



# An Exploration of the Differential Effects of Religiosity and Spirituality on Individuation in Emerging Adults

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## Background

- Individuation is an important developmental process that takes place in adolescence, wherein the adolescent renegotiates the hierarchical relationship with parents in order to strike a balance between autonomy (independent thought and decision making) and relational connectedness. Research indicates that individuation is deeply entwined with both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors;<sup>1</sup> furthermore, when individuation goes awry, it predicts a number of adjustment problems, including depression and spiritual struggle.
- Religiosity and spirituality, when explored from a developmental perspective, tend to correlate with identity markers, stages of development, and other contextual factors like relational quality.<sup>2</sup> This may indicate a relationship between religious and spiritual development and individuation. Steinberg suggests that the relationship between spirituality and individuation may be different than the relationship between religiosity and individuation.<sup>3</sup>
- The present study is an investigation of Steinberg's claim - we want to see whether religiosity predicts the health of the individuation process differentially from spirituality.

## Method

**Participants:** Participants (N=179) were undergraduate students at a private Midwestern university. The majority (74%) of students were Catholic; 13% were Protestant or Other Christian, 5% were atheist or agnostic, and 4.4% defined themselves as "spiritual but not religious."

The majority of the sample was female (72%) and the mean age was 19.5. 69% of the participants were White, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 10% Asian, and 5.5% were Black or African American.

**Procedures:** Participants completed the survey online, and received class credit for their participation.

**Design:** Participants were assessed on measures of healthy and dysfunctional individuation, spirituality, religiosity, religious and spiritual development, and religious orientation. (Measures are summarized in the correlation table at right.) Hierarchical regression analyses were used to determine whether religiosity predicted individuation differentially than spirituality for both healthy and dysfunctional individuation.

**Table 1. Survey Measures.** Table 1 (middle) displays the areas assessed by the survey, as well as the specific scales, with respective authors and dimensions, used to measure them.

**Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analyses.** Table 2 (far right) displays the results of hierarchical regression models predicting dysfunctional individuation (DIS) and functional individuation (SITA).

Area Assessed	Scale Used	Author	Correlation with DIS	Correlation with SITA
Dysfunctional Individuation	Dysfunctional Individuation Scale	Stey, Hill, and Lapsley, 2014	1	-.519**
Healthy Separation	A subscale of the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence	Levine, Green, and Millon, 1986	-.519**	1
Religious Orientation	Adapted Religious Orientation Scale	Chow, 2017	-0.030	.033
Religious Maturity	Revised Faith Development Scale	Leak, Louks, and Boulin, 1999	-0.052	.066
Religiosity	Measure of Religiosity	Friese and Wanke, 2014	-0.081	.020
Self-Assessed Religiosity	"To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?"	Fetzer Institute, 1999	.023	-.012
Non-Religious Spirituality	Spiritual Transcendence Scale	Piedmont, 1999	-.155*	.250**
Spiritual Maturity	Spiritual Experience Index	Genia, 1991	-.231**	.306**
Self-Assessed Spirituality	"To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?"	Fetzer Institute, 1999	.028	-.172*
Salience	"How important is God in your life?"	N/A	-.010	.073
Gender	"What is your gender?"	N/A	-.245**	.160**

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ , \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ .

## Results

**Table 2**  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Dysfunctional and Functional Individuation

	DIS				SITA			
	B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F Change
Model 1			.077	11.89***			.211	6.74*
Gender	-5.53***	-.277***			1.22*	.211*		
Model 2			.146	5.96***			.334	3.52*
Gender	-5.33***	-.270***			1.129*	.196*		
STS	.006	.014			.001	.011		
SEI	-.124**	-.294**			.023	.183		
Self-Assessed Spirituality	-1.40	-.123			-.390	-.117		
Model 3			.220	4.23***			.488	4.54**
Gender	-5.21***	-.261***			1.117*	.194*		
STS	.028	.063			-.007	-.053		
SEI	-.238***	-.564***			.074***	.599***		
Self-Assessed Spirituality	.118	.010			-.899**	-.270**		
ROS	-.242	-.147			.009	.019		
FDS	-.163	-.160			.074*	.252*		
Measure of Religiosity	.006	.003			-.156	-.257		
Self-Assessed Religiosity	-1.33	-.116			1.065*	.317*		
Salience	2.54**	.515**			-.296	-.203		

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ , \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

- Regression findings suggest there is a difference in the way that religiosity and spirituality relate to individuation, and that these relationships are different for healthy and dysfunctional individuation.
- Higher levels of spirituality correlate with separation-individuation that is more functional, perhaps indicating that individuation is necessary for the development of spirituality or vice versa.
- Longitudinal follow-up with study participants may provide valuable insight into how these variables interact as the individuation process unfolds.

## Contact

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## References

- <sup>1</sup>Kruse and Walper, 2008; Levpuscek, 2007; Golosow and Weitzman, 1969; Quintana and Lapsley, 1990; Daniels, 1990; Walper and Schwarz, 2001.  
<sup>2</sup>Min, Silverstein and Gruenewald, 2017; King, Abo-Zena, and Weber, 2017; Kimball, et al., 2016; Kaplan, et al., 2012.  
<sup>3</sup>Steinberg, 2017.