

Defining “High” and “Low” Scores on Measures of Spirituality

Since any student’s score on one of our measures of spirituality, religiousness, and related qualities reflects the *degree* to which the student possesses the quality being measured, defining “high” or “low” scores is, to a certain extent, an arbitrary decision. Nevertheless, an effort was made to introduce a certain amount of rationality into such definitions by posing the following question: In order to defend the proposition that someone possesses a “high” (or “low”) degree of the particular trait in question, what *pattern* of responses to the entire set of questions would that person have to show? Let’s use the quality of Equanimity to illustrate the procedure that was followed in answering such a question for each measure.

Equanimity is defined by six items, all of which happen to have three possible responses (scored 1, 2, and 3, respectively). The highest possible score (the highest “degree” of equanimity) is thus 6×3 or 18, while the lowest possible score is 6×1 or 6. For four of the items, students were asked, “Please indicate the extent to which each of the following describes you,” with the following response options: “to a great extent” (score 3), “to some extent” (score 2), and “not at all” (score 1):

Seeing each day, good or bad, as a gift

Feeling a strong connection to all humanity

Being thankful for all that has happened to me

Feeling good about the direction in which my life is headed

To be classified as being “high” in equanimity, we decided that the student should respond “to a great extent” on at least two of these items, and “to some extent” to the other two. This would generate 10 points on the equanimity scale (3+3+2+2). If the student happened to respond “not at all” to any one of these four items, that student would then have to respond “to a great extent” on *all* of the other three items in order to receive the same 10 points.

The other two items comprising the equanimity scale were preceded by the following instructions: “During the last year, how often have you...”, with the following response options: “frequently” (score 3), “occasionally” (score 2), and “not at all” (score 1):

Been able to find meaning in times of hardship

Felt at peace/centered

A person possessing a high degree of equanimity, we felt, would not respond “occasionally” to either of these items. Consequently, we decided that, in order to be classified as “high” on equanimity, the student should answer “frequently” to both items, which would generate 6 points on the equanimity scale. Thus, the minimum score required to be classified as a

“high” scorer on equanimity would be $10 + 6$ or 16. (Note that if a student happened to respond “occasionally” to either of the last two items, then that student would have to respond “to a great extent” on at least *three* of the first four items in order to be classified as a “high” scorer.)

At the other extreme, we decided that a student with a “low” degree of equanimity should answer “not at all” to at least one of the first four items, and only “to some extent” on the other three, yielding a maximum of seven points ($1+2+2+2$). If a student happened to respond “to a great extent” on any of these four items, then that student would have to answer “not at all” to at least two of the other three in order not to exceed 7 points. On the final two items, we decided that a student with a low degree of equanimity should answer no higher than “occasionally” on both, generating 4 additional points ($2+2$). Answering “frequently” to one of the two items would require a “not at all” response to the other in order not to exceed the total of 4 points. (Similar “tradeoffs” in student responses would be possible, of course, between the first four and the last two items.) Thus, the maximum score to qualify as “low” on equanimity was $7 + 4$ or 11 points.

A similar reasoning process was followed in choosing “high” and “low” cutting points on each of the other measures.