Prevalence, Predictors, and Implications of Religious/Spiritual Struggles Among Muslims

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The current investigation explored prevalence, predictors, and psychological implications of religious and spiritual (r/s) struggles among an Israeli-Palestinian, Muslim sample. R/s struggle was assessed by the Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (Exline et al. 2014), a newly developed scale that assesses a wide array of r/s struggles. Factor analysis of the scale in this study revealed five factors of struggle: Divine and Doubt, Punitive Entities, Interpersonal, Moral, and Ultimate Meaning. Of the 139 Muslim participants, between 1.4 percent and 40.2 percent experienced various r/s struggles. Positive God image and fundamentalism predicted lower levels of struggle, whereas negative God image and universality predicted higher levels of struggle. After controlling for religious variables, we found that both depressive symptoms and generalized anxiety were predicted by Punitive Entities and Ultimate Meaning struggles, while satisfaction with life was predicted by Interpersonal struggle. Possible explanations and implications of the findings are offered, and the limitations of the study are discussed.

Keywords: religious/spiritual struggles, Muslims, Israeli-Palestinians, mental health.

INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, researchers have shown a growing interest in the impact of religion and spirituality on people's physical and mental health (for recent reviews, see Paloutzian and Park 2013; Pargament et al. 2013). This body of research has, by and large, demonstrated positive links between religious and spiritual involvement and an enhanced sense of well-being. For example, religion and spirituality have been associated with greater levels of attachment security (see Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013, for a review), meaning in life (Park, Edmondson, and Hale-Smith 2013), comfort (e.g., Exline, Yali, and Sanderson 2000), and self-control (e.g., McCullough and Willoughby 2009).

However, this body of research has largely obscured potentially difficult or harmful aspects of religion and spirituality (Abu-Raiya, Pargament, and Magyar-Russell 2010). This picture has begun to change recently; a steadily growing number of empirical studies have tested potential detrimental or stressful forms of religiousness and spirituality. Among these forms, religious and spiritual struggles (RSS) (r/s struggles) have been receiving particular attention, and findings of studies in this area are consistent: r/s struggles are robustly linked to poorer health and well-being (for reviews, see Exline 2013; Exline and Rose 2013).

Though promising, this body of research is limited because it: (1) focuses primarily on Christian populations while neglecting individuals adhering to other religious traditions, and (2) focuses largely on struggles with the divine to the neglect of other forms of struggle. This study aims to address these limitations. Specifically, this study explores prevalence, predictors, and implications of r/s struggles among a Muslim sample by using the RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014), a newly developed tool for measuring r/s struggles that can assess a wide range of r/s struggles. Hence, this study also aimed to provide preliminary validation data for the RSS within a Muslim sample.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

RSS: Definition and Types

R/s struggles occur when some aspect of r/s belief, practice, or experience becomes a focus or a source of tension or internal conflict (Exline 2013). Stated differently, r/s struggles are "expressions of conflict, question and doubt regarding matters of faith, God and religious relationships" (McConnell et al. 2006:1470). Research has identified three main forms of r/s struggles: supernatural struggles, interpersonal struggles, and intrapersonal struggles (e.g., Exline 2013; Exline and Rose 2013). Supernatural struggles focus on beliefs about supernatural agents: divine struggles involve tensions or conflict centered on beliefs about God or a perceived relationship with God, and demonic struggles involve concern that the devil or evil spirits are attacking an individual or causing negative events. Interpersonal struggles involve negative experiences with religious people or institutions or conflict with others around religious issues. Other r/s struggles are intrapersonal: they have an inward focus on one's own thoughts or actions. Three types of intrapersonal struggles emerged as significant. The first are moral struggles, in which a person wrestles with attempts to follow moral principles or feels excessive guilt in response to perceived transgressions. Two other intrapersonal struggles are doubt-related struggles, in which people are troubled by doubts or questions about their beliefs, and ultimate-meaning-related struggles, in which people feel a lack of deeper meaning in life.

This six-dimension structure of struggle has been confirmed recently by Exline et al. (2014), who developed and validated the RSS Scale, using a large, mostly Christian, sample. The first goal of the study was to test whether this theoretically and empirically based factor structure of r/s struggle is applicable to Muslims as well.

RSS: Prevalence

People may be unwilling to divulge certain types of r/s struggle. For example, studies have shown that many people see anger toward God (a type of divine struggle) as morally wrong (Exline, Kaplan, and Grubbs 2012), and those who disclose such feelings to others may receive stigmatizing responses (Exline and Grubbs 2011). Yet despite the potential barriers to reporting r/s struggles, it has become clear that r/s struggles are not uncommon; many people experience r/s struggles and are willing to report them (e.g., Exline and Grubbs 2011; Fitchett et al. 2004; Johnson and Hayes 2003; McConnell et al. 2006; Phelps et al. 2012). For example, Johnson and Hayes (2003) found that 25 percent of over 5,000 college students reported significant distress associated with their religious and spiritual concerns. In a study of a large national sample of college students, 18 percent indicated that they had frequently questioned their religious/spiritual beliefs and 40 percent occasionally felt anger toward God (Bryant and Astin 2008). Working with an adult sample who reported on an event involving some kind of suffering, Exline and Grubbs (2011) found that 54 percent reported some level of anger toward God. Among patients with different types of illnesses (diabetes mellitus, congestive heart, oncological problems), 15 percent of the total sample reported moderate to high levels of r/s struggle (Fitchett et al. 2004).

RSS: Predictors

Which variables predict r/s struggles? Empirical studies have identified several religious/spiritual and personality factors that are related to r/s struggles. With respect to religious/spiritual factors, r/s struggles have been tied to being part of a religious minority, quest orientation towards religion, and seeing God as elusive (Bryant and Astin 2008). In terms of personality, r/s struggles have been associated with anxious or ambivalent attachment to God, neuroticism and pessimism (Ano and Pargament 2013), and narcissistic qualities and a sense of entitlement (Grubbs, Exline, and Campbell 2013). Situational variables, such as negative appraisals of stressful events (Ano and Pargament 2013), poor social support (McConnell et al. 2006), and family-of-origin stressors (Szewczyk and Weinmuller 2006), have also been identified as significant predictors of r/s struggles.

How can the findings related to the predictors of r/s struggle be explained? R/s struggles are more likely to be experienced by r/s individuals with a weaker "general orienting system"—general beliefs, practices, patterns of relationship, coping resources, and burdens, and personality characteristics that guide the individual in the search for significance in life (Pargament 1997). A more limited general orienting system tends to lack breadth and depth, flexibility, and benevolence; as a result, the individual is less equipped to deal with the full range of life experiences, including pain and suffering. Consistent with the aforementioned empirical findings, it seems that personality traits such as neuroticism and pessimism, along with negative affectivity and narcissistic qualities, make r/s individuals prone to, or at risk of, experiencing r/s struggles.

Religious and spiritual variables represent one important subset of the orienting system; Pargament has referred to this subset as the religious orienting system (ROS) (Pargament 1997). ROS consists of both resources and burdens that can facilitate or impede efforts to deal with life challenges and demands. In this vein, Pargament (1997) notes that the religious orienting systems of people vary in their strength. Indicators of a stronger ROS include greater embeddedness of the individual in a religious system, greater commitment to religious beliefs and practices, and religious beliefs that are more positive or benevolent in nature.

Conversely, some religious factors might be indicators of a more limited ROS and hence could put the individual at risk of developing r/s struggles. Some empirical evidence has lent support to this hypothesis. For example, Ano and Pargament (2013) found that insecure ambivalent attachment to God was a significant predictor of r/s struggles. R/s struggles have been tied also to being part of a religious minority and seeing God as elusive (Bryant and Austin 2008).

The third goal of the current investigation was to test a few variables as potential predictors of r/s struggles: religious participation; viewing God as distant, cruel, or loving (such views are basic facets of a person's God concept but do not, by themselves, imply the presence or absence of r/s struggle); closeness to God; fundamentalism; and universality (i.e., acceptance of other world religions as equally valid ways of pursuing Truth/God) (Beck and Jessup 2004). On both theoretical and empirical grounds:

H1: Religious participation, viewing God as loving, and closeness to God are indicators of a stronger ROS and hence will be related to lower levels of r/s struggles, while viewing God as cruel or distant is an indicator of a more limited ROS and therefore will be related to greater levels of r/s struggle.

With respect to fundamentalism and universality, this study is clearly exploratory. Higher levels of fundamentalism and lower levels of universality might be reflections of a stronger ROS (by representing, for example, a greater commitment to faith) and hence might be associated with lower levels of r/s struggle. On the other hand, higher levels of fundamentalism and lower levels of universality might be reflections of a more limited ROS (by representing, for example, a more

rigid and inflexible adherence to faith, something that could be more easily shaken or shattered) and therefore might be linked to greater levels of r/s struggles.

RSS: Implications for Health and Well-being

There is now an extensive literature linking r/s struggle with emotional distress and poor physical health (for reviews, see Ano and Vasconcelles 2005; Exline 2013; Exline and Rose 2005, 2013; Pargament 2007; Pargament et al. 2005). Many studies have documented links between r/s struggles and emotional distress (e.g., Ellison and Lee 2010), including greater anxiety (e.g., McConnell et al. 2006), depression (e.g., Ano and Vasconcelles 2005), and suicidal ideation (e.g., Exline, Yali, and Sanderson 2000; Rosmarin et al. 2013). Although most studies have been cross-sectional, longitudinal studies have shown that r/s struggles may predict increases in depressive symptoms (e.g., Park, Brooks, and Sussman 2009; Pirutinsky et al. 2011) and even higher mortality rates (Pargament et al. 2001). Even though some studies suggest positive links between r/s struggles and growth (Pargament et al. 1998; Pargament, Koenig, and Perez 2000), the weight of the evidence is clear and leads to a straightforward conclusion: r/s struggles are painful and can pose a significant risk to health and well-being.

Though promising, the body of research on r/s struggles is limited because it: (1) focuses primarily on Christian populations and neglects individuals adhering to other religious traditions, and (2) focuses on r/s struggles with the divine to the neglect of other forms of struggle.

To address the first limitation, a small but steadily growing body of research on the links between r/s struggles and health and well-being has been recently conducted among non-Christian populations. Overall, findings from this body of research have been similar to those obtained from Christian samples. Among two samples of American adult Jews in the community, for example, r/s struggles have been tied to worry, anxiety, and depression (Rosmarin et al. 2009), and poorer physical and mental health (Rosmarin, Pargament, and Flannelly 2009); among an adult American community sample of Buddhists (Philips et al. 2012), r/s struggles were related to poorer spiritual well-being and depression; and among an adult American community sample of Hindus (Tarakeshwar, Pargament, and Mahoney 2003), r/s struggles were linked to poorer life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, and to greater depressed mood.

A few studies on the links between r/s struggles and health and well-being have been conducted among Muslims. Again, findings obtained from these studies are consistent with those obtained from samples of other religious traditions. More specifically, r/s struggles among a sample of Bosnian war refugee Muslims have been linked to lower levels of hope and greater levels of experience of war trauma (Ai, Peterson, and Huang 2003); depressed mood among a sample of American Muslims experiencing various stressful interpersonal events following the 9/11 attacks (Abu-Raiya, Pargament, and Mahoney 2011); poorer general health and greater impact of traumatic events among disabled Iranian war veterans (Aflakseir and Coleman 2009) and university students (Aflakseir and Coleman 2009:11); lower levels of quality of life and higher levels of perceived stress among immigrants and nonimmigrant Muslim university students in New-Zealand (Gardner, Krägeloh, and Henning 2013); depressed mood, poorer physical health, and angry feelings among an international web-solicited sample of Muslims (Abu-Raiya et al. 2008); and perceived stress and lower self-esteem among an Iranian sample representing general education and religious education institutions (Ghorbani et al. 2013).

The majority of these studies have used the Negative Religious Coping Scale of the RCOPE (Pargament, Koenig, and Perez 2000) or other scales derived or adapted from this scale. These scales focus largely on divine struggles to the exclusion of other forms of struggle. The only notable exceptions are projects by Abu-Raiya et al. (2008) and Ghorbani et al. (2013). Both of these studies used the Islamic Religious Struggle subscale of the Psychological Measure of Islamic Religiousness (PMIR) (Abu-Raiya et al. 2008), which assesses both divine and doubt struggles. Nonetheless, the Islamic Religious Struggle subscale is a brief instrument (six items)

and does not assess demonic, ultimate meaning, interpersonal, and moral struggles. The fourth aim of the study was to fill this important gap in the literature by testing the links between r/s struggle and mental health. R/s struggle is assessed by the recently developed RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014), and mental health is assessed by three indices: satisfaction with life, depressive symptoms, and generalized anxiety. Based on theoretical grounds and previous research, we hypothesized:

H2: Higher levels of all types of r/s struggle will be linked to greater levels of depressive symptoms, and generalized anxiety, and to lower levels of satisfaction with life.

Data and Methods

Context of the Study

We chose to work with a sample of Israeli-Palestinian college students in this study. Israeli-Palestinians are those Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship. They are the remnants and descendants of the pre-1948 war community of Mandatory Palestine that remained within the borders of the State of Israel after its establishment (Bligh 2003). With regard to religious affiliation, though the majority of Israeli-Palestinians are Muslim, particularly of the Sunni branch of Islam, a significant portion of them (about 25 percent) are Christian.

Muslim Israeli-Palestinians represent a particularly appropriate sample for the study of r/s struggles. They are exposed to the conflicts that plague the Middle East, including interreligious group tensions and war. In addition, as a national, ethnic, and religious minority in the predominantly Jewish state of Israel, Israeli-Palestinians experience discrimination in multiple aspects of life such as employment, education, and ownership of land (Pappe 2011).

Members of this population tend to show a strong adherence to religious beliefs and practices (Abu-Raiya 2013). These religious beliefs and practices are manifested in the public as well as private spheres. It could be argued that religion within this group is a "social norm" (Stavrova, Fetchenhauer, and Schlösser 2013). Research has shown that religious beliefs and practices serve as a valuable coping strategy for Muslims facing stressors in general, and discrimination and oppression in particular (Abu-Raiya and Pargament 2015). On the other hand, the stressors associated with life in Israel for this group may trigger fundamental religious and spiritual tensions and conflicts within themselves, with other people, and with the supernatural; in short, r/s struggles.

In short, this study is unique in a few respects. First, it explores prevalence, predictors, and implications of r/s struggles within a Muslim sample that lives in a stressful context that may increase the likelihood of r/s struggles. This religious group has received relatively little empirical attention in studies of the intersection of religion and spirituality and health and well-being in general, and the intersection of r/s struggles and health and well-being, in particular. Second, this study is conducted among Palestinians in Israel; to our best knowledge, no single relevant study has been conducted among this population. Third, this study assesses r/s struggles using a recently developed tool for measuring r/s struggles that can assess a wide range of r/s struggles (RSS) (Exline et al. 2014). Hence, this study aims to provide preliminary validation data for this scale within a Muslim sample.

Participants

Participants were 139 Palestinian-Muslim college students living in Israel. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 47 years with a mean of 23.7 years (SD = 6.82). Most participants were female (72.3 percent) and single (60.4 percent). Participants rated the degree to which they

considered themselves religious and spiritual on two five-point scales ranging from very low (1) to very high (5), with a higher score indicating greater self-rated religiousness and spirituality. The mean on the self-rated religiousness item was 3.22 (SD = .67) and the mean of the self-rated spirituality item was 3.20 (SD = .83).

Measures

Measures are listed below in the order in which they appeared in the survey. All of these measures were translated from English into Arabic by the first author (who is bilingual and an expert in the field of the psychology of Islam) and back translated to English by a professional translator to ensure translation accuracy.

Religious Participation

Religious participation was assessed via a six-item scale composed of different religious practices, which was adapted from an earlier measure (Exline, Yali, and Sanderson 2000). Participants indicated how often they perform each of these practices (i.e., talking to God, reading religious text, watching/listening to programs on religious/spiritual topics, attending religious/spiritual services or meetings, thinking about religious/spiritual issues, talking to others about religious/spiritual issues) in the last week on a scale ranging from never (0) to more than once a day (5). Higher scores indicate higher religious involvement. Items were summed ($\alpha = .85$).

God as Cruel, Distant, and Loving: The God-10

Views of God as cruel, distant, and loving were assessed with the God-10 (Exline, Grubbs, and Homolka 2015). The God-10 begins with the prompt, "Generally speaking, I imagine God as being..." followed by 10 adjectives rated from not at all (0) to extremely (10). Factor analysis performed in the validation study revealed three factors: "cruel," "distant," and "loving." However, factor analysis performed on the current data suggested two subscales, which will be used in subsequent analysis: a three-item "positive God image" subscale (e.g., loving, caring; $\alpha = .82$) and a seven-item "negative God image" subscale (e.g., distant, cruel; $\alpha = .88$). These two subscales were, as expected, moderately negatively correlated ($r = -.62$). Responses were averaged. Higher scores on the positive God image subscale indicate greater positive view of God, whereas higher scores on the negative God image subscale indicate a more negative view of God.

Closeness to God

After completing the God-10 scale, participants rated the item "In general, how close do you feel to God?" on a four-point scale ranging from not at all (0) to as close as possible (4), with higher scores indicating greater closeness to God. This item was drawn from the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) (Underwood and Teresi 2002).

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism was measured by the five-item Intratextual Fundamentalism Scale (IFS) (Williamson et al. 2010). If participants gave a positive answer to the screening question ("Do you identify with a religious tradition that includes a Sacred Writing?"), they were then asked to indicate their agreement to each of the scale's five statements (e.g., "Everything in the Sacred Writing is absolutely true without question") on a six-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (–3) to strongly agree (3), with higher scores indicating greater fundamentalism. All participants of this study gave a positive answer to the screening question. Items were averaged, with one reverse-scored ($\alpha = .75$).

Universality

Universality was measured by the four-item Universality subscale of the Multidimensional Quest Orientation Scale (MQOS) (Beck and Jessup 2004). Participants rated their agreement with each of the four statements (e.g., "Heaven is open to people of all world religions") on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Higher scores on this scale indicate higher universality. Responses are averaged, with one reverse-scored ($\alpha = .73$).

Religious and Spiritual Struggle

R/s struggle was assessed via the newly developed RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014). Participants read: "Over the past few months, to what extent have you had each of the experiences listed below?" They then completed the 26 RSS items, using a scale from not at all/does not apply (1) to a great deal (5). This scale is composed of six theoretically-based, factor-analytically-derived r/s struggle subscales: Divine, Demonic, Interpersonal, Moral, Ultimate Meaning, and Doubt. Item scores on each subscale were averaged. Higher scores on each subscale indicated greater struggle of that type. The results section presents the findings of a factor analysis performed on this scale.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction was assessed by the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985). Participants rated their agreement with the five statements (e.g., "In most ways my life is close to ideal") on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Higher scores on this scale indicate higher life satisfaction. Responses are summed ($\alpha = .83$).

Depressive Symptoms

Depressive symptoms were measured by the 10-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (Andresen et al. 1994). Participants rated the extent to which they have experienced 10 depressive symptoms (e.g., "I felt lonely") in the past week on a four-point scale ranging from less than one day (0) to five to seven days (3). Higher scores on this scale indicate higher depressive symptoms. Items are summed, with two reverse-scored ($\alpha = .86$).

Generalized Anxiety

Generalized anxiety was assessed by the Generalized Anxiety Scale-7 (Spitzer et al. 2006). Respondents rated the extent to which seven symptoms of generalized anxiety (e.g., "feeling nervous, anxious or on edge") have bothered them within the past two weeks, on a four-point scale ranging from not at all (0) to nearly every day (3). Responses are summed ($\alpha = .89$).

Procedures

The study's procedure was approved by the institutional review board of the college in which the study took place. After receiving the IRB's approval, letters were sent to students in which the study's purpose was explained. Students were asked to indicate on the letter whether they consented to fill out the questionnaires. At the last stage, the fourth author entered the classrooms and explained the purpose of the study to students, emphasizing the fact that they were to be completed anonymously, and that the findings would be used purely for research purposes. Participants did not receive any compensation. The response rate was high; 74 percent of the questionnaires (148 of 200) distributed were returned to the author. However, nine of the questionnaires were only partially completed, and hence they were eliminated from the analyses.

<p style="text-align:center">RESULTS</p>

Factor Analysis of RSS

To test whether the factor structure of the RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014) should be retained in the current sample, the 26 items of the scale were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction and direct oblimin rotation. The direct oblimin rotation was selected because the various subscales of the measure were expected to be correlated. The factor analysis yielded six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and accounted for 66.1 percent of the variance. However, because one of these factors was a single-item factor, and the scree plot bent sharply on the fifth factor, a decision was made to accept the five-factor solution. The eigenvalues of the five factors ranged from 8.35 to 12.88 and together accounted for 60.87 percent of the variance.

Three of the factors that emerged in this study were identical to the ones found in the validation study and hence we retained their original labels: Interpersonal (e.g., "felt as though others were looking down on me because of my religious/spiritual beliefs"; $\alpha = .73$), Moral (e.g., "worried that my actions were morally or spiritually wrong"; $\alpha = .82$) and, Ultimate Meaning (e.g., "questioned whether life really matters"; $\alpha = .79$). The fourth factor ($\alpha = .82$) was a combination of the originally labeled divine (e.g., "felt angry at God") and doubt (e.g., "felt troubled by doubts or questions about religion or spirituality") struggles. We named the resulting combined factor, Divine and Doubt. The fifth factor ($\alpha = .77$) included all the items composing the originally labeled demonic struggle (e.g., "worried that the problems I was facing are the work of the devil or evil spirits") and the punishing God item (i.e., "felt as though God was punishing me"), which was originally part of the divine struggle subscale. Because both demonic and punishing God appraisals involve being punished or attacked by supernatural entities, we decided to call this factor Punitive Entities. These five subscales, which were, as expected, moderately correlated (correlations coefficients ranged from .28 to .56), will be used in subsequent analysis.

Prevalence of R/S Struggle

To provide insight into the frequency with which participants experience r/s struggle, the base rates of participants' endorsement of "quite a bit" or "a great deal" are provided for each item of the Religious and Spiritual (RSS) Struggles Scale in descending order in Table 1. Taken together, between 1.4 percent and 40.2 percent of the sample experienced various r/s struggle.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation, range) of the study's main variables. As for religious variables, participants scored relatively high on positive God image and fundamentalism, relatively moderate on religious participation, closeness to God, and universality, and relatively low on negative God image.

With respect to the different RSS subscales, Bonferroni-corrected comparisons showed, that in comparison to the other subscales, participants manifested the highest scores for Punitive Entities ($M = 2.62$, SD = .98; $p < .05$) and Ultimate Meaning ($M = 2.50$, SD = 1.15; $p < .05$), which did not significantly differ from each other ($p > .05$). These scores were followed by Moral ($M = 2.28$, SD = 1.05; $p < .05$) and Interpersonal ($M = 2.08$, SD = .88), with Divine and Doubt endorsed the least ($M = 1.47$, SD = .66, $p < .05$).

Regarding the mental health variables, participants indicated moderately high scores on satisfaction with life and low scores on symptoms of depression and generalized anxiety. These scores are comparable to those from the U.S. sample used in the original RSS validation project (Exline et al. 2014).

Table 1: Base rates and factor loadings for items in the Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale

	Frequency (%)	Factor	Item Loading
Felt as though the devil (or an evil spirit) was trying to turn me away from what was good	40.2	Punitive Entities	-.812
Questioned whether life really matters	38.0	Ultimate Meaning	.802
Questioned whether my life will really make any difference in the world	37.7	Ultimate Meaning	.811
Worried that the problems I was facing are the work of the devil or evil spirits	36.9	Punitive Entities	-.798
Felt as though God was punishing me	34.4	Punitive Entities	-.689
Had concerns about whether there is any ultimate purpose to life or existence	28.7	Ultimate Meaning	.842
Felt guilty for not living up to my moral standards	25.7	Moral	-.845
Had conflicts with other people about religious/spiritual matters	25.7	Interpersonal	.823
Felt torn between what I wanted and what I knew was morally right	22.4	Moral	-.765
Worried that my actions were morally or spiritually wrong	20.3	Moral	-.742
Felt attacked by the devil or by evil spirits	19.8	Punitive Entities	-.810
Felt troubled by doubts or questions about religion or spirituality	18.9	Divine and Doubt	.768
Felt hurt, mistreated, or offended by religious/ spiritual people	18.6	Interpersonal	.756
Felt angry at organized religion	18.6	Interpersonal	.645
Felt as though my life had no deeper meaning	15.2	Ultimate Meaning	.656
Wrestled with attempts to follow my moral principles	14.0	Moral	-.689
Struggled to figure out what I really believe about religion/spirituality	13.9	Divine and Doubt	.778
Felt as though others were looking down on me because of my religious/spiritual beliefs	13.9	Interpersonal	.664
Felt tormented by the devil or evil spirits	13.2	Punitive Entities	-.795
Felt rejected or misunderstood by religious/spiritual people	13.2	Interpersonal	.667
Felt angry at God	7.7	Divine and Doubt	.834
Felt confused about my religious/spiritual beliefs	7.7	Divine and Doubt	.754
Worried about whether my beliefs about religion/spirituality were correct	6.3	Divine and Doubt	.767
Questioned God's love for me	4.2	Divine and Doubt	.623
Felt as though God has abandoned me	4.2	Divine and Doubt	.792
Felt as though God had let me down	1.4	Divine and Doubt	.831

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Religious participation	15.14	6.78	0–30
Positive God image	8.99	1.89	0-10
Negative God image	1.08	2.00	0–10
Closeness to God	2.63	.68	1.00–4.00
Fundamentalism	2.71	.78	−2.80–3.00
Universality	−.70	1.40	−3.00–3.00
Divine and doubt struggle	1.47	.66	1.00–4.75
Punitive entities struggle	2.62	.98	1.00–5.00
Interpersonal struggle	2.08	.88	1.00–4.20
Moral struggle	2.28	1.05	1.00–5.00
Ultimate meaning struggle	2.50	1.15	1.00–5.00
Satisfaction with life	22.27	5.66	5.00–35
Generalized anxiety	8.02	5.53	.00–21
Depressive symptoms	12.12	5.11	.00–30

Table 3: Religious/spiritual struggle subscales: correlations with religious variables and mental health measures

	RSS Subscales: Specific Types of Struggle					
	RRS (Full Scale)	Divine and Doubt	Punitive Entities	Inter-personal	Moral	Ultimate Meaning
Religious Variables						
Religious participation	−.03	−.10	.00	.10	−.04	−.13
Positive God image	−.16	−.37**	.02	−.07	−.02	−.10
Negative God image	.27**	.47**	−.05	.18*	.11	.26**
Closeness to God	−.17*	−.15	−.18**	−.11	−.04	−.17*
Fundamentalism	−.33**	−.60**	−.02	−.19*	−.10	−.24**
Universality	.25**	.25**	.18*	.00	.21*	.27**
Mental Health Measures						
Depressive symptoms	.48**	.26**	.40**	.38**	.31**	.47**
Generalized anxiety	.51**	.31**	.46**	.34**	.36**	.42**
Life satisfaction	−.15	−.09	−.12	−.18*	−.03	−.17*

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

Correlational Analyses

Table 3 presents the correlations between the RSS subscales and both the mental health measures and religious variables. With respect to the intercorrelations between the RSS subscales and mental health indices, higher scores on all of the RSS subscales were significantly linked to higher levels of both generalized anxiety and depressive symptoms, with correlations ranging from .26 to .46. Higher scores on Interpersonal struggles ($r = −.18$, $p < .05$) and Ultimate Meaning struggle ($r = −.17, p < .05$) were associated with lower scores on life satisfaction.

Regarding the links between the RSS subscales and religious variables, religious participation was not linked to any of the RSS subscales. Closeness to God and fundamentalism were associated

Table 4: Predicting mental health from religious/spiritual struggle subscales (β)

	Mental Health Measures		
	Life satisfaction	Depressive symptoms	Generalized anxiety
Religious Variables			
Religious participation	.17		
Positive God image			
Negative God image			
Closeness to God	.24*		−.10
Fundamentalism			
Universality			
RSS Subscales			
Divine and Doubt	−.00	.02	.06
Punitive Entities	.02	.23**	.30**
Interpersonal	−.21*	.15	.03
Moral	−.20	.00	.06
Ultimate Meaning	−.13	.26**	.22*
R^2 change	.06*	.30**	.27**

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

with lower levels of struggles, whereas negative God image and universality were tied to higher levels of struggles.

Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Predicting Mental Health from R/S Struggles

In order to determine the variables that needed to be controlled in the regression analyses, the correlations between the demographic and religious variables and mental health measures were calculated. These analyses showed that none of the demographic variables was significantly correlated with any of the mental health measures, and none of the religious variables was significantly linked to depressive symptoms. On the other hand, higher scores on satisfaction with life were tied to higher scores on religious participation ($r = .24$, $p < .01$) and to higher scores on closeness to God ($r = .31$, $p < .01$), which in turn were related to lower scores on generalized anxiety ($r = −.17$, $p < .05$).

In the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis, all religious variables that were related to any of the mental health variables were entered. In the second step, all of the five RSS subscales were entered as one block, and the significance of change in R square was tested. When the results of the second step revealed that the change in R square was significant, then the beta weights associated with each subscale were examined for statistical significance. This process was repeated for each mental health measure. Table 4 summarizes the findings of these analyses.

The five RSS subscales combined accounted for unique variance in all of the mental health measures (R square change ranged from .06 to .29). Focusing on the specific mental health measures, higher scores on depressive symptoms were related to higher scores on Punitive Entities ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$) and Ultimate Meaning ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$) struggles. Higher scores on generalized anxiety were also associated with higher scores on Punitive Entities ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$) and Ultimate Meaning ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$) struggles. Greater levels of satisfaction with life were tied to lower scores on Interpersonal struggle ($\beta = −.21$, $p < .05$).

Table 5: Predicting religious/spiritual struggle from religious variables (β)

		RSS Subscales: Specific Types of Struggle				
	RSS (Full Scale)	Divine and Doubt	Punitive Entities	Inter-personal	Moral	Ultimate Meaning
Religious participation	−.02	−.07	−.08	−.17	−.00	−.10
Positive God image	−.16	−.14	−.00	−.12	−.17	−.24*
Negative God image	.19	.25**	−.05	.17	.15	.21
Closeness to God	−.10	−.06	−.16	−.12	−.04	−.12
Fundamentalism	−.34**	−.57**	−.04	−.17	−.14	−.29**
Universality	.26**	.20**	.21*	.02	.24**	.27**
R^2 change	.19**	.49**	.07*	.04	.06*	.17**

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

Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Predicting R/S Struggles from Religious Variables

In order to determine the demographic variables that needed to be controlled in the regression analyses, the correlations between the demographic variables and the RSS subscales were calculated. These analyses showed that none of the demographic variables was significantly correlated with any of the RSS subscales. Hence, the hierarchical regression analysis was composed of one step in which all the religious variables were entered as one block, and the significance of R square was tested. When the results revealed that the R square was significant, then the beta weights associated with each variable were examined for statistical significance. This process was repeated for each of the RSS subscales. Table 5 summarizes the findings of these analyses.

The religious variables combined accounted for unique variance in four of the five RSS subscales (R square ranged from .07 to .49). Focusing on the specific RSS subscales, Interpersonal struggles were not predicted by any of the religious variables. Higher scores on Punitive Entities were associated with higher scores on universality ($\beta = .21, p < .01$). Higher scores on Divine and Doubt struggles were tied to higher scores on negative God image ($\beta = .25, p < .01$), lower scores on fundamentalism ($\beta = -.57, p < .01$), and higher levels of universality ($\beta = .20, p < .01$). Higher scores on Moral struggle were related to higher scores on universality ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). Higher scores on Ultimate Meaning struggles were tied to lower scores on positive God image ($\beta = -.24, p < .05$) and fundamentalism ($\beta = -.29, p < .01$), and to higher scores on universality ($\beta = .27, p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The current investigation represents an in-depth exploration of the r/s struggle phenomenon within a Muslim sample. To assess r/s struggle, we used the newly developed RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014). This scale, in contrast to previously used r/s struggles scales, assesses a wider range of r/s and is composed of six theoretically-based and empirically-substantiated struggle subscales: Divine, Demonic, Interpersonal, Moral, Doubt, and Ultimate Meaning.

The first goal of the study was to test whether this factor structure of struggle is applicable to Muslims as well. A factor analysis revealed that a five-factor solution, rather than a six-factor solution, fits best the data gathered from this sample. Nonetheless, despite this difference in the number of factors, their contents and configurations are quite similar: three of the factors (i.e., Interpersonal, Moral, Ultimate Meaning) that emerged in this study were identical to the ones obtained in the RSS validation study; the Divine and Doubt factor was a combination of two factors (i.e., Divine, Doubt) obtained in the validation study; and the Punitive Entities factor

includes all the items composing the demonic struggle factor, as well as the punishing God item, which was part of the divine struggle factor in Exline and colleagues' (2014) study.

The two unique configurations of struggle (i.e., Divine and Doubt, Punitive Entities) that emerged in this study are interesting and deserve further scrutiny. Why do divine and doubt struggles go hand by hand? There are two possible explanations. First, doubts that people have about their religion are often associated with their concerns, questions, and negative emotions about God. In support of this point, the Divine and Doubt subscales have shown substantial intercorrelations (.58–.68) in RSS validation studies in Western samples as well (Exline et al. 2014). Second, both divine and doubt may represent unacceptable forms of struggle among Muslims. Islamic theology and Muslim religious institutions strongly discourage negative feelings (e.g., anger, disappointment) toward God, as well as experiencing doubts toward the divine and other central religious beliefs. As a result, Muslims may suppress these feelings and doubts, or simply be unwilling to admit them.

At first glance, the grouping together of demonic and punishing God appraisals seems counterintuitive. However, a closer examination reveals that they have two common denominators, one of a psychological and another of a theological nature. Psychologically, both demonic and punishing God appraisals involve being punished or attacked by supernatural entities, and hence the suggested term Punitive Entities. Theologically, in contrast to divine and doubt struggles, which represent unacceptable forms of struggle, the demonic and punishing God appraisals represent "acceptable" ones within Islam. One of God's names in the Qura'n is the "Punisher" and Muslims are encouraged to strongly fear the punishment of God. Similarly, Satan is depicted in the Qura'n as the reason behind any wrongdoing, difficulty, or conflict, and as always trying to seduce people and lead them astray. Thus, in comparison to individuals from other religious traditions such as Christianity, Muslims may feel greater theological "permission" to experience and report both demonic and punishing God struggles.

The second goal of the study was to provide prevalence data on the r/s struggles of Muslims. A notable percentage of participants (1.4 percent to 40.2 percent) indicated experiencing various r/s struggles "quite a bit" or "to a great deal." These data suggest that the phenomenon of r/s struggles might be prevalent among Muslim populations as is the case with other religious groups (Bryant and Astin 2008; Johnson and Hayes 2003; McConnell et al. 2006). It is worth noting that the types of struggles that were more frequently endorsed were Punitive Entities and Ultimate Meaning, whereas the less frequently endorsed type was Divine and Doubt. It seems that in general this differential prevalence fits the relative theological acceptability of the different types of struggle. This explanation is supported by some of our preliminary, unpublished findings suggesting that Muslims tend to view negative feelings toward God as morally wrong.

The third main aim of this study was to test five religious variables as potential predictors of r/s struggles: religious participation, positive/negative image of God, closeness to God, fundamentalism, and universality. We hypothesized that religious participation, positive God image, and closeness to God would be related to lower levels of r/s struggle, while negative God image would be related to greater levels of r/s struggle (H1). This hypothesis was partially confirmed. Though correlational analyses revealed many connections in the expected direction, regression analyses demonstrated two robust links: a positive link between negative God image and Divine and Doubt struggle, and a negative one between positive God image and Ultimate Meaning struggle. These findings are consistent with Pargament's (1997) assertion that r/s struggles are more likely to grow out of a more limited religious orienting system.

Contrary to what was expected, the study revealed no associations between religious participation and any of the RSS factors. One possible explanation for this surprising finding is that rituals and ceremonies may be "part and parcel" of life among Muslim participants; that is, habitual practices that are regularly performed without question or tension. In contrast, the individual's relationship with the supernatural may be more dynamic and "alive," providing comfort and solace at times but eliciting questions and doubt at other times. Another possible

explanation for the lack of connection between r/s struggles (broadly speaking) and religious participation is that such an association might be moderated by other variables, such as religious orientation (Allport and Ross 1967; Ryan, Rigby, and King 1993). For participants who are intrinsically motivated, religious participation may be predictive of lower r/s struggles while for those who are motivated by social pressure or sense of guilt (i.e., extrinsically motivated) religious participation may be predictive of higher r/s struggles. Perhaps these two competing tendencies offset each other, resulting in no association between religious participation and r/s struggles.

This study also explored whether fundamentalism and universality would predict higher or lower levels of r/s struggles. The findings that emerged were intriguing. Fundamentalism was consistently and negatively linked to different types of struggle, while the opposite was true for universality. On the face of it, these results lend support to the idea that higher levels of fundamentalism and lower levels of universality reflect a stronger ROS and hence constitute protective factors from r/s struggle. This combination may strengthen the ROS by helping religious people to develop a greater commitment to their faith. This finding challenges the notion that fundamentalism and low levels of universality are entirely problematic. Along similar lines, other studies have linked fundamentalism to greater optimism and happiness (Sethi and Seligman 1993) and universality to poorer religious and existential well-being (Beck and Jessup 2004).

And yet, it is important to keep in mind that previous studies have established robust links between fundamentalism and prejudice (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Laythe, Finkel, and Kirkpatrick 2001), and links between universality and an open, quest-oriented approach to religious belief (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993; Beck and Jessup 2004). Taken as a whole, this pattern of findings suggests that we think of fundamentalism as a double-edged sword: on one hand, it might be a source of intolerance and prejudice, while on the other hand, it could be a shield from r/s struggles and conflicts and a source of personal comfort (for further discussion regarding the bright and dark sides of fundamentalism, see Hood, Hill, and Williamson 2005). Conversely, higher levels of universality may be accompanied by greater openness to religious and cultural diversity, yet be purchased at the price of greater internal conflict and less peace of mind.

The fourth and final goal of the study was to explore the psychological implications of r/s struggles among an Israeli-Palestinian, Muslim sample. We hypothesized that higher levels of all types of r/s struggle would be linked to greater levels of depressive symptoms and generalized anxiety, and to lower levels of satisfaction with life (H2). This hypothesis was largely confirmed. Correlational analysis revealed that all types of religious struggles were positively associated with depressive symptoms and generalized anxiety, whereas Interpersonal and Ultimate Meaning struggles were negatively linked to satisfaction with life. Overall, these findings are consistent with those obtained from Muslim (e.g., Abu-Raiya et al. 2008; Abu-Raiya, Pargament, and Mahoney 2011; Aflakseir and Coleman 2009), and non-Muslim samples (e.g., Exline 2013; McConnell et al. 2006; Philips et al. 2012; Rosmarin et al. 2009) in which r/s struggles were assessed in the context of coping with specific life stressors. They are also consistent with the initial findings generated by the RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014), and findings generated from the Islamic Religious Struggle subscale (Abu-Raiya et al. 2008; Ghorbani et al. 2013), which have assessed a wide array of r/s struggles.

Though correlational analyses revealed that the various types of r/s struggles and mental health are generally linked to each other, hierarchal regression analyses presented a more nuanced picture of these links. After controlling for religious variables, both depressive symptoms and generalized anxiety were predicted by Punitive Entities and Ultimate Meaning struggles, while satisfaction with life was predicted by Interpersonal struggle only. Hence, though the various types of r/s struggles might be associated with poorer mental health of Muslims, it seems that Punitive Entities, Ultimate Meaning, and Interpersonal struggles are more salient in this domain.

Nuanced as the negative links between r/s struggles and mental health among Muslims may be, an important question centers on how to explain these links. There are two sets of possible

explanations: the reductionstic and the nonreductionstic (Abu-Raiya and Pargament 2015). The basic idea behind the reductionstic explanation is that the links between r/s struggles and well-being are not direct, but rather mediated by nonspiritual variables. According to this line of thinking, r/s struggles lead to some nonspiritual consequences (e.g., anger, disconnection from one's religious community) and those nonspiritual elements of life eventually lead to negative outcomes. In contrast, according to the nonreductionstic explanation, r/s struggles lead to negative outcomes because they reflect a shaken system of ultimate beliefs and practices and a threat to one's deepest values, commitments, and worldview. From this latter perspective, it is the spiritual character of the struggle that is most directly responsible for its effects on mental health.

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of this study have some important implications for theory, research, and practice. The two unique configurations of r/s struggle (i.e., Divine and Doubt, Punitive Entities) emerged in this study raise questions regarding the most meaningful conceptual framework on which we should differentiate between the different types of r/s struggles among Muslims. It could be that, besides the content of each type of struggle, other issues such as theological and social acceptability should be taken into account. Future research should test alternative conceptual frameworks to determine the one that best reflects the different manifestations of r/s struggles among Muslims. And the finding that fundamentalism is associated with lower levels of struggle among Muslims, whereas universality is associated with higher level of struggles, points to the need for a more nuanced evaluation of fundamentalism and universality, respectively. Future research should further distinguish between the social/psychological benefits and costs of these two phenomena among Muslims.

The findings of this investigation have an important practical implication. Given the demonstrated links between r/s struggles and indices of mental health, it would be inappropriate to overlook these struggles in any form of psychological treatment designed for Muslim populations. The findings point to the need to assess for the presence of r/s struggles once indications of their existence have been manifested. It is important also to look at r/s struggles in conjunction with the religious orienting system of the client. Such a system might be composed of protective factors (e.g., positive God image, fundamentalism) and risk factors (e.g., negative God image, universality) of r/s struggles. Efforts should be made to help people anticipate, make sense of, and sort through their struggles. This recommendation is supported by some analyses based on Christian samples suggesting that individuals who are unable to resolve their struggles over time are at greater risk of poorer mental and physical health, while people who experience these struggles temporarily do not face the same risk (Exline 2013; Pargament et al. 2001).

Given the rarity of empirical studies among Muslim populations on the predictors and implications of r/s struggles, this study should still be considered exploratory and its results should be considered with caution. In addition, the results should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. First, the results of the present investigation are cross-sectional and consequently do not allow causal inferences. For example, higher fundamentalism and lower universality might be the cause as well as the effect of greater levels of r/s struggles. Moreover, some undetermined variable might have produced the connections among these measures, and consequently, absolutely no causal relationship might exist at all among them. The same can be said about the links between r/s struggles and mental health. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the causal connection between r/s struggles, religious variables, and mental health indicators. Second, the sample is unique in its geopolitical context, and consisted of college students, mostly female. These facts limit the generalizability of the findings to the larger Muslim population. Future studies should attempt to replicate and generalize these findings to more diverse samples. Third, the study utilized a survey format and its findings were based on self-report data.

Although the instruments used have good psychometric properties, self-report measures can be subject to bias. Future studies should explore the use of laboratory-based behavioral tasks and physiological measures. Finally, this study examined a limited set of outcome measures and potential predictors, and did not test potential moderators/mediators between r/s struggles and well-being. To shed further light on the r/s struggle phenomenon, future research should test further indices of health and well-being, further potential predictors, and test for potential moderators/mediators, both secular and spiritual.

Despite these limitations, this study represents a promising further step in understanding the prevalence, implications, and predictors of r/s struggles among Muslims. These findings suggest that the RSS Scale (Exline et al. 2014) is a potentially useful tool for studying r/s struggles among Muslim populations. The study's findings also suggest that r/s struggles: (1) are prevalent among Muslims; (2) can be predicted by religious variables; and (3) have significant positive links with undesirable mental health indicators (i.e., anxiety, depression), and negative links with a desirable mental health indicator (i.e., life satisfaction).

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