

Components of the Semantic Field of „Spirituality“ and “Religion” Emerging from Semantic Differentials

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Abstract. The Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study on “Spirituality” had a special focus on the semantics of “spirituality” and “religion,” and for this purpose has included a semantic differential approach. Two semantic differentials were part of the questionnaire and have been completed by 1,082 US-American and 703 German respondents: one of Osgood’s “classical” instruments with 18 pairs of opposite adjectives, which had revealed a three-dimensional structure (Evaluation, Potency, Activity) in previous cross-cultural research; The second instrument was a contextual semantic differential with 30 pairs of opposite adjectives that has been constructed for this study. Both semantic differentials have been included twice in the questionnaire: first for “spirituality,” then for “religion.” Results are based on Paired *t*-tests comparing associations with “spirituality” and associations with “religion” for all adjectives, and on ANOVAs with focus groups in the US and the German samples. Results are visualized in line figures and scatter plots, which represent the semantic fields. Results generally indicate high regard for “spirituality” and rather negative evaluation of “religion.” They reveal relatively little differences between Germany and the U.S., but considerable differences between respondents who self-identify as “more religious”, “more spiritual,” “neither religious nor spiritual” or “atheist” in the respective focus groups. We conclude that the semantic differentials yield insight in the surplus of “spirituality.”

Keywords: Semantics; Semantics of spirituality; Semantic differential; Spirituality; Atheist

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About three decades we are witnessing changes in the religious fields in the West, which may be called “spiritual turn” and are associated with changes in semantics. Time for the question: What’s the benefit? Is there a semantic surplus of self-attributed „spirituality“? If yes, what is it? The question for the surplus of “spirituality” may be of particular importance in regard to people who self-identify as “atheists,” as “neither religious nor spiritual” or as “more spiritual than religious,” because for them the question could be sharpened: Does “spirituality” offer, for experiences of transcendence, for beliefs and expectations, new semantic options, which were not available by “religion” alone? If yes, how can these new semantic options be described? Or – back to the basic version of this question – what does “spirituality” mean for them?

Answers can be expected from an inspection of the commonalities and differences in the semantic fields for “religion” and “spirituality.” And a promising approach for the reconstruction of the semantic fields for “religion” and “spirituality” are, as will be demonstrated in this paper, semantic differentials, if they are designed and evaluated adequately. If applied to both “religion” and “spirituality,” semantic differentials may help us not only understand the commonalities and differences between these terms, but permit the reconstruction of the semantic field from closer attention to the thematic connotations of the adjectives of the semantic differentials. This approach has been taken in our study and has turned out productive and effective. To our knowledge, this approach is new, even though we note that a semantic differential approach has been included in previous research.

Zinnbauer, Pargament, and colleagues (1997) were not only among the first to study the semantics of spirituality inviting 346 persons in the USA to give their own definitions of religiousness and spirituality, but their study has also used an abbreviated version of Osgood’s semantic differential, even though they evaluated the semantic differential for reporting correlational patterns of positive and negative perception only. Several other studies on the semantics of “spirituality” (see reviews in Keller, Klein, Swahajor, et al., 2013; Berghuijs, Pieper, & Bakker, 2013) did not use a semantic differential, but comparable instruments such as adjective rating (Greenwald & Harder, 2003), word list associations (La Cour, Ausker, & Hvidt, 2012) or sentence completion (Büssing, 2006), or related, but somewhat more qualitative methods such as subjective definitions (Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008; Berghuijs, Pieper, & Bakker, 2013; this study), faith development interview responses (Streib & Keller, 2007) or connotation to “spirituality” in narratives embedded in biographical interviews and diaries (Ammerman, 2013). Of course, the semantic differential approach is not new in the study of religion and has been used to investigate God images to mention one famous example (Broughton, 1973; Benson & Spilka, 1973; Francis, Robbins, & Gibson, 2006), but, with the exception of Zinnbauer et al. (1997), the semantic differential has not been used in research on the semantics of “spirituality.”

Method

Sample. While a total of 1886 respondents ($n = 1113$ Americans and $n = 773$ Germans) have answered the questionnaire of our Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study of “Spirituality” in such a way that their data can be used in most analyses, not all respondents completed the semantic differentials. A few participants reported that they sometimes felt the semantic differentials to be awkward. Although we offered an instruction, this task was skipped by 9% of the German and 2% of the American respondents. Therefore the report in this paper is based on data of those respondents who completed all bipolar scales of the semantic differentials ($n = 1082$ Americans, $n = 703$ Germans). In the American sample, ages range from 15 to 82 years ($M = 34.23$, $SD = 14.50$) and in the German sample from 16 to 90 years ($M = 42.03$, $SD = 13.56$). Of the American and German respondents sampled, 62.75% and 55.90% are female, respectively.

For further typological analyses reported in this paper, data were split into six focus groups, which were constructed according to their self-identification as “more religious than spiritual,” “equally religious and spiritual,” “more spiritual than religious, not atheist or non-theist,” “more spiritual than religious atheist/non-theist,” “neither religious nor spiritual, not atheist or non-theist” or “neither religious nor spiritual atheist/non-theist.”

Osgood’s 18-Item Semantic Differential. For the systematic study of semantics we used the semantic differential, which has been developed and used in cross-cultural research by Osgood (1962; Snider & Osgood, 1969; Osgood, May, & Miron, 1975). We used the 18-item version presented by Osgood (1962, p. 16) to be rated on a 5-point scale for “spirituality” and for “religion.” The merits of this method have been corroborated specifically for cross-cultural use by Osgood and colleagues (1975). It is supposed to assesses three dimensions/factors: *evaluation* (E : nice–awful, fine–coarse, heavenly–hellish, smooth–rough, mild–harsh, clean–dirty), *potency* (P : big–little, powerful–powerless, strong–weak, long–short, full–empty, many–few) and *activity* (A : burning–freezing, hot–cold, fast–slow, sharp–dull, light–dark, young–old).

In our data, the E - P - A factor structure could be corroborated, even if not perfectly, by PCA with Varimax rotation with respect to both the eigenvalues and the scree plots. For the term “religion” in both sub-samples, the three identified factors strongly resembled those of Osgood and explained 65.48% of the variance in the American and 62.92% in the German sub-sample. For “spirituality,” only the first two factors, E and P , could roughly be replicated in both sub-samples, while the third factor, A , could not be identified. Thus, for the term ‘spirituality’, Osgood’s factors seem to be only approximately replicable. Therefore, we refer to the E - P - A factor structure established by Osgood, when sorting the adjective pairs and estimating the evaluation of “religion” and “spirituality” across the various focus groups.

The Contextual Semantic Differential. Because we were interested in a more specific and detailed exploration of patterns of semantic-contextual connotations of “religion” and “spirituality,” we have developed a Contextual Semantic Differential for this study.

For the construction of our Contextual Semantic Differential, we first created an item pool of descriptives for religion and spirituality, collected in Germany and in the USA; thereby we used dictionaries and published lists of adjectives referring to religion and/or spirituality, e.g. from the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC 2007, <http://www.liwc.net/>) from the Pennebaker Laboratory. The final set of adjective pairs has been selected by an expert rating of our bilingual and bicultural research team to ensure cross-cultural comparability as well as embeddedness in each cultural context. This resulted in parallel American and German versions of the Contextual Semantic Differential.

Our final Contextual Semantic Differential consists of 30 pairs of oppositional adjectives; items are: flexible–inflexible, liberating–oppressive, tolerant–intolerant, relaxing–rigorous, creative–destructive, laissez-faire–demanding, healing–wounding, calm–loud, positive–negative, modern–traditional, fascinating–boring, individual–collective, selfless–selfish, altruistic–egoistic, universal–particular, new–old, seeking–dwelling, thisworldly–otherworldly, mature–immature, feminine–masculine, interconnected–isolated, rational–irrational, moral–immoral, introverted–extroverted, sacred–profane, achieving–complacent, strong–weak, holy–secular, subjective–objective and lonely–sociable.

Thus, in this paper we report the analyses of the semantics of “spirituality” and of “religion” based on 1785 responses to (a) Osgood’s (1962) Semantic Differential and (b) on a self-constructed Contextual Semantic Differential; each semantic differential was offered in two blocks, one for “spirituality” another for “religion,” in the same format and with the same instructions. Thus we have four blocks of semantic differentials, which allow the juxtaposition of the semantic associations to “religion” and “spirituality” on the same adjective polarities. All in all, we have a 2×2×2 design (“religion”/“spirituality” × Osgood’s Semantic Differential/Contextual Semantic Differential × USA/Germany). Furthermore, for some analyses, we split samples into six focus groups.

Results

Results from the semantic differentials in our data speak in a variety of ways to the difference between “religion” and “spirituality” as the respondents in the study see these differences. Further, the analysis of the semantic connotations helps to profile the understandings of our participants about “religion” and “spirituality.” Finally, by dividing our samples according to country (U.S. and Germany) and also according to our six focus groups, which are constructed according to the “spiritual”/“religious”/“atheist”/“non-theist” self-identifications, a variety of group profiles and group differences can be analyzed – answering the question “who

speaks?” Of special interest here are the groups, in which the contrast between “spirituality” and “religion” is very high, because this will allow inferences about the surplus of “spirituality” as a relatively new semantic option.

In terms of method, the results reported here are mainly based on paired *t*-tests. These paired *t*-tests were calculated ($CI = .95$) to estimate the differences between the means for “religion” and the means for “spirituality” for each polar adjective pair in both semantic differentials. The most obvious and easy to read visual presentation for these *t*-test results are polar line figures; in order to demonstrate our procedure step by step, we include below (Fig. 1) one such polar line figure for results with Osgood’s semantic differential in the US and German samples.¹

However, for the presentation and visualization of results for the semantic field, and especially for the Contextual Semantic Differential, scatter plots may be better suited. The semantic field construction is based also on the paired *t*-tests assessing the differences between the means for “religion” and “spirituality” for each adjective pair. Within the scatter plots, however, the means for “religion” and “spirituality” are interpreted as vectors indicating the affinity of each adjective pair to the axes for “religion” and “spirituality.” For easier reading, only the positive poles of the adjective pairs are presented.

The presentation of results starts with selected results for the Osgood Semantic Differential and then proceeds to the Contextual Semantic Differential. This may reflect a move from the rather structural to a more decisive orientation to content and context.

Commonalities and Differences between “Spirituality” and “Religion” in the Osgood Semantic Differential

As presented in Figure 1, paired *t*-tests for the German and the U.S. samples reveal significant differences (the majority on the $p < .001$ level) between „religion,“ (dotted line) and „spirituality” (solid line) for most adjectives. Between the U.S. and German sample, the differences appear minor on first sight, perhaps indicating comparable semantics of “spirituality” and “religion” in cross-cultural perspective.

However, it is obvious that the difference in associations to “spirituality” and “religion” is by far greater for the six adjectives on the top. These first six adjectives belong to Osgood’ dimension *E* (*evaluation*). This indicates that, for the total

¹ First results from our evaluation of the Osgood and Contextual semantic differentials were previously published (Keller, Klein, Swahajor, et al., 2013) with special attention to the difference between “spirituality” and “religion” and thus with the presentation of a whole series of polar line figures, which allow insight in the typological comparison between three sub-groups (‘highly spiritual low religious,’ ‘highly religious’ and ‘neither spiritual nor religious’). These three sub-groups were constructed for the purpose of powerful statistical calculation and complexity reduction. This paper expands these results taking them to further differentiation within the semantic field of “religion”/“spirituality” and calculating with our six focus groups (which e.g. explicitly account for self-identified “atheists”).

group of respondents in our study, evaluation of “spirituality” is by far more positive than their regard for the *potency* (*P*) and the *activity* (*A*) of “religion” and “spirituality.” “Spirituality” is associated with the evaluative adjectives “nice,” “fine,” “heavenly,” smooth,” “mild” and “clean” much more than “religion.”

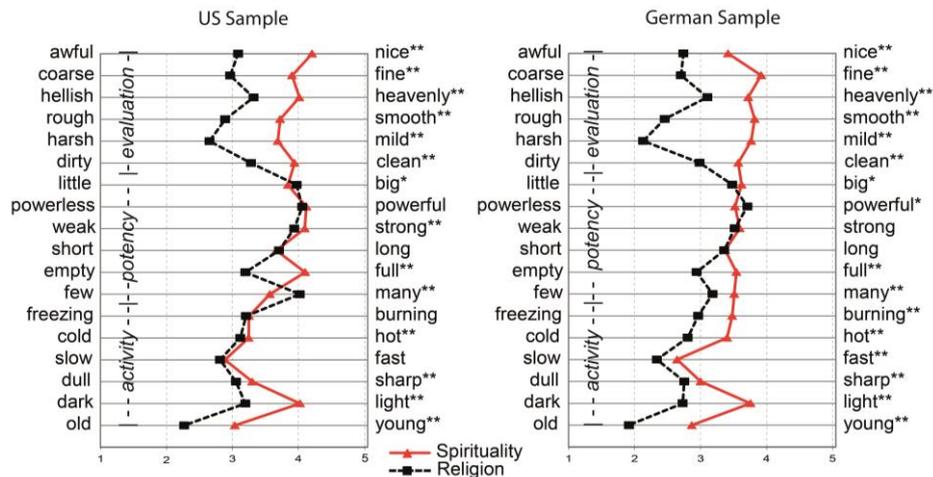


Fig. 1 Commonalities and Differences between “Spirituality” and “Religion” Based on Ratings on the Osgood Semantic Differential in the U.S. and German Samples

Note for Fig. 1: ** indicates significant differences on the $p < .001$ level; * indicates significant differences on the $p < .05$ level.

Using the same results from the paired *t*-tests, the semantic field can be visualized with vectors for “religion” (*x*) and “spirituality” (*y*) (see Figures 2 and 3). This visualization has the advantage that we see the adjectives assemble in specific field segments. The field segments can be identified as follows: in the upper right segment, all adjectives assemble that have a positive rating for both “spirituality” and “religion,” which means that in regard to these adjectives, there is less difference than common ground between “spirituality” and “religion.” In contrast, the adjectives in the upper left segment have negative ratings for “religion,” but positive ratings for “spirituality,” which indicates exclusive or more exclusive association of these adjectives with “spirituality.” Lower right segment would be the place for adjectives belonging exclusively or more exclusively to “religion.” It is noteworthy that, on the basis of total sample calculation, there is no single adjective exclusively associated with “religion,” the lower right segment is empty. Finally the lower left segment is the place for adjectives with negative associations for both terms.

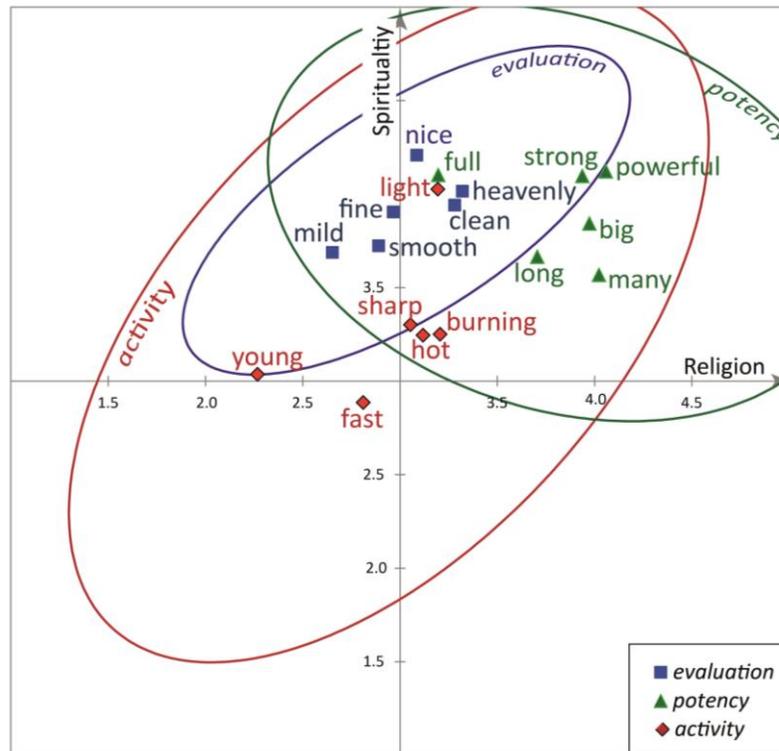


Fig. 2 The Semantic Field for “Spirituality”/”Religion” Based on Osgood’s Semantic Differential in the U.S. Sample

Note for Fig. 2 and 3: The confidence ellipses correspond to a 95% confidence interval for a bivariate normal distribution with the same means and the same covariance matrix as the variables represented in abscissa and ordinates.

On first observation of Figures 2 and 3 already we see that almost all adjectives assemble in the upper field segments; this demonstrates that only very few adjectives have negative ratings for “spirituality,” but all adjectives are more or less strongly, but positively associated with “spirituality.” This is different for “religion,” where we see positive and negative associations. And here the scatter plots for the Osgood differentials indicate a slight difference between the American and German respondents: Respondents in the U.S. appear to see less difference between spirituality and religion, since most adjectives assemble in the upper-right field segment. In contrast, for the German participants, the adjectives slightly move more to the left into the segment indicating exclusive association with “spirituality.”

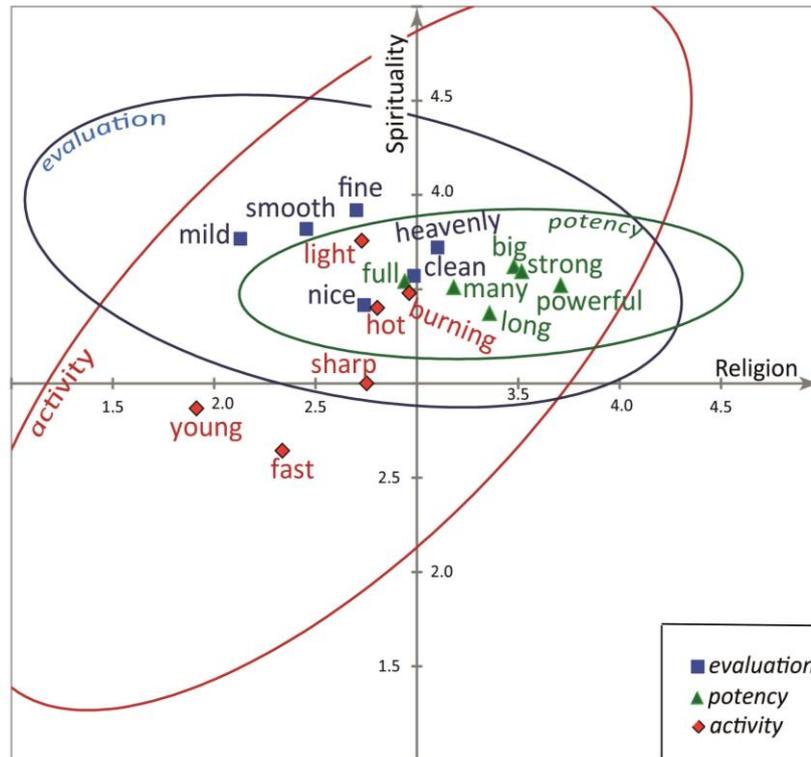


Fig. 3 The Semantic Field for “Spirituality”/”Religion” Based on Osgood’s Semantic Differential in the German Sample

To differentiate this result, the associations to Osgood’s three factors are marked for all adjectives in Figures 2 and 3; thus the membership of adjectives in factors *E*, *A* or *P* can be seen easily. In addition, the adjectives belonging to one of the three Osgood factor are circled by confidence ellipses. The advantage of these ellipses is that they present an estimate of how the three factors *E*, *A* and *P* are positioned in the semantic field. For the factor *A* the equal association with both “religion” and “spirituality” is obvious for both countries, because the ellipse aligns with the diagonal from lower left to upper right; but for the German respondents the *A*-ellipse has slightly moved to the left, indicating a slightly more positive regard for the activity of “spirituality” for the German respondents. This is similar for the factor *P*: for the U.S. respondents, all adjectives assemble in the upper right segment and are more pronounced – meaning that both “religion” and “spirituality” are regarded to have strong potency; in the German sample, the *P*-adjectives have not only lower ratings, but fall slightly more in the exclusive “spirituality” segment. Most obvious however is the cultural difference for evaluation: our German respondents appear to evaluate “spirituality” more positively, while for the U.S. respondents, rather both “spirituality” and “religion” receive positive

evaluative connotations. These results so far are based on the total U.S. and German samples without any distinction between subgroups. Therefore, as the next step, we present results from the Osgood semantic differential differentiated according to the focus groups.

The data we have collected allow for more detailed answers to questions such as the following: Is there a difference in the associations in the semantic differential according to respondents' "spiritual," "religious" or "atheist" self-identifications? For which groups can we identify the highest difference between the semantics of "spirituality" and "religion" – and thus the unique positioning feature of "spirituality"? To answer these questions, we have calculated the factors for each focus group and compared them. This calculation has been completed by an ANOVA/post-hoc test for the six focus groups and for each country separately. Results are presented in Fig. 7.4. Thereby, we limit presentation to the factor *evaluation*, because for this factor, differences are considerable.

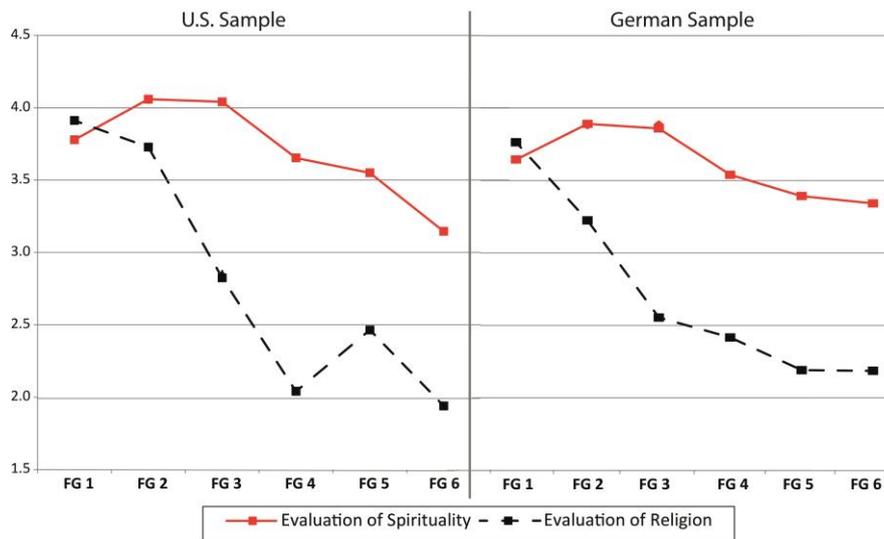


Fig. 4 Focus Group Means for the *Evaluation* Factor in Osgood's Semantic Differential

Note for Fig. 4: FG = Focus Group; Values on y present the means for the factor in a range from 1 (= total agreement with the *negative* adjectives) and 5 (= total agreement with the *positive* adjectives)

In Fig. 4, it is obvious on first sight that the pattern for the U.S. and German respondents is not so much different, while the differences between the focus groups are large. The figure demonstrates that "spirituality" is generally rated far more positively than "religion" throughout the focus groups, except for the "more religious than spiritual" (FG1). By far the highest difference between "spirituality"

and “religion” is documented in the factor *E* (evaluation) for the focus groups of the “more spiritual than religious” and the “neither religious nor spiritual” respondents (FG3 through FG6). On top in regard to the difference between “spirituality” and “religion” however are the “more spiritual than religious atheists and non-theist” in the U.S. (FG4). For respondents in this group, but also for the other “more spiritual” and the “neither-nor” respondents, “spirituality” appears to offer new and positive semantic options that “religion” alone did not provide.

What is it that these groups of respondents associate positively with “spirituality”? On the basis of the Osgood semantic differential, we cannot say much about this question for content and context. But this is the special contribution of the Contextual Semantic Differential.

The Semantic Field for “Spirituality”/“Religion” Resulting from the Contextual Semantic Differential

It is the special potential of Contextual Semantic Differentials to help identify context-related and contextual connotative associations. With the Contextual Semantic Differential that we developed for our study, we are investigating the connotative associations of 30 polar adjective pairs with the respondents’ subjective understandings of “spirituality” and “religion.” For this purpose, the terms in the contextual semantic differential are conceptually selected with the intention of linking the terms under investigation (in our case; “spirituality” and “religion”), on the one hand, with higher-level connotative constructs that are regarded to be contexts, on the other hand. In our case such connotative constructs are (to name some of them): experiences of transcendence, sense of connectedness, moral climate, sense of autonomy, personal growth and freedom. Thus, the adjectives in the Contextual Semantic Differential have a two-directional signification and therefore are supposed to allow respondents indicate how strongly they associate those higher-level connotative constructs with “religion” and “spirituality.”

Looking at our results, which also are based on paired *t*-tests ($CI = .95$), we first present the positioning of all (positive poles of the) adjective pairs in the semantic field for “spirituality” and “religion.” As Figures 5 and 6 show, also for the Contextual Semantic Differential almost all of the adjectives assemble in the upper half of the semantic fields. The strongest and more exclusive associations with spirituality in both the American and German sub-samples are represented by adjectives such as “creative,” “liberating,” “flexible,” “tolerant” and “individual.” For “religion,” there are no exclusive associations; the lower-right segment is empty. For both the American and German sub-samples, it seems that religion per se is barely visible. In both samples, adjectives such as “strong,” “moral,” and “sacred” are indicators for both “spirituality” and “religion.” Adjectives that are least associated with both “religion” and “spirituality” assemble in the lower-left segment; to these belong “new,” “modern,” “lonely” and, for the Ger-

man sample, also “laissez-faire” and “rational” – displaying the Germans’ more critical view.

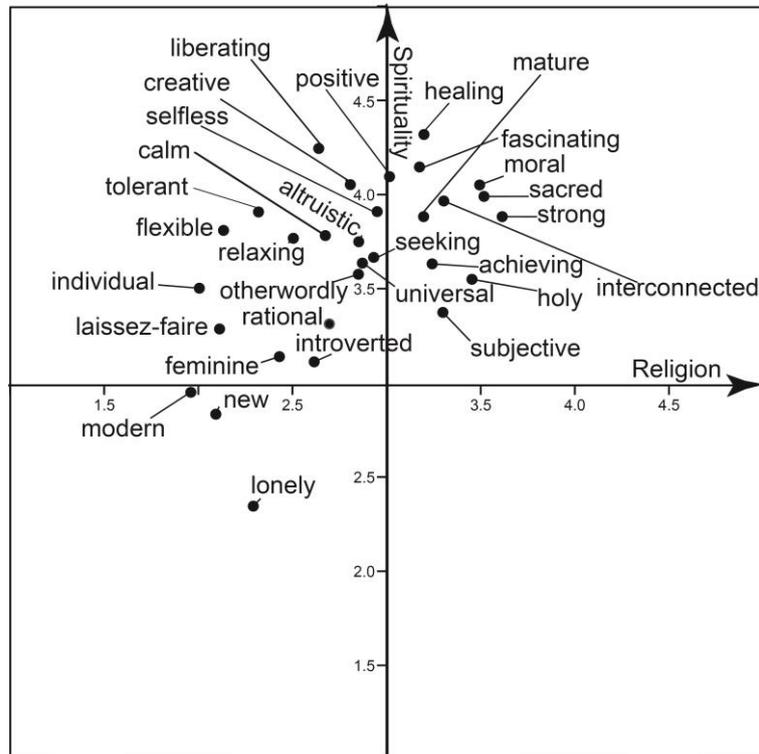


Fig. 5 The Semantic Field for “Spirituality”/”Religion” Based on the Contextual Semantic Differential in the U.S. Sample

Obvious also is – again – the cultural difference between the U.S. and the German sample: the cloud of adjectives in the German field is clearly positioned almost exclusively in the upper left segment – which indicates the more positive regard for “spirituality” in the German group. Further: While in the American sample, both “religion” and “spirituality” are characterized by adjectives “achieving,” “mature,” “fascinating,” “healing,” and “positive,” these adjectives fall on the “spiritual”-only side in the upper-left segment for the German sub-sample.

These are results for the total U.S. and German samples without further differentiation between sub-groups. For a more detailed portrait, the next and final step of presenting results implements two additional criteria: first, the division of the samples according to the focus groups; second, a focus on higher-level connotative constructs. For the latter, we selected two connotative constructs: experiences of freedom and morality. The reasons for our focus on these two constructs are

these: both represent a central dimension of religion (experiential and moral dimensions), both display considerable differences between associations with “spirituality” and associations with “religion,” when focus groups are examined separately.

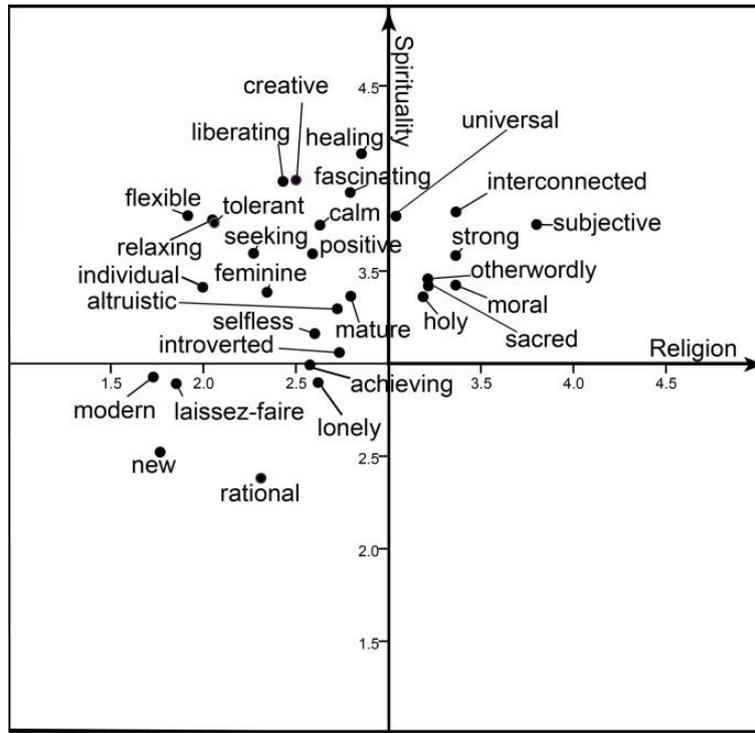


Fig. 6 The Semantic Field for “Spirituality”/”Religion” Based on the Contextual Semantic Differential in the German Sample

Experiences of Freedom as Connotations to “Spirituality” and “Religion”

From the 30 polar adjective pairs, two were selected that (a) can be interpreted to coherently connote with experience of freedom and (b) are on top of the list sorted according to the difference between the adjectives’ association with “spirituality” and with “religion.” Criterion b is justified with respect to the question for the surplus of “spirituality.” These adjectives are “liberating” and “creative.” From their focus group membership, we should then be able to determine the group differences, resp. identify the characteristics of those groups of respondents, who associate “liberating” and “creative” exclusively with “spirituality.”

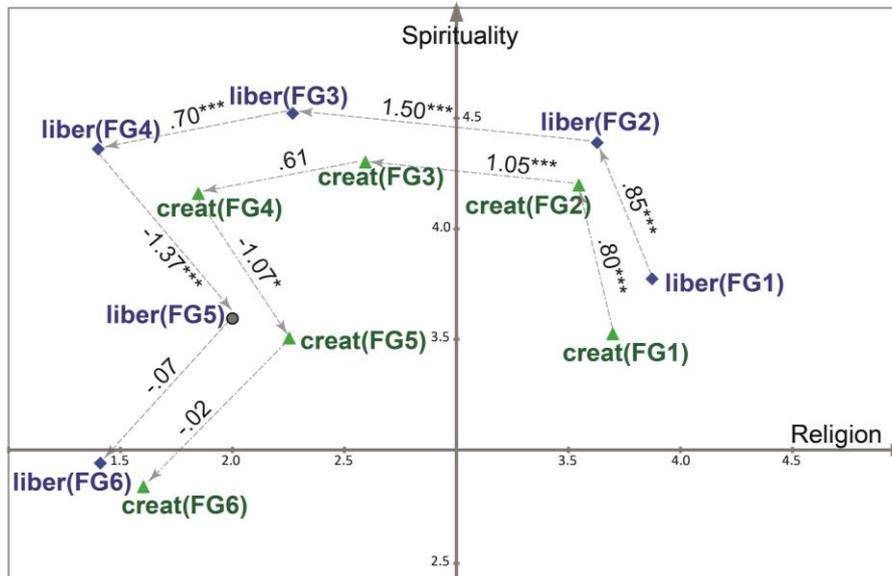


Fig. 7 Focus Group Differences for Adjectives Indicating Freedom in the Semantic Field for „Spirituality“ and „Religion“ for the U.S. Sample

Note for Fig. 7 and 8: liber = liberating, creat = creative; FG = Focus Group, Values at arrows are estimates of incremental change in distance between the association with spirituality and religion with significance levels: *** = significant with $p \leq .001$, ** = significant with $p < .05$, * = significant with $p < .10$.

Figures 7 and 8 display the focus group specific location of the two adjectives in the semantic field. Additional information about the difference between the focus group specific ratings for these adjectives is given by the values at the arrows, which are estimates of incremental change from one focus group to the next of the distance between an adjective's association with "spirituality" and its association with "religion" (calculated as subtraction of adjective rating for „spirituality“ minus adjective rating for „religion“); these estimates are the result of an ANOVA/post-hoc test.

What do the figures present? For Focus Group 1 of the "more religious than spiritual" self-identifying respondents in both countries, "liberating" and "creative" have clear and equal associations with both "religion" and "spirituality." This indicates that for the "more religious" respondents – less surprisingly – "religion" is associated with experiences and expectations of creativity and liberation; it more surprising for this group that here "spirituality" has the same strength of associations.

A similar picture emerges for Focus Group 2 of the "equally religious and spiritual" respondents, with the exception that for them "spirituality" has stronger association with the two adjectives. The incremental change of difference between

ratings for “spirituality” and “religion” is considerably large: for the U.S. sample, .80 and .85, for the German sample even 1.06 and 1.55.

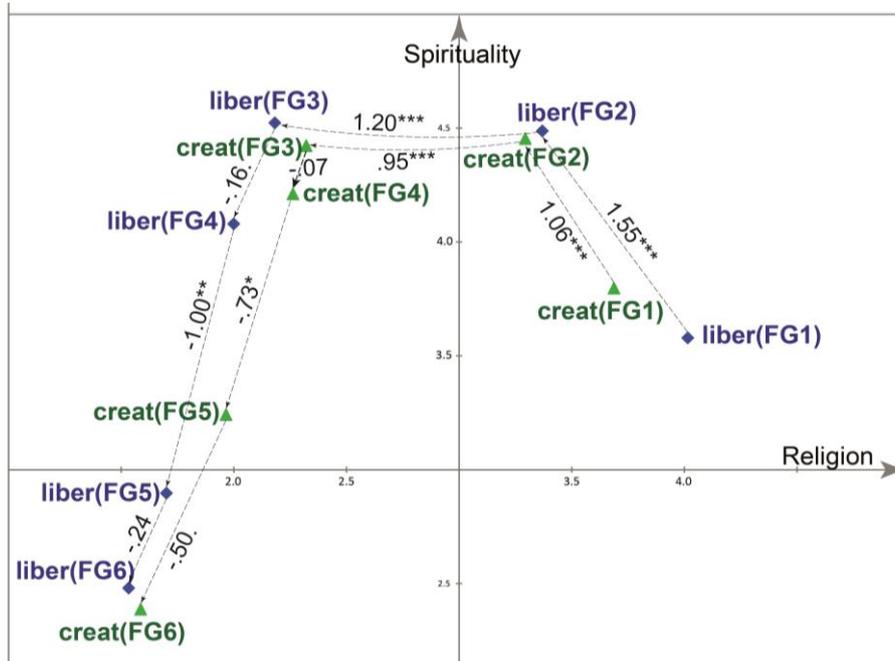


Fig. 8 Focus Group Differences for Adjectives Indicating Freedom in the Semantic Field for „Spirituality“ and „Religion“ for the German Sample

For Focus Group 3 of the “more spiritual than religious, not atheist or non-theist” respondents, the two adjectives move into the upper left field segment, indicating a more exclusive association with “spirituality.” The incremental changes indicate another high increase of the difference between associations with “spirituality” and with “religion” (in a range of 1.05 and 1.50 for the U.S., and .95 and 1.20 for the German focus groups) – indicating a clear profile of the “more spiritual” respondents in both countries in regard to the association of freedom and “spirituality.”

Focus Groups 4 of the “more spiritual than religious atheists and non-theists” in both countries are very interesting. These respondents have low regard for traditional “religion,” relating to a God does not belong to their preferred vocabulary; and correspondingly “liberating” and “creative” have *negative* associations with “religion” – put another way: “religion” is highly associated with the opposite poles “oppressive” and “destructive.” Nevertheless this group of respondents indicates a positive connotative relation of liberation and creativity in the religious/spiritual semantic field: they associate these adjectives with “spirituality.” This is more pronounced for Focus Group 4 in the U.S. sample. For these groups of “more spiritual than religious atheists or non-theists,” it is obvious that “spiritu-

ality” offers a surplus, namely the option to locate experiences and expectations of liberation and creativity in the spiritual/religious semantic field.

In a certain way, the position of the respondents in Focus Group 5 (“neither religious nor spiritual, not atheist or non-theist”) and Focus Group 6 (“neither religious nor spiritual atheists or non-theists”) confirms and profiles results for Focus Group 4; The position of our two adjectives is close to the neutral line for “spirituality,” but still, or even more, in the negative range for “religion” – which indicates that, for these respondents, liberation and creativity is definitely *not*, or rather *negatively* associated with “religion,” but *neither* positively associated with “spirituality” either.

This scatter plot of the religious/spiritual semantic field also profiles the difference between the two groups of self-identified “atheists” / “non-theists.” Atheists or non-theists who self-identify as “spiritual” use the option to associate creativity and liberation with “spirituality,” while for the “neither religious nor spiritual” atheists/non-theists this is not a semantic option.

Moral Connotations to “Spirituality” and “Religion”

The other higher-level connotative construct, which we chose for presenting the difference of focus groups in the religious/spiritual semantic field, is morality. Also here three adjectives have been chosen to represent this construct, namely “moral,” “altruistic” and “selfless.” Figures 9 and 10 present the focus group specific location of these adjectives in the religious/spiritual semantic fields for the U.S. and the German sample.

Rather than going through all of the focus groups, as we did for the freedom adjectives, we highlight interesting findings. Compared to the freedom adjectives (Figures 7 and 8), we observe generally lower ratings, i.e. lower association with “spirituality,” for the morality adjectives in both the German and the U.S. focus groups (Figures 9. and 10). This is interesting, because it points to differences between both higher-level connotative constructs for “spirituality:” “Spirituality” appears to be more clearly associated with and characterized by freedom dimensions such as liberation and creativity, while morality dimensions appear to be of secondary impact for characterizing “spirituality.”

Also cultural difference is more obvious for morality: Different from the U.S. respondents, the low associations of moral adjectives with “spirituality” appear to be stronger for the German sample; ratings for some focus groups reach into the negative field segments below the neutral line (which is 3.0 in our 5-point rating). This is especially obvious for “selfless” for the “more religious than spiritual” group, but even more for the group of the “neither religious nor spiritual atheists and non-theists” for all three adjectives. This indicates a more critical standpoint of German non-religious/non-spiritual persons toward “spirituality,” which is rated here as “selfish” by both highly “religious” and low “religious.”

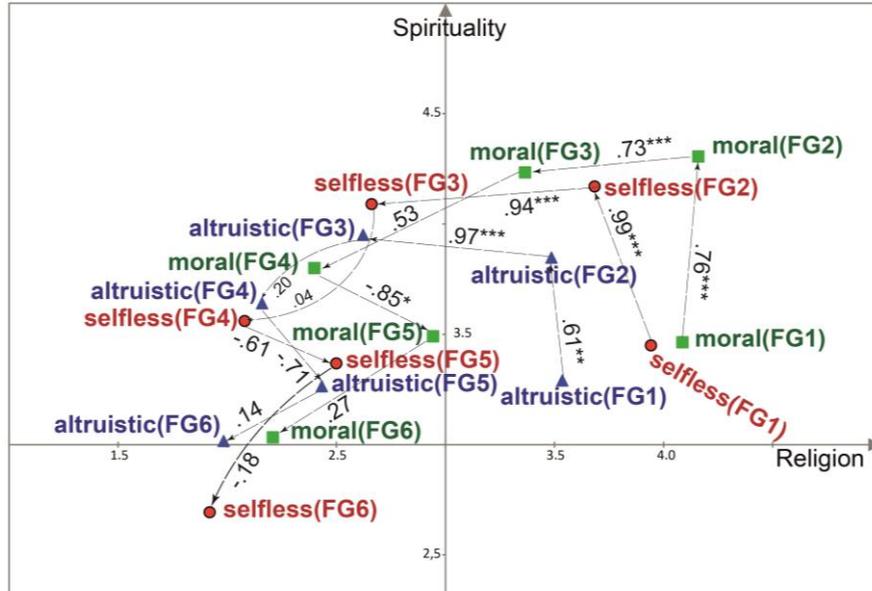


Fig. 9 Focus Group Differences for Three Adjectives Indicating Morality in the Semantic Field for „Spirituality“ and „Religion“ for the U.S. Sample

Note for Fig.9 and 10: FG = Focus Group, Values at arrows are estimates of incremental change in distance between the association with spirituality and religion with significance levels: *** = significant with $p \leq .001$, ** = significant with $p < .05$, * = significant with $p < .10$

Differences between the Focus Groups 2, 3 and 4, which are characterized by “spiritual” or “more spiritual than religious” self-identification, are less strong in regard to their association with “spirituality” than in regard to their association with “religion.” This indicates that association of the adjectives with “religion” has much more effect on the “spirituality”/“religion” difference and thus on the incremental changes.

Nevertheless, a clear tendency is obvious also for morality adjectives: the adjectives representing the higher-level construct of morality for the “more spiritual than religious” respondents in both countries assemble in the upper left field segment for the exclusive “spiritual” associations. This can be interpreted that, also for morality, “spirituality” offers a semantic surplus for those people who are reluctant to self-identify as “religious,” but are not inclined either to reject both “religious” and “spiritual” at the same time (as in Focus Groups 5 and 6).

It should be noted that this kind of focus group specific spread of adjective ratings does not occur in all higher-level connotative constructs. For example, what could be termed ‘transcendence’ and certainly belongs to the core connotative constructs for “religion” and eventually for “spirituality” and is represented by adjectives such as “holy,” “sacred” and “otherworldly,” displays a very different pattern: all adjectives for all focus groups assemble in a cloud along a line from lower

left to upper right. This indicates that “holy,” “sacred” and “otherworldly” are connotative with approximately equal strength for both “religion” and “spirituality” – and is not associated exclusively with only one of both terms.

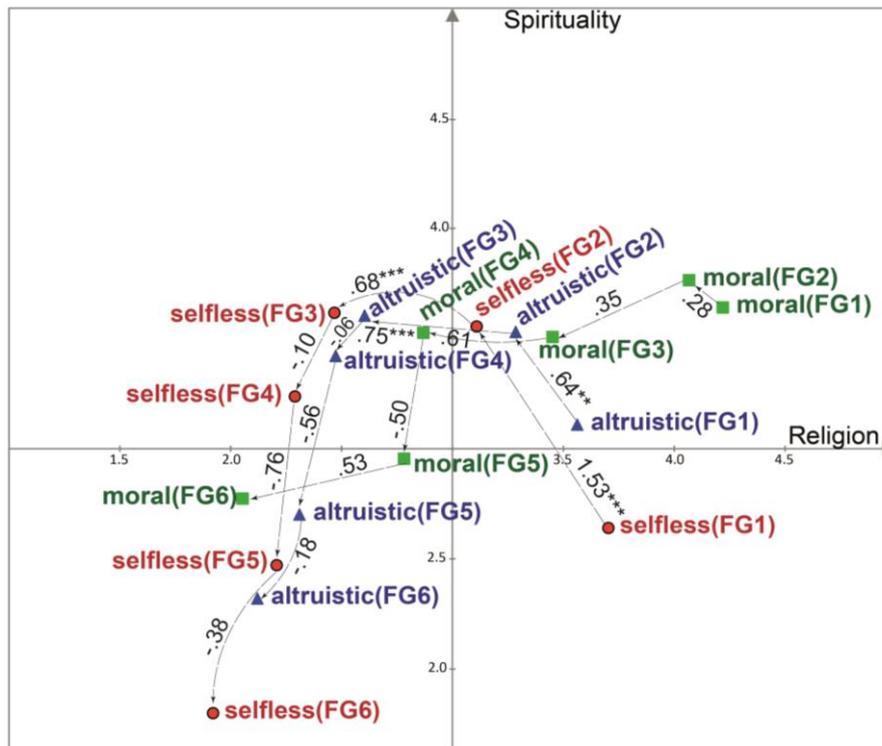


Fig. 10 Focus Group Differences for Three Adjectives Indicating Morality in the Semantic Field for „Spirituality“ and „Religion“ for the German Sample

Discussion

The results reported in this paper rest on semantic differentials which offered common standards for the quantitative exploration of connotations and denotations of the terms “spirituality” and “religion.” This methodological approach has provided the opportunity to demonstrate for the respondents in our U.S. and German samples (a) generally highly positive denotations for “spirituality” and, connected with this, low evaluative ratings for “religion” – as if the positive evaluation had moved from “religion” to “spirituality;” (b) that “spirituality” has a variety of semantic connotations, which greatly differ according to cultural and focus group membership and (c) that the difference in associations with “spirituality”

and “religion” accounts for the semantic surplus that “spirituality” has for specific focus groups.

As reported elsewhere (Keller, Klein, Swahajor, et al., 2013), the results with Osgood’s and our own Contextual Semantic Differentials suggest that the concept of “religion only” appears to fade away from discourse. While there appears to be not much left for “religion only,” which is indicated by the fact that the lower right field segments are empty in almost all figures presented above, “spirituality” seems to have attracted semantic associations much more strongly. These findings correspond to the observation that the percentage of people who identify themselves as “more religious than spiritual” is decreasing, particularly in the USA, while, at the same time, the number of those who identify as either “more spiritual than religious” or “equally religious and spiritual” is increasing (Fuller, 2001; Hood, 2003; Streib, 2008).

Along with changes in frequencies of self-identifications, the semantic connotations of the terms “religion” and “spirituality” appear to have changed. This is indicated by our results with the Osgood semantic differential, in which the adjectives, especially those for the factor *evaluation*, have clear tendency for assembling in the “exclusively spiritual” upper left field segments. This tendency is the same in the Contextual Semantic Differential, where “spirituality” is associated with “flexible,” “liberating,” and “creative”, while “religion” is associated with “oppressive,” “intolerant,” and “rigorous.” In these connotations to “spirituality,” we may see a reflection of Zinnbauer *et al.*’s (1997) findings for the U.S. about a distinction between the terms spirituality and religiousness, which has, for the “spiritual not religious” respondents in their study, a pejorative note. Identifying with “spirituality only” seems to imply taking a stance against religion. We may see this also resonating with the results and perspectives for England presented by Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski, & Tusting (2005), which appear to speak for a tendency from “life-as religion” to “subjective life spirituality.” Further, for the Netherland as another European country, results from Berghuijs et al. (2013, p. 392) document that “only a minority links spirituality with religion, and an even smaller minority uses explicitly ‘Christian’ expressions.”

Our study with the semantic differentials however has its particular strengths in focusing on the question “who speaks.” Group differences play a decisive role in our evaluation – which therefore can be seen to respond to Zinnbauer et al.’s (1997, p. 562) suggestion that “further researchers ... recognize the many meanings attributed to religiousness and spirituality by different religious and cultural groups, and the different ways in which these groups consider themselves religious and/or spiritual”. We have therefore used our focus group distinctions in evaluation of the semantic differentials.

It is less surprising that “more religious than spiritual” respondents do not much differentiate between “religion” and “spirituality;” substantive differences can be seen neither in *evaluation*, nor in the other Osgood factors. We may be rather surprised that these focus group members have not more negative regard for “spirituality.” Also for the higher-level connotative constructs freedom and moral-

ity, the “more religious than spiritual” respondents do not indicate much of a difference between the association with “spirituality” and “religion.”

This becomes different when “spirituality” as self-identification is valued equally or higher: Especially for the “more spiritual than religious” focus groups, the difference between associations of evaluative adjectives with “spirituality” and “religion” differ (see factor *E* in Figure 4). Also on the basis of the Contextual Semantic Differential, the “more spiritual than religious” and the “more spiritual than religious atheists and non-theists” focus groups show greatest differences in associations between “spirituality” and “religion.” This pronounced profile of semantic connotations can be elaborated more concretely and precisely by focusing on the higher-level connotative constructs of freedom (adjectives “liberating” and “creative”) and morality (adjectives: “moral,” “altruistic” and “selfless”). These connotative constructs reflect the results of La Cour, et al.’s (2012) and of Berghuijs et al.’s (2013) studies: Freedom and also morality could be identified as connotatives for “spirituality” by factor analyses in these studies; however, these studies could only tentatively contrast these to “religion” and could not finally determine which groups prefer such semantic connotations. It is one of the advantages of our 2x2x2x6 design (including the six focus groups in each country) that we can be more specific. And in our results it is freedom and to a lesser degree morality, which fall in the upper left segment of “spiritual only” semantic connotations for both “more spiritual” focus groups. Here the surplus of “spirituality” as semantic option is clearly visible, especially for the “more spiritual than religious atheists and non-theist.”

The “neither spiritual nor religious” focus groups show more critical views of both “religion” and “spirituality,” with “spirituality” looking less negative on both the Osgood and the contextual profile (see Figures 7 to 10). But evaluation is more negative in the German “neither religious nor spiritual” focus groups. This is plausible when we take into account that critical views on religion are more usual and in line with the cultural mainstream in Germany than in the U.S.. German respondents who identify themselves as “neither religious nor spiritual” do not digress so much from the social standards of their cultural context and may thus afford more critical views not only on religion but also on spirituality.

While generally for the “neither religious nor spiritual” respondents and particularly for the “neither religious nor spiritual atheist and non-theists,” “spirituality” does not appear to have any semantic surplus, it is the more interesting that, for the “more spiritual than religious” respondent, and particularly for the smaller groups of “more spiritual than religious atheists and non-theists” in both countries, the semantic surplus is considerable. This regards especially the semantic higher level connotative construct of freedom and to a lesser degree morality. Here, we may assume that the semantics of “spirituality” offers a language to express experiences of and expectations for freedom – options that did not exist without “spirituality.”

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