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Personality, Identity, and American Protestant Fundamentalism: What are the Connections?

Personality, Identity, and American Protestant Fundamentalism: What are the Connections?

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Introduction

The main intent of the study was to link personality and identity development with protestant fundamentalism as a means of dealing with ambiguity and making important life choices. Previous findings indicate that identity processes mediate between personality variables and religiosity (Duriez, et al., 2008; Duriez & Soenens, 2006) and fundamentalism (Bartoszuk & Deal, 2016).

Methods

Participants: Data was collected at two universities in the U.S. (upper Midwest and Southeast). 440 students (out of 808) identified as protestants (54%), the age range was between 18 and 29 with a mean age of 19.97, the majority of students was female (79%), and White (87.2%, with 6.8% Black, 1.1% Hispanic, 1.8 % American Indian, and 0.7% Asian).

Instruments:

Personality, (IPIP), (Oregon Research Institute, n.d.). 50-items on a 5-point Likert Scale, including 5 subscales: Neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

Dimensions of Identity Development Scale, (DIDS), (Luyckx, et al., 2008): 25 items on a 5-point Likert Scale, including 5 subscales: Commitment making, exploration in breadth, ruminative exploration, identification with commitment, and exploration in depth.

North American Protestant Fundamentalism Scale, (NAPFS), (Deal and Bartoszuk, 2014): 24 items on a 5-point Likert Scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The scale includes four subscales: (1) inerrancy of scripture (i.e., “The Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God”), (2) evangelism (i.e., “Christians should witness to others, so that they can be saved”), (3) premillennialism (i.e., “The Bible gives us important clues about the future and the end of time”), and (4) separatism (i.e., Christians should be in the world, but not of it”).

Results and Discussion:

Four stepwise regression models were used with the following independent variables [step 1 (age, sex, student status, university), step 2 (personality variables), step 3 (identity process) to predict fundamentalism (inerrancy, evangelism, premillennialism, and separatism)].

Stepwise Regression Predicting Fundamentalism with Demographics, Personality, and Identity Processes

	Inerrancy p	Evangelicalism p	Premillennialism p	Separatism P
Age	NS	NS	NS	NS
Gender	NS	NS	NS	NS
Year	-0.04	-0.05	NS	-0.04
School	0.32	0.37	0.34	0.34
Neuroticism	-0.02	-0.01	NS	-0.02
Extraversion	NS	NS	NS	-0.01
Openness	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.02
Agreeableness	0.02	0.03	0.03	NS
Conscientiousness	NS	NS	NS	NS
Commit/making	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.03
Exploration/broad	NS	NS	NS	NS
Ruminative	NS	NS	0.02	0.02
Ident w/commit	NS	NS	NS	0.03
Exploration/Depth	NS	0.04	0.05	0.05
R ² Change				
R ² Step 1	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.08
R ² Step 2	0.14	0.15	0.13	0.08
R ² Step 3	0.12	0.30	0.15	0.16
ADJ R ²	0.31	0.30	0.32	0.30

Step 1: Findings revealed that higher status students (such as juniors and seniors) scored lower on inerrancy, evangelism, and separatism compared to lower status students (such as freshmen and sophomores). Students attending the Southeastern university scored higher on all four fundamentalism subscales compared with students from the upper Midwest.

Step 2: Students with increased scores on neuroticism scored lower on inerrancy, evangelism, and separatism; higher scores on extraversion were associated with less separatism; higher scores on openness revealed less fundamentalism on all four subscales; finally, students with higher scores on agreeableness scored higher on inerrancy, evangelism, and premillennialism.

Step 3: Students with increased scores in commitment making also had higher scores on all four fundamentalism scales; higher scores in ruminative exploration were associated with higher scores on premillennialism and separatism; higher scores on identification with commitment were related to separatism; and finally, higher scores on exploration in depth were associated with evangelicalism, premillennialism, and separatism.

These independent variables explained about 30% of the variance for each of the regression models predicting inerrancy, evangelism, premillennialism, and separatism.

