

Keeping the Faith: Exploring the notion of Spiritual But Not Religious among American Adults

Faisal Hassan

Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India
E-mail: faisal.hassan.rizvi@outlook.com

Quinn Clark

Research Scholar, Department of Religion, Columbia University, New York, USA
E-mail: qac2000@columbia.edu

Abstract

The emergence of Spirituality in the west resonates well with the growing trench between people and religion across the globe. This could be the reason that unaffiliated population is increasing with an all time high around the world and this population has secured the third place amongst the world religions. The divinity which comes handy with spirituality could be experienced whenever an individual engages himself/herself into some or the other spiritual practice, same goes for religion and religious practices. This research paper dives into the concepts of religion, spirituality and psychology in order to situate and decipher the spiritual behaviour of American adults who identify as either religious or spiritual. The paper tends to investigate the relationship/s between psychological constructs of spiritual behaviour among the sampled population. The study recruited 250 American adults, both males and females. The study aimed at exploring the relationship/s between psychological variables which would reflect a measure of their transcendent spirituality. The results showed significant and non-significant relationship/s between the variables studied. The paper thus endeavoured to chronicle the unexplored avenues of spiritual behaviour concerning the subjects who indulge themselves into the ever evolving realms of spirituality and religiosity.

Keywords: Spirituality, Religiosity, American, Spiritual but Not Religious, Psychology

Prelude

Spirituality affects instantly, having a widespread appeal, it makes people connect with fellow people allowing them a space to idea exchanges about religion, divinity and faith in their own traditions and belief systems. Whereas religion is believed to empower the believers against the challenges of life, to guide them on the righteous path and to enlighten them so that their future generations might live and grow in accordance with the practices they would inherit. Both spirituality and religion are believed to be emphasizing upon attaining inner peace, yet the human

search for peace is an unending journey. In the age of racism, extremism, violence and hate, all in name of religion, people have increasingly made religion questionable, making the case for spirituality.

Religiosity somehow stems from the desire to establish a peculiar supremacy over individuals since the time immemorial. While spirituality presents a subtle face of belief, religiosity seldom allows its subscribers to go flexible and accommodate innovations. Then starts a never ending tug of war between the allowed and the prohibited, which has not concluded or had a ceasefire but with time passing by, it has become toxic. Spirituality has been erasing the lines drawn in name of religion, making it more genteel and less aggressive. Spirituality has enabled religions to gain their lost glory and claim their true meanings through practice and this cannot be denied. Therefore it has become an important subject of investigation as to what effects it has on human minds. Be it Yoga, Sema or Zen, the spiritual approaches to life have redefined the harsh translations of the divine messages by religious traditions of the world to the truest sense.

Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR) has become the most happening thing among the people around the world, as it makes its way through the contemporary research literature. This research initiative tends to explore the impact of SBNR among American Adults and aims to identify the challenges being faced by religion also identify the factors that make spirituality a popular choice beyond the binary of beliefs.

Background

The purpose of present study is to determine the role of spirituality and religiosity in the lives of people and the significance of the presence of belief systems. The research would investigate how these things affect or change the lives of individuals across the world. At present when faith-based aggression is making life cumbersome in some regions of the world, it would be interesting to know how individuals are finding solace in spirituality and continue to look at the brighter side

of life. Some holding fast to their respective beliefs and respecting human life in every possible way, and the others just being non-affiliated and practicing some kind of spirituality in their lives.

Literature Review

Spirituality

Spirituality and religiosity are the key concepts in the psychology of religion and have been appearing in most of the research literature concerning human behavior. Pate & Bondi (1992) described spirituality as the sense of one's place in the universe. Gilchrist (1992) identified spirituality as that which individuals deem sacred in their respective lives, enabling them to transcend from negativity to positivity. Transcendence refers to a fundamental, intrinsic motivation which involves suppressing individual needs for the welfare of larger group (Piedmont, 1999). Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) noted the upsurge in interest in these constructs over the past 15 years by both applied and basic researchers. The recent years have seen a tremendous growth in the neuro-scientific study of spirituality and religion. Emerging out of this increasing interest is a growing number of assessment instruments that attempt to capture these constructs from a variety of theological and psychological perspectives (Hill & Hood, 1999).

Religiosity

Taylor & Chatters (1988) discovered that people who practice religion have better and positive worldview which contributes to well being. King (1990) has mentioned that the increased social support that is typically provided by religious congregation enables better psychological coping. Research has been establishing some significant facts about religion time and again, people who identify themselves as religious and spiritual report better physical and mental health (Koenig & Cohen, 2002); (Koenig et al 2001); (Powell et al, 2003). Although the specific mechanisms are still under research, yet it has been hypothesized that these relationships are likely to be attributed to several religious and non-religious factors.

Spiritual But Not Religious

Psychology considers spiritual and religious beliefs as a unitary aspect of the individual differences that exist among people. There is a growing upsurge among western societies about being spiritual but not religious, so much so that religiously unaffiliated people have been placed on third rank in the United States as per the data provided by Pew Research Center. Spirituality as well as religiosity aim at finding purpose and meaning in life, and thus individuals indulge into practices that bring about some sense of meaning to them. Although sources of meaning are varied and unique to each individual, the belief that life is meaningful is common across individuals and present to a greater or lesser degree. Meaning in life is regarded as a positive variable, an indicator of well-being (Ryff, 1989), a facilitator of adaptive coping (Park & Folkman, 1997), and a marker of therapeutic growth (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). Different stages of human development are crucial in the personality development of an individual. The period of adolescence is most crucial. It is a period of life span that includes systematic changes at biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual level with nature and nurture in the dynamics of development. Adolescence has been recognized as crucial period for value development. Values and religion are assumed to be important in adolescent development as a part of formation of meaningful view of the self and the world (Rothbaum & Wang, 2010). It is then when an individual looks for an affiliation, when the innate inquisitiveness is not satiated and dissatisfaction with the environment harbours.

Rationale

The driving force behind this research is the curiosity to explore the appeal of spirituality and reasons for drift in beliefs and practices of people, also developing psychological understanding of the related concepts. This research aims to understand how spirituality could be the new peace model for the society, because humanity thrives in a world where science is still searching the god particle.

Objectives of the Research Study

The objectives of the research study are as under:

1. To examine the relationship between Spirituality and Religiosity among American adults.
2. To examine relationship between Spiritual and Religious Practices among American adults.
3. To examine the psychological bases of Spiritual But Not Religious behavior among American adults.

Hypotheses

- H₀₁** There is no significant difference between Spiritual Americans and Religious Americans on their Spiritual Transcendence.
- H₀₂** There is no significant difference between male Americans and female Americans on their Spiritual Transcendence.
- H₀₃** There is no significant difference between Spiritual Americans and Religious Americans on their Spiritual/Religious Practices.
- H₀₄** There is no significant difference between male Americans and female Americans on their Spiritual/Religious Practices.
- H₀₅** There is no significant difference between Rural Americans and Urban Americans on their Spiritual Transcendence.
- H₀₆** There is no significant difference between Rural Americans and Urban Americans on their Spiritual/Religious Practices.
- H₀₇** There is no significant difference between the Americans from nuclear families and the Americans from joint families on their Spiritual Transcendence.
- H₀₈** There is no significant difference between the Americans from nuclear families and the Americans from joint families on their Spiritual/Religious Practices.

Methodology and Methods

Participants

The participants of the study were 250 American adults, both males and females, who would be recruited through a randomly drawn sample. The sample will be divided into two sub samples on basis of gender.

Tools

Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES)

Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) scale aims to measure Religious Sentiments (RS) and Spiritual Transcendence (ST) of individuals. In order to understand spirituality an individual's efforts to construct a broad sense of personal meaning with an eschatological context, during the year 1999 an American psychologist, Ralph L. Piedmont had developed the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (STS) to validate the theoretical construct. The items of the initial STS were duly analyzed within the context of the Five Factor Model of personality (FFM; Digman, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992). The need to assess religiosity along with spirituality caused the expansion of STS into ASPIRES, which enabled the researchers to study religious and spiritual factors separately (Piedmont, 1995).

The RS domain of ASPIRES consists of two subscales: the Religiosity Index and the Religious Crisis scales. Piedmont (2004) had shown the acceptable reliabilities for scores on these two scales, which are .89 and .75 for the Religiosity Index and Religious Crisis scale, respectively. The ST domain of ASPIRES consists of three subscales namely Universality, Prayer Fulfillment, and Connectedness. The items of ASPIRES are answered as in a Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). Piedmont (2004) had also shown that scores on the ST have acceptable reliabilities for self report scales, which are .94, .78, .49, and .89 for Universality, Prayer Fulfillment, Connectedness, and overall Total Score, respectively. The scores on these scales have also been predicting an array of related spiritual constructs and a number of psychologically salient constructs which significantly led to the scientific understanding of spirituality (Piedmont, 2004).

The ASPIRES short form (SF) was created to address the unique needs presented by these and other compromised populations and situations. The present study has incorporated ASPIRES short form comprising of 13 items, keeping in view the time constraints and continuity of the experiment in order to sustain the interests of the participants.

Spiritual & Religious Practices Scale (SPS)

The Spiritual & Religious Practices Scale (SPS) was developed by Hussain and Singh (2015). It is a 1 item scale framed to measure the influence of religion in the lives of individuals. It measures two dimensions of religious identity of individuals: (1) Spiritual Practices, and (2) Religious Practices. This scale enables the researcher to identify that the person is more spiritual or more religious and what are the daily activities which could be attributed to the influence of religion over the personality of the concerned individual. SPS is a Likert-type scale, the responses of which range from 1 (Always) to 2 (Never). SPS is one of its kind instruments which reflect upon the spiritual and religious practices of an individual so as to infer if the individual is spiritual or religious (Hussain & Singh, 2015).

Procedure

Prior to data collection the subjects will be briefed about the purpose of the research and the data will be taken only after the due consent has been received.

Data Analysis

Post data collection for the research study, the hand scoring of the response forms would be done accordingly. The prescribed manuals are to be consulted and taken consideration of; subsequently the obtained raw scores would be tabulated for final analysis. With help of appropriate statistical techniques and measures the obtained raw scores would be thus converted into inferences and conclusions will be drawn. The data was analyzed on basis of some demographic variables which included gender, denominations, family type and civility. The observations were then tabulated and listed accordingly for the purpose of making inferences and deducing final outcome.

Results and Discussion

Followed by careful observations and classifications on the demographical basis, the results of the study were obtained. The tables which follow contain reflections from the life and experiences of American adults who have been questioning their own beliefs and finding answers to questions

which have been most inconvenient to be asked. The tables show how they performed on spiritual transcendence and spiritual as well as religious practices with respect to gender, denomination, family type and civility.

Table 1: Comparative Mean Scores on Spiritual Transcendence with respect to Gender and Denomination

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p
Spiritual Transcendence	Male	137	31.01	3.195	248	4.299	0.01**
	Gender						
	Female	113	33.00	4.106			
	Spiritual	108	32.33	3.974	248	1.527	0.128
Denomination							
	Religious	142	31.59	3.569			

Notes: **Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

An observation of table 1 tells us that females have emerged superior to the males in terms of Spiritual Transcendence (ST). The value of t-test shows that the difference between the mean scores of males and females on the counts of ST is significantly different. Therefore it could be understood that the difference is highly significant. The table also shows that on the counts of Spiritual Transcendence (ST), spiritual people have scored higher than religious people.

Table 2: Comparative Mean Scores on Spiritual/Religious Practices and its Dimensions with respect to Gender and Denomination

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p
Personal Transformation	Male	137	22.45	4.116	248	10.217	0.01**
	Gender						
	Female	113	17.27	3.843			
Self-Purification	Male	137	12.20	.632	248	7.289	0.01**
	Gender						
	Female	113	11.65	.566			
Expanding Awareness	Male	137	17.82	1.601	248	10.293	0.01**
	Gender						
	Female	113	15.56	1.871			

Spiritual / Religious Practices	Gender	Male	137	52.47	5.859	248	10.760	0.01**
		Female	113	44.47	5.849			
Personal Transformation	Denomination	Spiritual	108	19.37	4.627	248	2.156	0.03*
		Religious	142	20.67	4.786			
Self-Purification	Denomination	Spiritual	108	11.94	.645	248	.352	0.72
		Religious	142	11.96	.678			
Expanding Awareness	Denomination	Spiritual	108	16.51	2.062	248	1.930	0.05*
		Religious	142	17.01	2.039			
Spiritual / Religious Practices	Denomination	Spiritual	108	47.81	6.992	248	2.042	0.04*
		Religious	142	49.65	7.062			

Notes: **Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 2 indicates that the males are superior to their female counterparts in terms of Personal Transformation (PT). The value of t-test shows that the difference between mean scores of males and females on the counts of PT is significantly different. Therefore it could be understood that the difference is highly significant. Similarly, male subjects have emerged superior to their female counterparts on the counts of second dimension, Self-Purification (SP). The value of t-test shows that the difference between the mean scores of males and females on the counts of SP is significantly different. Therefore it could be considered that the difference is highly significant. In the case of Expanding Awareness (EA), the observations have suggested that, male subjects have greater mean values on EA than their female counterparts. The value of t-test shows that the difference between the mean scores of males and females on the counts of EA is significantly different. Therefore it could be well understood that the difference is highly significant. Simultaneously, the mean scores for Spiritual/Religious Practices (SRP) show that the males have considerable advantage over their female counterparts on the counts of SRP. As the observation is supported by the value of t-test, it could be inferred that the difference between the means is significant. The subsequent observation is confirmed by the value of p, which further consolidates it too.

The table further depicts that subjects who identified themselves as religious have scored higher than their counterparts on the counts of Personal Transformation (PT) and the difference is significant. The observation is well supported by the value of t-test and corresponding p value. While on the counts of Self-Purification (SP), religious subjects have a slight edge over their spiritual counterparts, but the difference is not significant so the groups could be considered statistically equal. The observation has been supported by the value of t-test and corresponding p value. Regarding Expanding Awareness (EA), religious individuals have scored higher than their spiritual counterparts and the mean difference between the groups is significant. The observation is therefore supported by the value of t-test and corresponding p value. In the case of Spiritual/Religious Practices (SRP), religious individuals have displayed a considerable edge over the mean score of their spiritual counterparts. Therefore the groups differ significantly on the counts of SRP and the observation has been well supported by the value of t-test and corresponding p value.

Table 3: Comparative Mean Scores on Spiritual Transcendence with respect to Family Type and Civility

Variables		N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p	
Spiritual Transcendence	Family Type	Nuclear	148	31.84	3.976	248	.385	0.700
		Joint	102	32.02	3.438			
	Civility	Rural	105	31.91	3.719	248	.008	0.99
		Urban	145	31.91	3.802			

Notes: **Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 shows that individuals from joint families have a slight edge over their nuclear family counterparts on the counts of Spiritual Transcendence (ST) but that difference is not significant. The observation is thus supported by the value of t-test and further confirmed by the p value.

It further explains the behavioural patterns of rural and urban individuals who are practicing some faith. Individuals from rural areas have scored exactly equal as their urban counterparts in terms of Spiritual Transcendence (ST). Since the difference between the means is zero, the groups are statistically equal on for ST. As the t-value has supports the observation, the p value has also confirmed that the mean difference is not significant on the counts of ST. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the means of rural and urban subjects on the counts of ST.

Table 4: Comparative Mean Scores on Spiritual/Religious Practices and its Dimensions with respect to Family Type and Civility

Variables			N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p
Personal Transformation	Family Type	Nuclear	148	19.82	4.803	248	1.143	0.254
		Joint	102	20.52	4.671			
Self-Purification	Family Type	Nuclear	148	11.86	.639	248	2.732	0.01**
		Joint	102	12.09	.676			
Expanding Awareness	Family Type	Nuclear	148	16.61	2.131	248	1.776	0.07
		Joint	102	17.07	1.931			
Spiritual / Religious Practices	Family Type	Nuclear	148	48.29	7.177	248	1.538	0.125
		Joint	102	49.68	6.880			
Personal Transformation	Civility	Rural	105	20.08	4.791	248	.090	0.92
		Urban	145	20.13	4.741			
Self-Purification	Civility	Rural	105	11.99	.727	248	.759	0.44
		Urban	145	11.92	.613			
Expanding Awareness	Civility	Rural	105	16.76	2.050	248	.223	0.82
		Urban	145	16.82	2.074			
Spiritual / Religious Practices	Civility	Rural	105	48.83	7.200	248	.052	0.95
		Urban	145	48.88	7.011			

Notes: **Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 4 indicates that individuals from joint families are slightly superior to their nuclear family counterparts in terms of Personal Transformation (PT). The value of t-test shows that the difference between mean scores of males and females on the counts of PT is not significantly different. This is also duly supported by the p value which further indicates that the difference is not significant. Next observation explains that, individuals from joint families have emerged superior to their nuclear family counterparts on the counts of second dimension, Self-Purification (SP). The value of t-test shows that the difference between the mean scores of males and females on the counts of SP is significantly different. Therefore it could be considered that the difference is highly significant. In the case of Expanding Awareness (EA), the observations suggest that, individuals from joint families have scored more on EA than their nuclear family counterparts.

The value of t-test shows that the difference between the mean scores of males and females on the counts of EA is not significantly different. Therefore it could be considered that the mean difference between individuals of nuclear and joint families is not significant. Similarly, the mean scores for Spiritual/Religious Practices (SRP) show that individuals from joint families have considerable advantage over their nuclear family counterparts on the counts of SRP. As the observation is supported by the value of t-test, it could be inferred that the difference between the means is not significant. The observation is supported by the value of p, which consolidates it too.

It further depicts that the urban individuals have scored slightly higher than their rural counterparts on the average Personal Transformation (PT). But the difference between the means of both groups is not significant, while the t-value has supported the observation; it is also confirmed by the p value. This consolidates the finding that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of individuals coming from rural and urban backgrounds. Moreover, in the case of Self-Purification (SP), individuals from rural areas have scored higher than their urban counterparts. Since the difference between the means is statistically not significant, it would not be considered as significant difference, so the groups are not significantly different on the count of SP. As the t-value has supports the observation, the p value has also confirms that the mean difference is not significant on the counts of SP. For the Expanding Awareness (EA), urban individuals have a slight edge in their mean scores as compared to their rural counterparts.

But the mean difference is not significant, therefore the groups are not significantly different; the observation is supported by the t-value and confirmed by the corresponding value of p. For Spiritual/Religious Practices, urban individuals have a slight difference in their mean scores as compared to their rural counterparts, but the difference is not significant. The finding is supported by the value of t-test and corresponding p value, so there is no significant difference between the means of rural and urban individuals on the counts of SRP.

Conclusion

The findings from the study have provided some valuable insights into the nascent notion of Spiritual But Not Religious based upon the inclination of American adults towards spirituality as well as religiosity. Therefore it could be concluded that:

1. There is no significant difference between Spiritual Americans and Religious Americans on their Spiritual Transcendence.

2. There is a significant difference between male Americans and female Americans on their Spiritual Transcendence.
3. There is no significant difference between Spiritual Americans and Religious Americans on their Spiritual/Religious Practices its dimensions viz. Individual Practices, Collective Practices, and Sacred Practices.
4. There is a significant difference between male Americans and female Americans on their Spiritual/Religious Practices and its dimensions viz. Individual Practices, Collective Practices, and Sacred Practices with respect to gender.
5. There is no significant difference between Rural Americans and Urban Americans on their Spiritual Transcendence.
6. There is no significant difference between Rural Americans and Urban Americans on their Spiritual/Religious Practices its dimensions viz. Individual Practices, Collective Practices, and Sacred Practices.
7. There is a significant difference between the Americans from nuclear families and the Americans from joint families on their Spiritual Transcendence.
8. There is a significant difference between the Americans from nuclear families and the Americans from joint families on their Spiritual/Religious Practices and its dimensions viz. Individual Practices, Collective Practices, and Sacred Practices.

Future researches could focus on studying a larger sample from more states of the USA, as this study was limited to the states of Georgia and New Jersey only. Studies may sample a larger population so as to obtain higher reliability and validity with the results. There is considerable difference between non-religious, non-spiritual and unaffiliated individuals, utmost care is required to draw the lines of difference in order to avoid confusion about the concepts involved.

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