Watson, Omidbagi, & Chen, 2016). These two measures also combine with Mindfulness to describe a multi-process model of self-regulation in Iran (Ghorbani, Watson, Farhadi, & Chen, 2014). In Iran, therefore, Religious Fundamentalism, and conservative religiosity more generally, should correlate positively with these indices of relative mental health.

Two additional variables, Muslim Attitudes toward Religion (MAR; Wilde & Joseph, 1997) and Muslim Experiential Religiousness (MER; Ghorbani, Watson, Geranmayepour, & Chen, 2014), were included as empirical markers to clarify Muslim religious adjustment. In Iran, the three

fundamentalist religious commitments should be positively associated with higher levels of MAR and MER.

Hypotheses

This study proposed that fundamentalist religious commitments would predict greater religious and psychological adjustment in Iran. Support for this suggestion would be most straightforward with the confirmation of three sets of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Religious Fundamentalism along with Transcendence should predict better psychological functioning. Specifically, these scales should correlate positively with MAR, MER, Adaptive Narcissism, Integrative Self-Knowledge, Self-Control, and Mindfulness and negatively with Maladaptive Narcissism, Splitting, and Interpersonal Dependency. Opposite linkages should appear for Symbolism.

Hypothesis 2. There should be a significant interaction effect between Transcendence and Symbolism in predicting religious and psychological adjustment variables. Specifically, among people of low Symbolism, we would observe a positive association of Transcendence with religious (e.g. MAR and MER) and psychological adjustment (e.g. Integrative Self-Knowledge), whereas the pattern would be opposite for people of high Symbolism. This moderating effect would associate Literal Affirmation with fundamentalist religious commitment and psychological adjustment.

Hypothesis 3. The Both type of religion/spirituality should display the highest levels of fundamentalist religious commitment and the best psychological adjustment than the other three types.

Method

Participants

Students enrolled in two different state universities in Tehran, Iran, served as the research participants. One was the co-educational University of Tehran and the other was the female-only Alzahra University. The average age of these 139 men and 246 women was 22.9 years ($SD=5.9$).

Measures

A single questionnaire booklet contained all scales. Translations of all but the Interpersonal Dependency and Grandiose Narcissism scales occurred prior to previous investigations. In all these procedures, one individual translated a measure from English into Persian, and then another translated it back into English. Differences between original and back-translated instruments were minor and easily resolved through revisions when necessary in the Persian translation. Scales appeared within the booklet in the sequence of their descriptions below. The mean response per item quantified responding to each instrument.

Religious Fundamentalism. Included in the short RFS (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004) were 12 statements ($\alpha = .88$, $M=0.53$, $SD=1.67$). Response options ranged from -4 (*strongly disagree*) to ± 4 (*strongly agree*). Illustrative of Religious Fundamentalism was the self-report, "To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion."

PCB. Assessment of PCB factors (Duriez et al., 2005) involved the use of items previously identified as valid within the Iranian cultural context (Ghorbani et al., 2009). This instrument used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Defining Transcendence ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.83$) were six statements, whereas 10 statements described Symbolism ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.68$). Transcendence appeared in such beliefs as “God has been defined for once and for all and therefore is immutable.” Reflecting Symbolism was the self-report, “God grows together with the history of humanity and therefore is changeable.”

Religious-spiritual type. Participants indicated their religious-spiritual type by identifying themselves as “religious and spiritual” (Both type), “religious but not spiritual” (Religious-Only Type), “spiritual but not religious (Spiritual-Only Type), or “neither religious nor spiritual” (Neither Type).

MAR. Fourteen statements made up the MAR (Wilde & Joseph, 1997: $\alpha = .95$, $M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.92$). Responding ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An illustrative attitude said, “Islam helps me lead a better life.”

MER. The 5-point Likert-type scale assessed MER (Ghorbani, Watson, Geranmayepour, & Chen, 2014). MER operationalizes Muslim spirituality as a bonding with God that is submissive, close, and loving. Indicative of these 15 expressions of spirituality ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.04$) was the claim, “Experiences of submitting to god cause me to feel more vital and motivated.”

Integrative Self-Knowledge. The Integrative Self-Knowledge Scale (Ghorbani et al., 2008) used 1 (*largely untrue*) to 5 (*largely true*) response options with 12 statements that assessed efforts of the individual to synthesize past, present, and desired future self-experience into a meaningful whole ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.68$). One item said, for example, “If I need to, I can reflect about myself and clearly understand the feelings and attitudes behind my past behaviors.”

Self-Control. The brief version of the Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004) included 13 statements ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.61$), with reactions to each ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Indicative of Self-Control was the claim, “I am good at resisting temptation.”

Mindfulness. Fifteen expressions of a lack of mindfulness made up the Brown and Ryan (2003) Mindful Attention Awareness Scale ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.69$). Participants reacted to each using 1 (*almost always*) to 6 (*almost never*) response options. A representative item said, “I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present.”

Splitting. The Gould et al. (1996) Splitting Index included three 8-item measures of the consequences of using polarized tendencies to evaluate self or others as all good or as all bad. Responses to each item ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Self-Splitting ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.77$) appeared in such assertions as, “My feelings about myself are very powerful, but they can change from one moment to the next.” Indicative of Family-Splitting ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.77$) was the reverse-scored self-report that “My relationship with my family is solid.” Illustrative of Other-Splitting ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.73$) was the reverse-scored assertion, “My friendships are almost always satisfying.”

Grandiose Narcissism. The Foster et al. (2015) scale contained 35 statements assessing seven dimensions of Grandiose Narcissism. Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly*

agree). Factors included Authority ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.19$; for example, “I like to be in charge of things”); Self-Sufficiency ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.03$; for example, “When something needs to be done, I do it on my own”); Superiority ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.11$; for example, “I’m better than other people at most things”); Vanity ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.10$; for example, “I think it’s important to look as good as possible”); Exhibitionism ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.18$; for example, “I do things to get attention”); Entitlement ($\alpha = .71$, $M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.94$; for example, “I deserve to get what I want”); and Exploitativeness ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.05$; for example, “I’m willing to manipulate others to get what I want”). A principal component analysis with an oblique rotation reduced these seven factors to two defined in terms of their mental health implications. With an eigenvalue of 2.53 and explaining 36.2% of the variance, Maladaptive Narcissism displayed loadings by Exhibitionism (.83), Entitlement (.77), and Exploitativeness (.83). Adaptive Narcissism displayed an eigenvalue of 1.49, explained 21.2% of the variance, and exhibited loadings by Authority (.76), Self-Sufficiency (.82), Superiority (.64), and Vanity (.40). Statistical procedures used regression factor scores to focus more clearly on Maladaptive and Adaptive Narcissism.

Interpersonal Dependency. The Pincus and Gurtman (1995) instrument included three 12-item measures of Interpersonal Dependency to which participants responded with a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scale. Love Dependency ($\alpha = .73$, $M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.55$) included such statements as “After a fight with a friend, I must make amends as soon as possible.” Exploitable Dependency ($\alpha = .73$, $M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.59$) items said, for example, “I find it very difficult to say ‘no’ to the requests of friends.” Indicative of Submissive Dependency ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.63$) was the claim, “I am easily downed in an argument.”

Procedure

Research procedures conformed with institutional guidelines for the conduct of ethical research. All participants volunteered for the project, and their responding was anonymous. Groups of varying size received the questionnaire booklet in a classroom setting.

Results

Preliminary analyses revealed gender differences in religious and psychological adjustment variables. Women scored higher on Religious Fundamentalism, Transcendence, MAR, and MER and lower on Symbolism. Women were also lower on Maladaptive Narcissism (and higher on Self-Control, Mindfulness, Love Dependency, and Exploitable Dependency ($ps < .01$)). All subsequent analyses, therefore, controlled for gender.

Relationships for religious and psychological adjustment measures

Table 1 presents partial correlations, controlling for gender, among the psychological variables used to clarify religious functioning. Adaptive and Maladaptive Narcissism covaried directly. Adaptive Narcissism also displayed direct linkages with Integrative Self-Knowledge and Self-Control and an inverse association with Submissive Dependency. Maladaptive Narcissism correlated negatively with Integrative Self-Knowledge, Self-Control, and Mindfulness and positively with all three Splitting factors and Love Dependency. In other significant relationships, scales recording healthier self-functioning correlated negatively with constructs reflecting maladjustment. Positive associations also appeared among measures of adjustment and separately among most measures of maladjustment.

Table 1. Correlations among psychological adjustment variables controlling for gender.

Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
Measures of adjustment											
1. Adaptive Narcissism	–	.11*	.17**	–.01	.24***	.02	–.04	.01	–.02	.00	–.43***
2. Integrative Self-Knowledge	–		.52***	.44***	–.27***	–.60***	–.24***	–.42***	–.13**	–.34***	–.60***
3. Self-Control	–			.35***	–.25***	–.48***	–.17**	–.33***	–.13**	–.24***	–.44***
4. Mindfulness	–				–.26***	–.35***	–.25***	–.26***	–.01	–.12*	–.32***
Measures of maladjustment											
5. Maladaptive Narcissism					–	.35***	.25***	.30***	.11*	.07	.03
6. Self-Splitting						–	.29***	.39***	.18***	.37***	.44***
7. Family-Splitting							–	.42***	–.17***	.06	.13**
8. Other-Splitting								–	–.17**	.04	.29***
9. Love Dependency									–	.60***	.15**
10. Exploitable Dependence										–	.42***
11. Submissive Dependency											–

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

Hypothesis 1 was examined in partial correlations for religious measures that appear in Table 2. Fundamentalism, Transcendence, MAR, and MER correlated positively with each other and negatively with Symbolism. Symbolism consistently predicted maladjustment. Specifically, Symbolism displayed associations that were inverse with Integrative Self-Knowledge, Self-Control, and Mindfulness and direct with Maladaptive Narcissism and all three Splitting factors.

Other religious constructs had mostly positive but also some negative mental health implications. Fundamentalism, Transcendence, MAR, and MER correlated positively with Self-Control and negatively with Maladaptive Narcissism and Family-Splitting. A direct relationship appeared for Transcendence and MER with Adaptive Narcissism. In addition, Fundamentalism and MAR predicted lower Self-Splitting and Other-Splitting. All these outcomes associated Muslim religious commitments with better psychological functioning. On the contrary, relationships with maladjustment appeared when Fundamentalism, Transcendence, MAR, and MER correlated positively with Exploitable Dependence and when Transcendence predicted greater Love Dependency. These results, in supporting Hypothesis 1, documented the positive psychological adjustment for Religious Fundamentalism.

Moderation effects for PCB

Regression analyses tested Hypothesis 2 by examining the moderating effects of Symbolism on Transcendence predicting MAR (β for the product term = .13, $p < .001$), MER ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$), Integrative Self-Knowledge ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$), Mindfulness ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$), and Other-Splitting ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$). Figure 1 depicts these effects. Positive Transcendence relationships with MAR and MER were stronger when Symbolism was higher. In addition, Literal Affirmation (high Transcendence and low Symbolism) described the highest scores on each of these two

Table 2. Correlations between religious measures and psychological adjustment controlling for gender.

	Religious measures				
	FUND	TRAN	SYMB	MAR	MER
Religious measures					
Fundamentalism (FUND)	–	.65***	–.70***	.80***	.74***
Transcendence (TRAN)		–	–.53***	.69***	.65***
Symbolism (SYMB)			–	–.67***	–.58***
MAR				–	.85***
MER					–
Measures of adjustment					
Adaptive Narcissism	–.03	.12*	.05	.07	.12*
Integrative Self-Knowledge	–.01	–.03	–.16**	.02	–.03
Self-Control	.14**	.13*	–.16**	.20***	.15**
Mindfulness	.08	.07	–.18***	.09	.00
Measures of maladjustment					
Maladaptive Narcissism	–.21***	–.11*	.31***	–.18***	–.11*
Self-Splitting	–.15**	–.06	.30***	–.14**	–.09
Family-Splitting	–.22***	–.20***	.26***	–.24***	–.18***
Other-Splitting	–.13*	–.07	.16**	–.13*	–.09
Love Dependency	.10	.17**	–.03	.08	.08
Exploitable Dependency	.19***	.19***	–.07	.15**	.16**
Submissive Dependency	.09	.02	.08	–.02	.02

MAR: Muslim Attitudes toward Religion; MER: Muslim Experiential Religiosity.

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

scales, with Reductive Interpretation (low Transcendence and high Symbolism) defining the lowest scores. For the three psychological constructs, Transcendence predicted better mental health when Symbolism was low and worse mental health when it was high. Literal Affirmation (high Transcendence and low Symbolism) was the most consistently adjusted attitude. This better adjustment appeared in comparison with all the other three attitudes in the analysis of Mindfulness and Other-Splitting.

Religious-spiritual types

Frequencies of the four religious-spiritual types were not equal, $\chi^2(3) = 34.50, p < .001$. Out of the 385 research participants, 121 (31.2%) belonged to the Both type, 82 (21.1%) to Religious-Only, 126 (32.5%) to Spiritual-Only, and 56 (14.4%) to Neither. A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) controlled for gender and revealed significant overall type differences in religious and psychological functioning, Wilks' $\lambda = .523, F(48, 1080.45) = 5.48, p < .001$. Table 3 presents the MANCOVA results for each scale. Type contrasts appeared with all but Adaptive Narcissism, Mindfulness, and Exploitable and Submissive Dependency. For Transcendence, MAR, and MER, significant differences appeared between all four types, with the Both type highest followed by the Religious-Only, then the Spiritual-Only, and finally the Neither types. Religious Fundamentalism displayed the same pattern except that the Both and Religious-Only types did not differ significantly. The Both type scored lowest on Symbolism, with the Religious-Only, Spiritual-Only, and Neither types scoring progressively higher on this scale.

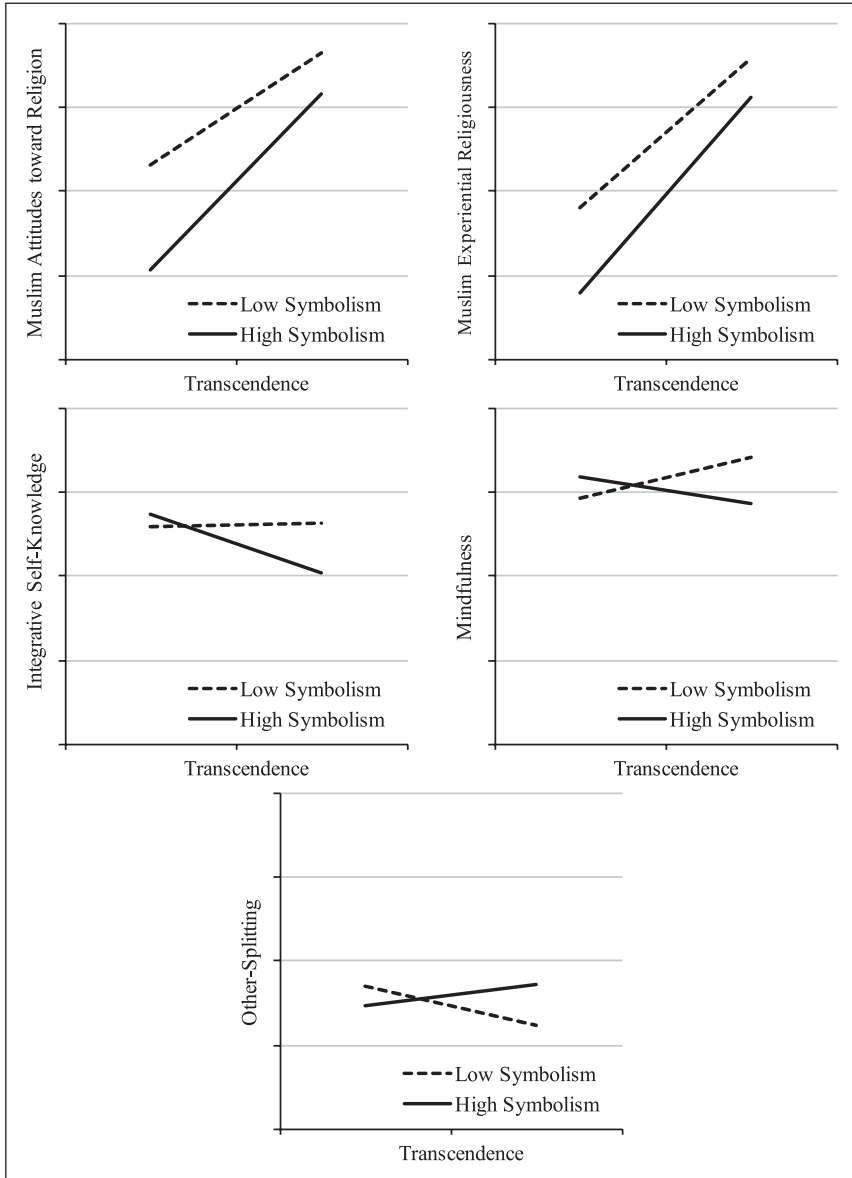


Figure 1. Symbolism moderation of Transcendence relationships. All measures are on a 1–5 response scale. Low and high Symbolism are defined as 1 SD below and above the mean. Interaction plots.

Except for Love Dependency, psychological measures most importantly linked the Both type with better mental health. Both type participants exhibited the highest Self-Control, and along with the Spiritual-Only type scored highest on Integrative Self-Knowledge. The Both type was also lowest on Maladaptive Narcissism and on all three splitting scales. The three other types displayed relatively less adjusted functioning in two or more of these significant contrasts. Love Dependency data proved to be complex. The Both type scored higher rather than lower on this presumed index

Table 3. Religious-spiritual type differences in religious and self-functioning measures.

Measure	Religious-spiritual types				F	Post hoc
	Both (B)	Religious (R)	Spiritual (S)	Neither (N)		
Religious measures						
Fundamentalism	1.39 ± 0.13	1.10 ± 0.12	-0.06 ± 0.12	-0.85 ± 0.19	44.79***	(B, R) > S > N
Transcendence	4.13 ± 0.07	3.84 ± 0.08	3.55 ± 0.07	3.10 ± 0.10	26.47***	B > R > S > N
Symbolism	2.13 ± 0.06	2.48 ± 0.07	2.70 ± 0.05	2.99 ± 0.08	31.31***	B < R < S < N
MAR	4.46 ± 0.07	4.10 ± 0.08	3.54 ± 0.07	3.04 ± 0.10	61.66***	B > R > S > N
MER	4.32 ± 0.08	3.96 ± 0.09	3.50 ± 0.07	2.74 ± 0.11	50.25***	B > R > S > N
Measures of adjustment						
Adaptive Narcissism	-0.07 ± 0.09	0.02 ± 0.11	0.08 ± 0.09	-0.06 ± 0.14	0.55	
Integrative Self-Knowledge	3.60 ± 0.06	3.28 ± 0.07	3.55 ± 0.06	3.29 ± 0.09	5.68**	(B, S) > (R, N)
Self-Control	3.51 ± 0.05	3.21 ± 0.06	3.24 ± 0.05	3.08 ± 0.08	8.63***	B > (R, S, N)
Mindfulness	4.18 ± 0.06	4.16 ± 0.08	4.17 ± 0.06	4.17 ± 0.09	0.01	
Measures of maladjustment						
Maladaptive Narcissism	-0.21 ± 0.09	0.03 ± 0.11	0.11 ± 0.09	0.15 ± 0.13	2.86*	B < (S, N)
Self-Splitting	2.67 ± 0.07	2.95 ± 0.08	2.85 ± 0.07	3.20 ± 0.10	6.42***	B < (R, N); S < N
Family-Splitting	1.76 ± 0.07	2.03 ± 0.09	1.92 ± 0.07	2.11 ± 0.10	3.52*	B < (R, N)
Other-Splitting	2.31 ± 0.07	2.58 ± 0.08	2.51 ± 0.07	2.49 ± 0.10	2.79*	B < (R, S)
Love Dependency	3.61 ± 0.05	3.50 ± 0.06	3.46 ± 0.05	3.67 ± 0.07	2.80*	B > S; S < N
Exploitative Dependency	3.40 ± 0.05	3.37 ± 0.07	3.24 ± 0.05	3.38 ± 0.08	1.64	
Submissive Dependency	2.41 ± 0.06	2.57 ± 0.07	2.38 ± 0.06	2.51 ± 0.08	1.91	

MAR: Muslim Attitudes toward Religion; MER: Muslim Experiential Religiousness.

In post hoc contrasts, types within parentheses do not differ. Types were both religious and spiritual (B), religious but not spiritual (R), spiritual but not religious (S), and neither religious nor spiritual (N).

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

of maladjustment in comparison with the Spiritual-Only type, which in turn was lower than the Neither type.

Discussion

This first examination of the RFS in Iran confirmed once again that conservative religiosity has largely positive mental health implications outside the West. Fundamentalism correlated positively with a Self-Control Scale that helps describe an Iranian Muslim spiritual ideal (Ghorbani, Watson, Omidbagi, & Chen, 2016). It also correlated negatively with the exploitativeness, sense of entitlement, and exhibitionism of Maladaptive Narcissism and perhaps most importantly with all three dimensions of splitting. A religiously based rejection of splitting would presumably interfere with any tendency to evaluate one's own religious tradition as all good and other religious traditions as all bad. Support for this idea appeared in the previous demonstration that in Iranian Muslims the

fundamentalism of Truth of Texts and Teachings predicted abilities to see wisdom in other religious traditions as measured by Xenosophia (Ghorbani, Watson, Amirbeigi, & Chen, 2016).

Religious Fundamentalism correlated positively and strongly with Transcendence, MAR, and MER. These scales, therefore, reflected conservative religiosity as well, and they too displayed linkages with psychological adjustment. Like Religious Fundamentalism, all three instruments correlated positively with Self-Control and negatively with Maladaptive Narcissism and Family-Splitting. Transcendence and MER also exhibited a positive association with Adaptive Narcissism, and the MAR predicted lower Self-Splitting and Other-Splitting.

Symbolism data presented additional evidence of conservative Muslim religious adjustment. Robust negative relationships appeared for Symbolism with all four measures of conservative religiosity. In the West, such results might point toward cognitive and interpretative flexibility in contrast to fundamentalist narrowmindedness. In Iran, however, partial correlations identified Symbolism rather than conservative religiosity as more psychologically problematic. Symbolism predicted poorer Iranian self-regulation as measured by Integrative Self-Knowledge, Self-Control, and Mindfulness (Ghorbani, Watson, Farhadi, & Chen, 2014). Symbolism also correlated positively with Maladaptive Narcissism and with all three splitting measures. As a defense mechanism prominent within narcissistic personalities, splitting reduces anxiety by avoiding representations of self and others as complex, ambiguous, and potentially disturbing combinations of both good and bad (Kernberg, 1985). Splitting, therefore, introduces rigidities and inflexibilities into what theoretically should be the rational and realistic functioning of the ego. Symbolism rather than conservative religiosity, therefore, seemed to be the more inflexible perspective on self and others in Iran.

Interactions between PCB factors yielded additional data linking conservative religiosity with adjustment. Among the four attitudes, the fundamentalism of Literal Affirmation described the best mental health as defined by highest Mindfulness and lowest Other-Splitting scores, along with two other attitudes. Literal Affirmation also scored higher than Restorative Interpretation on Integrative Self-Knowledge. In short, the conservative religiosity of Literal Affirmation displayed at least some connections with better mental health.

Data for religious-spiritual types further linked conservative religiosity with adjustment. The Both type was highest on Transcendence, MAR, and MER and lowest on Symbolism. This type along with Religious-Only participants also exhibited the highest Religious Fundamentalism. Most importantly, however, the conservatively religious Both type displayed the best mental health. Specifically, the Both type scored highest on Self-Control and, along with the Spiritual-Only type, on Integrative Self-Knowledge as well. Both type participants were also lowest on Maladaptive Narcissism and on all three measures of splitting.

Complexities

Evidence largely confirmed the hypotheses of this investigation, but unexpected complexities also appeared. Conservative religiosity consistently predicted an Exploitable Dependency that was clearly maladjusted in Iran. Conservative religiosity, therefore, was not wholly beneficial in its implications. Clarifying partial correlations, in fact, suggested that Muslim commitments would have even more consistently reflected mental health in the absence of this influence. A covariance with Exploitable Dependency also explained the positive Transcendence relationship with Love Dependency and perhaps contributed to higher scores on this measure by the Both type in comparison with the Spiritual-Only type. Muslim in contrast to Western personality adjustment theoretically requires a subordination of the self for the greater good of society (Smither & Khorsandi, 2009). Findings for Exploitable Dependency perhaps identified psychological liabilities that might accompany an excessive subordination of the Muslim self.

Against expectations, Religious Fundamentalism failed to reflect Literal Affirmation as defined by a significant interaction of high Transcendence with low Symbolism. Literal Affirmation did describe highest scores on the MAR and MER, but these interactions occurred because the positive Transcendence relationship with these measures was stronger at higher levels of Symbolism. Here, Transcendence seemed more influential in promoting conservative religiosity when it worked against the interference of Symbolism. An even stronger influence of Literal Affirmation would have been obvious had stronger Transcendence relationships with these measures appeared at lower levels of Symbolism. Interpretative complexities associated with these interactions perhaps suggested the usefulness of defining Literal Affirmation not only in terms of significant interactions but also in terms of evaluating the two PCB factors as significant simultaneous predictors. If defined by linkages with higher Transcendence and lower Symbolism on the penultimate step of the multiple regressions, Religious Fundamentalism, MAR, and MER all described Literal Affirmation.

Additional complexities appeared when PCB factors as simultaneous predictors had psychological implications that were different from those in the partial correlations. In these results, Transcendence for the first time displayed connections with lower Integrative Self-Knowledge and higher Self-Splitting and no longer predicted greater Self-Control or lower Maladaptive Narcissism and Family-Splitting. A linkage also appeared for Symbolism with Adaptive Narcissism. These outcomes all suggested that the relative adjustment of Transcendence at least sometimes reflected its incompatibility with the relative maladjustment of Symbolism, and vice versa. The uncovering of a positive Symbolism linkage with Submissive Dependency also suggested that an incompatibility with Transcendence operated as a protective influence against a perhaps excessive subordination of the Muslim self.

Limitations

This analysis of Religious Fundamentalism in Iran supplemented previous studies, once again suggesting that conservative religious commitments have largely adaptive implication outside the West. These results should nevertheless be interpreted with caution. Research participants were university students who were not necessarily representative of the population. Other Muslims in Iran or Muslims living in other societies might display different results. In addition, at least some variance in responding might have reflected the tendencies of university students to present themselves (Jones & Elliott, 2017) or their religion (Abu-Raiya, 2017) in a favorable light. Finally, these correlational data can say nothing about causation. It cannot be said, for example, that conservative religiosity caused less splitting or vice versa because these relationships could have been the by-product of some other influence. Analysis of causation will require the use of some other research design.

General conclusion

Researchers in the psychology of religion often interpret conservative religious commitment as reducible to psychological processes that have at least somewhat problematic psychosocial implications (e.g. Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Batson et al., 1993). The present and previous studies have demonstrated that contextual, cultural factors are important as well. Conservative religiosity has predicted more adjusted psychological functioning for Muslims in Iran (Ghorbani, Watson, Amirbeigi, & Chen, 2016; Ghorbani et al., 2013), Malaysia (Tekke et al., 2015), and Pakistan (Khan, Watson, & Chen, 2017); for Hindus in India (Kamble, Watson, Marigoudar, & Chen, 2014); and even for Christians in Iran (Watson, Ghorbani, et al., 2015). In this Iranian study

as well, the RFS, and conservative religiosity more generally, predicted relative mental health. A recent study also found that religious fundamentalism is associated with less support for extremist violence in Muslims (Beller & Kröger, 2018). These linkages were not especially robust, but the directions of these outcomes were noteworthy in the challenges they presented for prominent Western interpretative perspectives.

Contextual, cultural factors may be important even within the West. In contrast to Religious Fundamentalism, the Biblical Foundationalism Scale attempts to express conservative religiosity in a language that is less aggressively embedded in the culture wars of the United States (Watson et al., 2003). In American Christians, partial correlations looking at Religious Fundamentalism after controlling for Biblical Foundationalism uncover a psychologically closed religious perspective, but Biblical Foundationalism after controlling for Religious Fundamentalism remains a clear index of conservative religiosity that instead predicts psychological openness (Watson, Chen, & Hood, 2011). In addition, the narrowmindedness of Religious Fundamentalism and other indices of conservative religiosity is at least partially and sometimes wholly explained by a Defense against Secularism which includes such beliefs as “Reason is a weapon that the culture uses to destroy faith” (Watson, Chen, Morris, & Stephenson, 2015). The psychological implications of conservative religiosity in the West may, therefore, reflect not only psychological but cultural ideological factors as well. Implied in this suggestion is a possible explanation for why Christians in Iran appear to be more open than Christians in the United States. Christians in Iran live in a formally religious society in which secularism is less influential as a threat against faith.

To suggest that conservative religiosity has psychological benefits in no way means that it will be without mental health liabilities. Direct relationships of Religious Fundamentalism and other Muslim religious measures with Exploitable Dependency made that clear in the present project. The claim instead is that a full understanding of conservative religiosity appears to require analyses across cultures and across ideologies within cultures (Watson, 1993, 2011). This study demonstrated that such a conclusion may also apply to such supposedly more open religious perspectives as that measured by the PCB Symbolism factor. For a comprehensive psychology of religion, the task presumably is to see both religious and nonreligious perspectives in their full psychological and cultural complexity.

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