

Life is Bigger? Positing Openness to Other-Religion Reincarnation on Respect for Religious Equality with Compassion as a Moderator

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ABSTRACT

As religious discrimination and intolerance grows, the human rights of many people across the globe are affected negatively. Because of increasing belief in reincarnation, this paper posits the role that Openness to Other-Religion Reincarnation (OORR) may have on Respect for Religious Equality (RRE) with Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) having a moderating effect. This paper's conceptual model and research propositions are novel, as the newly introduced construct of OORR and the moderator variable of COOE are reviewed in relation to RRE. Moreover, the paper provides suggestions for future empirical research and encourages scholars to conduct studies across multiple countries and cultures based on the developed concepts and literature review.

(Keywords: religious equality, reincarnation, compassion, past life belief, metaphysics, social interaction, interpersonal communications)

INTRODUCTION

As religious discrimination and intolerance rise, many individuals face injustices across all areas of society. There is global evidence of increased religious prejudice. For example, over "84% of the world's population identify themselves with a religious group [and] according to Pew, in 2018 more than a quarter of the World's countries experienced a high incidence of hostilities motivated by religious hatred, mob violence related to religion, terrorism, and [physical violence including death and] harassment of women [and girls] for violating religious codes. The spike in religious violence is global and affects virtually every religious group" (Muggah and Velshi, 2019).

Scheitle and Ecklund conducted a U.S. study to analyze people's negative experiences based on

their religious affiliation. They utilized "new data from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults featuring oversamples of key religious minority groups and an instrument dedicated to measuring the extent to which individuals experience hostility, discrimination, and violence due to their religion" (Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020, p.1). Their analysis included individuals' experiences with both interpersonal and institutional religious discrimination.

With regard to interpersonal religious discrimination, Scheitle and Ecklund found "that the most common experience reported is receiving verbal insults due to one's religion. Just under 30 percent of U.S. adults say they have experienced such insults. The next most common experience, at 8.7 percent, is being threatened with physical violence due to one's religion. About 6 percent of U.S. adults report being chased or followed (5.9 percent) or having their personal property destroyed (5.5 percent) because of their religion [while] 2.5 percent of U.S. adults report being physically assaulted and 1.9 percent report having their home vandalized because of their religion" (Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020, p.6).

With regard to institutional discrimination, Scheitle and Ecklund found that these situations "are much rarer than the types of interpersonal hostility experiences. [For example,] the most common type of [institutional] religious discrimination reported by U.S. adults at 7.3 percent of individuals reporting is unfair treatment by a school, college, or other educational institution. Unfair treatment by a medical provider (4.2 percent), receiving an unfair work evaluation (4.0 percent), and unfair treatment when traveling (3.8 percent) are the next most common types of discrimination" (Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020, p.6).

"Overall, just over a quarter of U.S. adults say that they sense hostility from others because of

their religion (26.9 percent). A similar proportion say that they feel disrespected because of their religion (26.0 percent)” (Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020, p.5).

Moreover, interpersonal and institutional religious discrimination can occur between and among different groups of individuals, including but not limited to people of a) religious versus non-religious traditions, b) different religions, c) different sects of the same religion, and d) the same religion who practice different levels of adherence to that religion.

Belief in reincarnation is rising to about 30% of the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2021 and Kain, 2021) and more than 20% of the South American and European populations (Moraes, *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, practitioners of past life regression (Weiss, 1988, 1992, 1997, 2000, and 2004) and life between lives regression (Newton, 1994 and 2000) have documented hundreds of cases supporting the idea that individuals who believe in reincarnation also believe that they will change religious beliefs in a future life on Earth.

Since the attributes of empathy and compassion towards others are held by individuals in a wide array of religious beliefs systems (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 2015 and Peng and Shen, 2012) and individuals of non-religious belief systems (Saslow, *et al.*, 2012) and because of increased awareness of the societal and environmental toll from economic development (Matten, Crane, and Chapple, 2003; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Castaldo, Perrini, Misani and Tencati, 2009; Harwood, Humby, and Harwood, 2011; Wicks, Keevil, and Parmar, 2012; and Craig and Allen, 2013), it is expected that an individual’s level of compassion towards themselves, others, and the environment may function as a moderator. Therefore, Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) was incorporated into the model as a moderating variable.

The objective of this paper is to posit a conceptual model and research propositions which support the notion that individuals who hold Openness to Other-Religion Reincarnation (OORR) are likely to have Respect for Religious Equality (RRE) with Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) having a moderating effect. This paper highlights the research literature, which suggests that the attributes of individuals who hold OORR are compatible to those with

RRE. Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory are featured as foundations in the conceptual framework.

Openness to Other-Religion Reincarnation (OORR) Defined

Openness to Other-Religion Reincarnation is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that there is a possibility that they may reincarnate into another religious or non-religious tradition in a future life on Earth. Because this construct is novel, a scale to measure it could not be found. Thus, the following question is suggested for use in future empirical studies: “I believe that there is a possibility that I may reincarnate into another religious or non-religious tradition in a future life on Earth” via a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Prior past life regression literature by Dr. Brian Weiss (Weiss, 1988, 1992, 1997, 2000, and 2004) and life between lives regression literature by Dr. Michael Newton (Newton, 1994 and 2000) support the development of the new OORR construct, as their subjects believed that they have experienced many reincarnations in various religious and non-religious traditions in order to learn and evolve.

In addition, Pasricha conducted a study involving cases of the reincarnation type (CORT) literature, which focused on interviewing a child who claimed to have memories of a past life. The child, their “parents, grandparents, siblings, and neighbors, or anyone who had heard the subject make statements directly or who had witnessed certain unusual behavior in the child at first hand” (Pasricha, 2001, 213) were questioned. Pasricha documented a case of a child who claimed to remember having been a different religion in a past life and acted in a “behavior appropriate for a different religion” (Pasricha, 2001 and 218).

Moreover, Dr. Ian Stevenson, who dedicated over 40 years to academic research, at the University of Virginia, investigating and documenting hundreds of CORT among young children, and his colleague stated that the young children “who claim to remember a previous life occur in many different countries and cultures. Investigators can find them most readily in South Asia and Western Asia, but they occur also in Europe, North America [and parts of the Levant]”

(Stevenson and Haraldsson, 2003, p.238). Dr. Stevenson acquired the past life memories of his subjects predominately by conducting interviews with young children to document their past lives (Stevenson and Haraldsson, 2003).

Respect for Religious Equality (RRE) Defined

In this paper, Respect for Religious Equality (RRE) is defined as the extent to which an individual supports the view that people should be equally respected and have equal rights and opportunities, in all areas of society, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. Since a scale could not be found in the literature, it is suggested that the following question is used to gauge and individuals level of RRE: "I believe that people should be equally respected and have equal rights and opportunities, in all areas of society, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs" via a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORIES

As stated by Bhattacharya, *et al.*, Social Identity Theory (SIT) "describes how individuals categorize themselves as members of social groups or organizations" (Bhattacharya, *et al.*, 2009, p.264). For example, "identification represents a sense of oneness between an individual's self-concept and their concept of the group or organization with which they consider themselves a member. This overlap of values can be heard anecdotally when references to 'I' become references to 'we'" (Bhattacharya, *et al.*, 2009, p.264). "Tajfel and Turner [among the theory's founders] argued that [as individuals strive] for a positive social identity, group members are motivated to think and act in ways that achieve or maintain a positive distinctiveness between one's own group and relevant outgroups" (Hornsey, 2008, p.207).

Regarding Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), Hornsey states that "Turner and colleagues nominate three levels of self-categorization that are important to the self-concept: the superordinate category of the self as human being (or human identity), the intermediate level of the self as a member of a social ingroup as defined against other groups of humans (social identity), and the subordinate level of personal self-

categorizations based on interpersonal comparisons (personal identity)" (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208).

SIT and SCT Linkage to OORR

SIT and the superordinate category of the SCT (i.e., classifying oneself as part of the human family offer a good foundation for the OORR construct) as it's defined as an individual's belief that people should be equally respected and have equal rights and opportunities, in all areas of society, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. Per the OORR definition, individuals are expected to view themselves as part of the *human family* regardless of their religious or non-religious traditions, as the OORR construct reflects a sense of non-duality or oneness towards individuals of all religious and non-religious belief systems.

Furthermore, hundreds of past life regressions (Weiss, 1988, 1992, 1997, 2000, and 2004) and life between lives regressions (Newton, 1994 and 2000) documented that subjects believed that they reincarnated into different religious and non-religious traditions in order to learn and evolve. Therefore, it's expected that individuals who hold OORR can view themselves *in someone else's shoes* (i.e., the individual can imagine themselves as a person of a different religious or non-religious tradition). Thus, OORR holders should share a sense of non-duality or oneness towards individuals of all religious and non-religious traditions and be able to empathize with them because of these beliefs, which is consistent with the tenets of SIT and SCT.

Possible Relationship between OORR and RRE

RRE encompasses the notion that individuals who hold this trait support the view that people should be equally respected and have equal rights and opportunities, in all areas of society, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. It is likely that individuals who are open to the idea that they may reincarnate into another religious or non-religious tradition (OORR) would hold the attribute of RRE, as they a) would expect to experience a future life on earth in another religious or non-religious belief system and b) would want to be treated equally, in all

areas of society, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Literature also supports the idea that individuals who believe in reincarnation would have a desire for religious equality because they remember experiencing life on earth in many religious or non-religious traditions either through past life regression (Weiss, 1988, 1992, 1997, 2000, and 2004) or life between lives regression (Newton, 1994 and 2000). Also, as supported by SIT and SCT, because individuals who hold the spiritual attribute of OORR are expected to have a sense of non-duality towards individuals of all religious and non-religious traditions and be able to empathize with them because of these beliefs, they are likely to have RRE. Thus, the literature review supports the research proposition that OORR is positively related to RRE:

P1 – OORR is positively related to RRE

COMPASSION FOR ONESELF, OTHERS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT AS A MODERATING VARIABLE

Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) is defined as “the extent to which a person is respectful, patient and caring towards themselves, others and the environment” (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2022, p.119). To assess an individual’s level of COOE, researchers can incorporate questions from the COOE Scale (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2021) as a moderator variable. Musa and Gopalakrishna’s “COOE instrument uses a five-point Likert Scale with twelve items, seven of which were adapted from [Neff’s (2003) Self Compassion Scale (pp. 231-232)] and the remaining five were adapted from [Stone, *et al.* (1995) ECOSCALE pp. 603–604]. Below are the twelve questions:

- 1 - I am kind to myself and others when I or others are experiencing suffering. SCS (Question 2, p. 231)
- 2 - When I am and others are going through a very hard time, I give myself or them the caring and tenderness I or they need. SCS (Question 3, p. 231)
- 3 - I am tolerant of my own and others’ flaws and inadequacies. SCS (Question 4, p. 231)

- 4 - I try to be loving towards myself and others when I or others are feeling emotional pain. SCS (Question 5, p. 231)
- 5 - I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my and others’ personality, which I am not fond of. SCS (Question 1, p. 231)
- 6 - When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people. SCS (Question 11, p. 231)
- 7 - When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance. SCS (Question 19, p. 232)
- 8 - It is no use worrying about environmental issues; I can’t do anything about them anyway. (Reverse Coded) ECOSCALE (Question 30, p. 604)
- 9 - My involvement in environmental activities today will help save the environment for future generations. ECOSCALE (Question 17, p. 604)
- 10 - I do not purchase products that are known to cause pollution. ECOSCALE (Question 25, p. 604)
- 11 - Economic growth should not take precedence over environmental considerations. ECOSCALE (Question 5, p. 603)
- 12 - The earth’s resources are finite and should not be used to the fullest to increase the human standard of living. ECOSCALE (Question 6, p. 603)” (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2021).

The attributes of empathy and compassion towards others are held by individuals in a wide array of religious beliefs systems (Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 2015 and Peng and Shen, 2012) and individuals of non-religious belief systems (Saslow, *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, there is increased awareness of the societal and environmental toll from economic development (Matten, Crane and Chapple, 2003; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Castaldo, Perrini, Misani, and Tencati, 2009; Harwood, Humby, and Harwood, 2011; Wicks, Keevil, and Parmar, 2012; and Craig and Allen, 2013). Therefore, individuals

who believe that they will reincarnate into different religious or non-religious traditions in a future life on Earth would likely be mindful of the global social and environmental issues that are affecting the planet, as they will have to experience these societal and environmental issues not only in their current life but also in their future life on earth. Prior research by Musa (2015), Musa and Gopalakrishna (2021) and Musa and Gopalakrishna (2022) introduced the COOE construct and Scale and tested in on individuals' attitudes towards sustainable consumption. They found that certain subjects held the attribute of COOE and it correlated to the subjects' purchasing views and behaviors (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2021 and 2022). Therefore, it is expected that an individual's level of compassion towards themselves, others, and the environment may function as a moderator between OORR and RRE.

The literature review supports the research proposition that the greater an individual's compassion for themselves, others, and the environment, the stronger the positive relationship between OORR and RRE:

P1.a – *The greater the level of COOE, the stronger the positive relationship between OORR and RRE*

DISCUSSION

This section will address the implications for the theory; recommend evaluations instruments for future empirical testing; and possible applicability for academia and the practice.

Implications for the Theory

This article builds on the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) literature by linking the spiritual concept of OORR to these theories and describing its applicability in relation to RRE.

For example, prior research by Musa (2015) and Musa and Gopalakrishna (2021) introduced and identified the association between compassionate consumer behavior and SIT. Musa and Gopalakrishna (2022) documented the connection between SIT and the consumer trait of Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE).

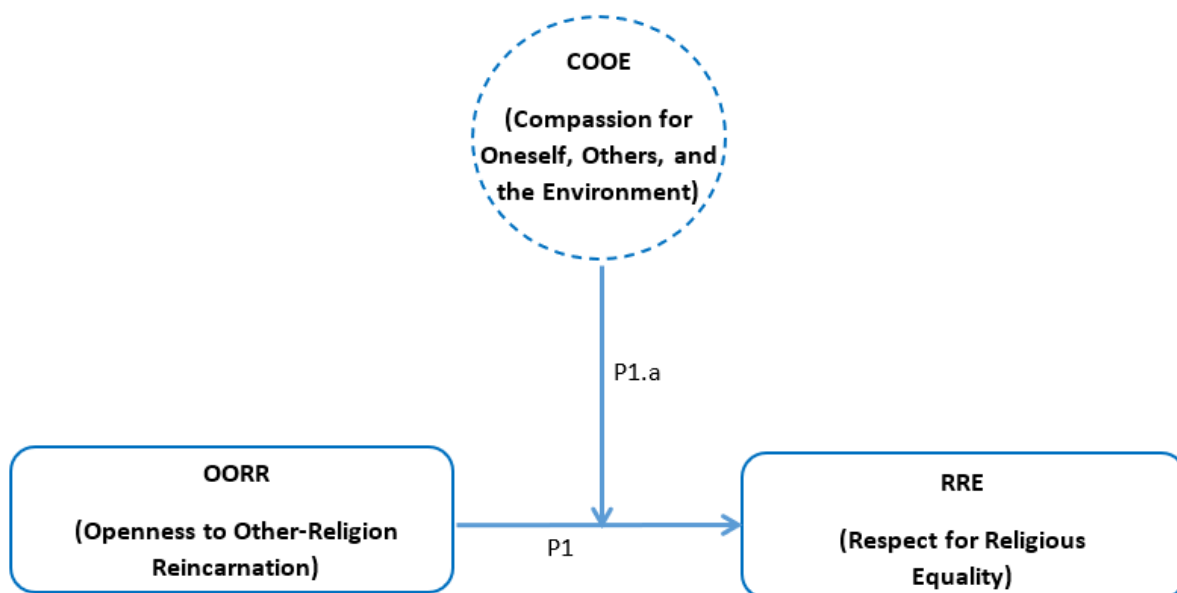


Figure 1: Conceptual Model.

This paper provides an example of how SIT and SCT are good foundations for the OORR construct in association with RRE. SIT is reinforced, as this conceptual study supports the theory's claim that when individuals classify themselves into social groups, a sense of non-duality or oneness ensues with the group members. For instance, OORR individuals are likely to view themselves in someone else's shoes (i.e., the individual can imagine themselves as a person of a different religious or non-religious tradition). SCT is also reinforced, as the conceptual study supports the theory's superordinate category of human identity. For example, the literature supports the predicted correlation between OORR and RRE, which suggests that OORR individuals are likely to view members of all religious and non-religious traditions as equal members of the human family.

Thus, both SIT and SCT provide a strong foundation for the OORR construct because, as documented by the work of Dr. Brian Weiss and Dr. Michael Newton, it's expected that individuals who hold OORR will also share a sense of non-duality or oneness towards individuals of all religious and non-religious traditions, which is consistent with the tenets of SIT and SCT.

Suggested Evaluation Instruments for Future Empirical Testing

This section will address the recommended evaluation instruments, which researchers could use to measure the dependent, independent and moderator variables.

Respect for Religious Equality (RRE) is the dependent variable and is defined as the extent to which an individual supports the view that people should be equally respected and have equal rights and opportunities, in all areas of society, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. It is suggested that the following question be used to gauge an individual's level of RRE: "I believe that people should be equally respected and have equal rights and opportunities, in all areas of society, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs" via a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The independent variable of Openness to Other-Religion Reincarnation (OORR), as discussed

earlier, is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that there is a possibility that they may reincarnate into another religious or non-religious tradition in a future life on earth. The following question is suggested for use in future empirical studies: "I believe that there is a possibility that I may reincarnate into another religious or non-religious tradition in a future life on earth" via a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The moderator variable of Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) is defined as "the extent to which a person is respectful, patient and caring towards themselves, others and the environment" (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2022, p.119). To assess an individual's COOE, researchers can incorporate the twelve questions from the COOE Scale (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2021) as a moderator variable.

Possible Applicability for Academia and Practice

This article contributes novel insights for both academia and organizations, which promote respect for religious equality, in multiple ways.

First, this paper develops a conceptual model, which will allow scholars to examine reincarnation belief with specific focus on reincarnation into other religious or non-religious traditions (OORR).

Second, it adds to the scarce literature on the study of reincarnation and religious equality by providing a conceptual model, which posits the effect of reincarnation belief on respect for religious equality while incorporating Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) as a moderator with an adapted 12-item scale (Musa and Gopalakrishna, 2021).

Third, the paper highlights the connection between compassion and various religious and non-religious traditions (Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski, 2015; Peng and Shen, 2012; and Saslow, *et al.*, 2012), while outlining some examples of present-day religious discrimination (Muggah and Velshi, 2019 and Scheitle and Ecklund, 2020).

Forth, it encourages researchers to build upon the conceptual framework and the literature cited to conduct empirical studies, across different countries and cultures, to analyze the possible correlation between the OORR construct and attitudes towards religious prejudice.

Fifth, the paper strengthens SIT and SCT by linking the spiritual trait of OORR to these theories and describing its applicability in relation to RRE. Sixth, it promotes the incorporation of reincarnation belief research to studies on religious discrimination and societal stewardship.

Eventually, as empirical studies are conducted globally, the results may provide insight for organizations that promote religious belief equality. For example, the organizations may possibly adapt their marketing campaigns and messaging to appeal to people who hold OORR. In addition, many institutions in numerous industries and sectors of society can benefit from the results of future global studies, including but not limited to a) the workplace, b) healthcare, c) the political arena, d) education, and e) the media.

Future reincarnation belief research that incorporates the Compassion for Oneself, Others, and the Environment (COOE) variable and links it to societal and environmental stewardship is encouraged, as Muggah and Velshi proclaim “collective action across religious divides are needed more than ever in our disorderly and fractured world” (Muggah and Velshi, 2019).

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