

RESEARCH

A Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale: The Short and Sweet of It

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Despite its relatively good psychometric properties and empirical validity, the 20-item Religious Fundamentalism scale developed by the authors has several problems. It does not measure all of the aspects of fundamentalism, as defined, as well as it might. And it could stand to be shorter. An item development program led to a 12-statement revision that is more internally consistent despite having broader coverage. As well, it is as reliable as the longer original scale, despite being 40% shorter, and at least as empirically valid.

A dozen years ago the authors presented a 20-item Religious Fundamentalism scale in this journal (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; see Table 1). Balanced against response sets, it was intended to measure

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*It is with deep sorrow that *IJPR* informs its readership that after a long battle with leukemia Bruce Hunsberger died of cancer as this article was going to press. He was loved by, and the best friend of, the senior author of this article, Bob Altemeyer. Bruce Hunsberger also did a truly wonderful job as a member of this journal's editorial board for many years. He was well known for his meticulous scholarship, keen mind, and attention to detail in his professional work with the psychology of religion. We have lost a fine contributor. He will be missed.

TABLE 1
The Original 20-Item Religious Fundamentalism Scale

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1. God has given humanity a complete, unfailling guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed.
 2. *All* of the religions in the world have flaws and wrong teachings.^a
 3. Of all the people on this earth, one group has a special relationship with God because it believes the most in his revealed truths and tries the hardest to follow his laws.
 4. The long-established traditions in religion show the best way to honour and serve God, and should never be compromised.
 5. Religion must admit all its past failings, and adapt to modern life if it is to benefit humanity.^a
 6. When you get right down to it, there are only two kinds of people in the world: the Righteous, who will be rewarded by God; and the rest, who will not.
 7. Different religions and philosophies have different versions of the truth, and may be equally right in their own way.^a
 8. The basic cause of evil in this world is Satan, who is still constantly and ferociously fighting against God.
 9. It is more important to be a good person than to believe in God and the right religion.^a
 10. No one religion is especially close to God, nor does God favor any particular group of believers.^a
 11. God will punish most severely those who abandon his true religion.
 12. No single book of religious writings contains all the important truths about life.^a
 13. It is silly to think people can be divided into "the Good" and "the Evil." Everyone does some good, and some bad things.^a
 14. God's true followers must remember that he requires them to *constantly* fight Satan and Satan's allies on this earth.
 15. Parents should encourage their children to study all religions without bias, then make up their own minds about what to believe.^a
 16. There *is* a religion on this earth that teaches, without error, God's truth.
 17. "Satan" is just the name people give to their own bad impulses. There really is *no such thing* as a diabolical "Prince of Darkness" who tempts us.^a
 18. Whenever science and sacred scripture conflict, science must be wrong.
 19. There is *no* body of teachings, or set of scriptures, which is completely without error.^a
 20. To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, true religion.
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^aItem is worded in the contrait direction, for which the scoring key is reversed.

the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity. (p. 118)

Like many other religion measures, our scale had strong psychometric properties, sporting a mean interitem correlation of .37 in a large sample of parents of university students, which produced an alpha reliability of .92. As well, it proved well-connected with right-wing authoritarianism (.68) and flourished modest but

nonetheless positive correlations (.23 to .41) with 4 measures of authoritarian aggression, including racial/ethnic prejudice.

Because our scale was designed to measure attitudes about one's religious beliefs, rather than adherence to any particular set of beliefs, we thought it should capture fundamentalism in many faiths. A 1992 study of Toronto Hindus, Jews, and Muslims established that it did, with alphas ranging from .85 to .94, and correlations with hostility toward homosexuals varying from .42 to .65—values consonant with those found in our predominantly Christian samples (Altemeyer, 1996, pp. 161–165). Similar results were obtained with a sample of Muslims in Ghana (Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck, 1999), where the fundamentalism measure posted an alpha of .87 and correlated .78 with hostility toward homosexuals.

In the years since 1992, the Religious Fundamentalism scale has always rendered strong associations with right-wing authoritarianism (.62 to .82). In fact, it was suggested that "fundamentalism can therefore usually be viewed as a religious manifestation of right-wing authoritarianism" (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 161). In addition, correlations have emerged in Canadian, largely Christian samples with dogmatism (.57 to .78), zealotry (.44 to .55), reports of how much religion was emphasized in one's youth (.54 to .69), frequency of church attendance (.51 to .67), belief in Christian teachings (.66 to .74), belief in a dangerous world (.44 to .59), self-righteousness (.52 to .54), hostility toward homosexuals (.42 to .61), prejudice toward women (.23 to .40), prejudice toward racial/ethnic minorities (.17 to .33), endorsement of "militia" attitudes (.18 to .28), endorsement of censorship of various "left-wing" publications and acts (.64), reports that religion brought one comfort and joy in life (.68), a lack of reports that logic and science brought one comfort and joy (–.33), a lack of doubts about religious matters (–.40 to –.59), and strong religious ethnocentrism (.70 to .82). As well, high fundamentalists have been found to hold big double standards about the teaching of religion in public schools (their religion, yes; others, no), to reject out of hand scientific evidence that contradicts their beliefs, to insist nothing could convince them they are wrong about the existence of the traditional God, to strongly proselytize their faith, and to enjoin their own children to hold the same beliefs they do.

Although one can spot persons scoring highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale in all the religions we sample, they are particularly concentrated in "fundamentalist" Protestant denominations such as the Baptists, Mennonites, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Alliance Church, and so on. So if these things sound to you like the beliefs and behaviors of religious fundamentalists, the scale would seem to have considerable empirical validity. (Many of these findings are reported in Altemeyer, 1996; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997; Altemeyer, 1998; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2002; and Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck, 1999. Others have only recently been discovered.) Other research programs have reported similar correlations for a number of these variables, especially the links between Religious Fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism, as well

as attitudes toward homosexuals (e.g., Laythe, Finkel, Bringle, & Kirkpatrick, 2002; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001).

Finally, by way of background, religious fundamentalists appear much more likely to fill the ranks of authoritarian followers, as measured by the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale, than to become authoritarian leaders, as indicated by their scores on the Social Dominance Orientation scale (Altemeyer, 1998; Altemeyer, in press). And recent evidence suggests that the racial/ethnic prejudice of fundamentalists has its roots in early childhood training in religious ethnocentrism (Altemeyer, 2003).

PROBLEMS WITH THE SCALE

As good as one may judge its record to have been thus far, the Religious Fundamentalism scale has some nagging problems. For one thing, at least half of its items involve the "one true religion" theme, such as, "Of all the people on this earth, one group has a special relationship with God because it believes the most in his revealed truths and tries hardest to follow his laws," and "No one religion is especially close to God, nor does God favor any particular group of believers" (a con-trait). Although our definition of fundamentalism begins with "the belief that there is one set of religious teachings" and ends with "a special relationship with the deity," we came to believe the middle of the definition ("fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth") got short-shrift in the scale that eventually coalesced to measure the concept. Over-measuring the "one special group" aspect could conceivably bias the measure to overrepresent fundamentalists' racial/ethnic ethnocentrism. So we decided the scale's construct validity needed retooling to make it more diverse, reflecting better the definition of fundamentalism.

Another irritation arose from various researchers who used only part of the scale in their studies, typically saying they had no room for all 20 items. Although there will probably always be someone who will chop up any size scale (picking the items judged to best favor his hypothesis), we had the luxury of a high alpha. Could we substantially reduce the size of the scale and keep alpha about .90? Not likely; not if we were also trying to make the scale more diverse, which would lower its internal consistency. Still, maybe if we worked at it...

SPREADING IT OUT AND TIGHTENING IT UP

We began testing revised versions of some of our old items and new, broader-ranging statements in the fall of 2000, using samples of 1,235 introductory psychology students at the University of Manitoba and 502 of their parents. The promising items were then checked out on 169 introductory students at Wilfrid Laurier University in January 2001. This led to more revisions tested with 774 Manitoba students in the fall of 2001. By the following autumn, we had 20 candidates for a new

scale (some of them, of course, lifted unaltered from the original scale). Three hundred and fifty-four Manitoba introductory psychology students worked their way through a long booklet of surveys that began with these 20 items. Thoroughly intermixed among them, another 343 students answered an otherwise identical booklet that began with the original 20-item Religious Fundamentalism scale. During the next month, 424 parents answered the candidate items, while another 412 gave responses to the original 20.

We culled the 20 candidate items for (a) the best interconnecting statements that would (b) give us topical breadth and (c) a scale balanced against response sets. We did not select items according to their empirical validity. In fact, we passed on several that punched up good predictive correlations, but that did not lump together well enough with the items that did interconnect (Item 15 in Table 1) or that were redundant (Item 16). Then we examined 16-item, 14-item, 12-item, and 10-item proto-scales and in the end decided that going lower than a dozen statements did too much damage. The 12 items of the revised Religious Fundamentalism scale are presented in Table 2. Four of the statements made the trip unaltered from the original scale, 5 others reveal revisions to original items, and 3 debut. The reader may agree that (with the dropping of Items 3, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 16 from Table 1) these 12 statements tap "one true religion" sentiments less often than the original scale did and reflect all aspects of our definition of fundamentalism a little more faithfully.

Examination of Table 3 will show that, among both students and parents, the shortened scale had much greater internal consistency than did the original scale—so much so that the alpha reliability of the new scale held its own despite the measure being 40% shorter and despite its covering a greater play of topics.

Principal axes factor analysis of the 20-item scale answered by the parents yielded two factors with eigenvalues over 1.0, controlling 50.5% of the variance—but only the first (eigenvalue = 8.44) would be kept by the standard scree test, as the second factor had an eigenvalue of only 1.67. Promax rotation of the two factors found all 10 pro-trait items, and 1 con-trait, had their higher loading on Factor I. The other 9 items, all con-traits, had their higher loading on Factor II, which correlated .70 with Factor I. An identical factoring of the new 12-item scale found only one factor with an eigenvalue over 1.0. This factor controlled 53.5% of the variance. If you force a 2-factor solution, all the pro-trait items load higher on Factor I, and all the con-traits on Factor II. The two factors account for 60.4% of the variance and correlate .80. The student data were a little looser, but came to the same end. The 20-item scale's first two factors (eigenvalues of 7.78 vs. 1.43) accounted for 46.1% of the variance, correlated .70, and were (12-8) pro-trait and con-trait factors. The student responses to the 12-item version yielded just one factor that controlled 51.3% of the variance. A forced 2-factor solution, which controlled 58.8% of the variance, produced the same pro-trait, con-trait factors found in the parent data, with the factors correlating .76. So both scales, in both samples,

were essentially unidimensional, showing just traces of the response sets one usually can uncover with balanced measures. But the more cohesive 12-item version predictably runs in a straighter line than its predecessor did.

Further examination of Table 3 will reveal that the shortened scale usually matched or exceeded the empirical validity of the 20-item version, with the notable

TABLE 2
The Revised 12-Item Religious Fundamentalism Scale

This survey is part of an investigation of general public opinion concerning a variety of social issues. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements, and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please indicate your reaction to each statement by blackening a bubble in SECTION 1 of the bubble sheet, according to the following scale:

- Blacken the bubble labeled -4 if you *very strongly disagree* with the statement.
 -3 if you *strongly disagree* with the statement.
 -2 if you *moderately disagree* with the statement.
 -1 if you *slightly disagree* with the statement.
- Blacken the bubble labeled +1 if you *slightly agree* with the statement.
 +2 if you *moderately agree* with the statement.
 +3 if you *strongly agree* with the statement.
 +4 if you *very strongly agree* with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about an item, blacken the "0" bubble.

You may find that you sometimes have different reactions to different parts of a statement. For example, you might very strongly disagree ("-4") with one idea in a statement, but slightly agree ("+1") with another idea in the same item. When this happens, please combine your reactions, and write down how you feel on balance (a "-3" in this case).

1. God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed.
 2. No single book of religious teachings contains all the intrinsic, fundamental truths about life.^a
 3. The basic cause of evil in this world is Satan, who is still constantly and ferociously fighting against God.
 4. It is more important to be a good person than to believe in God and the right religion.^a
 5. There is a particular set of religious teachings in this world that are so true, you can't go any "deeper" because they are the basic, bedrock message that God has given humanity.
 6. When you get right down to it, there are basically only two kinds of people in the world: the Righteous, who will be rewarded by God; and the rest, who will not.
 7. Scriptures may contain general truths, but they should NOT be considered completely, literally true from beginning to end.^a
 8. To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion.
 9. "Satan" is just the name people give to their own bad impulses. There really is *no such thing* as a diabolical "Prince of Darkness" who tempts us.^a
 10. Whenever science and sacred scripture conflict, *science* is probably right.^a
 11. The fundamentals of God's religion should never be tampered with, or compromised with others' beliefs.
 12. All of the religions in the world have flaws and wrong teachings. There is *no* perfectly true, right religion.^a
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^a indicates item is worded in the con-trait direction, for which the scoring key is reversed.

TABLE 3
Comparison of the Original and Shortened Religious Fundamentalism Scales

Statistic	Students		Parents	
	Original 20	Revised 12	Original 20	Revised 12
M Inter-item correlation	.34	.47	.38	.49
Alpha reliability coefficient	.91	.91	.93	.92
Correlation with: ^a				
Right-wing authoritarianism	.77	.79	.75	.72
Religious emphasis as a child	.49	.56	.42	.42
Belief in the traditional God	.57	.56	.60	.63
Frequency of church attendance	.58	.62	.60	.64
Belief in creation science	.66	.77	.69	.73
Religious ethnocentrism	.71	.71	.70	.73
Dogmatism	.74	.75	.72	.70
Racial/ethnic prejudice	.14	.12	.25	.18
Hostility toward homosexuals	.50	.51	.54	.57
Doubts about religion	—	—	-.40	-.44

^aAll correlations are statistically significant at the .05 level or beyond. Right-wing authoritarianism was measured with the 20-item RWA Scale (Altemeyer, 1999). Religious emphasis as a child was assessed with a 10-item Religious Emphasis scale (Altemeyer, 1988). Belief in the traditional God was measured with a new 7-item scale. Frequency of church attendance was obtained with a single item. Belief in creation science was assessed with a new 12-item scale. Religious ethnocentrism was calculated through the 16-item Religious Ethnocentrism scale (Altemeyer, 2003). Dogmatism was measured with the 20-item DOG scale (Altemeyer, 1996). Racial/ethnic prejudice was tapped with the 20-item Manitoba Ethnocentrism scale (Altemeyer, 1998). Hostility toward homosexuals was measured with the 12-item Attitudes Toward Homosexual scale (Altemeyer, 1988). Doubts about religion was assessed through the 20-item Religious Doubts scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997). All of these scales have alpha reliabilities of at least .85, and usually .90 or higher.

exception being (as suspected) racial/ethnic prejudice. All of which means, it would seem, the scale's construct validity has been improved by the testing and trimming. So try it. You may like it. Just do not chop it up and use only a whack of it.

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