

The Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS)

Psychometric Properties of Its Adaptation to the Religious Domain of Identity

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Abstract: The current study proposed the adaptation of the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) to the religious domain as an instrument to measure both individuals' religious identity formation processes (when a variable-centered approach is adopted) and religious identity statuses (when a person-centered approach is adopted). The scale has been tested on a sample of 727 Italian participants aged 13–65 years, by collecting evidence of score structure, convergent, and criterion-related validity. Regarding the score structure validity, we confirmed that religious identity formation consists of three processes (commitment, in-depth exploration, reconsideration of commitment) and that, by using these scores, individuals can be placed into five different religious identity clusters (achievement, diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, searching moratorium). As to the convergent and criterion-related validity, we tested the relationship that the three factors (religious identity formation processes) and the five clusters (religious identity statuses) have with religiousness and subjective well-being, respectively. Results indicate that the instrument is a promising tool to measure religious identity. Future studies should test this scale in other countries and with people from diverse religious traditions.

Keywords: religiosity, identity formation processes, identity status, validation, psychometric properties



Over the lifespan, individuals must grapple with the achievement of a clear personal identity across different domains (Fadjukoff & Kroger, 2016). In countries with a deeply-rooted religious culture, religious identity becomes an interesting aspect of identity to investigate. Generally, *religious identity* is conceived as the extent to which people self-identify with a faith tradition/community (Lopez et al., 2011) and is differentiated from the broader construct of *religiousness* (or *religiosity*) concerning the public or private adherence to beliefs and rituals of a religion (Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

While religiosity has been extensively investigated, religious identity remains a less explored topic, especially in terms of its development (Bell, 2016). Indeed, although

instruments aimed at measuring this construct adopt different methodological approaches (Ashdown et al., 2014; Brambilla et al., 2016; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Keyes & Reitzes, 2007), they do not unveil the processes underlying the *formation* of religious identity. Briefly, little is known about how people explore, commit to, and reevaluate their religious identity.

On the whole, the dynamics by which religious identity is developed have been studied within Marcia's (1980) theoretical framework (e.g., Bell, 2016) which distinguishes exploration and commitment as two central dimensions of identity and combines them in the four well-known identity statutes: *diffusion* (low exploration and low commitment), *foreclosure* (low exploration and high commitment), *moratorium* (high exploration and low commitment), and *achievement* (high exploration and high commitment).

Although valuable, this model does not consider other important dimensions related to the formation and maintenance of religious identity (Crocetti et al., 2010). Starting

from this gap, Crocetti et al. (2008) introduced a more nuanced picture of the concept of *exploration* and proposed the *three-factor model of identity*. According to it, identity formation is composed of the following processes: *Commitment*, concerning individuals' engagement in domains fitting their expectations; *In-depth exploration*, referring to individuals' active probe of their current commitments; *Reconsideration of commitment*, pertaining to individuals' quest for different areas relevant to identity when they feel no longer fulfilled with their present commitments.

Based on these theoretical considerations, the Utrecht – Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS; Crocetti et al., 2010) was developed. Several studies highlighted that this measure might be employed within both a variable and a person-centered approach (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015). Conceptually, the former strategy mainly determines relations at the variable level, whereas the latter at the individual level. In detail, when a variable-centered approach is adopted, the three distinct but intertwined identity formation processes (commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment) can be singularly associated with identity correlates within populations of individuals regarded as homogeneous and interchangeable. When a person-centered approach is used, the three-factor model is a helpful methodological device to reliably assign individuals sharing similar patterns of identity formation to subgroups within a given population; in other words, this holistic and dynamic view emphasizes the potential uniqueness of individuals and allow them to obtain identity profiles. As to this, Crocetti et al. (2008) found five statuses. Four out of them – *diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, and *achievement* – are similar to Marcia's (1980) ones, whereas a new one, labeled *searching moratorium*, reveals a positive side of moratorium (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015). In particular, the searching moratorium status is characterized by high commitment and high in-depth exploration (as for the achievement status) but also by high reconsideration of commitment (as for the moratorium status; Crocetti et al., 2008).

Although several lines of research showed that the U-MICS is a useful instrument to detect identity formation processes in several realms (Crocetti et al., 2012), it has never been validated in the religious domain. As the distinctive domain of religious identity is an important cognitive and social resource in people's life (King, 2003), we aimed to adapt the U-MICS scale to the religious domain (from now on, U-MICS – religious domain). Specifically, we collected data about the U-MICS – religious domain in a society strongly marked by Catholicism, like the Italian one (Iannello et al., 2019), and explored its psychometric properties by evaluating score structure, convergent, and criterion-related validity. Each of these kinds of validity evidence was collected both within the variable- (religious

identity processes) and person-centered (religious identity statuses) approach.

Structure of Religious Identity

The score structure validity evidence tests whether the scale structure is consistent with the expected theoretical dimensions. Within the variable-centered approach, the factorial structure of the U-MICS – religious domain should consist of three factors (Crocetti et al., 2010) corresponding to three different identity formation processes: *Commitment*, indicating the process of strong engagement in a religion; *In-depth exploration*, referring to the process of active probing own current religious commitment; *Reconsideration of commitment*, pertaining to the process of questioning different religious commitment when current religion is no longer fulfilling. The validity of this three-factor model can be further demonstrated by verifying its reliability and measurement invariance. As in previous validation studies, the U-MICS scale has shown very good levels of reliability ($\alpha > .80$; Crocetti et al., 2008), we aimed to verify whether these scale scores are highly reliable also when the scale is applied to the religious domain. Additionally, we tested measurement invariance of the U-MICS – religious domain. Firstly, we verified whether the instrument is gender invariant as it was for the U-MICS scale adapted to other domains (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2015). Secondly, we ascertained whether the U-MICS – religious domain works invariantly across adolescents (less than 18 years), emerging adults (18–29 years), and adults (30–65 years) because the U-MICS scale has so far only been tested among adolescents and emerging adults (Crocetti et al., 2012). Finally, we tested measurement invariance across believers and atheists in order to investigate whether items work equally well from the psychometric point of view in the two groups and, consequently, can be administered to both populations.

Within the person-centered approach, five identity statuses should be identified (*diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, *achievement*, and *searching moratorium*) in order to confirm the different positioning that individuals may have with respect to the three identity formation processes (Crocetti et al., 2008). In order to further test the meaningfulness and distinctiveness of these statuses, we tested whether gender (males vs. females), age (adolescents vs. emerging adults vs. adults), and religious status (believers vs. atheists) were differently distributed across them.

Relationship of Religious Identity With Other Constructs

Despite different self-report instruments to measure religious identity have been proposed in the literature (e.g.,

Ashdown et al., 2014; Dimitrova et al., 2014), none of these has been validated in the Italian language, so they could not be used to test the convergent validity of the U-MICS – religious domain scores. As the instrument we aimed to validate refers to the religious realm, we collected convergent validity evidence testing the relationships that the U-MICS – religious domain scores (obtained both using a variable- and person-centered approach) had with four aspects of religiousness (believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging) by using the validated Italian version of the *Big Four Dimensions of Religiousness Scale* (Saroglou, 2011). We expected religious commitment and in-depth exploration would have a positive association with religiousness dimensions, as people committed to a religion and/or who are deepening this commitment should also present public or private adherence to beliefs and rituals of a religion. By contrast, we expected a negative association between individuals reconsidering their religious commitment and religiousness.

As to religious identity statuses, we hypothesized that individuals having high mean levels of both religious commitment and in-depth exploration and low mean level of reconsideration (*achievement status*) would have the highest mean levels of religiousness. Instead, individuals with low mean levels of both religious commitment and in-depth exploration (*diffusion* and *moratorium*) would show the lowest mean levels of religiousness. Finally, we expect that individuals in searching moratorium and foreclosure would report moderate mean levels of religiousness (Griffith & Griggs, 2001).

Relationship of Religious Identity With Criteria

Finally, we collected criterion-related validity evidence of the U-MICS – religious domain verifying if the U-MICS scores in such scale are related to the level of individuals' subjective well-being. Subjective well-being refers to both individuals' cognitive judgments about achieving important values and goals in life (i.e., life satisfaction) and to the balance between positive and negative affect (Diener et al., 2018). Previous studies have investigated the association among the three factors of the U-MICS and subjective well-being (Villani et al., 2019), finding that only commitment is positively associated with both life satisfaction and positive affect.

The relationship between U-MICS scores and subjective well-being has been tested within the person-centered approach too. In particular, studies (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2018) showed that individuals in commitment statuses (*achievement* and *foreclosure*) reported higher mean levels of psychological adjustment than those in the low commitment ones (*moratorium* and *diffusion*); *Searching moratorium*,

instead, has been reported to be less troubled than moratorium (Crocetti et al., 2008).

Method

In this section, we report how we determined our sample size, all measures in the study, and all analyses including all tested models. If we use inferential tests, we report exact *p*-values, effect sizes, and 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Data collected for the current study and codes needed to replicate the study are publically available (Sorgente et al., 2021; <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14039123>).

Participants

The convenient sample was composed of 727 Italian participants, aged 13–65 years ($M = 23.40$; $SD = 11.32$), mainly female (78.2%). Many were high school students (43.8%), while other participants had a middle school diploma (1.8%), a high school diploma (18.9%), a degree (33.9%), or a post-graduate specialization (3.3%) as the level of education. Most participants reported being believers in God (70.8%) and Catholic (94.9% of the believers), whereas 16.8% reported being atheists. The remaining 12.4% had unsure beliefs as participants stated to be neither believers nor atheists.

Participating in the survey was entirely voluntary without any form of compensation. In the case of minors, the recruitment was preceded by the collection of parents' informed consent. In the case of adults, all subjects gave online informed consent. All participants were treated in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Measures

We administered four psychometric scales to measure respectively religious identity, religiousness, life satisfaction, and affectivity (see Table 1). The English and Italian versions of the U-MICS – religious identity are reported in section I of the supplemental material, which is publically available (Sorgente et al., 2021; <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14039123>).

Data Analysis

Score Structure Validity Evidence

Variable-Centered Approach

The expected score structure of the U-MICS – religious domain was tested by performing a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in *Mplus*. Missing data, ranging from 1.5% to 1.9% for each item of the U-MICS – religious domain scale, were managed by the Full Information Maximum

Table 1. Details about adopted instruments

Measure	Original validation	Italian validation	Construct	Subscale	Number and sample of items	Response scale	α
UMICS – religious domain	Crocetti et al. (2010)	Current paper	Religious identity	Commitment	5 (e.g., “My religion gives me security in life”)	5-point scale (1 = completely untrue; 5 = completely true)	.96
				In-depth exploration	5 (e.g., “I try to find out a lot about my religion”)		.91
				Reconsideration of commitment	3 (e.g., “I often think it would be better to try to find a different religion”)		.89
Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale	Saroglou (2011)	Dimitrova (2014)	Religiousness	Belonging	3 (e.g., “In religion, I enjoy belonging to a group/community”)	7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	.94
				Behaving	3 (e.g., “Religion helps me to try to live in a moral way”)		.93
				Bonding	3 (e.g., “Religious rituals, activities or practices make me feel positive emotion”)		.87
				Believing	3 (e.g., “I feel attached to religion because it helps me to have a purpose in my life”)		.91
Satisfaction with Life Scale	Diener et al. (1985)	Di Fabio and Busoni (2009)	Life satisfaction	Life satisfaction	5 (e.g., “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing”)	7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	.86
Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule	Watson et al. (1988)	Terraciano et al. (2003)	Affectivity	Positive affect Negative affect	10 (e.g., “interested”) 10 (e.g., “guilty”)	5-point scale (1 = not at all; 5 = completely)	.87 .91

Likelihood (FIML) method. Model fit was evaluated with the following indexes (Little, 2013): Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The reliability of each U-MICS factor was estimated calculating the composite reliability (ω).

Finally, to verify the U-MICS – religious domain equivalence across gender, age, and religious status, multigroup analyses were performed. Specifically, configural, weak (*metric*), strong (*scalar*), and strict (*residual*) measurement invariance were tested sequentially (Brown, 2015) for each of the three comparisons. Two sequential models were considered not sufficiently similar when the decrease in the CFI was equal to or higher than .01 and the increase in the RMSEA was equal to or higher than .015 (Chen, 2007). When a specific test for invariance was not met at one level, partial invariance was tested to determine which parameter(s) was not invariant across groups. If strong invariance was met, we compared latent means across groups to test religious U-MICS sensitivity to differences. We used a “ $p < .001$ ” criterion (Little, 2013).

Person-Centered Approach

Identity statuses could be identified using both Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) or cluster analysis. Considering that to make LPA converge we had to impose unrealistic constraints (equal factors’ variance and correlations across the different religious profiles; see section II of the supplementary materials; Sorgente et al., 2021) and that all previous validations of U-MICS used cluster analysis, we proceeded with the latter method. Cluster analysis was performed using the two-step clustering procedure (Gore, 2000) adopted in the original validations of the U-MICS (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2008, 2012). In the first step, after controlling to have sufficient levels of factor determinacy (see section III of the supplementary materials; Sorgente et al., 2021; Devlieger et al., 2016) and having saved from *Mplus* the three-factor scores obtained from the CFA, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted in *SPSS* using Ward’s method on squared Euclidian distances. We compared different cluster solutions based on three criteria (theoretical meaningfulness of each cluster, parsimony, explanatory power) and selected the best solution. In the second step, the initial cluster centers of that solution were used to run the final cluster solution. Finally, the distinctiveness of the identity statuses was tested in relation to age, gender, and religious status, running a series of χ^2 tests.

Convergent Validity Evidence

Variable-Centered Approach

Pearson correlations were run between the three factors scores of the U-MICS – religious domain and the four factors scores of the Big Four Dimensions of Religiousness Scale.

Person-Centered Approach

In order to verify whether the religious statuses presented different levels of religiousness, we run a Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) in which the identity status was included as the independent variable and the four-factor scores of religiousness were included as dependent variables.

Criterion-Related Validity Evidence

Variable-Centered Approach

A path analysis model, where subjective well-being dimensions (life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect) were regressed on the three dimensions of the U-MICS – religious domain, was run to verify if religious identity was able to explain a portion of the subjective well-being’s variance. To further verify if U-MICS – religious domain dimensions were able to explain a portion of subjective well-being’s variance that is not explained by similar scales (i.e., incremental validity), we performed three hierarchical regressions in *SPSS* (one for each dimension of the subjective well-being). In these hierarchical models, the four religiousness dimensions were included as independent variables in the first step and the religious identity processes were included in the second step. If the change in the portion of explained variance of the subjective well-being dimensions between the two models was significant (i.e., significant ΔR^2), the incremental validity of the U-MICS – the religious domain was confirmed.

Person-Centered Approach

In order to verify that the religious statuses presented different levels of subjective well-being, we run a MANOVA in which identity statuses were the independent variable and subjective well-being factor scores were the dependent variables.

Results

Descriptive statistics of the 13 items of the U-MICS – religious domain (see supplementary materials, section IV; Sorgente et al., 2021) suggested that some items did not have a normal distribution. Consequently, SEM models were run using the Robust Maximum Likelihood estimator.

Score Structure Validity Evidence

Variable-Centered Approach

The three-factor structure suggested by Crocetti et al. (2010) was tested with a CFA. Fit indices for this model were good, $\chi^2(62) = 331.54$, $p < .001$; RMSEA [90% CI] = .078 [.070, .086]; CFI = .950; SRMR = .036, confirming

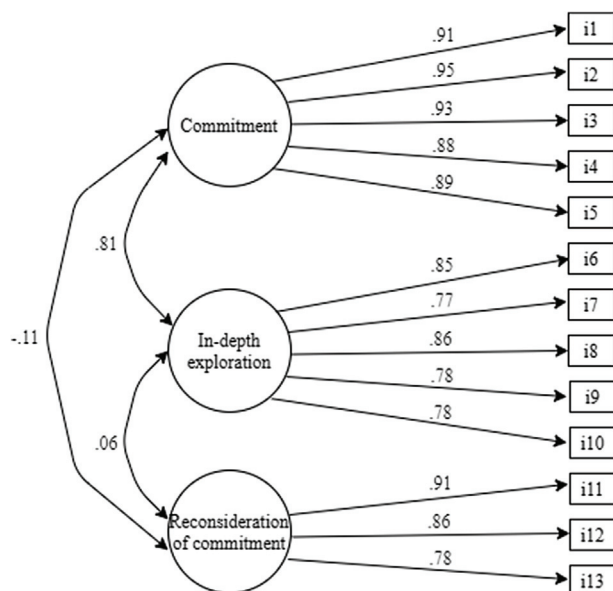


Figure 1. Measurement model of the U-MICS – religious domain.

the three-factor structure of the scale (see Figure 1). The factor loadings were all high ($> .70$) and significant ($p < .001$). Also, correlations among the three factors were as expected (Crocetti et al., 2010): Commitment was strongly and positively related to in-depth exploration ($p < .001$) and in-depth exploration was positively, but not significantly ($p = .20$), related to reconsideration of commitment. Finally, commitment was slightly and negative related to reconsideration of commitment ($p = .02$).

Furthermore, we run a two-factor model in order to verify if the strong correlation between commitment and in-depth exploration justified the merging of their items in the same factor. Fit indices for the two-factor model were not sufficient, $\chi^2(64) = 816.19$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .128 [.120, .136]; CFI = .860; SRMR = .075. Furthermore, relative fit indices indicated that the three-factor model suited better the data than the two-factor model: Akaike's information criterion (21,318.84 vs. 22,014.22) and Bayesian information criterion (21,510.94 vs. 22,197.17). Consequently, reliability and measurement invariance analysis was carried out on the three-factor model. First, composite reliability was estimated on the three factors and all proved to be highly reliable: Commitment ($\omega = .96$), in-depth exploration ($\omega = .90$), and reconsideration of commitment ($\omega = .89$).

Second, multi-group analyses of the three-factor model were tested for subgroups based on variables relevant for the construct (see supplementary material, section V; Sorgente et al., 2021): gender (154 males vs. 561 females), age (219 adolescents vs. 333 emerging adults vs. 102 adults), and religious status (121 atheists vs. 507 believers).

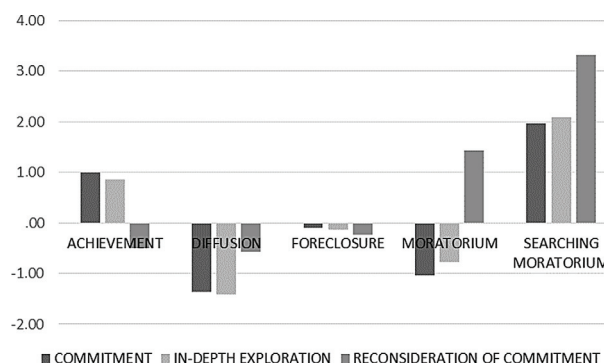


Figure 2. Factor scores of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment for the five identity statuses.

Whereas for gender and age comparisons full measurement invariance was found, for the religious status comparison we found full invariance only until the strong invariance step. When the items' residual variances were compared, items 4 (.034 vs. .403) and 5 (.071 vs. .398) resulted to have residual variance lower for atheists than for believers. As a full strong invariance is sufficient to compare latent means (Dimitrov, 2010), we verified if the three identity processes had different mean levels across groups. No differences were found across gender and age. Instead, believers had levels of commitment and in-depth exploration significantly higher than atheists.

Person-Centered Approach

In comparing different cluster solutions, the five-cluster solution was selected as the most appropriate. The five-cluster solution explained 77.9%, 75.9%, and 71.6% of the variance of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration, respectively. Furthermore, findings indicated that the emerged five-cluster solution (see Figure 2) strongly resembled the five-cluster solution found in previous publications (Crocetti et al., 2008, 2012; Hatano et al., 2016).

Specifically, the first cluster (*achievement*; $n = 226$; 31.6% of the sample) included participants scoring high on commitment and in-depth exploration, but low on reconsideration. They gain tranquility and serenity from their religion, are strongly committed, explore deeply their religion, and never reconsider their commitment. The second cluster (*diffusion*; $n = 125$; 17.5%) encompassed individuals scoring low on all three dimensions. These are people who are not religiously committed but, at the same time, do not explore nor reconsider their choice. The third cluster (*foreclosure*; $n = 207$; 28.9%) had moderately low scores on in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. The score on commitment was slightly lower than zero. Some previous studies found moderately high scores on commitment in the foreclosure cluster (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2008).

Table 2. Convergent and criterion validity evidence for the variable-centered approach

	Pearson correlations between factor scores of religious identity and factor scores of religiousness			
	Believing	Bonding	Behaving	Belonging
Commitment	.77 [.70, .84]***	.70 [.65, .77]***	.77 [.71, .84]***	.76 [.69, .83]***
In-depth exploration	.67 [.60, .74]***	.63 [.56, .70]***	.68 [.60, .75]***	.67 [.60, .74]***
Reconsideration of commitment	-.13 [-.10, -.06]***	-.11 [-.18, -.04]**	-.13 [-.21, -.06]***	-.14 [-.21, -.06]***
Standardized beta of the regression paths from religious identity to subjective well-being factor scores				
	Life satisfaction	Positive affect	Negative affect	
Commitment	.34 [.19, .49]***	.21 [.05, .38]*	.06 [-.11, .23]	
In-depth exploration	-.03 [-.19, .12]	-.01 [-.17, .16]	-.04 [-.20, .13]	
Reconsideration of commitment	-.08 [-.15, .001]	.01 [-.09, .10]	.16 [.07, .25]**	

Note. Values in brackets are 95% confidence interval. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

However, the result of the current study was very similar to other related studies (e.g., Hatano et al., 2016). Members of the foreclosure status are those who are partially committed in religion, without being particularly interested in exploring it, neither in reconsidering it. The fourth cluster (*moratorium*; $n = 66$; 9.2%) entailed individuals scoring low on commitment and in-depth exploration and high on reconsideration of commitment. These are people who are currently not committed to any religion and are not actively probing any commitment but are strongly considering changing their religious positioning. Finally, the fifth cluster (*searching moratorium*; $n = 92$; 12.8%) grouped individuals scoring high on all three dimensions, that is, people who have a religious commitment but are actively probing it and evaluating to reconsider it.

In order to confirm identity clusters' distinctiveness with respect to demographic variables (age, gender, religious status), we performed a series of χ^2 tests. Males and females [$\chi^2(4) = 8.29$, $p = .08$], as well as adolescents, emerging adults, and adults [$\chi^2(8) = 7.02$, $p = .53$] were equally distributed across the religious identity statuses. Instead, clusters differed for the prevalence of religious statuses [$\chi^2(4) = 228.89$, $p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .60$]. Achievement, foreclosure, and searching moratorium clusters were mainly composed of believers (97.7%, 90.2%, and 92.6%, respectively), while diffusion and moratorium clusters had a higher prevalence of atheists than expected by chance (67% and 43.6%, respectively).

Convergent Validity Evidence

Variable-Centered Approach

After performing a CFA model to save the four religiousness factor scores, $\chi^2(48) = 120.28$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.057 [.044, .070]; CFI = 0.978; SRMR = 0.019, the correlations between these scores and the factor scores of the U-MICS – religious domain were run (see Table 2). As expected, commitment and in-depth exploration had strong and positive relationships with all the religiousness

factors, while reconsideration of commitment had negative and weak relationships with religiousness factors.

Person-Centered Approach

Different levels of religiousness, Wilks's $\lambda = .39$; $F(16, 1,384.57) = 46.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$, were found across the five religious identity clusters. As reported in Table 3, post hoc analyses showed that the highest levels of believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging were reported by individuals who had an achieved religious identity status. These were followed by individuals in the searching moratorium cluster, in turn, followed by those in the foreclosure cluster. Finally, as expected, the lowest mean levels of religiousness were reported by individuals in diffusion and moratorium clusters.

Criterion-Related Validity Evidence

Variable-Centered Approach

After performing a CFA model to save factor scores of life satisfaction, $\chi^2(5) = 10.01$, $p = 0.075$; RMSEA = 0.038 [.000, .072]; CFI = 0.995; SRMR = 0.014, and affectivity, $\chi^2(169) = 817.51$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.082 [.076, .087]; CFI = 0.848; SRMR = 0.084, a path analysis model was run. Standardized regression coefficients (see Table 2) indicate that commitment is positively related to life satisfaction and positive affect, while reconsideration of commitment is positively related to negative affect. The in-depth exploration factor instead was not related to subjective well-being.

Results of the hierarchical regressions (see section VI of the supplementary material; Sorgente et al., 2021) indicate that the processes of identity formation explain a significant incremental percentage of life satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 5.7\%$, $p < .001$) and negative affect ($\Delta R^2 = 3.9\%$, $p = .01$) that is not explained by religiousness dimensions. Instead, the change in ΔR^2 was not significant for the hierarchical regression when the dependent variable was the positive affect ($\Delta R^2 = 0.6\%$, $p = .60$).

Table 3. Convergent and criterion validity evidence for the person-centered approach

MANOVA's post hoc cluster comparisons based upon Tukey tests for the five identity statuses on their level of religiousness							η^2
Dependent variable	Achievement	Diffusion	Foreclosure	Moratorium	Searching moratorium	<i>F</i> (4, 456)	
Believing	0.90 (0.56) ^a	−1.09 (0.56) ^b	−0.04 (0.65) ^c	−0.97 (0.46) ^b	0.27 (0.81) ^d	177.61***	.61
Bonding	0.81 (0.68) ^a	−1.00 (0.55) ^b	−0.03 (0.74) ^c	−0.89 (0.45) ^b	0.28 (0.86) ^d	120.19***	.61
Behaving	0.91 (0.57) ^a	−1.10 (0.55) ^b	−0.03 (0.64) ^c	−0.98 (0.48) ^b	0.25 (0.82) ^d	181.29***	.61
Belonging	0.91 (0.59) ^a	−1.09 (0.57) ^b	−0.04 (0.63) ^c	−0.97 (0.48) ^b	0.24 (0.82) ^d	174.59***	.60
MANOVA's post hoc cluster comparisons based upon Tukey tests for the five identity statuses on their level of well-being							η^2
						<i>F</i> (4, 550)	
Life satisfaction	0.35 (0.88) ^a	−0.29 (1.07) ^b	−0.13 (0.88) ^b	−0.17 (1.03) ^b	0.09 (0.81) ^{ab}	10.22***	.07
Positive affect	0.19 (0.80) ^a	−0.18 (1.10) ^b	−0.09 (0.88) ^b	0.08 (0.98) ^{ab}	0.12 (0.91) ^{ab}	3.78**	.03
Negative affect	−0.09 (0.88) ^a	−0.08 (0.97) ^a	0.01 (0.94) ^{ab}	0.18 (0.92) ^{ab}	0.33 (1.06) ^b	3.24**	.02

Note. A cluster mean is significantly different from another mean if they have different superscripts. A mean without a superscript is not significantly different from any other mean. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Person-Centered Approach

Significantly different mean levels of subjective well-being, Wilks's $\lambda = .90$; $F(12, 1,450.16) = 4.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$, were found across the five religious identity clusters (see Table 3). In particular, people in the achieved status reported the highest mean levels of life satisfaction and positive affect as well as the lowest mean level of negative affect. Individuals in the diffused identity status reported lower mean levels of life satisfaction and positive affect and the same mean level of negative affect than achieved people. High mean levels of negative affect instead characterized the moratorium and searching moratorium statuses. Individuals in the searching moratorium status had not only a high mean level of negative affect, but also life satisfaction and positive affect. The foreclosure religious identity status presented a non-extreme/average mean level of subjective well-being.

Discussion

The U-MICS enables researchers to evaluate three pivotal processes of identity formation (commitment, exploration, and reconsideration of commitment), when a variable-centered approach is adopted, and to reliably assign individuals to identity statuses when a person-centered approach is adopted. With the aim of adapting the U-MICS to the religious realm, we provided (for both approaches) evidence of score structure, convergent, and criterion-related validity. Our findings present initial evidence indicating that the variable- and person-centered approaches yield valid U-MICS – religious domain scores (dimensions and clusters respectively). We suggest readers adopt the variable-centered approach when they are interested in investigating how each religious identity process is related to identity correlates (e.g., subjective well-being), while

prefer the person-centered approach when they aim both at unraveling the “unique pattern” of those processes within a subgroup of individuals and at comparing these profiles respect to relevant other variables. Furthermore, researchers could evaluate to fruitfully integrate both approaches, which together explain more variance than each approach singularly does (see the supplementary material, section VII; Sorgente et al., 2021). At the same time, our initial evidence suggests not to use the person-centered approach (the religious identity status) without also considering the variable-centered approach (the religious identity dimensions), as the latter can explain a larger variance of related variables.

Religious Identity Formation Processes

Adopting a variable-centered approach, we demonstrated that the U-MICS – religious domain measures three different religious identity formation processes: the degree to which people engage in religion and gain tranquility and safety from this engagement (*Commitment*); the degree to which individuals deal with their religious commitment actively (e.g., thinking about their choices; *In-depth exploration*); the search for more satisfactory religious commitments (*Reconsideration of commitment*).

After confirming the three-factor model, we verified that these factors were highly reliable ($\omega \geq .89$) and, from a psychometric point of view, worked equally well across different groups. We found a full strict invariance for gender and age comparisons, whereas for the religious status comparison (believers vs. atheists) we found a partial strict invariance, as two items of the *commitment* factor (“My religion gives me security for the future”; “My religion allows me to face the future with optimism”) had residual variance significantly lower for atheists than for believers. Particularly, it seemed that believers have a more heterogeneous

way to cope with future uncertainty than atheists, which is in line with Zwingmann and Murken's (2000) assumption that religious people use different strategies to overcome future uncertainty. Although these two items had different residual variance across groups, it was possible to compare both latent and observed scores across believers and atheists because it is sufficient to have at least 80% of items that are fully invariant across groups to make a meaningful comparison (Dimitrov, 2010).

When we compared latent means, we found that religious status (believers vs. atheists) had an impact on the mean level of commitment and in-depth exploration. Specifically, believing in God increases the level of engagement in a religion (commitment) and the active probe of this engagement (in depth-exploration). Conversely, the levels of reconsideration of commitment are the same across the two groups, meaning that believers and atheists are equally sure of their choice and do not want to reconsider it. Despite results suggest that, at least from the psychometric point of view, the U-MICS – religious domain works equally well for both believers and atheists, this study did not investigate how atheists felt in answering items that refer to religion and which meaning they attributed to them. Further studies should carry out cognitive interviews with atheists to explore how they interpret each item of the scale and if they consider them comprehensible and applicable to nonbelievers.

Finally, the relationship that the three factors of the U-MICS – religious domain had with religiousness and subjective well-being confirmed that both the process of being committed to own faith and the process of exploring it in-depth are positively related to religiosity. The very similar relationships that commitment and in-depth explorations had with the religiousness dimensions, together with the high correlation that these two dimensions of the religious identity have each other, should invite scholars to investigate if these two religious identity dimensions are better differentiated in relation to others potential convergent constructs.

The difference between these two dimensions is more evident in relation to subjective well-being because the only religious commitment was significantly associated with subjective well-being. We can speculate that this difference is theoretically meaningful as it is coherent with (1) Crocetti and Meeus (2015) showing that in-depth exploration, differently from commitment, might be associated with confusion and distress, and with (2) Villani et al. (2019) reporting no association between in-depth exploration and subjective well-being.

The reconsideration of religious commitment was, instead, poorly and negatively associated with religiousness and well-being. As to the relationship between religious identity and subjective well-being, it is important to stress

that we treated this relationship as unidirectional as previous studies did (e.g., Villani et al., 2019), but we cannot exclude that this relationship may be bidirectional (e.g., Doane & Elliott, 2016) and/or spurious (e.g., Levin & Markides, 1986).

Religious Identity Status

According to the position that individuals have respect for the three processes of religious identity formation, individuals can be located in different religious identity profiles. In particular, we identified five different religious identity statuses (*achievement*, *diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, *searching moratorium*), which were consistent with those found in previous studies (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2008). These clusters were equally distributed across gender and age groups, while had a different prevalence of believers and atheist, confirming their relevance for the religious domain. Furthermore, we found significant differences when we tested the levels of religiousness and subjective well-being across these five clusters. Religiously achieved individuals had the highest mean level of religiousness and well-being. Instead, religiously diffused individuals showed the lowest mean level of religiousness and well-being. Individuals in the moratorium and searching moratorium statuses presented high mean levels of reconsideration of commitment and negative affect, even if searching moratorium seemed to be a more adaptive identity status than moratorium (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015). Finally, religiously foreclosed individuals showed an average mean level of religiosity and well-being, maybe because they have inherited their faith from parents, without really questioning it (Baker-Sperry, 2001).

Limitations and Future Studies

Before concluding, it is important to recognize some weaknesses of this study that future works are called to address. In particular, regarding the variable-centered approach, more evidence is needed about the distinctiveness between in-depth exploration and commitment. In our study, these two factors are too strongly correlated and are very similarly related to religiousness dimensions. This latter issue probably depends on the similarity between religious identity and religiousness constructs, so future studies should collect convergent validity evidence using variables able to bring out the potential differences between commitment and in-depth exploration.

Furthermore, new evidence needs to be collected to make stronger the conclusion about the validity of the five religious identity statuses we identified. The concerns about the validity of these statuses are generated by the LPA that did not confirm the profiles obtained using the cluster

analysis and by the scarce incremental validity (i.e., significant only in relation to the “life satisfaction” factor) that the person-centered approach had over the variable-centered one.

Finally, as the current study has been carried out in a context marked by a long-established Catholic tradition, future studies should verify if our results are replicable in different cultural contexts and for different religions.

Conclusion

The current study proposed the adaptation of the U-MICS to the religious domain and showed that this scale is a promising instrument to capture the complexity of individual identity in the religious realm by integrating the assessment of both religious identity formation processes and religious identity statuses. An instrument able to detect both processes and statuses is an important tool for researchers and practitioners because religious identity significantly impacts several aspects of people's lives (e.g., psychological adjustment; Villani et al., 2019). Future studies are needed to confirm and complement the initial evidence collected in the current study.

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Open Materials: We confirm that there is sufficient information for an independent researcher to reproduce all of the reported methodologies (Sorgente et al., 2021; <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14039123>). Questionnaire for the Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule are not publically available due to copyright restrictions, but all other materials are available in the public repository.

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