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Perceiving Sacredness in Life: Correlates and Predictors*

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Summary

Building on research demonstrating relationships between well being and perceptions of aspects of life as sacred, this study describes the rationale for and development of a scale measuring perceiving sacredness in life. It then explores associations between perceptions of sacredness in life and these four domains: *religious/spiritual* (intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity, quest, mysticism, religious/spiritual history, worship attendance, frequency of prayer, importance of religion/spirituality), *personal* (purpose in life, commitment to empiricism, narcissism, self esteem, relational attachment), *social* (community service attitude and helping, social support, imagination tutoring), and *situational* (enjoyment and frequency of everyday pleasant events, impact of negative events, positive childhood recollections). Participants ($n = 113$) responded to a mailing to a national random sample within the United States, completing 16 scales pertaining to the religious/spiritual, personal, social, and situational domains. While many variables were correlated with perceiving sacredness in life, there were three overall predictors: intrinsic religiosity, mysticism, and community service attitude.

Keywords

Sacredness; sacred; well-being; intrinsic religious orientation; extrinsic religious orientation; religious quest; mysticism; worship attendance; prayer; spirituality; purpose in life; narcissism; self esteem; attachment; community service attitude

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Perceiving Sacredness in Life: Correlates and Predictors

As a growing body of empirical research demonstrates, people find it meaningful to describe aspects of their life as sacred, a term used to designate something as extraordinary, set apart for a special purpose or manifesting spiritual qualities, meanings, or significance (Pargament, 1997; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). The manifestation of the sacred in life is, as Pargament (1997) notes, spoken of in the scriptures of all the world's major religious traditions, and the experience of this manifestation has been studied on a theoretical level by classical scholars of religion such as Otto (1923) and Eliade (1958, 1959, 1973). As psychologists of religion, Pargament and Mahoney (Pargament, 1997; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002) have called attention to the process in which aspects of ordinary life are experienced as sacred, taking on extraordinary qualities and spiritual significance. Virtually any aspect of life (objects, ideals, actions, etc.) can be experienced as sacred, and this process has a powerful impact on people's lives. Often the results of perceiving sacredness in aspects of life are constructive, enabling people to gain increased meaning and help from these dimensions of their lives (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002). However, it may also lead to negative results, as when destructive leaders are sanctified or wars are waged over objects held as sacred, or when there is the perception that something sacred has been violated (Jones, 2002; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Pargament et al., 2005).

Several empirical studies have looked at perceiving sacredness in various activities of people's everyday lives, a process which Pargament and Mahoney (2005) call sanctification of various aspects of life. Identifying aspects of life, like marriage, parenting roles, and marital sexual intercourse as sacred is often associated with positive outcomes, such as providing a sense of greater fulfillment and an investment in preserving such aspects of life (Mahoney et al., 1999; Swank et al., 2000; Murray-Swank et al., 2005). In a study of the extent to which personal strivings (goals which people pursue in daily life) were perceived as sacred, Mahoney (Mahoney et al., 2005) found that people were more likely to perceive strivings as sacred if such strivings were associated with family relationships, religious or spiritual issues, altruistic activities, and existential concerns. The more people perceived their strivings as sacred, the more likely they were to be psychologically invested in them. Perceiving strivings as sacred was also associated with an increased sense of life purpose, meaning, and joy, but not, interestingly enough, with less psychological and physical health problems. In a study of the extent to which healthcare professionals working with elderly people perceived their work

as sacred and God as present in their work, Grant (2004) demonstrated that a greater sense of the presence of God in work and a greater belief in work as sacred were positively associated with both stress-related growth and positive religious outcomes (increased spirituality, closeness with God, and relationship with faith tradition).

One of the purposes of this study was to develop and test a scale measuring the extent to which people perceived sacredness in life. The authors conjectured that such a scale could be particularly useful with people who may not identify themselves as overtly religious, or who might reject religious and, in particular, theistic language in describing their spiritual lives, but whose spiritual lives might include a perception of sacredness in life. For example, in a study of women who had had abortions, Geoghegan (2000) found a correlation between Christian orthodoxy (as measured by the Christian Orthodoxy Scale [Fullerton & Hunsberger, 1982]) and religious problem solving styles (as measured by Pargament et al., 1988) among the Christian women in her sample. The correlations between orthodoxy of belief and religious problem solving styles yielded a negative and statistically significant correlation between orthodoxy and the self-directing religious problem-solving style ($-.51, p < .001$). Positive and statistically significant correlations were obtained between orthodoxy and the deferring religious problem solving style ($.49, p < .001$) and collaborative style ($.39, p < .001$). Geoghegan and Doehring (2002) used these findings to reflect upon the choices that women face in using patriarchal religious traditions to understand their abortions. Do they draw upon traditional patriarchal beliefs about God and creation? Or do they reconstruct these traditions? Those adopting a self-directing style of religious problem solving will likely reconstruct their religious traditions; these self-directing women scored significantly lower on the orthodoxy of belief scale. For these women, a scale measuring the extent to which they perceive sacredness in life might have been more meaningful than scales which use religious and in particular theistic terms to describe their spiritual lives.

Two doctoral dissertations using the scale (Perceiving Sacredness in Life) developed by the authors demonstrated significant correlations in samples where an overtly religious scale was not useful. In a longitudinal study of teenagers who participated in a spiritually-oriented but not overtly religious substance abuse prevention program, Gould (2004) found that at the end of the week-long program, there were moderate increases in participants' perception of sacredness in life. These increases were maintained six months later. Drawing upon people from a broad diversity of religious traditions, Clarke (2004) found that perceiving sacredness in life correlated modestly with personal

creativity, a relationship that was even stronger for those with a panentheistic view of God and for women.

As these studies demonstrate, people do perceive various aspects of their life as sacred, and perceiving sacredness has significant associations with health and well being. Though we know something about the associations between perceiving sacredness and various aspects of life, as yet we do not understand how perceptions of sacredness develop. In theory, such perceptions are likely related to religious/spiritual formation and practices, aspects of personality, aspects of one's social life, and situational factors. Building on this multi-level contextual approach, the authors hypothesized that perceiving sacredness in life would be correlated with variables in four domains: religious/spiritual, personal, social, and situational.

In terms of the religious domain, we hypothesized that perceiving sacredness in life would be correlated with *intrinsic religiosity*, speculating that the more one perceived life as sacred, the more likely one would be engaged in a process of making one's religion/spirituality intrinsically meaningful. We also theorized that *having mystical experiences* would correlate with perceiving life as sacred. We speculated that having the experience of self transcendence that characterizes mystical experiences would make one more likely to be able to look beyond the horizons of one's own life and perceive a sacred quality in life. We speculated that experiencing one's *religion as a quest* would make one more open to perceiving all of life as sacred. Finally, we wondered if having a childhood in which one's family participated in religious or spiritual practices, celebrated religious holidays, and sought out religious professionals would make people more likely, in their adult lives, to see life as sacred. In other words, *being acculturated in a religious or spiritual tradition* would go hand in hand with heightened beliefs that all of life is sacred. We also included measures of *worship attendance* and *frequency of prayer*, and *rating religion or spirituality as important*, because these global measures of religiosity often are correlated with measures that focus on a particular aspect of religiosity or spirituality, like perceiving life as sacred.

In terms of the personal domain, we hypothesized that perceiving sacredness in life would be correlated positively with *self esteem*, because having a healthy sense of one's own value would make one more open to an awareness of life as sacred. Building on research on what happens when people perceive their strivings as sacred (Mahoney et al., 2005), we speculated that *feeling a sense of purpose in life* would make one more likely to see life as sacred. We speculated that relational health, measured in terms of secure *relational attachments*, would be part of a trusting attitude that would be positively correlated

with perceiving life as sacred. We hypothesized that as *narcissism*, and *fearful, dismissing, or preoccupied relational attachments* increased, one would be less likely to look beyond one's own needs and one's insecure relational attachments to experience a sense of life as sacred. In other words, one's basic sense of trust in oneself and others would correlate with perceiving life as sacred. We further speculated that an intellectual orientation which we described as *a commitment to empiricism* would make one less likely to be open to perceiving life as sacred.

In terms of the social domain, we hypothesized that perceiving sacredness in life would be positively correlated with having *an attitude that supports community service*, as well as with *being involved in social and community helping*. Valuing community service, as well as reaching out to others would be related to perceiving life as sacred. We also hypothesized that experiencing *social support*, with its sense of being embedded in a relational matrix would be correlated with perceiving all of life as sacred. We hypothesized that perceiving life as sacred would also be correlated with having childhood experiences that encouraged *a rich and active imagination*, allowing one to enliven mundane and seemingly banal events with a sense of sacred possibilities.

We hypothesized that in the situational domain of life, factors that correlated positively with perceiving sacredness in life would be *enjoyment and frequency of everyday positive events*, and *positive childhood recollections*. We speculated that the more one could experience and enjoy everyday events, and the larger one's repertoire of positive memories, the more one would apprehend life as sacred. We also hypothesized that *the impact of negative events* would be correlated negatively with perceiving sacredness in life; we speculated that the more one experienced the impact of overwhelming negative life events in one's daily life, the less one would be able to perceive life as sacred.

Our intent in this exploratory study was to test whether perceiving sacredness in life would be a significant correlate with many aspects of people's lives: their religious/spiritual, personal, social, and situational lives.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The sample was solicited from a national random sample of 1,000 residents in the United States, who were sent letters about the research project. Of those who received the letters, one hundred and seventy-five people returned

postcards indicating interest in completing the survey. Surveys were mailed to them, and 113 surveys were returned. The sample was 60% male and 40% female and ranged in age from 23 to 90 years old, with a mean age of 56.1 years ($SD = 15.7$). It was predominantly Euro-American (88%) and well-educated (24% had some college education and 53% had completed college, professional, or graduate school; in the 2003 United States census, 27% of the population had completed a bachelor's degree). In terms of religious affiliation, 60% identified as Protestant, 16% as Roman Catholic, 5% as Jewish, 14% as none, and the remaining were New Age, Unitarian Universalist, Mormon, or Buddhist.

Measures

The Perceiving Sacredness in Life Scale was developed initially through discussions in a research group consisting of faculty and doctoral students at Boston University in the Counseling Psychology and Religion program. Members of the research group interviewed 13 individuals whom they had identified as having a high perception of sacredness in life as well as a group of hospital chaplains, and did a thematic analysis of these people's descriptions of sacredness in life. This qualitative study, along with ongoing group discussions, generated 48 statements, both theistic and nontheistic, about perceiving sacredness in life. We then combined statements that were similar, eliminated items that were too specific to any particular religious tradition, and modified items to make them more experiential and less cognitive. This 37-item scale was piloted with a sample of 23 people (12 men and 11 women) from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, occupations, and income and educational levels, and with an age range of 22 to 68. In response to feedback from participants of the pilot study, we further modified the scale by shortening it, changing the response category from an intensity rating to a frequency rating, and making the language more inclusive of people from different religious backgrounds. Finally, we added a section at the beginning of the scale that identified six statements about God: theistic, deistic, pantheistic or panentheistic, agnostic, atheistic, and none of the above. We conjectured that people would be more likely to interpret items on the scale within the framework of their own beliefs after they first endorsed a statement describing their basic beliefs. Our final version consisted of 28 items, 14 theistic and 14 nontheistic (see Appendix). These were divided equally (with one exception) into the following nine categories: perceiving sacredness in life in general, nature and creation, time,

everyday life, the journey of life, people in general, relationships with people, the self, and qualities or aspects of life.

The following scales were used to measure the religious domain. The intrinsic subscale (I) of the Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Motivation Scale (Gorsuch et al., 1989, 1998) measures genuine commitment to faith, and the extent to which people have made their faith personally meaningful. The extrinsic subscale (E) assesses whether religion has extrinsic value for the individual adherent, and is a means to some end (i.e., used for social benefits). The Quest Scale (Batson et al., 1991) has twelve items that measure the degree to which an individual's religion involves an open-ended, searching quality, often prompted by existential questions. Twelve of the twenty items from the Extrovertive and Introvertive subscales of The Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975) were used to measure the extent to which people have had profound experiences associated with a sense of timelessness, ineffability, oneness with the universe, or "nothingness." The third subscale of The Mysticism Scale, Religious Interpretation, was eliminated because its similarity to the Perceiving Sacredness in Life Scale could confound our results. These instruments all have established construct validity and reliability; alphas range from .65 to .83, indicating that all these scales have reasonable to strong internal consistency. In addition, The Religious/Spiritual History Assessment was developed by Doehring for this research project. It is an 18-item scale that assesses people's exposure to religious or spiritual ideas and practices in their childhood and teenaged years in terms of participation in religious schools, worship events, relationships with people who were experienced as deeply religious/spiritual, and the use of religious/spiritual meanings to make sense of life. For example, the scale asked questions like the following: In a crisis did your family use religious/spiritual practices or ideas (e.g., talking about God or a higher power) to help them deal with the crisis?

The following scales were used to assess the personal dimension. The Purpose in Life Scale and the Existential Vacuum Scale from The Life Attitude Profile (Reker, 1981) (16 items total) measure the extent to which people experience a sense of meaning and purpose in life. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory: Alternate Form (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1981) is a 40-item forced choice measure that assesses the extent of narcissism as a personality trait. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) has 10 items measuring feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance. The Relationship Questionnaire and Self-Report Attachment Style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) consists of four descriptions of attachment styles: secure, dismissing (being

comfortable without close relationships), preoccupied (being uncomfortable without close relationships and worrying about this) and fearful. Each description is ranked according to how closely it fits one's self-description. Validity had been demonstrated for all these scales through peer reports and correlations with similar measures. Reliability has also been confirmed; scores, using various methods of analysis, have ranged from .72 to .95. Finally, The Commitment to Empiricism Scale (developed by Hammer for this research project) is a five-item scale that assesses whether people have a positivist attitude toward life, with statements such as "seeing is believing" and "science will be able to answer the important questions of life."

Various aspects of the social dimensions of life were assessed using the following scales. Two subscales from the Community Service Attitude Scale (Harris Shiarella et al., 2000) were used to measure sense of connectedness with and empathy for people in the community. The List of Helping Activities (Amato, 1985, 1990) was adapted to make a 15-item scale of various helping behaviors and measures social responsibility. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item scale that measures sense of belonging and perceiving a sense of support from family and friends; one additional item on community was added. Construct validity is supported for all of these scales, and reliability is strong; alphas have ranged from .75 to .93. The Imagination Tutoring Scale (developed by Clarke for this research project) measures the extent to which people recall being raised in an environment that encouraged imagination, and the degree to which they have retained that outlook on life (for example, "My parents, grandparents, and/or other elders told me stories that involved faith, acts of compassion, mysterious wonder, or awesome happenings in nature").

The scales used to assess situational dimensions of life were as follows. The Pleasant Events Schedule (PES) (MacPhillamy & Lewinsohn, 1982) is a 49-item scale of pleasant events (26 of which were employed in this study) that are rated in two ways: how frequently they have occurred in the past month and how much enjoyment was derived from each event. Validity and reliability have been demonstrated, and internal consistency is strong ($\alpha = .96$ for frequency of pleasurable events and $.98$ for enjoyability). A list of life stressors was drawn from The Health and Daily Living Form (Moos, Cronkite, & Finney, 1992) and respondents were asked to check which of these events they had experienced. Respondents were also asked to identify the most serious negative life event they had experienced. Four items from The Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979), which has established validity and reliability, were used to measure whether this event still has a traumatic impact,

in the form of intrusive thoughts or avoidant behaviors. In addition, five questions, devised for this research project, were asked about the extent to which respondents felt they had control over the event, derived a deeper meaning from it or considered it helpful or a burden (for example, "Did this event allow you to derive deeper meaning from and about your life?"). The Positive Childhood Recollections Scale was developed by Hayes and Hughes for this research project. It consists of 12 items about positive and negative childhood experiences, like having a best friend, having difficulty fitting in at school, and other similar negative and positive events. A demographic questionnaire was included.

Results

The coefficient alpha for the Perceiving Sacredness in Life Scale was .98, showing very high internal consistency reliability. The correlation coefficient between theistic and nontheistic statements was .89 ($p < .001$), indicating that this sample did not differentiate between these two sets of items.

In terms of construct validity, the coefficient alpha demonstrates that the scale is measuring a single construct. Data relevant to convergent validity was obtained by relating the Perceiving Sacredness in Life Scale (PSL) to the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSE) (Underwood, 1999; Underwood & Teresi, 2002), a scale with established reliability and validity which was developed to "assess aspects of day-to-day spiritual experience of an ordinary person" (Underwood, 1999, p. 11). Given that it measures something similar to the PSL, we expected that if our scale had validity it would be strongly correlated with the DSE. Our data confirmed this hypothesis ($r = .83, p < .001$).

Though closely related, these two scales measure two distinct dimensions of spiritual or religious experience and can be distinguished from each other in the following ways. First, the PSL is more accessible to people from a variety of religious backgrounds and theological beliefs. For instance, it gives participants the opportunity to circle one of six statements about God. The items of the DSE draw upon theistic and Western understandings of the spiritual to a greater extent than the PSL. Second, the DSE generally references personal connectedness with God and the PSL is more concerned with seeing sacredness manifested in a variety of domains of life. Third, the DSE tends to describe positive aspects of religious or spiritual experiences. The PSL, in contrast, generally does not identify the experience of sacredness either positively or negatively. Finally, correlation coefficients of the PSL and of the DSE with the

religious, personal, social, and situational factors that we studied are not the same, and, in some cases, are quite different.

Regarding the six statements about God, 42% (n = 47) endorsed the statement describing God in theistic terms, 35% (n = 40) the panentheistic description, 12% (n = 14) endorsed the deistic description of God, and 8% (n = 9) the agnostic statement. No one endorsed the atheist belief statement or selected "None of the above." Three participants did not select any statement.

Table 1 presents the correlations between perceiving sacredness in life and all of the variables in each domain. Table 2 presents the predictors, and Table 3 the overall predictors.

Discussion

All of the religious variables measured in this study, except for Quest, had significant positive correlations with perceiving sacredness in life. The largest correlation was with the measure of intrinsic religiosity, demonstrating that the more a person's religion is personally meaningful, the more he or she is likely to perceive sacredness in life. Religious involvement, or a sense of spirituality in general, also correlates strongly with perceiving sacredness in life. Frequency of prayer and worship attendance and the felt importance of religion or spirituality have robust correlations with perceiving sacredness in life. Even going to church or other places of worship for extrinsic reasons, for example, to make friends and see people one knows, is modestly related to perceiving life as more sacred. Being raised in a religious or spiritual family culture goes hand in hand with perceiving sacredness in life in adulthood. Finally, the frequency of personal mystical experiences had a strong moderate correlation with perceiving sacredness in life, indicating that the more a person experiences a sense of transcendence and oneness with creation, the more likely he or she is to experience life as having extraordinary quality or special purpose. In sum, it appears that many aspects of religiousness or spirituality are associated with experiencing sacredness, but the more that this religiosity can be made personally meaningful, so that it plays an integral role in one's inner and outer life, the more one is likely to perceive sacredness in life.

It is worth noting that those who chose to participate in this study were all quite religious in terms of their frequency of worship attendance and prayer. Given this religiosity, it is not surprising that there was no significant difference between their endorsement of theistic and nontheistic items on the Perceiving Sacredness in Life scale. Given that one of the purposes of the study

Table 1. Relationships Among Perceiving Sacredness and the Religious/Spiritual, Personal, Social, and Situational Variables

	Correlations with Perceiving Sacredness in Life		
	Total	Theistic	Nontheistic
Religious/Spiritual Variables			
Intrinsic Religiosity	.72***	.76***	.64***
Mysticism	.39***	.33***	.43***
Religious/Spiritual History	.35***	.35***	.34**
Extrinsic Religiosity	.22*	.20*	.23*
Quest	-.07	-.12	-.01
Frequency of Worship Attendance And Prayer	.71**		
Importance of Religion/Spirituality	.64***		
Personal Variables			
Purpose in Life	.42***	.42***	.39***
Commitment to Empiricism	-.33***	-.35***	-.30**
Narcissism	-.31**	-.35***	-.25**
Self Esteem	.30**	.30**	.28**
Secure Attachment	.26**	.23*	.28**
Fearful Attachment	-.21*	-.22*	-.20*
Dismissing Attachment	-.21*	-.23*	-.18
Preoccupied Attachment	-.21*	-.22*	-.20**
Social Variables			
Community Service Attitude	.45***	.40***	.47***
Social and Community Helping	.28**	.25**	.29**
Social Support	.16	.18	.13
Tutoring the Imagination	.05	.01	.1
Situational Variables			
Enjoyment of Everyday Pleasant Events	.25**	.20*	.29**
Frequency of Everyday Pleasant Events	.20*	.18	.22*
Impact of the Most Negative Event	-.11	-.12	-.10
Positive Childhood Recollections	-.00	-.01	.00

n = 113

*** p < .001

** p < .01

* p < .05

Table 2. Religious/Spiritual, Personal, Social, and Situational Predictors of Perceiving Sacredness in Life

Religious/Spiritual Predictors	Perceiving Sacredness in Life	
	Standardized Beta	
Intrinsic Religiosity	.60***	
Mysticism	.33***	
Religious/Spiritual History	.12	
Extrinsic Religiosity	.11	
Quest	-.07	
Personal Predictors		
Purpose in Life	.39**	
Commitment to Empiricism	-.23**	
Narcissism	-.16	
Self Esteem	.02	
Secure Attachment	.02	
Fearful Attachment	-.11	
Dismissing Attachment	.08	
Preoccupied Attachment	.06	
Social Predictors		
Community Service Attitude	.45***	
Social and Community Helping	.01	
Social Support	.06	
Tutoring the Imagination	-.10	
Situational Predictors		
Enjoyment of Everyday Pleasant Events	.15	
Frequency of Everyday Pleasant Events	.09	
Impact of the Most Negative Event	-.05	
Positive Childhood Recollections	-.04	

n = 113

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Table 3. Overall Predictors of Perceiving Sacredness in Life

Overall Predictors	Perceiving Sacredness in Life	
	Total	
Intrinsic Religiosity	.63***	
Mysticism	.31***	
Community Service Attitude	.16*	

n = 113

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

was to see if the scale could be meaningful for people who identified themselves as spiritual and not religious, the study was not able to test this hypothesis. Future research using the scale could use the scale with people who were more likely to identify themselves as spiritual but not religious.

Turning to the personal variables assessed, a strong correlation was observed between the sense of having a purpose in life and perceiving sacredness in life. Moderate correlations were also evidenced with several of the other personal variables. The more a person is committed to empiricism, and adopts a positivist attitude toward life, the less likely it is that this person will perceive life as having extraordinary qualities. The more narcissistic or absorbed a person is in his or her self, the less likely he or she will perceive life as special or extraordinary. This finding implies that the more a person is able to "forget about" his or her self, and transcend the horizons of his or her own world, the more he or she will be able to see life as sacred. In contrast to being narcissistically absorbed, self-esteem is positively related to experiencing sacredness; having a positive sense of self may allow persons to look beyond themselves, and see special or blessed qualities in the life around them. In addition, the more secure a person's relational attachments to others, and the less a person experiences attachments to others that are fearful or dismissing, the more a person will see life as sacred. These findings on the personal dimensions taken together, create a portrait of people who perceive life as sacred: they have a sense of purpose in their lives, have high self esteem, are not narcissistic, and have secure attachments to others.

Relationships between perceiving sacredness and the social variables indicate that the more people have a sense of responsibility for helping others in

need and contributing to the community, the more they will perceive life as sacred. An awareness of the needs of others, along with a commitment to help is linked with the ability to look beyond one's self and see sacredness in life. Similarly, those who do extend themselves and help families, friends, and people in the community are more likely to perceive a sense of the sacred in life.

In terms of relationships between perceiving sacredness and the situational variables, significant correlations were found with the frequency and enjoyment of pleasant events. Being able to enjoy pleasant events suggests the ability to be present in the moment, without ruminating on past events or worrying about future events. The fact that frequency of everyday pleasant events is not as highly correlated with perceiving sacredness in life as is actually enjoying these events, suggests that it is the depth of enjoyment more than the frequency of everyday pleasant events that is related to perceiving sacredness in life.

None of the demographic variables indicated differences in perceiving sacredness in life except for age, which had a small to moderate correlation with perceiving the sacredness in life (correlation coefficient of .25, $p < .01$). Given that many studies in psychology of religion find that religiosity is correlated with age, it is not surprising that in this sample, the older a person was, the more he or she perceived sacredness in life.

Three factors were overall predictors: intrinsic religiosity, mysticism, and community service attitude. In terms of intrinsic religiosity, people are not simply accepting beliefs as generic truths. Having an intrinsic religiosity means that people have developed personally meaningful religious symbols that mark the boundary between the known and the unknown. When they have this kind of religious faith or spirituality, we can predict that they will perceive sacredness in life; that is, they will be open to the experience of the unknown, the sacred, and the unconditioned infinite simultaneously with the awareness of their own finitude.

Mystical experiences are a separate predictor of experiencing the sacredness in life. Hood (1975), who developed the scale to measure the frequency of mystical experiences, also uses the imagery of "boundary situations" to describe events that cause people to experience that boundary between the known and the unknown. He has empirically demonstrated a correlation between experiencing boundary situations and mystical experiences. Examples of this connection are the moments reported by people in the days following a profound loss when they experience a sense of deep connection with creation and the creator (if their faith is theistic) and a sense of peacefulness amidst the chaos of

acute grief. It is not surprising that mysticism is a predictor of perceiving sacredness in life.

While both intrinsic religiosity and mystical experience can be described as referring to being on the boundaries between the known and the unknown, and finding or having ways of experiencing that sense of the infinite that lies beyond the horizon of what is known, the third predictor—attitudes about the importance of community service—has to do with the nitty-gritty of life. We can predict that people who feel a need to help in the community are more likely to have a sense of the sacred in life. The more one develops a sense of responsibility for one's fellow human beings and creation as a whole, the more likely one is to perceive the sacred in the world. This predictor could be described as having to do with incarnation, perceiving the sacred in each other and in the community: loving one's neighbor. Whereas with intrinsic religiosity and mysticism one reaches toward the transcendent beyond, a positive community service attitude relates to recognizing the penetration of the transcendent into the known world.

When reflected upon psychologically, these three separate predictors— intrinsic religiosity, mystical experiences, and attitudes toward helping in the community—make sense. While this study does not demonstrate the religious or psychological outcomes of experiencing the sacred in life, it does support religious and spiritual notions concerning the incarnate and transcendent aspects of the sacred, and helps psychologists of religion better understand the perception of the sacred: its correlates and predictors.

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Appendix

Perceiving Sacredness in Life Scale

Instructions: This scale refers to ways people may experience religion and/or spirituality in their lives. We want to find out about your own spiritual or religious experiences. If the terms we use to describe spiritual or religious experiences do not fit your own experiences, please substitute words or ideas that describe your own experience when you respond to the question.

Below are five statements about God. CIRCLE the statement which comes closest to your understanding of God.

- a. I believe God is a personal being who reigns over all creation, who looks after us and listens to our prayers and praise. God responds to our needs and stays close to us when evil comes.
- b. I believe God created the world and everything in it and then made us responsible for ourselves and for creation. God looks down on us from above without intervening in creation or our lives.
- c. I believe that God is the spirit or source of all creation. God is all around us, in nature and in all people.
- d. I am not sure what or who God is but I do think that it is beyond our understanding to comprehend such ultimate things. I often wonder if there is a God but I do not think that I will ever know for sure.
- e. I do not believe there is a God. I do not believe that God created the world or controls our affairs. There is no higher power that can intervene in our lives.
- f. None of the above statements comes close to my beliefs concerning God or spirituality.

Please use your understanding of God to respond to the following statements:

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Infrequently	Never
2. I feel reverence for all living things.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I sense that there are qualities of life, such as love and hope, which are everlasting.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I see each person, each leaf, each raindrop, all of creation harboring a spiritual presence.	5	4	3	2	1
8. In tragic experiences as well as joyful, I feel that God is present in the world around me.	5	4	3	2	1
10. God has given a sacred purpose to my life.	5	4	3	2	1
12. I sense that my spirit is part of God's spirit.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I experience something more sacred in life than simply material existence.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I see people as having something holy within them.	5	4	3	2	1
18. I see each day, good or bad, as a gift from God.	5	4	3	2	1
20. I feel there is something of me that is sacred.	5	4	3	2	1
22. I experience God's presence in my everyday life.	5	4	3	2	1
24. There are things, ideas, or actions in life that I experience as sacred.	5	4	3	2	1
26. I see each creature as a sacred part of the web of life.	5	4	3	2	1
28. I see God's presence in all of life.	5	4	3	2	1